A dreamcatcher with a circular web and feathers hanging from it, set against a warm, golden sunset background. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a soft glow and long shadows.

Stichting Kind en Spiritualiteit

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ISSUE 2

Soul to Soul

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

Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of Soul to Soul! We are pleased you have found us and hope you will enjoy reading our journal.

We published a pilot issue in December 2020 and although we were confident that there was a need for this type of journal, we were a little overwhelmed by the positive response we got. People from all over the world have enjoyed reading that first issue, and shared it with colleagues and friends. Some of you wrote to us to tell us what you liked about Soul to Soul, and several people sent us their ideas for articles. We said in the first issue that 'we would love to double the size' and with your help we did just that!

Several articles in this issue touch on the theme of 'stillness'. One of the things that the great spiritual traditions of the world have in common, is how they recognize the need for moments of silence, and offer ways to cultivate our capacity for 'stilling'. We humans need to be alone sometimes, turn down the volume on the thoughts in our heads and quietly connect with our hearts, our bodies and with nature. And we know children need this too, especially in a world that puts so much pressure on them. Yet most schools, families and even religious communities seem to find it difficult to introduce moments and places for 'stilling' into children's lives. We just seem to give them more noise, more entertainment and more pressure.

There are ways to let children rediscover and enjoy silence though, and in this issue of Soul to Soul you will find many ideas to do that. Noel Keating, for example, writes about meditation in Irish primary schools, and shares some powerful comments from children. Valery Duffy-Cross talked to Katherine Carpenter about her research into children's experiences of silence, and Janet Marshall shares some inspiring thoughts and ideas for 'the art and skill of stilling'.

We hope you will enjoy reading Soul to Soul, keep sharing it, discuss articles with your colleagues, and try out some ideas in your own work. We have now added the possibility to download Soul to Soul as a pdf, which some of you asked for.

We would love to hear from you, so do contact us at soul2soul@oblimon.nl

If you are new and missed the first issue,
you can still read it here:

[https://issuu.com/revsteve59/docs/
soul_to_soul_issue_1__2_](https://issuu.com/revsteve59/docs/soul_to_soul_issue_1__2_)





Soul to Soul

Who we are, what we do
and how we work

Soul to Soul is an online journal about children's spirituality. We offer a space to researchers and practitioners to explore different aspects of children's and young people's spirituality, share ideas and learn from each other.

Soul to Soul builds a bridge between the worlds of practitioners and researchers, and creates a forum for reflection and interaction between people from different professional and cultural backgrounds.

Soul to Soul enables readers to access current research and learn about important developments surrounding children's and young people's spirituality. To do this we publish articles, book reviews, interviews and information about appropriate events and professional development.

Soul to Soul enables children's voices to be explored and represented in relation to their spiritual development.

Soul to Soul appears twice a year, in May and November. It is made by an international team of editors, in partnership with the Dutch *Stichting Kind en Spiritualiteit*. The team meets several times per year, online or physically.

Proposals for articles or other contributions can be submitted to any of the editors, who will discuss these proposals in their meeting. All contributions are peer reviewed.

soul2soul@oblimon.nl

Interview:
*Katherine
Carpenter*



Fi

young



Interviewee:
*Valerie
Duffy-Cross*

inding space 'to be'

Exploring contexts that might best support people's expressions and experience of spirituality



Val Duffy-Cross was interviewed by Katherine Carpenter, a member of our Editorial team. Val worked in education for 38 years in the UK and Germany and was the Headteacher of two secondary schools (13-18, 11-16) in the Midlands. She is now a PhD student at the University of Winchester. A former feminist activist, Val has retained the optimism afforded by the formative 1960s. She has hosted a Julian meditation meeting in her home for 25 years, is a member of the Alister Hardy Trust and has particular research interests in the field of children's spirituality.

What inspired you to start researching?

It began back in the 1980s when I was responsible for Pastoral care in a High school. I was seriously concerned about young people's mental health. At the time there was no real psychiatric provision for them in the UK, and it felt as if schools were becoming 'exam factories'. Over the following twenty years or so, school inspectors began emphasising pace in lessons. There was just no time for young people to reflect on any learning during a lesson, or simply to pause. And yet, when allowed, children wanted to pose profound questions about the meaning of life, ecology and so forth. These were questions that they were burning to ask and they would emerge sometimes, irrespective of what the lesson was focussed on.

So you saw that something was missing in the curriculum?

Yes, I was really worried that the children were so busy, so stressed, and didn't have time or opportunities for silence. So I brought in a 'Silence Dome' for one week, which we set up in the school gymnasium. It was a physical space (a geodesic dome that I specially hired) where children could go and sit quietly. Whilst some used it as an opportunity to escape their lessons, and some of my colleagues thought I was rather odd, many children found it a very valuable experience. These issues were the drivers for my ongoing PhD research. I want to explore contexts that might best support young people's expressions and experience of spirituality, and to question whether their attitudes towards, and opportunities for, silence might impact on their spirituality.

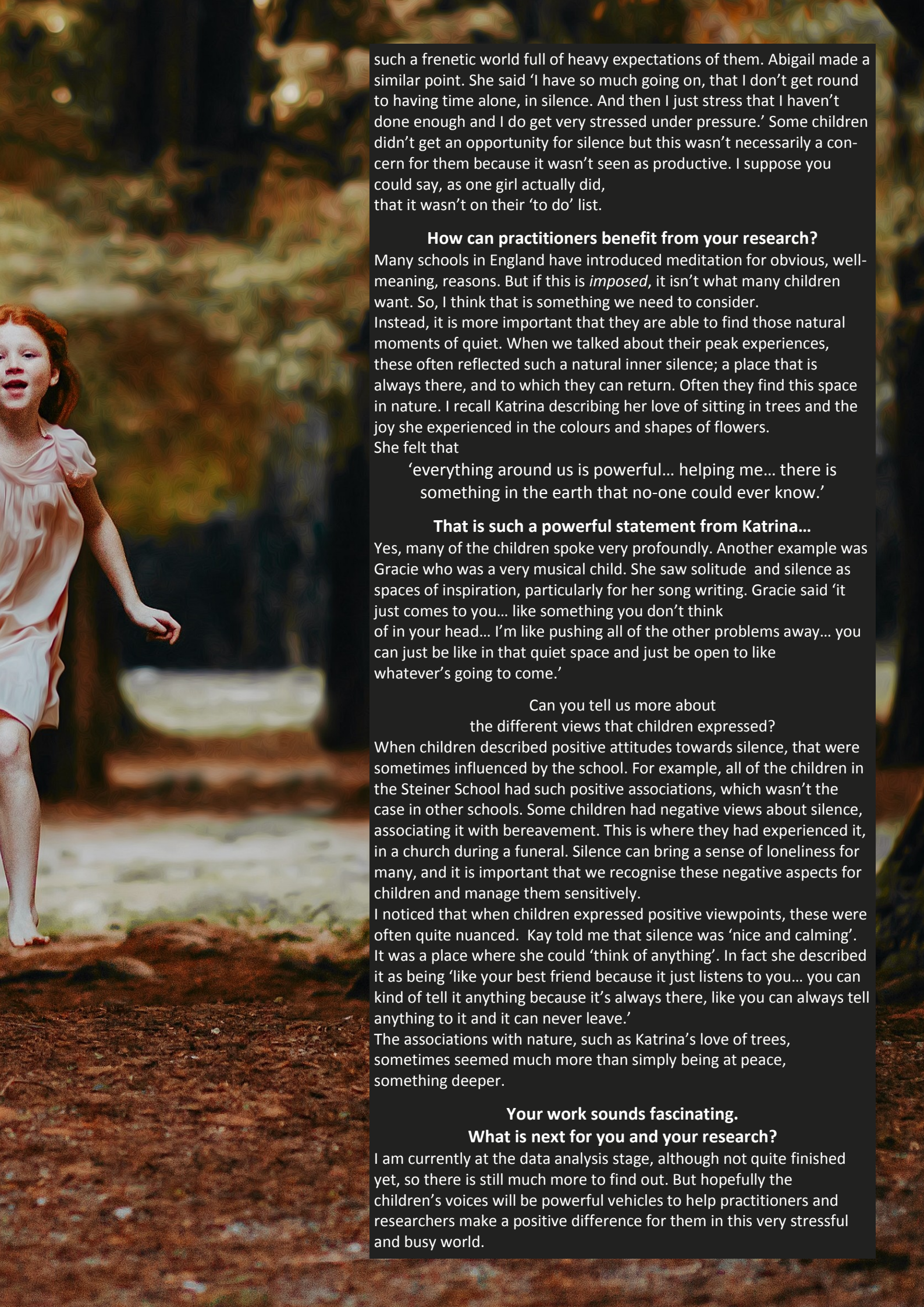
How did you approach the research?

Context was really important for me, so I worked with four different schools of different types: secular, catholic, Quaker and Steiner. I gave questionnaires to young people aged 12-13, 120 in all. From those who completed them, I then interviewed 40 children. I was interested in knowing what their daily routine was like; what the most important thing in life was to them; what was the happiest time of their life; and what their thoughts and experiences of silence were. It was important for me to honour periods of silence in the interview process too, a silence that was often extremely productive.

What did you find out?

It was clear that all of the children showed aspects of spirituality that other researchers have identified. I could hear adults' voices in some of what they said, particularly around concerns about the future, such as not being able to find jobs. There were social pressures, too, around how society perceived they should 'be'. Their lives sounded so pressured and busy. Jasmine, for example, had a dance show in two weeks' time but was stressed because she hadn't choreographed any of the dances yet. Ravi spoke about being productive as a positive thing. 'It means I can get more done', he said. 'If I get more done, then I can do less work later on.' He hadn't quite realised until we spoke how busy his days were. I asked if he had any downtime and he replied 'No, if you don't take sleep as down time.' It was clear that many, like Ravi, were lacking that space to 'be' in





such a frenetic world full of heavy expectations of them. Abigail made a similar point. She said 'I have so much going on, that I don't get round to having time alone, in silence. And then I just stress that I haven't done enough and I do get very stressed under pressure.' Some children didn't get an opportunity for silence but this wasn't necessarily a concern for them because it wasn't seen as productive. I suppose you could say, as one girl actually did, that it wasn't on their 'to do' list.

How can practitioners benefit from your research?

Many schools in England have introduced meditation for obvious, well-meaning, reasons. But if this is *imposed*, it isn't what many children want. So, I think that is something we need to consider.

Instead, it is more important that they are able to find those natural moments of quiet. When we talked about their peak experiences, these often reflected such a natural inner silence; a place that is always there, and to which they can return. Often they find this space in nature. I recall Katrina describing her love of sitting in trees and the joy she experienced in the colours and shapes of flowers. She felt that

'everything around us is powerful... helping me... there is something in the earth that no-one could ever know.'

That is such a powerful statement from Katrina...

Yes, many of the children spoke very profoundly. Another example was Gracie who was a very musical child. She saw solitude and silence as spaces of inspiration, particularly for her song writing. Gracie said 'it just comes to you... like something you don't think of in your head... I'm like pushing all of the other problems away... you can just be like in that quiet space and just be open to like whatever's going to come.'

Can you tell us more about the different views that children expressed?

When children described positive attitudes towards silence, that were sometimes influenced by the school. For example, all of the children in the Steiner School had such positive associations, which wasn't the case in other schools. Some children had negative views about silence, associating it with bereavement. This is where they had experienced it, in a church during a funeral. Silence can bring a sense of loneliness for many, and it is important that we recognise these negative aspects for children and manage them sensitively.

I noticed that when children expressed positive viewpoints, these were often quite nuanced. Kay told me that silence was 'nice and calming'. It was a place where she could 'think of anything'. In fact she described it as being 'like your best friend because it just listens to you... you can kind of tell it anything because it's always there, like you can always tell anything to it and it can never leave.'

The associations with nature, such as Katrina's love of trees, sometimes seemed much more than simply being at peace, something deeper.

Your work sounds fascinating.

What is next for you and your research?

I am currently at the data analysis stage, although not quite finished yet, so there is still much more to find out. But hopefully the children's voices will be powerful vehicles to help practitioners and researchers make a positive difference for them in this very stressful and busy world.

Feature:
Janet
Marshall



Finding stillness

*Children are constantly commanded to 'Sit still!'
What they need - and long for - is stillness*



**“ ‘Just sit still’
A phrase all too familiar
to parents, leaders and teachers.
We seek to get children to go against
their own grains by asking them to
become static and to listen
when we have something
to tell them or teach them.”**

Janet Marshall





Be still and know...

'Just sit still please, will you?' a phrase all too familiar with parents, leaders and teachers. Too often perhaps, we seek to get children to 'go against their own grains' by asking them to become static in order to listen when we have something to tell or teach them. It seems to me however, that when natural stillness occurs with an individual, or a group of children or adults is when they suddenly become 'hooked', totally absorbed and captured by what is being presented to them or indeed by the atmosphere and mood that surrounds them. It is both a magical and precious moment when this is witnessed. I simply love rising to the challenge of engaging children this way through a variety of stimuli and especially via the medium of storytelling.

For over twenty years I have enjoyed working with children in a variety of sacred spaces. At one time it was my task to still and inspire them in school classrooms. In 1996 I found myself working at a national, Christian (Anglican) Shrine in the village of Little Walsingham, Norfolk. I rapidly became aware that not only did I have the privilege of teaching them about this place and its history but suddenly there were some pretty special spaces to just 'be' in.

Firstly, I observed their responses when they entered the grounds. Suddenly it was peaceful. Statues of saints, crucifixes and Stations of the Cross pictures loomed at them as they walked towards my ancient, barn classroom. Many were open mouthed, some gasped or made a comment. Others walked past unaware. Once within the womblike dimness of the Shrine Church, and then the Holy House where the main prayers are offered by pilgrims within that church, the atmospherics of solace and security, mingled with a powerful aroma of burning wax candles and oil lamps jarred the senses. In a way, the surroundings took over and seemed to say to all – STOP. I witnessed many severely disturbed children and those with acute special educational needs suddenly become silent, when previously they had been unsettled and vocal. So, my challenge began, how could I make the most of this and enable them to gain from being in the space personally, as well as educationally? Stilling, coupled with using voice, actions and the senses became my main tool.

But the real art and skill of stilling is an entity itself. I first hit on it many years ago when I met the amazing, retired teacher Mary Stone and she presented her technique, outlined in her book *'Don't just do something, sit there'* (Published by: RMEP Press). The first thing that came across was that she had a passion for engaging and *enabling* children to express themselves and connect with themselves and others. Secondly, she came straight to the point and taught them *a skill* – to be still in body and mind through *simple instructions*. She began by getting them to sit in a comfortable position with arms on their lap or down at their sides, without any hindrances or objects around them. With frequent practice children learn how to adopt this quickly and as Mary Stone pointed out, the world was her oyster so to speak. She was especially interested in presenting sacred spaces and special places to them via stilling. In my work at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, I saw exactly what she meant when I realised the potential there for using stilling to help the place, the spirituality and the atmosphere come alive to children in an extraordinary way.

Stilling involves simply teaching children or adults to slow down, be still and become aware of their breathing, similar to any meditation or mindfulness technique. They might be sitting at a desk, on the floor, in a church or on a mosque or temple carpet, they might be on a lawn, in a forest, on a beach, or in their own room at home. Quite simply it can be done anywhere. Once they are still and relaxed they might be told a story or asked to respond to where they are through their senses. As they breathe deeply, they are asked to listen, sniff, be aware of temperature around



them, listen or let their mind and imagination work if a story is being presented. If there are lots of things to look at around them in that space, they might open their eyes and use that sense too.

With stilling, after the leader has described or told a story or encouraged them to observe, they are then asked to move again, stretch and wriggle before being encouraged to respond to open questions about what they felt, or thought about during the time they were still. Verbal responses are amazing and all that is needed is to accept what they say, not judge it or question. It is always worth noting down though what is asked or said because in a teaching context this can be followed up on, in meaningful ways afterwards. I quickly became aware in the Shrine context that it is important not to wreck the experience by getting them to analyse too much. Sometimes children need to let the space take them over so to speak. Sometimes just getting them to write down their responses or draw them could be effective.

**Being still is probably
not a common framework
for life with children
and adults these days
but I guess the 'covid months'
have enforced it more
and sometimes being alone
and quiet with the same routine
and environment day after day
has made people feel edgy.
'What on earth can I do in this
still, eventless time?' ask many.
It can bring on panic and fear.
Will I ever be active again?
If it can be embraced creatively
however, then perhaps
it can actually be liberating?
Often people, especially children
can suddenly realise they NEED
to be still at times.**

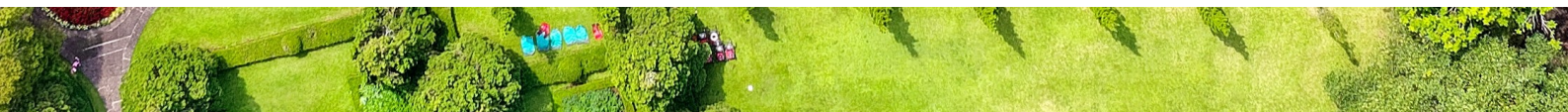
I diverge here slightly to memories I have of using the stilling technique in my educational work when I was Head of Schools & Family Learning at St Paul's Cathedral, London for several years. Here we had a huge, brightly lit sacred space, often full of noisy tourists. The soaring dome raises up in the centre and amongst the crowds I would ask the children to lie down and be still, and just look up. With encouragement to help them slow their breathing and be still, it was truly astounding to see how they seemed to be transported as they observed the height, immensity, beauty of the mosaics and the way in which the light was shedding its rays. It was possible to shut out the noisy crowds around them. As I talked them through the story of the Gospel writers and Jesus himself depicted in the designs, something rather special occurred. We would repeat this in the more secluded Choir area, and again, sometimes we had to really coax them to sit up again as they were so 'into it'! Mind blowing comments would be shared by those children as I asked them how they had felt when lying still.

I love using labyrinths with children to teach stilling of mind whilst either walking one or using a finger version, taking the finger for a walk round a small one that might be made of wood or just printed on paper. This offers a great springboard into relaxation, calming, praying, mind freeing. Music and poetry and images can also be added to the experience. In doing so of course it is important to note that labyrinths go back thousands of years. There is even evidence of stone age people scratching circular labyrinth pathways on cave walls. The labyrinth pattern, be it on a wall or set out with stones to walk a pathway on the ground, or printed on paper so you can take your finger around the pathway is not a maze. You can see the end at the centre and you can never get lost. Your goal is to reach the centre and then to start your journey out again, back into the outside world. It is safe on a labyrinth and you are free to leave it easily at any point.

I used to use finger labyrinths in Norwich Cathedral when I worked with schools in there, they would just be invited to sit quietly somewhere and walk around the circular pattern using a finger. We also had a huge canvas one to put out in a transept to walk around. It is a great way to get them to slow down, walk very slowly with feet or finger and whilst doing so, to let their minds wander. I found this a great compliment to being in the beauty of the sacred space with its arches and beautiful ceilings and windows. It was especially effective when used at the end of the Cathedral experience to reflect on what they had seen. It is also a great way to encourage them to become spiritually aware of the space around them and the effect it has had on their emotions and feelings.



**“I love using labyrinths with children
to teach stilling of mind”**



Spirituality and spiritual awareness, of course, is just as powerful outdoors in nature or in a classroom, when suddenly pupils witness the power of a science investigation or the wonder of mathematics. Spiritual Development is a fundamental requirement of the National Curriculum in the UK, not just through Religious Education but across the whole learning curriculum. Teachers in the UK have to show evidence of spiritual development opportunities in their teaching across the whole curriculum. Investing therefore in stilling skills may have much to contribute to enabling this in schools.

Nature teaches us much about stilling. The bulbs under the earth are still and grow silently in the dark then they immerse in Spring. The frog or toad that can be still for an unnervingly long time. Stillness is a basic survival technique for many creatures and insects. Knowing when to move fast or slow. If we learn a technique of stillness, maybe we can tune in so much more with our world? Stillness can equal learning and the appreciation of beauty and creation in all its fullness.

Wellbeing is so much at the forefront at the present time, so having the courage to teach stilling must surely be therapeutic and medicinal for mind, body and soul.

I recently advertised free finger labyrinth resources for teachers on Facebook via a teachers' group with an added script to help them to direct the children's thinking using images and phrases. I was astounded at the response I got. So many requested copies and were eager to try it with their classes when they returned to school recently after much home learning in lockdown. There is a great need for simple ways in which to subdue anxieties 'see the wood for the trees' in present times so to speak.

Two years ago, I was asked to do a reflective day at a school for children with special educational needs. The class I was with were aged 12-14 years but with mental ages of around 6-7 years. Many were Autistic and struggled with anger issues. Again, stilling and the labyrinth came into its own. I gave them finger labyrinth patterns to keep at the end of the session, along with coloured beads on a string that they had

made themselves. Each colour represented a feeling: happy, sad, angry et cetera. Being able to just sit quietly and take out your labyrinth and beads when you feel overwhelmed can be great therapy, 'time out' when things get too much. Taking children and young people with these sorts of difficulties to new places, Cathedrals and the like can be overwhelming and distressing so when these pupils made a follow up visit to the Cathedral, they brought their labyrinths and beads with them. Step by step we entered the sacred space, stopping to be still if we needed to.

I have dwelt much on encouraging children and young people in particular to be still but can it be that sometimes it is actually a reverse situation? Maybe we can recall times when we want children to become active, to come and eat a meal or something else and they are still and engrossed in something. We almost have to break their spell which is an awful shame, especially if they were midway in an imaginary game. This was something I would always endorse with my teams in sacred space work: **PLEASE** give them time to be still, to absorb. Often, we can be all too keen to move on and keep feeding facts to them. They need time to absorb where they are and what it is saying to them.

Perhaps in this past year we have all had a little of that, time to stop and be aware of what surrounds us, the good and the bad. I have to confess that I have enjoyed much of that solace and have become aware so much more of 'what I do where' and, 'who and what really matters'.

As an advocate of stillness in education and simply being still to appreciate 'being' alive in the world, there is still so much surrounding this topic that remains untapped. I now offer a lot of learning programmes for schools that involve storytelling, bringing history alive, Religious Education topics, stillness, sensory appreciation and more importantly *fun*, using drama, music and more and it is wonderful to be able to take these into so many different school communities. When one does this, it is a case of meeting them 'where they are' so I witness many different learning styles and ethos. It is great to be able to spread the stillness and creativity bug! Presently it is still often by film or zoom, but hopefully soon I will be back in the classrooms, school halls and gardens.

For more ideas on resources for stilling and creative learning based on it do contact Janet:
janet@journeysforlearning.co.uk
Web: journeysforlearning.co.uk

“As an advocate of stillness in education and simply being still to appreciate ‘being’ alive in the world, there is still so much surrounding this topic that remains untapped.”



Feature:
Noel
Keating



Meditation A

Child

"I found that meditation has the capacity to nourish the innate spirituality of the child and the children demonstrated a great capacity to give metaphorical expression to its impact on"

Noel Keating

Awakens the Heart:

Men, Meditation and Personal Spiritual Experience

y
on their lives.”

I spent 40 years in the education sector in Ireland as a teacher and school principal at second-level (i.e. with students aged 12-18) and, later still, as an education officer for a Catholic Schools Trust. When I retired in 2012, because of my personal experience of the fruits of meditation, I felt called to promote the practice of meditation as a whole-school practice in Irish schools. This means that the whole school stops at agreed times and every child meditates in their classroom with their teacher – all at the same time. With the help of other volunteers from Christian Meditation Ireland I launched a project which offered free in-service to Irish primary schools interested in exploring the possibility of whole-school meditation. The project promotes meditation as a universal practice which finds expression in both secular and faith contexts.



To bolster my credentials as leader of that project I completed a Masters in Applied Christian Spirituality and, as part of that program, undertook research into the child's experience of meditation with a particular focus on its spiritual fruits. I was so impressed by what I found that I committed to undertake further study of the topic and in 2017 I was awarded a PhD for my interdisciplinary research. While meditation has become very popular in secular society because of the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn on mindfulness, its focus on meditation as a secular practice is on the pragmatic benefits that arise for those who meditate. So, while there had been a great deal of research in recent decades on the practical benefits of mindfulness and meditation practices, there was a paucity of study into its deeper fruits.

My research confirmed that meditation gives rise to practical benefits and deep inner fruits in children. I found that meditation has the capacity to nourish the innate spirituality of the child and the children demonstrated a great capacity to give metaphorical expression to its impact on their lives. Their remarkable use of metaphor gave voice to their perception of personal spiritual experience which lay beyond their capacity for conceptual description; yet they managed to convey it through metaphor in their own, ordinary, everyday language.

Consider, for example, Helena (7) who said

‘When meditation is deep in you, you feel like you are somewhere you’ve always wanted to be since you were small.’

Or the profound statement from Jason (12) that

‘Meditation is like a map and your destination is who you really are.’

In spirituality research, such statements must be examined and interpreted with a spiritual sensitivity, because – in the absence of theological training – participants must use ordinary language to point toward spiritual experience. Such interpretation is all the more important when dealing with children because their cognitive capacity is still in development.



One of the key conclusions of my research is that it is very important to create opportunities for personal spiritual experience in children and also to generate opportunities where they can talk about it. I see the growing popularity of mindfulness as an opportunity to speak about the inner fruits of meditation, even in a secular context.

Since 2012 more than 50,000 children have been introduced to meditation in over 250 Irish primary schools which have committed to practice whole-school meditation at least twice each week – the two-hour free in-service proved to be very attractive to schools. Children typically meditate for one minute per year of age.

Children love to meditate. Writing in the early 1990s about Christian meditation and children, Madeline Simon described children as ‘born contemplatives’, suggesting that children take to meditation ‘like ducks to water’. John Main, who recovered the ancient practice and promoted it as one very much suited to the ordinary lay person, suggested that meditation opens the human heart as naturally as sunlight generates the opening of a flower. My doctoral research confirms that children experienced such heart-awareness as





they sat in the stillness and silence of meditation. My book, *Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents*, describes in the words of the children themselves what it feels like for a child to meditate and explains how they experience the fruits of meditation at a very deep level in their lives. In addition to outlining the practical benefits the children experienced, I summarise the themes expressed by the children as deep inner fruits of meditation as follows: (1) 'Meditation helps you to be yourself'; (2) 'Meditation helps you to feel the goodness inside'; (3) 'Meditation brings you closer to God'; and (4) 'Meditation makes you a kinder person.'

There isn't sufficient space in this short article to do justice to what the children said but a few examples will give a flavour of what they experienced at a deep level within. For example, Julia (12) said

'You are not talking when you're meditating, so it takes you more inside yourself.'

And Pamela (11) said

'I think meditation brings out the real me, and I don't have to pretend to be someone else...When I meditate, I can be myself and I accept myself for who I am.'

Very many children spoke of becoming intensely aware in meditation of their own inherent goodness and feeling a strong sense that they are unconditionally loved.

For example, Sophie (8) noted,

'Meditation helps me to be more aware of the goodness inside me.'

Jack (11) said,

'When I'm angry I don't feel the goodness inside, but when I meditate, then I do feel the goodness in me.'

And Lucy (10) described that,

'When you're not doing meditation, you sort of ... have a snap inside you. As if you are always getting ready to snap. But when you do meditation, the goodness comes out. The bad feelings disappear and the goodness flows in.'

As well as making them aware of the goodness within themselves, meditation also helped children to become more keenly aware of the innate goodness in others and to relate better with those around them. The children seemed

to recognise that the goodness in themselves and others is who they really are, their deepest essence, their true-self.

Many children described meditation as bringing them closer to God. Natalie (11) said

'I take a few minutes, not to talk to God, but to be with him, to feel closer to him.'

Ella (9) said

'When I meditate it feels like me and God are connected...I can feel his love.'

Many children felt their sense of being connected to God in meditation was strengthened by the fact that the whole school meditated together. Adrian (11) captured this well, saying:

'It feels like everyone is one. We are all together and still it feels... as if everyone is where you are now. And God is in the presence.'

As well as nourishing their spirituality – helping them to discover their true-self, who they really are in God – many also spoke of how they experienced meditation as a form of guidance, nudging them in the direction of acting responsibly and doing the right thing. Sophie (8) found meditation made her a kinder person:

'When I let go of the things that are bothering me, it's like I've become a kinder person.'

Derek (9) felt that

'[meditation] releases kindness in you... and makes you feel more open-minded.'

Meditation seemed to give the children access to an inner wisdom, an inner truth and they allow themselves to be guided by it. This understanding was captured in the profound insight from Jason (12), quoted above – he used the very rich metaphor of mapping a journey to describe succinctly his understanding of the fruits of meditation, saying: "Meditation is like a map and the destination is who you really are."

My research has led me to conclude that there is an urgent need in society today for practices that awaken the person to their innate spirituality. Our society today has become very individualistic and people all too easily identify themselves with the ego. Thomas Merton spoke of the true-self as distinct from the ego-self and Richard Rohr describes the true self as 'who we are in God and who God is in us.' They are both pointing to a truth common to almost all religions, that there is a divine spark in the human person which is intimately connected to God, to the original, creative energy of the universe. My research suggests that

meditation awakens the person to an appreciation of who they are at the deepest level of their being, beyond the ego.

I used some novel methods to explore the children's personal spiritual experience in meditation - one of which I devised and named the 'Selection Box'. I believe those methods can be used with authentic subjectivity and to good effect in other contexts where personal spiritual experience lies at the heart of an inquiry. One approach was to ask questions by analogy, such as 'If your spiritual experience was a colour, what colour would it be?' And, in follow-up questions, to build on the participant's response to explore their personal experience as fully as possible. I found it was especially helpful to ask the children to think about a specific experience, especially if a particularly vivid example comes to mind for them.

The verbal medium is not always necessary for the spiritual and is often inadequate because the origins of the spiritual dimension are likely pre-verbal. I found that photo-elicitation was very helpful in eliciting rich metaphorical descriptions from the children, as noted in the quotes above.

I conducted two half-hour interviews with 70 children, with a three-week gap between the interviews. The second round of interviews was designed to explore more deeply some expressions used by individual children in the first round; but also, to ask all the children to reflect on the full range of emerging themes - including themes which might not have been raised by them in their own first-round interview. Finding a practical way of doing this without putting words in the children's mouths proved to be challenging and the pilot study was crucial in resolving the problem through the development of what I call the 'Selection Box' method.

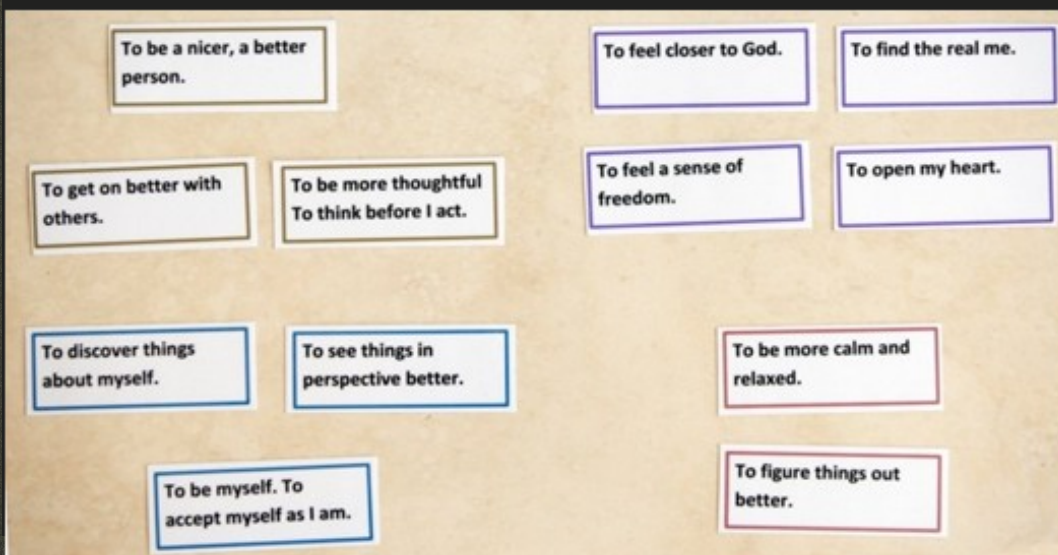
In analysing data from the first round of interviews, possible emerging themes were noted and I wrote them up as brief, one-line, descriptors, usually in the children's own words, each phrase beginning with the words 'Meditation helps me to.' For example, 'Meditation helps me to be calm and relaxed' or 'Meditation helps me to open my heart.' Thirty-two such descriptors were laminated as 'comment cards.' This allowed every child to handle each comment card physically - in random order - and respond tacitly, non-verbally, by separating out those comments which resonated with them from those that did not. It was stressed to each child that they may or may not have experienced what any card said. Each child was invited to go through the full set of cards, one by one, at their own pace and to place them in the Selection Box (an old sock box with a pull-out drawer adapted for the purpose) as shown here:

The children were asked to place a comment card in the 'Yes' box if it resonated with their own experience, in the 'No' box if it did not and on top of the box if they were unsure.

The cards which had been placed in the 'Yes' box were then examined. It was only at this stage that I mentioned the narrow coloured border around each card. There were four different colours in all and each child was asked to help to sort their 'Yes' cards by colour.




For an example, see here:









The coloured borders related to four broad sets of emerging themes that I had discerned from the analysis of the data from round one. Each child was then asked to take a moment to look over the cards they had chosen and to begin by selecting a comment that really stood out as holding meaning for them, in light of their experience of meditation and its benefits. And, very importantly, they were then asked to give a practical example to relate how the description they had chosen had arisen in their own experience. After they had freely chosen and spoken about a few comments, I then gently guided the child to choose a comment from a category not already touched upon.

In recent years I have worked at producing resources that can be used by teachers and parents to teach meditation to engage with meditation and its inner fruits. In 2019 I collaborated with Canadian singer Alana Levandoski to produce a CD, (Meditation with Children: Songs and Reflections), based on the findings of my research. The intention is that the songs would be used by teachers and parents to help the children reflect on the benefits and fruits of meditation. More recently, I have launched a YouTube page, Meditation for Wellbeing, comprising a range of videos that can be used by teachers and parents for the same purpose and also to teach children how to meditate. I have also launched an Instagram account, @meditation.wellbeing, which I hope interested readers may follow and which offers three gentle reminders each week about the rich, inner fruits of meditation.

The Selection Box method offers a very novel and tactile way of enabling participants to reflect on the overall emerging themes of a study including themes that had not arisen in their own first interview. The method allowed them to do this without being unduly influenced by me as the researcher and had the additional safeguard that I was then able to seek evidence of personal experience to tease out their understanding of each 'Yes' comment chosen by them in the second round. As the child spoke about each card, I followed up with supplementary questions as appropriate. It happened many times that a chosen 'Yes' comment was interpreted very differently to that intended by the original child. However, the exercise was still very worthwhile because it often gave rise to further rich, meaningful examples of personal spiritual experience that those participants had not referred to in their own first round conversation. A key benefit of this method is that, without having to say anything, each child first identified those comments that resonated with them; and it was the child who exercised the freedom to start the conversation by choosing to speak about those comments that meant most to them in their own experience of meditation.

It seems to me that the tactile nature of the 'Selection Box' exercise was important. Having sorted them by hand, each child then physically reached out and picked up the comment they were going to speak to and held it until they had finished speaking about it. The method allowed me to observe the child's body language as they physically handled the card as they spoke about it and enabled me to be especially alert to non-verbal signals as they arose and to follow up with appropriate supplementary questions prompted by those signals.

(For contact and for further reading suggestions, see the Resources on the back cover)

Interview
Deborah
Schein



Spiritual Development

An Interview with Patti Bailie PhD, a



Interviewee:
Patti Bailie

The relationship between Environment and Nature Education

an early childhood nature educator from the United States



**“We hope to make clearer
the spiritual side of nature.
We know it is there.
We just need to be looking
in the right places.
We also need the right lenses
and a shared language.
It is my hope that this will be one way
to help spiritual development become a
comfortable and more accepted aspect
of human development.”**

Deborah Schein





Patti Bailie is one of a small group of early childhood Nature educators and Nature preschool directors working in the United States since the early 1990's. Patti is currently an associate professor of Early Childhood Educator at the University of Maine at Farmington. She shared that early childhood education has a history of integrating nature education in several of the foundational pedagogies of this profession. For instance, Friedrich Frobel believed that "nature should be integrated into early childhood education" and did so by giving children a plot of land to grow gardens (Bailie in Sobel, 2016, 49). Maria Montessori believed that "nature reflects children's natural state" (ibid 50). Rudolf Steiner included natural materials such as pinecones, shells, rocks, and wood" (ibid 50) as part of the classroom environment. Patti also shared that many nature preschools today spend 50% or more of their time outdoors. The remaining part of the school day is spent indoors in stimulating naturally designed indoor environments (ibid 55). And forest kindergartens spend even more time outdoors, reaching 80 to 90% of their class time outdoors.

Patti's journey to becoming an educator steeped in both early childhood education and nature education was circuitous. She began the interview with a story about leaving work in an air pollution control company to become an elementary educator (an educator for children from first to eight grade). She found herself student-teaching in a first-grade classroom with a strict workbook-oriented lead teacher. Quickly Patti discovered that children learn better when given space to explore and experience learning on their own. When asked to step in for her lead teacher, Patti began to explore inquiry-based projects, collaborative learning, and outdoor exploration. In retrospect Patti shared,

"I believe I was connecting to the spiritual side of children but didn't yet know it."

After student teaching, Patti took a job at a nature center. Here she learned how to be a nature educator through her own authentic experiences. She worked with urban and suburban

children from toddlers to fifth graders from public schools, private schools, Head Start programs, parent groups, children with special needs, etc.

Patti shared some reflections of that time,

"Being at the nature center made me remember how I used to spend my own early years in the woods of Ohio. That was my own beginning. After working with these groups of children, my goal became clearer... wanted to work on making nature accessible to everyone. I knew in my heart that there was something of great value here."

It was at this point that Patti really decided to dedicate herself professionally to nature education. She left Ohio to help start the Early Childhood Outdoors (ECO) Institute at a nature center in Nebraska. She shared some of the wonderful steps taken by this organization in support of nature-based early childhood education. For instance, Patti shared,

"The Institute had grant money to create some amazing nature experiences for a growing number of children. We filled vans with nature trunks (for hands on nature experiences) that traveled to children who could not otherwise access nature. One van visited the Boys Town National Research Hospital Preschool for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We made bird feeders and the look on the children's faces showed awe and wonder. I could see it."

During this job Patti realized that in order to be an excellent early childhood nature educator, she would need to learn more about early childhood education and more about nature. This is one of the reasons Patti chose to work on a

doctorate in early childhood and nature education. And, while working on her doctorate Patti was invited to come to the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center to start a nature preschool in Wisconsin. It was here where nature, early childhood education, and spirituality actually came together for her.

As Patti spoke with me, I could see underlying reflections of spiritual development in her stories. There was Tim who wasn't learning until he was given space and time to create an aquarium with his classmates and in the process developed a stronger sense of self and a sense of wholeness. And a quiet child who found his own "home" under some fir trees reflecting his inner need for wonder and awe. There was also the small child who Patti sensed wanted to be seen and known and how she took time to fill that need by building a strong bond with the child.

Finally, I asked Patti how and when did she consciously begin adding a spiritual lens and language to her work in nature education? She said,

"It came from Ann Pelo's book (*The Goodness of Rain* (2013) and from you and your work on spiritual development – *Inspiring, awe, and empathy: Spiritual development of young children* (Schein, 2018)."

In a book review of Ann's book, Patti wrote that Ann considers the development of an ecological identity in young children as equally important as other domains of development. Patti shared Ann's points for developing an ecological self.

First you need to identify one's core dispositions.

Next, you need to see - with an open heart, a curious mind, and a humble spirit - that both "reflects and sustains a particular way of understanding one's relationship to the natural world and one's role in it" (46-47).

Lastly Patti shared that Ann's ecological self tells teachers and parents to "walk the walk, tell the story, and learn the names."

Now Patti is a professor at a college where

she trains interested individuals to become teachers. Some of her students have a love and an affinity towards nature, so she helps them integrate nature-based education into their pedagogy. She hopes they will work towards making nature more accessible to everyone. I asked her, "What do you teach your students about spiritual Development?"

Patti paused. She knows how important spiritual development is for children; for all humans. She understands how to be present for children and why wonder is so incredibly important. Still, here in America spiritual development is rarely mentioned in early childhood programs or within education in the United States due to a deep philosophy of separation of church and state. In fact, the words spiritual, spiritual development, spirituality are most often associated with religion. Because of this, even when mentioning Froebel, Montessori, and Steiner as foundational to the early childhood nature-based education movement and even though they all based their philosophies upon children being spiritual beings, the word spirituality is rarely mentioned.

Fortunately, times are changing and ideas of spiritual development are taking hold within education in the United States. The nature movement has been one of a most inviting and inclusive places for this to happen.

Patti and I are now working on the creation of a conference presentation where we hope to make clearer the spiritual side of nature. We know it is there. We just need to be looking in the right places. We also need the right lenses and a shared language. It is my hope that this will be one way to help spiritual development become a comfortable and more accepted aspect of human development within the United States.

(For contact and for further reading suggestions, see the Resources on the back cover)



**Book
Review:
Jacqueline
Huizinga**



‘Lydia en Steenhouwer praatten tegen Jabin en als hij ‘s nachts angstig wakker werd, zong Lydia zacht voor hem. Zissel liet haar handen dansen en vertellen, allebei, haar sterke rechterhand en haar reigerpootje. Jabin keek, geboeid. Niet alleen naar het reigerpootje, zoals de kinderen buiten en de werkers op het veld, nee, hij begreep dat ze met hem praatte en kreeg er geen genoeg van...’

Selma Noort



A children's book that can also captivate adults from the first to the last page is class! The fact that it has a Biblical theme and is set in the realm of King Solomon would make it fascinating reading for every theologian and youth minister. I'm talking about Selma Noort's *Koningskind* ('*The King's Child*').

Koningskind is the story of a girl, Zissel. She was born near a well, she has a small disability and she does not speak. She is an illegitimate daughter of King Solomon, the Biblical king renowned for his wisdom. Zissel grows up with her mother Lydia and a loving foster father, who urges her to turn her disability into a strength. One day Zissel discovers a severely traumatised little boy under a bush. He finds a new home with Zissel's mother, foster father and Zissel herself and they give him the name Jabin. And he becomes Zissel's soulmate.

The stories of Zissel and Jabin reveal the dark side of Solomon's power. The wise king builds a grand empire. The tyranny that comes with it is harsh and contrasts sharply with the modest but happy life that Zissel, her soulmate brother, mother and foster father lead. A baby brother is also added to the loving family. But one day everything changes. Zissel gets caught up in the drama of two mothers who both claim to be the real mother of the child. And Zissel knows the truth.

As in the well-known biblical story (1 Kings 3: 16-28), Solomon has to decide who the real mother is. He does that by making them a shocking proposal: chop the child in two and give each mother half of the child. One mother accepts the proposal, because she finds it reasonable or fair. The other mother begs Solomon to spare the life of the child and give it to her opponent. Solomon then decides who the real mother is: the one who wants the child to live. The story is known as the Judgement of Solomon. Is it about wisdom, or is it, as Phillis Trible claims, a tale of terror? Selma Noort tells the story from the perspective of Zissel. She knows the real story. She cannot help but be silent, but her eyes speak. Her disability has become her strength. But she is also fighting a courageous battle of life and death.

The well-known story gets a completely different perspective. It tells of the despair of a sister, a brother and a mother who are in danger of losing their dearest possession. It is an exciting story of love, resilience, ingenuity, loyalty and courage. And with a girl as the lead character. The story very cleverly sketches a credible image of everyday life under the kingship of Solomon. Selma Noort does not destroy the image of Solomon as the legendary king, but does write openly about his flaws. She also helps children understand how power and prestige can develop into a culture of corruption, cunning and deceit in the circles around the palace.

The power of this book lies in the way Selma Noort – unlike the Bible and the palace chronicles – writes from the perspective of ordinary people. She does this with a lot of empathy. She convincingly shows especially how the simple people are touched by the suspicion, greed and power at the palace. There is a constant veil of fear over life in the village where Zissel and her mother live with others. She thus shows that Bible Stories are Life Stories that also deal with real-world reality.

In my work as a trainer and coach with primary school teachers, I like to work with children's literature. Many good writers of children's literature know how to touch children at the level of life questions. Sometimes philosophical or spiritual, sometimes also deeply religious. With a picture book, a short story or a fragment, I initiate the conversation with teachers. A conversation that they continue with inspiration often enough with their pupils in the classroom.

I believe that the spiritual development of children, the way they develop a worldview, and their language development are closely linked. I like the way I can contribute to spiritual development while also promoting a culture of reading. It is important that children develop a language for what deeply touches and moves them, that they get an awareness of symbolism and the ambiguity of stories. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are religions of the book: reading is a spiritual activity in these traditions.

So now I can add this beautiful book to my collection. The book takes the reader into the world of a girl, her mother, and her soul-mate brother in Biblical times. That is a remarkable achievement in a time when the Bible is so far removed from children, according to many teachers. A book like this stimulates the imagination of children and brings the world of the Bible closer to them. This is not the primary purpose of the book. It is definitely not a book written to make young people convert to the God of the Bible, though Noort does show convincingly that biblical stories should be counted among world literature. And I would like to interest children in that.

Selma Noort herself writes in the Afterword that the story of the two mothers with King Solomon has always stayed with her, and that she was determined to write a book about it one day. She travelled to Israel to visit both Biblical sites and places of ordinary life.

The Biblical stories of Solomon are a fascinating court chronicle. However, behind them lie the many lives of ordinary people, who love and sometimes claw their way out of hell without anyone noticing. Selma Noort has told their story with *Koningskind*. The book is recommended for ages 10 and up though that seems a little early to me, given some of the themes that are explored. It is certainly recommended for readers aged 12 to 120.



**Book
Review:
Tilly
Jansen**



“We may have been focusing so hard on filling our children’s heads that we have forgotten about their hearts. I am in favour of a ‘knowledge-rich curriculum’ but is the knowledge we are currently teaching our children in schools what they need to lead well-rounded and happy lives?”

Adrian Bethune



“Happy together in our tribal classroom”

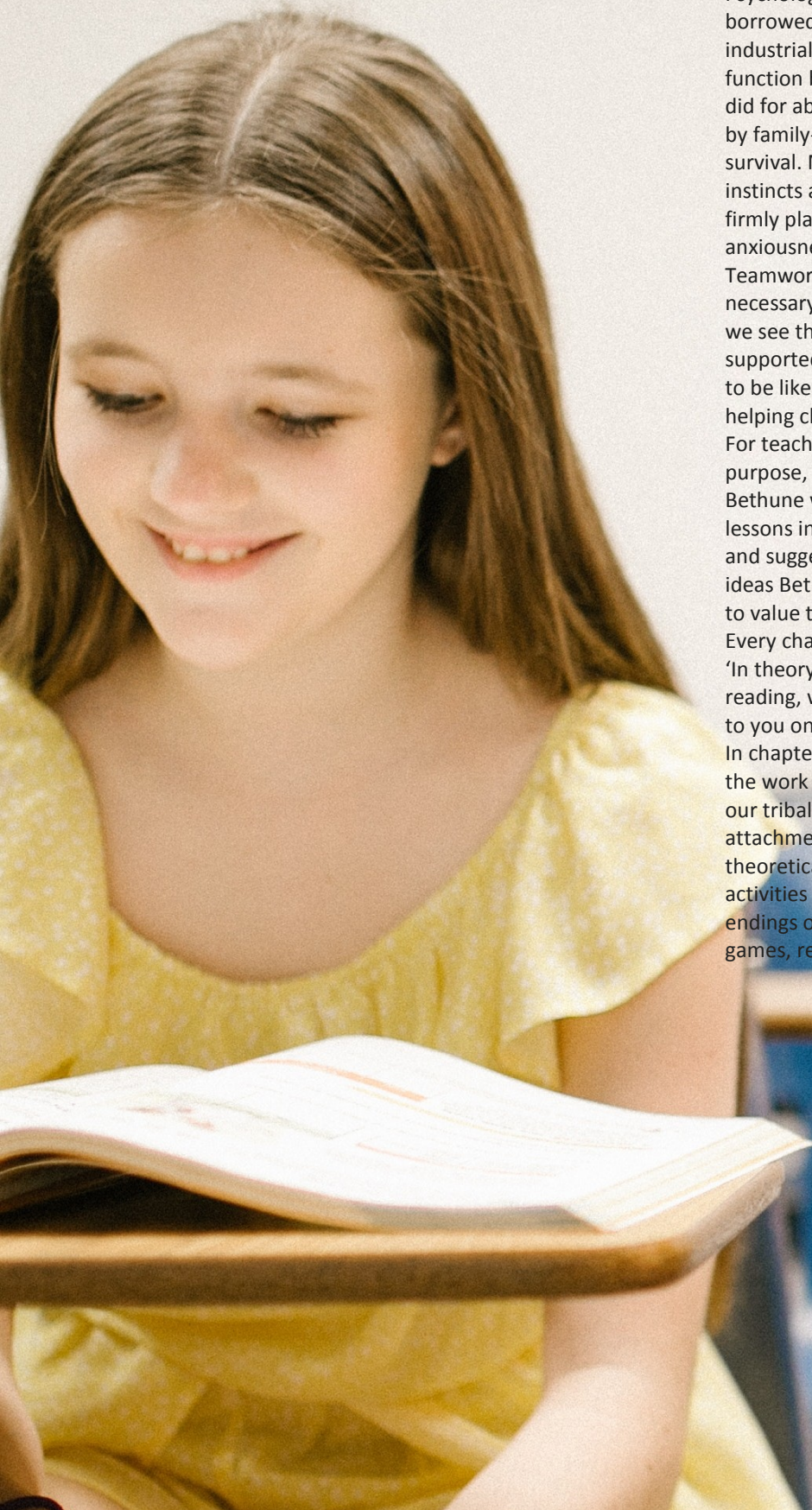
Teaching in classrooms? Did our hunter and gathering ancestors really do that? No, of course not. In the early days of mankind learning took place in the open; by cooperation, play and exploration. So what was the reason for mister Bethune, author of a book about wellbeing in the primary school, to create a tribal classroom in his school? Why did he - in his pursuit of teaching happiness - go back so far in time?

After a career switch from music to teaching Adrian Bethune discovered to his dismay that schools are not judged on the wellbeing of their pupils today. The one-sided focus on exams and academic progress puts children and teachers under huge pressure. The damage and stress this causes, strikes against the wish parents have to let their children grow up happy. Instead of dropping out, like so many young - and not so young - teachers unfortunately do, Bethune went on a journey to find ways to combine the two of them: wellbeing and academic attainment. He grounded his project (a tribal classroom in which pupils can be happy and achieve their full potential) on research from the fields of Neuroscience, Behavioural science and Positive Psychology. From professor Louis Cozolino (psychology) he borrowed the argument that we – although we live now in industrialized societies - are at the core a tribal species. We function best and happiest when we live and work like humans did for about 100.000 years: in small communities, held together by family-relations, rituals and the need to cooperate for survival. Modern culture often clashes with our basic social instincts and even our neurobiology, because our roots are still firmly planted in our tribal past. And that causes stress, anxiousness and unhappiness.

Teamwork, cooperation and strong personal relationships are necessary to survive in a tribal society. In a classroom situation we see the same. Children learn best, when they feel attached, supported and safe. It is the teacher's job - Bethune concluded - to be like a tribal elder: wise, experienced, brave and fair, helping children feel that they belong.

For teachers who regard schoolwork as a source of pleasure and purpose, not only for their pupils but also for themselves, Bethune wrote this guide. Teachers who are trying to make their lessons interesting and engaging, and who are looking for ideas and suggestions, can find these here in abundance. Not all the ideas Bethune puts forward are new, but a good teacher knows to value the 'oldies but goldies' as much as the brand-new ones. Every chapter in the book is composed of two parts: the section 'In theory' is always followed by a section 'In action'. Further reading, websites, and a bibliography complete the book. It is up to you on which level you plug in.

In chapter one (Creating a tribal classroom) Bethune explores the work of Cozolino. He touches themes such as: understanding our tribal roots, the tribal classroom, the social brain, attachment-based teaching, positive relationships. After the theoretical part he provides the reader with suggestions for activities in school: design a team flag, positive greetings and endings of the school day, teaching social skills, humour and games, residential trips.



In the other chapters Bethune raises among other things the theme of Neuroplasticity. Telling children that brains are not static and fixed, but malleable, makes them realize they have the power to shape their own brains through focus, effort and practise. He brings up the Stretch zone (the zone where our brains really come alive), and the importance of Exercise (the Daily Mile etc.)

On every page one feels that we are dealing here with someone who is every inch a teacher. His blend of scientific research, practical ideas and tales from the classroom is well considered, based on evidence and what is more: based on a lot of experience. That gives *Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom* its convincing power.

A happy classroom cannot do without a happy teacher. But please do not make the mistake that a happy teacher is a perfect teacher argues Bethune in the last chapter. Keep in mind that making mistakes is essential for learning; both for pupils as for teachers. Aiming all the time to be perfect like a Miss Honey, might be a greater barrier to a happy teaching practise than admitting that one is sometimes (but only for a split second of course) a Miss Trunchbull on the moments you feel swamped, dull and grouchy.

According to Bethune teachers are 'good enough teachers' (from the term 'good enough mothering', coined in the fifties by psychoanalyst Winnicott), if they do their utmost to develop a love of learning in their pupils and help them to reach their full potential. Martyrdom is not required to become a happy teacher. Trying to be 'good enough' is 'good enough' is his sensitive and sensible advice to us teachers.

Neither the word spirituality nor references to spiritual sources are to be found in *Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom*; unless one sees a photo - in the preface - of Adrian Bethune on stage with three of his pupils and the Dalai Lama as such.

Another point of view was needed to answer the question, if this guide to teaching happiness also can be regarded as a spiritual book. I had to search for the keynote in which it was written. Throughout the book I became aware of a spirituality, not in theory, but in practice. And like a tree is recognised by its fruit, Bethune can be recognised by the fruit he generates: his practical suggestions and tales from the classroom are food for the soul. Food that nourishes pupils and teachers alike.

Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom is a sensible, sensitive and spiritual guide for happiness. And Adrian Bethune is entitled to be called a wise tribal elder for composing it.



Rosanne
de Vries in
conversation



“For the teacher-student, receptivity is an important value. Receptivity makes you look at the world in an open way without any judgements.

In my opinion. If you have a teacher who is receptive, without judgement and doesn’t put you in a box, you are a very happy child.”

Edwin van der Zande



with
Edwin
van der
Zande



Edwin van der Zande is researcher and teacher-trainer at the Primary School Teacher-program of the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, NL. In his research his interest goes to the normative professionalism or value-based professionalism of teachers and professionals in other disciplines. For the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, Van der Zande developed a minor-program in philosophy, world religions and spirituality. Van der Zande's PHD research concerns the moral motivations that underlie professional activities. He is also researcher at the Titus Brandsma Institute affiliated to the Radboud University Nijmegen. There, his research focuses on life-orientation and social- and cultural spirituality. In conversation with Edwin, we talked about his vision on how teacher-trainers in universities can include spirituality in their programs and why spirituality is so important for teacher-students.

First Edwin, how did your interest in spirituality begin and why did you want it to have a role within the educational system?

My interest in spirituality started within my theology study at the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht. In this study I realized spirituality is a braiding of philosophy, religion and the way we act on these. When my predecessors were developing this minor-program for the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, it was mainly focused on religion. In those days (ten years ago) students in primary teacher training couldn't find any jobs after their graduation.

We realized the minor-program needed to be a wide program, one that would invite other students rather than just teacher-students. The one thing this minor-program was missing, was spirituality. We redeveloped the program with an integrative focus on religion, spirituality and philosophy. The key-point for me is to let students write their own biography and explore their view on the world, the meta-empirical and the good life. In my vision I see humans holistically as a whole of body, mind and soul. You're not a walking brain. You get knowledge and wisdom from intuition and a lot of experiences and perceptions.



In the minor-program we call this embodied knowledge or wisdom. The students can experience this through different forms of spirituality from the east and west of this world. It is important for me to deepen the concept of spirituality. Spirituality is more than meditation or mindfulness. In our western societies, these forms tend to be more psychologically supporting people in stress-release. It is an instrumental form of spirituality, where I think it is about a life-orientated attitude.

Do you miss attention to this life attitude and reflection for deeper values sources in regular bachelor programs?

Yes, I do. If you take children and spirituality, it's important to see the child as a whole and that the child develops itself more than in just a cognitive sense. The teacher must set the targets aside and learn to see the child in a holistic way. Spirituality could be a critical norm to prevent the educational system being reduced to just an instrumental target. The child should be a target on their own. But, therefore, teacher-students should experience for themselves what it means when a trainer educates them in a holistic way.

So, in your vision it's about a holistic development instead of just cognitive growth. Could I say that this is not only important for children, but also for teacher-students to grow in a holistic way?

Yes, in this moment we work a lot with Biesta and his pedagogical theory about qualification, socialization and subjectification. Especially subjectification is a critical educational goal for which we support students to become an autonomous human being, who can make decisions of their own and know what they stand for. Subjectification has a spiritual and personal component, because it touches upon the core value of acting in freedom. Besides, for teacher-trainer education it's important to realise that it is a practical and human-orientated study. Spirituality is a way of self-reflection and introspection. This also stands with the theory of Korthagen (Korthagen, 2005). Korthagen developed the onion model aiming for deep reflection. The core of reflection is reflecting on your mission or spiritual dimension. This spiritual dimension is more than just the identity of the student. It also influences the dimensions of behavior, competencies, and the values that underlie your actions. The minor-program is a laboratory where we explore the deepest layer of our human-being by addressing different human capacities



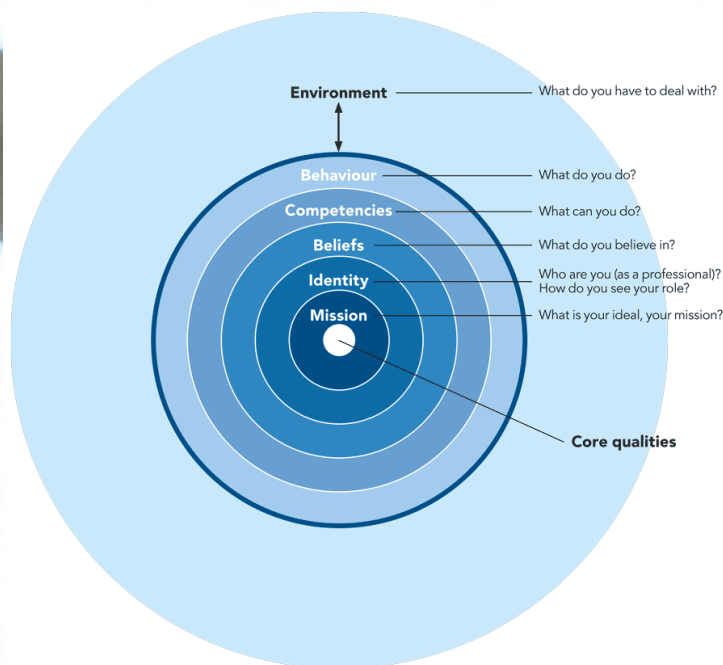


Figure 1: The onion of Reflection by Korthagen

In the minor-program, students write their biography, a narrative self-portrait. This self-portrait contains the answers on questions like 'what is your view on the world?', 'what do you think is the good life?' and 'how do you work on your ideal society?' The answers on the questions construct a document full of stories and experiences. The document shows teacher-students and their trainers their different views belonging to the personal, professional and societal dimension of their lives. Besides articulating these views, the teacher-students practice discerning their underlying values in their stories.

Now that the minor-program is in place for ten years, what kind of results do you get?

We realize that the self-portrait is contributing to a deep self-reflection. For my research, teacher-students continue to work on their narrative self-portraits, even after their graduation. As young professionals, they regard it a precious document which still helps them to deal with complexity in professional contexts. They better express their concerns in collegial dialogue. Now, the teacher-training program is integrating the self-portrait for all the students (not just the minor-students). There is more attention to this spiritual way of reflection, especially after I finished my PhD research (Life-Orientation for Professionals). Most students are excited about the self-portrait, although it is something unfamiliar in the bachelor programme. Some are relieved it's a deeper reflection than the practical one they are used to and want to have these philosophical conversations with themselves.

A risk is that the portrait becomes a 'to-do-thing' for many. In the beginning, most attention goes to showing teacher-students what the relevance of this deep reflection is. We always start with discussing first traineeship experiences and eliciting unconscious values that are at stake for them. I never thought we could reach this for the Bachelor degree, but we are even able to ask the students a question like 'what is your vision on the higher power?'. The exciting part is that a student can answer with, 'I really don't think it's a white man with a beard'. It is not about theology, but about the underlying value in this expression. In this answer there is a place for the value "autonomy". A further exploration of autonomy and related pedagogical behavior also touches the spiritual dimension.

Can you conclude that spirituality has a place in the system of the teacher-training program?

The teacher-trainers are excited and really want to learn and integrate this. In the teacher-trainer program it is called 'normative professionalism' or 'value-based professionalism'. I like the last term best. Value-based professionalism becomes a part of the system. Teacher-trainers need to learn how to guide the students. When you ask a student to open up, you have to open up yourself. The teacher-trainer isn't the expert like in mathematics or geology. Biesta calls this the pedagogy of interruption (Biesta, 2010).

We - teachers from the minor-program - see there has to be a cultural change within the university. We help the teacher-trainers through dialogue, we teach them how to be open and be aware of the multi-perspective. It is important for teacher-trainers to be aware of their perspective regarding the teacher-students. This awareness shows the teacher-trainers' values that determines the way he or she teaches. We want to show the teacher-trainers and teacher-students that this way of learning (with the self-portrait) makes your moral and existential positioning palette more colorful and richer.





The funny part in this, in all the layers of the educational system, from universities until the primary classroom, students and teachers need to get to know themselves and get to know others. As a teacher-student you could also let children make a self-portrait.

A way to let children show their worldview is to let them draw their own world. It demonstrates their worldview. Philosophy, spirituality and religion join in an exercise like this: you wonder with the children. I think if you let children wonder and marvel, you are engaging with an important spiritual skill. For the teacher-student, receptivity is an important value. Receptivity makes you look at the world in an open way without any judgements. In my opinion. If you have a teacher who is receptive, without judgement and doesn't put you in a box, you are a very happy child.

What are the benefits for a child when a university lets their teacher-students make this self-portrait and developing their spiritual skills?

I hear from the teacher-students that they experience a different kind of looking at the child. Because the students are more aware of their own interpretation-window and judgements, they are trained to look behind the behavior of the child. I know a teacher-student who is diagnosed with ADHD and has a history with difficulties in the classroom. After following the minor-program, this student knew what values were important in his life and he experienced the ways that helped him (like meditation through making art or with yoga). He told me now he can help children with ADHD as well, knowing that spirituality is more than only sitting silently on a meditation couch.

To conclude, you think that writing a self-portrait with a focus on life-orientation contributes to a good education?

Yes, because it makes the students aware of who they are, in private and as a professional. Writing this makes you more open and receptive, it makes you realize what moves you. This awareness is something most people skip in their lives and it is something that is always progressing. This awaking never stops, this progress goes on in your whole life. I hope that children will notice that their teachers see them in their whole being. You can always have blind spots, but this is my mission.

Feature:
Steve
Younger



Time for Reflection

Sensings: a mechanism for spiritual development?



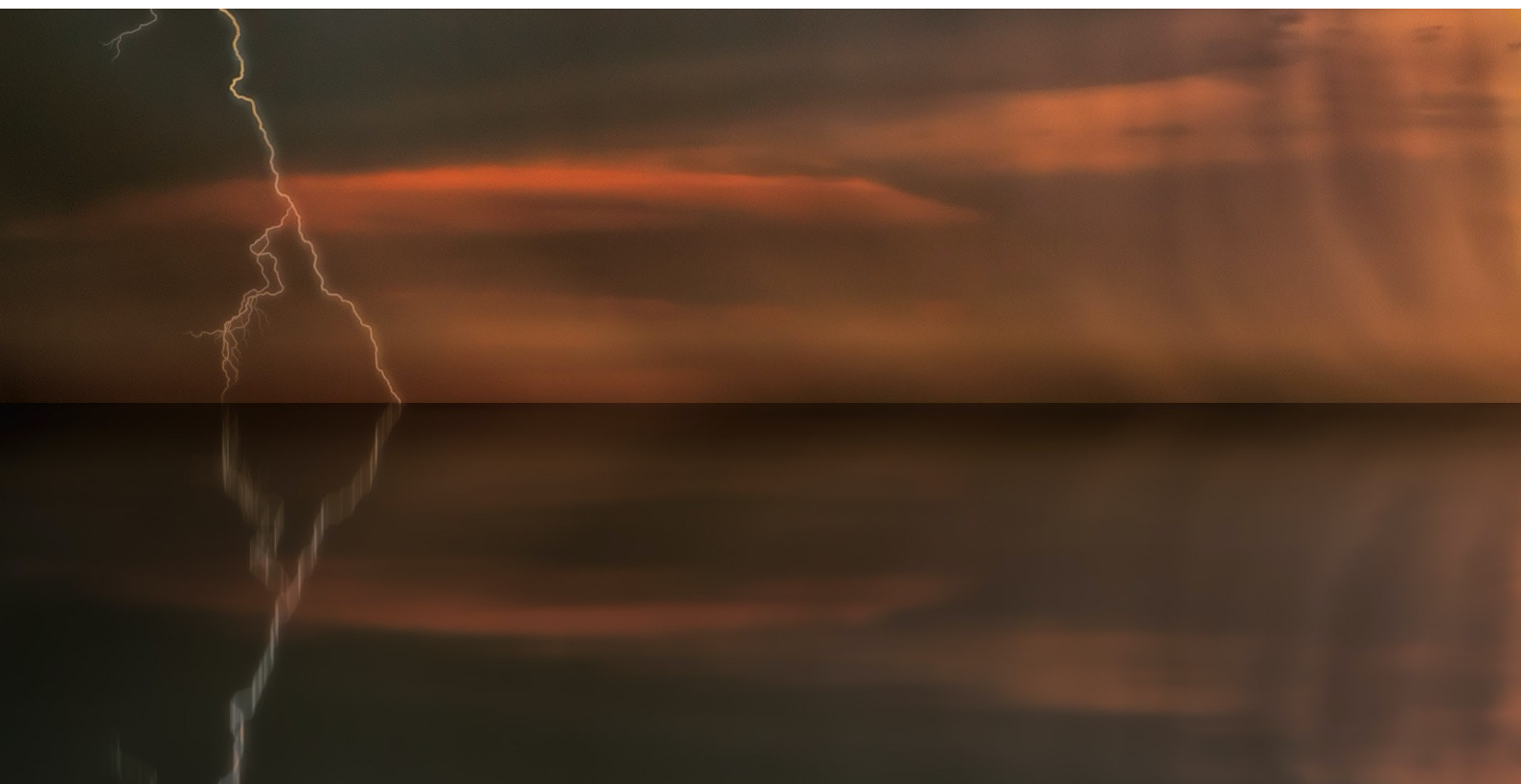
Since the Education Act (Scotland) of 1872, Scottish schooling has included a requirement for every school to provide 'Religious Observance' for its pupils. This was originally exclusively Christian in character and acted as effective religious instruction and enculturation. Parents could, if they so desired, opt their children out of this religious observance and so the schools are properly described as 'non-denominational.' 'Non-denominational' means that our Scottish schools are not affiliated to Christianity or to any religion. They use a secular curriculum. Currently, approximately 90% of Scottish Primary and Secondary education schools are 'non-denominational' and 10% are 'Roman Catholic'. Separate and distinct Roman Catholic schools in Scotland have been State-funded since 1918. There are also a very small number of independent faith-based schools.

Reflecting societal, cultural and philosophical shifts, the 'religious observance' in Scotland's non-denominational schools metamorphosed through a number of phases in terms of curriculum: from "religious instruction", to religious education", to "comparative religion." Scotland, in common with many European nations, now has a multi-faith society. The experiential side of 'religious observance' largely remained in place in the non-denominational sector beyond the middle of the 20th century, settling into a broadly common pattern of 'assemblies.' These were often weekly whole-school or year-group events, conducted and led by local clergy. Through the 1970's and 1980's these routinely included hymn singing, prayers and some form of moral and religious address. Christianity undoubtedly held a privileged position, even within the supposedly 'non-denominational' schools. Increasingly, religious and moral **education**

fused together in the curriculum and were taught as a distinct school subject by qualified school staff. The religious **observance**, explored through the weekly assemblies, while legally the responsibility of the school, was by and large 'delegated' or left to local clergy who acted as school chaplains.

While a significant majority of schools had Christian chaplains providing this service, there were no nationally agreed guidelines or standards. Many secondary schools (11-16 year-old) were lax or infrequent in their provision of religious observance. In 2004 the Scottish Executive commissioned and produced the 'Report of the Religious Observance Review Group.' This group, comprising academics and educationalists, reviewed the field of moral and spiritual development and also conducted a wide-ranging public consultation. Their key recommendation was a shift from "religious observance" to inclusive "Time for Reflection" in which weekly assemblies became 'community acts expressing and celebrating the shared values of the school community.' There was also to be a focus on spiritual and moral development.

Scotland's 'Curriculum for Excellence' spells out detailed 'experiences and outcomes' for every age-level and across all subjects - except 'Time for Reflection' and 'spiritual development.' The benchmarks or characteristics of this reflective spirituality were six 'Sensings.' The word allows an intentional ambiguity: the 'Sensings' may be nouns or verbs (or both). The word also allows flexibility: the 'Sensings' could be explored experientially or philosophically (or both). The word also allows cross pollination: the physical senses (touch, taste, sight, sound, scent) and the affective realm, values and principles. The notion of the Sensings came from the



work of Rachel Kessler, Parker Palmer, Rebecca Nye, David Hay, Linda Lantieri, John Miller, and Steven Glazer. Hay with Nye are the key influencers who write of "categories of spiritual sensitivity" that can be regarded as universal: "Awareness-sensing - Here and Now, Tuning, Flow, Focusing. Mystery-sensing - Wonder and Awe, Imagination. Value-sensing - Delight and despair. Ultimate goodness. Meaning." (Hay with Nye 2006:65).

The six 'Sensings' at the core of Scotland's 'Time for Reflection' are described rather than defined:

sensing mystery

"experiences of awe,
wonder and mystery about
the natural world,
human achievement
and for some a divinity"

sensing values

"attitudes and feelings about what is
really important, what really matters"

sensing meaningfulness

"the ability to make connections
or to see potential patterns
in one's life which give it meaning"

sensing a changed quality in awareness

"the feeling of being 'at one'
with nature, oneself and others"

sensing 'otherness'


"the sentiment that humans
are more than their physical elements"

sensing challenge

"being challenged and moved
by experiences such as love, beauty,
goodness, joy, compassion,
injustice, evil, suffering, death"

My doctoral research (2014-18) sought to test the validity of these 'Sensings', and to find out how they were understood by both the educators, and the pupils and students. The pilot study was conducted with fourteen Primary School pupils: a boy and a girl from each Primary School stage from P1 (5 years-old) to P7 (11 years-old). I asked what they thought of their school assemblies as this was the principal method for schools to create 'Time for Reflection' events. None of the pupils used the language of the Sensings. I then gave them cards with the six Sensings and descriptions of each and asked them to "write, draw or talk" what these six things made them think of. The children were also asked to say if they had ever experienced any of these Sensings.



A full-page background image showing a sunset over a beach. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a person is visible on the right side, standing on the wet sand and looking out towards the water.

From the pilot study it was apparent that pupils had rich emotional literacy but poor spiritual literacy. They had experiences and emotions that matched the Sensings but could not relate to the language of the Sensings. With the help of this group of children I created an 'alternative' vocabulary.

Sensing mystery - became 'Wow!' moments. What takes your breath away? What makes your jaw drop? What makes you say, 'Wow! That's amazing!?' These particularly occurred in natural and outdoor settings, and could relate to the macroscopic or the microscopic.

Sensing values - became 'Now' times. Those things that happen which make you pause and think, Now...what do I do here? How do I handle this? What should I do about this right now?

Sensing meaningfulness - became 'How?' wonderings. How did I get to this point? How do I get where I want to be? How do I make sense of my life? Some of life's big existential questions emerge at this point.


Sensing a changed quality in awareness - became 'Aum' moments. What makes you feel something special and sacred has happened? What things change how you look at people and things?

Sensing 'otherness' - became 'Narnia' moments. Those moments of insight when you feel you have stepped into another world or beyond physical senses.

Sensing challenge - became the 'Ow!' moments. What have you seen that made you say, "That's not right!" or 'That should be changed,' or 'someone should do something about that.'

These re-named 'Sensings' were then tested in greater depth over the next eighteen months in eight schools across seven of Scotland's unitary Education authorities, with a total of seventeen pupils from P3-7 (ages 7 to 11) and thirty-five S1-6 students (ages 11/12 to 17). Qualitative data was also gathered in thirty-four interview sessions from nine policy-makers, eight practitioners, and nine parents.

In brief: the six re-named Sensings proved far more accessible and were universally validated by all interviewees. There was a clear distinction in how readily pupils could identify specific Sensings. For instance, while all ages understood Sensing mystery, the Sensing of a changed quality of awareness required Higher Order Thinking Skills. It was also evident that at least two other 'Sensings' were missing from the 'official' list: Sensing Stillness and Sensing Connectedness/Community. A third possible Sensing - Story-telling - also needs further exploration.



It was mostly in my participant observations of school events and of other episodes within school life that I discerned a yearning for stillness. My reflections on stillness as a missing sensing began with experiences on a School residential trip which had involved taking a class of thirty ten and eleven year-old pupils to an Adventure Centre in the Cairngorms National Park. Staff from the Centre took us for a forest walk to the shores of a loch. There was no agenda or declared purpose other than a walk on a frosty, spring morning that happened to be bright and clear.

For the children the excitement of piling into a convoy of minibuses and driving out of the Centre heightened their noise and energy levels. Released from the minibuses the children's initial reaction was to shout and run like excited dogs let off the leash with a thousand scents to follow. As the Centre staff gathered us and we began the walk along a marked trail I noticed the effect of the forest on the children and the adults (both the Centre staff and the school staff). Though these children were noisy and boisterous to start with, every one of them quietened as we walked under the canopy of Scots Pines and deeper into the forest. We all began to walk quietly. I noticed that each child also had moments where they just stopped. This 'stop' was literal and metaphorical. Each, for a moment, seemed to find a moment of stillness or quietness. Even the most energetic and relentlessly active would pause for a short while. It reminded me that I have previously observed other people have the same reaction to instances such as entering a Cathedral or encountering a painting in a Gallery or standing on an empty beach. I've felt the same moments myself in such places.

The frequent references to "stillness" in the literature and the frequent 'sensing' of moments of stillness in school life make me posit that there is an innate need in each of us for stillness, a need for moments of peace, wherever and however we find it. It is not a peripheral experience and it is prevalent across cultures and age groups. It merits recognition as a sensing in its own right. "Stillness" is the best word I can offer for that combination of restfulness, peace, quietness, stilling of body and mind, contemplativeness, ease, relaxedness, and mindfulness.

If there is a strong case for expanding the Sensings to include stillness, I believe there is an even stronger case to include sensing community. A sense of community or communion emerges in the relevant literature again and again. Relationship, the binding factor in community, is seen by many as constituting a fundamental part of being human. Our spirituality may feel personal and individualised, but most often it seems to be nurtured in company and community.





When talking to the children in the original pilot study, I had asked them what they especially liked about their school assemblies (their events for 'Time for Reflection'). There was an immediate and enthusiastic list of things with each child contributing at least one response. The most frequent positive responses were to visual material (pictures and videos), to singing (the majority), and to story-telling (right across the age-range). The Scottish Bible Society ('Transform' issue 85, Spring 2021) reports that, "70% of people in the world live in oral communities, where the spoken word and storytelling are the primary ways a message is delivered and understood. Although global literacy rates are rising, there are still 781 million people world-wide who can't read."

It remains to be tested, but it would be interesting to research if stillness, community and storytelling would need an alternative vocabulary for children to understand and explore them.

uBuntu – I am because we are

online workshop by Anna-Mari Pieterse

Tuesday, June 15th 2021 (€15)

7.30 – 9.00 am CET

uBuntu is the African philosophy of connectedness and interdependence of all life: 'I am because we are'. Anna-Mari Pieterse is founder of the uBuntu Civics Academy, a South-African education and resource centre, established to help reclaim uBuntu as a way to personal and social transformation. In this workshop, participants will be introduced to the principles of uBuntu as a spiritual tradition. They will discover how these principles can be shared with children, and how uBuntu can help children become more resilient. The workshop will consist of presentations by Anna-Mari, time for personal reflection, and group discussion facilitated by Dutch primary school teacher and researcher Ineke Struijk. Working language: English

The uBuntu workshop is part of the Dutch 'Dag van de Kinderspiritualiteit' program, an annual conference which this year has been organised in the form of a series of online lectures and workshops followed by an afternoon event in Nijmegen on October 2nd 2021. For more information see www.oblimon.nl, or contact us at info@oblimon.nl

International Association for Children's Spirituality

International Symposium

Children's Spirituality:

Keeping the Conversation Going

Online via Zoom 22-23 & 26-27 July 2021

The 2021 symposium will focus on the work of participants and the future of research and practices in children's spirituality, exploring questions such as how does our work address the diverse realities of children's lives and how can we continue to draw attention to the spiritual needs of children around the world? Live sessions will be scheduled at various times across four days to maximize opportunities for participation from wherever they are located. Join with other researchers and practitioners who are committed to keeping the conversation about children's spirituality going.

You need not be a member of the IACS to participate. All with an interest in children's spirituality are welcome and there is no charge for taking part.

The symposium will consist of a series of scholarly and practical conversations.

Participants are invited to share briefly about their research or practices re: children's spirituality through short papers or pre-recorded presentations that will be posted in advance and then discussed in live Zoom panel conversations.

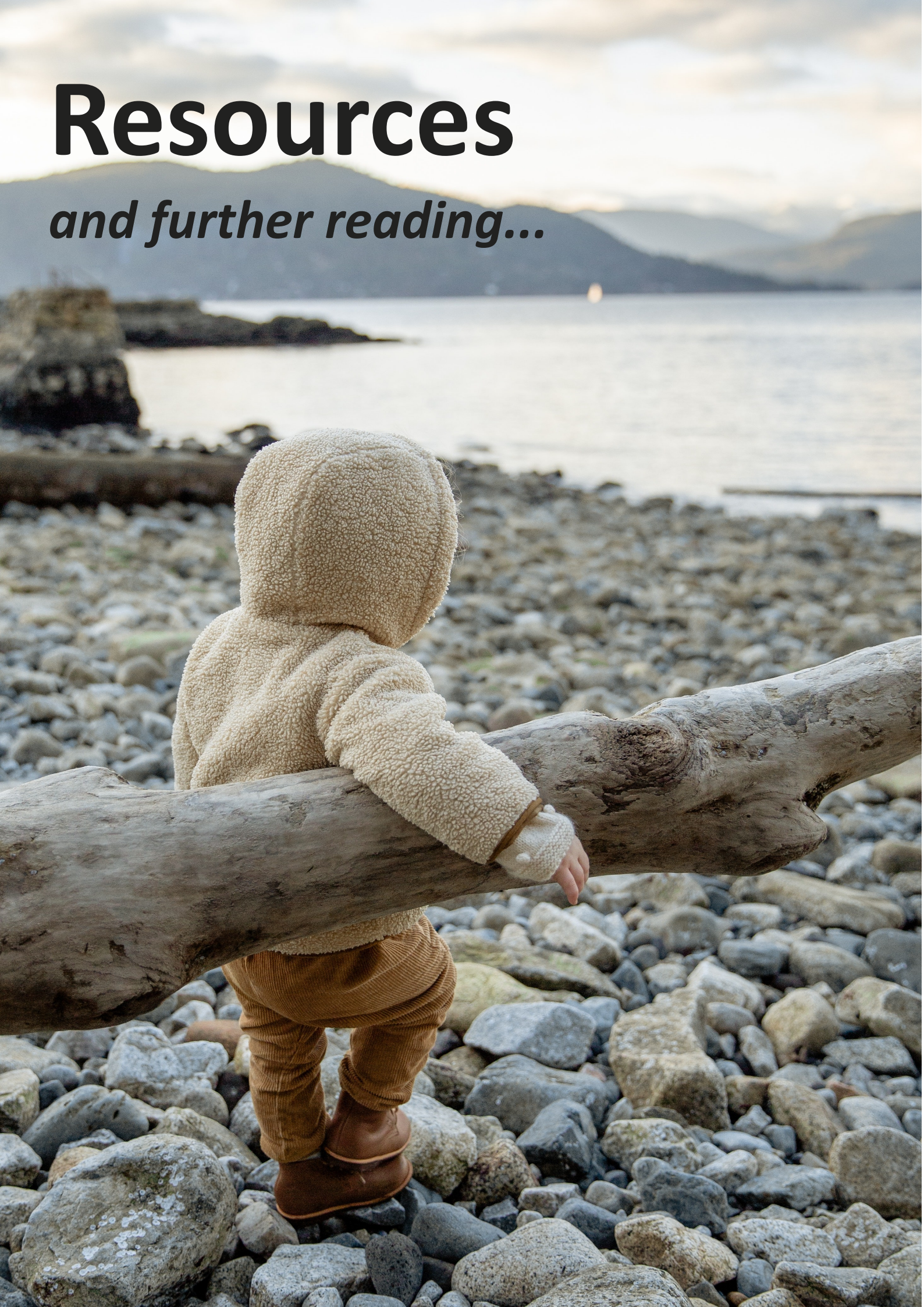
You need not provide a paper or presentation. If you prefer to read/listen/watch the submitted work and then join in the live Zoom discussions, send your completed registration form to IACS@RealKidsRealFaith.org by 1 July 2021. The registration form is available on https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Bj_n_u2hxEuCMOZwDI9CwNPeGJq23fE2/view?usp=sharing. We will send you a schedule of events and a Zoom link prior to the first day of the symposium.

For more information, please contact IACS Chair Karen-Marie Yust at kmyust@gmail.com.



Resources

and further reading...



Meditation Awakens the Heart: Children, Meditation and Personal Spiritual Experience

Noel Keating *meditation.wellbeing@gmail.com*

Berryman, J. W. (2013). *The Nonverbal Nature of Spirituality and Religious Language. The Search for a Theology of Childhood - Essays by Jerome W. Berryman from 1978-2009*. B. Hyde. Ballarat, Victoria, Modotti Press.

Clark, C. D. (2011). In *A Younger Voice: Doing Child-Centered Qualitative Research*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Gellel, A.-M. (2018). "The Language of Spirituality." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 23(1): 17-29.

Keating, M. N. (2017). *Children's Spirituality and the Practice of Meditation in Irish Primary Schools: A Phenomenological Exploration*. Ph.D., Waterford Institute of Technology.

Keating, N. (2017). *Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents*. Dublin, Veritas.

Keating, N. and A. Levandoski (2019). *Meditation with Children: Songs and Reflections*. Canada, Cantus Productions.

Simon, M. (1993). *Born Contemplative: Introducing Children to Christian Meditation*. London, Darton, Longman and Toddvan

Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany, NY, State University of New York Press.



The relationship between Spiritual Development and Nature Education

Patti Bailie PhD

Pelo, Ann (2013) *The goodness of rain: Developing an ecological identity in young children* Redmond, Washington: Exchange Press Inc.

Schein, D. (2018) *Inspiring wonder, awe, and empathy: Spiritual development for children* Saint Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Sobel, David (2016) *Nature preschools and forest kindergartens: The handbook for outdoor learning* Saint Paul, MN: Redleaf Press

Koningskind

Selma Noort

Selma Noort (Leiden 1960) is a Dutch writer, painter and former primary school teacher. Her many books for children and young adults are sometimes about 'stuff that is going on in the world' and sometimes set in a world of fairy tales. They always touch on meaning making and the big questions of life.

'Koningskind' by Selma Noort, Leopold, Amsterdam 2020, 264 pages, €16,99

Available from local bookstores and at www.kinderboeken.nl/boek/koningskind

Koningskind will be published in Russian by Samokat Publishing House and is being translated into German.



Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom

Adrian Bethune

Published by Bloomsbury Education (2018), in English. Available from bookstores and online booksellers, c.£14-£18 price range

Time for Reflection - Sensings: a mechanism for spiritual development?

Steve Younger

Glazer, Steven (Ed.) 1999 *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*

Kessler, Rachael 2000 *The Soul of Education*

Lantieri, L. (Ed) 2001 *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers* Beacon Press, Boston

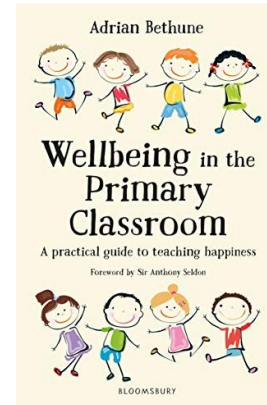
Miller, John P. 2000 *Education and the Soul: Toward a Spiritual Curriculum*

Nye, Rebecca & Hay, David 2006 (revised) *The Spirit of the Child*

Parker, Palmer 1999 *The Grace of Great Things: Reclaiming the Sacred in Knowing, Teaching and Learning* (in Glazer, S. 1999)

Parker, Palmer 2001 *The Courage to Teach: A Program for Teacher Renewal* (in Lantieri 2001)

Younger, Steve 2018 *Time for Reflection: A Guide to School Chaplaincy and Spiritual Development* Saint Andrew Press



Receptivity

Edwin van der Zande

Biesta, G. 2010 *Education after the death of the subject: Levinas and the pedagogy of interruption*. In *Handbook of cultural politics and education* (pp. 289-300). Brill Sense.

Korthagen, F., & Vasalos, A. 2005 Levels in reflection: Core reflection as a means to enhance professional growth. *Teachers and teaching*, 11(1), 47-71.

van der Zande, E. L. R. 2018 *Life Orientation for Professionals: A Narrative Inquiry into Morality and Dialogical Competency in Professionalisation* (Doctoral dissertation, Parthenon).

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 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.

