MOVING FROM

Theory to Practice

Religious Educators in the Classroom

Edited by

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This book could not be more timely. For too long, and in too many places, academic reflection on RE, ecclesial frameworks for the subject and advanced practice in the classroom have functioned in a tri-partite rather than tri-une manner. In gathering the insights of impressive contributors, the editors not only demonstrate the creative vitality of RE in their national context, they model an inter-dependent vision of RE which has relevance for dioceses, theologians and practitioners across the globe.

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This work admirably succeeds in its stated aim to throwing light onto Religious Education theory as it finds expression in living, breathing, professional practice in the classroom. Its eighteen chapters by RE practitioners, many of whom are classroom teachers, makes a significant contribution to the practical grounding of RE discourse in Australia. Many contributors provide pedagogical responses within the Enhancing Catholic School Identity space and many directly draw on the national RE framing paper. This volume enlarges the canvas of RE, addressing for example, spirituality, meditation, youth ministry and liberal arts among others. Most chapters helpfully conclude with issues and challenges for the way forward. This is a highly relevant work that celebrates the critical role of the classroom teacher.

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INTRODUCTION

The motivation for putting together this volume comes from much experience of Religious Education in Catholic schools. It is hard to come up with a single and dominant factor that provided the inspiration needed to take on the considerable task of editing a book that brings together such a range of leading practitioners. One experience, however, may give some insight into why this project came to be undertaken. Some time ago one of the editors was asked to reflect on what people in the future would say about the efforts that we made, as a Church, to respond to the profound cultural changes that have emerged in recent times. It was a good question!

After some consideration, two points came to mind, one general and the other much more specific. Firstly, future generations may be curious as to why we spent what seemed to be a lot of time and effort on internecine disputes. There is really no justification for this. In times of profound cultural change any community that cannot move beyond a fixation on its internal divisions and disputes will have limited appeal. Secondly, and thinking here in particular of the Catholic educational community, why did there appear to be such an emphasis on general responses such as developing framing documents or broad statements of principle, and not on how this translated into what teachers did in the classroom? There is certainly a place for planning and proper conceptualisation, but in the final analysis this

work is preparatory to what will take place in the classroom where the human interaction between teachers and students takes place.

This point is made more strongly if we think of the work that RE teachers do. It is they, and not clergy or professional theologians, who are generally most engaged with young people. Imagine what will be happening tomorrow morning – and the morning after and the morning after that – in a multitude of Catholic schools all over the country. Teachers will be engaging with students on moral issues, presenting the Church's understanding of sacraments, reading the scriptures, inviting questions, pondering the idea of a loving God acting in the world. This is not an exhaustive list. The substantial point though is that it is in a classroom setting that the human encounter that is at the heart of the gospels takes place. To neglect or under emphasise the importance of this encounter could be something that future generations will look back on and critically ponder.

A preeminent emphasis on what happens in the classroom should be central to planning and resourcing in Religious Education in Catholic schools. This emphasis recognises that the delivery of Religious Education must be an area of serious enquiry and evaluation. It should be a key consideration of, amongst other things, how we develop and refine curriculum documents. The risk is that if this emphasis on classroom practice is not in place then a fissure could develop between what is expected to happen in Religious Education and what actually takes place. An example may be helpful to further illustrate this point.

Some time ago, one of the authors was giving a presentation to a number of experienced RE teachers on a pedagogical methodology that had been adapted by schools in a particular diocese. As such, the presentation assumed a good understanding of the approach and many of the points made sought to extend and consolidate existing practices. During the presentation it became more and more obvious that there was some confusion amongst the participants about what was being offered. The cause of this became much clearer during the first morning break when some of the teachers taking part were asked about their impression of the material that was being discussed. A general consensus point was that the ideas were new and quite

challenging. This came as a surprise as the pedagogical approach had been well described in the official curriculum documents and had been in place for some time. To reiterate, the seminar was not intended for teachers who had no prior experience with the methodology. It was certainly not an introductory course. One teacher's comment clarified the issue. When asked about the approach she noted, 'Well none of us actually use this.' The reasons for why teachers were not following what was set out in the curriculum are worthy of further consideration but this is a topic for another day and perhaps another edited volume! The key point is that what was happening 'in the classroom' was not what was expected and planned for and this had a number of obvious and important implications. Three will be highlighted.

Firstly, proper professional development and formation is compromised when assumptions made about current practices are not well-founded. Secondly, development of resource material and other support material should be based an accurate understanding of what teachers are actually doing. Thirdly, proper sequencing and spiralling of learning for students cannot take place effectively if present and projected learnings do not conform to stated objectives. These and other implications all undermine the experience of Religious Education for students if there is not a shared and equal emphasis on planning and delivery.

What this volume seeks to emphasise and celebrate is what takes place in classroom RE in Catholic schools. It seeks to provide a stronger connection between planning and delivery by recognising the critical contribution of the classroom teacher. A very worthwhile goal to work toward is a more unified approach in Religious Education. To this end, the contributions in this volume seek to give some insight into what happens in the classroom, and thus further the considerable efforts made in Religious Education in Catholic schools in this country.

Brendan Hyde's chapter on Godly Play explores how Jerome Berryman's approach to theological play has been translated into classroom practice. He argues that Catholic schools do not 'do' Godly Play but rather their Religious Education curricula are

influenced by the key principles and practices of the Godly Play process. Anne-Marie Irwin's chapter on Sofia Cavalletti in the classroom complements Brendan Hyde's chapter by contrasting Cavalletti's Montessori method with Berryman's Godly Play. Anne-Marie presents the Montessori method through the Scripture and Liturgy Teaching (SALT) approach, developed initially through her doctoral research. Marty Ogle's chapter focuses on the Making Jesus Real (MJR) approach developed by Peter 'Mitch' Mitchell. MJR focuses on bringing Jesus' message, teachings and actions into the lived experience of students, using slogans such as 'fly like an eagle – don't hang with the turkeys' and the positive psychology of building on one's strengths, rather than focusing on pathology.

Alison Gore makes the case for a dialogical approach to teaching Scripture in the classroom in her chapter and uses the story of the Ethiopian in Acts who asked how it would be possible to understand the text 'unless someone guides me'. Alison draws from sources as diverse as the NCEC Framing Paper for Religious Education; Rebecca Nye's work on spirituality; and Pollefeyt's reflections on the teacher as witness, specialist and moderator in her reflections on how such guidance might be offered. Peter Mudge offers practical approaches for teaching spirituality in the classroom through strategies such as the Rule of St Benedict, the foundational Christian practice of breathing and the Examen. Laura Avery and Michelle Dermody continue the spirituality theme with their exploration on the ways in which mindfulness, meditation, prayer and the Examen can be incorporated into the life of the school. Laura and Michelle also refer to the Making Jesus Real approach presented in Marty Ogle's chapter.

Catherine Brown considers the Religious Education classroom through a 'Francis lens' because she believes his vision enhances and revitalises the curriculum, grounded as it is in love and mercy. Paul Sharkey regards the Religious Education classroom through the bifocal lenses of a Vatican II theology of Revelation and the findings of the Enhancing Catholic School Identity research. He reflects on the current cultural context and offers a Pedagogy of Encounter as a way to engage students in a form of Religious Education that is meaningful and formative for them.

Kevin Lenehan reflects on the revisions of the Religious Education frameworks currently underway in the four Victorian dioceses. He also describes the pedagogies of encounter and empathetic dialogue that become necessary when one appreciates the pluralising, detraditionalising and individualising cultural currents which shape the context for Religious Education today. The dialogical approach demands that teachers avoid being content heavy in their teaching to develop differentiated programs of learning where students can make meaning of the content from within their own horizons of understanding. Rina Madden, Ann France, Julie O'Donnell and Leeanne Butler offer a very concrete rendering of the Pedagogy of Encounter in their chapter which invites us into the life of St Joseph's Catholic primary school in Hawthorn. Here strategies of dialogue, provocations and deep thinking are explored in a narrative which stays close to the living action of a school.

A Catholic liberal arts approach to teaching Religious Education is advocated in the chapter by Renée Köhler-Ryan and Janina Starkey. This approach offers students a space of freedom, in which they can ask fundamental questions about what it means to be human and to lead a good life. Angelo Belmonte and Amber Calleja present the Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia Religious Education pathway in their chapter, arguing that it provides students with a program of learning and formation that is focused on the student's faith journey and their participation in the wider life of the Church. The Normativity of the Future approach developed by Reimund Bieringer – and further enhanced with Mary Elsbernd along with Peter Pitzele's Bibliodrama approach to Scripture – provides the foundation for the chapter offered by Karen Bergin and Ide Garvey, Principal and Religious Education Leader in St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Sunshine, Melbourne. Here themes of hope and God's dream for creation predominate as the authors share how they combated the secularisation of their school by asking their students to share their experience of Religious Education. On the basis of this student experience, the teachers embarked upon a journey of charism renewal, facilitated planning sessions and an appreciative inquiry approach to improving Religious Education in the school.

Michael Vial focuses on the skills and dispositions that are important for a student to gain in Religious Education. He reflects on the capabilities and dispositions literature from a Catholic perspective by presenting the recent redesign of the Religious Education curriculum in South Australia. David Ivers begins his chapter on the experience of Sydney Catholic schools with the Emmaus story and the three phases that can be discerned in it: Bewilderment, Inquiry and Questioning, and the Moment of Awakening and Action. These phases provide an organising structure for the chapter which covers topics as diverse as Backward Design theory, a process approach to pedagogy, Godly Play, e-learning, and authentic learning and assessment.

Christine Robinson and Chris Hackett explore the spiritual and religious capabilities associated with deeper learning in their chapter which focuses on the experience of Religious Education in Western Australia. Richard Rymarz presents the findings from a study he undertook of the ways in which textbook resources are used in the Religious Education classroom. The study began with qualitative research interviews of ten RECs and these interviews provided a basis for the development of a survey which was then completed by 867 teachers and RECs. He explores the links between content and pedagogy in this study which also considers the impact of online resources as well as the relationship between curriculum frameworks and the resources used in the learning and teaching process. Last, but by no means least, Toni Foley and Maree Dinan-Thompson reflect on the impact for religious educators of the increasing numbers of students who come from other religions or from non-religious backgrounds. Interreligious dialogue is presented as a way forward and the research of Belgian scholars such as Pollefeyt, Bouwens, Roebben and Haers was brought into a dialogue with Brennan, Ryan and Moran and others who support pedagogies aligned with the interreligious dialogue seen as essential in our context, shaped as it is by pluralism.

Those who are familiar with the discipline of Religious Education will recognise that as editors we have not scoured the nation to select contributors to this book who share our views and philosophy.

Rather, we have asked practitioners who come from very different places to share their diverse approaches. Our hope in so doing was that we would throw light onto Religious Education theory as it finds expression in living, breathing, professional practice in the classroom. We did not seek to harmonise the different approaches that have been articulated in these chapters into a single homogenised method. For example, the Godly Play approach presented in Brendan Hyde's chapter is seen by some as complementing the Montessori method presented in Anne-Marie Irwin's chapter, whereas others see these two methods as being like oil and water. Similarly, the Making Jesus Real approach advanced by Mary Ogle is seen as reducing Christian faith to humanised values by some, whereas others argue the approach leads students to the person of Christ, truly present in the midst of their experience. We have not sought to reconcile these differences because we believe that it is in the very differences that the kind of professional reflection and critique that leads to richer and better practice becomes possible, always for the sake of improved outcomes for the students in our schools.

CHAPTER 1

GODLY PLAY IN THE CLASSROOM
Some significant perspectives

by Brendan Hyde

Introduction

As an approach to religious education, Godly Play has gained much momentum in recent years in Australia. Not only does Australia have its own Godly Play network of accredited trainers and storytellers, the method is now influencing the classroom practice of a growing number of religious educators in various dioceses throughout Australia, with religious education curriculum documents now advocating elements of this approach. However, the influence of the Godly Play method in classrooms in mainstream Catholic schools is not without a number of issues and challenges. For instance, to engage in ideal Godly Play requires an accredited Godly Play Storyteller and Door Person (two distinct roles), a Godly Play room specifically set up for this purpose, at least the core presentations (stories), and an adherence to the steps of the Godly Play process among other key requirements.

In exploring the influence of Godly Play in the classroom context, this chapter begins by detailing three particular theoretical perspectives that underpin the approach of Jerome Berryman – its creator – to theological play. It then moves to examine how the Godly Play approach has been translated into classroom practice in terms of adhering to these theoretical perspectives, noting the juxtaposition between play and outcomes-based approaches to curriculum, how a

theology of play might underpin the curriculum, and the extent to which existential limits are taken as reference points for theologising with students. The chapter concludes by presenting some issues and challenges for the future, in particular noting that Catholic schools do not 'do' Godly Play, but rather that their religious education curricula are *influenced* by the key principles and practices of the Godly Play process.

Theoretical Perspectives

There are a number of theoretical perspectives that underpin Jerome Berryman's Godly Play approach. This chapter will confine itself to a discussion of three of these key perspectives – theories of play, a theology of play, and drawing on play to address existential limits.

Theories of play

Determining a precise definition for play is problematic (e.g., Brown, 2009; Chudacoff, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Most scholars instead prefer to describe the qualities, traits or principles of play. Surveying the literature indicates a common set of descriptions affirming that play is pleasurable and played for itself; it is voluntary and spontaneous, and lacks compulsion (Caillois, 1961; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2005; Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005; Chudacoff, 2007; Brown, 2009). To this list Garvey (1977) also adds that play has systematic relations to what is not play, such as creativity, problem solving, language learning, the development of social and other cognitive and social phenomena. These activities are not play, however play may nourish such endeavours (a point which is highlighted later in this chapter).

In his seminal work *Homo Ludens*, which was concerned primarily with the aesthetic quality of play, Huizinga (1955) argued that even in its simplest form, play involves more than a physiological phenomenon or psychological reflex. It is, he argued, a significant function in enabling all who engage in play to transcend the immediate needs of life and impart meaning to action. Therefore, all play 'means something' (p. 1). Contemporary scholars similarly note that the many play patterns in which human beings engage are an integral part of their culture, precisely because they mean something (Brewster, 1971; Ackerman, 2006).

A key insight from Huizinga (1955) for religious educators is that, because play always means something to those who are engaged in it, there is a close relationship between play and religious experience, specifically between play and sacred ritual as a means by which human beings create meaning in relation to the holy. For Huizinga, the concept of play merges quite naturally with the concept of holiness:

> In play as we conceive it the distinction between belief and make-belief breaks down ... archaic ritual is this sacred play, indispensable for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development, but always in the sense Plato gave it – an action accomplishing itself outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life. (pp. 25-26)

Following this line of thinking, Ackerman (2006) explores the notion of 'deep play' as the ecstatic form of play, involving the sacred. Deep play is central to the life of all people. It 'reveals our need to seek a special brand of transcendence' (p. 17). A close examination of religious rites and festivals reveals the many play elements which are present. These include dance, worship, music, and symbol. However, in religious ritual, these play elements attain great depth. They 'swallow time. They are ecstatic, absorbing, rejuvenating' (p. 17).

This resonates with Romano Guardini's seminal text, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, in which he posits the case for the playfulness of the liturgy. Using the image of the play of the child and the creation of the artist, Guardini (1953) states that the essence of the liturgy involves not work, but play – 'To be at play, or to fashion a work of art in God's sight ... such is the essence of the liturgy' (p. 181). Lang (1997) and Rahner (1965) also express this notion, Rahner maintaining that the Catholic liturgy 'is itself very like a single solemn piece of playing or miming' (p. 79) and that 'a sacral dance, carried out by both clergy and laity, has been woven around the austere core of the liturgy' (p. 80).

Guardini (1953) further suggests that the many aspects of the liturgy, such as the quality of language, gestures, colours, garments and instruments employed can only really be understood by those who are able to take art and play seriously. Its forms become the rules

of the game, or as Guardini says, 'the serious rules of the sacred game which the soul plays before God' (pp. 182-183).

While taking the art of play seriously may present challenges for both religious educators and theologians, in recent times there has been a more concerted effort to take the notion of play genuinely, moving towards a theology of play.

Ludic(rous) thinking – towards a theology of play

Hugo Rahner was among the first – and indeed the few – to articulate an understanding of religion as *theologia ludens*, an interpretation of traditional religion as play. Rahner (1965) posits that religion as play recovers the forgotten virtue of *eutrapelia*, a Greek word which attempts to express a balance between 'gravity and playfulness, crying and laughing' (p. 92) in religion. Put another way, it may also be translated as 'play for the sake of seriousness' (p. 95).

This was followed by David Miller's extensive work *Gods and games: Towards a theology of play*. In reviewing Rahner's contribution to play-theory, Miller (1973) notes that *theologia ludens* views God as a player, human beings as players, the Church as the community of play, and salvation as play. In other words, *theologia ludens* is 'a theology *of* play, *by* play, and *for* play; it must wittingly incarnate its content' (p. 159, italics in the original).

Brian Edgar's (2018) more recent work *The God who plays*, notes that the idea of a playful attitude, which ought to be central to people's relationship with God, stands in contrast with most common descriptions of the Christian way of life characterised by obedience to God and service to others. While these are important and necessary elements of discipleship needed to bring about God's reign in the present, most portrayals of the future Kingdom of God centre on joy, song, dance, laughter and play. The question for Edgar is, then, whether the people of God, who are called to live out the future kingdom in the present, ought to do more to demonstrate a life filled with joy, laughter and play, as well as obedience and service. Edgar notes that cultural presuppositions about play are 'ambivalent, to say the least, and the disconnect between play and the church … is comprehensive' (p. 2). The disconnect, he argues, needs to be addressed since play is the essential and ultimate form of relationship with God.

Jerome Berryman is one who has sought to address this disconnect. Employing the theological concept of the *Imago Dei*, Berryman (1982) argues that 'Play is at the heart of creativity, and creativity is at the heart of all creatures created in the image of the Creator' (p. 48). Since human beings are made in the image of the Creator, they are, therefore, creators as well, called to live as God lives – creatively, joyfully, freely *and playfully* (see also Edgar, 2018, p. 62). When those made in God's image live this way 'the raw grace of God's creation flows through the creative process [and] becomes available to humankind [enabling them] to help cooperate with God as co-creators' (Berryman, 2009a, p. 236).

Theological Play to address existential limits

Living creatively, joyfully, freely and playfully enables individuals to confront and address existential issues in life. While this holds for all people, Berryman maintains that this is especially true for children. The existential themes on which Berryman draws emanate from Irving Yalom's exploration of existential psychotherapy. In his clinical practice, the four existential limits Yalom encountered most were death, the need for meaning, the threat of freedom, and aloneness (Yalom, 1980; see also Reinhardt, 1960).

These existential limits are 'the empirical references for theologising' (Berryman, 2013a) with children. Importantly, and as much of his early work at the Texas Children's Hospital demonstrates, existential issues and ultimate concerns with children need to be addressed indirectly (Berryman 2013b). While play therapists help children cope with their fear of an unknown medical procedure through, for example, play with a model of the hospital's medical suite as a means by which to help children talk about their fears, Berryman's use of what he terms theological play (which later became known as Godly Play) enables children to grapple with the *unknowable* – questions such as "Am I going to die?" that indicate a child's attempt to cope with the existential limit of, for instance, death. The materials needed, for instance to tell the parable of the Good Shepherd, then need 'to replace the model of the surgical suite to make the existential meaning required to adequately respond to such a question' (Berryman, 2013c, 112).

Each of the three theoretical perspectives outlined above underpin Berryman's approach to Godly Play. Therefore, translating the Godly Play approach into the classroom practice of religious education in mainstream Catholic schools requires faithfulness to each of these theoretical perspectives. The following section examines how translating the Godly Play method into classroom practice can be problematic, noting in particular some tensions inherent in being faithful to these three theoretical perspectives.

Translating Godly Play into Classroom Practice

Perhaps not surprisingly, a number of Catholic Schools' Offices in Australia advocate the use of Godly Play techniques within their curriculum documents for use in the religious education classroom[1]. In particular, elements of this approach are drawn upon as a method of storytelling to present the texts of Sacred Scripture. For instance, Sydney Catholic Schools and Catholic Education in the Diocese of Rockhampton have each developed a series of storytelling scripts that can be used by classroom religious educators to tell, for example, *Feeding the Five Thousand* (Mark 6:30-44) and *The Coming of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:1-12; Galatians 5:22), together with two and three dimensional materials that can be used to accompany the telling of these stories. Opportunities are also included in the process for students to respond through artwork to these stories, although it is usually not the open type of response that Berryman advocates, with schools either scaffolding or placing limits on the types of activities in which students can engage. Those utilising elements of the Godly Play approach in these ways report the highly positive ways in which students engage with the process (Belmonte, 2017; Hackett, Sayce & Alteri, 2017), and indeed with the ways in which the process reveals how students are predisposed to learn and to make meaning in religious education (Hyde, 2018).

However, in terms of the three key theoretical perspectives that are central to Berryman's Godly Play method outlined above, the translation of this approach into classroom practice in mainstream catholic schools can be problematic. While some of the reasons for

this have been previously detailed (Hyde, 2011), three tensions are outlined below specifically in terms of theories of play, a theology of play, and using theological play to address existential issues.

Firstly, the descriptions of play outlined above – that play is pleasurable and played for itself, that it is voluntary, spontaneous, and lacks compulsion – are sharply juxtaposed to the outcomes-based approaches to curriculum that permeate the present educational climate. A curriculum based on statements of outcomes brings to the fore what is to be learnt and what is to be assessed, and signals to teachers the kinds of learning and teaching approaches that are likely to achieve the stated outcomes, as well as the types of assessment procedures that might be employed (Ryan, 2008). Play, at least in terms of the descriptions of it outlined above, does not generally feature in an outcomes-based approach to the curriculum. Adding weight to this notion, in a recent media release from Catholic Schools New South Wales, Moroney (2018) notes that in the context of outcomes-based approaches to curricula, play is often not legitimately acknowledged as a pedagogy in education, and that it is often discounted in favour of teacher-directed methods of instruction.

This is not to say that learning cannot, or ought not be enjoyable and engaging, but it does highlight that learning in an outcomes-based approach to education is certainly not conceived of in terms of play as a freely chosen, spontaneous activity. If the outcomes are predetermined, the play cannot be genuine. Activities with such predetermined outcomes might comprise endeavours that, as Garvey (1977) points out, have systematic relations to what is not play, such as creativity, problem solving, language learning, and the development of social and other cognitive and social phenomena. These activities are not play, however play may nourish such endeavours. At worst, however, such activities become pseudoplay (Berryman, 2002; Hyde, 2009) – activities that are disguised as play but have other motives, so that what may appear as play in the curriculum could, when analysed closely, amount to little more than a highly controlled activity in which children are required to participate.

In Berryman's process of Godly Play, there are no predetermined outcomes. Regardless of the presentation (story) of the day, children

are invited to play freely with the materials to make meaning and to encounter the elusive presence of God in their lives (Berryman, 2013c). They literally grasp this meaning with their hands as they work 'to discover with the teaching materials and wonder together in community and in small groups or individually through their art responses' (p. 82).

In the classroom, this issue could be partly addressed by ensuring that the outcomes to be achieved are broadly stated. Outcomes-based approaches are characteristic of contemporary educational approaches. However, having broadly stated outcomes means that students can demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. Educators can then plan for a variety of scaffolded play activities in the curriculum. For instance, a broad outcome such as 'students will respond to scripture stories' allows for a variety of possible ways in which students can demonstrate the achievement of this outcome.

Secondly, if play is not taken seriously in contemporary education, it will come as little surprise that it is taken seriously in either theology or religious education. A theology of play which envisions play at the heart of creativity, and creativity at the heart of all creatures created in the image of the Creator, and in which people are therefore called to live as God lives – creatively, joyfully, freely and playfully – needs to be at the centre of approaches to religious education that are influenced by Godly Play. This is problematic since most religious education curricula do include reference to a theology of play, and in some cases the classroom religion program is viewed solely in educative terms.

However, those religious education curricula that are underpinned by the notion of Divine Revelation can reflect a theology of play, and are, in fact, well positioned to accommodate elements of the Godly Play process. This is so, since Berryman's source for Godly Play's biblical theology is Samuel Terrien's (2000) *The Elusive Presence*, which focuses on the experience of God's presence in narrative form. From this, Berryman describes Revelation in terms of a game to be played – hide and seek – dignified by the Latin phrase *Deus Absconditus atque Preasens* (Terrien, 2000, p. 470), translated as God is hidden yet also present (Berryman, 2002, p. 131). One cannot play hide and

seek with people who are not present. The possibility that a presence can be revealed is required for the game to progress. The theological game of hide and seek is a life-long game in which the goal is to keep the game going rather than ending it by winning or losing (cf. Carse, 1986). Through playing such a game, children experience the elusive presence of a God who is at once both concealed and revealed, a 'hiddenness [that] is not an absence' (Terrien, 2000, p. 471). Berryman's Godly Play room − full of stories, parables, and liturgical action that embody the whole Christian language system − enables children to make meaning and to respect their experience of the presence and action of God in their own lives, and to give expression to this encounter.

While mainstream Catholic classrooms are not fully equipped Godly Play rooms, they can nonetheless enable students to discern the presence of God in their lives by providing opportunities for them to play through their responses to the stories of Scripture and liturgical action.[2] For instance, teachers could make available several choices of play activities in which students can engage. In presenting The Parable of the Good Samaritan, students could engage in a selection of activities such as playing with the parable pieces, drawing, painting, composing a song/jingle, and the like. Where this occurs, a theology of play is effectually underpinning key elements of the process of religious education. Children are able to live and to learn creatively, joyfully and playfully in making meaning and encountering God in their lives.

Thirdly, in terms of the existential limits, religious education in Australian Catholic classrooms is, generally speaking, not a matter of life and death![3] This is not to say that students do not engage in topics that concern existential issues, or that children do not acquire a religious literacy that may help them to speak about existential concerns. Religious education should indeed provide for such learning opportunities. Rather, it is to say that religious education in Australian Catholic schools does not envisage existential limits as 'the empirical references for theologising' (Berryman, 2013a) with children. Australian religious education curricula are not so much concerned with grappling with the unknowable as they are with Anselm's notion of faith seeking understanding, in which it is

possible to know *something* about the nature of God through a study of the Catholic faith tradition. It is interesting, however, to note that for Anselm, faith causes believers to seek understanding for the joy of knowing God. As Migliore (2014) notes, 'For Anselm, faith seeks understanding, and understanding brings joy (p. 2).' This is the joy of the Gospel about which Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, and it is the joy that becomes evident and can be observed in children when they engage in the Godly Play process, giving expression to the presence of God who is already present to them in the innermost depths of their being (see also Berryman 2009b, 2013c).

Importantly though, students of primary school age do experience and confront existential limits in their lives. There are numerous anecdotal accounts of students in Australian Catholic classrooms who are coping with the terminal illness of a parent or sibling, the realities of family breakdown, the need to make meaning from both joyful and tragic life events, the sense of aloneness and the need to belong. These are real for students, who experience them just as acutely as adults. Perhaps there is a case to be made for recognising existential limits as empirical references for theologising in religious education programs. Research has shown that children are able to address their existential limits through the Godly Play process (Berryman, 1995, 2013a; Hyde, 2010) and that particular Godly Play presentations provide the impetus for such exploration[4]. Perhaps this is an area of religious education that requires further exploration.

In the classroom this could be addressed by allowing students to revisit and use materials from previous presentations during the response time. This would, potentially at least, give students opportunities to use such materials to address and work through in regard to particular existential issues that might be confronting them. Students would also know that they had the freedom to choose to work again and again with those presentations that have meaning for them.

Issues and Challenges for the Future

There are a number of challenges and issues that need to be addressed in terms of the influence of Godly Play in classroom religious education programs. Grajczonek and Truasheim (2017)

maintain that Godly Play has no place in the mainstream classroom, and there is some truth to this argument. Berryman's method grew out of hospital and parish settings, whose aims are different to those of religious education in the compulsory classroom setting. However, and this point cannot be stressed enough, *Catholic schools in Australia do not 'do' Godly Play*. Godly Play has a trademark which identifies its method as distinct from others, thereby ensuring a high degree of quality for its trainers, storytellers, its materials and resources. To engage in Godly Play® requires adherence to a number of key requirements outlined earlier in this chapter. Anything less results in what Berryman (2013c) refers to as 'Okay Godly Play' (p. 176), or worse, 'Godly Play in name only' (p. 177). Religious education in Australian Catholic schools is unable to fulfil these requirements and, realistically, it should not be expected to do so.

However, this does not mean that religious education curricula cannot be *influenced* by the key principles and practices of the Godly Play process, such as those identified in this chapter. This is effectively what has occurred when schools have sought to translate Berryman's process into classroom practice. As noted, students engage in highly positive ways with such translated approaches (Belmonte, 2017; Hackett, Sayce & Alteri, 2017). The challenge, then, is one of remaining faithful to both the key principles that underpin Berryman's process and the demands of contemporary approaches to curriculum generally, including outcomes-based approaches and the conceptual approaches (emanating from the notion of an Australian Curriculum) that impact upon curriculum development in the various states and territories of Australia.

A second issue concerns a greater attention to the theology of play – ludicrous thinking – which, as noted by many, has not been taken seriously in either theology, or education generally, let alone religious education. And yet play, characterised by laughter, song and joy, is the essential and ultimate form of relationship with God (Edgar, 2018; Miller, 1973; Rahner, 1965). In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis notes that, while joy is expressed in different ways in response to the experiences of life, there are 'Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter' (par. 6). Play presents itself

a means by which people might slowly but surely 'let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust' (par. 6). Religious education curricula influenced by the Godly Play process are well positioned to take seriously a theology of play, enabling those who engage in this process to 'enter into this great stream of joy' (par. 6) and to live as God lives – creatively, joyfully, freely *and playfully*.

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NOTES

1 These include Catholic Schools' Offices in the Archdioceses of Sydney, Melbourne, and Hobart, and in the Dioceses of Ballarat, Lismore, Broken Bay, Rockhampton, Cairns, Bathurst, and the dioceses in Western Australia, although it should be noted that the extent to which Godly Play techniques are advocated varies considerably.

2 Some Catholic schools in Australia have established dedicated spaces and rooms set up to contain Godly Play materials and presentations for sacred stories, parables and liturgical actions, enabling children to make meaning, to respect their experience of the presence and action of God in their own lives, and to give expression to such encounters.