



Spirituality in early childhood pedagogy: A Froebelian approach in Chinese and English contexts



Research report to Froebel Trust

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In *Education of Man* (1887, p.55), Froebel states:

Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole – of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things. It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the sources of all that is good. A child that plays thoroughly, with self-active determination, perseveringly until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a thorough, determined man, capable of self-sacrifice for the promotion of the welfare of himself and others.

Project summary

Funded by the Froebel Trust, our research project 'Spirituality in early childhood pedagogy: a Froebelian approach in Chinese and English contexts' aims to explore the role of spirituality in supporting young children's holistic learning and wellbeing. Froebel's concept of Unity and Froebelian education focusing on children's holistic learning (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 1987; Liebschner, 1997; Tovey, 2013) as a theoretical framework, underpins our research into young children's spiritual growth in Chinese and English contexts.

The post-pandemic context alongside political unrest across the globe, has urged educators, researchers and policy makers to rethink education and develop more holistic approaches to children's learning informed by the Froebelian principles of Unity and connectedness (Froebel Trust, 2024) considering the ultimate importance of mental health and wellbeing. Our research project on spirituality in early childhood has arisen as part of the urgent call to respond to and address the challenges in these uncertain times (Pascal and Bertram, 2021).

This research is a small-scale qualitative study conducted through participant observations, focus group interviews, questionnaires, and informal conversations in four early childhood settings including two kindergartens in China and two nursery schools in England. Our research journey has been a spiritual one with all participants including young children, practitioners and parents in China and England developing, constructing and co-constructing a shared understanding of spirituality in early childhood pedagogy.

The main findings from our project are stated below:

- The evidence captured demonstrates the necessity of engaging early childhood educators and young children in deep conversations in order to move closer to an understanding of young children's spiritual growth.
- The research witnesses young children's spiritual growth as an ongoing holistic learning experience closely linked to their daily expressions of personal, emotional experiences, and the process of them making sense of who they are through relational engagements with family members, educators, peers, community, imaginary friends and nature as well as cultural and religious rituals.

- Spirituality is a complex concept in early childhood practice and there are different understandings held by the participants in our research dependent on the social, cultural, philosophical, religious, moral and psychological lenses that the participants connected with.
- The research suggests that the Froebelian lens on play 'as the most spiritual activity of the child' (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 1987) improvises and nurtures children's spiritual awareness and experience. With cultural variations in context, play has a unique capacity to enable the spiritual as a key part of young children's holistic learning and wellbeing.
- The research evidences the urgency of connecting and reconnecting with nature (Armstrong, 2022; [d'Ascoli and Hunter, 2022](#); [Kemp, Josephidou and Watts, 2022](#)) in that nature holds so much for the children to develop. Connection cultivates harmonious relationships and enhances deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world as a key component of children's spiritual awareness and experience.
- The research reveals that music, movement and other creative activities as well as cultural and religious rituals play a key role in supporting children's spiritual awareness and growth by supporting children to know and understand themselves, others, cultures and the world around them, and in developing children's resilience when facing challenges and difficulties (Ouvry, 2012; Powell, Goouch, and Werth, 2013; [Dyke, 2019](#)).
- Due to a lack of explicit guidance about young children's spiritual development from governmental and institutional policies in both China and England, spirituality proves to be a grey area to practitioners and parents.
- The research calls for the urgency of addressing spirituality as an intrinsic fundamental component of young children's identities and holistic learning experience (Hay and Nye, 2006; Bone, 2008; Zhang, 2012; Best, 2016; Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller, 2024) and thus the importance of providing time, space, resources, nurturing environments to support children's spiritual awareness, expressions and experiences in their daily lives.

We also share some implications arising from the research:

The research highlights that the application of Froebel's concept of Unity (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 2021) and the Froebelian principle of 'Unity, connectedness and

community' (Tovey, 2020) as the theoretical framework to research spirituality is beneficial. The research thus addresses the importance of contemplation of spirituality through a Froebelian lens in supporting the child in connection with family, community, nature and the world considering the relationalities in children's learning and life experience.

The research addresses the increasing recognition of the importance of early childhood spiritual education in the education policies in China. The *Guidelines for Quality Assessment of Kindergarten Care Education* (China Ministry of Education, 2022) greatly emphasises the importance of valuing children's play and the role of nurturing safe environments in supporting children's all-round learning. This signals the connections to spiritual education as an important area of concern in Chinese national education policies. This might have implications for policy makers in other countries.

The strong consensus about the importance of spiritual education among the participants in China and England suggests the need of further exploration of what the past, present and future hold for spiritual education and how early childhood educators nurture children's spiritual experience. This is especially important in the context of the neoliberal manipulations and its emphasis on economic productivity, decontextualization, and social engineering in education as argued by Osgood (2006), Moss and Dahlberg (2008), Strauch-Nelson (2012) and Ball (2021). Spiritual education goes unpractised due to neoliberal practices, policies and constructions of childhood. Further research that may aid us to support educators in fostering spiritual practice with young children in the future:

- *What challenges might face early childhood educators who are inspired by Froebelian heritage in relation to a holistic approach to educating the whole child as the essence of spiritual education (Best, 2016)?*
- *What inspirations might arise to empower early childhood educators to facilitate spiritual education embedded within Froebelian heritage?*
- *How might these inspirations better inform stakeholders including parents, professionals, academics and policy makers to uphold young children's holistic learning and wellbeing with spiritual growth being a key part of this experience as the centre of their practices?*

1. Introduction

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) addressed the importance of spirituality through his writing focusing on the Unity, which connects the child with family, community, humanity, nature, divinity and the wider unknown worlds (Froebel 1887, 1896, 1903; Bruce, 1987 & 2021; Liebschner, 1992; Brehony, 2001; Tovey, 2017 & 2020). Religious thinking around Christianity is a key part of Froebelian philosophy but Froebel's ideas were at odds with the orthodoxy of the time (Bruce, 2021). The essence of spiritual education in Froebelian tradition is the cultivation of holistic development of the child's body, mind, feelings, aesthetic awareness, creativity, morality and engagement between 'inner' and 'outer' (Best, 2016). Bruce (2021) argues that Froebel's concept of Unity is key to the fact that freethinking educators who may not have religious beliefs are embracing Froebelian philosophy in practice and addresses the importance of further investigating spirituality in early childhood across cultural contexts.

Although there still remains a lack of consensus among educators, researchers and scholars as to how spirituality is defined, it is acknowledged that spirituality is an important dimension of young children's holistic development linking to autonomy, intra-personal relationships, mindfulness, self-awareness, resilience, responsibility and wellbeing alongside religious dimensions (Bone, 2008; Zhang, 2012; Nimmo, Abo-Zena & LeeKeenan, 2019; Mata-McMahon, Haslip & Schein, 2020). Not addressing spirituality in schools deprives children of an important aspect of their learning experience, as spiritual development can bring new understanding and relevance to various aspects of learning and life among children (Giesenberg, 2000; Eade, 2003; Kirmania and Kirmanib, 2009).

It is important to create a safe learning environment and space where children feel safe to speak, talk and express their feelings, wonderments, confusions and puzzlement about nature, faith, religion and the unknown aspects in their lives. This supports children to develop deeper, wider and diverse ways of thinking and understanding of the worlds around them (Stockinger 2019). However, as Adams, Bull and Maynes (2016) and Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller (2024) observe, there is a great need for more clarity in framing how young children's spirituality may be understood drawing on a wider evidence base.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused many challenges for children and family lives in the global context. It was more difficult for families to connect due to restrictions. Children's learning had to be monitored at home, to a greater extent, and that had never happened before in the most recent decades (Tang, 2022a; Tang, 2023). The post-pandemic context alongside political unrest across the globe, has urged educators and researchers to rethink education, and develop more holistic approaches to children's learning considering the ultimate importance of mental health and wellbeing. Our research project on spirituality in early childhood has arisen as an urgent call to respond and address the challenges in these uncertain times.

The research project is a collaborative endeavour of Dr Fengling Tang and Dr Juan Zhao, drawing on prior experience and connections made in the Chinese and English contexts alongside our shared research interest in young children's spiritual growth as an under-researched area recognised by many. Thus, our research project aims to explore the role of spirituality in supporting young children's holistic learning and wellbeing in Chinese and English contexts. The research questions guiding this project are:

- *What does spirituality mean to young children, practitioners and parents in Chinese and English contexts?*
- *What provisions are on offer in Chinese kindergartens and English early years settings to support young children's spiritual development?*
- *How does spirituality support young children's holistic learning and wellbeing?*
- *How do practitioners and parents see challenges and obstacles in practising spiritual education in Chinese and English contexts?*

2. Methodology

2.1 Research approach

Our project is underpinned by an interpretivist qualitative research approach to seek meaningful viewpoints and perspectives of research participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). We see children and adults as active participants with agency, motivation and contribution to research (Robson, 2011; Mukerji and Albon, 2018). In relation to spirituality in early childhood, it is important to get an understanding of stakeholders' experiences and perspectives including children and adults involved in order to inform early childhood practice, policy and research (Bone, 2008; Adams, Bull and Maynes, 2016; Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller, 2024).

We also address the participatory nature of our research project by balancing the power between the researcher and participants through our attempt to develop genuine listening to participants' voices and establish trust between us and participants. We recognise the evolving dynamics of the relationships between the researcher and participants along with the progress of the research project (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). We anticipate challenges and issues arising from the ongoing process of our research project and aim to resolve those working together with the participants in China and England.

2.2 Data collection methods

We adopted qualitative data collection methods including observations, interviews, open-ended questionnaire surveys and informal conversations. The Froebelian view of young children as creative and proactive learners with curiosity, self-activity and motivation in learning and exploring the worlds around them (Froebel, 1887 & 1903; Bruce, 1987; Tovey, 2007) strongly resonates with us. We carried out 8-12 naturalist, participant observations in each of the four research sites including two kindergartens in China and two early years settings in England, to enable us to collect meaningful data such as children's narratives and play scenarios in order to get comprehensive understanding of children's lived experiences. Each observation lasted between one hour and one hour and a half with children in groups either inside the classroom or outdoors in the presence of the kindergarten teachers and practitioners.

We conducted two focus group interviews with kindergarten teachers and informal conversations in each of the two kindergartens in China. One focus group interview, as well as informal conversations with practitioners, were carried out in each of the two early years settings in England. There were between four to six kindergarten teachers and practitioners in each focus group interview and each focus group interview lasted 40 minutes to one hour or so. We also conducted open-ended questionnaires and informal conversations with parents in China and England to engage with their understanding and experience. Questionnaire response rate was higher in China than England: 8 parents out of 25 returned questionnaires in China whilst 5 parents out of 20 returned questionnaires in England. Researcher reflection field notes were also used as a source of data to accompany formal approaches to data collection such as observations, interviews and questionnaire surveys.

2.3 Research settings

We describe here the four settings from which we conducted our research with two of them (setting one and setting two) in London, England, UK and two of them (setting three and setting four) in Baoding, Hebei Province, China. Fengling conducted research in England and Juan carried out research in China. In the meantime, this research collaboration has drawn on our joint effort to explore spirituality in early childhood pedagogy alongside recognition of our individualities in understanding and presenting our research, thus comes the variation in the description of research settings between China and England below.

Setting one based in South London is a Montessorian preschool. It is community based provision to serve children and families in the neighbourhood with aims to deliver quality childcare and education with children aged three months to five years. There were three classes with 12 practitioners working in the setting. The setting places a great emphasis on supporting each child and every family. The practitioners are passionate about creating a friendly and nurturing environment for children, ensuring all children have positive meaningful experiences. Fengling's reflection on her experience in finding this community based setting after getting off the train station:

Off the train station, surrounded by tall buildings, London buses, and tram tracks, it's an immediate sense of loss. Where to go for the setting? Although printed off

the route last night, it's incredible loss in the real environment like this. Asked a man with a yellow jacket and then another man with a helmet, then had a sense of direction. Keep going, high buildings, broken roads, construction sites, just keep going on the left side, but no pavement for passengers now. Had to cross the road to the right side. Trying to find signs in the route map but still no, 'keep going', I said to myself. Keep going... I began to wonder if the setting is the right one for the spirituality project... Finally, I arrived at a closely-knit neighbourhood!

(November 2022, Fengling Tang)

Setting two based in South West London is a nursery school with Jewish ethos underpinning their practice whilst the setting welcomes children from diverse cultural backgrounds, all faiths and none. The setting aims to provide quality care and education for children from three months to five years with a carefully designed environment including indoor classrooms, garden and playground area. There were eight dedicated staff to support children's individual needs and encourage children's individuality, independence, creativity, and curiosity. One key feature of the setting practice is intergenerational engagement as part of a sustainable legacy to reduce social isolation and improve the wellbeing of children and the elderly in ever-changing and challenging worlds. See Fengling's reflection here on the surrounding area of the setting two:

The park was all white covered in snow, beautiful natural scenery in front of my eyes. I couldn't help walking towards it after getting off the train. Some people were walking in the common with dogs, some walking on their own or in pairs. A huge snow ball was already rolled up in the grass covered in white. The tree leaves and some bare branches were covered in snow, quietly displaying the natural beauty. So appreciative standing here accompanied by this unusual snow scenery. With Karen Armstrong [the author of Sacred Nature] critiquing people taking photos of places and not immersed in nature, I feel guilty about the urge of taking photos to record the special moment, which is purely spiritual.

(December 2022, Fengling Tang)

Setting three was founded in the 1950s and moved from Tianjin to the ancient city of Baoding with Hebei University in 1970. In 1999, the kindergarten passed the municipal level first-class kindergarten acceptance inspection. In 2000, it was promoted to a provincial-level demonstration park in Hebei. Hebei University Kindergarten is a renowned city kindergarten in Baoding, a national sub project experimental base for the Ministry of Education's "0-6-Year-Old Infant Potential Development" project, a "Children's Sensory Integration Training" base, and an educational practice base for Hebei University.

The kindergarten setting three has 13 classes and over 500 children in the kindergarten. There are professional classrooms in the park, including a sensory training room, scientific exploration room, electronic piano room, multifunctional activity room, microcomputer room, and book reading room. The aim of the kindergarten is to provide children with the highest quality education via rich learning resources and kindergarten teachers' professional practice.

Setting four in Baoding City was established in 1946, formerly known as the "Jizhong Nursery". The kindergarten once lived a guerrilla life under the leadership of the Party Committee of the central Hebei government in counties such as Renqiu and Raoyang. In 1949, it was relocated from Tunli Village in Raoyang to No.10 Ju Hutong in Baoding City and renamed as "Hebei Provincial Nursery". In 1953, it was relocated to Qingnian Road in Baoding City and renamed as "Hebei Province Kindergarten". In 1958, it merged with Baoding Kindergarten and was officially named "Baoding Youth Road Kindergarten". It currently has 26 classes with over a thousand young children and 132 faculty members.

The kindergarten setting covers an area of 16600 square meters, with a building area of 15500 square meters, outdoor activity areas of 12600 square meters, and a green area of 4080 square meters. The educational responsibility and ideal of all teachers and staff at Qingnian Road Kindergarten is to "realize the value of life with love and a sense of responsibility, and cultivate the culture of the kindergarten with respect and trust".

2.4 Ethical considerations

We adhere to ethical principles underpinning educational research throughout the research process. We applied University of Roehampton ethics guidelines and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) to reinforce the general principles about protection of all research participants, maintain wellbeing and respect participants as human beings with rights to make informed decisions and with the capacity to participate in research. We gained informed consents from adult participants including practitioners and parents in China and England for focus group interviews and questionnaires. We addressed

the voluntary participation as we acknowledged that participants might not be willing or have time to take part in research.

This is particularly important in the case of young children as a vulnerable population from the ethics perspective. We gained consents from parents and practitioners for us to conduct naturalist, participant observation in the two kindergartens in China and two early years settings in England. We carefully addressed children's voluntary participation and rights to withdraw anytime if they wished. We mitigated the impact of negative factors on child participants by attentively listening to their voices and carefully reading their facial/body expressions during the research process. We use pseudonyms in our research report, disseminations at research conferences and publications for public interests.

We had the permission of kindergarten teachers and parents in China for sharing photos as part of research dissemination, including this report to Froebel Trust. We had the permission of participants in England to share photos taken during the two workshops organised in August and October 2023. Without permission, we will not disclose images that could expose participants in either China or England. We aimed to apply both procedural ethics and affective ethics during our research and engaged with genuine listening to participants including young children by being with them rather than 'researching' them due to the sensitivity and complexity of spirituality as an area of study.

2.5 Analytical framework

In the context of rich data via triangulation of multiple data collection methods, we as researchers have engaged with data collection and discussion of findings in a rigorous way but not without difficulty over the research process. We acknowledge that our discussion of findings as part of the qualitative research process is cyclic without finite interpretation and requires us as researchers to return to data and the coding process throughout the research process (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Xu and Zammit, 2020). Thus, our discussion of findings in the following section is provisional and evolving. This is even more so considering spirituality as an under-researched area in early childhood education and care. We are aware of potential biases and misunderstanding, and jointly endeavoured to analyse and interpret research participants' lived

experiences and perspectives as authentically as possible. We would like to address that our academic integrity and professionalism inspired by the Froebelian principles acts as the theoretical lens underpinning our research project and facilitating our discussion of main findings in the following section.

3. Discussion of main findings

In this section, we focus on discussing the provisional findings aiming to illustrate how our research investigates the research questions set up at the beginning of our research journey. We hope to highlight connection between our main findings and existing literature/research and also further identify the research gap. In this way, we aim to investigate the role of a Froebelian approach in nurturing young children's spiritual growth in the changing and challenging times of the world we live in. The following discussion is guided by the four research questions.

3.1 What does spirituality mean to young children, practitioners and parents in Chinese and English contexts?

As researchers, our understanding of spirituality drew on our ongoing efforts to search, understand, construct and interpret existing scholarship in the field of spirituality. Our fieldwork in China and England witnessed the lived experiences and perspectives of participants in relation to spirituality, which is a very complex one.

3.1.1 Children's experiences

With regards to child participants, it was reasonable that we did not ask them what spirituality means but our participant observations in the two kindergartens in China and two early years settings in England evidenced young children's spiritual awareness and experiences in Chinese and English contexts. In many cases, the spiritual can be a tangible object such as a leaf, a feather, a stone to which children feel connected and which they feel special about. The girl Emma in setting one in England often held a brown leaf in her hand and took it home after the day at the setting. She saw the leaf as special company and she felt the leaf and talked to it. The spiritual is a particular moment of compassion and happiness as I listened to the girl

Hetty in setting two remembering her holiday at the seaside with her family and expressed with confidence and passion about how she felt happy being at the seaside with her mum and dad. This could be also seen in the boy in Chinese kindergarten who wanted to bring his drawing home as his mum would be happy and proud to see it.

Children's experience like these are personal but clearly show similarity in terms of the positive connection with something or somebody that is important to the child in different ways. That something and somebody is special to the children and they treasure those special connections. This reflects Hay and Nye's (2006) observation about the importance of spiritual sensitivity and relational consciousness in the construct of spirituality. We appreciated young children's natural inclination to spirituality via opportunities of play, being indoors and outdoors, caring for and emotionally engaged with peers in both Chinese and English contexts. Our observations of children's play scenarios witnessed young children being in their imaginary worlds with things, creatures, friends and known/unknown people around them, and being in the space and moment of listening to 'that inner voice', which reflects what Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller (2024, p.101) researched over time and across diverse cultural contexts.

Froebel's concept of Unity that places the child in connection with family, community, nature and the world, addresses the importance of relationalities in children's learning and life experience. Froebel's concept of Unity and how he applied it in his writings about young children's learning, although developed in past centuries, is still relevant and will be in the future too. We as researchers have confidence to say that Froebel's concept of Unity lays the foundation for a Froebelian approach to nurturing children's spiritual growth (Best, 2016; Tang, 2022a; Tang and Zhao, 2023).

3.1.2 Practitioners' and parents' understanding of spirituality

In relation to adult participants' understanding, including kindergarten teachers, practitioners and parents in China and England, we had deep awareness of the difficulty and complexity in them defining and understanding spirituality. This may be due to a lack of explicit guidance about young children's spiritual development from governmental and institutional policies in both Chinese and English contexts. This

may also be reflected in the Chinese context, where the boundaries between philosophical, cultural and religious traditions are often unclear (Yang, 2018), alongside that the spiritual seems to be something that sits across those boundaries. Juan spent a great deal of time communicating with adult participants and aimed to establish a way to develop shared understanding about spirituality as part of this study. In the two settings in England, the participants' more diverse experience with religious traditions alongside the introduction to participants via the article published on the Foundation Stage Forum 'Nurturing children's spiritual development in early childhood context' (Tang, 2022a), helped practitioners during the study in developing their understanding of spirituality focusing on the child's ongoing pursuit for a sense of his/her place in the universe.

This echoes how practitioners saw spirituality in children's awareness of others' feelings, respect of others' views and the place & culture they come from. What underpins the spiritual sensitivity and relational awareness is the genuine care and compassion rooted in the essence of being a child as a whole person. This is reflected in setting two in England with a Jewish ethos at centre of their practice. Practitioner participants shared their understanding during the study, they welcomed children from diverse religions and cultures and aimed to support children to develop a sense of belonging and understanding of differences. In particular, the intergenerational engagements supported children to appreciate connections with the elderly people and understand life cycles. Practitioner participants in setting one in England seemed to see children's holistic learning as key part of spiritual growth and addressed the importance of children making connections to community and learning about self and relationships with others. This aligns with Best's (2008, p.321) call for 'a willingness to embrace the spiritual as concept' and emphasis of spiritual experience and awareness as an essential part of children's holistic education.

We need to mention that Chinese early childhood education officially started in 1903 when the first kindergarten was established, framed by the Western Christianity missionary vision, which was influenced by the Froebelian kindergarten system (China Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). Contemporary Chinese early childhood education has grown and drawn on the 'living education' approach developed by Heqin Chen (陈鹤琴 1892-1982), known as the 'Father of Chinese Early Childhood Education' and 'China's Froebel'. This approach promotes a child-centred

pedagogy in the Chinese context. Spiritual development reflected in the living education approach does not relate to a religious perspective, but connects with the cultivation of children's emotions, self-esteem, confidence and moral development (Tang and Zhao, 2023). This echoes perspectives and experiences of the Chinese kindergarten teachers in this study.

It is difficult to summarise exactly the similarities and differences between participants' understanding of spirituality in China and in England, however, there is strong evidence about how the social-cultural lenses shape participants' perceptions of spirituality. Participants' experiences with diverse religions and faiths as well as non-religious beliefs in England seem to back up their understanding of the spiritual in the religious and secular contexts although they acknowledge difficulty in clearly defining spirituality. Some practitioners and parents in England saw spirituality as an attribute beyond religious domain and they seem to be more inclined to the importance of connection with nature, morality and cultural values in linking to spiritual awareness and development.

'Spirituality is a sense of belief or feeling. Being at one with yourself and others and your soul rather than physical or material things. It doesn't have to be built on religion. They are used as similar things but I feel spirituality is more of a meaning to life, where religious practices focus on organised entity with rituals.'

(Practitioner Alisha in setting one, England)

By contrast, Chinese kindergarten teachers seem to link spirituality to children's minds, psychological development, social and emotional dimensions of child development. There is an interesting cultural interpretation of 'spirituality' in Chinese language as noted by Juan in her conversations and interviews with practitioners and parents. Participants felt it more difficult for them to talk about 灵性 (ling xing) than 精神 (jing shen) as the former 灵性 (ling xing) with a clear emphasis on religious connotation whilst the latter 精神 (jing shen) with more focus on secular sides of child development including personal, social and emotional domains. Educational provision for 灵性 (ling xing) to participants is a little alien with secular beliefs being the main stream in the Chinese context, however, support for 精神 (jing shen) education is not something new to them. In the two Chinese settings, Juan has thus been on a journey with participants towards a shared understanding of 精神 (jing shen) education rather

than 灵性 (ling xing) education. Among the Chinese kindergarten teachers, there is recognition of children's interactions with human beings alongside engagement with nature as children's lived experience with spirituality.

It is interesting to note that despite the difficulty in defining spirituality participants in the study recognised the importance of supporting children's spirituality as part of their holistic learning and development. Our research project reveals that spirituality may mean different things to different people but there is deep appreciation of the need for providing space for children's spiritual growth, and there is great tolerance about ambiguity in defining spirituality alongside some degree of emerging consensus about what spirituality might entail. Bone (2008, p.344) refers to spirituality as 'a means of connecting people to all things, to nature and the universe' and argues for the role of spirituality in enhancing appreciation of wonder and the unknown and possibility for 'love, happiness, goodness, peace and compassion in the world'.

'I think it is very important to focus on the spiritual aspect of learning for young children. As a teacher, we should pay more attention to cultivating children's personality development and allow them to have different ideas in activities. Teachers should make children become happy people first, and then focus on what they have learned, rather than saying that we should give them something first, and then let them accept this process.'

(Kindergarten teacher Min in setting three, China)

3.2 What provisions are on offer in Chinese kindergartens and English early years settings to support young children's spiritual development?

We acknowledge the range of provisions in the four settings although they may vary a great deal regarding the intentionality and depth of those offering in supporting children's spiritual experience. It is a spiritual journey for all participants and us as researchers to make sense of what settings offer and how the offerings support and nurture children's spiritual growth. We discuss the three main areas of provision on offer in relation to children's spiritual growth below.

3.2.1 Play as the most spiritual activity of the child

Children's play experiences across the four settings show commonalities in terms of children's enjoyment and affordance of play for children's holistic learning and

wellbeing. The use of wooden blocks, clay, and other natural materials in supporting children to engage with their play were observed in the four settings. Children enjoyed outdoor play as much as play indoors. Our observations show great involvement of children in play scenarios with varied support of practitioners. Chinese kindergarten teachers' intention was to provide more guidance in order to support children's cognitive development when children were playing. This may be down to Practitioners in England seeming to follow the child's lead more and intervene less, unless they saw the need to offer a hand, especially when conflicts arose in children's play. There was a common sense among participants in China and England that play is important as key feature of childhood experience.

Our observations in the four settings reflected Froebel's thinking of play as 'the most spiritual activity of man' (1887, p. 55) and Bruce's (1987, p.13) application into modern context seeing play as 'a unifying mechanism' and as 'the most spiritual activity of the child'. We cannot emphasise enough Froebel's passionate advocacy of children's play here (Froebel, 1887, p.55):

Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole – of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things... A child that plays thoroughly, with self-active determination, perseveringly until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a thorough, determined man, capable of self-sacrifice for the promotion of the welfare of himself and others.

3.2.2 The urgency of engagement with nature

Our research project conducted in the four settings saw children's engagement with nature as an important part of setting practice. Engagement with nature is seen as important to support children's learning spaces and environments. Children's engagement with nature varies but there is a strong sense of urgency among practitioners and parents about the importance of connecting and reconnecting with nature (Armstrong, 2022; d'Ascoli and Hunter, 2022), especially in the context of the urban society we live in.

Having a very small sized garden has constraints, setting one however maximises the space and means to facilitate children's engagement with nature by providing planting opportunities outdoors, pretend play materials outside, learning outdoors, talking about seasonal changes such as the appearance of frost in winter and also engaging parents with nature walks in local parks with children. As practitioner Mathia shared her views, 'It allows children to feel free to explore and a sense of feeling more

grounded with nature and the outdoors. The sounds of nature help relax and calm the mind.' With a large garden and access to outdoor space available to them via the intergenerational spaces on the site, setting two in England feels the great benefits of children in developing connections with natural environments, enhancing learning opportunities outdoors, and also uniquely transforming outdoor experiences into indoors in terms of intergenerational activities to engage both children and the elderly, especially for those who are less mobile.

The two Chinese kindergartens have access to outdoor spaces in their own settings. The concepts about outdoor spaces are related to 'playgrounds' rather than the 'garden' image as is often the case in the UK. Playground offers space for children's collective physical exercises and assembly purposes for headteachers and teachers to address important kindergarten issues. With more awareness of the importance of nature to children and education, kindergarten teachers are encouraged to engage children with activities related to nature. More often, they use nature as valuable resources in support of children exploring learning opportunities such as seasonal changes, cultivation of care for plants, animals and natural environments, and developing positive attitudes towards nature. For instance, kindergarten teachers place plants, fruits and vegetables in the corners of the classroom to provide children with real life learning opportunities. On a snowy day, kindergarten teachers changed routine indoor activities and offered the children the opportunity to build a snowman, experiencing excitement and joy in nature as well as a deep connection with nature (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Children and teachers making snowman

This is reflected in Froebel's (1887, pp.164-165) advocacy for early childhood practice. Froebel's observation of nature as part of the divinity in supporting children's holistic experience is reflected below:

... it is so important that boys and adults should go into the fields and forests together striving to receive into their hearts and minds the life and spirit of nature... Such are the character and influence of nature as a whole, such are the character and influence of nature as the image and work of God, as the word of God, revealing, communicating and awakening the spirit of God in and by its integrity; as such, nature presents herself to inner contemplation.

Although it is unknown if all adult participants were aware of the divine nature drawing on our interpretation of their perspectives in Chinese and English contexts, it is clear there is consensus about the urgency of connecting and reconnecting with nature as argued by Armstrong (2022) and d'Ascoli and Hunter (2022). Nature holds so much for the children to develop connection, cultivate harmonious relationships and enhance understanding of the natural world. This is clearly agreeable to participants in China and England. Attempts to recreate the natural environments indoors are evident in the four settings. This is particularly reflected in Figure 2, where the kindergarten builds tall grass walls for children to experience nature indoors, cultivate the spirit of being curious and adventurous, and enhance appreciation of nature as a key part of the living environment. This is reflected in one parent's response, 'I hope that the beautiful and spacious kindergarten environment can nourish the spirit and body of my child.'



Figure 2 Nature indoors

3.2.3 The role of music, movement, creative and social cultural activities

The four settings all addressed the important role of music, movement, creative and social cultural activities in nurturing children's spiritual growth. This is particularly reflected in setting two in England with music engagements as the key feature of its intergenerational practice in the context of maintaining and celebrating Jewish rituals

and traditions. The Director had music expertise via training alongside her music experience rooted in Jewish culture, which further enhances music practice in the setting. Music engagement in setting two sees the routine greetings via singing and Jewish rituals as the magic to hold all together – being in the calm, peaceful, slow with the spiritual flowing from the young to the elderly. The spiritual space enhanced in the course of musical activities and connections developed between the children and the elderly through the intergenerational engagement were beautiful and heartfelt. The spiritual experience of the young and the elderly in setting two shows links to religion, culture, morality and the transcendental.

Conversations with practitioners in the two settings in England addressed the important role of music in supporting children to know and understand themselves and others, in developing confidence about who they are, in developing respect of others in relation to commonalities and differences, and in developing resilience facing challenges and difficulties. This is in line with many researchers such as Nichols and Honig (1997), Ouvry (2012), Burke (2018) and Dyke (2019) among others. Ouvry (2012) calls for efforts via research and training programmes with early childhood settings to connect and reignite the Froebelian tradition of rich engagement with music. The two settings in England do not claim to be Froebelian but what these music engagements entail is deeply Froebelian in connection with Froebel's concept of Unity and the Froebelian principle of Unity, connectedness and community.

Kindergarten teachers and parents in China recognised the value of music and dance activities in allowing children to experience the beauty of music, rhythm, dance forms and movements. They also addressed the opportunities for children to enhance their artistic and aesthetic qualities, and thus shape their spiritual life by engaging with music, dance and traditional Chinese cultural activities. For example, the teachers at setting four offer children opportunities to learn Beijing Opera and Chinese calligraphy (Figure 3), a key part of Chinese cultural heritage. In this way, children not only learn Chinese traditional culture, but also develop their appreciation of music, movement, Chinese cultural heritage and connecting the present to the past. This echoes the study conducted by Kilpeläinen and Ruokonen (2018) in that music activities enable adult-child ritual interaction and collective experiences with religious and spiritual awareness and development.



Figure 3 Chinese calligraphy

We would further address that the role of music, movement, creative and social cultural activities stands out as a meaningful way to nurture young children's spirituality. This links to Powell et al. (2013, p.1) who argue that Froebel's Mother Songs acts as 'a pedagogical tool and emotional conduit' for children and parents to 'understand their place, role and purpose in the world and connectedness to their surroundings and their (divine) creator'. Early childhood practice in relation to music, movement and creative engagements witness Froebel's influence across cultural contexts (Bruce et al., 2023).

3.3 How does spiritual education support children's holistic learning and wellbeing?

As observed by Adams, Bull and Maynes (2016), the themes of exploration, questioning, meaning making, and identity have long been linked to spirituality whilst the spiritual nature of early childhood education is often overlooked in mainstream contexts. Adams, Bull and Maynes (2016) therefore further argue for the need of more exploration to facilitate theoretical and applied understanding of young children's spiritual development in the context of the holistic approach to early childhood education. Similarly, the Froebelian heritage in relation to spiritual education is not widely acknowledged in early childhood although Froebel (1887, 1895, 1896 & 1903) many times addresses the important role of education in providing suitable nourishment to cultivate children's feelings, emotions, physical, sensorial and spiritual development and strongly advocates the holistic nature of the child's development and learning.

Our research contributes to the important area of spiritual education by evidencing connections to Froebelian Heritage. Participants in China and England address the importance of spiritual education in early childhood, and provisions on offer are educators' efforts to put spiritual education in contexts. Whereas there is difficulty in defining spirituality, there is difficulty in discussing what spiritual education means as argued by Marples (2006). However, Best's (2016) argument about the essence of spiritual education in the Froebelian tradition as developing the child as a whole person with holistic learning experiences clearly supports participants' beliefs about the importance of spiritual education.

The majority of the practitioners in the study recognised the value of working and acting together to create spaces for spiritual education in support of children's holistic learning and wellbeing. This is particularly important post the Covid-19 pandemic when many children and families are still experiencing the negative impact of the pandemic with children concerned about playing with others alongside a reluctance to express themselves. Spiritual education may offer space for children to regain their confidence to express their emotions and develop trust in others, as commented by some participants. This has to be accomplished together by educators, children and community as voiced by the participants.

Practitioners and parents in the study recognised the importance of providing space and time for children to discuss their own feelings as well as awareness of others' feeling and emotions. Kindergarten teachers in China put a lot of emphasis on guiding children to express themselves, learn how to work together with peers, and how to solve problems with confidence. Practitioners in England discussed the importance of supporting children to understand the impact of their own actions on others, and develop respect and caring attitudes towards others in society and embrace diverse cultures. There seems to be an acknowledgement among the participants about the importance of children's awareness and sensitivity towards others in settings', to nurture children's spiritual development. This clearly echoes the relational nature of spirituality as argued by many (Giesenberg, 2000; Eaude, 2003; Hay and Nye, 2006; Bone, 2008; Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller, 2024).

In relation to the Froebelian lens, participants acknowledge the positive impact that it might have had on children. For example, participant Erin in setting one, England shared her understanding of Froebel's ideas as 'invigorating and encouraging

children to feel confident and for children to ‘express their ideas and feelings in nurturing environments’. None of the four settings in our study claimed to be Froebelian, but all practitioners addressed the importance of developing positive relationships with people, community and nature as key in spiritual education. This again links to Froebel’s concept of Unity (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 1987; Liebschner, 1997) and the Froebelian principle of ‘Unity, connectedness and community’ (Tovey, 2020). This further echoes Best’s (2016) emphasis of ‘the education of the child as a whole person’ being the essence of spiritual education.

3.4 How do practitioners and parents see challenges and obstacles in practising spiritual education in Chinese and English contexts?

This section shares how practitioners and parents see challenges and obstacles in practising spiritual education in China and England. One of the major concerns raised by participants relates to the lack of explicit guidance from governmental and institutional level in relation to supporting children’s spiritual development. Spirituality is not explicitly identified as a learning domain in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2024) in England; the busyness of practitioners’ daily work to support learning might also have the spiritual development of children as a side line. Practitioners in this study acknowledged that it is hard to trace the moments and daily activities associated with children’s spiritual development.

A second challenge identified by participants in China and England is related to the lack of consensus about what spirituality means due to the individual, personal transcendental nature of the spiritual. This has been acknowledged in existing research such as Bone (2008) and Adams, Bull and Maynes (2016). At the same time, this challenge necessitates the need for further research and exploration. Interestingly though this challenge is not a denial of the importance of spiritual education in the early childhood context as commonly recognised by both practitioners and parents in China and England. Froebelian literature has seen scholarship in support of the holistic nature of spiritual education (Froebel, 1887 & 1903; Best, 2008 & 2016) alongside a Froebelian approach to nurturing children’s spiritual growth via the central importance of play as the most spiritual activity of the child (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 1987).

A third challenge addressed by participants is related to the ongoing negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and adults in China and England. This research project has arisen in the aftermath of the global pandemic with strong hope of the role of spirituality in mitigating negativities on young children, families and communities and facilitating mental health and wellbeing. Writing up the research report at this stage with more political unrest globally, there is an urgency again to turn to the spiritual for resilience, inner peace, a sense of belonging, awareness of alternative experiences, consideration of something bigger than ourselves, something more pertinent than political power, which is sensed by adult participants in China and England.

With the end of the COVID-19, the children resumed their normal study and life, but its effect on children are still here. I have found that my child's language expression ability is insufficient and they are afraid of socializing with unfamiliar people. I believe that in the future, kindergarten education should pay more attention to the spiritual aspect.

(Parent Ming from setting three, China)

'Every family may follow different things, religion, culture. Spirituality can be interpreted differently by people. Some families may not be open to this. However there are things such as meditation might be more acceptable to many as the more holistic side of things'

(Parent Jessica from setting two, England)

A fourth challenge identified is practitioners' concerns about children's experience with grief and severance in their family life. Anxiety and uncertainty associated with difficulty in children's lives shadow practitioners' efforts to support children to go through challenging times. This journey is a joint one with children and family members together. During the study, practitioners in setting one worked together via staff training towards a shared understanding of what spirituality might offer. Practitioners in setting two strived to bring the young and elderly together via intergenerational engagements to support families and communities. The two kindergartens in China aimed to provide the nurturing indoor and outdoor environments and learning opportunities with a focus on children's emotional development, connection with nature and Chinese cultural values.

It is important to create time and space for children to develop compassion, sympathy, sense of celebration, pride, resilience and sense of being together in difficult times (Tang, 2022a). We would like to conclude this section by sharing inspirations:

The intergenerational activities today - stories about picking olives, make oil to light candles, children sang and danced, the elderly enjoyed the beautiful moments with children again. Jewish celebration as a unique way to support children's spiritual identities but interestingly not all children are Jewish and they all enjoyed celebrating Jewish traditions. Spirituality within and beyond religions, it's a celebration of spiritual diversity. The moment of peace, maintaining traditions and rituals with joy and sense of togetherness across ages is something so unique. I see the elderly facial expressions with enjoyment and calmness as not all of them can express themselves orally.

(December 2022, Fengling Tang)

4. Reflective conclusion

4.1 The spiritual journey

This research project has taken us through an emotional spiritual journey from the very beginning till the end phase of the project. The reason why spirituality arose for us to explore was deeply related to the uncertainty and unprecedentedness of the time, during and after the covid-19 pandemic considering huge losses for many. By the time we began our research journey, the Russian-Ukraine war had started with the Gaza war at the end of our project. With political unrest on a global level, we as researchers have felt a greater need for spirituality more than ever before, considering the devastating impact on very young children in particular.

As we have learned what spirituality means to participants from a research perspective, we equally feel the importance of spirituality in mitigating human and environmental sufferings in the current contexts. Our spiritual journey has been wrapped up with emotions and strong anticipation for world peace. A Froebelian approach guides us and provides us with confidence and courage to experience children's worlds with spirituality as a tiny oasis in the vast uncertainty of the 21st century.

During the process of the research project, we have fought hard and gone through another battle in the context of neoliberalism. The obstacles along the way for researchers to battle through the fragmented processes and systems in the HE context, at times nearly destroyed our passion and hopes to engage with research. The visible

and invisible systematic barriers seem to be blocking the way towards humanity and are counter productive to quality experiences. Spirituality supports us to develop courage, patience, resilience and trust to listen to our inner voices as Froebel (1891, p.65) calls us:

'Frequent occurrences in my own life have convinced me that we ought to listen very intently to the lightest call from within, for we oftentimes afterwards discover that more importance lay therein than we had thought at the time...'

Our project on spirituality has been very much a spiritual journey for us to establish ourselves as academics and researchers with integrity, passion and professionalism with the hope of making a contribution to early childhood and beyond. This research journey has been a spiritual journey with a slow cook process. Our spiritual path has gradually yielded something we are proud of. Our spiritual journey reflects what slow pedagogy entails (Clark, 2022) in relation to our genuine listening to participants' voices and alignment with what comes up spontaneously in the process of our constructing and co-constructing spirituality with participants.

Our research journey narrates the complex mixture of the personal, cultural, religious, philosophical, and pedagogical perceptions as a key part of our efforts to construct and co-construct the spiritual. We acknowledge the evolving nature of this spiritual journey. In the meantime, child participants' experiences alongside kindergarten teachers' and practitioners' perspectives in China and England have supported us to develop a deeper understanding and encouraged us to articulate a working definition for 'spirituality' in relation to young children:

Spirituality is an innate ability of human beings including young children. Spirituality involves a process, in which the child develops awareness and consciousness of and makes sense of the surrounding worlds through curiosity, compassion, contemplation, love and wonder. Spirituality is the child's ongoing pursuit for a sense of his/her place in the universe (Tang, 2022a). Young children's spiritual growth develops in safe environments and with the support of 'knowledgeable and nurturing educators' (Froebel Trust, 2024). It is important to address the relational and complex nature of spirituality in early childhood and recognise that young children's spiritual growth cannot be hurried. Not addressing spirituality in early childhood practice deprives young children of a significant learning experience.

4.2 The researcher role

This research project has encountered various challenges in relation to the research team's work commitment in the context of HE landscapes. The most fulfilling part of the research project is involved in the learning journey – together with participants

including young children, professionals and parents. We aimed for a participatory research approach to guide our project by addressing the importance of active engagement in the study and recognising the participants' capacity to make a contribution to research. For example, we invited the research setting to co-present our research in the English context at the [Froebel Trust conference](#) in March 2023. We presented our research again together with participants for a BERA organised conference in February and September 2024.

Facing difficulty among the Chinese kindergarten teachers in understanding what spirituality means, Juan as the researcher in China introduced the kindergarten teachers to some Chinese research and literature about spirituality during the research process and drew their attention to the areas linked to spirituality. Similarly, practitioners in England experienced difficulty in making sense of spirituality. Fengling's role as a researcher has been more involved in providing dialogical space to develop a shared understanding of what spirituality might mean by sharing relevant research and her own publication 'Nurturing spirituality in early childhood context' (Tang, 2022a). Setting one in England has used this as an opportunity for training to engage with practitioners about this complex construct.

This research journey acts as a starting point for deeper engagement with the spiritual. Time and space prove so important for researchers to make reflections and dive into deeper, meaningful co-constructions of spirituality with participants. Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller (2024, p.142) argue for 'spirituality as the north star' for early childhood education to promote 'repairs pertaining to the social and racial justices' and include the whole human being considering the effects on our soul. We would like to echo Mata-McMahon and Escarfuller (2024) by stating that nurturing spiritual experience is the north star to guide young children's holistic learning and wellbeing.

We would like to acknowledge the importance of Froebel's concept of Unity (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 1987 & 2021) and the Froebelian principle of 'Unity, connectedness and community' (Tovey, 2020) as our north star in guiding our research project and leading our spiritual journey filled with hope and resilience alongside the challenges in the changing early childhood sector and higher education landscapes in England and internationally. The importance of the Froebelian lens in guiding our research project reflects what Bruce (1991, p.1) argues,

Looking at some of the past and current influences on our work with young children can be a valuable catalyst in this process of metacognition. This means that we come to reflect, to analyse our thinking, to question ourselves, and what we want to do next. Through this process, we see how consistent we are, how much coherence we achieve. It helps us to move towards our ideals, because we find the direction we would like to take which is right for now and right for the future. It helps us to operate with more than a pragmatic response to the here and now. When we are purely pragmatic, we have no sense of direction.

4.3 Research workshops

As part of the research project, we planned to organise workshops to engage with practitioners and parents in China and England in order to cultivate and develop a deeper, meaningful, shared understanding of spirituality in early childhood pedagogy. We believed that this would help to create continuing professional development opportunities for practitioners to facilitate spiritual education in early childhood contexts. We also believed that this would utilise the implications of our research to benefit children, families, early childhood settings, communities of practice and research, and policy making via a Froebelian approach across the cultural contexts. Over the last phase of our research project, we organised four workshops in collaboration with the four early childhood settings, two workshops in England and two in China.

4.4 Implications

Our research project throws light on the ultimate importance of nurturing spirituality in early childhood practice for young children's holistic learning and wellbeing, especially post the Covid-19 pandemic. Our research findings have implications for early childhood educators in China, England and beyond to reflect on their own practice by appreciating the importance of spiritual education and developing environments that support children to nurture their spiritual awareness and experience, through engagement with nature, music, art and creative and cultural activities. Our research also invites early childhood educators to appreciate the importance of listening to children's expression of their spiritual inner life within their play. Children's play cannot be rushed so as their spiritual growth.

Lacking recognition and guidance for supporting young children's spiritual growth as a key part of their holistic learning at governmental and institutional levels in China

and England, contrasts the significance of spiritual education in early childhood as experienced by the participants in our research. It is strongly hoped that our research provides space for policy makers in China, England and beyond to consider the importance of addressing spirituality in early childhood, listening to stakeholders including young children, and working together on the journey for nurturing young children's spiritual growth.

We also hope that our research further supports researchers and academics as this empirical research offers deep insight into spirituality in early childhood pedagogy considering the complexity and relationalities of spirituality across the social cultural contexts. The strong consensus about the importance of spiritual education in the early childhood context, suggests the need of further exploration of what the past, present and future hold for spiritual education and how early childhood educators nurture children's spiritual experience under the pressures arising from the neoliberal manipulations and its emphasis on economic productivity, decontextualization, and social engineering in education (Osgood, 2006; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008; Strauch-Nelson, 2012; Ball, 2021). We therefore raise further questions for future research:

- *What challenges might face early childhood educators, who are inspired by Froebelian heritage in relation to a holistic approach to educating the whole child as the essence of spiritual education (Best, 2016)?*
- *What inspirations might arise to empower early childhood educators to facilitate spiritual education embedded with Froebelian heritage?*
- *How might these inspirations better inform stakeholders including parents, professionals, academics and policy makers to uphold young children's holistic learning and wellbeing with spiritual growth being a key part of this experience as the centre of their practices?*

5. Outputs

Publications	赵娟《陈鹤琴教育思想三十解》(<i>Thirty interpretations of Chen Heqin's educational philosophy</i>) 山西人民教育教育社 2018 年 1 月。 Tang, F.L. (2022a) Nurturing children's spiritual development in early childhood context, https://eyfs.info/articles.html/personal-social-and-emotional-development/nurturing-children%E2%80%99s-spiritual-development-in-early-childhood-context-r403/ 赵娟《近现代燕赵蒙学演变》(<i>The Evolution of Yan Zhao Mongolian Learning in Modern and Contemporary Times</i>) 知识产权出版社 2023 年 10 月。 Tang, F. & Zhao, J. (2023) Spirituality in early childhood pedagogy: a Froebelian lens on the role of women in a Chinese context, in Bruce, T., Nishida, Y., Powell, S., Wasmuth, H. & Whinnett, J. (eds.) <i>The Bloomsbury Handbook to Friedrich Froebel</i>. London: Bloomsbury, p. 372-380
Conference/seminar presentations	Tang, F.L. (2022b) Spirituality in early childhood pedagogy: a Froebelian perspective, <i>Research seminar for Centre for Learning, Teaching and Human Development</i>, University of Roehampton, February 2022 Zhao, J. (2022) Spirituality in early childhood education drawing on the Chinese early childhood pioneer Heqin Chen's work, <i>Research seminar for Centre for Learning, Teaching and Human Development</i>, University of Roehampton, March 2022 Tang, F.L., Nikiforidou, Z. & Robles-Melendez, W. (2022) A need for play: Children's play and their cultural, social and spiritual self and identity, <i>Children and Childhoods Conference</i>, University of Suffolk, July 2022 Ish-Horowicz, J. & Tang, F.L. (2023) Nurturing young children's spirituality: blending a Froebelian approach into intergenerational engagements, <i>Froebel Trust conference</i>, March 2023 Tang, F.L. (2023) The role of play in nurturing young children's spirituality: linking Froebelian thinking to posthuman new materialist lens, <i>International Froebel Society 10th Biennial Conference</i>, Maynooth University, June 2023

	Garaloska, A. & Tang, F.L. (2024) Nurturing spirituality in early childhood: a Froebelian approach in a Montessorian context, <i>British Educational Research Association Socio-cultural theory in Early Childhood Education practice conference</i>, London Metropolitan University, 9th February 2024 Tang, F.L. & Ish-Horowicz, J. (2024) Nurturing young children's spiritual growth in early childhood: a Froebelian approach in China and England, a panel discussion to the BERA Conference 2024, University of Manchester, September 2024 Tang, F.L. (2024) A Froebelian approach to nurturing young children's spiritual growth, paper presentation to the European Early Childhood Education and Care Research Association (EECERA) Conference, University of Brighton, September 2024
Research workshops	Workshop one Focus: Nurturing spirituality in early childhood: co-constructing spirituality Organiser: Aleksandra Garaloska, Modern Montessori International (Croydon), London, England 16th August 2023 Participants: early childhood practitioners, parents and students in HE Workshop two Focus: Nurturing spirituality in early childhood: a Froebelian approach in communication with Jewish ethos and Montessorian education Organiser: Judith Ish-Horowicz, Apples and Honey Nightingale, London, England 27th October 2023 Participants: Local authority professionals, practitioners, parents and students in HE Workshop three Focus: The Importance of Spiritual Education: Researchers and Kindergarten Teachers Exchange the Froebel Method Organiser: Dr Juan Zhao, Baoding, China 8th September 2023 Participants: kindergarten teachers and academics in HE Workshop four Focus: The combination of spiritual education and early childhood curriculum Organiser: Yi Cao, Baoding, China 25th October 2023 Participants: kindergarten teachers

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