

Oblimon

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ISSUE 1

# Soul to Soul

*A journal for practitioners and researchers  
interested in all aspects of children's spirituality*

## Editorial: Liesbeth Vroemen



*Soul to Soul* is a journal about children and spirituality. It offers a space to researchers and practitioners to explore different aspects of children's spirituality, share ideas and learn from each other. And it is brand new!

We, the team working on this first issue, met at various conferences organised by the International Association for

Children's Spirituality. Memorable events from which we returned full of new ideas and inspiration. One of the things that made these conferences so special was the lively and open exchange of ideas between people with very different professional and personal backgrounds. The academic world meeting the worlds of teachers, nurses, gardeners, artists...with mutual respect, critical questions and curiosity.

For many years, the IACS also was involved with the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, a journal with research papers, scholarly articles, book reviews and conference reports. An equally important part of the organization's work, because a lot of interesting research is taking place, looking at children's spirituality from many different angles. Unfortunately, little is known about this among practitioners, who rarely have access to journals like the IJCS, or if they do, find them far too academic.

"Wouldn't it be good," we said to each other, "if there was a journal that bridged this gap?" So with that aim of 'building a bridge' in mind, we got together and started working on *Soul to Soul*. You are now reading the pilot version. *Soul to Soul* will be issued twice a year and will contain articles about 'good practice', interviews with researchers about their work, book reviews, contributions from children, announcements and reports. If you would be interested in contributing to *Soul to Soul* please get in touch with us. We will be looking for people sharing stories about their work, writing book reviews, or simply sending us suggestions. We would love to double the size of issue 2!

It has been a joy working on *Soul to Soul*. We hope you will enjoy reading it and we would love to hear what you think. You will find some questions on the last page and it will be really helpful if many readers send us their feedback. A first issue is a learning experience for the editors and we need your help with that!

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## Meet the Team

### Liesbeth Vroemen

Liesbeth is an independent trainer, writer and consultant from the Netherlands. After studying feminist theology and religious education at the Nijmegen University, she has been a teacher, translator, and youth worker. Her current work is with primary schools. As a founder member of Oblimon, a collective of trainers, she offers workshops and courses on children's spirituality, world religions, and philosophy for children. She also works with schools that are trying to strengthen their collective identity and reconnect with their roots. Liesbeth is co-editor of *Hemel en Aarde* a magazine for primary schools on spirituality and religious education.

### Deborah Schein

Deb has been an early childhood educator since 1972; receiving her PhD in 2012 with a focus on spiritual development. She currently teaches at Champlain College and provides professional development for Minneapolis educators. She has written two books on spirituality and continues to research the relationship between spiritual development, nature, play, peace, and well-being. Deb is Married to Jeffrey Schein; and has three grown children; and three grandchildren.

### Katherine Carpenter

Katherine is a qualified Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in the United Kingdom who specialises in working with children aged 5-18 years. Katherine has taught in both primary and secondary mainstream education as well as working in a 1:1 capacity with children who are unable to attend school due to illness, permanent school exclusion or because they are awaiting a specialist placement. Katherine has conducted and continues to initiate various research projects regarding children's spiritual development and has particular interests in exploring pupils' voices and experiences, Hikikomori (social withdrawal) and children coping with trauma and/or a special educational need.

### Steve Younger

Steve is a Baptist Church minister in Scotland, serving as Pastor of High Blantyre Baptist Church since 1986. He received his PhD in 2018, exploring spiritual development within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. He has been a school chaplain since 1982 with experience of spiritual development for pupils at all levels of Scottish School Education. He is the Chaplaincy Project Coordinator for 'Christian Values in Education (Scotland)' and lectures at the Scottish Baptist College on Pastoral Care, Creative Homiletics, and Education Chaplaincy.

### Rosanne de Vries

Rosanne is a third-grade teacher in a Catholic primary school in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. During and after finishing the study of religion and policy at the Radboud University Nijmegen, she became a member of Oblimon. As an educational counsellor, she guides schools and teachers on children's spiritual development, identity and philosophy. Rosanne guides teachers in exploring their life-stories, to find the values that are important in their pedagogical, spiritual and educational vision.

**Interview:**  
*Katherine  
Carpenter*



# Children

**Interviewee:**  
*Kate  
Adams*



# n's spiritual dreams

*Dreams in sleep which children believed  
had a divine connection*



Kate Adams is Professor of Education and Childhood at the University of Winchester, UK. She is a long-standing, active member of IACS, has served as both Vice-Chair and Co-Chair and hosted the International Association of Children's Spirituality international conference in Lincoln in 2016. She has combined practitioner experience as a teacher with an academic career. With 20 years' experience of researching and publishing in the field, she is committed to understanding children's spirituality and experiences from their perspectives to help their spiritual voices be heard.

#### **How did you get started with your research?**

Sometimes, what seems to be the smallest thing can have the most profound effect on your life. It was so small, I almost missed it. I was working as a primary school teacher and during a coffee break my colleague made a passing reference to a scheme run by Oxford University for teachers to undertake a piece of research in Religious Education. I requested details out of interest – those were the days before the internet! Before I knew it, I had been successful. My unintended career in research had started. That small study then led to an offer of a PhD scholarship at the University of Glasgow, to delve further into children's spirituality. I gave up my teaching job to pursue this new path and as much as I loved teaching children, I have never looked back.

#### **What did you research in those early days?**

Children's spiritual dreams – dreams in sleep which children believed had a divine connection. I didn't interpret or assign any meaning to their dreams, but most of the children felt that there was a message in it for them. They seemed to have a natural instinct to find meaning in their experience, irrespective of their religious or non religious backgrounds.

#### **That is quite an unusual topic.**

##### **How did you choose it?**

I like to think the topic chose me! I was deeply inspired by a boy, Mark, whom I taught. We often talked about children's ideas and beliefs about the existence or non-existence of God in our Religious Education lessons. I had done this for around 8 years but Mark said something I had never heard a child say before:



*"I know God exists. I talk to Him in my dreams"*

Dreaming connected with me on a deeper level too. It took me back to my own childhood, when I developed a particular fascination for dreaming. But it also has a very long history in many religions and spiritual beliefs around the world, as a way of humans and the divine connecting. I wondered how common this was in childhood, and what their dreams might be about.

### **What did you learn from this and later research?**

So much... it is hard to condense it into a short interview. I've learnt much about children. Unlike many adults, I never doubted young people's ability to experience or express the spiritual, but the range of experiences is so wide. And much more common than most think. Many young children say they remember past lives; feel, see or hear the presence of people or animals, some of whom have died, others they do not know; see angels; connect with the divine in different ways... but often they don't share these experiences for fear of being disbelieved or ridiculed.

I've also learnt much about adults. So many – parents, teachers – are scared of talking about spirituality. Children sense this and many don't have anyone to turn to so they keep it to themselves. Not all children want to share, of course, but for those who do it can be a very isolating experience. I remember Sophie, who used to see a guardian angel at the end of her bed. I asked if she had told anyone. She replied:

*"I told my Mum and Dad but they didn't believe me.  
So I don't tell them anymore."*

### **How do you think your research has impacted the lives of children?**

For many children the opportunity to tell me about their experience was invaluable because either they hadn't told anyone before, or worse still, like Sophie, they had told someone and had been laughed at or disbelieved. That is heartbreaking to hear. All they want is to have their spiritual voices heard. Fortunately, in some cases my work has helped children find someone else in their lives to talk with. I always need parental consent before approaching a child for their permission. It opened some parents' eyes to the fact that their own children were interested in such topics, never mind actually having these experiences! And I think it has impacted on some teachers too. I've interviewed in lots of schools and many teachers have been surprised at how profound some of these experiences have been. And how common they were. It has given some confidence to start these conversations in the classroom. Often, after talks, adults come up to me and say they now realise that they haven't been listening as carefully as they could have to their own children, grandchildren or nieces and nephews. They hadn't realised that they should have paid more attention. I know they returned

home with a different intention which will have benefitted not only the children in their lives, but also strengthened the trust between them.

### **I wonder why there isn't more research into children's spirituality?**

Given the interest in spirituality in wider society, it seems surprising to me that the majority of the research in the area is with adults. But that seems to be a trend in many fields. I think another key difficulty relates to the breadth and diversity of the term; it means so many different things to so many different people. That presents difficulties for academics and practitioners alike. But I don't think a widely shared definition is possible. I prefer to describe it rather than define it.

### **Can you say a little more about the problem of definition for practitioners?**

Absolutely. I've worked with a lot of teachers. In England, we have spiritual development on the curriculum but many teachers struggle with it. They say, 'can you define it for us? If we know what it is, we can deliver' Whilst there are definitions to help teachers, all are inevitably problematic. I say, 'let's embrace the fact that we can't define it. It is one of the few areas of the curriculum that cannot and should not be pinned down into a tick box. Let's see that as exciting, as valuable, as opening doors for creativity, not as an obstacle.' Let children lead, they will take you to places you could not imagine. Even school inspectors could be impressed.

### **What is the most poignant thing a child has said to you during your research?**

There's a saying that you remember a person not so much for what they do for you, but how they make you feel. I was really touched by an 8 year-old boy, Paul, who I spoke to in my very first piece of research. Paul recounted his dream in which he was crying as he floated up to heaven. He saw God sitting on a cloud who said to him, "don't worry, everything will be alright." The dream took place during a turbulent family time. Paul said the dream made him feel better, which was reassuring to know. But when I asked if he had ever shared his dream with anyone, he said,  
*"No. Only my cat. My cat never laughs at me or argues back."*

I'm glad for Paul that he had his beloved cat, but knowing that he didn't feel he could talk to anyone broke my heart. I'm honoured to have been the first adult he talked to about his dream and I hoped it helped him, despite the fleeting nature of our meeting. Paul is a perfect reminder of how vital it is that we offer a listening ear to children who seek it. Getting that message to wider audiences is a challenge. But it is one that IACS and other like-minded individuals can work on together as a global community.

**Book  
Review:**  
*Deborah  
Schein*



*Th*

# Wonder

*the extraordinary power of an Ordinary Experience*

*Vlad Petre Glăveanu*



# Wonder - The Extraordinary Power of an Ordinary Experience

Vlad Petre Glăveanu

For me, this book on wonder seems to have emerged from another recent book written by Glăveanu titled: *Mobilities and Human Possibility*.

According to Glăveanu, mobility (flexibility and movement) leads to physical, social, and symbolic possibilities and wanderings which eventually lead to human wondering. Throughout the book on wonder, the idea of possibilities is often linked to wonder. As an early childhood educator, this connection makes perfect sense and parallels Glăveanu's understanding that the human mind needs to value an openness for inspiration, possibilities, and most importantly - wonder. This is just one of the values of wonder shared within this book.

Who is Glăveanu? He is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Psychology and Professional Counseling at Webster University, Geneva. He has degrees in Psychology and Social and Cultural Psychology from the University of Bucharest and the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Glăveanu seems to be a big picture thinker who enjoys deep, open-ended questions and dialogue. One of the first question he asks is - what is wonder? To answer this question, he looks at the origin of the word 'wonder' by going back to Greek and Latin roots. But the definition for wonder that is threaded most throughout the book is the German word *wunde* or wound. This definition implies a negative dimension to the word wonder of being wonderstruck or full of bewilderment or confusion.

Most of what Glăveanu focuses on within this book is not wonderstruck but rather the many ways in which wonder enhances and benefits our lives. Something so needed today. He also shares a significant assumption about our human ability to fully wonder. He believes that young children do not yet fully wonder.

I believe this to be untrue as I view young children to be full of natural wonder, especially when nurtured

spiritually. I therefore began reading this book with a sense of unease and hesitation. These feelings were quickly laid to rest as Glăveanu's book on wonder unfolded in all its complexity, history, and interesting perspectives.

In Chapter 2, Glăveanu explores the differences between *wondering at* and *wondering about* with a lens on learning. Briefly, he suggests that wondering at requires the use of materials, is capable of leading to curiosity, is often full of emotion, and in the end, leaves no guarantee that learning has occurred. *Wondering about*, he says lacks sparks of motivation to feed a student's drive to interact and can live within a passive place.



Later in Chapter 9, Glăveanu picks up on this educational theme as he talks about how we sometimes need to re-learn how to wonder. He claims that when we are fully engaged in wondering, we are more capable of "moving beyond current fixations, certainties, standardizations, and outcomes to "a more openness, diversity, and process of shared wondering."

In Chapter 4, Glăveanu writes about accidental wonder as reflected in Alexander Fleming's accidental discovery of penicillin. From my perspective, young children accidentally fall into wonder every day because most things

are new to them. Think of infants discovering their own hands or a toddler picking their first flower.

Chapter 5 discusses how to make the familiar unfamiliar, hence the title of the book; so that there is new awe and wonder to be discovered every day. The chapter begins with a story about an out-of-the-box artist, Judith Scott who creates art out of objects. Using objects in this way reminds me of loose parts; where children are invited to explore objects not for the sake of the object itself but for what the child might think to do with the object. In fact, loose parts reflect how Glăveanu's Dynamic Model of Wonder represents the integration of excitement, awareness, and exploration needed for

experiences for wonder to emerge.

The chapter also introduces the concept of meta-position - the point at which new ideas become visible which may very well be where wondering begins.

Glăveanu continues sharing thoughts about playfulness which adds dimensions of joyfulness, spontaneity, and imagination to one's play and one's wonder. For me these ideas and words are like sparks of spirituality scattered on the page.

In the end, I walked away from this book with a better understanding of the intricacies of wonder. I also read about the differences between "wondering at" versus "wondering about"; and how wonder can affect how we think about and treat others such as strangers and refugees. I read about how wonder can help

lead to a better world through acceptance and kindness.

Most importantly, I saw how wonder might play an important role in nurturing a young child, as well as any age person's spirituality by opening us all up to the many extraordinary possibilities that exist for us every day

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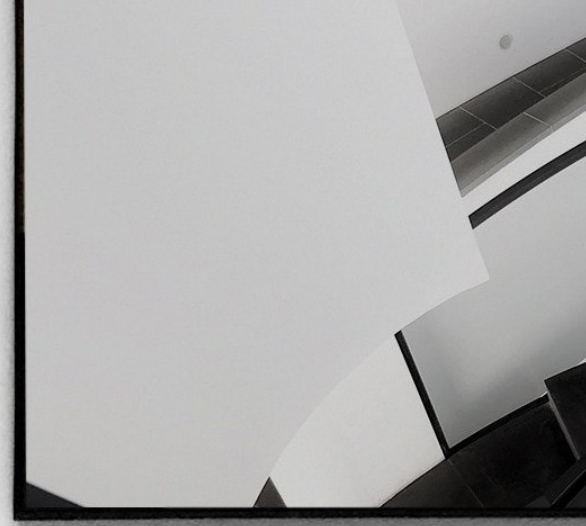
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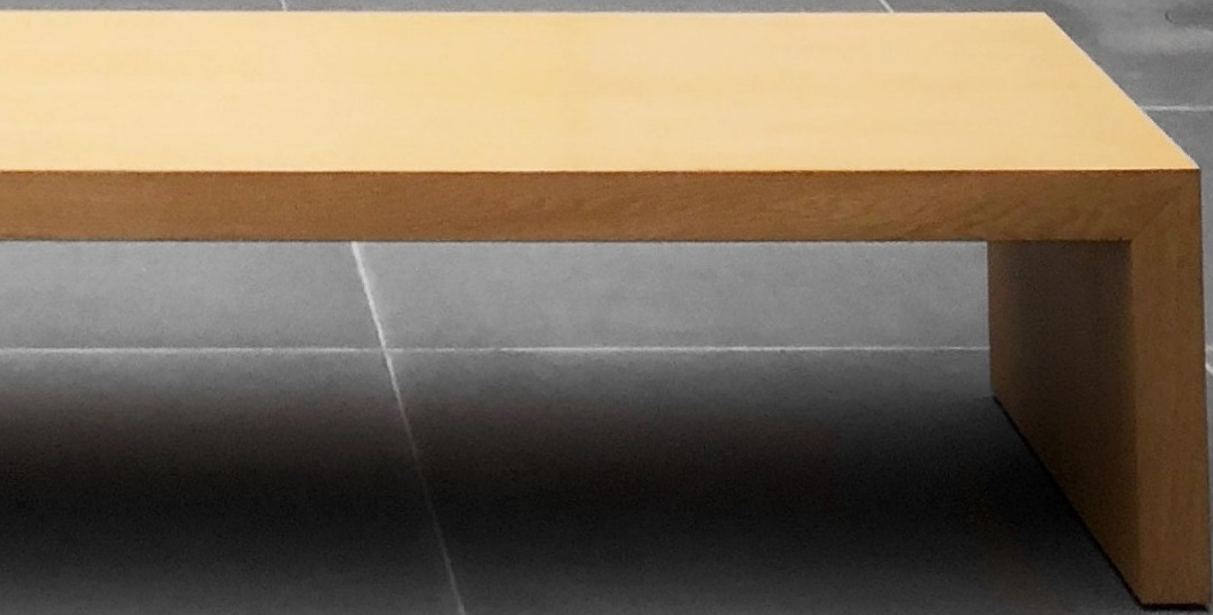


**Feature:**  
Liesbeth  
Vroemen



# Conversations v

*Children, philo*



# with a painting

*sophy and art*





Philosophy for Children is popular all over the world. In the past few decades, a variety of methods and tools have been developed and used in classrooms and youth work, often combining philosophical conversations with creative activities such as drama, painting and writing poetry. Many people who are interested in children's spirituality see philosophy for children as an important and inspiring way of exploring children's ideas and inner worlds. In my own work I have had many philosophical conversations with groups of children, and the last 15 years I have been training teachers and artists to do the same. Increasingly, I am focussing on a combination of philosophical dialogue and looking at art. I discovered that this combination often leads to conversations that I would like to call 'spiritual'. This, in turn, has changed the way I prepare my lessons and training sessions. 'Conversations with a painting' have become a deliberate attempt to make space for and support children's spirituality.

*'This is a scary place. I really don't want to be here'.*

A group of children, most of them aged 10, are looking at the painting 'Circus with Queen of Hearts' by Dutch artist Rinke Nijburg. They are fascinated, but also a little worried. They see or feel a lot of sadness, danger and doom. Most children say that the place that is pictured looks threatening. When they try to put a finger on that, they realise that they all see different things. And they are beginning to wonder: is the atmosphere in the place, in the painting, or in me?

Looking at art together and then talking about it, using the methods of philosophy for children: that can be a high impact activity. When looking at a work of art, children may experience joy, awe, confusion, or fascination. They see beauty, they think it is strange, they are touched

or spooked. These experiences are a 'soulful' starting point for a philosophical dialogue. Philosophy for children has many faces, but it is always important to analyse, reason, and question each other's thoughts and reasoning. Art brings in something different. It speaks to the imagination, to the heart, makes you aware of your intuitions and it also seems to be able to open the heart to other people's stories.

The basic structure of our sessions is simple. We sit around a sculpture or painting and take our time to look at it and, if that is allowed, touch it. Then we ask some questions that help the children to see more and become more aware of what is happening when they look. Sometimes we just ask them to say aloud what it is they see, or how it makes them feel. But also: is there something that your eyes keep wanting to back to? Or: is there something that seems to move or make a sound? Children open each other's eyes for new things and the image becomes ever more rich.

A next phase in the conversation begins when the facilitator starts to ask questions that go beyond what you see and feel. It is important now to have some questions ready that surprise and challenge the group and to which there clearly is no 'right answer'. Finding these questions often is quite a struggle for the facilitator, but a good question sounds as if it came to you just like that, it was in the air. And it leads the group to a philosophical question that feels important to them.

I have used the painting 'Circus with queen of hearts' several times in

training courses for primary school teachers. I always asked them to use it in their own classroom. We prepared this together, making a 'long-list' of possible questions. Teachers then made a shortlist for their own group. After looking at the painting with their children (aged between 8 and 12), and talking about what they saw, the teachers then had to decide on the spot which question to start with. In one of the groups, the children saw lots of things that reminded



them of roads and choices. They had a long conversation about paths in life and often having to decide between right or wrong, wise or not so wise. And asked themselves where this wisdom came from. In another group many children saw a scary tent that was really part of a spaceship. They also saw bullet holes and an alien. The teacher asked what made the girl 'alien'. Children said she clearly was not human, and ended up talking about what makes a human 'human', and alive.

In yet another group the teacher asked what made this place 'scary' and then what in general makes a place scary. Children said that it can be the impression that it is deserted, signs that something bad has happened here, or things that look dangerous. They realised that they saw and felt different things and that it had a lot to do with their own memories. And so they arrived at the question: do places 'have' an atmosphere, or is it all within yourself?



In one group the starting question was: 'What might be inside the tent, and would you go inside to find out?' The children then spoke about how things you don't know can be frightening, but also attractive. And in one group the children were really fascinated by 'the weird girl'. Until one of them said:

*'I am that girl'.*

She felt the other children treated her differently because she had a disability, and the group listened to her story and talked about what it is like when others call you 'strange'.

It happens surprisingly often that children spontaneously say: "I am..." referring to something in a painting. But we also ask questions that invite the children to make that connection with a work of art. Where do you see yourself in this painting? Where would you like to go? To whom or what would you like to say something? What draws you?

In the symbolic language of a painting, children see themselves, their own stories and the things that are going on in their inner world. And in their conversations about it, we encourage them to stay within that world of symbolic thinking. We try not to move too quickly to questions like 'but what does it mean?', or 'what is the artist trying to say?', because that usually makes the 'head', the rational thinking, take over. We want to let children connect with their own inner processes and wisdom, which is to a large part pre-verbal. And we want them to experience how these inner processes can benefit from the inner wisdom of the artist and that of the other children.

Connecting with your inner, pre-verbal wisdom, is that different from 'normal' philosophy for children? Yes and no. One can ask what 'normal' means. In recent years we have seen so many different approaches and methods that it has become difficult to identify common 'rules' of philosophy for children. Still there are some things that to me are characteristic for a spiritual approach and seem unusual for many practitioners of philosophy for children. First of all I try to start with

creating stillness, a meditative way of looking at a work of art. I often use a singing bowl or a breathing exercise to help the children relax and focus. Sometimes I ask them to put their hands over their ears or in front of their navel. Or I may ask them to look for a while and then close their eyes.

Of course the choice of a work of art matters, too. I often choose a work that is rich in symbolism that does not require a lot of knowledge. Also a painting or sculpture that clearly 'talks about' existential or spiritual themes works well (life, death, joy, sadness, loneliness, home, violence, quest). And I often simply choose something because I expect it will touch the children's hearts – which is a rather intuitive process that I cannot always justify. Then there is the type of questions we ask. I often opt for questions about associations and imagination. What does this house remind you of? Who might live there? If that flower had a voice, what would it sound like?

Philosophy for children often puts a lot of weight on critical thinking, analysis, being able to give arguments for what you just said, confronting different points of view. These are important skills to develop. But when I use 'philosophizing about art' within a context of spiritual education I am a lot less interested in these things and instead encourage children to be attentive, let their imagination flow, and freely express their questions and thoughts. Asking good questions, improvising while being sensitive to the 'spiritual potential' of the conversation, that takes a lot of practice. Which is why we organise training courses. But on the other hand I think you should just start!

*Rinke Nijburg: Circus with Queen of Hearts, 2002, acrylic, oil and enamel paint on canvas, 160x240cm. Rinke Nijburg kindly gave us permission to use his painting 'Circus with Queen of hearts' in this article.*

Conference  
report:  
Steve  
Younger



# Dag van de



# Kinderspiritualiteit

*A day to explore the spirituality of children*



# What is the Dag van de Kinderspiritualiteit?

Liesbeth Vroemen, a member of the International Association of Children's Spirituality, hosts an annual Dag van de Kinderspiritualiteit (Day for Children's Spirituality) in the Netherlands. She is the founder of an organisation called 'Oblimon,' a collaboration of Dutch educational leaders in Philosophy and identity. They are experts who are passionate about philosophy, spiritual education, art, creativity and imagination. "We focus on vision development as well as on concrete educational activities."

Oblimon (<http://oblimon.nl/>) offers training for Dutch teachers in helping pupils and students to develop their spiritual literacy and understanding. The annual conference day on children's spirituality is open to practitioners from across Europe with the sessions being in English and Dutch. This year's event was held in the Albertinum, a former Dominican Monastery that is now a part of the Arnhem/ Nijmegen University of Applied Sciences (the HAN or Hogeschool Arnhem-Nijmegen). The Titus Brandsma Centre for the Study of Spirituality is a part of the Nijmegen University and used to be in the Albertinum. This article summarises a couple of the sessions from the 2020 Dag van de Kinderspiritualiteit. The ideas here explore the use of literature and art, to explore emotions in the classroom. These ideas would adapt readily for a small group setting or for work with adults.

## **Lara Schout** **Zinvol Teken en met Kinderen** **(Making meaningful drawings** **with children)**

Lara Schout is a certified teacher of Zinvol Teken en and teaches Religious Education in Dutch Primary Schools. 'Zinvol Teken en' is a method for exploring children's experiences and feelings with crayons and paper. It has much in common with Art Therapy techniques. "Each exercise is an adventure for the child and you never know what will happen once you've started to draw," she says. It



enables adults working with children to help them create, express and explore their own emotional and spiritual literacy. The discussion with pupils as they draw and about their drawings is central to this process.

You need large sheets of paper (A3 or A2) and a supply of crayons. When drawing, Lara recommends that there are no rulers, no erasers and no rules about the drawings. "Let the children know that nothing is 'wrong'. This is not an art class and the art work is not given to parents afterwards or put on display in a classroom. It is up to the children what they do with their drawings afterwards." Thick crayons are best as they get children away from trying to be precise and rigid and to create faithful likenesses. In each session the leader gives instructions on what to draw. Here are some examples of the method.

### **Dream Plants**

Use a green-coloured crayon to make a smooth, continuous wavy line from the bottom left of the page to the top with a slight curve over in towards the top centre of the page. Make another line from the bottom right of the page to the top with a slight curve in towards the top centre of the page. Make more, shorter wavy lines from the bottom centre of the page up to the centre of the page. Use as many colours as you want and create a flower at the top of each stem - it doesn't have to be a real representation. Let it be a dream flower. Make up some fairytale butterflies too. Ask pupils, "How does your drawing make you feel? What are the animals and creatures you have drawn? Why did you pick these and what do they mean for you?"

In a variation of this exercise, you could start by drawing a football-sized circle in green. Draw the trunk and branches of a tree. Add in soil and perhaps some creatures that live in it. Add more branches and leaves, perhaps some fruit. What other creatures would you draw around the tree or coming to visit it? Surround the green circle with another colour.

### **Hearts**

"Create a calm atmosphere. Dim the light, provide soft background music, slow down and move slowly. Give each child pencils and paper. Tell them we are going to listen to our inner selves and then we will draw. Every child needs a base from which to fly out. In this heartfelt wish we will investigate whether every child feels sufficiently supported to do so. "

To start, tell the children to draw a fist-sized heart shape in the centre of their sheet of paper. Ask them to close their eyes and then ask them, "What do you carry in your heart?"

What is in your heart?" Tell them to draw this in the heart. Don't tell them exactly what to draw or suggest things for them. Wait until they spontaneously draw something by themselves. Wait for everyone in the group to finish. Next draw a larger heart around the first heart and draw inside the margins of this heart what or who carries you in their heart? Pupils could use words or symbols or drawings. Again, wait for everyone to finish. Ask the children to share - only if they want to...no-one is forced to speak up - how this made them feel and what they have drawn and what it means to them.

Now surround these concentric hearts with a third one that fills the page. Ask "What is it that gives you wings? What is it that makes you feel warm and safe and good?" Again: avoid giving specific directions or suggestions. Let the children have time to generate their own drawings and ideas. Ask the children to talk about their pictures. Allow time for everyone to walk around and look at one another's pictures. Let them talk about one another's drawings and ask questions about what they mean to the person who drew them. Avoid turning this into an art competition. You are not looking for comments on the artistic merit of the drawings. This is about creating a language of spirituality and creating an opportunity to verbalise spiritual experiences. Lara cautions that, "Sometimes you need to notify the parents or seek expert help. Make sure you take care of that."

***Ineke Struijk***

**Kinderboeken en gesprekken  
over wat je niet ziet maar wel voelt  
(*Children's books and conversations  
about things you can't see but feel*)**

Ineke Struijk is a Primary School teacher and a PhD student in Religious Studies. She works extensively with children's literature and picture books to initiate conversations about spiritual themes. This technique uses Children's books and literature to generate conversations

"about things you can't see but feel." She says, "Many children's books deal with spiritual themes. The story and the pictures can be a trigger to talk about things you cannot see but still are very real." If given encouragement many children will talk about quite profound experiences of spirituality: angels, dreams, visions, images, encounters, etc.

The methodology involves using Children's books and Literature to create and explore spiritual awareness. This is not about Mindfulness or Religious Education. The intent is to touch on spirituality and "the development of the soul". Children's Books can also connect people inter-generationally. They can connect people to their family, their culture, their past. Books create a 'space' to explore that triggers the imagination. They can create an awareness of other possibilities and provide space to think about who you are, and opportunities to sense meaning and values and identity.

Choose a book that is as much about the pictures as the actual text. As you read the book together with a child or a group of children ask questions that take everyone into the story and the experiences and feelings and emotions . What image or memory did this book bring to you? What feeling did this book give you? What thought has this book triggered for you? What questions has this book made you wonder about? What would you have done in this character's place? What do you think this character was thinking or feeling?

**Dag van de Kinderspiritualiteit**

will again be in Nijmegen

Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2021

Details from:

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**Feature:**  
Rosanne  
de Vries



# **Voices of Children**

***The Promised Land***

There are several ways to give children a voice within religious and spiritual education in primary schools. This article shows how a story can be a fundament to a spiritual conversation. In this article I write about a classroom of a Catholic school\* in The Netherlands. Children in the age-group of eight to ten years old talked with each other about 'new beginnings' and the Exodus story (The Promised Land). In this article I will give a theoretical background on how the conversation was formed within the lesson. The other part of this article shows the voices of the children and the art that they created after hearing the story and the group discussion.

### Lesson plan: the inter-worldview dialogue

This lesson is built on the theory of the inter-worldview dialogue. This dialogue is constructed in three different stages. The purpose of an inter-worldview dialogue isn't about persuading another child or just telling your opinion but about the deeper meaning of things. The dialogue includes every child in the classroom and the teacher should let them interact with each other.

#### The first phase...

...is about the introduction of the subject. In this article the children will discuss what a new beginning means to them, what do they think about this subject? What kind of perspective do they have on a new beginning? It opens the conversation to start telling the story of Abram going to the land of Canaan. He heard the voice of God to go to a land of abundance and wealth.

#### The second phase...

...narrate the story to the classroom. After the first discussing about the associations on new beginnings the teacher tells the story. This telling can be done with a book or article, but can also be done by telling by heart. After the story telling it is important to let the children talk about the narrative to understand it completely. The teacher can function as a mediator, so the discussion can pass by smoothly. It's about the opinions of the pupils, to understand the differences between one another.

#### The third phase...

...includes the children's perspective on the story. After the dialogue about the story itself the children can discuss in small groups what kind of other

situations also includes new beginnings or starts. The function of this last stage is to let children include the story into their own lives, to make it a recognizable subject. The most important questions to talk about are: have you ever experienced the things in the story? How did you cope with the tasks and difficulties? What are the differences or similarities with the ways in the story?

At the end of this last discussion and exchange of thoughts the children make their thoughts touchable by drawing their perfect world or land.

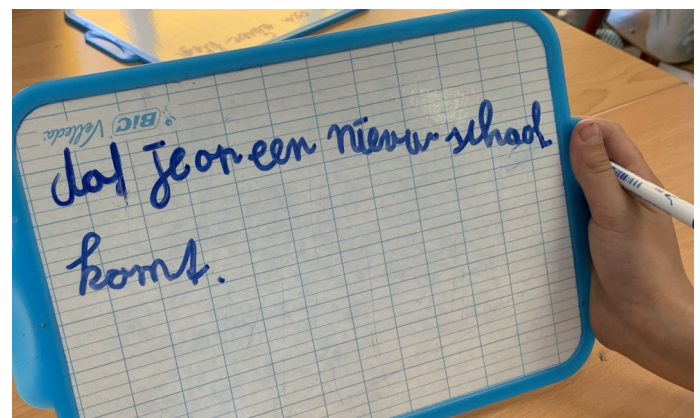
### New beginnings

The start of the lesson included a thinking-exercise about the question:

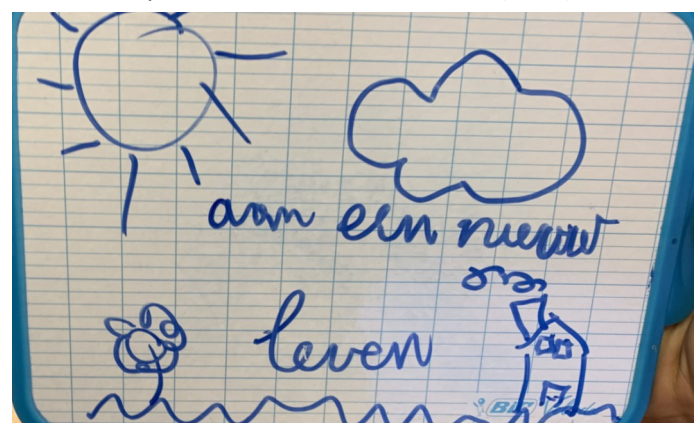
*"What do you think about*

*when you think about new beginnings?"*

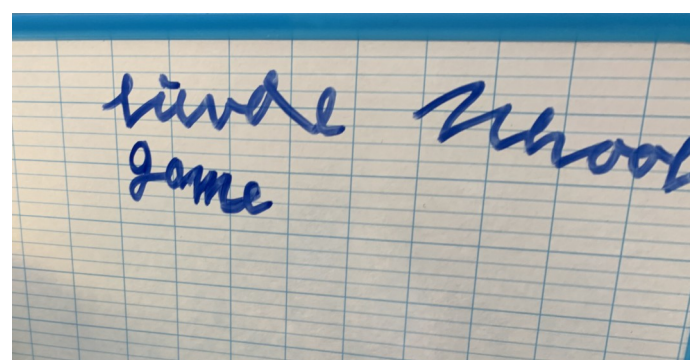
The children started to write down what they think about, after that they talked with a group of four about their answers.



"you're the new kid in school" (Leen)



"to start a new life" (Eva)



"Love, school, games" (Sascha)

#### \* What about other cultures and religions?

In the catholic school as described, there are a lot of different cultural and religious backgrounds. After the first stage the children were told they were going to listen to a Christian story. Before jumping to conclusions, the children had to listen carefully if they recognized the story and background. Hypothetically speaking the Islamic children should recognize the narrative in the Koran.

In the conversation in the class followed on the group discussions, children talked about what it means to start a new life.

“I think about the refugees from countries where there is war.”

“They (the refugees) are searching for a place to feel free and welcome.”

“If we do this, the country needs some places for this people. I don’t know if we have the space.”

The pupils felt like there must always be a place where you can be yourself as a person and can live the life you really want to live. The second word children talked about was “love”. Why could love be a new beginning?

“My parents are divorced, they deserve to be in love again.”

“This summer I had a new born sister, she is loved in our family. This is a new love.”

“I am adopted, I got a new beginning in a new family. This is a place where I am loved.”

Important in this phase of the group-talk is to let the kids finish their stories. Every answer must be appreciated. This is not an easy thing for every pupil. As a mediator I let them finish what they want to say and keep an open and safe space to open up about their opinion.

### After the narrative

The focused pupils listen very quietly to the narrative. They really felt the story and understood the reasons why Abram wanted to go to a new land. A new land meant to the pupils a new beginning, to start over in a country with (maybe) a lot of opportunities.

The next step for them was the third phase of the religious conversation, and let the story into their own lives. A good way to let children explore their thoughts is to let them draw what they think. A work of art is formed with deeper meanings and can help them to organize their thoughts.

So the pupils drew their own promised land, a land where they could start a new life.

In the drawings is a lot of nature. The children think that nature is a very important part of their lives and this has to be in the land of their dreams. Also, personal favorites are part of the drawings. The children wanted to involve a lot of candy and free food. Maybe because at this age, the children think that is a part of freedom - to eat as much as you want.

A goal I had in mind at the beginning of this lesson was to let children think about what freedom means, and what motives can play a part in leaving your home to find freedom. Without sending the conversation in this direction the children can with ideas about refugees and freedom of love and speech. An aim of an inter-worldview conversation is to let children think about their own life with a narrative they can relate to and be in touch with the children of their classroom. In this article I wanted to show a way you can manage to create an open and safe space to start this inter-worldview dialogue.



"We have electric cars and there is free food, so there is no hunger." (Sascha)



"I love gem-stones, and mountains are the place to find them." (Tije)

"I love nature  
and giraffes.  
This land  
has both."  
(Qezley)







In her editorial, Liesbeth wrote: "***Soul to Soul*** is a journal about children and spirituality. It offers a space to researchers and practitioners to explore different aspects of children's spirituality, share ideas and learn from each other."

Have you an example of 'good practice' you would like to share?

Do you know of a practitioner or researcher in children's spirituality we could interview?

Have you a book recommendation or review you could share?

Have you an article you'd like to submit?

Is there a conference or event about children's spirituality that you'd like to promote?

Is there a contribution from children that you could provide?

What would you like to see in future issues?

If you would be interested in contributing to ***Soul to Soul*** please get in touch with us. We will be looking for people sharing stories about their work, writing book reviews, or simply sending us suggestions.  
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