

# CHILDREN, ADULTS AND SPIRITUALITY – WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

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*This Paper is based on a Joint Lecture delivered  
at the Alister Hardy Society's Members' Day on 6 November 1998*

## I – THE NARRATIVE CONNECTION

We begin this Paper by repeating the question in the title, asking what **is** the connection between adults, children and spirituality. The connection is narrative. Narrative is how the connection between children, adults and spirituality is both established and maintained.

Jean François Lyotard in *Le Différend* says that narrative has a privilege in the way it assembles diversity. It is a genre that seems to be able to admit all others. Everything, says Marx, has a 'his-story' (1983: 228). There is an affinity between the people and the narrative. The popular form of language is the small, de-ritualised narrative. To paraphrase Lyotard, people like to tell stories and, in particular, they like to tell stories about themselves. This is how we as people - as children and adults – express our similarities with other people, and our differences from others. These stories that people tell about their lives and experiences are Lyotard's 'small narratives', the little stories which challenge and define the meta-narratives – the grand stories of ideology and moral prescription.

### **Sharing Narratives**

In the course of our work *The Children and WorldViews Project* has collected narratives from children and from adults. These narratives, or stories, can demonstrate how people make sense of their lives, how they give their lives coherence and meaning. In addition these narratives can also show how they explain both their own behaviour and the behaviour of others.

These different aspects could be termed people's moralities and spiritualities. One thing that really surprises (and charms) us in the work we do, with children and adults, is the willingness that people have to share their narrative. And perhaps the term willingness is insufficient in this context, for what we have experienced is the **desire** that people have to share their narrative. Again Lyotard had something to say about this when he described the obligation to narrate:

... someone speaks to me, and obliges me. Obliges me to do what? To retell, but not necessarily to my narrator. He doesn't oblige me to give it back to him – that's not what it's all about – but I'm obliged like a transmitter that cannot retain its charge, but will have to transmit it. That's the question of prescription, in the sense that there is a kind of imperative, that necessitates that at the moment one speaks to me, and that I have been spoken to, I have to speak. So, the stories that are told to me, and the stories that are my experiences as well, must be retold – they must be passed on.

(1969; 69–70)

Part of our work has been encouraging that narration, encouraging both children and adults to tell us their stories and we have found that the surest way to encourage somebody to narrate is to tell **them** a story: to offer someone a narrative so they respond with a narrative. A recent experience of Jane's provides an example of this.

### *Jane's Story*

This concept of narration became very clear to me quite recently in a reading group I organise in college. On this particular occasion we were having the normal kind of academic discussion – we were actually talking about feminism and post-modernism. After we had talked for a while, I offered a story instead of the normal academic argument. The response from members of the group was really interesting because what I immediately started getting back was more stories from their experience. These were either ones that supported what I was saying, or ones that contrasted with what I was saying. The whole atmosphere of the group was changed by this: the discussion became subjective rather than objective; it became grounded in experience instead of being abstract; it became active instead of passive; involved instead of distanced. Even the genre of prose in which people spoke became different. Bakhtin, the Russian language theorist, would have said that the genre of the prose changed from the epic to the novel. It was also interesting how people within that academic discussion who had been disempowered previously, became empowered by this change in the way we spoke.

What I find very interesting here is the power of the narrative and the way it changed the discussion. Apart from the **way** the discussion was changed by the story I told, the story itself was interesting too. We reflected on that story afterwards, because it was a story of a student of mine, who, two days beforehand, had been conned out of £300 in the centre of Winchester. Someone had come up to her asking for money and she had responded by giving this person £300 because of the 'sob-story' that had been told. It was a very sad story and the student was very upset. I had to deal with this so she told me the story, and then we went to somebody for some advice and she told the story again. Then, as I was trying to work out what to do, we went to student services and she told the story again. And then we went to the police station and she told the story again. In the end I was witness to four of these 'tellings'.

Of course each time I heard the story it was different and led me to wonder what, if this story told four times over the period of an hour is different every time, am I doing in my research? What am I hearing when I ask people for their narratives? What's the point of what I'm doing? I concluded that narratives are ephemeral; they change each time they're spoken, and they change each time they're told because each time the narrator is actually a different person. I had to question what my student was talking about – was she talking about what really happened? As it was different every time, she wasn't talking about what **really** happened.

Was she talking about her state of mind? Was she giving me each time her state of mind at the telling? I think that was a bit closer to it. Was she talking about her relationship with the listener? Was that the reason for the differences in the story? I think it was probably all of those things, and more. So I had to ask myself – and it also applied to other people in the group I was talking to – what would I have gained from taping my student's stories and trying to analyse them? What would I have found out? I'm going to leave those questions hanging in the air, and say that, in choosing to employ a narrative methodology, we have to deal with the recognition of those questions.

I refer once again to Lyotard, because he says that the pertinent trait is not fidelity. It is not because one has conserved the narrative that one is a good narrator, on the contrary, because one has added something, because one invents, because one introduces different episodes that form a motif with the narrative chain that remains stable. Narratives repeat themselves, but are never identical (1979: 66f). As we have said, we use narratives in our research and we use narrative to engender narrative. We use one to stimulate the other. Over the last five years of the Project we have gathered a range of stories from children and adults and in this paper we would like to share some of the stories we have been told to illustrate the process we use.<sup>1</sup> We want to delve more deeply into the practicalities of this process later in this paper but before that we need to give an example of the narrative connection in our work.

### Stories From Children

When we want to listen to children's stories we go into schools and talk to children, generally aged between 4 and 11 – that is, Primary School children. We're careful not to ask direct questions, but instead encourage them to talk by using very open-ended general questions. Our concern is that children have a way of responding to an authority figure by giving the answers they think are wanted so we try to avoid that trap by not letting them know what this is! This approach gives us very long, fascinating conversations with children, ranging over a wide variety of interesting topics.<sup>2</sup> When we first started our conversations with children one of the methods we used to encourage children to talk was by reading them a poem.

On one occasion the children we were talking to were aged six or seven and we used a Brian Patten poem, *Looking for Dad*, because we felt it would be something they could connect with:

Whenever Mum and Dad were full of gloom  
They always yelled tidy up your room  
Just because my comics were scattered here and everywhere  
And because I didn't care where I left my underwear  
They yelled "I'll send you to a house of correction  
If you don't tidy up your stamp collection".

Then one day they could not care less about the room's awful mess  
They seemed more intent on a domestic argument  
They both looked glum  
And instead of me Dad screeched at Mum.

One night when I went to bed he simply vanished  
Ten past seven, tenth of June, I had not tidied up my room  
Because I too was full of gloom  
That night I dreamt Dad was hidden  
Beneath the things I'd been given.  
In my dream I was in despair  
And flung about my underwear  
But could not find him anywhere.

I looked for him lots and lots  
Beneath crumpled sheets and old robots  
I looked in cupboards and in shoes  
I looked in all the chimney flues  
I remembered how he'd seemed to be  
Unhappier than even me.

When I woke I knew it was not my room  
That filled Mum and Dad with so much gloom  
Now I stare at all my old toy cars  
And carpets stained with old Mars bars  
And hope he will come back soon  
And admire my very tidy room.  
It's now the twenty-ninth of June.  
(1986: 42)

This poem was suggested to us by the head teacher of the primary school where we were working because she felt that the issues highlighted were ones being dealt with by the children in her school. Surprisingly enough, though, the narratives we got back from the children didn't necessarily address what we expected. For example, Victoria, aged seven, responded by telling us her story, which was about heaven and her Nan who had died.

#### *Victoria's Story*

Before my Nan died she told me lots of things because she knew she was going to die and she told me all about the things she was going to do and she said she was going to send me a postcard.

She said she would be happy and she wanted me to be happy when she died. On that day she got a picture of her and all the family, stuck it on a postcard and wrote on the back, "I'll see you in your heart". Now she's always with me. Now I talk to her all the time. I talk to her when I'm lonely. When I've argued with my friends I go and sit on the wall and think about her and talk to her. When I get fed up I sit there and talk to her about my friends. She tells me that she's riding on things. She says she's having a really nice time. She says she's going to ring me up. She says things in my head, she rings up my brain and talks to me. When she went up in heaven she took one of her special secrets. She took it with her and she can just ring me up, it's clever. This special secret makes her able to do that.

I keep on wanting to tell people things but they don't understand. I know everyone's in heaven who has died. Grandma tells me. She works in a cleaners. She washes all the clouds in heaven. She's got lots and lots of friends in heaven. She hopes we'll stay alive a long time but she wants me to go up there to see her. I'd like to go and see her but if you go up there you've got to stay there. You can't go unless you've died. Heaven is high, high in the sky, it's higher than space.

I've never worried about these things. I just keep it in my heart. It's not a problem. It makes me quite sad they [people] don't believe. But when God talks to them they will know. We are very, very lucky that just some people care in this world. Like me and my friends and everybody in this school. I hope we care. We keep this planet going. I think heaven is part of this planet.

My Nan was burnt when she died, cremated. I think that's better than worms coming in your coffin.

So Victoria's response to the poem about Dad leaving home was a story about her grandmother dying and the special relationship she had with her grandmother. Not a connection with the poem's specific content, but certainly a connection with the general concept of loss.

#### **Further Responses**

From this point the Project has looked at how to develop this narrative process further, which has been done by collecting both child and adult responses to Victoria's story. At different times we have shown her story to groups of adults and children of all ages and asked them to write down their response. What this has established is a process whereby a narrative poem gives us a narrative response from a child (eg: Victoria), which in turn gives us narrative responses from other children and adults. What is apparent from **all** these responses is that the age of those writing or speaking the narratives doesn't appear to make any difference to their response.

Here are two written responses from adults to Victoria's story. The first is written in the form of a poem, with the process returning to the poetic genre.

*An Adult's Story*

I wondered about the first loss  
And what that led to  
At each stage  
I thought of consequences  
And how to live with them  
Truthfully  
Where it might all end up  
And I was grateful

*Another Adult's Story*

My Gran was great, annoying and stubborn, but a genuine person who led a hard life. Her main characteristics were her East Bristol accent, her strong tea, her considerable girth and her memories of past life and of her husband.

She did not go out very much in later years, until eventually she **never** went out, and I visited every Saturday. She made it clear in her 90s that when her time came, she was under no circumstances to be taken to hospital and she wanted to remain at home – not go to the work-house. She became ill with various worrying aches and pains and after some dizzy spells and falls she was carted off to hospital before we had a chance to stop them. When she returned home, we assured her that this would never happen again and we worked out a way of insuring this.

Eventually she became very ill and was confined to bed. We stayed with her in shifts and gave her morphine when she needed it. One morning we had a phone call that she was on the way out. We went over and held her hand. She said my name and then became distant and she died. I have a photo of her making tea, and I said a poem at her funeral.

In the telling of these stories we can see that the threads are maintained between the generations and between one person and another. The connection is in narrative.

## **II – PRACTICALITIES OF THE NARRATIVE PROCESS**

### **Step One – Engagement**

Having presented some of the narratives we have collected we would like to explore two aspects of facilitating narrative – firstly, how we engage with children and adults; and secondly, what we have identified as the relational process.

Working from our findings we would contend that there are two key features which are intrinsic to facilitating narrative:

1. that the key to narrative is the relationships that exist between people;
2. that the kind of relationship between persons will affect, as we have seen, the kind of narrative that is told.

The idea of narrative and data as narrative comes from our methodology. When we started the Project we were quite sure that what we wanted was a qualitative framework: we were interested in listening to people, listening to children and hearing what they had to say. Because we wanted to listen to children's narratives we needed an approach that enabled

us to do that, and we had to think about how we were going to get children to talk about experiences and relationships that were important.

Brian Patten's poem *Looking for Dad* is just one method we adopted for fostering the kind of environment where children would feel comfortable to talk. On other occasions we have read stories that have been told to us by other children, or even walked round places that are important to the children we are with at the time – and this includes rubbish dumps, playgrounds and parks. As we reflected on these aspects of our methodology we soon realised that what we were doing was not an objective piece of research, and this is something we are happy to acknowledge in our work. We accept that it is subjective and for us this subjectivity is a very important part of what we do. As researchers we encourage the subjective relationships that we have with the children, not least because we feel that the narratives we are told would not be articulated if we ignored the subjective element and tried to be objective, distant and detached in our conversations and research.

In our analysis of these subjective relationships we started to try to unpick their nature and how we established them. We asked each other why we were getting these kinds of responses from children. Why were people surprised when we reported that this is what children were saying? Why did they then ask us how we got children to talk like that? What was it about the relationships we were having that enabled such narrative process?

### **Qualities of Engagement**

To find answers to these questions we went back to the interviews and our transcripts. Rather than talking with individual children on a one-to-one basis, we preferred our interviews to be carried out with pairs or small groups of four children, which we felt was the optimum size for a good interview. This raises the question of what we mean by this term 'interview'. What we wanted was to facilitate a process whereby the children were in dialogue with each other. That, in our minds, was a good interview because the children were interacting, listening, responding and exchanging narratives and stories – developing, in the process, their own ideas and narratives. Considering the interviews against this criterion of 'good' highlighted a clear distinction in our conversations with the children – between:

- a) times when the children weren't very keen to talk, when a particular question didn't stimulate much discussion or response; and
- b) times when children were at ease yet animated and enthusiastic, eager to talk and keen to participate.

Employing the term 'engaged' to describe the children in this latter kind of conversation, we carefully scrutinised the interviews once again to explore what we meant by this concept. This led us to **four qualities of engagement**:

- 1 **When a topic provokes extensive discussion and debate with an exchange of views and opinions** For example, when invited to speak to something about which they were curious, a common interview situation was for a child to offer an idea about God, or what happened when people died. Invariably this acted as a springboard for lively discussion among the group, other children responding with their own diverse ideas and questions such as 'what about dinosaurs?', 'I think my pet is in heaven' and 'what if you are cremated?'
- 2 **When an individual child talks at length about a relationship or experience**
- 3 **When a child speaks with feeling or emphasis**

#### **4 When a child presents a particular narrative of their own, which relates the topic of conversation to their own personal experiences**

As well as identifying these qualities of engagement, we also found that evidencing instances in the transcripts and interviews led us to points where children were conveying something that was important to them. Having reached this juncture of our work, we had to decide where to go next. What has unfolded since is a number of exciting but different avenues. One path has been to take children's narratives to adults; another – the one we wish to present for you in this paper – has been to investigate how the notions of engagement and narrative process can be usefully employed by teachers.

#### **Step Two – Working With Teachers**

It had taken the Project Team a considerable amount of interviewing and analysis to reach a point where we felt that we were beginning to grasp the kinds of processes and conditions that permitted children to speak freely and deeply about things that mattered to them. It was therefore a big step to work with teachers and explore what happened when teachers, instead of us, started to have the same kinds of conversations with children. Unlike us, they did not have the luxury of an hour to talk to small groups of children. What would happen when teachers applied the same process to a class of 30 children? Remaining true to the principles we had developed with regard to engaging with children, we were looking at ways of how to do this practically with a whole class.

This collaborative work with teachers is still continuing with four teachers at different schools in the south of England. As yet there are no final conclusions to offer, but nevertheless we feel that some important lessons have already been learnt by working together in this way.

After identifying four schools who would be prepared to join with us in our inquiry, we met with the head teachers to discuss our plans. At these meetings it was agreed that the Project would cover the supply costs of one afternoon each half term for the teachers involved to meet together and support each other in their work. In addition to this, members of the Project Team went into the schools on a fortnightly basis to meet with individual teachers and, reflecting on the experiences of the teacher to date, to plan an appropriate way forward. At our initial group meeting with the teachers they asked us for guidelines: *"How do we go about this process? We think it is important and we think we already do it to a degree, but can you give us some guidelines about how we can engage with children in this way? How do we get them to talk? How can we have that kind of relationship?"*

#### **Guidelines For Teachers ...**

This led us to draw up some guidelines – guidelines which have since been reformulated a number of times – reformulated because every time we talk to the teachers, or we have conversations with other people, we consider some other points to be important. These guidelines are therefore themselves part of a continually evolving process.

Appendix A sets out the initial guidelines we produced and gave to the teachers. As you can see, they present some idea of the narrative process, and in particular the process of adults engaging with children. The guidelines also outline some objectives (why we were asking them to do it, why we thought it was important) because we wanted the teachers to use children's stories to encourage other children to talk. We wanted to see if this process could really work, and, as far as we can tell at the moment, it is very successful.

In drawing up the guidelines we also felt that it was important to spell out clearly what we perceived to be the practicalities of the process: we asked the teachers to tape the children's responses to the stories and then work with the process to see where to go next. What we didn't offer in the guidelines (or anywhere else) was a prescription of what to do – we wanted to enable the teachers to work with their children and respond in a way that was suitable and appropriate for them.

### **... and How they Used them**

So what did the teachers do? They gave the whole class of children a story, or a picture, from another child and then to encouraged the children to respond in some way. In one school where the children were very young (reception age) they responded by drawing and talking. Other teachers working with older pupils gathered them in small groups for discussion, writing and reflection. In our guidelines we offered the teachers some general hints about the process of working with the children in this way,<sup>3</sup> which we hoped would also provide us with the kind of data to help us understand what happened between the teachers and children. In addition to this data, we asked the teachers to keep a log in which they recorded their own feelings and experiences about how they felt the children had responded to the narrative.

Combined with records of the Team's regular visits to the schools and the teachers' support group the Project has managed to collect a large and diverse data bank. As well as encompassing the responses of children within this process, we also have an ongoing account of how the teachers have responded and felt about working with their children in this way. This collaborative venture is still progressing and there is further analysis of our findings. However, we are convinced that the actual process of getting this far has revealed some interesting issues. For instance the teachers involved have, from the outset, frequently commented on how difficult it is to adjust to having these kinds of conversations in the classroom, how difficult it is to focus on a process rather than aiming towards a fixed endpoint of achievement and assessment. In the current climate of a prescribed curriculum, the teachers often expressed regret and guilt that, whilst such activities were no doubt of immense value for the children, there was simply not enough time or space to respond appropriately as issues were raised. They certainly wanted to respond but they saw this as simply not possible within the confines and tight parameters of curriculum content.

### **Steps Along The Way – The Balance of Relationships**

Whilst our reflections and analysis of this research continues alongside our work with the teachers, the pervading theme of relationship has emerged very prominently.<sup>4</sup> Further consideration of this has led us to conclude that, in considering narrative and how narratives are produced we are in fact also reflecting on a relational process, the particular kind of relational process that is established in these narrative dialogues.

The kind of relationality fostered in these dialogues is perhaps best highlighted when it is compared to the relationships referred to in the children's narratives. Many of the children's narratives we have collected speak about relationships with parents, friends, head teachers and class teachers. In some instances children describe the relationships they have with their school, and the kinds of relationships that are fostered between adults and children at school.

Having carefully considered these narratives and what they say about different kinds of relationships, we have identified a framework of qualities that are held in balance within



each and every relationship any given child has which, held in tension, is continually revisited and re-negotiated in every relationship. Thus not only does every relationship have its own balance of qualities, but in any particular relationship this balance is different at any given moment in time. We are therefore talking about something that is complex and constantly changing. The sort of balance of qualities we mean includes:

1. Meaning
2. Security
3. Negotiation
4. Freedom
5. Independence
6. Authority and authoritative statements.

Here we began to see the tension and complexity inherent in the balance – security and meaning on one hand; but also freedom, independence and negotiation on the other. For us, power underpins these qualities and continues to be a very significant issue for us, both in our research and in talking to others about talking to children.

### **Awareness of The Power Balance**

Our awareness of this power issue is something that has grown out of our wanting to listen to children. In our attempts to do this we have become acutely conscious of the power relationship implicitly present and constructed when an adult talks to a child. Indeed, it may be said that our work is propelled in no small way by trying to acknowledge this power differential and the value of removing it. In one of our meetings, speaking about the kinds of conversations we were trying to have with children, one teacher made the following comment: thus:

You don't stop playing because you grow old; you grow old because you stop playing. And this is playing with talk. You have to have a certain confidence and reflection, to be able to do it. And that's maybe why our colleagues don't want to do it. We're the enlightened ones.

As far as we are concerned, there is significant value in ironing out this power differential and carefully attending to how these qualities are balanced in our relationships.

### **III NARRATIVE AS COMMUNICATION AND SPIRITUALITY**

So far in our paper we have moved from philosophical reflection and empirical research to the classroom and to conversations with adults and with children. For us there is something very important in that whole process because normally there would be adults discussing philosophy or having adult conversations in one place, while children were having conversations somewhere else – these are the constructs by which we live. For philosophy you need to be a philosopher, to have adult conversations you must be an adult, but with children you can have children's conversations. What we are claiming is that this sort of division is precisely what retards people. So, if you don't want to retard people, you must break down those categories and believe that people can have conversations with one another – not according to their profession or their age, but according to the experiences that they have in common. As far as we can tell from our work, that is what actually happens – but not officially! Therefore if it does not officially happen and what does officially happen retards people, what should we do about it?

## Two Considerations

We wish to bring two considerations to this deliberation. First, the observations of Lyotard, to whom we referred at the beginning of this paper. At the end of *The Post-Modern Condition* Lyotard says, “let us wage a war on totality” (1984:82). For Lyotard, totality was represented by grand narratives, which silence small narratives. What can this mean for us, waging war on grand or meta-narratives such as Christianity or scientific objectivity? For us, what Lyotard seems to be saying is that if you are a scientist you can play this game, if you are a Christian, you can play this game, but you are not allowed to play the scientific game unless you are a scientist, nor the Christian game unless you are a Christian. Therefore no conversations can take place across the divide of the specified classifications. It is like having children in one place and philosophers in another; ultimately this operates as a barrier which prevents people telling their stories to one another.

We can apply this notion of a barrier to the school curriculum which is divided up into subjects: at this time in this place you will do history; at that time in that place you will do religious education; and at another time in another place you will have a literacy hour. This is perhaps because every curriculum subject is based upon a meta-narrative, upon the idea that, in that space, at that time, you can have knowledge which is known by historians; in this place, in this time, you can have knowledge which is known by scientists. And of course what happens is that education in schools is led by a notion of authority, starting with the person who has the knowledge (the teacher) who gives the knowledge to the child (the person without the knowledge). Now of course it can be argued that other things take place too, but the point we are making is that, if other things take place, they take place **despite** – not **because of** – that structure.

This brings us to the second consideration that we want to address – this ‘thing’ called spirituality. Is it a ‘thing’ because, if it is not a concept capable of definition, you cannot teach it? It is the mentality of rational construction which accords importance to what takes place, what it is called and why it should be there. Consequently there is no way in which spirituality can become part of the school curriculum such that it can be appropriately addressed. With a curriculum set in place, together with the principles and rules that underpin its authority and the particular discourse which that demands, it is no surprise to us that teachers find it difficult – if not impossible – to have conversations that are about the spirituality of the person and how that spirituality is nurtured and attended to.

## The Fundamental Problem of Self-Definition

Here we may say that we have arrived at the fundamental problem, the problem for the teacher, for the school and for the child. As far as we are concerned, it is simply not possible to import spirituality in a superficial way; it is not something which can simply sit alongside or thread through what **must** be done. Spirituality with its narrative, relational character cannot be accommodated in this tokenistic way. The actual psychological process of education is rendered contradictory: if you try to accommodate spirituality within that particular framework and concept of imparting knowledge, it just will not fit. So where do we go from here? Clive’s story perhaps brings together some of the points we want to make:

### *Clive’s Story*

I was speaking to 150 15-year olds from various schools, sitting in front of me during a series of edifying talks by guest speakers. I wanted to introduce them to some of the things the children had said and I started by asking them to put up their hands if they were an adult at which most, but not all (!), of the teachers put up their hands. Then I asked the children to put up their hands. Immediately, like some Pavlovian experiment, I saw all these young people putting

up their hands, and I saw other young people, who didn't put up their hands. You can imagine the atmosphere: up to that point I was playing some orthodox game – who are the adults and who are the children? Now there was a lot of excitement. What is going on? Did I expect that to happen? Was it going to spoil my joke or disrupt my plan?

Now we didn't know quite where we were because the authority had started to shift or even collapse, and ... whoops – we were all trying to work out where we were. So I said to one young woman: 'You didn't put your hand up!' and perhaps everybody wondered if I would tell her off. I said, 'You didn't put your hand up' and she said, 'No'. I asked why she hadn't put up her hand, and what category she thought she was, to which she replied: 'I'm a young adult'.

This brought realisation of the (all too obvious) significance and importance of self-definition. If you talk to someone in such a way as to indicate how you define them, such that they must now respond to **your** definition of **them**, they will not talk to you in the same way as if they had been allowed to define themselves. The qualities and balance of relationship that we had come to identify in our research will immediately come into place if we allow and encourage self-definition.

Are we advocating nothing less than an educational revolution? Perhaps we are. As Clive's story illustrates, even within the surface level of conversation there are always implicitly designed roles, which are conveyed in the conversation itself. For us that is why it is so difficult for teachers to initiate the sort of conversation with children that we are highlighting, the kind that do not presume at the outset, *'I am an adult and you are a child, and in the school environment we all understand what that means.'*

Certainly our work has shown us that for education and schools to make the connection between adults, children and spirituality there needs to be a radical reworking of relationships. In this paper we have taken the spiritual to be about being human and how to develop humanly. As far as we are concerned the connection between the spiritual, adults and children, is easy enough to make. However, whilst narrative relationality might give us the answer, it also presents its own challenges – for example in reflecting the way we defend our own sense of adulthood. These challenges do not exist just in our classrooms, they confront all of us who want to explore the kinds of connections that might be possible between children and adults through the question: 'how should we relate and respond?'. The way forward must lie in narrative – narratives shared in a relational process that are continually revisited and reflected upon.

## NOTES

1. Children's stories are collected by interviewing children, usually in small groups, and then transcribing the interview, removing the interviewer's words. This provides a continuous piece of prose.
2. For more on this first stage of the Project, see Erricker, C. et al (1977) *The Education of the Whole Child*.
3. See Appendix A
4. It is interesting that, although David Hay and Rebecca Nye's work is independent to that of the Project, we have both come to similar conclusions regarding the significance of relationality. For more about Hay & Nye's work, see Hay with Nye, 1998.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **THE CHILDREN AND WORLDVIEWS PROJECT GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS**

#### **1. Objectives – why we are doing this**

- the object of this programme is for you to use children’s stories, both written and drawn, to stimulate other children to talk about their own important issues.
- you will tape record the responses and use them in their turn to decide the next stage in the programme.
- children are thus using their own experiences to respond to the experiences of others and thus develop spiritually and emotionally.
- we are working towards developing a programme for spiritual and moral education for children in school which is child-centred and child-led.

#### **2. Procedure – what you will be doing**

- you will be given children’s stories and pictures to read and show to your children.
- how you proceed from here depends upon the age of your children and how they respond. You could ask open questions to the whole group and instigate a discussion. The tape recorder could be passed from child to child as they respond. You could ask the children to draw a response and then go round and record their spoken responses, using the pictures as the focus. You could simply talk to the children in small groups and record the conversations.
- these taped responses will be transcribed and analysed by you and the Project team together, in order to determine the next stage. Significant responses can be identified and if there is a sequence of responses by a particular child, this can form the basis of more stories.
- in discussion with the Project team you and your data will inform how the next stage of the programme will be constructed.

#### **3. Some general hints about the process**

- when tape recording children speaking either ask them to say their name before they speak, or, if this is too intrusive, say their name into the recorder as you respond. We’ve found this a particular problem in the past – comments on tape that we can’t identify! A written list of the children present is essential too.
- try to keep your participation in the conversation to a minimum and encourage the children to talk to one another.
- try to avoid moving the conversation towards a curriculum context – keep it as open and child-led as possible. Follow up issues that the children raise and open the conversation to

other children in the group for their responses. You don't need to give answers or wrap up the conversations so they have an 'end'.

- after a session with the children write up a personal log. This means writing down anything about the session that you felt was important and which wouldn't appear on the tape. Also your thoughts and feelings about the session. We will ask you to share these reflections if you feel you can because they will be very useful in analysing the data and will inform the process of the research and development.

#### **4. Support – how we will support you**

- we will have regular meetings with teachers involved. When other schools join the Project we will organise joint meetings to share our perceptions of the research and how it should develop.
- you can reach us by phone whenever you want to discuss anything: Cathy Ota on [-] any time, Jane and Clive Erricker on [ ] in the evenings. Cathy can come into school as required.

#### **5. Feedback – what we want from you**

- when you have used a tape label it with the date, the class, your name and the school name and give it to Cathy with the list of the children present.
- if you can share your log, or parts of it, we would appreciate a photocopy.
- also copies of relevant, named, children's drawings.

**Finally, we really appreciate your involvement in the Project and hope that you'll find it enriching for you and your children.**

Cathy Ota  
Jane Erricker  
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RERC Second Series Occasional Paper 22  
December 1999  
Copyright ©1999 Religious Experience Research Centre  
ISBN 0 906165 30 X