

***Speaking in Our Own Voice – The
Stories of Rudolf Steiner Early
Childhood Educators in the Context of
the Early Years Learning Framework***

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ABSTRACT

In *Belonging, Being and Becoming, The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF), secure and respectful relationships are positioned as fundamental to ensuring all children feel a sense of place or belonging when they attend an early childhood setting. The different ways that educators form relationships with children to create that sense of belonging may hold similarities and differences depending on the beliefs that each educator holds. An open and inclusive atmosphere, where belonging is central, acknowledges the diversity present in the culture of the service. For educators, being aware of personal beliefs is an important starting point for developing a sense of openness towards the different beliefs, traditions and aspirations that families attending early childhood services hold.

At the heart of this study was a professional need to explore how Rudolf Steiner philosophy interprets the practice of forming relationships with children. An instrumental case study provided the frame for investigating this issue. Through conversational interviews, the beliefs that the Rudolf Steiner educators held about forming relationships with children were collected and presented as individual stories. These stories highlighted how perceptions of spirituality, intuition, being present and mindfulness influence the connections between Steiner educators and children in the preschool setting. In the analysis of the stories, connections between the participants' perceptions of Steiner and the EYLF were made, and from these connections specific needs, for supporting practices of forming relationships with children, were expressed.

A shared concern about the impact of increased documentation and programming emerged through the participants' voices. This showed that for the educators to be fully present with the children, time and space were needed to undertake documentation that reflected the Steiner perceptions of the child and education. Therefore this research has proposed that educators working from different philosophical positions (like Steiner education) need further support such as a framework or exemplar to give examples of documentation

and programming that authentically reflect their philosophy in the practices of working with children and families.

CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Jessica Beth Horne-Kennedy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tracing the Beginning: Threads of Personal Connection

Stories weave for us the ancient rhythms from which humans have made meaning since they first sat around to chant and to tell stories of creation. When the rhythms are drawn from nature herself we root ourselves in the great teacher and healer that sustains all life. ...Stories are a wonderful way to heal and counter influences that distance us from ourselves. In the genuine meaning of the phrase 'in touch', stories connect us to what sustains our appreciation of each other and the meaning of being human (Smyth, 2006, pp. 116-117).

This thesis is a story that began in a small town in Central Otago, New Zealand (see Figure 1). It was a story that was nudging at me for some time to be told. I traced it back through my first experiences as an early childhood educator in Dunedin, New Zealand (See Figure 2). Then the story thread travelled with me over the Tasman Sea to Australia – to Millthorpe in country New South Wales, and then to the city – to Sydney.

At the heart of this story was my search to understand what it means to be an early childhood educator. It is a story of philosophy – what do I believe about being an adult caring for young children? The story is illustrated with pictures of experience – of working with children and their families as well as the new connections that I have made with other adults, who also travel on this path of being an early childhood educator. My beliefs are interwoven with my experiences as a mother, a storyteller, a researcher, and an educator working in the context of a Rudolf Steiner preschool. These experiences have all been pivotal in the path that this study has taken.



Figure 1: Central Otago, New Zealand (Photography by Jessica Horne-Kennedy).

When my daughter was born, the feeling and emotion of motherhood brought forth new perspectives about my role as an early childhood educator. I learnt firsthand the meaning of attachment, and this led me to question how I formed connections with the children with whom I worked. As a parent, I met the *Circle of Security* and I became interested in how I could use this in my work as a Rudolf Steiner educator (Circle of Security International, 2014).

When I returned to work, at a non-Steiner early childhood centre, the threads of the story I was seeking a way to express began to nudge stronger. I questioned how my work could support the emotional world of the young child and I wondered how the emotional climate of the early childhood setting influenced the child's experience.

When I worked in the Steiner setting, it was acceptable to be sensitive to the child's emotions – to feel the child's emotion. Tuning into the child's feelings was a strategy that we used to understand the child. However, the strategies that I observed through working in the non-Steiner setting seemed different and the

gaze I looked through was not the same as my colleagues – it forced me to further question my beliefs about the way I worked. Through this questioning, I wondered what was behind the beliefs that my colleagues held. What aspects of their philosophy guided their way of working with the children?



Figure 2: Coastal Dunedin, South Island New Zealand (photography by Jessica Horne-Kennedy).

1.2 What Understanding Personal Beliefs Means for Early Childhood Practice

In *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF)¹ there is an important focus on inclusive practices that

¹ *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) will be referenced in full the first time it appears in each chapter. For consecutive references the abbreviation EYLF will be used.

acknowledge and honour “multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living” (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 16). A starting point in working to positively recognise the differences that are present in the communities we work in is to investigate the beliefs we hold and to understand the origin of these viewpoints. When we clearly identify our beliefs, they can be used as tools for open dialogue with others. Engaging in processes that promote open-ended dialogue creates a foundation of respect, and this is crucial in fostering practices that create a sense of belonging for children and families. Critical reflection is fundamental in promoting inclusive practices because it allows space for early childhood educators to question how their beliefs influence their interactions with children and families. This study will aim to provide such a space to ask these questions of educators. The intention of this is to gain insight into how the beliefs of Rudolf Steiner educators impact on their ‘ways’ of working with children and families. Through listening to the stories others tell, we extend our perceptions of our own experiences and can gain powerful tools for critical reflection. At the centre of this study are the guiding research questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationships that Steiner early childhood educators have with the children in their preschool setting?
2. What are Steiner early childhood educators’ perceptions of (a) Steiner philosophy and (b) the EYLF; and what connections can be made between these perceptions and their relationships with children in preschool settings?

The thesis that is presented in the following chapters began from these questions that I had about my work as an early childhood educator working in both Steiner and non-Steiner early childhood environments. The second part of this discussion shows the structure of this thesis with an overview of each specific chapter.

1.3 Outlining the Story of This Research

Putting theory into practice will look different for each educator because of the unique personal beliefs that each person holds, as an educator’s understanding of what the relationship between theory and practice looks like is aided through

critical reflection. Giving thought to how the practice of building relationships with children is influenced by an educator's personal belief system is a fundamental way that theory, reflection and practice are woven together. In Chapter Two the literature review for this study has highlighted three key areas. The first area shows how attachment theory and the research based on using this is expressed in the concepts and ideas in the EYLF (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Understanding how personal beliefs impact on practice is a central element to the concept of belonging that forms a second focus area in the literature. A third area explores the role of philosophy as a foundation practice as described in the EYLF. The literature explores relationships in a Rudolf Steiner setting as a living example of how the philosophical beliefs of a particular cultural group, in the domain of early childhood education in Australia, interpret the underpinning theories of the framework.

1.4 The Case Study

A case study was chosen as the appropriate format for the study because it provides a holistic frame that reflects the nature of curriculum in the Rudolf Steiner setting. To conceptualise this particular case study, I have visualised it like the circle mat that I saw in the Steiner preschool. This mat was a gathering point and the holder of stories, songs, games and rest. The circle is a metaphor that features throughout the Steiner curriculum. It can be seen in the way that each day has a rhythm, and then this rhythm reflects the seasonal cycles of the earth.

Like the circle mat in the Steiner preschool, the case study has held and contained the story of the research. At the heart of the circle are the research questions and then from these questions are the layers that describe the processes involved in undertaking the research. These layers hold their own space but they also connect and overlap. In the spaces of connection, new meanings have formed that have highlighted specific themes and implications for practice.

1.5 Tools for the Story

The research includes qualitative methods, open-ended conversational interviews, naturalistic observations, and journal keeping with sketches and jottings focus on gathering naturalistic data based on the lived experiences of the participants that “feed into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding” (Stake, 2005, p. 454).

Chapter Three outlines the process of selecting a setting to participate in the study, the educators who participated in the study, and the methods for gathering and analysing the data.

1.6 Listening to the Voices of the Steiner Educators

Chapters Four to Seven tell the stories of the participants in this study: Hope, Jessie, Luke and Joy. These chapters share each educator’s voice and experience of working in a Rudolf Steiner early childhood environment. Richardson (1994) refers to the way that writing as a research tool can allow researchers to simultaneously learn about themselves while learning about the experiences of the participants. This occurred in the process of writing the narratives because as I wrote I became conscious of my reflective voice. Chapter Eight presents the analysis of this and the discussion about this process is in Chapter Three. In Chapter Eight the individual and shared perceptions of Steiner philosophy, and the EYLF are brought forward, and the common links are used to write about the themes identified in the educators’ stories.

1.7 Moving Forward and Seeing a New Pattern

The themes that were identified in this research are presented in the final chapter of the thesis. Chapter Nine draws the story of the case together and while doing so illuminates new light on the beginning research questions. By seeing the questions in this new light, I discuss that early childhood educators need time and space to explore how personal beliefs interact with regulatory guidelines to influence processes of forming relationships with children in their care. Therefore in this final chapter, it is proposed that further research is

needed for shared dialogue about methods of documentation that reflect the beliefs and practices evident in the Steiner context. The outcome of this being to develop an exemplar that could show ways that documentation can meet a spiritual viewpoint of education while also meeting the requirements of the EYLF.

1.8 The Context for this Study

1.8.1 Guiding Principles of Rudolf Steiner Early Childhood Settings

In a Steiner early childhood environment, there is an underlying set of principles that guide educators in their work with children. These educational principles stem from the distinctive philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner called Anthroposophy. Within the Anthroposophical world view, Steiner describes a three fold picture of the human as a being that develops in the domains of body, soul and spirit:

Through his body man is able to place himself for the time being in connection with things; through his soul he retains in himself the impressions they make on him; through his spirit there reveals itself to him what the things retain for themselves. Only when we observe man in these three aspects can we hope to throw light on his whole being, because they show him to be related in a threefold way to the rest of the world (Steiner, 1971, para. 7).

In this way, man is a citizen of three worlds. Through his *body* he belongs to the world that he also perceives through his body; through his *soul* he constructs for himself his own world; through his *spirit* a world reveals itself to him that is exalted above both the others (Steiner, 1971, para. 9).

The three-fold concept of the developing human being is given deeper clarity when Steiner describes the developing 'Faculties of the Soul' as 'Thinking, Feeling and Willing' (Steiner, [1909] (1965) p.41). *Thinking, Feeling and Willing* refer to aspects of ones being that emerge and unfold at different developmental points on the human life path. The period from birth to seven years of age is the period of the 'will' where the physical body is forming a foundation for all future development. Steiner makes reference to this period of physical development by saying:

Now before the change of teeth in the seventh year, the human body has a task to perform upon itself which is essentially different from the tasks of all other periods of life. In this period the physical organs must mould themselves into definite shapes. Their whole structural nature must receive certain tendencies and directions. In later periods also, growth takes place; but throughout the whole succeeding life, growth is based on the forms which were developed in this first life-period (Steiner, [1909] (1965) p.23-24).

The other periods of development that are included in Steiner's picture of the three-fold developing human being include the birth of the 'etheric' or 'life' body between the ages of seven to fourteen. The emergence of the 'astral' or feeling body occurs between the ages of fourteen and twenty one, and the body of the 'I' or 'Ego' that describes the capacities of thinking and a seeking of truth, occurs from the age of twenty one to twenty eight years. For educators who work with children in the period of early childhood, the concept of the emerging physical body is important to understand because it holds specific indications for how to care for the young child (Long-Breipohl, 2012; Oldfield, 2001).

1.8.2 The Role of Imitation in the Period of Early Childhood

The child in the period of early childhood is seen to experience the world through imitation and the way that the educator in this environment acts and interacts with the child is of fundamental importance in this way of developing. Steiner's words provide insight into the way that imitation occurs at this early period of life:

There are two magic words which indicate how the child enters into relation with his environment. They are: Imitation, and Example. The Greek philosopher Aristotle called man the most imitative of creatures. For no age in life is this more true than for the first stage of childhood, before the change of teeth. What goes on in his physical environment, this the child imitates, and in the process of imitation his physical organs are cast into the forms which then become permanent. "Physical environment' must, however, be taken in the widest imaginable sense...everything that takes place in the child's environment-everything that can be perceived by his senses, that can work from the surrounding physical space upon the inner powers of the child (Steiner, [1909] (1965), p.24).

In the daily practice of a Steiner setting, imitation means that the educators are mindfully engaged in meaningful work as the children a busily engaged in their work of play. The aim being to create a “...living environment... [where] the children learn from life as it happens around them” (Drummond & Jenkinson, 2005, p.9). When the children see the adults around them engaged in activities with a purpose like: bread baking, washing clothes, chopping vegetables, sweeping, and gardening they are given a pictures of how the world works. The words of Jill, an English Steiner Kindergarten Teacher describes the importance of meaningful work by saying:

One important lesson it teaches them, is that things don't come without effort, that you have to put yourself into it, we have to make the bread – and then we eat the bread. (...) when they buy a loaf of bread something inside them knows that bread does'nt fall out of the sky, somebody's made it, because they've seen the process. So it's very important that the environment contains those purposeful adults (Drummond & Jenkinson, 2005, p.10).

Steiner makes reference to the work that the educator is engaged with and links this to how the child uses imitation in their play:

The task of the kindergarten teacher is to adapt the practical activities of daily life so that they are suitable for the child's imitation through play. . . . The activities of children in kindergarten must be derived directly from life itself rather than being “thought out” by the intellectualized culture of adults. In the kindergarten, the most important thing is to give children the opportunity to directly imitate life itself (Steiner, 1923, as cited in Howard, 2006, para. 14).

In addition to imitation there are other indications for Steiner early childhood practice and these include: learning experiences that support children's wellbeing through rhythm and repetition; holding an awareness of children's sensory development in their experience of the learning environment; the need to give time, space and appropriate equipment for creative play experiences; and being responsive to the dynamics of the social environment that the child experiences, including the inner actions and mood of the adult (Steiner, 1924; Oldfield, 2001).

1.8.3 Rhythm and Repetition in the Steiner Preschool

Almon and Mitchell (n.d) say that the Steiner early childhood environment is:

an extension of the family experience, an intermediate step for the child between home and formal schooling. The goal is to provide a warm, calm, secure, aesthetic environment in which the imagination and creativity of the child will flourish.... where one can breathe easily, relax and play according to the impulses of one's heart (para. 1-3).

To carry the children through the day educators have a rhythmic schedule which provides a sense of security and consistency for the child. A sense of 'breathing easily' is a key concept in the way that rhythm is incorporated into the Steiner environment, and one that Rudolf Steiner believes educators must address in relation to each child's particular stage of development (Steiner, 1924).

The most important measures in education will involve paying attention to all that properly organises the breathing process and integrates it into the nerve-sense process. In a higher sense, a child has to learn to take up into his spirit what is bestowed on him by the fact that he is born to breathe (Steiner, 1981, as cited in Smyth, 2006 p. xiv).

Heckmann (2011) describes a breathing in and breathing out process that children experience in their daily rhythm. According to Heckmann, the breathing-in period (often involving activities like: drawing, water painting, and eating) is very short because she sees that "...little children can only concentrate for short periods of time" (para 4). In comparison, the period of 'breathing-out' relates to the child's experiences of the surrounding world – like free play, running and physical activity in nature. In order to bring balance in the day, and as Steiner says to "... properly organize ..." the breathing process (Steiner, 1981, as cited in Smyth, 2006 p. xiv), educators ensure that the daily rhythm has both periods of breathing-in and breathing-out so that a pattern is established. This sense of rhythm extends to the children's experience over the course of a week and year because on the same day each week the children will experience a particular activity like bread baking, water colour painting, or walking. The rhythm of the day in the Steiner setting is seen as being "... safe, predictable and

ritualistic ... important but unobtrusive ...” (Drummond & Jenkinson, 2005, p.8-10). Rudolf Steiner settings therefore emphasise slowness and calmness as being fundamental qualities to supporting children’s experiences of attending preschool because these qualities reflect the inner-world mood of the child.

1.8.4 Play and The Inner World of the Child

Throughout the principles of Rudolf Steiner education is the aim of nurturing each child so that they are able to develop their inner capacities to the full. This means that an individual who has inward direction and security is seen as having a foundation for life in which the outer capacities of initiative, compassion and insight can flourish. According to Steiner, these capacities are seen as the skills and knowledge necessary to work and contribute to society (Baldwin-Dancy, 2000). Providing nourishment for the child’s inner world is therefore a fundamental component of the practices used in a Rudolf Steiner preschool.

Rudolf Steiner makes reference to the child’s inner world by saying:

Although it is highly necessary that each person should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his early years of life are passed. For if we allow his organism to grow strong in this nonintellectual way, he will rightly develop in later life the intellectuality needed in the world today (Steiner, 1923, as cited in Howard, 2006, para.23).

The child’s inner world is seen as being a space of dream-like consciousness. In this space, creative play is central to the experiences that Rudolf Steiner educators provide because it is seen as the vehicle for the child’s “intuitive resources” of thought, dialogue and feeling (Paley 2004, p. 33). Paley (2004) refers to the quality of time within children’s play through describing an educator’s reflection of childhood: “playing in the backyard when we were kids. There’s a flow I remember, and a feeling that the world has slowed down enough for us to watch it turn” (p.55). This ‘slowed down space’ is a primary focus of the learning environment that the Steiner educator strives to create. It is a space of

calmness – a secure haven where the child can freely imagine, create, muse, wonder, feel and live (Drummond, 1999).

An English research study investigating the assessment and observation practices used by Rudolf Steiner educators, explored how the theme of imagination in the children's play reflects the child's inner world. The research showed that the children's play had an "... ebb and flow..." where the power of the children's imagination was seen as a way to "...transform their worlds- the inner world of make-believe and the outer world, with its dressing –up materials, capes, crowns and veils (Drummond & Jenkinson, 2005, p. 18). Imaginative play is a dominant thread that runs throughout the programme in a Steiner early childhood setting because it is seen as a holder of the "... complex of activities of soul: joy, sometimes also pain, sympathy, antipathy, and particularly, curiosity and the desire for knowledge" (Steiner, 1922, as cited in Jaffke, 2004, p.29).

1.8.5 Materials to Facilitate Imaginative Play in a Steiner Environment

Children who play in a Steiner environment are provided with toys that according to Steiner should not be "...too finished and perfect" (Steiner, 1906, as cited in Jaffke, 2004, p. 38). The materials are simple, and raw – often found objects from nature like: pebbles, stones, shells, sticks and wood. The toys are crafted by hand in natural fibres like silk, cotton, wool, and wood (Beaumont, 2014, cited in, Burrows & Stehlik, 2014). According to Jaffke (2004), Rudolf Steiner made specific indications for the types of toys that best support children's development in the first seven years.

One toy that Steiner valued greatly was a simple hand-made doll made from folding a napkin and suggesting a head, hands and feet through knotting the corners. This simple doll is often described in contrast to the more elaborate commercially made dolls that were available in the early part of the twentieth century to describe the importance of simplicity on the child's imagination and inner soul development. Steiner talks about how giving a child a simple hand-made doll means that the child "... will fill out the rest through imagination in soul and spirit. Then every time that child plays with the doll, there is an inner awakening that remains inwardly active and alive" (Steiner, 1906, as cited in

Jaffke, 2004, p. 38). The minimalist feel of the play materials in the Steiner environment supports the feeling of calm and peace, and by having less 'stuff' a "... feeling of more time and space and peace comes in" (Pridham, 2014 cited in, Burrows & Stehlik, 2014, p.18).

1.8.6 Relationships in a Rudolf Steiner Setting - a Holistic Construct

Raichle (2008) asks educators to consider how the learning space feels and how the human quality impacts on this feeling:

It is not true that our thoughts and feelings dissipate; leaving no impression on the environment-it is our thoughts and feelings that in a sense develop the nuance of the environment. Each environment, each space has its own 'feel' or atmosphere, and each affects our soul life accordingly (p.66).

Raichle (2008) presents a picture of the relationship between educator and child that extends beyond the social and sees that our actions and thoughts influence the environment and the child's sense of emotional connection to this environment. This view is supported by Immordino-Yang (2011), who suggests that new findings in the field of cognitive and social neuroscience ask educators to explore how children are influenced by the actions of those around them in the environment, including the mental actions and beliefs held by the adults they entrust. Immordino-Yang brings attention to the traditional views about brain development and its connection to bodily experiences that are held by Western culture and suggests that new findings move away from this view that sees emotions and thinking as completely separate processes (2011). Instead, the new findings bring a holistic vision to the previous understandings of development, stating that emotions are so closely involved with thinking and brain development that there is an undeniable impact on the learning and teaching relationship (Nielsen, 2003).

1.8.7 The Influence of the Emotional Climate on Relationships

By considering how the learning space feels, the impact of how the emotional climate influences relationships can be seen. Long-Breipohl (2009) examines how specific characteristics of the environment foster children's positive

engagement with the programme. The quality of “inner-warmth” is described as being important for the child to feel when they come to preschool (Long - Breipohl, 2009, p. 53). This inner warmth occurs through the preparation of the physical space; for example, ensuring that the room has been heated and is warm or through offering the children a morning snack such as porridge or muffins when they arrive. Another example is through the activities that the children see when they arrive – the educator will be engaged with home-like tasks such as preparing bread and the children will help to mix, stir and knead the dough. Or the adults maybe engaged in a craft activity where a child is able to sit quietly on a “warm lap” and watch the activity from a safe vantage point (Long-Breipohl, 2009, p. 53). This example illustrates how the creation of a home-like atmosphere creates a mood of calmness and security for children when they come to a Rudolf Steiner preschool. This picture can offer a starting point for reflecting and comparing how different Rudolf Steiner educators form relationships with children in their care. Each preschool will hold a different concept of what this means and will depend on a number of influences including the educator’s own beliefs of this. In the frame of working from a culturally responsive stance, it would be important for Rudolf Steiner educators to look at both their own and other Steiner preschools to create a constructive dialogue about what strategies support children’s sense of belonging when they attend preschool. Once these strategies are made visible a deeper understanding of how the underlying theories of attachment relate to philosophy and practice can be gained. This is where a research project that aims to investigate the practices of establishing relationships in Rudolf Steiner preschool settings can offer valuable dialogue and knowledge to the wider Steiner as well as non-Steiner early childhood community.

CHAPTER 2

FRAMING THE RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

Supporting children to feel secure and to feel that they belong is an outcome educators strive for in early childhood practice. An underlying principle of *Belonging, Being and Becoming, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) is the emphasis of “secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships between educators, children, parents and families” (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 12). The educator’s relationship with a child is paramount to facilitating a positive early childhood experience and a sense of emotional wellbeing for the child.

Understanding how to nurture and support children’s early relationship experiences is essential because when young children feel secure and happy about being part of something they reap the benefits of wellbeing gained through play, connections with peers and engagement in learning. There are diverse ways that early childhood educators form relationships with the children in their care and it is essential that a space for deep reflection about each child is provided. Through reflection, a space forms where educators can ask: who is this child? Where do they come from and what do they bring? Asking deeper questions about child development supports a genuine connection to the child’s personal story and place in the world.

There are three key sections to this discussion:

1. Theories of Attachment
2. Belonging
3. Personal Philosophy and the EYLF

The first section outlines the background theories and models of Attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1980; Colmer, Murphy, & Rutherford, 2011; Council of Australian Governments, 2009; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2002) as well as recent research into the impact of the

childcare experience on children's cortisol levels as markers of stress (Ahnert, Gunnar, Lamb, & Barthel, 2004; Sims, 2005; Sims, Guilfoyle, & Parry, 2005, 2006). These two areas acknowledge that when educators hold a close and respectful bond with young children, the benefits for the child's ongoing emotional security and wellbeing are far-reaching. Within the EYLF, belonging is about a child's developing self-concept and sense of feeling secure (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). For a young child, a positive connection to their learning environment is built from feelings of being safe, secure and happy; the way that educators form their relationship with each child to promote this is essential to consider in understanding what factors contribute to feelings of being secure.

The second section to this discussion takes the position that belonging is about ensuring that all who attend the early childhood setting feel accepted for who they are, and that the differences in family styles and cultural identity are positively affirmed, respected and where appropriate extended in a way that is empowering for the child and his or her family (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996). To support this space of acceptance and empowerment, there must be a strong practice of critical reflection where educators question their own identity (as early childhood professionals) by asking questions like: who am I? And: Where have I come from as an early childhood educator? Questioning personal identity helps to foster an openness to the diversity that surrounds us in a way that supports inclusive practices of building relationships with children. The process of building relationships in a new preschool environment holds both similarities and differences depending on the service's philosophy and background culture. Looking at differences allows knowledge to be gained about diverse "cultural practices and world views" (Council of Australian Governments 2009, p.16). This helps educators to critically reflect on the practices they use when working with children and their families so that the effectiveness of these practices in meeting the child's needs can be reviewed and improved. For early childhood educators, an aid to this process can be found by looking outside the boundaries of individual practice to investigate how other services form relationships with children.

The beliefs that educators hold influence their interpretations and understandings about what is considered the best way to form relationships with children. For example, if an educator chooses to work solely from one philosophical viewpoint, critical reflection could be enhanced by looking at services that work in a similar way to establish a broader picture about what a quality relationship means for the child and family. Through this picture the early childhood educator can gain new awareness of strategies that support warm, responsive and secure relationships for the children in their care. The third section of this discussion will focus on the approach to reflection that is found within the EYLF. Links will be made to the attachment relationship showing how this relationship is important across paradigms.

2.2 Theories of attachment

Aspects of current early childhood work can be traced to the work of both John Bowlby (1907-1990) and Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) (Colmer et al., 2011). The key premise of their work was the importance of secure attachment in infancy and early childhood. Attachment is identified as the close and affectionate emotional bond that occurs between the child's primary caregiver (usually the mother) and child. Two elements are seen within in the development of secure attachment in the child: the first being that the child seeks out the caregiver for support and reassurance in times of need and distress and the second being that from having one's needs recognised the child develops the confidence and ability to engage in activities away from the caregiver – in a state of separation (Dunst & Kassow, 2008).

Theories of attachment, in particularly the attachment relationship, are useful for informing types of practices for supporting children and families in situations where there is the potential for stress and anxiety (Colmer et al., 2011). For this reason, the position taken in this research project is that attachment theory and the formation of the secure attachment relationship are essential components of building positive connections with children when they attend preschool. This view reflects the position found in the EYLF, which emphasises that secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships are the foundation of effective teaching

and learning process in early childhood settings (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). While this is the position indicated, understanding what this means for early childhood practice can differ depending on the philosophy and beliefs held by the educators working in a specific setting (Davis et al., 2010). Research that proposes to explore the viewpoints and thinking processes of early childhood educators will make a much-needed contribution to our understandings of Early Childhood education in the current climate.

2.2.1 The Meaning of Quality Relationships

It has been shown in research that an underlying factor in promoting positive experiences for children is the establishment of warm, responsive and secure relationships between educators, children, parents and families (Davis et al., 2010; Hazel, Kemp, Newman, & Twohill, 2011; Linke, 2010; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996; Sims, 2011). Additionally, research by Sims (2008) showed that children's cortisol levels, as measures of stress, dropped when the child was engaged in a securely attached relationship with their caregiver. The educator's role and relationship to the child, is therefore paramount to facilitating a sense of emotional wellbeing (Kennedy, 2011; Marvin et al., 2002; Moretti, 2010; Sims, 2008). Reflecting on who the child is, where they come from and what they are interested in can help educators to form a connection to different aspects of the child's world and so build a deep and responsive relationship with the child. When an adult is sensitive to the way children form relationships to people, objects and new experiences, they can find strategies that are centred on each child's personality and individual situation (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996). Johansson (2004, p.24) reflects the importance of this kind of relationship by saying that the "substance of a preschool is constituted in the learning encounters that teachers create". The encounter created between educator and child highlights the importance of the relationship in practices of promoting social-emotional wellbeing (Carr, 2001).

2.2.2 Attachment Theory as a Theme in Processes of Building New Relationships

Having secure attachments in the early childhood environment helps children build relationships and supports children's sense of belonging and emotional

wellbeing. Joining a new learning environment can invoke feelings such as worry, sadness and distress for the child and because of these potential stress factors it is important to look at how practices acknowledge and support the child's emotions. For example, the way that educators nourish their relationships with children can support feelings of emotional wellbeing when a child is settling into a new learning environment. Here it is useful to consider a study by Davis et al. (2010) because this investigated educator beliefs and practices about how children's social and emotional wellbeing is supported in early childhood practice. An important theme that the participants acknowledged was the importance of creating a caring learning environment in which they held strong relationships with the children. Physical affection was identified as being a main strategy used in the interactions but the study did not refer to theories such as attachment theory, which describe the importance of relationships in early childhood. For example, what is it that makes the educator's relationship with the child a strong one? The researchers noted that a key strategy used by the participants was to make the child feel happy when responding to feelings of distress. However, there was no reference in the participants' responses to the critical part that emotions play in children's socio-emotional development (Davis et al., 2011, p.4). For children to feel secure in a learning environment, adults must become aware of how the child experiences the physical, social and emotional climate of the setting (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996, p.41). Forming a relationship with the child that responds to their immediate felt experiences is an underlying principle of attachment theory that is essential to bring to understandings of children's emotional wellbeing: however, it is only seen in a small way in the Davis et al. (2011) study. The study by Davis et al. (2011) suggests that there is a space to extend current knowledge about the use of the attachment relationship in the way that early childhood educators form relationships with children.

A programme implemented in an American context offers a comparison to the study by Davis et al. and shows how the attachment relationship can be brought into an early childhood setting to support the mental health and wellbeing of the children and surrounding community (Keller, 2011). The need for this project

grew from the surrounding community, which was described as being high-risk with significant levels of poverty and violence. Patterns of 'anti-attachment' were shown to be entrenched in the culture of the community to the point of negatively influencing the overall preschool experience for children, families and educators. Therefore the programme's aim was to take the theories of attachment (as they pertain to child development and mental health) out of the context of a therapy or counselling setting and into an early education context such as a child care centre or preschool, so that the relationship would become a therapeutic tool for supporting children through stressful and traumatic events. The key aim of this study is important because it shows that when a relationship of care and healing is in place this positively supports children through transitions, meaning that numerous benefits for the child's mental and emotional wellbeing can be gained. Furthermore, this study shows that the attachment relationship and associated theories of attachment are an essential component in establishing caring transition processes that respond to the child's emotional world.

Taking attachment theory further and illustrating how it can be applied practically in work with children and families is seen in The Circle of Security Project (Marvin et al., 2002). This study produced evidence-based research that supports a model of working therapeutically with 'at-risk' parents and children. The model, 'The Circle of Security,' applies attachment theory, object relation theory, and the need for reflection, interactions and practices of supporting children (Marvin et al 2002, p.107). The Circle of Security takes Ainsworth's theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978) of a secure base and haven of safety as a key underlying theme and combines this with ideas of current child development and research such as emotional regulation, interactive synchrony, states of mind regarding attachments and intimate relationships, shared states of consciousness, affect and perspectives, and reflective functioning. These ideas are then offered as a pictorial representation that combined with group facilitation offers the theory in a "user- friendly, common-sense fashion" meaning that it can be cognitively and emotionally accessible to those working with it (Marvin et.al. 2002, p.109).

It is important to question what models such as the Circle of Security project and those implemented by Davis et.al. (2011) and Keller (2011) mean for practice in preschool settings. The studies focused on 'high-need' situations where there was a need to heal the broken bond of a relationship. However, it is just as important to address the need for ongoing care of our relationships with children in the broader community. Holding awareness of situations and practices that can cause barriers to this bond of care in a relationship is a key to meeting each child's emotional needs. This aspect is important because it illustrates how an understanding of attachment theory is crucial in formulating pedagogical approaches that support children's emotional wellbeing. In a preschool, educators can look to implement strategies that build on theories of attachment when establishing relationships with the children. However, attachment theory must be placed as the foundation to other key elements like the formation of close bonds and relationships with parents that are also seen as a contributing factor in effective early childhood practices.

2.3 Belonging

Methods that encourage new dialogue based on the exploration of individual thought patterns and beliefs are important for the field of early childhood because it supports the theme of belonging that is woven through the EYLF and the National Quality Standard (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011b; Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Belonging involves educators engaging in practices that involve critical reflection about personal identity. An integral aspect of 'Belonging', as described in the EYLF, is that it is about a sense of place or 'knowing' where we belong as an individual and with who we belong to or identify with (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Belonging holds the connections and relationships that children form with other individuals, and these define and shape "who children are and who they can become" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 7). When educators who work with children and families are committed to meanings of culture as being a shared reality, the outcome can be seen in the way that the early childhood service promotes a strong sense of place for each child and their family. For this reason, research that allows early childhood professionals to understand the

philosophical structure of their practice in the context of the EYLF is important for authentically putting belonging into practice. Educators need opportunities to look at their personal belief systems and to look outside the boundaries of these systems because in understanding what is behind the 'whys' of what we do we can articulate the most effective practices of working with children and their families.

2.3.1 Supporting Connections Through Belonging

Feeling secure and feeling that they belong is an outcome educators strive for when building relationships with children in the preschool setting. The Circle of Security shows that when an educator creates a warm, safe and caring relationship with a child in their care a secure base is formed (Marvin et al., 2002). This 'human base' can be seen as a platform that the child can step off and explore their new environment from and is a building block for the child's beginning and ongoing feelings of belonging.

Being deeply connected to a place or space that we inhabit in a way that allows for feelings of security, peacefulness and enjoyment can describe what belonging means for children and adults (Hazel et al., 2011; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996). A sense of connection or belonging is described in the EYLF:

Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging...shapes children and who they can become (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 7).

The EYLF acknowledges that belonging is interwoven with the traditions, cultures, values and beliefs that are held by the child's family and wider culture. By seeing belonging in this culturally inclusive frame it can be thought of as a transformative tool in which we can understand our relationships with others on a deeper level. Sumsion and Wong (2011) propose that belonging does not stand alone, but that it exists within specific dimensions or axis points that interconnect and so creates a fluid, more pliable meaning. They make reference to physical, spiritual, legal, emotional, cultural, moral, ethical, political, temporal, social and spatial domains in their cartography, which intends to begin a conversation about the wider perspectives of belonging that are held by early

childhood practitioners (Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p. 35). This encompasses multiple perspectives built from diverse cultural perspectives of belonging that are held within one's immediate and wider early childhood community (Sumsion & Wong, 2011).

This discussion has begun in some sectors of the early childhood community where educators are coming to collectively interpret the Early Years Learning Framework. A specific resource has been created by early childhood professionals in New South Wales, Australia to support educators to unravel "the essence of the Early Years Learning Framework" (Children's Services Central, 2010, p. 3). In this resource, belonging and other concepts found within the Early Years Learning Framework have been explored. However, this dialogue must extend further to reach educators working across the diverse spectrum of early childhood services in Australia, including services that work from a specific philosophical frame.

2.4 Personal Philosophy and the Early Years Learning Framework

Within *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (Council of Australian Governments, 2009), *The National Quality Framework* (NQF) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011a) and the *National Quality Standards* (NQS) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011b) early childhood educators and services are being asked to articulate and review the philosophy that they hold. These documents are creating a change in the climate of early childhood education in Australia. Reflective practice is a core process in the EYLF because it is seen as the vehicle for educators to rethink why they enact their practice in a particular way (Connor 2011). Here, the educator's philosophy is a major influence in how early childhood practice looks, and this is acknowledged in the EYLF. The EYLF asks educators to question their own sense of 'being' as it relates to the values and beliefs that they bring to practices of working with young children and their families (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). A study by McMullen (2010 p. 10) describes how important it is for educators to look outside the boundaries of their own practice "to question or revisit their

long-held beliefs to shake up old, dusty assumptions about how things are supposed to be". McMullen's view is again reflected by Sims (1999) in the idea that identity is formed through the groups that we belong to. In terms of early childhood services, the group can be seen as the setting where the educator works and differences can occur at the philosophical level between services even though they are all working under the same government frameworks. Research has focused on how early childhood educators define their philosophy within a prescribed structure (Carr, Hatherly, Lee, & Ramsey, 2003; McMullen et al., 2005; Te One, 2003), but no studies have explored how educators working from a specific philosophy articulate this in a structure with strong contrasts to their own. The EYLF acknowledges there is great diversity in how services will approach the document, but services that already hold an ideology strongly embedded in their practice will journey through the document in a very different way. A setting in this position is a preschool working from the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner.

In Rudolf Steiner Education, early childhood is a time where the child inhabits an inner dream-like space and the child's development occurs primarily through the creative forces of their imagination (Hale & Maclean, 2004). Educators in these settings focus on nurturing the child's physical, emotional and spiritual being in quite different ways than evident in non-Steiner programmes (Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School, 2011). For example, in the EYLF 'Outcome Five' focuses on children being effective communicators. In this outcome there is specific emphasis on the use of both print based and screen-based texts in the early childhood setting. Screen-based texts such as the Internet and DVDs are among examples of how educators can facilitate a learning experience that promotes the child's communication. This premise strongly contrasts the philosophy and the practices employed in a Rudolf Steiner preschool where educators have consciously chosen to exclude these forms of texts in order to facilitate a space that focuses on a quietness and calmness (Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School, 2011; Von Kugelgen, 2004). The songs and stories shared with the children are done so orally through memorised stories, songs and verses rather than through an electronic method. This illustrates one area of practice (within the EYLF) where

the practices employed in a Rudolf Steiner preschool are in contrast to those of a non-Steiner setting. There is no doubt many other areas where Steiner and non-Steiner influenced programmes hold different understandings of what constitutes quality practice. This study aims to investigate, in a Steiner preschool, how educator beliefs interact with the themes of the framework and so influence and inform their relationships with children. This question is important because Steiner-influenced preschools are required to implement the EYLF as well as the *National Quality Standard* and need to find ways to do so that do not conflict with their basic principles.

2.4.1 The Impact of Philosophy on Early Childhood Practice

In any preschool setting, the background philosophy and culture can impact on practice in very subtle ways. The groups we identify with shape our sense of self and the beliefs that we hold in these groups influence how we act and interact in the world (Sims,1999). When there is a strong group identity, based on philosophy or culture, we often label those who exist outside our frame as being different. Recognising and positively talking about our differences can allow a culturally responsive approach to surface, and the diverse range of groups present in the community can then be included in a respectful way (Riehl,1993 as cited in Beckett, Konakov, & Robertson, 2012 p.36).

This way of proactively working with difference can also be applied to the differences that occur on a philosophical level of practice. Services working from a specific philosophy can often hold values that represent an alternative interpretation of current practices in early childhood (Gidley, 2008). An example of this can be seen in a setting such as the Rudolf Steiner preschool because the 'Steiner' philosophy holds a very specific view of child development that influences how educators approach practice and so interpret curriculum frameworks. Identifying different approaches in early childhood practice and creating a dialogue about what is seen as effective can help to create an understanding of what works best in practice (Elliott, 2006). Therefore, when we are able to listen, engage and share with others our practice is ultimately

strengthened and we are assisted to deliver positive experiences for children and families in our care (Hadley, 2010).

CONCLUDING POINTS OF THIS SECTION

This chapter has explored three specific areas that contribute to understanding the importance of relationships in children's experiences of attending preschool. Warm, responsive and reciprocal relationships are the foundation of theories of attachment and are seen as a crucial element to effective practices in early childhood settings (Kennedy, 2011; Moretti, 2010; Marvin et.al 2002; Sims, 2008). Therefore, section one of this discussion has focused on showing how these theories relate to current early childhood practice through reviewing research studies that hold children's emotional wellbeing and mental health as a primary focus. Looking at these links to attachment theory further highlights the importance of educators forming strong relationships with children and families.

The second section to this discussion has explored the concept of belonging that is identified in the EYLF. It has been illustrated in this section how the underpinning concepts of belonging are linked to practices that ask educators to question the source of their personal principles and beliefs in order to understand how these influence the relationships they form with children in their care. Articulating one's personal philosophy is a principle of the EYLF and this is explored in the final section of this chapter. This section has highlighted how reflection enables early childhood educators to question their own sense of being and use it as a tool to understand what beliefs underpin the relationships that they form with children and families. Seeing how beliefs are interpreted in practice can bring discussion and new understandings about how to best support children and families through experiences at preschool.

In the following chapter the methods this research study used to investigate the practices employed in a Rudolf Steiner early childhood setting are described. Creating a space for critical reflection around the themes within the Early Years Learning Framework and how they relate to the educator's personal philosophy of Rudolf Steiner education was an intention of the chosen methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design of the Research

The purpose of this study is to initiate a shared dialogue within the early childhood community about how educators' philosophy impacts on their work with children and their families. Philosophy holds a major impact on all areas of early childhood. Relationships are one of the principles of *Belonging, Being and Becoming the Early Years Framework for Australia* (EYLF) because they occur in all early childhood settings and influence the feelings that children and families have when they attend an early childhood service. Research has shown that when children feel a secure connection to their caregivers, and are happy to come and engage with the early childhood programme, there are ongoing benefits for the child's mental and emotional wellbeing (Educational Transitions and Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011; Greenman & Stonehouse, 1997; Marshall & Kenney, 2009; Marvin et al., 2002).

In this study, the way that the educators form relationships with children has been used as the system or case.

3.2 Case Study

In qualitative research, methodological approaches that focus on "how people make sense of their experiences within a framework of socially constructed, negotiated, and shared meanings" (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Lee, 2012, p. 32) are important. Case study is defined as a design that concentrates on gathering information about "real people in real situations" (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000, p. 181). To give a holistic picture about the lived experiences of the participants, case studies focus on research methods that capture the realistic and natural behaviour patterns evident in a specific social setting (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). It is important to emphasise that the case study in itself is not

the method but is seen as a specific choice of what will be studied. According to Stake (2005, p. 444), “a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry”. To Stake a case study is a system that is patterned in a specific way depending on the way the system works and functions together. Stake (2005) presents three types of case study design, and one of these is ‘an instrumental case study’. In an instrumental case study, the case is important but it is seen as a way to facilitate deeper understanding about an external issue through re-drawing a generalisation or bringing new insight (Stake, 2005). For example, in this study the case, which is the way that educators’ form relationships with children in the Steiner preschool environment, has been chosen as a tool for understanding a the wider ‘external’ interest of: how the educator’s perceptions of Steiner philosophy influence what they do in practice. In an instrumental case study:

The case is still looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed but all because this helps us pursue the external interest ... the choice of the case is made to advance understanding of that other interest (p. 445).

The instrumental case study is, therefore, seen as a means to extend or deepen understanding about a specific phenomenon. In this study, deepening understanding about the impact of philosophy on practice has been supported through writing the story that best represents this case. Narrative is used as an important tool for conveying the lived experiences of the participants at the heart of the case study.

3.3 Collecting the Stories

Narrative and story are important threads used in the methods of this study because they have supported the representation of the educator’s experiences about how they form relationships with the children in their care.

Rudolf Steiner educators use storytelling in numerous ways, from the impromptu story in the garden to describe the emerging spring flower to the circle time song that the educator memorises to tell as an interactive story

through music. The story is seen as a way for the child to emotionally step into the shoes of the characters they see in a way that is appropriate to where they are in their development (Mellon, 2000; Perrow, 2008). Therefore, the story and the storyteller provide a gentle scaffold for the child's social-emotional learning, and growth. In the context of this study, the use of narrative acknowledges the importance of story as it is used in the focus setting. In this setting it is seen as a form of expression that asks questions on a deeper level and so seeks answers that provide new meaning and information. Halprin (2003, p. 87) describes this process as being a therapeutic interplay between the unconscious and the imagination as they work together to connect "our inner life and vision and our outer expression in the world. Through the imagination, we penetrate the interior world and shape its contents into meaningful and visible forms".

Smyth (2006) suggests that stories are a way to connect us to a new appreciative understanding of another human being that allows a genuine feeling of being in touch with another human being. Smyth's reflections of her childhood memories of storytelling evoke the importance of the human connection that can be found when listening to a story told by another individual:

The vivid memories of my father's storytelling are stitched into me differently than what came from books. The books I most remember were the ones I read alone. Telling a story creates a different, deeper kind of companionship, and more immediate connection (Smyth, 2006, p. 119).

The use of story in this study followed a pattern of story gathering through conversational interviewing and observation. The stories that were gathered through these methods were intended to give a space to hear the participant's interpretation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as it was seen from the viewpoint of a Rudolf Steiner educator. Through this process, those who work outside the frame of Steiner education can gain insight into their own practices of working with children and families. Reflecting on the stories that other educators tell about their understanding of the EYLF can produce a new level of dialogue that Connor (2011) suggests can help us to question our sense of being as an educator and how this in turn influences the ways we work with children and families.

3.3.1 Dialogue – A Tool for Collecting the Educator’s Stories

Seeing the whole rather than breaking it into parts; seeing connections rather than distinctions; inquiring into assumptions rather than justifying or defending them; learning through inquiry and disclosure rather than persuading, selling or telling; and creating shared meanings rather than gaining agreement on one meaning (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998 as cited in Maurer & Githens, 2010, p. 280).

According to Maurer and Githens (2010, p. 280), dialogue is a form of communication that allows space for the exploration of “individual and collective assumptions and predispositions”. As an essential component to co-construction, dialogue was used as a tool within the research undertaken in this study.

The importance of creating shared meanings with the participants was an essential component to the approach taken during the interview process of data collection. The individual in-depth interviews were undertaken with each of the four educators. Using a conversational style of questioning, the objective was to gain detailed and richly textured “person-centered information” (Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood, & Axford, 2004, p. 412). The techniques of storytelling and probing as outlined by Minichiello et al. (2004) were adopted during the first and second interview because the story telling mode of questioning was seen as being an effective way to naturally describe the educator’s position about the key issues. The background theories of attachment including the attachment relationship formed a foundation for the questions at the first interview, where open-ended questions were organised into four sections of: attachment theory and the attachment relationship; strategies educators use to settle children into a new preschool environment; the educator’s personal philosophy and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The initial questions were seen as starting points to initiate a conversation about the processes and strategies that the educators use for settling new children into their preschool class and developing an initial connection with the child. Learning about the educators’ personal philosophies of practice and forming a picture of what this means in their practice and understanding of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) was a key intention at this first stage of the research process.

3.3.2 Observing and Looking In – Tools to Illustrate the Collected Stories

After the first conversations were held with each educator, the second part of the research process was to be present in the early childhood setting to observe how the educators formed connections with the children when they first came to the preschool environment.

The intention here was to observe each of the four focus children in such a way that the whole picture of the child's day was seen. This meant that the educator's interactions with each focus child were observed for up to an hour at three different points in the preschool day. The field work involved two visits to the setting for three consecutive days at a time with a period of three months between each visit. The time observing the educators totalled six hours each day. The underlying purpose was to create a relationship between the educator's conversation about what they did and the philosophy behind this with the actual occurrences of their day.

By using a story or narrative approach, the observations were recorded in everyday language, writing down everything that was seen and done (Cohen et al., 2000; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). O'Leary (2005) describes how the processes for recording observations can include a diverse mix of strategies such as journaling, jotted ideas, pictures and concept maps. In this way, the process of observing became an effective way to gain an entry point into the world inhabited by the educators, children and families. Through taking in the experiences "to see, hear, smell, feel and even taste (the) environment" (O'Leary, 2005, p. 119) the observations allowed me, as the researcher, to sense the world as experienced by the participants. Through sensing their world and immersing myself in it, the conversations held with each educator were given clarity and colour and I entered a new dimension in the picture of their beliefs and experiences. Bone (2008, p. 346) describes how she became the 'bricoleur' in her study, which explored the way that three different early childhood settings supported children's spirituality. In the role of 'bricoleur', she was able to deconstruct and then re-construct the data she gathered in order to create a new text and so tell a new story imbued with her personal reflection, experiences,

memories and attitudes. There is a relationship in the process that Bone (2008) describes, to the process that occurred as I made observations because as different threads emerged in the observations they then traced different pathways back to the conversations with the educators, and then to new questions in the stories they were telling. The use of observation became multi-layered because I added to the written observations with sketched drawings of objects, lyrics to songs and verses that I could hear and reflective descriptions about the mood that I felt as I was present in the environment.

3.3.3 The Second Interview

On the second visit to the research site, a second, more individualised, interview was carried out with each educator participant where the questions used were based on the first analysis. The intention was to move deeper below the surface of what the participants had previously shared to add another layer to each individual's story. The participants were asked questions about the observational stories that were collected during the first research period. These stories were based on specific observations of their interactions with a focus child. In order to elicit what was happening for the educator during these interactions, I asked questions like: What thoughts come to mind after listening to this story? If you could add words or descriptions to the story what would they be? Tell me how the story started for you?

3.4 The Quilt Maker and the Storyteller: Collecting Data

research as research-creation ... is no longer seen as a set of procedures to bridge the conceptual and the empirical, and report on a given reality. It is perceived as a form of engagement- of invention and intervention - that is situated within the realm of practice (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011, p. 104).

During my undergraduate studies in the fine arts, the concept of abstraction was discussed in relation to a student's work. In referring to the ideas behind making the art work, the lecturer stated that any work of abstraction must begin from a specific concept or concepts and from a need to link these concepts together in order to uncover or present the meaning of the artwork to the viewer (Thompson, Personal Communication, September, 2001).

To me, this memory from art school sits comfortably beside the view of Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) where the qualitative researcher's role is seen as an essential tool to 'making' and presenting data. The analogy of the researcher as 'quilt-maker' is useful because it also describes how collected or made data can go through a process of analysis, interpretation and evaluation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). The link to the 'quilt-maker' supports a holistic view of the research process. This has been the position in this project because the processes of data collection, analysis and reflection have interlinked and formed connections across each different stage. Giving space for these multilayered connections has been important because it has allowed deeper meanings to surface in the research.

There are similarities between the quilt-maker and the storyteller because like the quilt-maker the storyteller also stitches together the tales that are shared – edits them and put slices of realities together to create a message that reaches others. Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) say that qualitative research is a process of creating and bringing a psychological and emotional unity through a complex mix of elements all occurring at once. In this study, the participant's thoughts and experiences of being a Steiner early childhood educator have been collected in a way that gave me, as the researcher, an opportunity to engage in a reflective process about my own practice as a Steiner early childhood educator.

3.4.1 The Process of Crafting the Stories

Mellon (2000) talks about her process of creating stories as being like "mysterious collaborations" and the process of creating a story as being both subtle and complex (p. 51). Her thoughts about story crafting spoke to me because they reflect elements of the process that happened when I crafted the stories of each participant:

Just when you think a story is going one way, you may experience creative currents moving it in a new direction. ... Uncertainty is creative; it asks us to pay attention with much more than our ordinary consciousness. Names of characters or places or plot line may alter unexpectedly, words nudge at our ears, or a sudden onrush of feelings surprise and unbalance us (Mellon, 2000, p. 51).

Writing about each participant involved using my intuition to sense the essence of each participant's character. Listening to the voice of intuition meant that I needed to trust the process of writing and that the story to come to me was the one that needed to be told. Richardson (1994) describes the process of writing as "*a method of inquiry ... discovery and analysis*" (p. 516) and this is what happened as I read and re-read the transcripts of the interview conversations held with each educator. At times I listened to their recorded voices and asked questions like: who is this person? Where do they come from? What path are they travelling?

I immersed myself in their words, thoughts, and feelings; returning, in my memory, to the encounter we had together. Using my memory of this encounter I brought a picture of each educator into my mind's eye that expressed the essential characteristics of their 'being' as a Steiner educator. This picture was expressed in the narrative of each educator's story.

3.4.2 Self-Story: The Position of the Researcher

My story is one that I will tell as it weaves through my process of listening to the stories of the participant educators, and experiencing the world that these educators inhabit on a daily basis in the context of the Steiner early childhood environment. Kennedy-Lewis (2012) writes about a cultural divide that arises when educators take on the role of researcher in an educational setting that holds similarities to the one that they are based in. According to Kennedy-Lewis (2012, p. 109), challenges can arise as the individual shifts from one professional and cultural role to another. In this process of negotiation, self-narrative is seen as a tool to document, aid and define the individual's identity as it is situated within the research process. A starting point for self-exploration and analysis of one's position in the research can be found through self-narrative because used as a reflexive tool it allows one to be located "in the picture, to understand and factor in how what you see is influenced by your own way of seeing and how your very presence and act of research influences the situation in which you are researching" (Fook, 1999, as cited in Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 109). For these reasons, it has been important to document my voice as it arises

throughout the research. My voice gives me a sense of place and presence in the research while also maintaining a sense of professional being. My sense of place holds my identity as a Steiner early childhood educator, a mother and a post-graduate research student. Self-narrative has been used as a form of reflection in which to understand and articulate my position in the research – it identifies how my presence as researcher influences the specific situation. The story of myself as the researcher is woven alongside the stories of the participants. This notion of self-story and self-reflection is necessary because it has led to a process of understanding the picture in a more holistic and personal way.

Sharing who I am as the researcher and teller of this story is a conscious gesture, a process of reflection that situates me in a post-modernist position. In this position I see “writing as partial, local, and situational” where the “self is always present no matter how much we try to suppress it” (Richardson, 1994, p. 520). From this point, the process of writing allows a freedom to write in ways that tell and re-tell the stories within the research. Exploring this notion of storytelling allows me to both understand the topic I am studying as well as to understand the nature of the ‘self’ within this research process in ways that are “unknowable” and “unimaginable” (Richardson, 1994, p. 521). Exploring the research data in this way allows a personal narrative that locates me in the story of the case studied. The reasons for this are not self-indulgent but are for a specific purpose. Amadio (2012, p. 5) describes her use of self-narrative in a way that reflects my view also:

I aim to situate myself as a researcher who is also a part of the research. Like Ladson-Billing (2000) my research is part of my life and my life is part of my research. I hope that by sharing stories from my youth the reader may gain a sense of where my beliefs have come from, what experiences I have had, and how they may have influenced me.

3.5 Data Analysis

According to Atkinson and Delamont (2005), the tools used for analysis must reflect the context of the research and the social forms of the surrounding culture. The intentions of the project must be clear throughout the analysis, meaning conclusions that are drawn are easily traced back to the data collection

processes (Punch, 2009). In research that focuses on the social world of human existence, a cyclic approach is taken towards the analysis of data (Mukherji & Albon, 2010), thus meaning that as the “research progresses, and the researcher’s understanding of the collected material deepens, new themes and patterns may emerge that require additional questions to be asked” (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 230). In this way, the processes of data collection and analysis are seen as continually interacting together, with one feeding the other to aid a full investigation of the research questions. The view of analysis that underlies this project reflects this reciprocal and reflexive approach because during each stage of the data collection the analysis was crucial in guiding the collection process of the following stage. However, at each stage there were specific means for reviewing the collected data and these are outlined below.

3.5.1 Stage One Analysis

At the first stage of the research process, the analysis involved evaluating the interview data using a framework of questions that related specifically to Rudolf Steiner pedagogy and Attachment Theory. Srivastava and Hopwood (2009, p. 78) propose three categories of questions that provide reference points with which to meaningfully engage with the analysis process. Their questions ask:

- What is the data telling me?
- What is it I want to know? (Here making reference to the research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest).
- What is the dialectical relationship between what the data is telling me and what I want to know? (Refining the focus and linking back to research questions)

Questions such as the ones listed above acted as the coding system for making sense of the participant’s responses by reading through the transcribed responses and then using the questions to identify key phrases in what the participants shared. In this way, the questions formed categories for organising the themes arising in the data. At the first stage – following the first visit to the research site – the analysis focused on the voices of the participants including specific quotations that articulated emerging narratives.

The intention of this first analysis was to outline a frame for the story that described the case being studied. The key themes that were identified in the quotations or words worked to guide the second interviews and observations carried out on the second visit to the research site.

3.5.2 Secondary Analysis

The view that qualitative analysis is a constructed and multilayered process was the position taken in the second stage of analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). This continued to construct the narrative of the case study at hand.

The focus here was to piece together a narrative that offers a shared insight about the observed practices of the Rudolf Steiner preschool. According to Holman Jones (2005, p. 767), the story helps to “create, interpret, and change our social, cultural, political, and personal lives”. Through telling a story, intricate connections are woven “among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation” and it is through the process of letting go that one hopes the reader or listener will bring their own interpretation of the story as it relates to their life context (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765). The importance of letting go and letting the story emerge from the participant’s experience was an important focus of this stage of the analysis.

Also, at this secondary stage of the analysis the collective voice of the participants began to emerge. This voice was the one that began to highlight common responses and also sketched an unconscious pathway from one individual to another. Tuning into these subtle links between the stories began to highlight new meanings in the data that linked to the original intentions of the project but also formed new pathways that enhanced the understanding of these intentions. Through identifying these new links and placing them beside the central research questions, additional layers began to reveal how the influence of educator beliefs on practice were to be seen.

3.6 Setting and Participants

3.6.1 Selecting the Preschool

The setting for this project is a Rudolf Steiner preschool in Victoria, Australia that educates and cares for children aged between three and five years of age. The preschool was selected from a pool of twenty Steiner preschools that are listed as being in operation in the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan and surrounding suburban areas (Hale, 2012). Within the structure of each preschool, the attendance patterns or days that children attend will vary. Therefore, a factor in selecting the preschool for this study required that children attend for three consecutive days in a group with the same lead educator.

The first stage of the selection process involved sending an introduction letter to the preschool director of each of the twenty schools with a consent form for the director to complete if willing to participate. Following this initial letter, each preschool was then contacted by telephone to confirm that the information letter was received and to answer any questions that had arisen. Some of the services declined participation in the first instance while some requested further information, which I sent through email or by telephone conversation. There were challenges at this point in the research process, as many of the directors were extremely difficult to contact and it was necessary to follow up with a number of telephone calls, messages and emails to obtain a response. When a service was found that agreed to participate, there was ongoing contact through email, telephone and written sent documentation in the lead up to the two field visits.

3.6.2 Selecting the participants

The process of selecting participants was based on the strategies of purposive sampling. According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), many qualitative studies encompass more than one strategy for selecting participants because this allows a depth of information to be gained and so responds to the multilayered and complex nature of issues explored in qualitative research. Employing strategies

of purposive sampling therefore means that the researcher will select a sample of participants that is seen as able to give insight into the aims of the study. Within the area of purposive sampling, there are specific categories of strategies that further aid the study's purpose and design (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). A critical-case sample is an example of a strategy where the researcher selects specific individuals based on their experience, knowledge and viewpoints because this is seen as bringing insight to the research that could not be learned from selecting participants through a random strategy. In this way "the researcher can learn more about the phenomenon than would have been learned without including these critical cases" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 112).

The organisation of staff in a Rudolf Steiner preschool setting depends not only on the ratio required by the government regulations, but also on the way that the programme is designed and delivered. Therefore, the number of educators who are employed at a Steiner preschool varies and depends on the number of children attending the service each day and the stipulated pattern for attendance. For example, some preschools ask that children attend in a two-day group or a three-day group where the requested days are in a consecutive pattern. In these instances there may be a different educator who works with each specific group. Also, where a Rudolf Steiner preschool caters for a group of seventeen or eighteen children, there will be two educators working together. While the adults work together, there is a leading educator for each group who is responsible for the daily, weekly and yearly rhythm. This rhythm includes planned experiences of storytelling, 'circle time', bread baking, painting, birthday celebrations and seasonal festivals.

The main participants in this study were the educators who work directly with the children and families using the service. From the preschool that was chosen for this study, four participants were chosen as the focus group. The criteria proposed for selecting the participants was to be based on three key conditions, namely that the participants:

1. Held qualifications and/or at least one year of experience in Rudolf Steiner education;

2. Were the main educator responsible for the learning and care programme of the preschool group;
3. Planned to remain with the group for the duration of the year.

However, some of the criteria changed because the process of selecting the participants became dependant on choosing educators who were available at the time the research was happening and willing to be interviewed. The time available for speaking with each educator had to correspond with the needs of the setting; therefore, the final selection process happened in consultation with the service director. The service director provided the names of the staff willing to participate and I then made contact providing written information about the project. The following table (Figure 3) shows how the participants in the focus group met the selection criteria.

	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3
Hope	Over 20 years of experience in Steiner Education. Qualified early childhood educator	Educator responsible for the main preschool programme.	Yes
Jessie	1 year of experience in Steiner Education. Qualified early childhood educator.	Educator responsible for afternoon preschool programme.	Yes
Joy	Less than 1 year experience of working in Steiner Education. Qualified primary school teacher.	Educator responsible for garden programme. Assistant educator in preschool room.	Joy had moved from the area and was not working at the centre when the second interview took place.
Luke	Less than 1 year experience working in Steiner Education. No formal qualifications in education.	Assistant educator in preschool room.	Yes Luke was with the preschool group for the duration of the research but left before the year ended.

Figure 3: Summary table of participants experience in meeting selection criteria

3.6.3 Selection of Participating Focus Children

Prior to beginning the research at the preschool, families were informed of the project and voluntary participants were requested. I had decided that to best study how educators form relationships with children, the focus children should be 'new' to the setting and 'new' to Steiner education. This would highlight the need, and processes employed, to develop relationships, which is the focus of this study. From the families who expressed interest in participating, a sample of four families was selected using purposive sampling. The initial criteria for this sample group was:

1. Participants who were completely new to this preschool setting and whose child had begun attending this specific preschool for the first time within the past six months;
2. No siblings of the child had attended the preschool or a Steiner educational setting – for example, an older child in their family did not attend;
3. Families who had specifically chosen this preschool as their first introduction to Rudolf Steiner education – meaning that the family had never attended a Rudolf Steiner playgroup and had only recently come into knowledge about this approach to education.

These criteria allowed a group to be formed based on families who hold similar knowledge and are in the same position with a child beginning at a Steiner preschool. The centre director facilitated the process of selecting families by providing a list of the families that met the specific criteria and who would be available at the scheduled time of undertaking the fieldwork. The sample group remained the same throughout the duration of the research and there was no need to select from the wider pool of families attending the preschool.

Participant/s:	Selected from:	Reason for Selection in Study:
Critical case sample of four early childhood educators who work at the preschool.	The larger pool of educators who are employed as the main educators of each preschool group.	<p>The educator holds qualifications and/or at least one year of experience in Rudolf Steiner education. The educators are directly responsible for the children as the leader of a specific preschool group.</p> <p>The educators will be with the children throughout the year that the child attends preschool.</p>
One focus child per educator (four in total) and their family.	<p>A convenience sample of the first four families who met the criteria and who, in consultation with the centre director were asked to be part of the study.</p> <p>The centre director held a list of additional families who attended the preschool and could be called upon if the initial participants withdrew involvement. However this step was not necessary as the first four families remained with the study for its duration.</p>	<p>The child is beginning at the Steiner preschool for the first time.</p> <p>This is the family's first experience of Rudolf Steiner education.</p> <p>There have been no other family siblings attend a Rudolf Steiner educational setting.</p> <p>The child's family have given full consent for their child to be observed as part of the study.</p>

Figure 4: Summary table of Participants in Study

3.7 Ethical Considerations for the Project

This study focused on uncovering educator's perspectives about an issue related to children's emotional wellbeing and development; therefore, considerations were made towards the key participants in the study – the children and their families and the early childhood educators. Choices in presenting and bringing

research into the public domain are made with an awareness of the ethical rights of the participants and their communities. At the core of this research was the responsibility of the researcher to protect and maintain these rights (Christians, 2005). In undertaking research that involves young children, the methods used “need to be developmentally appropriate, sensitive to the issues of ability, power and vulnerability ... and able to accommodate the faithful representation of children’s views, experience and meanings” (Punch, 2009, p. 48).

The educational setting of this study – The Rudolf Steiner preschool – brought additional considerations regarding the methods used for data collection and analysis. For example, when I entered the environment of the preschool I did so with quietness – I did not speak to the children to ask or answer questions because this kind of interaction was not in keeping with the focus of imitation that the educators believe is important. A gesture of being ‘invisible’ is described by Bone (2007) in her reflection about being a researcher in a Steiner kindergarten:

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 (p. 101).

I used methods to collect data that allowed me to be present in the preschool in an unobtrusive way. I began on the periphery, as an onlooker, writing my observations in a small book while sitting on a chair at the back of the room. I would move around if the children came close to ensure I merged into the background. However as the days passed, my presence changed also because through speaking with the educators they became more at ease with me in the space and so invited me to be part of the morning tea and lunch table where I sat with the educators and children. I also found ways where I could be engaged in practical tasks of the preschool, such as washing dishes and still be in a position where I could absorb the mood of the environment and what was happening it.

Many of the methods employed in this study asked the educator to personally reflect on his/her role working with children and families. Self-reflection is a personal and sensitive process; therefore, the emotional safety of those involved in the study influenced the way that the research was conducted. Firstly, this involved being open about the aims and purposes of the study through describing the research design fully and making the requirement of personal reflection clear to the participants (Punch, 2009). Openly stipulating the aims of the study also involved providing a clear background picture about my position in the study, being open about my role as an early childhood educator who works in a Rudolf Steiner setting. For this reason, I shared with the participants the intentions for undertaking this study and investigation in this area of early childhood education. To ensure that the processes of data collection and analysis remained objective and focused towards the intentions of the study, I was provided with supervision by experienced researchers who had no association with the participating preschool.

According to Carroll (2002), ethically sound research provides a space for participants to be heard safely. Ensuring that the participants felt secure in their role during the interviews and observations was important. To support this, the participant had the choice to bring a support person if they felt the need for this although none of the participants acted on this. The upholding of confidentiality has been maintained through the use of pseudonyms in all documented data gathered from the participants, and each participant had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. This confidentiality also extended to the wider community of the preschool where the name of the service was not disclosed in any way. The excerpts selected from the participants' interviews and used in the stories of the data analysis were selected through shared consultation between the participant and researcher and at any time the participant felt uncomfortable having this information used (and later disclosed to a wider audience) they had the right to withdraw it. This shared consultation happened through sending the participants a transcript of their interview as well as providing them with a copy of their individual story. In producing the final form for this research, the participants have had the opportunity to review this and give feedback in order

for the presentation to be an authentic account of their beliefs and voice. In this way, the intention of placing the findings of the study into the wider community has been done so behind a veil of anonymity while also allowing the voices of the participants to be fairly heard (Punch, 2009; Christians, 2005).

While the participants' stories are central to this study, it needs to be acknowledged that they would not exist without the children's involvement. The ethics involved in a study of early childhood that requests the participation of young children must consider the welfare and care of the children (Nutbrown & Clough, 2010). According to Punch (2009), the research must be in the child's best interests and contribute to the child's wellbeing in a direct or indirect way. A core premise in this study has been the investigation of educators' perspectives on supporting children and their families. Through dialogue about forming relationships with children, early childhood educators can understand how to positively influence children's immediate and long-term wellbeing. In this light, respecting and acknowledging the child and the world of childhood is a fundamental belief within this project.

CHAPTER 4

LUKE

Luke has studied at university in New Zealand and gained qualifications in commerce and tourism management. While he is not an early childhood trained educator he has worked with primary school children in holiday care programmes and as a sports coach. Luke's role at this Steiner centre involves assisting the lead educators in the preschool room. The second time we talked, it was Luke's last week at the centre – he was leaving to travel overseas. Luke had been teaching the assistant, who was replacing him, about the role. Through helping the new assistant, Luke reflected on his time at the centre saying:

Right now he is like I was before I started, he knew little about Steiner is just starting to read up on the philosophy now. I will probably answer more questions then tell him anything I think it's just important that he experiences it himself.

STARTING STEINER

Luke came to this centre when a friend, whom he had studied with at university, told him about a position that was available. *My background, primarily it was commerce. I majored in Tourism Management but my bachelor consisted of business papers and I took a few electives which relates to what I am doing now so these were about six papers – out of personal interest; philosophy, psychology, humanities, global sciences - environmental sciences.* This has been Luke's first experience working in a Steiner setting. Luke grew up in New Zealand. *My mother was going to send me to a Steiner school and I think for quite a while she was quite disappointed that didn't eventuate. I had learnt a little, only a very little, about it when I heard about the position that could potentially be going. I did most of my research when I actually got the position so I am still learning; I am very new to it.*

Before coming to the centre, Luke had been working with children in holiday programs for two weeks every school holiday period. His experiences were based on interacting with children and their play and coaching different sports

for the five to twelves. *It was very different and I didn't know what to expect when I arrived here but I didn't know that I would enjoy it as much as I am. Aspects of it, like with the babies, I didn't know if I would enjoy that. I kind of wanted to get straight over to the older kids but (the babies) they've got so little judgment on everything – you know on everything. Their thoughts, all their reasons for doing things are so pure, at their most purest form, without sounding to cheesy.*

For Luke, the experience of working with very young children was different. *When I started working here I was thrown into the babies' room. Sorry I shouldn't say 'thrown in' but I was put in for the first three weeks, so that was very new to me.*

Relating to the very young child was a process of getting to know new children as they came. *They are screaming and you need to learn what they want and what they need, and to grow a connection with them so you can prevent that from happening or from happening less. That was very interesting for me because a lot of the time babies' wants and needs are so basic – they are hungry or thirsty or tired or maybe they have a full nappy or something. I found that I was able to pick up relationships with a lot of them, in a funny almost silent way, if that makes any sense?*

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CHILDREN

The relationships I have formed with the children – some of them are pretty powerful. I don't think I will forget the purity of this age group and being in this environment. I don't know how it is at home, I don't know what it's like outside the gates, but you never really walk out and leave in a bad mood. You have been affected by the children all day in such different ways than in the outside world. That will be something that will be hard to forget and the way that these little people look up to you and how they treat you and what they get from you many things that I won't forget.

Luke tells a story about what it has meant to connect with a baby.

I'm good friends with L who works in the babies' room, we went through university together and she was holding a new child that was screaming and she needed to do something else and needed to pass him to me. As funny as it sounds, because I couldn't picture myself saying this, I hadn't made that initial connection so I wasn't ready to take that responsibility. I feel that I would kind of damage this relationship for the future and this child wouldn't be as comfortable with me as I could make it by getting this kind of initial connection. So, I have often refused or stayed away from that, not for very long, just until I felt that this child was ready to embrace me as well. If they weren't ready, a child - especially a baby, your face becomes familiar and they become comfortable with you for whatever reason that's often unknown. So, if that was destroyed in the first stage then that's going to stay like that. I have noticed that with a lot of the babies, some of the lovely women will pick up this child and hold it and try and comfort it and no matter what they did to calm it down they would continue to scream because for whatever reason that connection wasn't there with that child. But if you give that child to me - I am thinking of one or two in particular they will just stop crying immediately. I found that it was because I had that connection. I don't want to be getting too deep here, I have found it and I have seen these relationships form but it is very deep. I suppose first impressions are always important. I guess not just for the children but you know you could kind of stuff it up at the beginning and then kind of develop it later on and have a good relationship but I feel that it's different with the babies and with all children - young children.

Children are intuitive and can sense the mood of the adult.

It's really important - your state of mind, if that's not clear to anyone else it's almost like how some animals can feel if you are upset. I always feel it's similar with young babies.

Luke remembers another time when an educator he was working with asked him to hold a baby: *I actually saw it wasn't going to work out on this occasion so I just avoided it. Then the next occasion was where he was sitting on the ground, there was a carer next to him but I was able to sit next to him and make the eye contact. I don't know, for some reason it made the difference and as soon as that*

happened I picked him up, put him on my lap and he started calming down. Then I stood up and held him – he faced me and, honestly I shouldn't of even started trying to explain it – I don't even think I can. It's like you have to be ready for this as well – like everything is going to be all right. With the older children and with the babies they can pick up on the energy that is set. Like if there is something else outside of preschool you cannot bring anything into the room. You have to really focus and think about your mood and your attitude and the way you are the entire day. More importantly at the start of the day, if something is a little bit off and the children start playing up – there is just a different energy in the room. You will often look back and think: Why is it like this today? You can often put it down to how one or both the teachers are acting in the room for that day. So it's interesting, you've really got to focus on that. Even if you are tired, if you are just a little bit flat, then it's going to change everything. It's probably going to have the opposite effect on the children and they'll become out of control so it does promote an energy sort where- I still can't understand it but I definitely feel it does.

I talk with Luke about the times when something completely spontaneous influences the energy of the children. Like on the afternoon, when I was observing the children and educators in the outside garden, a sudden thunderstorm came over and it became very dark. Many of the children started to cry and the adults quickly brought them back inside to the preschool. Luke remembers this day saying: *they were really upset weren't they? The teachers were calm, it was just a casual thunderstorm, but it was something that really frightened the children. I don't know, I think that their minds can blow things so far out of the water they can make believe things. They have got an extraordinarily creative side and a lot of that comes through terror, and it doesn't really matter what you tell them. Obviously it comes down to how long you have. They calmed down after a while but you know at the time we were as calm as you could be. I don't know if it is bad to say but I found it a little bit funny because looking that they were so distraught over something so small and so harmless I kind of felt a little bit funny. But I also felt really scared for the children because you don't like seeing them like that – you never like seeing them upset. It was like: this is a lesson they can take on board. This is something new that they have faced in their day.*

Maybe next time it will be better. How did I feel about it? I guess we were just going to take it on our chin and see how it panned out but I knew it was going to be okay within twenty minutes. It was interesting though just seeing how children react to things like that –what their minds can do to make them so upset.

A SILENT WAY OF WORKING

Luke reflects on the way that educators interact with the children in the preschool room saying: *I find it really interesting, allowing them to use their imagination without interfering too much which I absolutely agree with.*

To Luke, because of the way that things work around here (in the preschool), the children are really happy they come each morning and they enjoy being here. A lot of it is because of the way things are run. Obviously there are many of them that may cry after the first half hour because mum or dad is saying goodbye but in general I think they are happy because of this philosophy even though they are not aware of it.

Luke has noticed that the educators work on a level *spiritually bringing their own values into the children. The educators interact with children in that way as opposed to other non-Steiner means of education and teaching.*

When Luke thinks about how the educators work he thinks of a particular educator at the centre. *Well she is very passionate in this philosophy, in how it works and she's always using it even though a lot of it's silent. It will be so interesting to see what it does for these children as their brain develops, I would love to see.*

Luke describes this silent way of how he uses the philosophy – *we are always doing something. Like downstairs, I will pick up the broom straight away and I will start sweeping the deck, the stairs, where everyone sits outside. I will never say: " 'A' will you like to help me with this?" because I think that's supposedly the wrong way to go about it. It's amazing what children do when they will try to imitate what you are doing. It can be catastrophic or it can be really good, and if one starts copying then they just all swarm so it's as simple as that. Another thing is a lot of mainstream systems always tell children what to do. You should be doing*

this, you should be doing that but in the Steiner preschool you step in when you need to. It's often just played out by imitation you are always being constructive and it's really good. When it comes to 'dusty gnome'² in the morning the room will be an absolute tip and they are so good at cleaning up, they're amazing. It's like the room will be spotless in ten minutes. You have to step in and give someone a basket or say: "you need to be cleaning" or: "you need to start helping" but most of them – they know where everything goes, you give them something and boom it goes there and they are just so good, they're so good at so many of those skills. I think it's because of imitation as opposed to forcing it upon them and saying: "I would like you to do this and: "you need to help me" because they don't want to do it that way more often than not. So if you let them come along and be open to it in another way - it's quite amazing. The oldest we have is five and the youngest is three and they have so many deficits in other areas but the areas that we focus on – in a silent way – again it's pretty amazing. Imitation is huge; subconsciously they just pick up on it and slowly start to feed off it. It's like they don't see those things as chores and jobs, they see these things as the norm - things that you should be doing and can make fun out of. When I was this age I doubt I would have been like that.

Luke thinks back to the spiritual quality that he sees the educators bringing into their work and remembers something that one of the children said to him: *I had an interesting comment this morning from 'L', she is four. She came up to me and tugged my tee shirt and said: "Luke when you leave I am going to give you my whole spirit" and I was like how did you even just come up with that? To understand that- that's got to be something that the teachers have brought here. Maybe it is something normal for a four year old in a mainstream setting to say? I don't know? Imitation is a big thing but other than that the teachers interfere very little with their play – slash not at all. The only reason they interfere is that they*

² 'Dusty Gnome' refers to a song that educators in a Rudolf Steiner setting sing to signal to the children that it is time to pack away the toys after playtime.

are doing something wrong. Morning circle is the other kind of big involvement with the children and it's very calm and slow and deep, and I guess spiritual. One educator might bring a little bit of yoga or meditation into it without actually doing that but that's like the vibe that's going around. I haven't been involved in Montessori or mainstream enough to pass judgement but I know its (Steiner) really getting into the children's souls and spirits and its bringing it out –if that makes sense? So the presence that's taking the morning circle -the teacher- whatever they are doing, the children are just engrossed in that and they will start imitating whatever is happening. There is no intellect being used – nothing but the body and that realm.

WAYS OF CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN

For Luke, connecting with the older children is similar to being with the babies but also different. Luke describes how he connects with a child to help them separate from their parent when they arrive in the morning. He feels that the older child's *needs are still very simple, not as simple as younger, but you can distract them really easily. So you can deter their thought from their mother leaving and not coming back for the day – you just need to find what those things are. It's good that you can communicate with the older kids. You can learn and understand something that they love about their day and talk with them about that, and get them excited about that. If that doesn't work you can bring something else that is around you and tell them it's fine and that's all it takes. They will be great for the rest of the day – they won't say mummy or daddy's name.*

Talking with the child is part of what Luke does to form a connection but is not used to *try and make the child think things are okay.* To Luke saying things like: *“Mummy's gone, she will be back at the end of the day”, “everything's okay and your mum is gone, and she's going to be back” or: “ stop crying” are things that simply do not work.*

It's all about that child feeling comfortable with you and knowing you, and knowing them and what they like. It's very simple to work everything out because they are simple at this stage – the things that they process. As long as you can understand that -you can always work with them. Even if they are troubled, or

even if they misbehave more than others there's always means you can find. If you sit down and start, even if it's something that they are not always enthusiastic about -like a piece of paper to colour on: "you draw me a lovely picture and we will get ready to play the game that we played yesterday" or "we will build the biggest sandcastle that you have ever seen". Luke focuses his energy on getting the child distracted, thinking about something else, and then they are okay. I would like to hope that I do understand, even though I am not qualified, but I do feel that I still understand a lot about what it takes of being with children in a good way.

Relating to the children and thinking about how they do things has been helped through the experience of observing the children. *I have done a few observations here and they have all been under Steiner. They are almost reports of some of the things that the children have been doing. There is a framework for it but you write your own observation and then you look at the framework and you choose certain things that you have seen. Like creativity and group building and relying on one-another and working as a team. It helps you think more, it makes you think more in depth about what was going on. Like something simple, making a sand castle and turning it into cake and turning it into triple-decker cake. You take one or two photos of it and this is just fun time. This is something that they did in a ten-minute period out of the day and you can go in depth into what they were thinking and why they were doing it, and you know they were actually working together feeding off each other and they were learning. It's really good you could do it all day and every day – observations and writing what you understood of what they were doing, they are great.*

HELPING 'J': LEARNING TOGETHER

In Luke's role assisting the lead educator, he helps the children to get dressed, put their shoes on, pack their bags and wash their hands. Also, he is often clearing away after lunch, making beds for rest time and preparing fruit for the morning and afternoon tea. When Luke is helping a child work through a difficulty of putting shoes on or finding lost belongings, moments of special connection happen. Luke thinks about some of these situations. *There have been a few children that have always struggled getting their own shoes on and deciding*

in their head that they are incapable of doing it on their own. Once you have established a relationship you are able to work with them, and work through whatever barrier they have. 'J' had these shoes that he has never been able to put on himself. I was late outside one day and I tried to convince him that he could do it; it was really hard for him. 'J' is starting school in a few months and he is pretty ill prepared for it, I think, but when we achieved that together I know that he hasn't forgotten. He may forget about it eventually but he looks up to me in many other ways now, even though they have nothing to do with his shoes or jacket. That was like big sense of achievement for 'J'.

Luke remembers what he did on that day to help 'J'.

I did sit with him. I can't remember exactly what I said to him but I used an example of something else that he had done, that he had found difficult. Which still wasn't enough-he would try and then he would fail but he wasn't really trying because he was so used to somebody else doing it. He was so used to dad doing it or a teacher doing it. Every day, every time he had to put his shoes on, I was there for about five minutes and I kept referring back to this thing that he had done and had found difficult, and kind of taught him about persistence but I didn't use the word and after a lot of effort and focus on one thing we got there in the end.

CHAPTER 5

JOY

Joy is a qualified primary school teacher who has specialized in music teaching and has been teaching children music for the past ten years. Joy is employed as the gardening teacher at the centre. When the second conversation took place (four months later), Joy had left her teaching position at the centre and was employed as a music teacher at a non-Steiner primary school.

Part One

I have learnt so much, I hadn't realised how much I have learnt until I went into another situation where I was teaching music the other week. We were just sitting having our lunch relaxing and some children were putting up their hands to talk to me. Putting up their hands to ask: "Can I throw my apple core in the bin?" And I thought goodness me I am so fortunate to have seen – to have been a part of this education where it's more natural and it's more flowing and the children, even if they do go a little crazy at times, they're themselves most of the time and we support that – it's such a gift and I hope it's the future.

When Joy comes into the room there is softness about her. I remember how she went straight to the children who were busy tidying and quietly greeted them: "Hello Sweetie how are you today?" Then towards the end of the day I observed her with a group of children who had gathered inside away from a sudden rainstorm. Joy was playing an instrument; it may have been a flute. In this moment there was magic. The room was filled with calm and peace, the children and adults were entranced and the mood emerged from Joy as she sat - smiling warmly as she played.

Joy is a musician and music educator and has been working with children through music for ten years. In her work, she holds a deep belief *in the power of music education as a vehicle for change to help children discover themselves - who they are and what they can do in the world.*

Joy came to this philosophy through a friend whom she lived with. Her friend had been working at the centre and had established the garden programme that Joy now teaches. Joy's work with the children in this Steiner centre is focused on nature and sustainability – she is the educator who leads the gardening programme. Alongside the work that Joy does in the garden, at the centre, is her role as a supporting educator in the preschool rooms.

Joy knew that this centre was working from the Steiner philosophy but the philosophy is something that she is still learning about. Together Joy and her friend would *chat about elements* of the philosophy. What the parents are drawn to in the philosophy is also what Joy feels connected to.

I guess that a lot of parents are drawn in by a focus on the natural elements, so the use of natural toys that spark your imagination rather than a physical thing-like a fire truck or something. Again that speaks to what I believe to be true for children. I was curious and still am curious about behaviour management and how problem behaviours are addressed through the Steiner philosophy – I am learning bit by bit from teachers and other sources.

In Joy's eyes, Steiner education is about the child *initiating what's going on, being flexible as a teacher, picking up on that and following their movements. I think it's so important to let them follow their instincts – what's calling to them rather than being told things like what this is and what that is.*

One of the first things that sparked Joy's interest in this philosophy was *definitely the focus on self-directed play because I really believe in child-centred learning.* This belief flows strongly through Joy's story about working in the Steiner philosophy.

RELATING TO THE CHILD

I find relating to the children very easy. I don't see it as something different, as relating to adults. Some people do, they change their voice and they change their attitudes and all that stuff – they are just little humans.

Being with children feels natural for Joy, and when the relationship flows, the children are naturally engaged in their play. However, Joy does experience 'tough

moments' and has found that they seem to correspond with the moments that she has wanted to do something in particular that has come from her and not from the children.

Joy will often think about how she has worked with the children and how it could change to be more effective in helping the child. Her description of leading the garden programme expresses this:

Every week we would do a garden activity. I used to take a group of children out of their play into a different situation and do a planned garden activity – so plant seeds or something. I found it difficult to get all the children really engaged in the activity and since a couple of weeks ago I have switched my mentality on that, and swapped the garden timetable so that I can do the programme when the kids are already in the space. Basically I will tell the children I'm doing something and I will go and do it and they are drawn in naturally. The ones who want to be doing it are drawn in and are curious and are asking questions. I have found it so much easier because it makes my job less behaviour management, and just doing the task and getting the kids focused and involved.

When Joy worked in this way – quietly working in the environment–she noticed that the programme came more from the children's interests. *For example, I thought to do one particular activity like harvesting some vegetables and then one of the children asked a question about the worms and I said: "who would like to go and see the worms" and "let's go and see the worms" and "I wonder what they eat and let's go and ask the kitchen if they have got scraps" and it's just like, it's a beautiful flow – it makes my job easy and it's almost like getting the kids to do the work for you.*

They're such little curious things, normally when I do an activity it's often the same kids that always want to help in the garden which is wonderful. It gives them something to do but I am aware that there are some children who sometimes enjoy it when they are doing it but aren't so keen to begin. So I'm trying to make sure that they are included, not every time, but every now and then because I just know that what we do in the garden and centre here has ripple effects in their home life. Even in a couple of weeks of working here – of getting into the routine of feeding

the chickens - the children are reminding me: "let's go and feed the chickens" so I think those good habits are so wonderful to filter into the families. I have had so much feedback from the parents – like the kids are identifying all kinds of vegetables in the fruit shop and in the garden – they are little horticulturalists!

There is an excitement and passion in Joy's voice when she shares her experience of working with the children in this way. This passion is also present when she talks about the *natural curiosity* children have. Joy sees so much importance in this because, to Joy, this is *driving them*. *It's so important to let children be children. While they are that age – they can deal with the harsh realities later on.*

HELPING THE CHILD START THE DAY

Joy's enthusiasm for the garden has helped her to settle children into their day especially when they first say goodbye to their parents in the morning.

In the beginning of the year there was quite a lot of anxiety when they were being dropped off. Often because I was there first thing in the morning doing a garden activity, we could use that as something to engage them straight away.

Sometimes the parents would come with us until the child was pretty engaged with what was going on, and then they would leave and it would be okay. The kids would be fine with that. When the child had something to care for, or to do, it helped them to settle inwardly. There were some children that responded really well to that and would get into this habit of anxiety and crying when their parents were leaving. As soon as they saw me and we mentioned going out into the garden to do a harvest they would nod and get their shoes, and even if they were a bit upset they would sort of come and then they would be fine when they were out in the garden, it was a process that they went through.

For Joy, allowing space for the child's curiosity carries the child's thinking somewhere else – away from the thought that their parent has left. *They have so much curiosity – there is so much out there, any little thing like: "look there's a bee..." Tiny little things get them questioning.* Joy also sees how this process works the other way. *When they get picked up they would have done something, for*

example, if we have a basket full of vegies the kids will drag their parents and say: "look what we have done, look what we have picked."

Within Joy's understanding of the Steiner philosophy there is a thread of personal reflection about rhythm and routine. This thread weaves back and forth through her thoughts about the way adults work in the setting and how the setting is organised.

This thread first emerged when Joy talked about what she saw the lead educators doing:

I think today was really great because the leader ... was really focused. She has a really strong idea about what happens and what doesn't happen. I find that when there is a really good leader it's really easy to fit in and know where my role is. Occasionally, particularly when the main leaders been away and there have been other staff, I have found it quite confusing and its sort of hard when the staff are barely working out what they need to do and where they need to be. You know- we are not giving our full attention to the children all the time and that's really something that I think is really important.

An educator who is working casually in the room might not know the children as well as the educator who is working with the children predominantly because this educator has a really strong knowledge of what is happening. This knowledge is *prompted through the Steiner practices in general; the daily rhythm and weekly rhythm – that's a pretty good framework to work in. You know every day what time we do circle time, what time we have lunch, what time we go to which garden. It was a bit chaotic in the beginning when the staff and the children were all learning, but that rhythm is really settled in. I think it does really come back to the leader having a really clear idea of how they lead the class and being on the same page, in simple terms of: what's okay to do and what's not okay to do. Like, for example: it's not okay to yell in the room, it's not okay to walk around with sticks. Sometimes on occasion, that hasn't been clear like – what's okay and what's not okay and one person said one thing and one person said another and kids first of all become confused and have no idea – it's great to be learning and absorbing but it's also useful to be really clear in language. What's going on here, what do I*

need to be doing? Often there will be situations that just require immediate attention and I will use my better judgement and follow up and discuss it with the lead teacher afterwards. Not being afraid to ask: "is this okay?" Sometimes, something will happen and I will go up to the teacher and say: "look this has happened – should I do this? Yes or no?"

Learning about Steiner education has changed the way that Joy relates to the children. *I've always been flexible in terms of my learning style and adapting to what children would like but probably not as much as I am now. I really like the idea of the children owning their own learning and being really involved in the process. So, choosing their adventures. In music teaching you've got your scales; "learn this one and that one". I think I am really open now, to perceiving where somebodies interests lie- where their talents lie and just flowing with that. I do have a greater belief that education throughout the ages should be a lot more like that because it's very boxed up at the moment. We are forced to do a lot of things that we don't like, and a lot of things that we are not interested in - that we will never use in our lives ever again.*

REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Joy sees that having a framework in place for documenting the children's learning is a good thing because it means that the educator records *things that happen with the idea of it being a learning experience rather than just: "isn't that cute"*.

For Joy, the Early Years Learning Framework is *very straightforward* and she doesn't have *a problem using it*. Joy describes the process she has taken with the framework.

Previously I was writing out the EYLF stuff verbatim and then sort of relating what the child did to a specific thing. After speaking to the lead educator, Joy then relaxed that rule a little bit. Now she will take the overall headings and fit these into what she observes the children doing. When we do a garden activity, I'll take photos and write up a little story and then put the photos in and then part of it is

the evaluation. The evaluation is where Joy puts in a couple of headings to show the learning that is happening.

The only challenge that Joy describes with the framework is:

The time it takes to write it up. If I've got time to sit in a quiet place and write it up then that's fine, but if I'm half keeping an eye on the children who are starting to wake up from their sleep then I don't have that. I think it's important to have full focus on the children in the room. It's very hard to do the writing up. Sometimes I have had to sort of stand up and drink a cup of tea and squish it in! It is difficult, if there was a way where it could be reduced to writing up one chunk a week or something, I think it would be so much better for the children. For us to really be present in the room – all the time- and not be concerned: "oh my god I haven't done all my papers and they are due this week!" I have been trying to play with some shortcuts. I'm not so keen on the split in focus – you know you are trying to be there with the children and: "Oh no, where's the camera I have to get the camera and bam – oh no! What did you say? Let me write that down quickly." It would be awesome if you had a little pixie next to you that could record it all.

The need for constant documentation of what the children are doing takes Joy away from the whole moment of wanting to be present with the children. Just concentrating on being there with the child and relating to them and letting them flow naturally, changes when the focus is on documenting the moment.

I've found in the garden programme when I was on my own with four or five kids and it was me documenting and trying to do things and organising and all this, I just had so many hats on- it was exhausting. I found it so hard to keep the quotes in my head. These days I carry my little mobile phone and when somebody says something I will talk into it and record it for later. It helps when additional staff are present because Joy has extra support to take photos. This allows her to just be there with the children and be involved in what they are doing.

Particularly if you are following their direction, their cues and their leads. If you want to follow that, it's really hard to do while you are trying to photograph a particular thing and write about a particular thing. I have changed my writing quite a lot because it used to be the one activity. Like we would be planting and I

would write a story about what we did and now it's: we started off doing this and we ended up doing that but we also did this and I think that's totally fine for the EYLF. There's tonnes of stuff – learning opportunities coming out of there.

Part Two

I speak with Joy a second time and this time things have changed as she has moved on from the Steiner preschool and now teaches music in a non-Steiner primary school setting. Even though there has been this change, Joy recollects her thoughts about working in the Steiner environment and begins by telling me her thoughts on child-centred learning, about what she sees the children doing when they are following their instincts.

In the context of the preschool: the natural curiosity of children to discover what things are, and what they do – the chain reaction, sequences of things. For example, in the garden they were always fascinated by the little creatures- the wiggly worms, the snails. The children would ask all these questions: “So what do they eat?” “Where do they go?” “Do they like...?” “Are they friendly?” “Do they like being patted?”

Following their natural instincts for discovery particularly in nature- I think is very important. Also I found ritual in the preschool (particularly the rhythms) really important to the kids.

I remember one kid really wanting to help set the table for the morning tea and the lunch and nothing I said could deter him from wanting to help set the table; even though he wasn't allowed to go and get the glasses and the bowls. Finding a way to let the children be involved with something like that would be quite important for me. They are naturally drawn to it.

Through remembering her time in the Steiner preschool, Joy shares what she believes as important for the adult to do, to support child-centred learning.

Well one thing that's very important is to take some time to get to know the kid and just to spend some time either with one child or a small group of children. Often, the fascination will be in the group setting as well, and they all are curious about

the same thing. But just really taking time to be present with the child: listen to what they are interested in and hear them and work with that. It's very important. Being present can be quite difficult in a setting when you have, are supposed to be minding, twenty-thirty kids at a time. I focused it to one or two kids, I found that worked best when I was doing the garden programme when there were other teachers supervising, and I could really just give myself to listen to a couple of kids at a time and spend time with them.

Joy talks about the possibility for working in this way in the Steiner preschool – to really listen to the children's instincts and to let the children be drawn in naturally and follow their own instincts.

Joy has her own thoughts about what this may look like and reflects on her current work in the non-Steiner primary classroom.

In the primary teaching that I do at the moment, I teach music, and it's a prerequisite that the classroom teacher stays for the lesson and is involved in it – for two reasons. One is to do the crowd control, so that I am free to do my job and I can really get stuck into the creative side of things without having to waste time getting kids to listen. The other is that the teacher also learns from me, some little tricks to take some creative games into the room, to get the kids to focus again. So it's a two-way thing and I think in that context it could be possible. For example, if the kids are out in the garden and there are enough teachers to be supervising (without having to make the garden person be supervising ten kids as well) then the garden person can be free to do their thing. If it's painting – same deal, maybe one teacher could be focusing on the painting while the others are looking after the room and looking after the kids and supporting the activity- like a focus on that activity. I think that letting kids get quite drawn in is very valuable for them. So I wonder if it might work in that way? Divide the day into different activities and having one person really focus on that activity and the others sort of do the work that needs doing.

Joy describes how she saw the children being naturally drawn into the activity of bread baking in the preschool room. She begins with her memory of seeing the

lead educator sitting at the table quietly beginning the process of making the bread.

It was fantastic – she makes sure that she sits down at the table she is sitting at eye level with the kids and she is present with the children and she starts the activity. I remember her, just starting, making the dough, kneading the dough. The kids trickled over one by one. The curiosity gained momentum and lots of kids came over, well all of them came over eventually. I was sitting next to the kids and mentioned the bread when I could, but I knew my priority was to support ‘L’. So if she needed me to take someone to the toilet, if she needed me to wash a dish or whatever -that was number one. I respected that because I could see what amazing work she was doing with the kids and that worked really well when she was doing that. I think she is a very good teacher, I think she does that quite a lot in her teaching. We were her support team!

On that day, the activity was held and structured but it was a natural way for the children to come and the adults did their part seamlessly – it looked formed but it just naturally came together. *That’s the kind of magic of teaching that way – when it all comes together maybe it looks like it’s structured but its magically beautiful.*

Joy thinks about two of the lead educators that she has worked with in the Steiner preschool. She remembers that they *had the capacity to put out the stops and be a little bit hard-line when necessary but also be really gentle at other times.*

That, to me, gains a lot of respect from the children first and foremost but also from the teachers because the kids learn that they can’t get away with certain things. They settle into a rhythm after a little while. I think initially they’ll experiment and push the boundaries and all that stuff but they learn over time that the teacher is not going to put up with this. I think that creates quite a safe space to be themselves within. Then in the tender moments – for example when its story time, or circle time, or even sleep time and the teacher is singing to the kids and showing a lot of compassion - its just such an admirable thing to see those two things being used, sometimes one after the other.

It's the same thing in relation to the staff. I think with the support staff it's very important to know what the boundaries are - so what we are supposed to be doing and how. Also it's very important to show a little bit of gratitude to the support staff because it's such a hard job and often they are most confused about what they are meant to be doing. So when things go really well be really grateful to the staff for that and I think a good lead teacher can see potential in both children and staff. When you know a staff member is particularly interested in one particular activity, for example: if they are doing a drawing and they love drawing and the kids love watching them draw. To find a way to incorporate that because if you can include the strengths of the staff in the day you know it makes them feel like they have contributed more.

WORKING WITH 'CHALLENGING' BEHAVIOURS

I think they've got something to say that we are not really listening to. The kids that don't quite necessarily fit in – in terms of doing what the teacher said or behaving correctly. I don't really know – I'm learning as I go along.

Joy is drawn to situations where children may be playing ... *loud and particularly rough.*

I am not really afraid to face a challenge of rough behaviour in children. For one reason I feel very passionately about the way humans communicate, and I think that it's really important for children to learn good communication skills when they are growing up. A really big part of that is when they are in the heat of the moment, when something has angered them or they are upset. Developing the language skills to express what is going on, to deal with it in a way that is not physical violence. I think it's just a personal fascination with communication in those situations. I have looked into non-violent communication and I think everyone knows that when you get angry or frustrated there is something you need to say, and it is quite hard to express it. You know, when the emotions take over trying to translate what their actions might really be trying to express. If a child is having a tantrum and maybe it might have been something quite silly that set it off, but it's really important to look through that and see what it might be that's stressing the child out. I am not an authority at all but I am fascinated by it and I

think I did learn a lot from 'L' when I was in her classroom. She wasn't afraid (I think some teachers a quite quick to comfort children when they burst into tears) to be a little hard lined and wait until the child stops crying and then work out what's going on. Stick to her rules, whatever her room rules were, to really stick to them.

Joy observed that this educator approached the child's emotions and behaviour as a process to benefit the child in the long term rather than just comforting them immediately. *By watching what she was doing it resonated with me. I guess we would have approached it quite similarly, she has a lot more experience than I have and I was inspired to watch her.*

When she thinks about the process of working with the children's behaviour, Joy remembers a child that she worked with in the preschool.

There was one little boy in particular, he had a condition that resulted in a development delay – it wasn't obvious but I do remember addressing him in the same way as I would other children when he became upset. I learnt over time that when he becomes upset it is for a very specific reason – he is very attached to routine. He really takes promises seriously, so if you tell him: "we are going to do something" and then we run out of time and say: "actually we are not going to do it" he gets really really upset. It took me a while to learn that and to just sort of listen to him. At one point he was crying and crying and crying and I could just not understand – I did not know what to do. I had to wait until he could talk to me again, and all he wanted to do was that particular thing I said we would do in the morning that we hadn't done. That's completely unique to him – I guess it took me a while to get to know his character before I could get to that point of realisation.

Thinking about the little boy that she worked with takes Joy to a place where she is reminded about the time pressures in the preschool work, and allowing space for discovering those little things about the child and their personality.

I wish in an ideal world there would be these little invisible gnomes or angels writing up all the documentation, hanging out with the kids and washing the dishes and all that stuff. I understand how it's important to capture these observations as they happen and it's important for the kids to see the teachers cleaning the room

and preparing the food. But look: it is like trying to be ten people at once it can be very challenging and I don't know what to do about that.

MEMORIES FROM THE STEINER PRESCHOOL

Joy's memories of the Steiner preschool are now entwined with her experiences of teaching music in the non-Steiner primary school and she has formed thoughts about the two different environments. When Joy traces her thoughts back to her experience of the Steiner preschool she remembers the sense of nature.

Well the natural setting is the first thing that jumps to mind – being in a beautiful garden area where the kids can just play out in nature and discover things for themselves. At the moment I teach at some state primary schools and they have concrete slabs and fake grass, and I just think these kids: they don't even have the chance to have this journey of self-discovery through the natural environment. They are sort of fenced off from the natural environment in a way and that's such a big part of learning as a child, and problem solving it will help them to develop skills that will enhance all areas of their life later on.

Understanding the importance of rhythm in the Steiner context was an element of Joy's experience working in Steiner education that flowed back and forth. She said: *there is a flow within a structure that is very important – I am not sure – I think it might be a Steiner thing. The children know the times that they have their food. I think the element of ritual is very beautiful when they say their little blessings before the meals I thought that was very beautiful – teaching children to respect who has created the meal and where it has come from – a little bit beyond: "there's food on my plate and I am going to eat it."*

Which is different, at the schools I teach in now; they open their lunch box and see a packet of chips and that's the end of the thought process. What is this? And where does it come from?

In the Steiner preschool, Joy could see a gesture of giving gratitude, with the underlying thought that there is something wider in the world – something bigger.

In the Steiner setting, Joy felt that the staff were given a lot of freedom to teach in our own style and to almost even experiment: 'to just learn ourselves, different processes. It was quite free in that respect, I thought that was really wonderful. We could learn along the way and if something didn't work out there wasn't a school rule. We could try and adapt, and we were thinking about it a lot as well – how to be a good teacher'.

CHAPTER 6

JESSIE

Jessie is a New Zealand qualified Montessori educator and began working at this Rudolf Steiner centre eighteen months ago. Jessie's role is lead educator in the afternoon preschool programme. She also works with programming and compliance to ensure the centre policies are current.

And who I am – there is a growing feeling that I want to creatively express what's within me and make it live and breathe on the flame and breathe on the spark.

Jessie walks into the room slowly and sits down beside me. She stretches her arms up and rests her legs on a chair that is placed in front of her telling me that her foot is causing her pain and she needs to rest it. Then she breathes in and lets out a long sigh indicating that she is ready and so we begin.

Being an educator at this early childhood setting has been Jessie's first experience of working in a Rudolf Steiner environment. Before she came to work in this environment, Jessie worked as a Montessori educator in New Zealand.

I have been working in Montessori for years and from that background I have used a lot of scientific observation and objective observation. As I got more adept at that type of observation and started drawing conclusions, I started noticing that it wasn't enough and then I started adding subjective observation as a layer and that started answering more of my questions. I needed to make a conscious decision many years ago whether I studied Montessori or Steiner and my sister had her children in Montessori and also I am very academic, so I chose Montessori because at that time it was the natural way to go.

When Jessie describes her journey into Steiner she shares how it has been a process of investigating her beliefs and philosophy about what respect means in the early childhood setting.

I base everything on a deep respect for humanity so that's not necessarily restricted to children. Children have specific needs as opposed to adults but I have a general need to have respect shown to me, and equally show respect.

But as well as that, I have a need for the group and that is to be a community. So, the respect has come from a deep need in me. Montessori, I could journey with because Montessori has got a very strong respect for the individual child. I began to understand that respect is based on individual needs but then it gets more complex because it grew. So here I was trying to apply respect to individual needs and maybe the group wasn't as coherent. Then I went the other way – the other extreme – and started focusing on respect for the group and then started noticing: “the individual needs are not getting met”. I didn't see that I could bring the two together in Montessori so I am in Steiner, now and I am a lot closer to: “How do I maintain, establish, develop respect for others?” And the others having respect for themselves and each other as well.

To Jessie, Steiner Education holds elements and qualities that she sees as being therapeutic. Understanding this aspect of the philosophy has helped Jessie to investigate the question of respect that she is seeking in her work. Jessie's interpretation of the belief that Steiner Education is like a therapy is about *children meeting their own needs and a chance to be, instead of being told what to do.*

There is obviously that what a teacher needs to do but a child that is drawing that is totally engaged they are meeting all their needs. Then you get into very subtle levels of respect and how you protect that child's space and how you make sure they've got beautiful materials to work with. Respecting beauty because a child respects beauty and respecting order because a child respects order. Having a little bit of chaos every now and again as an extreme to see one from the other.

The element of nature within the Steiner preschool is in Jessie's eyes one of the ways that the environment becomes therapeutic.

I think I understand therapy now. Everything that you touch in the Steiner room is therapeutic because natural materials are connecting to the natural world. When you work with the natural materials – you are engaging ... more than just playing. Whatever you are playing with - you are engaging with those materials, you are connecting with everything you do, complex interactions. The therapy of the painting: mesmerisation of when the paint hits the paper and splays out. The therapy, the remembering that we are all connected in this web of life, simply by experiencing it and being one with the environment. Through being able to respect each other and ourselves and

finding ways to do that. The therapy, the warmth and the unconditional love that everybody shares or everybody can share.

BEGINNING EXPERIENCES AT THE STEINER CENTRE

When Jessie first began at the centre she felt as though she was on completely unfamiliar ground - *I felt like I had walked into some kind of ... surreal ... commune. It was incredibly uncomfortable and I walked into a lot of dysfunctional relationships with the staff, which have since been resolved.* Jessie tuned into the atmosphere instantly and saw that it was influencing how things were being run. She could sense it because she had *come from an environment that was way worse. So even though I was aware of it (it was pretty minor), the longer I was in it - you kind of shrink and adjust and then it became more and more difficult to keep myself removed from it.*

For Jessie, beginning her learning about the philosophy has come through *asking a lot of questions. I asked anybody who would listen. I just built it up myself and I am doing the course ... every evening. I have just come back from the conference.*

Through doing training in Anthroposophy in Sydney, Jessie already had a huge interest but initially *was finding it a real struggle because: they have very very esoteric ideas and concepts and I was a very practical and down to earth person and I guess I might still be and none of it really resonated. I didn't really get how it would apply to children. I thought it was kind of loose and the behaviour management, like the amount of rough play and the amount of children not doing what was expected.*

When Jessie questioned the things that happened in the preschool she thought back to her experiences in the Montessori setting.

In Montessori it's black and white, if this happens that happens: action – consequence, action – consequence, action – consequence. I just didn't really understand why people were not stepping in and stopping certain behaviours and that was the thing that really stuck out. I was blown away by the natural resources and beauty in the room and I don't think there was any painting at that point but I was intrigued with the cutting off of edges and why would you do that? And why there is a rhythm? And why do teachers put out activities when children of that age are more than capable of getting them off

the shelf for themselves? I've got questions based on that deep need for respect for each other.

When Jessie asked these questions, each of her colleagues would give a different answer. The answers were based on their experience of Rudolf Steiner's work. One person would give her a *playgroup answer*, one would give an *anthroposophical answer* and one would give a Steiner kindergarten answer. Jessie would like to *sit down and compare notes* – to share her experiences with her colleagues. *I am a primary teacher, I am a Montessori teacher, I am an early childhood teacher – I've got a lot of strings to my bow – I have worked in mainstream, I have worked in Montessori.* On some days Jessie can feel *overwhelmed and lost.*

I have a lot swimming around because I have always wanted to do the best for children. As far as my schooling went I got the best done for me so what does that look like?

JESSIE REFLECTING ON WHAT IS 'BEST' FOR THE CHILD?

At the moment – I am not happy with the way circle time is run. I am not happy with the disjointed one song and then an unrelated song after that. I have seen a Steiner teacher do a group where one thing flowed into another and that's the most successful group I have seen. So I'd like to work with the elements of earth and water and fire with the children. So, the heat of the sun, and what does the heat of the sun do? Putting that in with the seasons, still working with the seasons and staying true to Steiner but bringing those elements into our song and our rhythm. Not the going over and over the dusty gnome or the fairy but just telling true stories that are beautiful and there is a learning experience. Like today I told a story about getting two guinea pigs to foster, and yesterday it was a story about discovering some yummy food to make.

What I used to do in Montessori is tell stories about people in the playground helping each other because I'm not allowed to read from a book here at story time or rest time. I've been told that that's not what we do in Steiner so I've been experimenting with what story I can tell. I just need to bring a story to the children (wherever it comes from is irrelevant) that's meaningful to them and speaks to them.

Like if I have seen a rainbow that morning or a beautiful sunrise or sunset the night before then I will say that. But I don't have lots of time – I have to be really good to think on my feet.

Jessie agrees that spontaneous story telling feeds the relationship that she has with the children – of how they see her and relate to her. However, Jessie expresses a frustration because she gets *no planning time, none. So that's why there is no preparation for the story.* If Jessie had the space to prepare a story it would be different, she *would probably look into the fables or the Grimm's fairy tales* or she would look *into the children's play and apply that to the story.* Rather than different stories each day, Jessie would *build on a story and have the same story going through the week* to let the story 'grow'.

PLANNING AND THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Jessie feels passionate about the Early Years Learning Framework and feels that *it's like putting on a pair of woolly socks or a really comfy scarf, or a really soft coat and a nice warm beanie on a cold day.*

According to Jessie, the centre uses the VEYLDF- the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. *The EYLF has learning dispositions in it and it would be very nice in a Steiner setting to be able to use process when we are doing our planning– to link process to our explanations of our evaluations of learning. ... I have been trying to get them to consider it... but we are using VEYLDF, which only have outcomes.* While the centre does not use the principles of 'Belonging, Being and Becoming', Jessie has looked at the Early Years Learning Framework and holds understandings about it. She says:

It's based on Te Whāriki. If we used the ELYF and we could speak to learning dispositions, it would be just amazing. The EYLF is based very much on process and it gives the teacher a lot more license. You still have your outcomes but they can be taken for granted and linked to the processes. You can write much more to the processes of children's learning like enthusiasm and perseverance because children are a process; their 'being' is a process. I don't think we are really into summative information gathering at this age so I am not too sure why outcomes are of primary importance in the VEYLDF.

When Jessie worked in New Zealand she used Te Whāriki and loved it. Jessie's passion about Te Whāriki is similar to Belonging Being and Becoming and she feels no challenge in using it at all.

I just love it; it's got everything in it that I need to express what I am doing. I could bring Steiner in and I wouldn't have to change anything and I could take it to Steiner and I wouldn't have to change anything.

Jessie is reflective about what the framework says and means and there are some aspects, related to the use of media and communication, which Jessie has an opinion about.

I've done a debate with other teachers about this when I was at Uni; literature says that screens are harmful to even older children. So you cannot disagree with those studies but the only thing is: this is the world that we are living in, and how ideal can we really make our classrooms while still being reflective of community? What they want - when they are talking about that - is what a lot of private and independent schools are doing. The children are recording their own learning at four years old. They have got their little headsets on, they have got the video of themselves, and they are speaking into the microphone about what they are learning. It blew me away when I saw it and I can see a place for it, but four-year-old children are very young to be doing that. I can also see the value because you get the child's voice so I'm sitting on the fence. Media is a tricky one, I do think four year olds are very young but I don't know any four year olds (this is a Steiner) that don't have a screen which is even more reason for not having them at preschool. I don't know it's a case of dammed if you do and dammed if you don't.

I just wish screens would disappear for young children but they are not going anywhere. I think we need to stay true to our philosophy but we need to find a way.

When Jessie thinks about how she uses photos in the Steiner preschool she remembers (when she worked as a Montessori educator) how she saw photos used in a Reggio Emilia setting.

I barracked for having a screen out the front of the room - you have got your electronic photo frame that keeps scrolling through your photos. So I asked one principal: "Could I please have that?" because parents aren't allowed in the room, like they are not allowed in the room in Steiner. I said: "Look these

parents need some kind of communication – there is no communication and I am having all of these interviews which would be completely unnecessary if the parents knew what would happen in the day.” The frame is not for the children, it’s for the parents at pick up. Turn it on just before they drop off and turn it off when they are finished. The children are in the room and they don’t see it at all because Montessori is the same with screens. So that principal left and another principal came and I sidled over to her and said: “do you like this idea?” and she said: “absolutely”. I put it up and got good responses from the parents – you could just see the relief in their bodies. They were really anxious about what their children were or weren’t doing and that answered so many of their questions and there was absolutely no need to speak to any of them.

Jessie feels strongly about protecting the child’s space and shares more about this:

Ideally I would love the parents to be part of it but when a parent comes in – not conscious of what we are trying to do – the children’s protected space is challenged, is threatened. I feel that. A parent came in for the birthday this morning; you hardly knew that she was there so it really depends on the person. Like some people will come in and talk on their cell-phones, and other people will just come in and talk at you in a really loud voice in the middle of the room when children are... It seems like adults can put themselves in priority over children very quickly and easily and to protect a child’s inner work it’s a subtle holding of their space. At the beginning of the year I had no idea about the subtleties and I steadily grew more and more about how I could be with them without trampling over their subtle needs.

BEING WITH THE CHILD TO GIVE SUPPORT

Jessie’s beliefs about the child weave strongly through everything that she does. She says strongly: *“there is no contradiction at all - there is no contradiction between what I believe and what I do.”*

When a new child begins in the preschool room and they are finding it emotionally difficult to settle away from their caregiver, Jessie uses specific strategies that come from her personal beliefs.

However the way that she is able to work with the child depends on the dynamics of staffing in the room.

There's the ideal model and there's the realistic model – it depends how we are staffed. If the other person knows the children then I would physically contain as in hug or hold in some way so that they feel safe, secure and nurtured in a little space of warmth and love. I believe in conscious projection, so just thinking: "you are safe", "you are ok". I would say it as well, depending on the child. If the child is really crying, and saying that is just noise then I would just think it. Depending on the child I find that just patting them across the forehead with their fringe can be really calming but some children need a stronger hug they need both arms. I do think touch is very, very, very important but I also think that every child in every single circumstance needs something a little different.

Then there's the other, when the other person in the room the children don't know, and I just do my best. If I am needing to hold the group, I can't walk away and leave the group because the other person doesn't know the rhythm or routine. Then I would usually ask the mum to stay until I have got the time to spend with the child.

Jessie describes being with the child to give emotional support as a journeying process where she provides *an expanding heart space to encompass the child*. This 'heart-space' creates a mantle of warmth around the child, and is something that takes time and persistence. It does not happen instantly *sometimes it might take longer. Just being there and being there and being there and then the next time it happens the child already knows that they have gone through that journey with you, and they have been safe.*

For Jessie, part of this process is about keeping the child in her mind: *I keep my mental projection with that child that needs that nurturing. I also I have a bigger picture than just the immediate. I know that by nurturing that child, in that one instance, it's going to make it shorter and easier the next time. So it's an investment.*

BEING THE LEAD EDUCATOR – JESSIE'S EXPERIENCE

Jessie's story continues when Jessie describes her experience of being the lead educator during the school holiday period when the preschool is open to provide child care in the term breaks. During this experience, Jessie had space to reflect

on how she saw the programme working. Jessie felt a transformation during this time that she was teaching and the two weeks drove her into knowing what she needed to do for herself as an educator.

It parked me where I need to be, it gave me courage and confidence. I had two days of headaches while the creative brain – the functioning – went through me, and then the headache went and I grew, every day I grew. I miss that growth, it was so expansive.

Jessie felt that this growth was from being with the children. *I was with them the whole time, for seven and a half hours. It made me feel what a full day is like for the children and I know some of the subtle areas that I was missing because I was not aware of them.*

When Jessie led the group she tried out new strategies for settling the children like:

the children working with the fruit getting it ready with me because that's what I had done with the children in Montessori. I couldn't see why these children couldn't do that every morning and take responsibility for it. That gave me time to sit down with the three year olds and really contact them properly.

The 'fruit' was a real sense of needing to do this for the children and then it turned out that three year olds needed that time with me. Instead of – what I call barking orders at them – I was able to be with them in a purposeful way. The behaviour shift that I saw, due to sitting down for twenty minutes with them over fruit, was total. They didn't need any orders barked they were relaxed, they were calm, they were peaceful. One child 'J' who has never really sung before started singing all the lyrics for the songs.

A sense of closeness began to form with the children:

One child who has never hugged anybody, that we have ever seen, came up and hugged me when I came back into the room. I felt that that was really precious and I am glad that I followed my intuition. I also had them washing their own lunch dishes and morning tea dishes. I put two bowls down on the table, and that ended up being a huge social activity for them and it was gorgeous.

The way that Jessie approached other activities like watercolour painting and baking was to invite the children. She presented the activity on the table for a small group of five children and if a child was not engrossed in play Jessie would invite the child to take part in the activity. This approach was different to what she had seen in the preschool– where the activity was planned for the whole group altogether. Some thoughts arose for Jessie within her reflection about this.

In the big group, to me, it's like a teacher has put that there. That's the teacher's decision and the children fall into line because they are either obedient or they've been coerced because: "that's what we are doing now". If you invite them, they're coming at it from their own expressive need or desire to engage. So in Montessori it's always been that they come from that point. It's never the teacher putting it on them.

Jessie observed that during the activity none of the children said 'no':

Everyone was beautifully engaged in what they were doing and there was no behaviour management needed. To Jessie, the two weeks were filled with peace and calm – it was just bliss, for everybody. So we were singing songs like: "I am happy, I am good, I am brave, I am bold, my own spirit I can hold"- really deep spiritual affirmations for each child.

In her role, Jessie felt that she could bring her authentic self and express herself. The connection she felt to the children and that the children felt towards her were about this sense of Jessie was being 'herself' and *there were no barriers*.

It began as an experiment for me, and then I started realizing that the children started randomly coming up and giving me hugs and randomly singing all these different songs every day. They were really reflecting what was going on within and I realized that it was working. So instead of being the objective bystander, I just dove in with them and I just let myself be immersed in the process as well. We were all in it together, it felt like we were negotiating things and taking on each other's points of view and it just felt like a team effort. There were still things that I needed to say; that only I could say, and things that I did that only I could do, but what could be negotiated or discussed – they knew it was open.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT AS A PROCESS

One insight I got – which I am holding pretty close – is when it comes to behaviour management. The only reason why you would ever step into that is to bring the child back into wholeness -that sense of wholeness.

I don't know how to explain this. It's like a cat pawing – sort of bringing them back in little bit by little bit. Maybe they need to be a little bit separate? It's not a process of: "You need to sit by yourself because you are not able to join our circle and play using the rules". If that has to happen then at some point (it might not even be immediately after) I will sit down and be with them and have that discussion. I won't just leave it there. To me, that's only the beginning of the process – removing somebody from a situation. I was always very upset that that ever needed to happen at all. So I have found my peace with that it's like: " Oh we are not going to do it that way tomorrow are we? Why are we not going to do it that way?"

To Jessie, working through the child's behaviour in this way is *giving them the power.*

PERSONAL CHANGE AND HOW IT HAS INFLUENCED JESSIE'S WORK

Within Jessie something happened that made her want to change the way that she approached her work with the children, that brought her to this point of understanding. Jessie holds a deep belief that the children's needs must be met in a respectful way and her thoughts and beliefs echo in her words:

I needed those children's needs to be met. I'd been watching their needs not being met for too long. I'd been very frustrated and very angry for a long time and then I'd let that go but I'd let my emotional response to that situation go and what remained was: "I needed those children's needs met".

The particular way that Jessie began to work with the children during her time as lead educator *was based on a variation of an approach with children in her last school where she had seen a profound transformation.*

This approach has come from Jessie's interest in children's self-esteem.

I have done workshops in self-esteem and I've always had a huge interest and personal interest in how you build self-esteem. I guess a lot of it is simply from asking questions along the way: of myself, of different theories of research -

picking it all up subconsciously, and putting it in my toolbox and making it me and making it: "who I am".

I am well aware as soon as I speak it has an impact. The way that you act has impact. If that is the case then what you speak and how you act is so important. Every single part needs to be considered so I am going to choose something that can nourish the soul over something that is just there because it looks cute or sounds cute.

Jessie describes a moment with one of the children that made her *really evaluate* the *quality* of her thoughts.

My guinea pig had just died and I was very distressed. I was thinking about my guinea pig, I was quite sad and he was talking to me. He said: "guinea pig" and then he kept on talking and then he said: "guinea pig". I asked him to tell me what he had just said, and he just blurted it all out but no guinea pig. I just said: "Did you just say guinea pig?" He said: "no". So that was quite a bizarre experience for me and I am not going to forget that in a hurry. It was pretty amazing. It made me really evaluate my thought quality because how could you not after that experience. That was quite intense, that moment; there was nothing that I could do about it. If there was, I would never be thinking that.

Over the time that Jessie has been working with the children in the Steiner preschool she feels that she has *gone full circle* in her journey through the philosophy. When she began she was seeking a way to understand her question: *"How do I maintain, establish, develop respect for others?" And the others having respect for themselves and each other as well.*

A thread that has helped Jessie with her question has been an interest in research about children's self-esteem.

Well I do know because of the research, that children with low self-esteem are less likely to learn to their full capacity. Hence it would make sense, research wise, to nurture self-esteem before expecting children to learn at their greatest efficiency or effectiveness. So that's being really pragmatic, what does it mean for me? Well it's been a life-long journey and there have been many many signposts along the way, many choices made. Montessori was very important in terms of independence because for anybody to have high

self-esteem, they need to be able to independently do what they can do; what they are capable of doing.

Jessie reflects on the changes she made to the preschool programme where the children were: independently preparing their fruit for morning tea, independently washing their dishes, as much as they could they were independently doing their shoes. I asked their parents: "please bring shoes that they could do on their own". I showed them ways of independently putting on their jacket where they didn't need my help.

Supporting children to be independent was seen by Jessie as a shared process where together, they found a way together to achieve a task. Jessie remembers how she worked with one of the children in the preschool.

There was one girl. 'A' picked her up and took her outside because she refused to do her own shoes. I said: "You need to sit on the deck until you have them on." So she sat on the deck for twenty minutes. We had new monkey bars in the yard and she wanted to play on them. So after about fifteen minutes she tried to put on her own socks and shoes and she did it, and she looked at me and I looked at her. I beckoned her to come over and I said: "You put your own shoes on" and with a big smile I said: "That's so special" and every day since she has put on her own shoes. So then she started getting other people, other children to help her with her shoes and then she would help other children with their shoes. It was just divine! So that was an extreme example of how we do this. Her mum had said to me: "we have got the biggest battles, getting her shoes on in the morning. So I had been fighting this battle for a few weeks, and I had just gotten to the end of the road and I didn't know what to do next. So that's what we did and that worked.

In Jessie's thinking process something changed, *something shifted.*

It was like, okay I either get quite forceful about this and look her in the eye and say: "You need to put your shoes on or you can't come out into the yard with us." And it was like I just can't do that today so I almost gave in completely. I supported her by giving her the space and the motivation to do them herself. So I supported her from being dependent on me to being independent.

Jessie inwardly believed in the child and she trusted in the girl's ability to put her own shoes on. Jessie didn't need to say this she just felt it.

Within this process, Jessie identified that there was an unspoken element. *I like to call them moments of intuition.*

I meditate a lot; about them, just for me, for over an hour every morning. I don't actively meditate on them – if there is something that is processing it will come up and I will just let myself witness that. Sure enough there will come a moment when the answer arrives or I just feel a subtle change. When I am in that situation again, if it is a repeated situation, I just know what to do or I ask them: "What do you need?" Or: "What's happening for you?" I only ever ask them when I know there will be an answer. I have never asked and not got a very succinct, beyond their years answer. So, it's the timing of answering it.

CHAPTER 7

HOPE

Hope has been involved in Rudolf Steiner education for the past twenty to thirty years. She is a qualified early childhood educator and has worked at this Steiner preschool, full-time, from when it opened in 2011.

I walk into Hope's preschool room – and instantly I am transported to a place that is filled with beauty – a natural beauty – a haven. As soon as I come into this room there is a sense of calmness. The sun is shining through the window. There is a beautiful smell. Is it lavender? Sandalwood? Rose? Cooking? Or is it a mixture of these smells? All around me there are objects from a world that I feel is familiar that I know and remember but that has a mood from somewhere in the past – perhaps my past. They have an old world quality about them. What is this place that I have entered? I feel like I want to curl up on one of the soft cushions and take the atmosphere of this room into my whole being.

I see Hope; she is sitting – working on polishing a chair. Hope is quiet; she does not talk to the children; she is engaged in her work. There is a quiet murmur in the room, it is the only noise that I hear – it is the noise of a small group of the children as they talk. The children talk quietly to each other as they play a game about brushing their hair and then riding their horses.

The feeling of this room links me to Hope and it is in this feeling that I seek to understand who Hope is. What is Hope's story? Who is Hope?

THE JOURNEY OF FINDING STEINER PHILOSOPHY

When I first met Hope, I was struck by her deeply personal connection to the philosophy that she works within. To Hope, being a Rudolf Steiner educator is a spiritual vocation based on a journey she has travelled throughout her life.

Hope's journey through Rudolf Steiner's philosophy has been mapped out by the voice of her intuition - her feelings and emotions and began when she was a young woman – a student beginning her studies in early childhood education.

There is passion in Hope's memory of her time studying and an admiration for those who taught her. She says that she can remember very vividly when she was studying the three-year course in Melbourne at The Institute of Early Childhood Development.

- it doesn't exist anymore which is really sad and it used to be the Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers College and it was three years of very full learning with very experienced women, wise women – most of them were older women.

As part of her studies into alternative methods of education, Hope's class was taken to a Rudolf Steiner school in an experience of seeing another philosophy of education in action. When Hope entered the space of the Rudolf Steiner kindergarten her intuitive voice spoke to her:

I just immediately fell in love. I think because I was born a lover of nature I've always had this sense of wonder. Now I can look back and see this in myself, the fact that I've always felt not quite like everybody else that there is something else in the world. I know I felt that when I was a child, I was slightly apart not knowing why. So in that little introduction to Steiner it was the natural materials and cloths and that notion of self-directed play, where the children are using their will -their imagination, I just loved it and I went and used those things in my own kinder.

This was the first signpost on Hope's journey towards Rudolf Steiner education. Hope was drawn to the aesthetics that she saw in the kindergarten space. The philosophy was not something that she delved into at this early stage. *I still had a journey to go through and I had my own journey that I needed to do.*

The next stage of Hope's personal journey took her on travels to new countries where she made connections with new people and made new friends. One of these connections became a second marker for Hope – a chance meeting with a person who was connected to the Rudolf Steiner School she visited as a student. Together they went to England and stayed at Michael Hall where the Steiner teacher training happened. Hope was *blown away*, she remembered reading about the philosophy - *the first things about the Epochs and the Temperaments*. However her experiences *rested* and Hope travelled further on her journey. Hope described herself as *a woman living her life*. After a cycle of seven years,

Hope *met a man*, became pregnant and then she began to think about the education she wanted for her child.

Hope's experiences as an early childhood educator had been in non-Steiner settings in a range of contexts.

I had been doing kindergarten work, I'd worked in the country, I'd worked in inner-urban, I'd worked in toddler groups, I'd worked under high rise, multi-cultural, country, so I'd had this experience with all these different settings.

When Hope became a mother a strong feeling arose within her:

I had my baby and that made me start thinking about schooling and I didn't want her to go to mainstream. I don't know whether it was Karmic – I think it must be Karmic. I just had this knowing without knowing –that I wanted her to be in that realm. I wanted to be in that realm because I've always had lots of questions in my life. I've been on a spiritual journey for a long time.

By thinking back to her first experience as a young woman studying early childhood education, Hope described how she felt when she first experienced the Steiner kindergarten and imagined how this must feel for a young child.

It was like a big wow and it was like heartfelt emotion about how beautiful an environment can be - to walk into a setting and how children must feel to walk into that setting. It was like a little light bulb moment and it was something I was searching for because I truly have this sense of beauty in me, I have it in my home- it's how I live my life. I wouldn't say I am an extreme Steiner person, I think I live in the world, but the very meaningful things to me are the human things about humanness and how we treat each other – how we live our lives.

After this moment of knowing, Hope began to search for answers to her questions about Anthroposophy.

I did the teacher training part time. I did little vignettes of hearing talks of various doyens and Anthroposophists. Little pictures would come- like the kindergarten teacher representing a Madonna and the Madonna cloak, that's what I hold really close.

The Christ Impulse is an element of Rudolf Steiner's teachings that Hope felt very connected to, and humility, a virtue that Christ was seen to embody, meant a lot to Hope:

Well for me one of the biggest things is humility and this is something I have learnt over time and I think that is very much a sensibility that Christ had and it's something I tell my colleagues. I don't tell them I suggest that maybe it's a quality that's good to have because in the realm that we work in lots of ego can rise.

Steiner education is an ongoing journey for Hope that she has been travelling now for twenty years. Her journey is something that she is still on. Hope sees that the humility of 'Christ' within the philosophy extends to how she guides and mentors new colleagues.

I keep getting pictures of things – new pictures of how to be and of how to work. Just think wow! What a great idea so I started using this idea and it's a different way of me being and it's so good so I'm still very open.

THE REALM OF HOPE'S WORK: THE STEINER PRESCHOOL

When Hope tells me how she works with children and families she says that she is mindful of how she interacts with those she meets. Being sensitive and mindful is one way that she strives towards the virtue of humility within the Christ Impulse.

I'm very mindful of the things I do. Of the way I touch a child, the way I speak, touch is really important. Sometimes you can't get to that point because you are tired. We get tired in this work, for me the perfect scenario is if I see something. I always go there and touch the child and speak quietly but I do it as much as I can within the parameters of our work. I think that's what I would like to encourage my colleagues to do. I would give them suggestions, the word humility – it's the lack of imposing something on another person. Sometimes I need to use the words, I might say: "Well for me the notion that I think about constantly is humility."

Mindfulness and sensitivity towards others is a quality that weaves through Hope's work as an early childhood educator. When a child begins in her kinder –

she meets them as *an individual* and tunes into the child's specific needs on any given day.

It's a constant ebb and flow for each individual child. I may use one technique with one child; I may not use it with another child. I'm really keen with my sensibilities to meeting the needs and also the deeper needs of the child. I think I am pretty good at sensing what they need and I try and work on that level with the parent as well. Last year I had ten very difficult children and that really challenged me as it would anyone. Moving from your first reaction to another place, it takes longer with some children. Sometimes its simple, sometimes it's complicated. I just trust in my ability to sense what they need and when they need me.

Hope describes to me how she feels a deep connection to children.

I've come to understand in my lifetime how connected I am to children. I think I am connected to everyone but I've come to understand it more fully and more consciously that my intuition is pretty strong. I sense a lot of what the children need, for me it helps a lot because that's what I base my relationship with them on. I always say they are here-we're coming together for a reason. They have chosen for whatever reasons to be with me. I am very philosophical that I am meant to be in their lives. I accept, rather than years ago I said: "Why do I get all these difficult children?" Its not that I didn't care for them before- it's just a different way of thinking. It's very much about my feeling life that is intuition and sensing into the needs of the children.

When a new child joins the kinder group, Hope creates a connection through the strategies she uses to support the child through the transition.

I would probably be close to them. I do all the nurturing things; I would sit with them, cuddle them if they're upset. If I need to use words they are words like: "I understand that you are missing your Mum, I understand that you are missing your Dad, I understand that." I want to be really empathetic so the child gets some sense even if they don't quite understand. That's how I start and I've had children who would hold on to me and that's how the child would separate from mum. So I am happy to do whatever needs to be done to support the child and the parent because sometimes the separation is really hard for the parent.

So pretty quickly you've got to be that person. It can be any of the staff, if I notice that a child was drawn to another staff member than I am happy to encourage that or let that happen but I would just be conscious of the new child.

Hope remembers a situation where a group of children were all upset at the one time. This felt overwhelming for Hope and her strategy was to first connect and settle each *child as best she could and then rely on other staff to help her meet the needs of the children who were upset.*

In her kinder room Hope has created a special chair to help with these situations, which she calls her 'Nurturing Chair'.

I have my chair, a soft chair in the corner, and I call it my nurturing chair. And if I sense that children need to be held that's a nice place to go.

MY FEELING LIFE

Hope's feeling life is about an unspoken feeling or intuitive message that she receives about a person – when she meets the person.

It's like a knowing I don't consciously look at someone and consciously think about them – I actually get the messages before it's something I have learnt to trust in.

When Hope talks about this way of being and understanding others she expresses frustration because it is something that is difficult to articulate. Hope uses her feeling life in her interactions with the children. Hope's frustration is about the need for documentation about the children's learning.

All my things are in my head- so that's why I get annoyed with all this documentation because I feel I know the children really really well. If I could just write in my own words you know - how I know the children – I would feel much happier.

Hope feels that her picture and understanding of the children changes when she has to document it – the picture is not whole anymore and it does not feel honest

because you don't put negative observations - the challenges that children are having. It might be that I am sensing something in them they are not the things that we put in - I've got all that in my head. Steiner uses a saying: when

the universe is gathered up and it's within us – the universe is in us –that really made sense to me. Over the years I've learnt to trust my intuition or my knowing.

MEETING THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

When Hope first encountered the Early Years Learning Framework, it was with strong feelings of aversion because she felt the amount of writing that was needed was intense.

Well to be honest, when I first came here and had to do it – I hated it. I really was just bucking up against it because I just want to work with the children in my room ... I don't want all the writing there is a lot of expectation about what we have to do and I struggled with that.

Hope has been given time to complete her programme but expresses that it is a challenge to get everything done.

It's quite challenging having to do an observation every month on every child because I don't think I have enough time to do my room work and I do come early – I come three quarters of an hour early every morning. So that would be the hard thing for me, things are overwhelming because I don't have the time. I would prefer to have time and space and I know all the girls would say: "But Hope you have two hours a day" but I have other things as well.

Time was needed to find a way to connect with the framework. Through a process of reflection, Hope found elements in the framework that felt right for her.

I think the place I am at now, I'm really happy. So I have worked and worked with my understanding and I think I have evolved a way of working that works for me.

To Hope, the framework is not about having a prescribed way of working but is about *showing what we do - it's just putting it into words.*

You just have to show that you understand and that these elements come out. So I've embraced it now, and I feel that it's a beautiful document.

The place that Hope has come to with her documentation allows her to see it as an interwoven process that connects, the observations of the children with the

things that happen on a daily basis in the kinder. Hope sees that the approach to planning based on the Early Years Learning Framework fits with Steiner Hope has found a way to link her style of programming to the element of the Rudolf Steiner curriculum that follows the yearly seasonal rhythm. Hope describes how she links the Framework requirements to the Steiner philosophy:

It's linked to the seasons, it's linked to my planning, my planning is in it as well. Other people may not perceive this but what I deem to be important is expressed in my programme. The sense of place, sense of belonging, that whole notion of identity and even the learning aspect where they say you have to have a disposition- problem solving, creativity, all those areas are what we do, its about the work coming out of the child. It's not about us imposing our will because we think a child should know their colours.

Hope remembers an experience from her work in a non-Steiner setting. *I have worked in mainstream where every day a train set is set up now what does that say to a child? That child might have other ways of using the train set.*

Hope uses her programme to tell stories about the children – *every day I am writing a story: "Today the children found some dirt..." and, I write a story, I paint a picture trying to get the elements that we're working with.*

The stories that Hope writes allow her to show and express *the many beautiful things that* happen in the kinder. One of these is the way that Hope understands the freedom that the child expresses.

It's much easier to work with children because they're open. There is just this wonderful openness and they sense it in us as well. They are open and I don't know if I am explaining it very well because I don't know if I can explain it.

WORKING FROM THE HEART

Hope shares her thoughts about how she sees herself – how she feels that women have more intuition and that *they are intuitive beings* – she describes herself as a *heart person* and believes that the children *pick up on that* quality. When Hope has to be more assertive at times in managing children's behaviour, she does this based on her deeper understanding of the child's needs.

There are times where I have to be very firm with them and sometimes I have to be really firm. I do that because I know that's what that child needs. And it's not – it's a much deeper thing - I don't know it's hard to explain. It's not that they have done something wrong – it is part of that but it's also - I know there is a background to why that behaviour is happening. I sense into it.

Hope uses her feeling life when she forms a deep knowing about what each child in her care needs. Hope shares her understanding with the parents of the children she meets. When the parents may be worried about their child, Hope helps them to see things from a different angle – *I might be able to help them make more sense of why they may be responding or living in that way at that particular time. I think that's one of my – one of the positives things because we can put children in boxes – we are too quick to go to boxes.*

Hope does not use labels to describe a child's specific behaviour – *I described a child recently to someone and they said he might be slight spectrum of autism and I think well my perception is he hasn't incarnated yet.*³ Hope wants to understand the journey of the child – to understand why he is the way he is.

One element that helps Hope to understand the child's journey is to observe and see what the parent brings – how they respond to their child. Hope's connection to parents that she meets and works with is linked to her Anthroposophical belief of incarnation and the idea that there is a spiritual element in her relationships with others.

Now some parents I am very close to and I would say we have had past lives. I feel very connected to these people and I think they have been connected to me. Also they've been open to what we do and how we do it and how I work with the children. But I do have parents, not many, maybe an odd one, that is

³ This viewpoint is one that underlies the picture given by Rudolf Steiner about the development of the human being. Steiner refers to a journey that the individual travels from the spiritual world or cosmos to earth as being the path of incarnation (Steiner, 1963; Steiner, 1971; Long-Breipohl, 2012).

still quite distant but I don't judge that person because I understand this person has a journey too. I think that's a way of working with parents – to look at them and to say they've come to me I can only do so much. It also makes me look at the way I am and the way I respond because of course it's much easier to respond to an open parent to one that's bringing a lot of their own stuff.

Working with some parents brings challenges for Hope in the way that she has to be conscious of her own mood and her reaction to behaviours that she feels bring a negative energy to the kinder. When a parent *rushes in loud walking, loud voice*, Hope feels sadness and through this brings a consciousness of care and support to that person instead of becoming annoyed at their behaviour.

We are all human beings so we all have these little challenges and I think that's good because it's me working through my connection with that parent – we might have old past lives stuff.

When Hope reflects on the challenges that meet her as an educator she talks about a certain type of tiredness that comes with the work she does.

I mean tiredness can be to do with your whole life but I think I work in a certain way that takes a lot of my energy. It might be that I go to every child when they are lying down, I could just sit there and not do that; sometimes you've got to make an extra effort. If a child has been aggressive and you've had to be firm with them, I always make an effort to cuddle them and to bring that positive back to them so they can let that go. I will sit with them, let it go and come back to that normality part of the hug. So it's the follow up and it's about our emotions. I'm a very emotional person -I feel things in my heart and I think we are dealing with emotions every day. When I come through here I hear babies crying and I get emotional because I'd rather them be home with their mother or their father – without judgment but they're the things. And we have the work pressure from our employers about what they expect from us and they are very much into this (indicates the programming aspect – by pointing to programming books) and I don't want to be into that.

People say to Hope: “Are you looking after yourself” and “You've got to protect yourself.” For Hope having a supportive co-worker who is *in sync means everything* because there is a sharing of the workload, and Hope does not have to

think about everything that needs to be done – *it makes it less tiring. It's very tiring when you have to think of all the things that need to be done.*

Protecting herself also happens on a meditative level because of a belief in the Christ Impulse.⁴

So I really try and visualize the light and I just lie. I suppose you would call it a meditation but it's not a formalised meditation and I just try and do the gratitude thing. Even if something hard has happened here, I just look at all the good things in my life and even at work if something comes up or I'm disappointed about somebodies action or response to something – I put it in perspective. I say: "that's okay – if that parent thinks that – I'm not going to take it on board" I will accept it – I can apologise if it's something I need to apologise and then I let it go.

Hope feels that time has given her wisdom about living in the world and she feels that life is getting simpler in some respects. She walks into her kinder room every day and that becomes the focus for her – other things are left aside. *It's like my home. So I'm like the mother in the home. That's how I see myself.*

There is a feeling of home in Hope's kinder and this feeling is carried into how she interacts with the children. Hope feels a joining to the children and she is there in a quiet way as a mother figure to all the children. When the children rest, Hope rests with them:

⁴ Steiner made reference to the significance of the Christ figure when he described a sculpture intended for the first Goethenäum in Dornach, Switzerland. According to Steiner, the 'Christ' embodied the "...most sublime human principle ever to unfold on the earth" (Steiner, 1915, para 1) and in his sculptural representation two ideas were important to show: "Firstly, it will be important to show how the being that we are concerned with dwells in a human body. Secondly, it must also become apparent how this human body, in every facial expression and in every gesture reflects a magnificent degree of spiritual refinement, which descended with the Christ from cosmic and spiritual heights into this body in its thirtieth year" (Steiner, 1915, para 1).

Sometimes I lie down with them and I just lie down and put my hands on them and I can close my eyes. I think how many people can close their eyes with a room full of children lying on mats? But that's taken me time – it's a time thing and also I stick by what I expect by the children. It's lovely to see those children who used to struggle – we need to rest. We need to be quiet so much of the world is full of movement and noise and chatter.

Hope tells me that she feels her role is to help the children she meets to find quietness within themselves *to help them hear or feel because they numb themselves from emotion.*

A particular child comes into Hope's mind when she talks about this – a child who

gets so dammed angry when its pack up time and I said to him the other day: "You know it would be really lovely if you could just help us because we need everyone to help us" but he is a bit angry and he has to learn to relax and open up to the world around him. He's very much into all the negative TV things.

Hope helps this child by accepting his emotion and by becoming very soft and mothering. Hope talks with him about his feelings: I have learnt to acknowledge their feelings. I say: *"I understand that you are angry." And I think it's good to say: "I acknowledge that you are angry and I understand." I know you are angry" and he says: "Mmm, yes." You can see it in his body.*

The children need to hear the word that labels their emotion *because then they can acknowledge the emotion in themselves.* The child can then call what they are feeling something, and can *feel those things* and then *be able to move on.*

Acknowledging the feeling acknowledges who the child is and helps them to *move on to the next place.*

A lot of the work Hope does with the children and their emotions takes energy – it's like giving a therapy in some sense – supporting the child's emotional development. Supporting the child in this way is also about building a rapport and persevering with this.

So in your understanding of the child, don't make it easy – don't allow that child to do something that's not acceptable and I think this is another thing about tiredness. So you've got to be constant and you've got to persevere. It takes energy – especially physically – if they're annoyed.

Hope feels tired after working with the children in this way: *I go home at night and for a lot of the year I just lie down on my bed as soon as I got home. I walk in and I'm just – Hope's face and body shows a tired looking expression – and I just want to lie down and relax.*

When Hope tells me about her feelings of tiredness she recollects another memory about a situation with a child in her kinder. This is a child that she has worked with for some time now – around two years. The situation she remembers was when she was outside in the kinder garden and she heard *a child screaming* and so *rushed over*. The assistant educator told Hope what had happened – the child Hope had been working with for the past two years had bitten another child so she called to this child and talked to him.

The way I work with this child now – I don't get angry with him, I give him sympathy, I have empathy for him. To begin with I give him sympathy and I put my arm on him and I'll say: "I'm sad that you did that, I'm saddened that you did that" and: "if you're angry and you don't want a child to do something I want you to talk to them, if you can't talk you come to me, you don't hurt people". That's what he needs help with, he actually needs to hear the words, so he can understand what he is doing because it just comes – it's like a switch. So it's helping him, whatever that thought is that makes him grab and hurt someone it's to help him through that process. So he's angry – I said: "if you're angry turn away – come to me I will help you." It's supporting him even though he's been the perpetrator- it's about him. To me, that's like a healing thing for him – I think?

Hope understands that each child has a particular Karma and that this influences how children interact with each other, sometimes in a negative way. When Hope talks about Karma, she reflects on her own journey, that now she is in a place where she understands herself in *a very deep way* and thinks that this deepness is from her admiration of the picture of Christ *as a child – as a figure of goodness*. Hope believes that the goodness of the Christ Impulse has influenced her work as a Rudolf Steiner educator and that it *is very much a part of who she is* and has

been.. When Hope connects deeply to the attributes that are embodied in the figure of Christ, she is taken into a different zone of *being that person, that needs to meet the children's needs.*

Hope used to frown a lot and realised through this that her face reflected her thoughts and mood.

You can't work with children with anger and I've had to at times because there's been: 'this place is pressure' but it's better, it's less, and the other thing is about: 'no judgment' and 'no expectation'. This is something I've learnt over the last five, six seven years as a conscious way of being in the world. It doesn't mean that I don't have expectations just humdrum expectation and judgment. Parents I don't judge, that relieves a lot of thinking about things.

There are reasons for how people behave we don't know a person's story so I don't judge and I think if you don't have expectations the most wonderful things come to you instead of expecting things from the children in a really heavy way it just flows.

Hope lets the play flow from the children and what their interests are:

Yesterday the boys moved the play stands so now the room has changed and I thought: Shall we shift the room? I thought about it and it's how I wanted it to be anyway. It's come from them and that's how I work. So I notice that something is happening and I just support it, whatever it is, I try to anyway.

That's another reason why I hate the documentation –why do we say a child has to be at this point? That's not how I work. I don't want to work like that. What does it mean that a child can tie his shoelace? That's expectation but every child has a story and they will get to what they need at a particular time that's how I really feel.

We do these transition reports the parents have to write them and then we have to. We did one mid-year for the children but this one goes onto the school and it's got all the learning outcomes. I actually fill that in from my heart I don't look at anything and I just write about the child.

I had one father – they were going overseas so I had to fill it in and he just said to me: "You know 'A' better than I know 'A' – than we know 'A' " and I said: " Oh thank you for that"

Because what I had written I understand them in a different way. I suppose that's what that was saying.

On each child's birthday, Hope tells a story to the child and their family of *how they come from way up in the sky and they have an angel that looks after them and they frolic on the clouds.* Hope tries to build this beautiful image *that they have come from somewhere* and that's what she believes so towards the end she says:

"There's a boat that passes and takes the children and of course the birthday child asks the guardian angel: "where is that boat going" and the guardian angel said: "you will go on that boat one day – when you are ready". Then one day the birthday child is playing in the clouds and the clouds part. The birthday child looks down and there is the first time that she or he sees his mother and his father. Then the child knows that it's time to go on that journey, so then the boat comes and takes them and they say goodbye to their guardian angel".

When a grandparent of a child in Hope's kinder died, the child's parents came to Hope and talked about how would they deal with it – with their daughter?

I had that with my own daughter so I make it a very spiritual thing and give them the images that will help the child because somewhere there is that memory that hasn't been flushed out of them. I'm just linking on a deeper level and knowing that they have a memory of that but I tend to think that the people that are more connected to that whole vision of the world have memory so it feels right I just try and make that as believable as possible and I believe it.

Hope tells the children stories that come from the natural world and from her connection to the spiritual world.

It's like the fairies. Despite most of them watching TV and watching violent things (a lot of the boys watch terrible stuff), they still accept the fairy story. I said yesterday: "Ahh the fairies brought the birds!" Then today I couldn't find something and 'A' said: "maybe the goblins have got that and taken it away?" because we have a story about the goblins when things disappear. Those stories go deep into them because they have memory, they have memory of all the elemental beings and I think that's a beautiful thing for a child to have.

CHAPTER 8

FORMING MEANING FROM THE STORIES: A DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

This is my inner-vision of each educator: I see each individual standing alone speaking their words, but then as their words are voiced and listened to connections are made to other educators that stand near (Notes from Reflective Research Journal, October 2013).

Now my picture of each educator shows them standing on the circle mat in the kinder – and surrounding their physical being I hear their voices speaking about the questions at the heart of this study. These guiding questions are:

1. What is the nature of the relationships which Steiner early childhood educators' have with the children in their preschool setting?
2. What are Steiner early childhood educators' perceptions of (a) Steiner philosophy and (b) the EYLF and what connections can be made between these perceptions and their relationships with children in preschool settings?

During the interview conversations a dialogue was created around these questions, and from this each educator's story was written. The first stage of deciphering the dialogues in the stories happened through the framework of questions provided in Chapter Three. These questions asked:

- What is the data telling me?
- What is it I want to know? (Here making reference to the research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest).
- What is the dialectical relationship between what the data is telling me and what I want to know? (Refining the focus and linking back to research questions).

From using these questions, a secondary tool for analysis was created, and this is represented in Figure 5. The aid for analysis shown in Figure 5 was used to analyse each educator's story. Shared beliefs, interpretations and perceptions emerged across the stories. The focus of this discussion will be how I used these commonalities to give insight into the central questions, underlying theories and literature of this study. From asking the specific questions shown in Figure 5, a clearer picture of each educator has formed. At times a participant's voice formed a connection with another participant. The third stage in the analysis has explored these connections and in doing so has begun to link what has been found back to the three areas described in the literature review of this research: Theories of Attachment, Personal Philosophy and the EYLF, and Belonging.

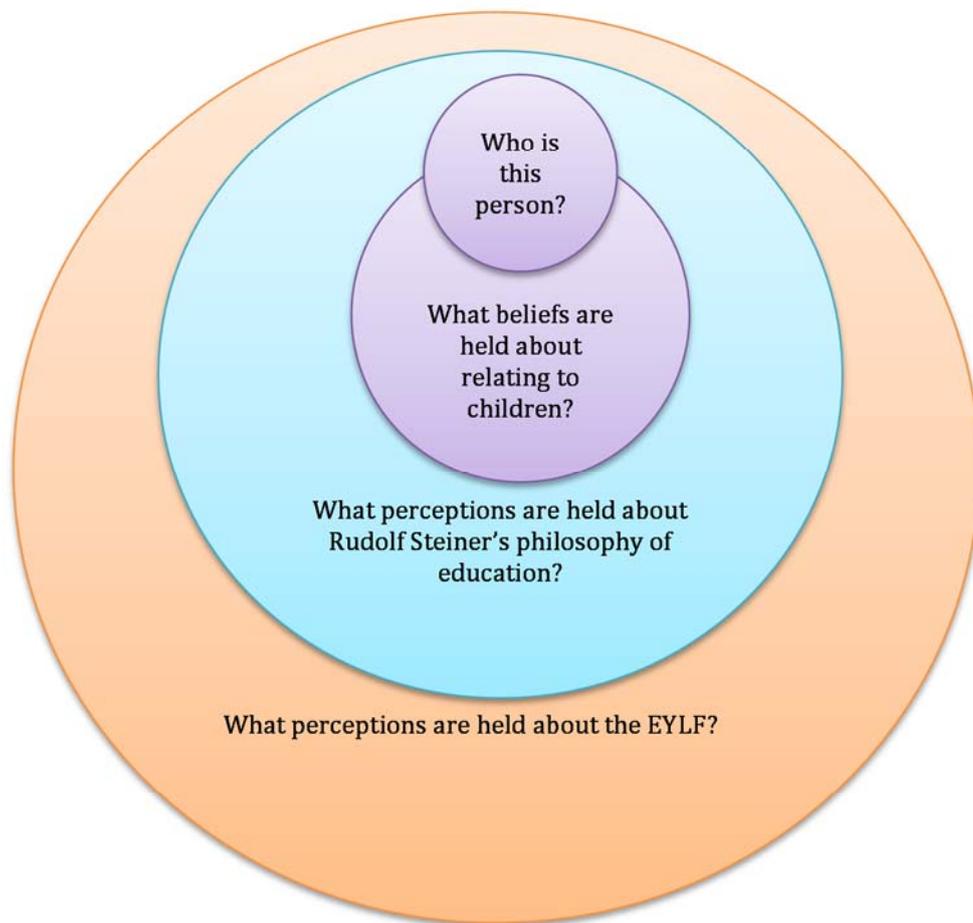


Figure 5: Initial analysis of the educators' narratives.

8.2 Personal Beliefs about Relating to Children

8.2.1 Luke

Luke's story highlighted his belief that you can ... *pick up relationships ... in a funny almost silent way ...* and that forming a relationship was a process of ... *getting to know a new child that comes.* Luke said that establishing a connection with a child for the first time was about being ready *to take that responsibility ...* and if he was not ready he thought that he could potentially damage the relationship for the future. Luke spoke about a time he refused to calm or soothe a distressed child because he believed so strongly that both he and the child needed to be ready for the connection.

I have often refused or stayed away ... not for very long, just until I felt that this child was ready to embrace me as well. If they weren't ready, a child - especially a baby, your face becomes familiar and they become comfortable with you for whatever reason that's often unknown. So, if that was destroyed in the first stage then that's going to stay like that. I have noticed that with a lot of the babies, some of the lovely women will pick up this child and hold it and try and comfort it and no matter what they did to calm it down they would continue to scream because for whatever reason that connection wasn't there with that child. But if you give that child to me - I am thinking of one or two in particular they will just stop crying immediately. I found that it was because I had that connection. I don't want to be getting to deep here, I have found it and I have seen these relationships form but it is very deep. I suppose first impressions are always important.

Luke's belief about how children are effected by first impressions extended to his thoughts that how the adult's thoughts and mood also impacts the relationship and connection with a child.

It's really important - your state of mind, if that's not clear to anyone else its almost like how some animals can feel if you are upset. I always feel it's similar with young babies. ... With the older children and with the babies they can pick up on the energy that is set. Like if there is something else outside of preschool you cannot bring anything into the room. You have to really focus and think about your mood and your attitude and the way you are the entire day. More importantly at the start of the day, if something is a little bit off and the children start playing up - there is just a different energy in the room.

You will often look back and think: "Why is it like this today? You can often put it down to how one or both the teachers are acting in the room for that day. So it's interesting, you've really got to focus on that. Even if you are tired, if you are just a little bit flat, then it's going to change everything. It's probably going to have the opposite effect on the children and they'll become out of control so it does promote an energy sort where - I still can't understand it but I definitely feel it does.

8.2.2 Joy

One of the first things that struck me strongly about the way Joy described the way she relates to children was her belief that children were no different to adults.

I find relating to the children very easy. I don't see it as something different, as relating to adults. Some people do, they change their voice and they change their attitudes and all that stuff – they are just little humans.

This was like a foundation belief for Joy and from this others were described, like taking time to get to know the kid and ... to spend some time either with one child or a small group of children. Often, the fascination will be in the group setting as well, and they all are curious about the same thing. But just really taking time to be present with the child: listen to what they are interested in and hear them and work with that.

Relationships with children also contain specific qualities and Joy identified some key ones that she saw as being important in the relationships between the educator and child. These qualities were found in a space where the adult had the capacity to put out the stops and be a little bit hard-line when necessary but also be really gentle at other times. Joy's belief was that this approach to connecting with the children created an element of respect from the children ...

because the kids learn that they can't get away with certain things. They settle into a rhythm after a little while. I think initially they'll experiment and push the boundaries and all that stuff but they learn over time that the teacher is not going to put up with this. I think that creates quite a safe space to be themselves within. Then in the tender moments – for example when it's story time, or circle time, or even sleep time and the teacher is singing to the

kids and showing a lot of compassion – it's just such an admirable thing to see those two things being used, sometimes one after the other.

Joy described how she is passionate *about the way humans communicate.*

Through reflection on a specific interaction with a child, Joy showed how her belief about the importance of human communication was fundamental in her relationships with children.

There was one little boy in particular, he had a condition that resulted in a development delay – it wasn't obvious but I do remember addressing him in the same way as I would other children when he became upset. I learnt over time that when he becomes upset it is for a very specific reason –he is very attached to routine. He really takes promises seriously, so if you tell him: "we are going to do something" and then we run out of time and say: "actually we are not going to do it" he gets really really upset. It took me a while to learn that and to just sort of listen to him. At one point he was crying and crying and crying and I could just not understand –I did not know what to do. I had to wait until he could talk to me again, and all he wanted to do was that particular thing I said we would do in the morning that we hadn't done. That's completely unique to him – I guess it took me a while to get to know his character before I could get to that point of realisation.

8.2.3 Jessie

Jessie is very clear about how her beliefs influence her practices saying that: *there is no contradiction between what I believe and what I do.*

To Jessie, connecting and forming relationships with children in her care, is about a respect for others founded on warmth and *unconditional love that everybody shares or everybody can share.*

Through her relationships with the children Jessie speaks about providing an *expanding heart space to encompass the child.* In this space she believes in the importance of *conscious projection, so just thinking: "you are safe", "you are ok".* Thought consciousness is something that Jessie places great importance on when she talks about her connections with the children: *I keep my mental projection with that child that needs that nurturing. I also I have a bigger picture than just the immediate.* In making reference to children separating from their caregiver

Jessie said: *I know that by nurturing that child, in that one instance, it's going to make it shorter and easier the next time. So it's an investment.*

Another important aspect of the way Jessie nurtures the child is through touch.

I do think touch is very, very, very important but I also think that every child in every single circumstance needs something a little different. ... Depending on the child I find that just patting them across the forehead with their fringe can be really calming but some children need a stronger hug – they need both arms.

Reading Jessie's story gives a picture of her practice that emerged from her reflections of putting herself in the child's shoes to see the child's perspective. She said: *I was with them the whole time, for seven and a half hours. It made me feel what a full day is like for the children and I know some of the subtle areas that I was missing because I was not aware of them.*

These subtle areas included Jessie seeking new ways to connect with the children by involving the children in tasks that the adult would usually do such as preparing fruit for the morning tea. With these activities Jessie discovered that when the educator and the children worked together it brought a closeness. Jessie's words reflected her thoughts about this way of connecting:

The 'fruit' was a real sense of needing to do this for the children and then it turned out that three year olds needed that time with me. Instead of- what I call barking orders at them – I was able to be with them in a purposeful way. The behaviour shift that I saw, due to sitting down for twenty minutes with them over fruit, was total. They didn't need any orders barked they were relaxed, they were calm, they were peaceful.

By working with the children, Jessie explored how they were all working together. She changed her way of *being the objective bystander* to diving into the process with the children letting herself *be immersed in the process as well*. Jessie's belief about who she was as the 'educator' included a view that saw her learning with the children.

... it felt like we were negotiating things and taking on each other's points of view and it just felt like a team effort. There were still things that I needed to

say; that only I could say, and things that I did that only I could do, but what could be negotiated or discussed – they knew it was open.

In her approach there was both a sense of mutual respect and mutual support through negotiating things and facilitating a sense of empowerment for the children. This sense of togetherness that was present in Jessie's connections with the children influenced her approach to 'behaviour management'. Here Jessie took a view that managing the children's behaviour was about bringing *the child back into wholeness ... like a cat pawing – sort of bringing them back in little bit by little bit*. Jessie's personal beliefs and interests in yoga and meditation can perhaps be seen as an influence here because she made reference to the sense of inner-peace and wholeness that yoga is said to support saying that the songs she sang with the children were *really deep spiritual affirmations ... like: "I am happy, I am good, I am brave, I am bold, my own spirit I can hold"*.

8.2.4 Hope

When Hope shares her personal thoughts about how she connects and forms a relationship with the children, she speaks strongly about a gesture of mindfulness and this weaves into how she speaks and uses touch in her interactions with the child. Hope says: *I always go there and touch the child and speak quietly*. When a child is upset and needs support Hope becomes *soft and mothering* she stays *close to them*, doing *all the nurturing things* like: sitting with the child in her '*nurturing chair*' and cuddling the child.

Along with her belief of mindfulness is sensitivity or a *sensing* of the child's immediate and *deeper needs*. For hope, trusting her *intuition* and *sensibilities* helps her in her work because she says: *that's what I base my relationship with them on*. In forming connections with the children, Hope acknowledges that each child is an individual, and that one child's needs will look different to another child's. *It's a constant ebb and flow for each individual child*.

The picture of the child that Hope holds, sees that each child has a particular *Karma* and personal *journey* to make. With each group of children, Hope holds a belief that: *we're coming together for a reason. They have chosen for whatever reasons to be with me. I am very philosophical that I am meant to be in their lives*.

Beneath Hope's interactions with the children is a belief about helping the child to find a sense of *quiet* in themselves *to help them hear or feel because they numb themselves from emotion*. In her relationships helping children to be aware of their emotions is a fundamental belief that Hope holds. Hope uses language for this purpose like: *"I acknowledge that you are angry and I understand."* Because she believes that language like this can help the child to *acknowledge the emotion in themselves... feel those things* and then *be able to move on*.

Recognising the child's emotions is part of a process that supports a connection with the child. Hope spoke about this when she talked about an incident with a child in the preschool:

The way I work with this child now- I don't get angry with him, I give him sympathy, I have empathy for him.... So its helping him, whatever that thought is that makes him grab and hurt someone its to help him through that process.

Woven into this process about understanding and supporting the child's behaviour is a gesture of 'no-judgement'.

I don't judge and I think if you don't have expectations the most wonderful things come to you instead of expecting things from the children in a really heavy way it just flows.

8.3 Shared Beliefs about Relationships with Children

Identifying the shared perceptions that the educators held about Steiner philosophy has been important because they have traced connections to some of their personal beliefs about relating to children. Luke talked about an element of silence when establishing a connection with a child where both partners (adult and child) need to be 'ready'. For Luke, this readiness is about being conscious of his thoughts because he sees these as an influence on the atmosphere that surrounds the child. When Luke made a connection he waited, and sat down beside the child before making eye contact. Luke observed that *for some reason* this approach made a difference for calming and connecting with the child. Luke's process of connection with the child began even before he picked the child up, and before he entered the child's physical space. This method of

calming the child is like an expanding gesture where Luke slowed down his approach to meet the child. Once this happened and Luke picked the child up, and placed him on his lap the child *started calming down* and it was then that Luke felt a connection. Luke stood up and held the child, the child who had stopped crying faced Luke and there was a moment that Luke finds difficult to articulate. Something happened in the space between Luke and the child – a certain presence or mood. The moment that Luke experienced with this child connects to Jessie’s description of ‘conscious projection’, which refers to the way that Jessie would use her thoughts combined with holding or hugging a child to give support when the child was distressed. Luke and Jessie’s beliefs suggest that the inner mood of the educator becomes important to consider. This belief is reflected in recent literature showing findings from affective and social neuroscience that acknowledge, “emotion and cognition, body and mind, work together in students of all ages” (Immordino-Yang, 2011, p. 102). The beliefs shared by Joy and Hope weave a similar pattern alongside the one that Luke and Jessie’s belief show. This similar pattern is described by Joy’s belief that building a relationship with a child is about taking time to *be present* and *listen* to the child. This thread touches slightly to the importance of *being ready* and *being silent* because to listen to the child one needs to become quiet and still. Stillness is part of Hope’s beliefs about working with children. Underlying her relationships with the children is a belief that, as an educator, her work is to help the children find a sense of *quiet* in their being. Hope strives towards this in her relationships with the children and believes that by being mindful and aware, and by using her intuition she is able to sense what the children need on a *deeper* level.

The way that Hope uses her intuition to sense the deeper needs of the children shows how her beliefs about relating to children cross over into an interpretation of Steiner philosophy that incorporates feeling and emotion into her methodology. Hope’s words reflect this when she describes her way of interacting and connecting with the children as being *very much about my feeling life that is intuition and sensing into the needs of the children*.

Presence is a diverse and multifaceted thread that can be seen to underpin the educator's beliefs about relationships. In each of the educator's stories presence appears and reappears as the educators describe the way that they relate to the children. Presence suggests a quietness and this was visible because when I sat in the kinder observing each educator – I saw this presence as their way of being and working. To understand further how the quality of presence is felt in the atmosphere of this setting and how the educator's actions contribute to it, a definition of presence is useful. This definition of presence sees first that teaching is about “engaging in an authentic relationship with students where teachers know and respond with intelligence and compassion to students and their learning”(ibid, 2006, pp. 265-266). Within this “authentic relationship”, presence is seen as: “a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step”(Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 265). This definition of presence can be distilled further through the term ‘caring presence’ because this has space for qualities of warmth, slowness, and ‘dreaminess’ that I saw and felt in the Steiner setting (Covington, 2003; Goodfellow, 2008). ‘caring presence’ is phenomena within nursing practice that has been used to describe the “way a nurse can be with patients to provide an atmosphere of shared humanness and connection”(Covington, 2003, p. 301). Goodfellow (2008) translates this concept for early childhood work suggesting that ‘caring presence’ is about creating a space to listen to the child in a holistic sense “to orient ourselves, as ECEC practitioners, to understanding children's thinking and experiencing” (p. 18). Given the healing nature of Steiner education – that Jessie's story describes – the concept of ‘caring presence’ is even more important because it recognises that the process of connecting with children can be therapeutic in nature. The process of deconstructing the educators' stories to identify what they believe about relating to children shows that ‘being present’, and ‘caring presence’ is integral to the unique and holistic nature of relationships in Steiner practice.

8.4 The Educators' Personal Perceptions of Steiner Philosophy

8.4.1 Luke

To Luke the Steiner philosophy is enacted in a *silent* way through imitation and example. Luke spoke about how he is always doing something meaningful.

we are always doing something. Like downstairs, I will pick up the broom straight away and I will start sweeping the deck, the stairs, where everyone sits outside. I will never say: 'A' will you like to help me with this? because I think that's supposedly the wrong way to go about it. It's amazing what children do when they will try to imitate what you are doing. It can be catastrophic or it can be really good, and if one starts copying then they just all swarm so it's as simple as that. Another thing is a lot of mainstream systems always tell children what to do. You should be doing this, you should be doing that but in the Steiner preschool you step in when you need to. It's often just played out by imitation you are always being constructive and it's really good.

The experience of working with Steiner educators gave Luke insight about what Steiner education was about, and again imitation was a strong element of what he saw during group activities like play and the morning circle.

Imitation is a big thing but other than that the teachers interfere very little with their play – slash not at all. The only reason they interfere is that they are doing something wrong. Morning circle is the other kind of big involvement with the children and it's very calm and slow and deep, and I guess spiritual. One educator might bring a little bit of yoga or meditation into it without actually doing that but that's like the vibe that's going around. I haven't been involved in Montessori or mainstream enough to pass judgement but I know its (Steiner) really getting into the children's souls and spirits and its bringing it out – if that makes sense? So the presence that's taking the morning circle -the teacher- whatever they are doing, the children are just engrossed in that and they will start imitating whatever is happening. There is no intellect being used – nothing but the body and that realm.

8.4.2 Joy

A key aspect of the Steiner philosophy that spoke strongly to Joy is the focus on play materials created from *natural elements ... toys that spark your imagination rather than a physical thing-like a fire truck or something. Again that speaks to what I believe to be true for children.* Joy sees that Steiner education is about child-centered processes where an educator needs to be flexible, *following a child's movements ... to let them follow their instincts – what's calling to them rather than being told things like what this is and what that is.* In the context of the Steiner preschool, Joy perceived that the daily rhythm and weekly rhythm is *a ... good framework to work in. You know every day what time we do circle time, what time we have lunch, what time we go to which garden.*

Joy identified that the strength of the daily rhythm comes from the lead educator being the one person that carries and holds this rhythm. Her words described this: *I think it does really come back to the leader having a really clear idea of how they lead the class and being on the same page, in simple terms of: what's okay to do and what's not okay to do.* Joy saw this carrying and holding of the rhythm in her observations of the room leader making bread with the children: *It was fantastic – she makes sure that she sits down at the table she is sitting at eye level with the kids and she is present with the children and she starts the activity ... I remember her, just starting, making the dough, kneading the dough. The kids trickled over one by one. The curiosity gained momentum and lots of kids came over, well all of them came over eventually... That's the kind of magic of teaching that way – when it all comes together maybe it looks like it's structured but its magically beautiful.*

When the second conversation with Joy occurred, she was no longer working in the Steiner context and from this outside vantage point she was able to reflect on what her memories and perceptions of the philosophy were. Joy spoke about the way that the educators 'teach' the children respect for their food and the origin of their food: *I think the element of ritual is very beautiful when they say their little blessings before the meals I thought that was very beautiful – teaching children to*

respect who has created the meal and where it has come from – a little bit beyond: “there’s food on my plate and I am going to eat it.”

Which is different, at the schools I teach in now; they open their lunch box and see a packet of chips and that’s the end of the thought process. What is this? And where does it come from?

8.4.3 Jessie

For Jessie, Steiner education is like a therapy: *Everything that you touch in the Steiner room is therapeutic because natural materials are connecting to the natural world. When you work with the natural materials, you are engaging ... more than just playing... you are connecting with everything you do, complex interactions that come through playing with beautiful materials from nature.*

Nature is an aspect that Jessie could see in other areas of Steiner practice. For example she commented on the use of the seasons in the songs and rhythm as being *true to Steiner* and had observed the way that a Steiner educator had taken a group circle time where the songs *flowed* into one another.

Jessie also sees that the therapeutic aspect of Steiner education is about the *children meeting their own needs and a chance to be, instead of being told what to do*. There were significant practices that Jessie identified as being particular to Steiner education, and which were different to other environments she had worked in. In terms of children’s behaviour, Jessie thought that the ideas and concepts related to Steiner education were *‘kind of loose’*.

In her experiences working in the Montessori setting, there was an approach to children’s behaviour that was *‘black and white’*. *If this happens that happens: action – consequence*. Jessie saw that there was a different approach to children’s behaviour in Steiner and she wondered *why people were not stepping in and stopping certain behaviours ... like the amount of rough play and the amount of children not doing what was expected*.

Another practice that Jessie could see as being particular to Steiner was the way materials were presented to the children such as the painting paper: *I was intrigued with the cutting off of edges and why would you do that?* Jessie’s

experiences as a Montessori educator meant that she questioned the differences she saw between the philosophies. One question she asked was: *why do teachers put out activities when children of that age are more than capable of getting them off the shelf for themselves?*

Additional perceptions that Jessie has formed about Steiner philosophy have arisen through how she has been told to meet the philosophy in her practice. For example when Jessie spoke about telling stories to the children she said: *I'm not allowed to read from a book here at story time or rest time. I've been told that that's not what we do in Steiner so I've been experimenting with what story I can tell. I just need to bring a story to the children ... that's meaningful to them and speaks to them.*

Jessie spoke about the space of the preschool being a *protected space* where the child's *subtle needs* are a priority. Jessie had made an observation about the Steiner setting – comparing it with the Montessori setting saying: *parents aren't allowed in the room, like they are not allowed in the room in Steiner.* A key reason for this was because *when a parent comes in – not conscious of what we are trying to do – the children's protected space is challenged, is threatened.* The Steiner educator's role is about a *subtle holding* of the child's space in order to protect the child's *inner work*.

8.4.4 Hope

Hope has been travelling with the Steiner philosophy for some time. Her first perceptions of the philosophy were about a *sense of wonder*, the use of *natural materials and cloths* in the environment as play things and the way that the children used their *will* and their *imagination* through *self-directed play*. As she journeyed further with the philosophy her connection to it became one of *heartfelt emotion* because she felt that it reflected her personal beliefs about *living in the world ... the very meaningful things ... the human things about humanness and how we treat each other – how we live our lives.* For Hope, these 'meaningful' things were her interpretations of the Steiner philosophy... *like the kindergarten teacher representing a Madonna and the Madonna cloak, and the virtue of humility* that Steiner described through the 'Christ Impulse'.

8.5 The Influence of Nature on Human Connection

When the educators spoke about their perceptions of Steiner education there was a shared view about the role of nature in the philosophy. In Steiner education, the learning environment reflects the natural world and the resources for play are often made from natural materials like wood, wool, silk, cotton and comprise gathered objects like shells, pine cones, stones and crystals. Jessie talked about how 'being' in the Steiner preschool is like a therapy because of the human connection to nature that happens on a sensory level through touching natural objects.

When Joy reflected on her first encounters with the philosophy she spoke about how the toys *sparked* imagination. Similarly, Hope described the inspiration she felt when, as a student she saw a Steiner environment for the first time. Her words were ones of inspiration:

that little introduction to Steiner ... was the natural materials and cloths and that notion of self-directed play, where the children are using their will – their imagination, I just loved it and I went and used those things in my own kindergarten.

There is a deeper gesture in the way that the Steiner environment integrates the world of nature and this can be hinted at in a memory Hope shared from childhood where she spoke and reflected about being a *born lover of nature*:

I've always had this sense of wonder. Now I can look back and see this in myself, the fact that I've always felt not quite like everybody else that there is something else in the world. I know I felt that when I was a child, I was slightly apart not knowing why.

This personal belief from Hope's memory forms a subtle connection to Jessie's thoughts about Steiner education being therapeutic through the use of nature in the Steiner environment being a healing tool to support the child. The 'therapy' that Jessie sees in the Steiner environment is about human connection, and the role of nature becomes a metaphor for a much more complex picture which Jessie describes:

The therapy, the remembering that we are all connected in this web of life, simply by experiencing it and being one with the environment. Through being able to respect each other and ourselves and finding ways to do that. The therapy, the warmth and the unconditional love that everybody shares or everybody can share.

The shared perceptions about the role of nature in the Steiner philosophy also describes a particular belief about the way that Steiner educators form relationships with children. When the educators talked about the significance of the natural world to their practice and to Steiner philosophy they described how their particular worldview informs the ways that they connect with another individual. Rinaldi (2005) helps with an understanding of how the outer picture of the universe –the world of nature and the cosmos - can be reflected inwardly on a human level.

Sensitivity to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us to others; abandoning ourselves to the conviction that our understanding and our own being are but small parts of a broader, integrated knowledge that holds the universe together (Rinaldi, 2005, p.19, as cited in Goodfellow, 2008, p. 18).

This “broader integrated knowledge” holding the universe together is reflected in Hope’s voice when she speaks about a feeling that *there is something else in the world*, and this sense of ‘something else’ is also described through listening to Luke’s thoughts about Steiner philosophy as holding qualities of ‘silence’, calmness and ‘spiritual’ presence.

8.6 Being ‘Silent’ the Role of the Adult in the Steiner Preschool

I could see Luke’s thoughts about silence, calmness and spirituality in the way that the educator’s inhabited the space of the preschool. Being a visitor in this space took me to a new understanding of what being engaged, with ones surrounding environment, means. I observed that the adult in the Steiner preschool was deeply connected to the surrounding environment; they were quietly present in it, in such a way that the children were free to be present in their play.

In Hope's story, I shared my impression of Hope as she was working in the room surrounded by the children at play. It was as if there was an invisible aura around Hope as she held the space just by 'being' there. Joy spoke about a *magical* element she saw during a bread baking activity in the way that the lead educator worked and interacted with the children.

These moments where the adults in the Steiner preschool are engaged in quiet, almost meditative work further describes Luke's perception of silence in the Steiner philosophy where the educator leads by doing, and by being deeply engaged in their work. Luke could see how imitation is a strong feature in the way that the adult in the Steiner preschool carries out their 'work' because the adult is *always being constructive. Imitation is huge; subconsciously they* (the children) *just pick up on it and slowly start to feed off it. It's like they don't see those things as chores and jobs, they see these things as the norm - things that you should be doing and can make fun out of.*

Within Luke's understandings about imitation being a strategy for interacting with children, was a comparison to non-Steiner settings where Luke said: *a lot of mainstream systems always tell children what to do. You should be doing this, you should be doing that* but in the Steiner preschool *you step in when you need to. A connection was made to Luke's comparison of Steiner and non-Steiner when Joy spoke about Steiner education as being about giving children freedom through self-directed play and letting children follow their instincts ... rather than being told things ... like what this is and what that is.*

In the educators' perceptions about Steiner education, there are assumptions about what non-Steiner settings do. The educators use these assumptions to show how the practices of Steiner philosophy are different. However, when Jessie talks about her actual experiences as a Montessori educator, her reflection shows that recognising the differences across belief systems can be supportive in recognising the origin of one's beliefs. In Jessie's case making an actual comparison between Steiner and Montessori helped her to form perceptions of what practices were specific to Steiner education, and aided her understanding of enacting the philosophy in her practice as an educator.

According to Long-Breipohl (2012), inner self-development is the process of engaging the spiritual world in one's practice of being an educator, and in this process there are particular ways that educators must "serve young children". One such way is that educators must find a way to link the "young child's connectedness to the spiritual world" to their own educational practice (Long-Breipohl, 2012, p. xxxiii). For educators who are still finding their place within the Steiner philosophy, ideas such as this one can feel overwhelming because they suggest complex methods for relating to children. When I listened to Jessie, I heard this as a message that emerged from her reflections especially when she spoke about feeling *lost* and *overwhelmed* in the beliefs of those around her. Educators need time and space to explore the meanings held within their personal beliefs and the beliefs of others because as Jessie's process showed, when educators examine how their philosophy influences their practice, their relationships with children are deepened. Giving space for the possibility of transformation through reflection is therefore fundamental for educators.

8.7 Individual Perceptions of the EYLF

8.7.1 Luke

While Luke did not talk specifically about the EYLF in his interview responses I did observe him helping with the documentation by compiling the children's profile books. Here he was shown specific observations to include in the books and was sitting at the table filing the work.

8.7.2 Joy

Joy's perception of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is that it's positive because it means that there is a focus on the child's play *...being a learning experience rather than just: "isn't that cute"*. To Joy, the EYLF is a *very straightforward* way to show and document the children's learning. However there is one aspect of the framework that Joy perceives as a challenge and that is *... the time it takes to write it up*. Not having enough time to get all her written work complete felt concerning for Joy because to her it meant that there was a *split in focus where you are trying to be there with the children* but this can be

compromised because your mind is thinking: *“Oh no, where’s the camera I have to get the camera and bam -oh no! What did you say? Let me write that down quickly.”* Joy reflected that the EYLF is time consuming in her comments:

It’s very hard to do the writing up. Sometimes I have had to sort of stand up and drink a cup of tea and squish it in! It is difficult, if there was a way where it could be reduced to writing up one chunk a week or something, I think it would be so much better for the children. For us to really be present in the room -all the time- and not be concerned: “oh my god I haven’t done all my papers and they are due this week!”.

Joy spoke about the feeling of being exhausted because she had to wear ... *so many hats...* she was leading the programme, documenting and supervising four or five children on her own. This led her to seek ways to use the EYLF that followed the children’s *direction, their cues and their leads*. Joy changed her way of using the EYLF to write a story that expressed more than just one activity and included a fuller picture with more details.

Like we would be planting and I would write a story about what we did and now it’s: we started off doing this and we ended up doing that but we also did this and I think that’s totally fine for the EYLF.

In Joy’s perception of the EYLF she could see that there were many *learning opportunities coming out* that she could express in her stories about the children’s learning.

8.7.3 Jessie

Jessie’s interpretation of the EYLF is that it is based on *process and it gives the teacher a lot more license*. Jessie sees a strong connection to Te Whāriki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum in the EYLF in the way that it ‘speaks’ to children’s learning dispositions. With dispositions ... *you can write much more to the processes of children’s learning like enthusiasm and perseverance because children are a process; their ‘being’ is a process.*

There is a passion in Jessie’s perceptions of the EYLF – it feels comfortable to her *like putting on a pair of woolly socks or a really comfy scarf, or a really soft coat and a nice warm beanie on a cold day*. In her comments, Jessie sees that the EYLF

is inclusive of Steiner beliefs and has room to express these: *I could bring Steiner in and I wouldn't have to change anything and I could take it to Steiner and I wouldn't have to change anything.*

8.7.4 Hope

Hope's first experiences of meeting the EYLF were filled with feelings of dislike and hate where she was *bucking up against it* because she felt that it was taking her away from working *with the children*.

The difficulties that Hope felt were entwined with the extra work required for documenting observations of the children. Hope commented that it was *quite challenging having to do an observation every month on every child* because this extra work impacted on the time that she had to prepare her room for the children.

I don't think I have enough time to do my room work and I do come early – I come three quarters of an hour early every morning ... things are overwhelming because I don't have the time.

Another level of Hope's annoyance with the framework that it meant she was not able to truly express her picture of how she knows the children.

All my things are in my head- so that's why I get annoyed with all this documentation because I feel I know the children really really well. If I could just write in my own words you know – how I know the children – I would feel much happier.

As Hope worked through her connection to the EYLF her perception of it changed and she found a way that it could express her programme. Hope believes that the framework is a *beautiful document* and because it does not have a definite 'prescribed' way of working it allows her to put into words what she does with the children. Hope talks about how she is able to show the seasonal rhythm in her programme and use her programme to tell stories about the children in her care. Hope shows the elements of the EYLF like a *sense of place*,

sense of belonging, and that whole notion of identity as coming out of the child and being expressed in the child's dispositions for learning.

8.8 Perceiving the EYLF

The narratives of Joy, Jessie and Hope described their experiences of working with the EYLF, while Luke spoke about observations he had carried out *under Steiner* he did not talk specifically about the EYLF.

The educators' perceptions of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) formed two distinct categories. There were elements of the document that felt positive and elements that were perceived as challenges.

8.8.1 Like 'Woolly Socks' on a Cold Day

When Joy spoke about the *EYLF* she saw it as a positive way to focus on the learning that comes from the children's play. To Joy the EYLF is a *straightforward* way to record the children's play to show the deep processes of learning that happen. Joy sees that the EYLF helps to challenge and extend a view of children's play through seeing it as a meaningful learning experience rather than observing an activity because it is seen as being *cute*.

Jessie and Hope spoke about the EYLF in a similar way. For Jessie, the EYLF allowed children's processes of learning to be acknowledged and therefore to show that each child's *being* is a unique *process*. Jessie perceived that the use of learning dispositions in the EYLF had potential for use in the Steiner setting because it meant that learning process could be linked to the evaluations of the children's learning. Hope's perception of the EYLF is that it gives a platform for showing what she does with the children and putting her work *into words*. The way that the EYLF does not stipulate a *prescribed* method of working has been positive for Hope because it means that she has *evolved* her way of working with the document to make it *work* for her.

8.8.2 Wearing ‘So Many Hats’

For the educators, the EYLF brought challenges in the way it meant more time was needed to document the programme and the children’s learning, and this time often took the educators away from other tasks.

Joy spoke about the challenges of time and how *the time it takes to write it up* impacts on the space of being present with the children.

I think it’s important to have full focus on the children in the room...I’m not so keen on the split in focus – you know you are trying to be there with the children and: “Oh no, where’s the camera I have to get the camera and bam – oh no! What did you say? Let me write that down quickly.

Joy spoke about how this brought on feelings of exhaustion, because she felt she had to wear *so many hats*. The hats she wore described the different tasks that her role as an educator involved. Often Joy felt that she was doing everything at once. Joy’s words sat with me for some time especially when she said:

I wish in an ideal world there would be these little invisible gnomes or angels writing up all the documentation, hanging out with the kids and washing the dishes and all that stuff. I understand how it’s important to capture these observations as they happen and it’s important for the kids to see the teachers cleaning the room and preparing the food. But look: it is like trying to be ten people at once it can be very challenging and I don’t know what to do about that.

Hope’s first perceptions of the EYLF formed a close connection to Joy’s words because Hope’s first contact was one of total dislike where she felt the expectations associated with it took her away from focusing on the children.

Hope said:

I really was just bucking up against it because I am the sort of person I just want to work with the children in my room. And I don’t want all the writing- there is a lot of expectation about what we have to do and I struggled with that.

Hope also expressed a challenge in the way that she was being asked to document the children's learning. She felt that if she could just write in her *own words* how she knew and understood the children she would *feel much happier*. It was important for Hope to express her intuitive understanding about the children in the documentation.

The most recent report written by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) about the ongoing areas of burden that early childhood educators and services are experiencing highlights the large amount of time being spent on documentation of children's learning. On average each room in an early childhood service spends up to two hundred hours per year (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013). This report highlights that in the current climate of early childhood education across Australia, time is precious. The need for constant documentation of what the children are doing impacts on the time available for educators to just 'be' with the children -in the present moment. This has implications for the way that educators are able to genuinely connect and foster ongoing meaningful interactions that support the child.

8.8.3 A Different Need for Time

Listening to Hope and Joy describe the challenges they met due to the needs of planning and observing to meet the requirements of the EYLF is one layer of the educators' perceptions of the EYLF. However, another layer formed through the EYLF's focus on professional reflection. Professional reflection is vital for supporting educators in a deep understanding of their work with children and families but as a process it takes time. Examining personal beliefs about philosophy is a starting point for educators to understand the reasons for doing the things they do with children, and when educators are new to a service they especially need time to become familiar with the services practices and philosophy. This was the case in Jessie's story where she spoke about the challenges she felt when she first came to work in the Steiner setting. For Jessie she felt confusion, frustration and anger, because her sense of self-expression felt challenged through the practices of the philosophy she was working in.

As I was leaving one afternoon, Jessie said to me: *reflection, reflection, reflection, it's just so important* because for Jessie a process of personal 'inner transformation' occurred that meant she questioned her ways of 'being' with the children and through this had come to a place where she was able to make changes and interact with the children in a different way.

Concluding Thoughts

There is a tall old tree in the garden of the preschool whose long, thick roots spread out and create a certain presence. The roots are always there and the children connect with the tree through these grounding anchors. The tree enfolds the children and becomes the source of endless imaginations in their play; houses, beds, tables, cars, boats. I remember Hope telling me about her connection to this tree – she felt its presence deeply and it being there was important for her in deciding to work at the preschool.

Like the roots and branches of this tree, the voices of the educators have enfolded me as a researcher, and through listening to their stories a new story is nudging to be told. This story speaks to the research questions and brings a new depth in explaining what is unique about the relationships the Steiner educators have with the children. Through listening, this narrative has also formed a deeper understanding into the second research question: What are Steiner early childhood educators' perceptions of the Steiner philosophy and the EYLF? And in doing so has uncovered unique connections between these perceptions.

While the educators of this study are working within the frame of Steiner early childhood education, this frame is not an isolated entity. It is situated in a wider one that asks all educators – working in the field of Australian early childhood education – to examine their practice in the context of *Belonging, Being and Becoming, the Early Years Learning Framework of Australia (EYLF)*.

But where does the Rudolf Steiner educator stand in this framework? And where is *Belonging, Being and Becoming* seen in the practices of the Steiner educator? The story of this research traces intricate pathways between these two questions

in order to address the questions that are the heart of this study. The concluding thoughts of this chapter bring these pathways into focus.

The data has told me clearly that 'being present' is a perception that the educators have made about Steiner philosophy. As part of my analysis I visually mapped out the educator's shared beliefs, and presence was seen as a concept that other similar and related concepts grew to and from. In asking the question: Where do the Educator's Perceptions of Steiner Pedagogy and the EYLF connect? Presence has been identified as a link because it was referred to in the educators' perceptions about Steiner as well as the EYLF.

In their perceptions of the EYLF, the educators felt strongly that the amount of time needed for documentation took away from the time available to 'be' with the children in a focused and present way. The educators' voices expressed that the EYLF was a positive because the unprescribed nature of the document meant that they could use it to *show* the richness of their Steiner programme. However finding an effective way to 'show' their work and express their philosophy had been a journey – beginning with negative reactions, then a process of working through the content of the EYLF to arrive in a place where it felt like something they could embrace.

In addition to seeing the link of presence, a second link was seen in the way that the EYLF promotes reflective practice because each educator made reference to a process of inner reflection in the way they worked with the philosophy.

The perceptions of Steiner philosophy showed how the process of finding their place in the philosophy was a journey beginning with particular feelings (sometimes positive or negative) then after going through a process of reflection they arrived at a point where they understood it in a new and clearer way.

Giving space for the educators to go through this process has been an important outcome of this research because in the process of telling their story, the educators used reflection to express how their beliefs impacted their work with children and families.

In the chapter that follows, the links between the educators' beliefs about forming relationships, their perceptions of Steiner philosophy, and the EYLF will be placed in the context of the three focus areas of this study: Theories of Attachment, Philosophy and the EYLF, and Belonging.

The intention for this being that implications for current and future early childhood practice can be explored.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

It is easy to forget how mysterious and mighty stories are. They do their work in silence, invisibly. They work with all the internal materials of the mind and self. They become part of you while changing you (Okri, 1996 as cited in Perrow, 2008, p. xvi).

9.1 The Story of the Case Study

In this research, the case study has told a story of the educators who work in a Steiner preschool. Case study was chosen as a means to investigate and explore in depth what it means to be a Steiner educator in the current climate of early childhood education in Australia. At the heart of the case were questions about a key aspect of early childhood practice: forming relationships with children. Warm, caring and reciprocal relationships are a principle focus of both the EYLF (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) and Steiner pedagogy (Long-Breipohl, 2012). The two questions that focused this inquiry were:

- What is the nature of the relationships, which Steiner early childhood educators have with the children in their preschool setting?
- What are Steiner early childhood educators' perceptions of (a) Steiner philosophy and (b) the EYLF; and what connections can be made between these perceptions and their relationships with children in the preschool setting?

To explore these questions, open-ended conversational interviews were held in which each educator had an opportunity to share aspects of their practice – as a Rudolf Steiner educator. The second conversational interview drew on specific elements that the educators' shared in the first conversation and used these to gain a deeper picture of each educator's beliefs and understandings about working in the Steiner philosophy. The first analysis of the interviews involved writing a narrative about each educator's beliefs about relating to children, their connection to Rudolf Steiner education, and perceptions about the EYLF.

Through the process of writing the educators' stories I reflected on my experience of being with them. My reflection took me to a new space of connection that transcended regular conversation, meaning that my role of 'storyteller' changed in order to facilitate a story that expressed a shared reality.

9.2 Relational Space and 'Caring Presence'

Through writing each narrative, I felt feelings of closeness and strong connection to the educators and these feelings brought forth the possibility for deep personal reflection. As I wrote, I returned to the space where the educators shared their feelings and thoughts, then when I worked in my practice as an educator, I carried the educators' beliefs with me as thoughts that meant I reflected on my work in a different way. Amadio (2012) gives a description of an 'in-between' space and this has guided an understanding of the reflection that occurred through my story-crafting:

the in-between is a space of perfect harmony with the self and the universe, a space when we are truly connected to those people in that place. It is a place where we understand relatedness, so we may find relational space. Yet it is even more, in that space the body, spirit and ego, have synchronised with others there and they with you. The individuals merge to become us, yet are still able to be themselves (pp. 126-127).

On another level Amadio's words are even more important because they put into words the concept of human connection through nature that the educators in the study described when they spoke about silence, intuition and spirituality as being perceptions of the Steiner philosophy. Luke described the special way that he slowly prepared himself to be ready to connect with a young child, and through his description he alluded to this space of the 'in-between' that Amadio (2012) gives. Similarly, Hope talked about her intuition as *inner-knowing* or a feeling that there was *something else in the world* it described both her human connection to the child and her connection to the world of nature. Hope's words also allude to the notion of the "in-between" because they suggest a relatedness of being 'tuned in' to the child – thus reflecting the "perfect harmony" that can happen in this space (Amadio, 2012, pp. 126-127).

Recognising this 'in-between' space is important because it weaves into the notion of 'caring presence' that was highlighted in the educators' personal and shared beliefs about Steiner philosophy and human connection. 'Caring presence' pulls together a view of human connection that is holistic because it connects to the belief that we are part of a bigger universal picture.

In relating to the children, 'caring presence' occurs in a space of closeness and sensitivity where there is a focus on understanding a deeper picture of who the child is. The concept of caring presence has crossed over and connected to other beliefs that the educators used to describe their relationships with children in their care.

9.3 Presence and the Spiritual Thread

There was a spiritual quality in the relationships that the educators shared with children in the Steiner preschool and this linked to a gesture of *being present*. Observing the Steiner educator as he or she sits mindfully engaged in work such as cooking, cleaning or crafting shows an adult being quietly present and aware of what is occurring in their surroundings, in a way that allows space for the child to simply 'be'.

In this study the educators described their relationships with children as being based on an element of intuition. For example, Hope talked about using her intuition and feeling life to sense what the children needed from her. To Hope, this process of *tuning in* and trusting her feelings about what is happening for a child forms the foundation of the adult-child relationship.

Luke spoke about a silent connection that was present in his initial interactions with children. He felt that it was important to be inwardly ready when he began a relationship with a child. This meant that if he was not fully present and did not feel *ready*, then the child might sense this and not feel comfortable with him. In contrast, if time was given to *getting this kind of initial connection 'right'* then the foundation for a close relationship was established. Jessie also spoke about how children can tune into an adult's thoughts and sense their mood. She felt strongly that educators must examine the quality of their thoughts. She gave a

unique description of an encounter with a child where something that the child said reflected what she was thinking. This experience alerted Jessie to the importance of being aware of her *thought quality* when interacting with the children. In recent literature, attention has been given to educational practices that acknowledge a connection between mind and body. Immordino-Yang (2011) refers to this saying:

Children's bodies, brains and minds are meaningful partners in learning. Each child builds on his or her biological predispositions, his or her 'nature', grappling with his or her own biological and psychological 'self' as a platform on which to understand the thoughts and actions of other people, both peers and teachers. ... Neuroscientific evidence suggests that we can no longer justify learning theories that dissociate the mind from the body, the self from social context. To learn, students empathically recognize the teacher's actions, thoughts and goals, a process that reflects each student's own social and cognitive experiences and preferences (p. 101).

9.4 Seeing Links to the Research Questions

9.4.1 Presence and Attachment Theory

Being present along with being conscious of one's thoughts has an impact on experiences of connecting with others. This is a belief that gives insight into the type of relationship that Steiner early childhood educators have with the children in their preschool setting. The educators' beliefs about *being present* and *thought consciousness* provide living examples of how adults can be "attuned to children's thoughts and feelings (to) support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 12).

Being responsive to children in the context of a primary caregiving relationship is reflected in specific intervention programmes that draw on attachment theory such as The Circle of Security (Marvin et al., 2002) and Through the Looking Glass (TtLG) (Colmer et al., 2011). Practices in these programmes focus on supporting children in very subtle and sensitive ways to feel secure. An important factor within these programmes is seeing the relationship as a process to work with especially if there are issues or difficulties because acknowledging

and working with these difficulties supports the development of a “deeper and stronger relationship” (Colmer et al., 2011, p. 19).

9.5 Finding Common Links Between Perceptions of Steiner and Perceptions of the EYLF

9.5.1 Reflection as a Shared Practice of Steiner Philosophy and the EYLF

The process of forming relationships was expressed in Jessie’s story as being central to a powerful reflective transformation. In this, Jessie was seeking a way to apply a personal belief of respect towards her interactions with the children especially when she found some of the children’s behaviours challenging. She looked carefully at her own behaviours and then, based on self-reflection, made changes to her practice. Through this deeply personal process she found new ways of working with the children that enabled her to authentically express her personal beliefs and respond sensitively to their experiences. Her voice expressed this:

It seems like adults can put themselves in priority over children very quickly and easily, and to protect a child’s inner work it’s a subtle holding of their space. At the beginning of the year I had no idea about the subtleties and I steadily grew more and more about how I could be with them without trampling over their subtle needs (Jessie, personal communication, July 17, 2013, p. 12).

Listening to Jessie’s process of personal reflection shows a link that formed in the analysis of the educators’ stories. In this analysis, a common factor that was expressed in the educator’s perceptions of Steiner philosophy and the EYLF was an emphasis of reflective work. This common factor shows how the data and findings give insight into the second research question:

- What are Steiner early childhood educators’ perceptions of (a) Steiner philosophy and (b) the EYLF; and what connections can be made between these perceptions and their relationships with children in the preschool setting?

There is a subtle way that this interconnection (between Steiner pedagogy and EYLF) shows how an educator’s reflection is unique to his or her beliefs of being

an educator. In the example of Jessie's story her beliefs drove her reflective practice, which then influenced how she worked with the children.

In the present climate of early childhood education in Australia there is a strong focus on reflective practices that enhance educational outcomes for children (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011b). The National Quality Standard and the EYLF suggest specific questions for guiding reflection and note that when educators are critically reflecting they may use a range of methods (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011b; Council of Australian Governments, 2009). This is important because, as seen in literature, when early childhood educators had space to reflect and develop their understanding of the EYLF their confidence with it grew, they understood it differently and it was translated into authentic and quality interactions with children and families (Children's Services Central, 2010; Hadley, 2010; Moretti, 2010). This is what occurred for the educators' in this study because they described how through reflection they found a connection to the EYLF. However, as shown in both the literature review surrounding Steiner pedagogy and the educator's stories, the style of reflection that informs Steiner practice is drawn from a spiritual picture of the universe, and human development (Long-Breipohl, 2012).

9.5.2 Inner-Reflection –The Importance of the 'Spiritual' in Steiner Philosophy

When Hope spoke about the birthday story she tells for each child she describes how the child travels with an angel from high up in the clouds down to the earth below to meet his or her parents. This spiritual picture of the child's birth is illustrated by the painting the 'Sistine Madonna' (see Figure 6 below)– an image that Hope also refers to in her perceptions of Steiner philosophy (Long-Breipohl, 2012; Raffaello, 1512; Spitalny, 2007).



Figure 6: The Sistine Madonna (Raffaello, 1512).

Note: Retrieved from:

<http://www.wga.hu/frame.html?/html/r/raphael/5roma/2/03sisti.html>

Literature shows that spirituality is deeply complex and holds different meanings for different individuals and the groups that they identify with (Bone, 2008, 2010; Grajczonek, 2012). Grajczonek (2012) believes that it is essential for educators to explore what spirituality means within their own personal beliefs:

It is important to bear in mind that early childhood settings are open to all, and children enrolled in them represent a diverse range of beliefs and values which may be informed by particular spiritual and/or religious traditions. In this regard, educators occupy a delicate position that includes: (i) being authentic to their own values and beliefs; and (ii) being respectful of young children's own beliefs and values (p. 156).

The philosophical and spiritual pictures about human nature, that are unique to the educators' perceptions of Rudolf Steiner Education, ask for deep inner reflection on the part of the Steiner educator. It is seen as a requirement for Steiner educators to embrace the spiritual view within Steiner early childhood education and a connection to these beliefs is seen as a life-long process of self-development (Long-Breipohl, 2012). In the Steiner philosophy one's life-journey, self-development, and inner-reflection are interchangeable (Steiner, [1920] (1982); Raichle, 2008).

Hope spoke extensively about her journey through Steiner education and similarly Jessie talked about her process of developing a connection to the vision of this philosophy. Working with our personal story about philosophy is essential in supporting the practical work we do with children. From a non-Steiner perspective, Colmer et al. (2011) express the need for ongoing reflective work, saying:

Educators ... need to be supported in caring for young children and the impact of their interactions. ... When educators undertake reflective practice, they carefully examine the context of their work – relationships, practices and understandings (knowledge and beliefs) (p.19).

9.6 Place, Memory and Belonging: Tracing Pathways

There is a memory I have of the first time I set foot in a Steiner kindergarten. The walls were painted a soft rose pink: colours that were soft and calm. In the corner of the room a white muslin cloth hung from the ceiling like a transparent tent. Then beneath this tent, hand-made dolls were tucked neat and warm in their beds (see Figure 7). My eyes were drawn to a shelf where hand-woven flax kete⁵ were placed. Each individual kete contained different objects from nature: shells, pumice stones, pine cones and drift wood. I remember this shelf clearly, the objects all had their place in a neatly ordered way and this order felt inviting. The objects were speaking to me and asking me to play. Through experiencing the colours, objects and physical organisation of this space I had been carried

⁵ Kete is the Te Reo Māori word for basket (Moorfield, 2003-2014).

somewhere else. Carried to a dream like space where my thoughts drifted and I was engrossed by a sense of peacefulness. This place embodied a feeling I can only explain as coming from deep within me.



Figure 7: Hand-made 'Steiner Baby' in basket cradle (photography by Jessica Horne-Kennedy).

I use this memory to illustrate how through understanding my connection to this place from my past, I am working with the concept of 'Belonging' to develop a "knowing" of "where and with whom" I belong (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 7). Tracing one's personal narrative involves processes of reflection that support an awareness of identity and place in the world. Te Whāriki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, states that 'belonging' contributes to feelings of: "inner well-being, security and identity" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 54). Our identity holds our concept of self, our beliefs, understandings, experiences and perceptions of the world we live in. These characteristics that make up our identity have a relationship to the

concept of inner-reflection that Hope and Jessie describe in their practice. Meditation, intuition and feeling were tools used by Jessie and Hope to reflect on their work with the children. Reflective practice is strongly embedded in the EYLF and the *National Quality Standards* as a way to “help educators to think more deeply about their work and motivate them to explore new ideas and approaches” (Council of Australian Governments, 2010, p. 7).

By crafting a story about the way each educator has met and journeyed with Steiner education, their personal narrative has provided a reflective tool to understand the impact of their beliefs on their practice. For the wider early childhood community, this research shows that self-reflective storytelling can present a possible tool for understanding the concept of belonging. For educators working outside the frame of Steiner education, reading the stories in this case study can allow an opportunity to question existing beliefs in their practice by looking beyond the boundaries of their practice. This kind of critical reflection supports practices of belonging because when educators understand the whys of what they do they can clearly see how their beliefs inform their practice.

9.7 Seeing the Patterns of the Research

This study has highlighted the unique attributes embodied in the relationships that Steiner educators form with children in their care. The educators’ shared beliefs highlighted how qualities of silence, imitation, spirituality, presence and calmness underpin the nature of their attachments to children.

Each educator shared their perceptions of Steiner philosophy and some of these crossed over and wove into the educators’ beliefs about relationships and connection. For example, the way that the adult inhabits the space of the Steiner preschool can be traced to the deeper picture of Rudolf Steiner’s vision for education that involves being sensitive to children’s needs and personality. While some of these perceptions were unique to each educator’s background of professional and personal experiences there were shared interpretations that highlighted distinct patterns. These patterns have been explored through tracing a connection back to the three areas within the literature: attachment

theory, belonging, and reflective practice. In exploring the relationship of the data to these specific focus areas the core research questions have been given further insight.

In chapter eight, connections were made between the educators' perceptions of the EYLF and Steiner pedagogy with the intention of showing how the two overlap and interconnect in regard to relationships that educators form with the children.

'Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice' is an aspect of professional practice, identified through this research, that is common to both the EYLF and Steiner early childhood practice (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011b; Council of Australian Governments, 2009). However, working with processes that enable educators to examine the link between their personal narrative and their practical work with children and families is complex. The stories of Hope and Jessie highlighted that the Steiner approach to reflection is a deeply personal and complex process that cannot be rushed. Educators need time and space to engage in these cycles of deep reflection because this in turn supports strong relationships with the children in their care. In this study the deep knowledge that the educators held about the children came about through their personal processes of reflection.

Presence emerged as a link between the educator's perceptions of the EYLF and Steiner philosophy when the educators referred to the amount of documentation making an impact on their ability to be 'fully present' with the children. Based on the current legislation requirements for documentation in early childhood services, many Steiner educators are changing the ways that they document children's learning experiences (Field notes, March, 2013), and the current legislation is meaning more and more of an educator's time is needed to focus on specific activities that meet legislative requirements of the *National Quality Framework* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013).

In the stories that Hope, Jessie and Joy shared there were strong feelings about the pressures of additional planning and documentation that *Belonging, Being and Becoming*, requires. They spoke about the impact of these documents on

their work with children and families. Listening to their voices about this issue showed a need to find ways to work with the EYLF that would still mean that educators' could be fully 'present' and engaged in their work.

The educators shared ideas about how they could make the documentation work for their practice. Hope talked about her experience of writing reports about the children's development and expressed that when she wrote from her heart a different way of knowing and understanding the child was presented.

Being an early childhood educator takes energy – children are energetic! The adults working in this field need time to balance the multiple tasks and duties required for their role. This is important because when educators are fully present for the children in their care they can foster quality connections and interactions.

9.8 Future Possibilities for Practice

In this research, a connection between the perceptions of Steiner philosophy and the EYLF has identified that the time educators spend working on documentation (such as observations and programming) has an impact on the time spent 'being present' with the children in their care. Space for shared reflection is needed so educators can engage in further dialogue about methods of documentation that meet Steiner philosophy and the EYLF while still allowing space for being present with the children. The outcome of this shared dialogue would be to develop an exemplar that Steiner and non-Steiner educators could use to guide observational documentation and programming based on a spiritual and intuitive picture of the young child.

Underneath any philosophical umbrella, there are different interpretations of the core beliefs held. This project has focused on a small sample group and therefore has only offered a glimpse into how the Steiner philosophy is perceived in relation to the EYLF and the way that educators form relationships with children. Therefore to give a comprehensive platform, from which to inform the proposed exemplar, there would be benefits in working with a larger sample group across a number of Steiner services. For this reason, further

research is needed to give a strong foundation for the proposed exemplar because this must reflect the diversity in the beliefs held by Steiner early childhood educators. In this study the participant's individual perceptions of Steiner philosophy have been identified and discussed in relation to the core research questions. However it is important to note that an analysis of the participant's stories using a framework based on Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical view of human development is beyond the scope of this research but would be worthy of future investigation.

While this study has focused on the practices of Rudolf Steiner educators, it has highlighted the value of giving space for reflection about the impact of educator beliefs on forming relationships with children. Therefore the outcomes of this research could extend to other services that work from a specific viewpoint. Educators working in Montessori, Reggio Emilia or a particular religious or cultural group setting could benefit from research that results in an exemplar of 'documentation guidelines' to support their philosophy and practice in relation to the EYLF.

Deeply secure relationships with children in early childhood settings have far reaching benefits for the child's development in the immediate and long-term picture of their learning. Therefore, it is vital that educators are supported to understand how to best promote a strong sense of belonging for children in their care. When services are guided by examples of practice that encompass the diversity represented in early childhood education across Australia then their work of forming emotionally rich and secure relationships with children is deepened. When early childhood educators engage in processes of shared dialogue connections between philosophy and practice are established which then help educators to understand the nature of their relationships with children. Giving space for educators across diverse philosophical services to construct and share stories about their beliefs promotes critical reflection that can enhance and improve practices of working with children and families.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Introduction Letter to Preschool Director and Information Sheet about Proposed Project



School of Education
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Please accept this letter as an introduction to a research project that I am proposing to undertake as part of my MEd in the School of Education at the University of New England.

In order to begin this project I am required to contact the Director of a preschool that has been identified as a potential site for the project to both outline the project and to gain permission to approach the staff and parents of the preschool.

The project has been outlined below and I have attached a consent form with this letter for you to complete - if you agree to your preschool service participating in the project. In addition I am more than happy to talk with you in person about the proposed research and to answer any questions that you may have about it.

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to further contact with you.

Regards,

Jessica Horne-Kennedy

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

Working Title	<p>The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the Context of the <i>Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)</i></p> <p>A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner Preschool</p>
Aim of the research	<p>The research aims to explore how a Rudolf Steiner early childhood educator's philosophy impacts on their work with children and families. A case study of children beginning preschool has been chosen to focus an in-depth exploration of this central aim. The study will use qualitative methods to collect and analyse the data such as: in-depth-interviews, journal keeping and observation.</p>
Position of Researcher in Project	<p>I hold qualifications in early childhood education and Rudolf Steiner education and currently work at a Rudolf Steiner Preschool in Sydney.</p>
Data Collection Methods	<p>The data collection methods will focus on the educator's practice in the preschool setting such as how they interact with children. Four focus children who are beginning preschool for the first time will be chosen. I will observe and document (through writing) what I see the child doing when s/he begins attending the preschool environment. A key focus in the observations is on the educator's interactions with the child because this will aid an understanding into the central aim of the study. The written observations of the child's experiences will only be used to help in my interview discussion with the educator about his or her practice.</p> <p>The child's involvement in the study will help me to gain an understanding of the educational practices that the educator uses in their work.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study will remain confidential. No individual will be identified by name in any publication of the results. All names will be replaced by pseudonyms that you choose; this will ensure that your child is not identifiable.</p>
Participation is Voluntary	<p>Please understand that the participant's involvement in this study is voluntary and I respect their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participant can discontinue their involvement at any time without consequence and do not need to provide any explanation if they decide not to participate or withdraw at any time.</p>

Use of information	I will use information arising from this study as part of my Masters thesis, which I expect to complete in February 2014. Also, information from the study may be used in journal articles and conference presentations before and after this date for which I will obtain permission for this purpose. At all times, I will safeguard the child's identity by presenting the information in a way that will not allow their identity to be revealed.
Upsetting issues	It is unlikely that this research will raise any personal or upsetting issues but if participant's feel that it does they may wish to contact their local GP or Community Health Nurse.
Storage of information	I will keep hardcopy recordings and notes of the interview in a locked cabinet in my home-based office. Any electronic data will be kept on a password protected computer at the same site and will also be stored on a USB device that will be kept in a locked cabinet. Only the research team will have access to the data. All data completed during the research project will be returned to my Principal supervisor – Professor Margaret Sims once I have successfully completed my thesis.
Disposal of information	All the data collected in this research will be kept for a minimum of five years after successful submission of my thesis, after which it will be disposed of by deleting relevant computer files, and destroying or shredding hardcopy materials.
Approval	This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No: HE12-231 Valid to 23/01/2014).
Contact details	<p>Feel free to contact me with any questions about this research by email at jhorneke@myune.edu.au or by phone on 0450020463</p> <p>You may also contact my supervisor. My Principal supervisors name is Professor Margaret Sims and she can be contacted at margaret.sims@une.edu.au or 02 6773 3828.</p>
Complaints	<p>Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at:</p> <p>Research Services University of New England Armidale, NSW 2351 Tel: (02) 6773 3449 Fax: (02) 6773 3543 Email: ethics@une.edu.au</p>

Appendix B

Introduction Letter to Educator-Participant



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XXXXXXXXXXXXX
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23 April 2013

The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the Context of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

*A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner
Preschool*

Dear Educator of xxxxxxxx,

Recently I made contact with the Directors of your service with regards to the above project that I am undertaking as part of my Masters in Education studies at The University of New England. I am delighted that the Directors agreed to support my studies by taking part and the next stage for me is to now make contact with you. This letter is to share a little of my background so that you are familiar with who I am and my position in the project.

I am a New Zealand qualified early childhood educator – having completed undergraduate studies at the Dunedin College of Education in 2004. Prior to being an early childhood educator I trained as an Artist working in mixed-media painting and textiles. As an early childhood educator, my work has occurred in diverse environments including community adult education services and Rudolf Steiner Schools in New Zealand and Australia. I have always felt 'at home' in a Rudolf Steiner environment and through feeling a deep connection to Anthroposophy my work with the child and their family has been supported enormously.

My studies at the University of New England have allowed me to question what I do and to ask questions about the position of Rudolf Steiner's work in the current climate of government frameworks such as *Belonging, Being and Becoming–The Early Years Framework for Australia (EYLF)*, *The National Quality Framework (NQF)* and the *National Quality Standards (NQS)*. Due to these frameworks early childhood educators and services are being asked to articulate and review the philosophy that they hold. For this reason, I really felt that it was important that services working from a different philosophical frame- like Steiner Education- had a clear voice. Through listening to your ideas about children, early childhood education and Rudolf Steiner's work I hope to present your voice as a thread in the narrative surrounding this issue.

Accompanying this letter is a more detailed outline about the project as well as a consent form for you to complete and return if you agree to take part. Once I have gained the required consent from all the participants involved in the study – I will confirm dates with you for beginning the project. My intention is that this will be in the month of May.

I am more than happy to answer any questions you have and can be contacted at the above phone or e-mail contact.

Thank you for your time in considering this project.

Warm regards

Jessica Horne-Kennedy

Appendix C

Information Sheet for Educator-Participant



School of Education

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INFORMATION SHEET FOR EDUCATOR-PARTICIPANTS

I wish to invite you to participate in my research project, described below.

My name is Jessica Horne-Kennedy and I am conducting this research as part of my MEd in the School of Education at the University of New England. My supervisor is Professor Margaret Sims. I hold qualifications in early childhood education and Rudolf Steiner education and currently work at a Rudolf Steiner Preschool in Sydney.

Working Title

The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the Context of the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*

A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner Preschool

Aim of the research

The research aims to explore how a Rudolf Steiner early childhood educator's philosophy impacts on their work with children and families. A case study of children beginning preschool has been chosen to focus an in-depth exploration of this central aim. The study will use qualitative methods to collect and analyse the data such as: in-depth-interviews, journal keeping and observation

Data Collection

I would like to conduct a face-to-face interview with you at your place of work. The interview will take approximately one hour.

Methods

With your permission, I will make an audio recording of the interview to ensure that I accurately recall the information you provide. Following the interview, a transcript will be provided to

you if you wish to see one. I will also use observations of your interactions with one target child. The observations will help me to gain an understanding of the educational practices that you use in your work.

Confidentiality

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study will remain confidential. No individual will be identified by name in any publication of the results. All names will be replaced by pseudonyms that you choose; this will ensure that you are not identifiable.

**Participation is
Voluntary**

Please understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary and I respect your right to withdraw from the study at any time. You may discontinue your involvement at any time without consequence and you do not need to provide any explanation if you decide not to participate or withdraw at any time.

Study Questions

The questions used within the study will not be of a sensitive nature: rather they are general, aiming to enable you to enhance my knowledge of the philosophies that underpin your practice.

Use of information

I will use information gained from the interviews and observations as part of my Masters thesis, which I expect to complete in February 2014. Information from the study may also be used in journal articles and conference presentations before and after this date – I will contact you to gain your consent for this purpose. At all times, I will safeguard your identity by presenting the information in way that will not allow you to be identified.

Upsetting issues

It is unlikely that this research will raise any personal or upsetting issues but if it does you may wish to contact your local GP or Community Health Nurse. At any stage of your participation in the study you may bring an additional person as support.

**Storage of
information**

I will keep hardcopy recordings, notes of the interview, written observations and photographs in a locked cabinet in my home-based office. Any electronic data will be kept on a password protected computer at the same site and will also be stored on a USB device that will be kept in a locked cabinet. Only the research team will have access to the data. All data completed during the research project will be returned to my Principal supervisor – Professor Margaret Sims once I have successfully completed my thesis.

**Disposal of
information**

All the data collected in this research will be kept for a minimum of five years after successful submission of my thesis, after which it will be disposed of by deleting relevant computer files, and destroying or shredding hardcopy materials.

Approval

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No:HE12-231Valid to 23/01/2014).

Contact details

Feel free to contact me with any questions about this research by email at jhorneke@myune.edu.au or by phone on 0450020463

You may also contact my supervisors. My Principal supervisors name is Professor Margaret Sims and she can be contacted at margaret.sims@une.edu.au or 02 6773 3828.

Complaints

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at:

Research Services
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351
Tel: (02) 6773 3449 Fax: (02) 6773 3543
Email: ethics@une.edu.au

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to further contact with you.

Regards,

Jessica Horne-Kennedy

Appendix D

Consent Form for Educator-Participant



School of Education
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CONSENT FORM FOR EDUCATOR-PARTICIPANTS

The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the Context of the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*

A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner
Preschool

I,, have read the
information contained in the Information Sheet for Participants and any
questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. Yes/No

I agree to participate in this study, realising that I may withdraw at any
time. Yes/No

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published using a pseudonym. Yes/No

I agree that I may be quoted using a pseudonym. Yes/No

I agree to the interview having my audio recorded and transcribed.

Y
e
s
/
N
o

I would like to receive a copy of the transcription of the interview.
Yes/No

I am older than 18 years of age.
Yes/No

.....

Participant

Date

.....

Researcher

Date

Appendix E

Introduction Letter to Parents/Caregivers of Focus Child Participant



School of Education
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 Fax +61 2 6773 2445
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XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
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 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

23 April 2013

**The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the
 Context of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)**

*A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner
 Preschool*

Dear Parents /Caregivers of Children attending xxxxxxxxxxxxxx,

My name is Jessica Horne-Kennedy and I am writing to you because I recently made contact with the Directors of your Child's early childhood setting with regards to the above project that I am undertaking as part of my Masters in Education studies at The University of New England. I am delighted that the Directors agreed to support my studies by taking part and the next stage for me is to now make contact with you. This letter is to share a little of my background so that you are familiar with who I am and my position in the project.

I am a New Zealand qualified early childhood educator – having completed undergraduate studies at the Dunedin College of Education in 2004. Prior to being an early childhood educator I trained as an Artist working in mixed-media painting and textiles. As an early childhood educator, my work has occurred in diverse environments including community adult education services and Rudolf Steiner Schools in New Zealand and Australia. I have always felt 'at home' in a Rudolf Steiner environment and through feeling a deep connection to Anthroposophy my work with the child and their family has been supported enormously. My passion for Rudolf Steiner's work also extends to my own family as my daughter has recently begun attending a Rudolf Steiner preschool- I know first hand the importance we place on these special and unique environments for our children.

My studies at the University of New England have allowed me to question what I do as an educator and to ask questions about the position of Rudolf Steiner's work in the current climate of government frameworks such as *Belonging, Being and Becoming–The Early Years Framework for Australia (EYLF)*, *The National Quality Framework (NQF)* and the *National Quality Standards (NQS)*. Due to these frameworks early childhood educators and services are being asked to articulate and review the philosophy that they hold. For this reason, I really felt that it was important that services working from a different philosophical frame- like Steiner Education- had a clear voice. Through listening to the educator's ideas about children, early childhood education and Rudolf Steiner's work my intention is to present their voices as a thread in the narrative surrounding this issue.

While the project is focused on interviews and discussions with the educators at 'xxxxxxxxx', I will also observe how the educators interact with children who attend the service. For this reason I require your consent to include your child as one of four focus children involved in the study.

Accompanying this letter is a more detailed outline about the project as well as a consent form for you to complete and return if you agree to take part. Once I have gained the required consent from all the participants involved in the study – I will confirm dates for beginning the project. My intention is that this will be in the month of May.

I am more than happy to answer any questions you have and can be contacted at the above phone or e-mail contact.

Thank you for your time in considering this project.

Warm regards

Jessica Horne-Kennedy

Appendix F

Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers



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INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

I wish to invite you to participate in my research project, described below.

Working Title	The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the Context of the <i>Early Years Learning Framework</i> (EYLF)
Aim of the research	A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner Preschool The research aims to explore how a Rudolf Steiner early childhood educator's philosophy impacts on their work with children and families. A case study of children beginning preschool has been chosen to focus an in-depth exploration of this central aim. The study will use qualitative methods to collect and analyse the data such as: in-depth-interviews, journal keeping and observation.
Data Collection Methods	The data collection methods will focus on the educator's practice in the preschool setting such as how they interact with children. I have chosen your child to be one of four focus children in the study because s/he began preschool for the first time this year. I will observe and document (through writing) what I see your child doing

	<p>when s/he attends the preschool environment. A key focus in the observations is on the educator's interactions with your child because this will aid an understanding into the central aim of the study. The written observations of your child's experiences will only be used to help in my interview discussion with the educator about his or her practice.</p> <p>Your child's involvement in the study will help me to gain an understanding of the educational practices that the educator uses in their work.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study will remain confidential. No individual will be identified by name in any publication of the results. All names will be replaced by pseudonyms that you choose; this will ensure that your child is not identifiable.</p>
Participation is Voluntary	<p>Please understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary and I respect your right to withdraw from the study at any time. You may discontinue your involvement at any time without consequence and you do not need to provide any explanation if you decide not to participate or withdraw at any time.</p>
Use of information	<p>I will use information arising from this study as part of my Masters thesis, which I expect to complete in February 2014. Also, information from the study may be used in journal articles and conference presentations before and after this date for which I will obtain your permission for this purpose. At all times, I will safeguard your child's identity by presenting the information in a way that will not allow their identity to be revealed.</p>
Upsetting issues	<p>It is unlikely that this research will raise any personal or upsetting issues but if you feel that it does you may wish to contact your local GP or Community Health Nurse.</p>
Storage of information	<p>I will keep hardcopy recordings and notes of the interview in a locked cabinet in my home-based office. Any electronic data will be kept on a password protected computer at the same site and will also be stored on a USB device that will be kept in a locked cabinet. Only the research team will have access to the data. All data completed during the research project will be returned to my Principal supervisor – Professor Margaret Sims once I have successfully completed my thesis.</p>
Disposal of information	<p>All the data collected in this research will be kept for a minimum of five years after successful submission of my thesis, after which it will be disposed of by deleting relevant computer files, and destroying or shredding hardcopy materials.</p>
Approval	<p>This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No:HE12-231Valid to 23/01/2014).</p>

Contact details

Feel free to contact me with any questions about this research by email at jhorneke@myune.edu.au or by phone on 0450020463

You may also contact my supervisors. My Principal supervisors name is Professor Margaret Sims and she can be contacted at margaret.sims@une.edu.au or 02 6773 3828.

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Email: ethics@une.edu.au

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to further contact with you.

Regards,

Jessica Horne-Kennedy

Appendix G

Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers of Focus Child Participant



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CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS OF FOCUS CHILD PARTICIPANTS

The Influence of Philosophy on Practice: Educators' Stories in the Context of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

A Case Study Investigating Children's Beginning Transitions in a Rudolf Steiner Preschool

I,, have read the information contained in the Information Sheet for Participants and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. Yes/No

I may withdraw our involvement at any time. Yes/No

I agree to my child being observed as part of this Masters research project.

Yes/No

.....
Participant Date

.....
Researcher

.....
Date