



Children's and Youth Work

The United Reformed Church
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Bi-monthly Update Extra : Training and Conference Digest

Letter from Lorraine

Welcome to this, our second training and conference digest. Once again we want to share with you key learning from the ongoing training opportunities that the wider team enjoy. We hope you find the input from our CYDO+ team, Sam, Lorraine and Steve helpful to you too, either in developing your thinking and practice or simply in giving you some insight into current trends in children's and youth work. Or, of course, suggestions of good speakers if you are organising a conference or training event in your area.

Do let us know if this is something that you value and how often you would like to receive it.

If you want to know more about any of the issues raised, then feel free to contact the CYDO or team member in question and I am sure they will be more than happy to share their full notes with you or chat about what they have learned.



The third Conversation conference will be held in Canterbury from 31 January to 1 February 2020. This is an opportunity to network with others involved in Children's and Youth Work across the denominations and is suitable for anyone involved in this field who is interested in exploring cutting edge, innovative and even risky conversations about children, young people and the Church.

'Hearing voices: re-imagining ministry with children and young people'

Book your tickets here: <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/theconversation/300840>

FAITH FOR THE FUTURE launch event 12 September 2019. BARNAs Research commissioned by World Vision on The Connected Generation: 18-35s based on 15,000 interviews in 25 countries—

Notes by Sam Richards HCYW

Visit theConnectedGeneration.com to see the webcast, pre-order report, download free chapter etc.

We need to slow down and listen to this generation too often talked at and talked about.

Young Adults (YAs) around the globe are often more alike than other people in their local context.

77% of them say that events around the world matter to them.

Only 1/3 feel cared for (loved and supported by others close to them).

Less than half describe themselves as forward-looking. They are feeling anxious about important decisions, afraid to fail, under pressure to succeed, feel sad or depressed, insecure in 'who I am', afraid of violence. This generation need church to be emotionally connected to community, yet: 23% of them have strong levels of connectivity, 39% have medium levels of connectivity, 38% have weak connectivity - nearly 2 in 5. Practicing Christianity makes a difference – these YAs have stronger levels of connectivity.

Young adults don't merely want to see that Christianity is TRUE; they also want to understand that it is GOOD (for friends, neighbourhood, family, for the world etc).

If we keep naming this generation as entitled, narcissistic, snowflake, slacktivists, lazy etc, what impact does that have? - how should we rename them? What does a redemptive name look like for this generation?

Only 32% of YAs have 'someone who believes in me'.

Church naturally goes 'up' in age and 'in' in focus, it only goes 'down' and 'out' intentionally.

When preaching to YAs, remember their attention is not an obligation but a gift – you have a maximum of 90 seconds to convince someone to listen! They are not looking for experts but fellow travellers. Important to listen first. This is a Post Christian context, there is hope in openness of 18-35s to narrative and the gospel message – they have no baggage about Christian faith.

What happens to the faith of young Christians? 22% leave the faith – atheist or 'none' 30% become nomads (no church or spiritual home) 38% become habitual church goers 10% are resilient disciples

Easy to love Jesus but hard to follow him. What makes the difference? Meaningful relationships; strong networks; wanting to be like the people they are with (the church community). Church offers a model of intergenerational discipleship, close personal relationships with older adults, mentoring relationships.

How do practicing Christians become resilient? 54% attend monthly, 34% weekly. Why do they go to church? - to grow in faith, learn about God, how I live my faith, teaching and wisdom for life, the worship and music.

What's missing from church? Nothing said 20%; my friends said 18%; Opportunities to fight injustice said 17%.

YAs are not seeking out or expecting relationships in church.

They are digital disciples, with 51% reading and posting online, 52% watching videos and 52% podcasts, 73% listening to worship music. YAs are waiting for someone to see them and believe in them – they want to be agents of change and transformation (not receivers of help) - want to do something. We need to ask them what they are passionate about and what they do outside of church, and then draw on that. Let them lead and coach them as they lead. A willingness to lament with them is also important. If we are not making room for young leaders today they won't be around tomorrow. We are not giving big enough opportunities – they want to be contributors, not merely consumers.





<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/children-youth-family-ministry/upcoming-events/homegrown-8-october-2019/> The Homegrown conference will be taking place on Tuesday 8 October 2019

Homegrown families and households to nurture faith together, and to spur each other on as they encounter Jesus and faith in every day life? This event offers opportunities for both theological reflection and practical equipping. Watch live from 9.30am to 2.30pm and from 8.00pm to 9.30pm

CHILDHOOD SPIRITUALITY CONFERENCE—GODLY PLAY UK (notes from Lorraine Webb, Programme Officer for CYW)

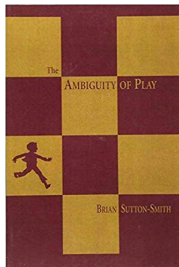
The keynote speaker was [Professor Elizabeth Wood](#) from Sheffield University who spoke on Children's Interests and Inquiries in Free Play Activities.

There is nothing "simple" (child's play) about a child's play. It is complex and intricate and is a blend of structure and freedom. Adults can negate or damage children's play, sometimes imposing false structures on it. Children need space to escape the rule-bound environment and go "out of bounds" – literally or metaphorically. Children will not stay within the rules and boundaries we set but will form their own.

Play is a sacred space – as adults we have to tread carefully – Sometimes just catching a child's eye can ruin the game and we have negated the play. Play is a liminal space – it occupies a space between fantasy and reality, structure and freedom, light and dark. It pushes boundaries and can be learning, disruption, rebellion in a safe environment. Play is not always "nice" and children do not always "play nicely" as they disrupt and contest the social order. As long as this does not go too far, it is an essential part of play and should not be stopped. Play involves the setting and negotiating of rules – free play is often rule bound but they are the children's rules. The purpose of rules is intrinsic to the exploring of working theories and testing of boundaries.

School "stops" free play just at a key time when it is developing in complexity and challenge and teachers interfere rather than interact. It is turned into an adult-manipulated play experience and OFSTED/management expect to see the adults getting involved in children's free play and developing it in educational directions. And yet so much more is learned if children are given the freedom without interference – indoctrinations is not play!

Michelle Hill did some amazing research into a group of children playing "Dead Forever" in the home corner. Instead of intervening, she observed and recorded. The children were exploring what it means to be alive/not alive. As they played, they were subconsciously negotiating how much knowledge was actually comfortable for them and ready to pull back themselves if it was going too far, so teacher input was not needed. Through it they developed a continuous thread of an ethic of care for each other. They brought in scientific knowledge and religious experience and used these to help them work out their own understanding of difficult issues, wanting to share their commonality of experience. There is a space between scientific knowledge and imagination and at these points they might come out of the game momentarily to check facts. There is a need to have the facts and a mutual understanding of who might hold the facts – often an older child.



https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0674005813/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_U_pZ92CbT0KJRJD The Ambiguity of Play: Brian Sutton Smith - a scholarly book (text book) on what is going on underneath the surface when children play, considering the various theories and research. The terminology and style might be challenging for the casual reader but the contents are extensive and informative.

<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/9379/?fbclid=IwAR16mZeaVPL4DsnRBhYyznz76cHJBT18Of--ilq2PQoQKRiuW0GBPiRrkPI> – This research paper contains the "Dead Forever" research mentioned above, together with other observations on children's play in the Primary classroom.



Godly Play session: <https://www.youtube.com/user/GodlyPlayFndn/videos>

Godly Play has its own youtube channel you can subscribe to which show full sessions of Godly Play and also some of the scripted stories. Godly Play is A Christian movement centred on childhood spirituality – providing training to transform thinking and practice for the whole of life.

- The Heart of Godly Play
- Creating Sacred Space
- Building and working in community
- Learning religious language
- Using religious language to make meaning

- A Godly Play session includes a time to:-
- get ready
- tell a story using objects and artefacts
- explore the story more with open questions and discussion
- respond with a free choice using a variety of materials – art... silence... play... writing...
- enjoy a simple feast and sharing



Godly Play can help you see and do things differently
*"In most religious education children are told who God is.
 In Godly Play children discover who God is."*

Labyrinth: Something about the winding path helps us unwind. It is not a maze which is scary and confusing, it is a quiet space you like to go where nobody bothers you, a place to be quiet with your thoughts, get a blessing, maybe talk to God. They have been around all over the world and for thousands of years and are used for many different purposes. They have been used in the Christian tradition since the 14th Century in Algeria and Turkey and are a virtual pilgrimage when actual pilgrimage is too dangerous.

There are no rules as to how they should be used. You could put a basket in the middle and carry things there, or collect things to carry out, there could be activities/meditations to do on the way.



Children and Young People exploring prayer and spirituality through Prayer Spaces in Schools

(notes from Jon Steel, CYP development practitioner for Yorkshire)



Prayer Spaces in Schools is a national organisation that supports Christians to set up activities and spaces in their local schools where “*children and young people, of all faiths and none,.. explore life's questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way*”. (www.prayerspacesinschools.com)

The activities all tend to be of a very practical, visual and reflective nature and there are lots of ideas on their website as well as guidance on how to set up prayer spaces in your own locality. Recently Prayer Spaces have done some [research](#) which showed the great impact that prayer spaces had on children and young people – of different faiths and of no faith.

Whether we work with cyp in schools or in churches, here are a few really helpful ideas on helping them to reflect on their own lives and their connections to other people, the world and to God.

Giving children and young people space to reflect on themselves and their lives is extremely valuable and not something that many of them get to experience. All our lives are so full and busy, but especially young people’s. When we (all) stop and create a space, God meets us there. In this space with God we can rest, reflect, wrestle, and be renewed.

Prayer or reflection through activities can be accessible to young people whatever their age, ability or faith, far more than traditional ways of praying. There are many creative ideas and resources out there for helping people to pray in new or different ways whether in a school or in church worship.

Experiencing God can be a far more valuable thing than simply discussing or being taught about God. In our work with children and young people, how much space do we create for them to reflect, or do we fall into the pattern of programming their time so it is full of other activity? What opportunities might there be to introduce some reflective activities or silent reflection into our groups?

If you would like to explore any of these ideas a bit further, have a look at the Prayer Spaces website and get in touch with your CYDO.

PRAYER SPACES IN SCHOOLS CONFERENCE (Notes from Jane Henderson, CYDO for East Midlands)

Jim Davis, The Children’s Society.

Children are dealing with a lot of issues in their lives, e.g. young carers, parents, siblings, death, murder, grief, drug abuse.

He spoke about the importance of getting the right balance in a child’s life between them being

Selfish, Self Harm, Self Loathing, Self Absorbed, Despondent and unhappy

And

Selfless, self-aware, self-assured, self-esteem, confident and happy.

2009, Good Childhood Report, discovered that society has become individualistic, with a diminished collective responsibility towards children and young people. We model this behaviour to children.

Good Childhood report 2019 <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/the-good-childhood-report-2019>

Looks at trends over time. Children’s happiness in family life has been stable over the last 10 years, but life as a whole, with friends, with school has dropped a lot. With School has dropped significantly over the last 4/5 years.

We need to become interested in wellbeing not well becoming. Education is not about well being but about what you are going to become. We were asked to consider how hard it is to navigate the school system with the pressures and testing etc. Does the expectation to achieve, meet individual targets and do well conflict with a sense of belonging.

How spiritual styles shape our experience of prayer. if you have a ROOTS subscription:

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/worship-and-learning-support/spiritual-styles> .

LEGO SERIOUS PLAY—(notes from Ruth White and Phil Ray. Children’s and Youth Development Officers for Wessex)

The Wessex CYDOs recently attended a training day in Oxford exploring Lego Serious Play. It might sound like a day for Adult Lego fanatics who want to have a serious play session without children getting in the way, but it was not. It’s like a mix of Godly Play and Appreciative Inquiry.

It’s a facilitation method that has been used in the business world since 2010. It’s a way of working with groups who are considering an issue and exploring possible solutions. It starts with the understanding that much of the creative parts of our brain remain locked to us, playing with metaphors and ideas in a 3 dimensional way can unlock our creative thinking and spark our brain cells; enabling us to creatively dream big dreams and come up with creative solutions. As you begin to talk and discuss, you also begin to build and from this action comes creative thinking.

The training day was extremely hands on (as to be expected), taking the participants gently through challenges, building, sharing and reflecting, all using Lego.

As CYDOs we would recommend this training to anyone with a leadership or training role in teams. We have used it extensively with our churches since the training day. After the initial costs involved in buying enough Lego to fill the boot of an estate car (Car boot sales made this much cheaper), we have been able to use the methods with churches who are exploring their vision and mission as well as a children’s event exploring Faith and Christianity.

Read more about the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method here on the LEGO.com website: <https://www.lego.com/en-us/seriousplay>

You never know what possibilities it will unlock for you



EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN'S MINISTRY (notes from Lorraine Webb, Programme Officer for CYW)

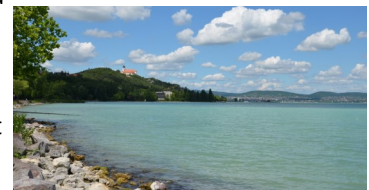
The European Conference on Children's Ministry (ECCE) meets every three years for five days and I had the pleasure of attending in March 2019 with eight other UK representatives. Participants came from five regions of Europe, including Russia and Kosovo, and the theme was **Moving Towards New Horizons in Children's Ministry: Be Brave, Be Curious, Be Adventurous.**

Resources were shared through the "Market Place", ideas shared through a Surgery of Children's Ministry, and we discussed how we become braver in our ministry through a World Café. The days were punctuated with social events, worship and prayer, creative Bible studies and visits to local churches.

There were three lectures with follow-up discussions: Dr. Angela Kunze-Beiküfner spoke on Child-based theology: theology for, with and by the child. Enabling children to question and discover their own truths rather than spoon feeding them. Prof. Dr. Bernd Beuscher spoke on how to educate children by learning from them; Understand the difference between childish and childlike, avoiding manipulation and encouraging exploration. Dr. Stefanie Schardien spoke on being adventurous with the Bible: Choose your Bible carefully and consider their aim. Are they theologically sound? Do justice to child and the text. Avoid hidden agendas. This includes looking carefully at the illustrations and what impression they impart.

There was also a choice of workshops. I led two workshops on Additional Needs, with a focus particularly on sensory diets and an opportunity to do some hands-on experimentation. We learned a bit of Makaton together and tried a sensory story. I also attended a workshop on exploring the topic of death in school. The trainer talked about the after-school group she ran with primary aged children focusing on this topic—they made and decorated a mini-coffin, designed a model of their 'room' in Heaven, and visited a cemetery. Several books were recommended but sadly these were all in German.

The ECCE meet again in Hungary (on the shores of Lake Balaton!) in Spring 2022. The cost this year was €650 for a single room, plus any travelling expenses. As an opportunity to share knowledge and ideas and experiences, to learn together and experience new approaches, to network with likeminded people from around Europe, and to be inspired and encouraged in your work, you could do worse than start saving and sign up for ECCE 2022. Keep an eye on the website—the steering group meet in February (I am on that group planning the next conference) and there should be more information available after that. <https://ecceconference.org>



National Interfaith Youth Conference 13th April 2019, St Andrew's (report by Matt Baines—Youth Ministry Development Worker for Scotland)

The National Interfaith Youth Conference was organised by Interfaith Scotland and the Coexistence Initiative and for its theme asked, "What is Justice?", a topic that was both substantial and a valuable one for young people, indeed *all* people to consider. The event consisted of talks from four speakers representing Christian, Islamic and Sikh perspectives. Of the four speakers, three gave very accessible and relevant presentations that covered both the place of justice in their tradition and it's contemporary practice. There was just one speaker who I felt went into an unnecessarily cerebral philosophical consideration of the notion of justice, that while interesting in its own right, did not feel relevant to the context of interfaith dialogue at this level.

Although the event was pitched as a Youth conference, it was not clear beforehand that it was more specifically aimed at young adults in the 18 - early 20s bracket. The 16-year-old who attended from my own group while attentive was evidently not as engaged as the other delegates. Having said this, I was greatly encouraged by what I saw there in the eagerness of young people to relate together across differences of religion, ethnicity, culture and faith. I did, however, have the impression that both the speakers and hosts were somewhat overeager to emphasise the similarities between the faiths represented at the expense of considering the differences in their respective approaches to justice. While I appreciate the desire to develop a positive and congenial rapport, I feel that this approach demonstrated a lack of confidence in the desire of both speakers and audience to truly establish a common ground with deep foundations. There had been a question and answer time planned with all the speakers which might have been a good opportunity to take the discussion to a deeper level, but this had to be cut short due to limited time.

In conclusion, my impression of the conference was overall very positive and I would strongly encourage youth groups to consider partnering with other faith groups in similar acts of dialogue at a level appropriate to the young people involved. I would definitely recommend that when planning such an event, to allow plenty of time to go 'off-script' and really find out what you have in common and what is unique to different traditions. Ultimately our world will be a far better place when young people of different faiths and cultures really get to know each other and develop lasting friendships.

AND FINALLY If you have received this as a paper copy or by a friend forwarding it to you and you would like to be added to our mailing list for our bi-monthly newsletter and supplements, please do sign up here: <https://tinyurl.com/ycgnpojs>.

Our Data privacy note is here: https://www.urc.org.uk/images/Children-and-youth/documents/CYW_Data_Privacy_Notice.pdf