Finally, another issue will be not to allow too familiar religious ideas to become normative, and also to discover strengths in the children's surprising considerations that are part of mental resistance and coping power. Without a doubt further experience will be gained with such forms of theologising. The reflections presented here aim at encouraging such research.

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Wolfhard Schweiker

Including the Difference – Embracing the New Vision

"Each class is a welcoming community. Leaders and participants of each class extend the welcoming heart of God, recognize and receive guests, and provide amenities to facilitate invitation, inclusion, and expectation of being met by the God of all grace." This is the website announcement of the Oak Hills Presbyterian church, Kansas inviting children to their Sunday School classes (www.oakhillspca.com). These words sound good. Children are invited and included to be met by the God of all grace. The church and its Sunday School leaders try to provide the means to facilitate not only invitation but also inclusion. I wonder if the 'prepared environment' of the classes - as Montessori would say – and the attitude and practice of the Sunday School leaders is shaped to include all children and to realize the inclusion of difference. Will Sergej, who has a muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair, find rooms without steps and barriers? Will Lisa, who is mentally handicapped, be able to take part in the wondering about the story? Will John, who likes to play baseball, running around and wrestling with his mates, be happy sitting in the circle? Will Patricia, who is blind from birth on, get into a biblical story and enjoy the story materials?

When we ask such questions, we will have to start by taking a look at these children. They have to be the very centre of our considerations. Looking at them consciously and in a detailed way, we recognize: It is easy to invite all children, but it is hard to include them. An invitation with the welcoming heart of God is a big challenge. There are no easy solutions realizing inclusion. But we can meet this challenge by thinking about 'Including the difference and embracing this new vision' in a theological and pedagogical way and share some best practical experiences. We start with the question: What is meant by 'inclusion'? Then we ask:

Why should we include the different and difference? Here we notice international standards and focus on theological reasons. The main part will be a glance at the big task on how to realize inclusion in 'Godly Play', the established approach in religious education by Jerome Berryman (1991, 2002) in the tradition of Maria Montessori and Sophia Cavaletti. And finally, we try to embrace this new vision gently without breaking it.

1. Including the Difference - what does it mean?

In all human societies and groups there is a tendency to exclude people, who are different. The problem of these people is not that they are different from other people. We all know that nobody is like the other. Everybody is an individual and differs from any other individual. Therefore, it is helpful to follow René Girard, who uses a distinction between two forms of difference (1982). On the one hand, he talks about a socially established and generally accepted difference that does not need to exclude anybody. On the other hand, there is a difference deviating from the social norm. These norm-deviant features bear a negative connotation as they are looked upon with a devaluating attitude. And in consequence of the debasement of those features the person as a whole is evaluated in a negative way, which often leads to their marginalization or even exclusion from society.

Sometimes exclusion is also intended and accompanied by positive aims. Society sometimes separates some people in order to give them a special treatment and education or to facilitate their integration into society. This model, for instance, is carried out in Germany. Since the 1970s, a special education system for people with special needs has been established. These people are taught in ten different types of special schools by special teachers who studied special education. Maybe this sounds very German. It is like tiding or clearing up the difference.

The Swiss artist Ursus Wehrli (2004) did something like that by clearing up art. He took the picture "Volleyball" by Niki de Saint Phalle and cleared it up. Now we really have a picture with a good order, tidy files and a clearly structured overall view (Rohrmann 2014, 4). However, this

tendency to exclude difference is part of all societies, because it is part of the human being itself. Mankind is always acting and behaving in a range of tension between exclusion and inclusion or between relative isolation and self-determination.

The two historical stages of integration and inclusion seem to be very similar. Inclusion, however, is distinctly different form the notion of integration and mainstreaming. Both integration and mainstreaming start from the point of view that people with special needs and features belong to special classes and should be integrated as much as possible into the general setting. So there is a two-group-thinking. There are the ones who differ from the norm (norm-deviant difference) on the one hand and the big group of 'normal' individuals on the other hand.

Inclusion, however, starts with another notion of normality. It states, in a saying of the former German president Richard von Weizsäcker: "It is normal to be different". This new way of thinking marks a paradigm shift. What we have to learn is both difficult and easy: Everybody is different! This difference has to be accepted ('accepted difference').

Following this philosophy, there will be no gaps or walls between people. There will not be any dividing difference. The attempted goals in an inclusive setting are to prevent anybody from dropping out and to make sure that all diversities are served. So there are not just diversities in health and handicap but also in sex, age, cultural background, education, social status, religious tradition and so on.

Even though they seem very close to each other, these two approaches, integration and inclusion, vary significantly (Halvorsen & Neary 2001). The main difference, I would like to point out, is the 'shared ownership for educating'. It means that I am responsible for all children. The inclusive approach shares the conviction: All children are *my* children. The original title of this paper "Including the Different", which was presented at the Summer Conference at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley CA, was posed in terms of integration. It has been reformulated according to an inclusive perspective. The focus is not any more on the

(norm-deviant) "Different" but on the "Difference" concerning all features of people in general, which ought to be accepted. Therefore, we changed the title in "Including the Difference".

2. Including the Difference - why to do so?

Why should we create inclusive settings serving the special needs of children and adults within church and society? Many different answers may be at hand. We will mention a legal point and then discuss a theological argument.

2.1 International and national standards

The 'right for inclusion' is stated by the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (e.g., Article 3c) and the European Union's Convention (e.g., Article 19). The U.S. Constitution and many national Constitutions guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens and try to realize the basic human right of equality. There are various state laws trying to reinforce the right of inclusion and equality. In the U.S., there are people with disabilities, who are determined eligible for services and protections under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). For those students, schools must provide any possible facilities in academic and non-academic areas that enable them to receive free appropriate public and the most possible inclusive education (Smith et al. 2008, 9). Today, the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is ratified by many countries. Germany signed the Convention on March 27th 2009. This implies that all these countries have to work on the realization of the Convention's demands and give report every two years to the United Nations. It means, for instance, that all these "State Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels" (Art. 24,1; Beauftragter 2010, 35).

2.2 Theological reasons

In the discussion about inclusion there are many references to the human rights and a lot of educational arguments. Theological and philosophical

aspects, however, are widely neglected. Of course, in daily life, churches are referring to the Christian tradition. The website of the Oak Hills Presbyterian Church, for instance, explains their inclusive invitation to Sunday School classes with the theological reason "to extend the welcoming heart of God". There might be many convincing ways to find an inclusive attitude in the scripture, in Christian tradition or theological reasoning. Nevertheless, any path you might take will lead to the centre of a Christian community in diversity and mutual acceptance of difference.

There is, for instance, an ecclesiological argument that refers to the body of Christ consisting of many different members, who are all needed (1 Cor. 12). We could even make a point by starting with the Holy Trinity as an example of absolute equality within a diversity and difference within God himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, of course, Jesus himself turned to the very different, acknowledging their difference and admonished the mighty that these people are an important part of the religious and secular community.

I would like to share a theological argument for inclusion that was first stated by Karl Ernst Nipkow (2005, 286-294). His starting point is equality as the opposite of difference. To achieve equality in terms of equal appreciation one can equalize difference "to the top" or "to the ground". To equalize difference "to the top" means that people who are quite different, for instance people with disabilities, will share in ethical terms the same value, psychologically spoken the same competence and ontologically the same nature. All human beings are theologically spoken created in the image of God (Gen 1, 27). Therefore, everybody is participating in the same "perfection" of its creator. All people are equal according to these God-made circumstances. It is the universal equality of human dignity. This biblical tradition is the primary historical root of the idea of equality in modern times. The alternative way of thinking leads to the anthropological opposite.

You can also equalize difference "to the ground". There is a central thread of tradition leading from the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah (chapter 53) to Jesus' death on the cross and to the roots of the specific Christian ethics. It is witnessing the faith experience that God went down

to the very ground himself. The Suffering Servant "had no dignity or beauty" (Is 53,2). Jesus probably regards himself and his mission as part of the tradition of this Servant and the Christian recognize God in Jesus on the cross. God himself gets marginalized and disabled. In being nailed to the cross, he gets "immobilised" (Hull 2001, 80) and even as the risen Christ he carries the signs of wounds on his hands and feet (Eiesland 1994). Equalizing difference "to the ground" means that nobody has firm ground under his feet, everybody is vulnerable and mortal. It is only in God that we may find identification and solidarity. Both ways reasoning inclusion – the way to the top i.e. to the creator, and the way to the ground i.e. to Christ on the cross - may motivate and encourage us to embrace difference as equalized and dignified.

3. Inclusion in Godly Play and how to realize it?

"The debate is far less about whether inclusion should be used and more about how we can use it better and more effectively" (Smith et al. 2008, p. XXI). The task is to realize inclusion in religious education and especially in the Sunday School approach Godly Play, which was brought up by Jerome Berryman on the basis of Montessori's pedagogy. This is not easy. Therefore, it is good to have a grounded conviction, an inspired attitude and helpful instruments like the Index for Inclusion (Booth et al. 2002). The challenge of inclusive religious education may appear like the squaring of the circle. It is comparable to the question of how to get a square rolling. There may be many solutions for moving such a 'disabled' wheel. However, it might afford some thinking and fantasy to move it smoothly. The picture in figure 6 shows one possible intelligent solution by simply changing the environment. Preparing the environment for the special learning needs of children is a key in Maria Montessori's education and a primary principle of Godly Play.

3.1 Godly Play's roots in special education

The Montessori approach has its earliest roots in special education and compensatory early childhood education. Maria Montessori studied the work of the French medical practitioner Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard (1775-

1838), who is called the Father of Special Education and his scholar Édouard Séquin (1812-1880; s. Standing 1959). Montessori was the first woman to receive a medical degree in Italy. During her work as a physician assistant in the Psychiatric Clinic of Rome she studied the medical and special-educational writings of Itard and Séquin in 1897. Her work as a physician in an asylum which housed "defective" children initially sparked her interest in children with disabilities. Because of Montessori's successful experiences with the children in the asylum, she next initiated a special education teacher training program.

As principle of the educational institute for special teachers and a model school nearby, she developed, on the basis of Séquin's "physical method", a specific approach to educate and teach children with mental handicaps in 1900. The core is the tight connection between intellect and sensory activities. Motor actions and senses are trained specifically and sometimes even isolated to activate the intellect of these children. Montessori finally transferred this individualized special educational approach to general pedagogy and extended it to all children. In the next step, we will see if the special educational origin in Montessori's pedagogy will also be found in Godly Play. And further on, we will test what makes Godly Play - which spread out the last ten years in different European Countries like the United Kingdom, Spain, Norway, Finland or Germany - to be or to become an inclusive approach.

3.2 Godly Play - an inclusive approach?

Sunday School classes are mainly heterogeneous. There are sometimes more or less differences concerning age, social status, education levels or cultural and religious backgrounds. I presume that some churches will have different classes trying to build classes as homogenous as possible. However, a typical Sunday School class will be a heterogeneous group in need of an inclusive setting. How inclusive may a Godly Play setting be or become?

Playing relationship

"Playing the ultimate game to know God makes the player awkward and judgmental. Playing for the pleasure of playing itself makes the player graceful so that God, the player, other players, and God's earth all can join in the game" (Berryman 1995, 7). This description of the ultimate game of Godly Play by Jerome Berryman sounds very inclusive. All players, God, and his creation join together in a pleasant game. Nobody is excluded. "The *rules* that shape that game are found in the pattern of the creative process in communication with the Creator" (Berryman 1995, 8). Godly Play "uses the creative process that we have been given as creatures created in the image of the creator" (Berryman 2003, 37). If the rules of playing and behaving in a Godly Play session refer to the creational process of God creating every human being in his image, the relationships will occur at the same eye level and differences will be equalized in terms of esteem.

"Getting ready" is a way of preparing to participate in this creational and equalizing process of God. "Building the circle" is a way of illustrating and comprehending the equal dignity of every member having the same distance to the centre. "A Godly Play community begins right here, by building a circle where each and every participant is warmly welcomed" (Berryman 2002 Vol. 1, 13). The goal is not just geographical inclusion, getting everybody in the room seated on the right place but playing the creational "web of relationship" (Berryman 1995, 12) made in the image of the Creator. This standard is even higher than the ones you find in the Code of Ethics for Educators of Persons with Exceptionalities (Smith et al. 2008, 32).

Safe Space

Children passing the threshold enter a Godly Play room, which is well structured and always organized in the same way. This will give them a feeling of security and orientation. They are surrounded by a Christian language, which might help them to deal with the existential borders of their lives. One of the existential topics in an inclusive setting might be

the experience of difference. How may I manage life in the tension of being outsider or insider, being mobbed or accepted? In order to create a safe space it is necessary to empower children and to live the message: "You are gifted. You are able to get into the story and to choose the materials by your own. You are an important and loved member of this community (Berryman 2006, 77). This is an attitude of shared ownership. All children belong to the community as equals (Smith et al. 2008, 40). And all children should get the necessary support to act self-determined. The Montessorian advice "help me to do it on my own" is even more important for children with disabilities in the context of an inclusive setting. It will prevent them from being devalued as dependent objects of aid address.

Stories

There are some Godly Play stories of Jerome Berryman talking about equal community and human difference. The most impressing story is "The Good Shepard and World Communion". The circle of the World Community gathering around the table of the Lord is a symbol of communion of diversity. It might model the respect for difference of each person in a Godly Play session. There are many more stories, like the Good Samaritan, including the ethnic foreigner through which children and adults may be taught to share difference.

However, there are also many Godly Play stories where differences and disabilities are not mentioned. Should not children also be told about Paul's painful physical ailment (2 Cor 12, 7) in the Godly Play story of "Paul's Discovery" and about the tongue and language disability of Moses in the "Exodus" story (Ex 4, 10)? It is so wonderful that the Bible's heroes are not perfect but often somehow handicapped and still extraordinary. This is no coincidence but God's decision to choose the weak (1 Cor 1, 26). For if we ignore the exceptionalities of biblical persons, we might also pass over the exceptionalities of our children i.e., pass them over on the one hand. And on the other hand, we will not have the opportunity to deal with our own disabilities in the mirror of biblical 'heroes'.

There are some more questions to think about concerning Godly Play stories: Why is the creation in the image of God left out in the Creation story? What about telling the Jesus stories about outcasts, sick and disabled? What about the story in which Jesus is having communion with the sinners? This biblical context of the parable (Lk 15, 1-2) is, for example, not told in the story of the Good Shepard. Would it not be a good idea to create a Godly Play story about the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12) and its many different members, who contribute to the body's function and health? Even to those who are lacking and in need (1 Cor 12, 24) no member can say: "I have no need of you" (1 Cor 12, 21). Every member is gifted and indispensable for the body of Christ (There is one Quaker Story in Godly Play manner called „Gifts" which emphasises the giftedness of everybody (1 Cor 12, 1-12).).

Language

The story language of Godly Play is basic and easy to understand. The verbal language is built of basic vocabularies, simple semantics, short sentences and straight story lines. Furthermore, there are three dimensions of the non-verbal 'unspoken lesson' supporting compre-hension: The language of gesture, material and silence. The accompanied visual language of materials and gestures are very helpful for children, who are not able to decode the spoken language properly. What is heard can be seen by the children in the same moment. And therefore, they have two language systems at their disposition to support their understanding. The third one is silence and deceleration. There is enough time to think, to understand and to get into the story. Godly Play generally also uses the same terms for the same things and is repeating important parts like the introductions of stories (e.g., in the parables or in the desert box stories) frequently. During the wondering the told story is still visually present. The footsteps of Sarah and Abraham are still in the sand. The seven days of creation are in the right order in the field of view. This makes it much easier to talk about the most important part of the story or the part we could leave out. Therefore, younger children and children with mental or learning disabilities have the chance to think in a concrete-operational way - as Piaget would describe it – by moving different pieces.

Paul, for instance, a boy with speech and language impairments spoke his first complete sentence in the feast of a Godly Play session: "Good Lord, thank you for the Creation!" All of the language characteristics might have helped him to do so. But I assume being touched by the story emotionally and feeling the safe space might have been crucial factors as well to let his language flow (Fleig/Schweiker 2008, 178). Another way supporting people with disabilities, of course, is using "People-First" Language (Smith et al. 2008, 31).

Inner differentiation

A main principle within inclusive settings is the approach of inner differentiation. It is important to meet the different individual needs of children. This principle is applied to content, process, product, affect and learning environment (Table in Smith et al. 2008, 46). The most difficult aspect in Godly Play to differentiate is content. The story is told to all children in the same manner. It is just possible to vary the story for the whole group but not for each individual. So story telling is a frontal instruction, which is neither differentiated nor collaborative. The children are not able to interact during this part of the session. The story telling in Godly Play is, in a way, traditional instruction because it is teacher directed and the child remains mainly passive (Smith et al. 2008, 40).

In the wondering and creative work period it is much easier to differentiate in pacing, goal, language and learning materials. During the creative work there is, of course, also the opportunity to tell a story for one or the other child individually. Team teaching and parallel teaching is also a suitable way to meet the children's needs. It is a big advantage to have two adults within a Godly Play room. So the doorperson, for instance, might give support to a single child while the story telling person is leading the feast.

Summary

Godly Play is, in many aspects, an inclusive approach! That is, last but not least, due to the inventor, who has a daughter with *spina bifida*, struggling himself with knee and hip problems and also having experience in teaching children with special needs. In Godly Play, the welcoming atmosphere in a safe space inviting children to a playing relationship of equals with one another and God is a strong inclusive background of this approach. Building and perpetuating the circle of children at the same eye level is an external ritual promoting the internal process of accepting differences in order to gain not just geographical but also relational inclusion.

The selection of biblical stories and the focus of the stories are in some cases ignoring the exceptionalities of people or people with disabilities themselves. The language of Godly Play however, is in a multidimensional sense very basic and easy to understand for people with hearing and visual disabilities.

Inner differentiation as a main principle of inclusive education may hardly be realized in the period of storytelling. But perhaps this might be compensated by the language advantages of Godly Play. Still, there are certain impairments of children which make it impossible to use the advantages of visualized story telling.

3.3 Special Needs and Needs to Adapt

There are ten types of Schools for pupils with special needs in Germany and thirteen categories of disabilities served under the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Smith et al. 2008, 7). It goes without saying that at least this small number of different disabilities is calling for the need of adapting Godly Play to the individual needs of these children. For the moment, I will pick three types of disabilities to point out the need of adaptation. Further ideas and experiences will be dealt with in the afternoon classes.

Orthopaedic impairment

Will Sergej, who is disabled by muscular dystrophy and using a wheelchair, find rooms without steps and barriers? And once he gets into the room, will he find there an appropriate place in the circle? This might be one of the easier exercises: The whole group may just move from the ground to the chairs to remain at the same eye level. Then the story will be presented on a table. This table should be a little lower than a normal eating or writing table and it is helpful if it has a sloping surface with a slant to improve the sight of the children. For some children with orthopaedic impairment it might also be possible to put them in a sitting sack on the ground. It is good to ask them or their parents. They are the experts of their needs. If we do so, we recognize the slogan of people with disabilities: "Nothing about us without us!" So, it is helpful to communicate and cooperate very closely with them.

Visual impairment

Will Lisa, who is blind from birth on, get into a Godly Play story and enjoy the materials? It is no problem for a person with blindness to listen and understand a story if he or she has no mental handicap. People with blindness even 'watch' TV. However, the most important thing of Godly Play presentations is the story material. And it is a huge difference for them not just listening to the story but feeling the story. Material to touch, however, must fulfil specific criteria. The shape has to be clear, three-dimensional and correspond to the experience of the children. It does not, for instance, make any sense to symbolize a bird on the fifth day of the creation story by a feather if a child has never touched the feathers of a bird. So, blindness does in some cases call for individual tactile materials. Especially stories with visual pictures need to be changed into multisensory tactile versions. But the development of individually used material will, on the other hand, question the Montessori principle of just one set of material within the room for everybody.

Hearing impairment

The visualizing materials of Godly Play are very helpful for people with hearing impairment. The unspoken lesson of material, gesture and silence talks to them very clearly. However, this is not enough. The verbal language has to be translated into sign language or Makaton Signing for people who are mentally disabled. One person tells the story and moves the pieces and the other signs and speaks for lip reading. The problem of this approach, however, is that you have two focuses. Much better is one person doing it all. Speaking and signing at the same time and afterwards moving the pieces or making the gestures. This is a way of slowing down and enriching the story extremely for everybody.

4. Embracing the Vision – Steps of Realization

We have thought about some principle of inclusive pedagogics, of theological reasoning and a very few specific practical questions of just some types of disabilities. This is not enough to realize inclusion within a Godly Play classroom. We have to get more experiences, exchange them, adapt materials and do some work of research. So, for the moment, we are still at the very beginning.

There is, however, an amazing network and a high level of special and inclusive education with lots of international experiences, which we ought to use in religious formation (Bildung). A cooperation with special teachers and a further education program to be trained as inclusive assistants could be one way of meeting the different needs of all children. And, of course, we should go on meditating the welcoming heart of God, for instance, by telling new stories and listening to those that tell us how Jesus went to the outcasts, how Paul described the church as a body with many parts, which are all needed. These Christian stories and images evoke:

- The vision that each Sunday School class and Christian congregation will be not just a welcoming but also an including community.

- The vision that difference will no longer be a matter of disturbance in the body of Christ but a gift of enrichment.
- The vision that Sergej sitting in the wheel-chair will move in without barriers, Patricia will 'listen' to the sign language and Lisa will feel the story while all of us are enriched in playing the relationship with one another, with the creation and the Creator inclusively.

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Dortmunder Beiträge zu Theologie und Religionspädagogik

herausgegeben von

Prof. Dr. Michael Basse

und

Prof. Dr. Thomas Pola

Band 12

LIT

Inclusive Religious Education

International Perspectives

edited by

Bert Roebben and Katharina Kammeyer

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