

Getting the adult out of the way to promote the spiritual development of the child: a case study of Godly Play with school children

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Abstract

In endeavouring to nourish the spiritual development of school children how can we hold in balance the power of the adult with the autonomy of the child? Godly Play is a model of Christian nurture developed by Jerome Berryman that attempts to be a non-coercive way to enable children to engage with spiritual questions using the Christian language. Through a case study, I will examine how Godly Play reduces the power differential between the adults and the children, fosters respectful interaction of the adults with the children and protects the child-oriented space. I will discuss how the adult attempts to ‘get out of the way’ by creating community, giving children the tools to enter into the story, providing the opportunity and choice for different ways of knowing and allowing children to make authentic meaning for themselves.

Keywords: adult power; children’s spirituality; Godly Play; schools; spiritual development

Spiritual development in schools and the power of adults

The British Education Reform Act of 1988 states that ‘the school curriculum should aim to promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life’. Various scholars have addressed the difficulties in fulfilling the mandate to promote pupils’ spiritual development inherent in widely practiced curricular approaches (for example Priestley, 1997; Best, 2008; Watson,

2010). One of the potential impediments to the promotion of pupils' spiritual development in schools is the power that adults exercise over the children in their care. Annemie Dillen (2006) has explored the concept of children 'between liberation and care,' distinguishing between the 'caretaker perspective' that views children as weak and vulnerable and the 'child liberator perspective' which argues that children require care but that they are also agents and holders of participation rights and need the freedom to express their own thoughts. Godly Play is a method of religious education developed by Jerome Berryman that has a view of children offered by the 'child liberator perspective.' In this paper I will use a case study to describe how Godly Play endeavours to reduce the power differential between adults and children and to give children agency in their spiritual development.

The Godly Play approach: religious education and spiritual development

David Hay and Rebecca Nye (2006) have developed the notion of 'relational consciousness' to identify the core of children's spirituality. Spiritual development is about becoming 'more deeply aware both of ourselves and of our intimate relationship with everything that is not ourselves' (21). 'In childhood in particular, as a sense of identity is sought for, established and deepened, questions are raised which are essentially spiritual: Who am I? Where do I belong? What is my purpose? To whom or what am I connected or responsible?' (77). Godly Play is an approach to religious education in which the goal is not to transfer information or answers but to 'learn the art of how to use the Christian language system to cope with the limits to our being and knowing' (Berryman 2009, 66). These limits have been identified as the need for meaning, what it is to be a free human being, the limit of our aloneness and the reality of death (Yalom, 1980). Godly Play provides opportunities for children to find

spiritual direction in their lives through engaging in the creative process. The role of the adult is to create a 'space for each child's spiritual quest and the working together of the group.'

He or she reaches out to all in a way that does not impose or overwhelm the children's initiative. The teacher's presence radiates respect, warmth, openness, generosity of soul, exuberance for being, curiosity, collaboration, self-discipline and a yearning to explore with the children.... In a Godly Play environment it is probably more accurate to refer to the 'teacher' as a 'guide' and 'mentor.'

(Berryman 2009, 153-154).

Central to Godly Play is 'getting the adult out of the way' by the intentional reduction of the power differential between the adults and the children, the respectful interaction of the adults with the children and the protection of the child-oriented space. The observations of the case study will be used to discuss how the adult 'gets out of the way' to allow the children to develop in their relational consciousness and in their search for meaning.

The structure of a Godly Play session

Godly Play is based on a Montessorian approach with a carefully prepared environment, equipped with two- and three-dimensional materials for telling the Christian stories. The children are welcomed at the threshold by the doorman and invited to sit in a circle with the storyteller. The storyteller fetches a story from a shelf and uses the special materials to present the story. The children are invited to wonder about the story and explore their connectedness to it. This is followed by a time when the children can choose how they would

like to respond, which may be through drawing, painting, modeling, building, writing or playing with one of the stories from around the room. The children's response may relate to other things going on in their lives – not necessarily the story that has just been told. The work is then put away, everyone returns to the circle and the feast is shared (something to eat and drink). This is the time when prayers may be said.

The case study

This case study involved a class of 26 children aged ten and eleven who were attending a Church of England school in Sheffield in the UK. Seven months previously a Godly Play space had been set up in a church with the intention that each class from the church school would participate in five or six Godly Play sessions every year, delivered by trained Godly Play teachers from the local churches. The class experienced four sessions of the Godly Play story 'Faces of Easter;' a series of stories about the life of Jesus. There was then a break of two months, followed by a final session in which the Parable of the Good Shepherd was presented. Each afternoon of Godly Play lasted about ninety minutes.

It is the final session that I will present with an in-depth analysis. Data include a transcription of the audio recording, field notes, photos of students' work and a survey in which the students were asked to reflect on their experience of Godly Play. I was the storyteller and my role was that of participant-observer. I have focused specifically on the responses of Susan and Alex (fictional names have been given) because what I was able to observe about their active participation is particularly revealing about issues of adult authority.

The threshold and building the circle

After walking up the road from the school, the children entered the church and sat in the pews to take off their coats and shoes. Each child was welcomed at the threshold to the Godly Play space by a door person who was sitting on a chair so she was at eye level to the children. She greeted each child by name and asked ‘Are you ready?’



Figure 1. The Godly Play space with the focal shelves in the centre background and the parable shelves to their left.

As each child came into the space, they were greeted with a smile or some conversation by the storyteller (the author) who was already seated on the floor in front of a 'focal shelf' (displaying key Christian images). Children chose for themselves where to sit in the circle, and when everyone was seated the storyteller welcomed them as a group, and the candle on the focal shelf was lit. The children were invited to ‘watch where I go to get this story from, so if you ever need it, you know where it is,’ as the storyteller went towards the 'parable' shelves, and brought one of six gold boxes back, placing it centrally within the circle.

The wondering before the story

The storyteller wondered what might be inside the box. ‘Maybe there is a parable inside because parables are precious like gold..... This box has got a lid and it’s a bit like that with parables. Sometimes they are difficult to get into but we can keep coming back to them.... Shall we look inside?’

A large piece of green material was taken out of the box and the children were invited to imagine what it could be. Suggestions from different children included grass, a blanket, a cloak, a rug. The storyteller pulled up the centre of the green material so it stood up from the floor and Susan suggested it could be a hill. The storyteller responded, ‘it could be a hill...yes... one that takes a long time to climb or that you go up quite quickly?’ Susan replied ‘both’. Other materials were taken out of the box. The children suggested that a circle of blue felt was water, a kite, a parachute... The black pieces became feet, socks and rocks (that could be sunk into the water), bits of path, storm clouds, a black hole (suggested by Alex), and a sad face (suggested by Susan). The brown strips were worms, paths, walls and wristbands (suggested by Alex). After each idea the storyteller played with the pieces to visualize what each child had said... putting the cloak round her shoulders, walking her fingers up the hill, placing the brown strips in a line to make a path and then wrapping a piece around the wrist.

One of the girls remarked under her breath ‘Oh... its taking ages’ and the storyteller acknowledged her frustration, saying ‘it is taking a long time... you are right... it does take a long time to get ready to enter into a parable and sometimes it feels like its taking too long but you know to really get into a parable we have to play with it first.’ This time of

wondering had taken 9 minutes. The brown strips were then arranged into a square and sheep were placed inside, ready to begin the story.



Figure 2. The parable materials set out ready to begin the story

The story

As the storyteller told the story she looked down at the materials and moved the pieces carefully. The pace was slow and the words were minimal. In the story the good shepherd ‘walks in front of the sheep to show them the way’ and leads them ‘to the good green grass’, ‘to the cool, still fresh water’ and ‘where there are dangerous places shows them how to go through.’ When one of the sheep is lost in the dangerous place (where later in the story a wolf is placed) the good shepherd searches for the sheep and ‘brings the sheep safely back to the fold.’ The children stayed focused on the story, except for one boy who tried to attract the attention of others. His behaviour was ignored and it was not disruptive to the other children.

The wondering after the story

After the story had been told the storyteller looked up at the children in the circle and asked ‘I wonder if the sheep have names?’ ... The five sheep were given names by different children...Bob, Jimmy, Spike, Dave and Fred. The storyteller then pointed to the fold and asked ‘I wonder if the sheep are happy inside this place?’ Suggestions included that the fold is too small for them and that they need freedom but also safety from the wolf. The storyteller tried to hold the different ideas of the children ‘So it sounds like some of you are wanting to give the sheep some freedom but you are still worried about this danger.’ Other ideas followed, for example: ‘you could make the fold bigger with more strips’ (so the fold was enlarged), ‘they’ve got no water in here,’ ‘we could cut some of this off and stick it in here’ (referring to the blue piece of felt) and ‘they would get sick of each other.’

One child asked if the brown strips could be moved around the danger in order for the sheep to move in the rest of the space and still be safe. This was done, which sparked off new thoughts from the children: the wolf could get hungry and go to get the sheep, if the wolf was killed then its family might get angry and kill the sheep and we could sink the danger in the water, but this might make the water go bad. Alex stated confidently ‘The danger isn’t contained and it is impossible to contain the whole of danger so we’ll never be safe.’ One child imagined that bombs could be placed around the dangerous place and, if a sheep happened to step on a bomb, it was eaten by people.

It was then suggested that we could split the place in half, so the storyteller rearranged the pieces as in the photo below.



Figure 3. The materials of the parable rearranged during the wondering after the story

The storyteller asked ‘I wonder what this whole place could really be... in life?’ to which Alex responded ‘It could be a human seeing that as all humans have a good side but they also have a dark side. Humans have a good and a dark side’ ‘Oh?’ (storyteller)... pause... ‘anger and stuff.’ (Alex)

Other ideas included: ‘Water can be dangerous too’

‘it could be like there’s some bad patches in life and then there’s war but then it’s OK with the grass.’

‘if... eh... you put... eh.. the wolf with the sheep they could learn to be happy together.’

‘earth... planet earth.’ (Alex)

‘like sometimes you are on the wall and you are wobbling and it depends which way you go... which way you fall.’ (Susan)

‘I’ve just had an idea like the fence could be like a path the path of life like if you could turn to the bad side and then.. or turn to the good side.’

The storyteller again used the materials from the story to illustrate what the children were saying. She used verbal responses like ‘Mmmmmm,’ ‘that’s interesting,’ ‘so are you saying

that.....?’ ‘it sounds like you think that...’ ‘Ahh right..’ ‘so now we could....’ She sometimes repeated what the children had said to ensure that all the children could hear.

During this time of wondering two of the boys (one of whom had tried to seek attention during the story) were chatting quietly to each other whilst others were speaking. When this happened a second time the storyteller said to them ‘We need to listen to each other.’ The boys responded by stopping their chatting.

The Response Time

The story materials were slowly put away and the gold box returned to the shelf. The children were then told that they now had time to carry on wondering in whichever way they would like. As this was the fifth week of Godly Play they were familiar with the room and where to find the response materials (paints, pens, crayons, different paper, fabric, wool, scrap wood, clay and wooden pieces for construction). They also had the option of playing with one of the stories from around the room or continuing with any of the work that they had been doing last time. The storyteller looked at each child in turn and asked if they knew what work they wanted to do. Each child got up to collect what she needed to do her work. Within a short time all the children were actively engaged in their chosen work and remained so for the next twenty five minutes. The storyteller remained sat on the floor and the door person remained at the edge of the space, available if any of the children needed help. The children used a variety of ways to play and express themselves. Some chose to find a space to work alone, some sat in small circles and chatted as they worked on their individual responses, and some worked together.

One girl chose, for the third week in succession, to play with the Parable of the Great Pearl. On the first week she had asked the storyteller to present the story to her and on the second week, after she had retold the story in a similar way to how it had been demonstrated by the storyteller, she had been prompted by the storyteller to wonder what might happen next in the story. She had responded by asking the storyteller to tell her the ‘answer’. The storyteller had explained that there is no right answer and that it was *her* story so she could choose what happened next. After realizing that the storyteller was not going to give ‘the answer,’ the girl had searched for pieces from other stories on the shelves that helped her to construct her own ending. She had told the storyteller that ‘the merchant is going to give his pearl to the poor people... but they might not want him to.’ The role of the storyteller was to tell the parable but then to allow the girl to wonder about the story herself (as it always is in Godly Play). In this way the girl was empowered to make her own meaning (which is interestingly infused with issues of relationship and authority). It was important that the girl had been allowed agency in her choice of work. If she was only allowed to play with the story that had been presented to the class that day, then she could not have continued coming back to the Parable of the Great Pearl to discover its meaning for her.

A couple of girls made ‘Do not enter’ signs for their rooms – one of them telling the storyteller ‘I don’t think it’s fair because *I* have to knock but *they* (parents) don’t knock when they come into *my* room.’ By not restricting the children to make something ‘about the story’ the girls could choose to work on what was important to them (and their response is about adult authority). It is possible that the idea of the personal space of a bedroom came from the image of the sheepfold in the Parable of the Good Shepherd.

Alex worked together with two other boys to build a track down which they rolled a ball.

This play was possibly linked to the metaphor of the path in the wondering after the story.



Figure 4. Alex rolling a ball down a track

Susan chose to bring pens and paper and to sit next to the storyteller. She drew purposefully for eleven minutes and then wanted to talk about her picture.

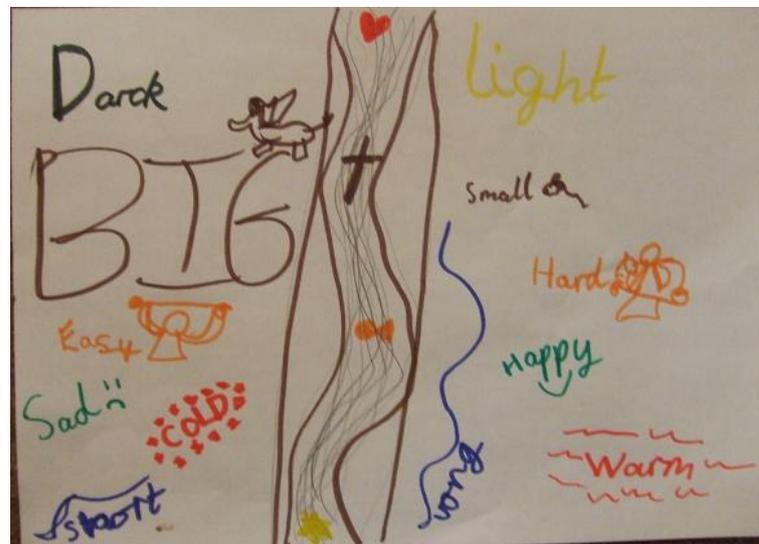


Figure 5. Susan's picture of the dark and the light side separated by a wall and a path

Susan explained that her picture was of a wall with a path along it separating the dark side and the light side; that easy and short ways are on the dark side, but hard things and long

paths are on the light side. She had chosen to put small on the light side ‘because I am small’ She seemed to be trying to articulate that, although we can choose between the light and the dark, both sides are linked and are inevitable in our lives. The star of David, the fish, the cross and the heart were later added onto the wall as symbols of faith, hope, trust and love ‘that help us in our lives.’ Susan said that her thoughts are hard to put into words and described her work as philosophy. She turned the page over and asked me to spell ‘Philosophy’ so she could write it in big letters on the back.

Susan then turned to look behind her at the story materials on the focal shelf that she had been playing with in the session nearly two months previously. This wasn’t a story that had been presented to the class but the materials had caught her attention and she had chosen to play with them. She had arranged the people in a circle around the table on which she had placed the symbols of the bread and the wine. The priest figure had been laid under the table. Susan had taken the figures for the Christ child and the risen Christ from the story of the Holy family (which had been presented in the first session) and had placed them at either end of the table. She had then done a pencil drawing of the arrangement (in which all the people were holding hands) before reconfiguring the figures in a line. Susan had been very careful to make sure the figures were placed in age order and had pointed out to me that although the boy in the wheelchair is low down he is actually older than others who are higher than him. Susan had told me that the figure of the priest was lying down ‘because the people don’t want him to get in the way. They want to get the bread and the wine straight from Jesus.’ The arrangements and the pencil drawing from the previous session can be seen in the photos below.



Figures 6 and 7. Susan's arrangements of the people, the priest, the bread and the wine and the figures of the Christ child and the risen Christ.



Figure 8. Susan's pencil drawing of her arrangement of the people in a circle with the priest under the table.

In this final session Susan chose to take the materials from the shelf in order to recall how she had played with them two months previously. This is how she expressed herself:

'...*this* is about life (pointing to the wall in her picture) and....they (pointing to the people) are all about life which is one link' (between her work this week and in previous sessions).

The storyteller remembered out loud how Susan had arranged the people; ‘you had people all round in the circle and you had Jesus, didn’t you, either side?’ ‘and them on the table’ (said Susan, pointing to the bread and the wine) ‘...the *main* message from that was the people of the world they are not given their life, the bread and the wine, they’re not given their life by this figure that I was using (pointing to the priest) they are given it straight from them...Jesus...but then in the other one they were receiving it. They were lining up to receive it, but in the circle everybody was equal which is the same as it was in the line but you’ve showed less of that message ..this one you’ve got life because they are giving you the life by having by giving you this the food and the water and them...and sometimes you don’t.. like when you stay in the desert you don’t actually need the food and the water you need the food and the water from them not like.. you need it from them as well as physical... they will give you both if you listen to them.’

The meaning making of Susan demonstrated a deep awareness of her relationships with others, with a deep inner self and with God. In the discussion that follows this case study I will explain the ways that the storyteller ‘got out of the way’ to create an environment that allowed Susan to have agency in her spiritual development.

It is interesting that the priest figure who was placed ‘out of the way’ was another example of a child choosing to explore authority issues. Might it be that the children felt free to engage with these matters because the power differential between the adults and the children in the room had been reduced?

The feast

After 25 minutes the children were asked to clear up their work and gather back in the circle. The candle was brought into the centre of the circle and a tray of grapes was passed round. Each child took a bunch and held it in their hands. They were told that while they waited they might want to carry on thinking about what they had just been doing or about something in the story or they might want to think about something they were thankful for – maybe for good food to eat and for the people who have grown the grapes and brought them to us. The period of silence whilst the grapes were given out lasted for two minutes. There was an opportunity for any child to say anything out loud at the end but silence was kept (with giggling from some of the girls). Whilst the children ate the grapes the storyteller discussed with the children how she was hoping to write up what had happened in the sessions so that the report could help others who might find it helpful to know how Godly Play is being used in schools. The children then left the circle and the door person said goodbye to each one as they went back out through the threshold.

The ways the adult gets out of the way

In Godly Play the role of the adult is to model how to use the Christian language system to make connections with their lives and to create meaning. To this end the adult has control over decisions such as the choice of story, how the story is told, the stories and response materials that are available in the room, the structure of the session and the limits of acceptable behaviour. At the same time the adult attempts to get out of the way to allow the child to have agency in their spiritual development.

I will describe four essential ways in which the power differential between adults and children is reduced in a Godly Play session:

- creating community
- giving children the tools to enter into the story
- providing the opportunity for different ways of knowing
- allowing children to make authentic meaning for themselves.

Creating community

The community of children is central to Godly Play. This is also one of the tenets of engaged pedagogy practised by bell hooks (1994) in which everyone's presence is valued. Community in Godly Play is based on the circle. In the Godly Play session the creation of the circle begins when the door person and the storyteller welcome each individual child through the threshold and into the circle. The circle reduces the differential in power between the adults and the children: the storyteller is sat in the circle with the children and remains seated, and therefore physically low throughout the session.

The door person remains outside the circle in order not to 'over adult' the space. The gold box is placed in the centre of the circle which helps teach that 'we all come equally to the parable to discover what it means for our lives' (Berryman 1991, 30). During the wondering time the storyteller demonstrates by example the way to listen and to value others. The circle promotes eye contact, gives a sense of belonging, encourages democracy and the understanding that everyone is on a journey. In the Feast, the final stage of the Godly Play

process, the sharing of food and a chance to talk together is an important part of building the community. When children feel valued they are empowered to have agency in their learning. This was reflected in the engagement of the children during the entire session.

In a survey in which the children were asked to reflect on their experience of Godly Play, Susan wrote that she liked the time of wondering ‘because you could say what you thought and think about what other (sic) people thought.’ In exploring ‘the language of education’ Jerome Bruner recognises that most learning is a communal activity. ‘It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture.’ The invitation to wonder in the circle means the pupil becomes a ‘party to the negotiatory process’ and ‘an agent of knowledge making as well as a recipient of knowledge transmission’ (Bruner 1986, 127).

Giving children the tools to enter into the story

Godly Play uses the narrative mode to engage the children, allowing them to be active participants in entering the story and in choosing what the story means to them. Ann Trousdale (2004) draws on the work of Bakhtin (1981), Jerome Bruner (1986), and Harold Rosen (1986) to argue that the narrative mode nurtures children’s spiritual growth because it has inner persuasiveness rather than being authoritative, as with the paradigmatic mode. Her experience (and mine) is that children’s interpretations of stories are very likely to be quite different from those of adults: ‘children’s developmental levels affect their response, as do their own unique life experiences, inner needs, preoccupations and attitudes’ (Trousdale, 2004).

The goal of the storytelling is to engage wonder, the creative process, and the awareness of our existential limits as human beings in both the speaker and the listener. This is a co-operative venture between the children and the adult teachers. When the teacher truly is wondering the children sense wonder in the air. It manifests itself in the playfulness present in the room. Permission and reinforcement are present to reinforce it. When the teacher enters religious language with wonder he or she shows the children by example how to open up the creative process (Berryman 1991, 62).

The role of play and wonder in spiritual formation has been discussed by Chuck Melchert and Anabel Proffitt (1998). They cite Diane Hymans who describes ‘what-if’ play for creating learning spaces that allow ‘the freedom to look at the world from a variety of points of view in a safe environment’ (Hymans 1996).

Godly Play uses an oral method of communication because this is ‘best for opening up the creative process and playing with ideas’ (Berryman 1991, 71). It also uses a sensori-motor method because this gives children the tools to play with the story. The storytelling method draws the children into the story and allows space for the children to use their imagination. During the wondering the storyteller uses the materials to translate what the children are saying into a visual form, so that the circle of children can play and work with the ideas. This also models how the children can enter into the story for themselves because, as the storyteller explained to the frustrated girl in the circle, ‘to really enter into a parable we have to play with it.’ The wondering process after the story invites the children to generate meaning by connecting their life experience with the story.

It is interesting how much of Susan's picture was developed from the play and the meaning making that she had done with the story during the wondering time in the circle. The short and long paths referred to different journeys up a hill (she had imagined that the green cloth could be a hill). She had seen a sad face in the black pieces and had already imagined wobbling on the wall and the possibility of falling onto either side. The play with the people and the priest was made possible by having the story materials available in the room and then allowing her time to do her own exploring and theologizing in a sensorimotor way.

Providing the opportunity for different ways of knowing

The Godly Play space is an 'open' classroom in which the stories and response materials are accessible to the children. The different intelligences identified by Howard Gardner (1993) are respected in Godly Play by providing a wide variety of response materials to the children. The approach in schools tends to be dominated by the linguistic and logical-mathematical but other ways of knowing are more appropriate in spiritual education. Guy Claxton (1997) distinguishes between 'd-mode' thinking – which relies on reason and logic and deliberate conscious thinking and 'the slow ways of knowing' which include qualities such as insight, intuition and wisdom. Tony Eade (2003) argues that the curriculum needs to include 'space and reflection and creative, imaginative activity' to allow for slow ways of knowing which give opportunity for the unconscious to work and enable learning which is holistic and which is necessary in the search for meaning and identity.

In a Godly Play session the children are given the opportunity to use the whole of themselves - body, mind and spirit. The knowing of the body by the sense and the knowing of the spirit by contemplation are valued as highly as knowing of the mind in Godly Play and Berryman argues that we must respect spirituality's non verbal nature (Berryman 2012). Alex's responses reveal these aspects of spirituality. For example he chose to 'know' through building a path and rolling a ball down it. In the wondering part of a previous Godly Play session it is noteworthy that Alex chose the painting of the baptism of Jesus as the one he liked best, saying 'I liked when he was getting baptised... when I feel the water it makes me feel better so I understand it.' In Godly Play sensorial experiences are available such as using water in the Baptism story and sand for the desert stories. The lighting of the candle and the silence that was kept before the feast were opportunities for children to know through silence and contemplation.

Donald Winnicott writes that 'it is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality. It is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self' (Winnicott 1980, 63). The criteria of play identified by Catherine Garvey (1990) are that play is pleasurable, is done for itself, is voluntary, involves deep concentration and has links to the creative process. By not 'getting in the way' through demanding a product, assessing, praising or manipulating (which are characteristic of a teacher-centred approach to learning) the adult can provide a space in which the child is allowed to play and so allow the creative process to take place.

The work of Susan and Alex was significant for them because *they* had chosen which materials to work with and how to play with them. There was time for the children to have their own personal space which was not intruded upon by an adult authority figure. Children

instigated interaction with the adults, not vice versa. So Susan and a few others chose to sit near the storyteller and, at the times of their choice, to interact with storyteller. Children could also choose whether or not to sit with others or to work with others. They were able to create small learning communities with their peers if they so wished.

Allowing children to make authentic meaning for themselves

It is wise to avoid putting children into the position of having to choose between what they think and feel about a lesson versus what the teacher tells them to think and feel about it. That puts the children in a double bind. They either have to give up their own authentic response or risk displeasing the adult who is promoting a particular way to think and feel about it.

(Berryman 2009, 44)

Susan was able to enter into the creative process to discover meaning by first joining in with the playful exploration of the children in the circle. The children initiated the ideas and the storyteller demonstrated that she valued the thoughts by comments like ‘Mmmmmm’ ‘that’s interesting’ ‘Ahhh!’ The storyteller responded to the words and insights of the children without making value judgments but she did facilitate the wondering so the children were encouraged to use their imaginations and to make meaning. As Susan shared her thoughts about what her picture meant and as she reflected on the work she had done in the previous sessions the role of the adult was to really listen and to allow the child to be at the centre of the theological and philosophical reflection. In the survey Susan wrote that she liked the time of response ‘because you could pice your thouths to-gether (sic).’

Susan's meaning making throughout the five sessions demonstrated a deep awareness of her relational consciousness. Themes included the choices between light and dark, the inevitability of both light and dark, the religious ideas of faith, trust, hope and love, issues of equality (in the circle), authority (the priest under the table) and of justice (being careful to place the boy in the wheelchair in order of age not height) and the need for spiritual as well as physical nourishment (the bread and water in the desert). She identified her playful response as 'philosophy' and as about life and how you live. Susan tended to use more 'religious' ideas (she attends church with her family) whereas this was not explicit in the responses of some of the other children, for example Alex's insights about the impossibility of containing danger and the good and dark sides of humans. This is significant in the argument that Godly Play enables the adult to affirm and draw forth the spiritual insights of the children, as opposed to indoctrinating children into what the adult thinks or feels. In fact Godly Play goes further than allowing children to make meaning for *themselves*: the storyteller certainly received *from* the school children through their verbal and non verbal responses. In such a co-operative venture children are the 'guides and teachers' of adults as well as their 'students and dependents' (Devries 2001, 172).

Can the school teacher 'get out of the way'?

The Godly Play sessions that I have described were not held within the school environment and were lead by adults who were not part of the school staff. After observing the positive response of his pupils to Godly Play, a teacher at the school tried to lead a Godly Play session in his classroom. He found that the children still related to him as the 'expert' with the

‘answers’ and as such his perceived authority was a block to the children figuring things out for themselves. I have argued that a balance between the power of the teacher and the autonomy of the child is necessary for promoting pupils’ spiritual development. Does our education system, dominated as it is by the teacher centred approach to learning and with all its implicit adult power structures, actually enable this? In such a climate, is it possible for the school teacher to 'get out of the way'?

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