

How Do Children Understand Prayer in a Church School?
**A Video-Based, Constructivist Grounded Theory Study Using a
Godly Play Approach**

by

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Abstract

There is little in the qualitative research literature about how children understand prayer. Previous research has tended to be from a psychological or empirical point of view enumerating the how and why of prayer, but not getting to the nub of how children understand prayer.

This thesis draws on the work of Berryman who developed Godly Play, a pedagogy for teaching about the Christian faith. It focuses on wondering about a Biblical story followed by free response work time which allows the children to make meaning from the story in their own ways. Berryman suggests that children play at the edges of understanding in relationship with themselves, God, others and nature. The pedagogy of Godly Play was adapted as a research method for this study.

This study is located in a Church of England and Roman Catholic Aided Church school and focuses on the understanding of prayer in a small group of children aged 7 and 8. The study also investigates the question of what adaptations need to be made to make use of Godly Play as a research method. The children and researcher were involved in Godly Play style sessions based on the Lord's Prayer. These sessions were videoed and analysed using Constructivist Grounded Theory.

This study has found that these children understand prayer as a communication between themselves, God and people who have passed away. There are key relationships between God, Self, Others, Nature and Creation, the Church and the Bible. These relationships are based on Love. Nature and Creation are important for children as a means of expressing their ideas about prayer. Furthermore, the findings in this study confirm and extend Berryman's ideas about how children are in relationship with God. Lastly, it is concluded that Godly Play can be adapted successfully as a research method with some changes to the underlying epistemology and accommodation of ethical considerations as to the use of children's responses.

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Dedicated to Barbara Cracknell, an inspiration.

1 Introduction

A previous opportunity for research (Southward, 2015) allowed me to start to consider what children understand as prayer. That study concluded that a theory proposed by Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967), which posited that children's understanding of prayer developed in a linear fashion according to their age, was partially borne out in the data collected. However, the ages at which children appeared to develop certain understandings of prayer were much more fluid than those suggested by Long, Elkind and Spilka, and that nurture of the child – growing up in a Christian home or attending a faith school, for example – was an important factor overlooked by the original paper. From this, I started to wonder what children really understand by prayer and if they were experiencing prayer in the same way as intended by adults who were leading during worship times. This question is of potential importance as if children are experiencing prayer differently from adults then adult practice needs to be amended to take into consideration what the children think is significant.

In this thesis, I intend to argue that children and adults make meaning in a world to which they only have partial access. Given this, a methodological approach (section 3) which acknowledges that children are meaning makers was employed. Godly Play (section 2.5) provided a structure for the children to express their ideas and Grounded Theory (section 3.5.1) was employed to analyse the data collected during four, filmed (section 3.4.3) Godly Play sessions led by the researcher. Previous studies were used to argue that my study is filling a gap in the literature concerning the understanding that children have of prayer (section 2.2).

Reflexive notes (in italics and in the style of a blog to differentiate them from the rest of the thesis) position me as the researcher within the research itself (see sections 1.1 and 6). My background is in teaching in primary schools for the past 20 years. I have been responsible for RE in a faith school for the past 9 years. I am an active Christian and my faith means a lot to me. My own faith and my experiences as a teacher have no doubt influenced both the motivation for this research and my understanding of the children's constructions of prayer. This, the limited nature of the data and the

application of Constructivist Grounded Theory to the data have led to a substantive theory which explains a phenomenon in one, specific context. This is in contrast to a formal theory which explains a phenomenon in a wider context (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 31).

1.1 A personal view about prayer

Prayer is a blessing. It is a personal and public aspect of being a Christian. Prayer comes in many forms and in many places.

Prayer is a communication between humans and God. It can be personal but not private – prayer is always out there with God. Jesus prayed to the Father that this cup be taken away from him. This was his communication with the Father.

There is no right or wrong way to pray. Different Christian traditions have different ways of praying. My own belief is that there are as many ways of praying as there are people in the world! It is that varied. Sometimes prayer works, sometimes it feels like there is nothing there.

So, what is prayer? What is a definition of it? A Christian understanding of prayer, I mean. How does prayer relate to the Holy Trinity? How is prayer going to affect the work that I am doing? I know I want to approach the work prayerfully as well as prayer being the subject – hence I need to write part of this thesis in the first person to try and write down my own ideas of prayer.

I was christened young and brought up as a Christian throughout my childhood. It has been a part of me and my life since I can remember. This does not mean that I have never had doubts or fears regarding Christianity – I have had long periods of not going to church and turning away from organised religion, and doubts about a loving God when my Grandad was unexpectedly taken from us when he was young. But, and it is a big but, I have always believed there is a God, a benevolent God, who is guiding and looking after me, even in the darkest of dark times.

Prayer is important to me and something natural. I find myself talking to God at strange times, and not just at traditional times of prayer. I do not often get a reply or a response that I would like, but there is something that keeps me from giving up on prayer. A thought that maybe, somewhere, someone is hearing me and listening. How that works with millions of people praying I really do not understand. But I know I have a personal relationship with God, tentative, faulty and patchy as it is.

Prayer is a mainstay of my life and work, despite the problems I have with it. I am not a paragon of virtue, I do not pray as regularly as I probably should, but what I do works for me and I can understand and benefit from it. It is what I turn to in times of stress or upset or when I need guidance. I am not great at listening back, but I am getting better. I do not want anyone to think that I am a shining light in prayer...I muddle along as best I can and I hope I encourage other people by my life and attitude. There is always room to be better.

My interest in prayer and children's understanding of prayer seemingly came from nowhere. I mean, nowhere conscious. I needed a topic for some research and this popped into mind. Since then, it has just made sense. How do children understand prayer? What implications does this have for collective worship in schools and churches with children? How can prayer be made more accessible for children? And, most importantly, what can adults learn from children about prayer? Children are more vulnerable, more fragile, more innocent than many adults. How does their lack of experience in the world affect their understanding of prayer – and I do not mean that as a negative but as a positive. How does their perceived innocence affect their understanding? Does this innocence lead to a purer form of communication with God?

In my own story I have experienced lots of illness and difficulties, but something has kept me going and that something, I am convinced, is God. I was struck by an image I read about once of a sheet of paper, completely black except for a tiny white square in the middle which had an equally tiny cross in it. That little ray of hope in the blackness.

My story is important for this research as I believe it says a lot about how I think about prayer and the world. I believe there is a God, that humans can know partially and

fallibly. I believe that the way of communicating with God is through prayer, but that prayer can take many and varied forms. I also believe that there are many routes to God – mine happens to be Christian. I believe that people can be spiritual and have a relationship with God without being religious and that spirituality is a natural part of life. There are a lot of assumptions there which I am going to need to unpick and justify, but that is my own understanding of the world...and it works for me.

This section will be returned to and analysed in section 3.3.4.

1.2 The place of prayer in an English church school

It is a legal requirement for schools in England to hold an act of collective worship daily (UK Government, 1994). This practice is especially valued in Church of England (C of E) and Roman Catholic (RC) aided and controlled schools which have a distinctive Christian character. Part of this act of worship could be prayer, either collective, led or individual. In my own school, prayers are said by the children at the start of lunch and at the end of the day in addition to those in worship. Given this, prayer in a church school is legally justified.

However, there are children in a church school who do not follow the Christian faith or sometimes any faith. It is possible for parents to withdraw their children from collective worship (UK Government, 1994); however, in a church school, this is unusual. This is because parents choose to send their children to a church school, generally understanding its character, and are therefore implicitly agreeing to the underlying ethos, including prayer. There is a tension for church schools between nurturing the 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils', as required of all schools by the National Curriculum (2014), and that of educating children in the Christian faith (SIAMS, 2013), which could be seen as being indoctrination. Hemming (2018) discusses an 'unresolved tension between the developing capacity of children to exercise freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right of parents to provide direction and guidance in this regard' (p. 156) which arises from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2017). Here there is a difficulty between the wishes of the parents and the rights of the child, should they not wish to

be Christian in faith. However, Hemming goes on to state that there is an assumption in some arguments that 'children are always willing to be indoctrinated' (p. 157) thereby seeing children as passive receivers and not capable of independent decisions. This, as discussed in section 3.6, is not the approach taken in this thesis, where children are deemed capable of constructing their own lives and is not the argument put forward by Hemming (2018) where children are 'active agents' and 'religious actors in their own right' (p. 157). The implication of this is that children may be in a church school which has a specific ethos but they are still able to make decisions about their own faith journey; they are not compelled to follow a Christian faith should they not want to. This includes praying. Hemming notes, that in some schools 'children were under the impression that they were required to pray in order to avoid being disciplined by teachers' (2018, p. 166; see also Hemming, 2015 and Shillitoe and Strhan, 2020) and goes on to mention subversive activities on the part of the children who did not want to be part of prayers. Given this, the issue of prayer in school is a difficulty which it could be hard to manage but there are two ways in which the issue of prayer in a church school could be justified.

Firstly, from an educational point of view, the children in the school may be present when prayers are said but not compelled to join in (Bristow, 2012). Common practice in schools I have worked in is to ask children to be respectful and quiet while a prayer is being said, then only to say Amen at the end if they agree to the prayer. Given this, the children are under no compulsion to pray; only to be respectful of the requirements of others. Secondly, in an extension of the point above, it could be argued that as parents have chosen to educate their children in a Christian community, there is an implicit understanding that prayer is part of this community and is therefore something to which tacit consent is given. The children are covenanted into a Christian community, rather like a family, and belong to that community by choice of their parents. In common with point number one, the children are still free to choose their own way of responding to prayer but are not compelled to pray or agree with the prayers of others should they not wish to.

The school in this study, Treeforth Primary School (pseudonym), is of joint Anglican and Roman Catholic foundation. This means that the children are drawn from the communities of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in the locality by preference over children from other faiths or of no faith (taken from the admissions policy, Treeforth Primary School). This implies that the majority of the children come from committed, Christian families of either denomination. In addition, the RE curriculum supports sacramental preparation in partnership with the local churches of both denominations. This means that an agreement exists between the school and the families and the church communities of which the parents are made aware before their child enters the school (taken from the RE policy, Treeforth Primary School). This enables prayer to be said within the school, for, by and with pupils, and makes provision both for nurturing spiritual and faith formation as appropriate, while respecting the children's rights to choose their own paths into or out of faith.

Given this, the role of prayer in a church school is a privileged one as children and staff can come together in a deep spiritual understanding and communion. Bristow writes,

So the Christian teacher, or the teacher without a faith who nevertheless wants to do a professional job, is faced with both a great opportunity and an exciting challenge: facilitating prayer, in the knowledge that they are not imposing anything, but rather liberating and channelling that innate spirituality, all within an enabling rather than a limiting framework. (2012, p. 8)

Prayer is a fundamental basis on which an English church school thrives and therefore a deeper understanding of how a small group of children, drawn from Treeforth Primary School, understand prayer is of potential interest and importance for English church schools in general (see also section 5.3.4).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Why is this research needed?

A review of the available literature showed that while there is not much about children under 12 and their understanding of prayer, there is more research about young adults' understanding of prayer (Day, 2009; Giordan and Woodhead, 2015, for example). In order to focus this study on children rather than adolescents, literature which refers to children under the age of 12 has been considered. This has tended to be from psychological or quantitative perspectives which, I will argue, are not suitable methods for eliciting what children think prayer is. This is because trying to reduce prayer itself to quantitative data does not honour the whole experience of prayer. In this section, I intend to position this research within a Christian tradition and to review the literature which exists already about children and prayer, arguing that this research fills a gap. As the school in this study has a joint Anglican and Roman Catholic foundation, the community in the school operates within a Christian paradigm. Given this, this thesis argues that while this is a sociological study of prayer, some theological understanding of the nature of God and of prayer is necessary. However, whether prayer is effective, or God exists, are arguments which are not for this thesis.

2.2 Reviewing the literature: children and prayer

Much of the research on children under 12 and prayer comes from a psychological standpoint (Goldman, 1964; Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967; Woolley and Phelps, 2001; Bamford and Lagattuta, 2010; Spilka, 2013, for example) or sociological standpoint (Hemming, 2015; Giordan and Woodhead, 2015; Shillitoe and Strhan, 2020, for example). In this section I intend to review several of these papers in depth, arguing that the underlying positivist epistemology of the papers is only one way of approaching the problem of how children understand prayer and that it is not necessarily the best for explaining something mystical. This is relevant as it helps position this thesis in the literature, and I argue that in using a qualitative research design, this study is filling a gap. I also review two further papers (Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes, 2008; Bosede Ola, 2018), whose conclusions are similar to those of this thesis, despite concerning different samples. The earliest substantial work on children and prayer is that of

Goldman (1964) who aimed to describe religious thinking and its development in a Piagetian manner. To do this, a 'psychological research method' was employed, namely clinical interviews (pp. 34 – 35). This encompassed a sample of children between 6 and 17 years old. A picture of a child praying was used as a stimulus for the children to explain what they thought was happening in the image in order to elicit the children's understanding of prayer. Direct questioning was not used because Goldman considered that prayer 'is an area of religious activity where it is easy to be misled by children, trying to please an adult by giving the right sort of expected answers' (p. 177). The results were scored, and a discussion given of 'what children pray about, their concepts of the efficacy of prayer and their concepts of the non-efficacy of prayer' (p. 177). At no point does Goldman query whether children pray or not – indeed, the first sentence of the chapter on prayer reads, 'most children pray' (1964, p. 177) – and there is an assumption that the children questioned all had an understanding of prayer which matched that of Goldman.

Goldman identified different types of prayers, including altruistic prayers – for family, friends, others and pets/animals – and prayers for the self, as well as for protection and recovery (pp. 180 – 182). He then identified four conceptual stages of prayer development, starting with magical thinking, followed by a semi-magical stage, non-magical stage and finally a stage focused on faith and 'the fact that one cannot know' (p. 188). These are linked to Reik's earlier work (1955) on how societies change from magical thinking which develops into prayer in a religious context. The two studies are summarised in the table below:

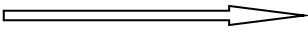
	Magic			Religion	
Reik (1955)	‘My will be done’ (p. 22)	‘My will be done because I am God’ (p. 22)	‘My will be done with God’s help’ (p. 22)	‘Thy will be done’ (p. 22)	
Goldman (1964)	Stage 1 – ‘the claim of immediate assurance from God or materialistic results appearing by magical power.’ (p. 184)	Stage 2 – ‘a semi-magical conceptual stage, with argument by results employed but the problems posed only result in confusion.’ (p. 184)	Stage 3 – ‘more rational arguments by results are employed, with particular emphasis upon the spiritual results of prayer upon the person praying’. [non magical concepts] (p. 184)	Stage 4 – ‘...an advanced level of ideas in maintaining that no certain knowledge of the efficacy of prayer is available, only reasoning by probability, or by conviction and faith is open to them’. [non magical concepts] (p. 184)	

Table 1 - Goldman (1964) and Reik (1955) stages amalgamated (Southward, 2015)

This shows how closely religious thinking and psychological development theory were linked in the 1960s. Goldman’s psychological exploration of how children think about prayer describes the content of children’s prayers and whether they think prayer is effective or not, but does not explain what children think prayer is. This is assumed from the start to be both part of their lives already and stereotypical (for example a picture

in Goldman (1964 p. 249) is of a child kneeling by a bed with hands together and eyes closed).

Next, Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) set out to try to find out what children understood by the term prayer through a scientific approach, evident in the title of the journal in which it was published (Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion). Despite the 1964 research from Goldman, this is not referenced in their work, although Reik (1955) is referenced. Long *et al.* set out their positivist position from the outset. They do not comment on the fact that there were some children whose faith was unknown or other than Christian and, later, do not differentiate between these children in their analysis, which is a significant omission. This is because further on in the paper the authors comment that 'the notion of prayer thus became not only more abstract but also more circumscribed in the sense that it was now seen not as a universal human activity, but rather as an activity *associated with and derived from a particular belief system*' (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967, p. 106, italics added). The authors do not define to which belief system they are referring, whether Christian, a different religion or another belief system altogether. The authors acknowledge that a 'theological position has been presupposed', but this is only in a footnote (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967, p. 102). It is left to the reader to deduce the theological standpoint of the authors. It seems that there is an assumption in the paper that if God exists then prayer exists, and that this prayer is a universal trait which humans share (in common with later research from Hay and Nye (2006) who claim that spirituality is a universal and biological human trait). From the perspective of the reader of Long, Elkind and Spilka, it feels rather that the authors have side-stepped difficult theological issues and the matter of a definition of what prayer is in their quest to quantify how children pray. Therefore, the results gained do not seem to have an adequate theological grounding when considering how and why children pray.

In the data analysis and results in Long et al., there is again an assumption that prayer is a real and valid activity to be studied, although they never define what they think prayer is. The results were analysed 'so as to test statistically impressions gained from a subjective reading of the protocols' (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967, p. 103).

Although there are a few qualitative quotations to support the statistics, this is essentially a data-led study (in the sense of data as being numbers) which enumerated the number of times children reported praying, the attitude of prayer that they took while praying and the content of their prayers. I was also interested to note in the coding strategies exactly what the authors felt that the children should be praying about and what, exactly, they meant by 'particular and appropriate activities' (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967, p. 105). While the authors do not define such activities, later in the paper they refer to praying on Sundays and at bedtime which implies that this is what they considered to be 'appropriate' (p. 107).

Epistemologically, then, Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) have assumed there are behaviours to be discovered and quantified which led them to a theory of a linear progression in the development of prayer understanding in childhood. This means that their research methods (semi-structured questions, direct questions and picture cues) do seem to link with the quantitative approach to the eventual datasets generated and to the overall positivist theoretical perspective. The same authors more recently published a further book entitled 'The Psychology of Prayer – A Scientific Approach' (Spilka, 2013) and which is still, after 40 years, taking an approach to the research into prayer of it being a quantifiable phenomenon and which does not come to any further conclusions about what children understand about prayer. While the authors do seem to have identified how and what children do when they pray, they have not been able to explain the deeper *why* questions which religions, according to McGrath (2016, p. 14), could answer. By reducing the ineffable nature of prayer to statistics, that study, while interesting as a starting point, seems to miss the essential nature of prayer, that of communication with an unknowable God in a way which is essentially mysterious. The positivist approach is at odds with the nebulous nature of prayer. Here I see an opportunity for research into children's prayer which is more interpretive and descriptive, rather than statistics led, and which focuses on children's understanding of prayer, rather than the behaviours they associate with prayer.

Thirdly, following from the work of Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) in approaching the espoused development of children's understanding of prayer from an empirical

standpoint, Woolley and Phelps (2001) took their research and developed it further. Both papers argue that there is a developmental aspect to children's understanding of prayer and relate this to a Piagetian understanding of stages of children's development. Woolley and Phelps comment that there is 'considerable development in the concept of prayer between the ages of 3 and 8' (Woolley and Phelps, 2001, p. 154) and they relate this to a psychological approach to child development – theories of mind. In order to investigate the question, Woolley and Phelps used a mixed methods approach including structured interviews with the children, a parental questionnaire, an entity task (where the children were asked which entities presented could pray) and a judgement task (based on scenarios, related to the children, who were then asked what was going on in the stories). Despite the qualitative methods employed, the results are mainly presented in a quantitative form, again reducing prayer to numerical descriptors. In relation to the previous research, Woolley and Phelps found that children seemed to develop an understanding of prayer at an earlier age than proposed by Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967), although the three-year-olds had only a vague idea of what prayer, as defined by Woolley and Phelps, meant. According to the children interviewed, young children and babies cannot pray. Woolley and Phelps link this to cognitive development in children including the development of language. I would argue that language is not necessary in all types of prayer (speaking in tongues, for example, or meditation) and, given this, children of all ages can pray in a manner which is suitable for them. Woolley and Phelps (2001b) link wishing and prayer, commenting that 'children's early wish and prayer concepts might be very similar if not synonymous, or even that early prayer concepts might arise from concepts of wishing' (p. 158). This links both to Reik's work on magic (1955) and to Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) who propose that there may be an element of magical thinking in early childhood prayer. However, Woolley and Phelps later write that 'the contents of children's prayers may be more realistic than the contents of their wishes' (p. 159) which implies that prayer and wishing are different and that children can differentiate between them. This may bring us closer to an understanding of how children understand prayer.

To summarise, Woolley and Phelps extend the original theories of Goldman (1964) and Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967), amending the ages at which the proposed stages of

prayer development happen, and also considering how wishing and prayer may be linked in young children. This is significant for this study as they do not conclude what they think prayer is for children. In addition, they approach the subject in a positivist manner. I argue that this approach is not getting to the nub of what prayer actually is for children, although adding in the element of wishing as a contrast to prayer further developed what had been understood as children's conception of prayer up until this point.

Fourthly, a study into how children view prayer was carried out by Mountain (2004) who investigated how prayer functions for children and what the meaning of it is in their lives. A grounded theory approach was taken to dealing with the data collected from interviews, child drawn illustrations and gap filling tasks. What is unique about this study in relation to the others mentioned is that it is cross-faith and involves children from Christian (Catholic and non-Catholic), Jewish and Muslim backgrounds and schools. Thus, the study is more far-reaching than previous studies and takes a wider view than this present research is proposing. The focus is on the meaning and function of prayer for children – how does it affect or mould their lives? What does it *do* for them? Mountain (2004) found prayer has a distinct function for children as 'a personal way to perceive and respond to the experiences of life' (Mountain, 2004, p. 240). I would argue that while this is important, it does not really get to the heart of what children think prayer is, which is what this study aims to do. However, Mountain also considers what the meaning of prayer is for children. Her findings are summarised below:

Finding One	Prayer means connection or communication with God
Finding Two	Prayer is related to the Image of God
Finding Three	Prayer continues within the secular environment
Finding Four	The meaning or prayer is an inner aspect of life related to feelings and hopes
Finding Five	The meaning of prayer is affected by the environment
Finding Six	Both communal and personal elements are involved in the meaning of prayer
Finding Seven	Ritual and Symbol are part of the meaning of prayer.

Table 2 - The Meaning of Prayer (Mountain, 2004, p. 156 cf.)

Bearing in mind that Mountain's work is a cross-faith study, remarkable similarities were found. An overarching category – 'Prayer is communication with the good God' (Mountain, 2004, p. 238) – neatly binds the observations together. Mountain concludes that,

Prayer does have meaning and significance for children in contemporary Australian life. Prayer is viewed both as a personal activity and experience as well as a communal activity. Learning within the faith community has been shown to have some influence on the ways in which prayer is conducted and in relation to the image of God to whom the prayer is directed (Mountain, 2004, p. 162).

While this is helpful, it does not get to an understanding of what the children think prayer is. Mountain uses a dictionary definition of prayer at the start of the thesis where

she writes, 'prayer is defined as devout petition to or any form of spiritual communication with God or an object of worship' (Mountain, 2004, p. 21). This is in contrast to this study where prayer is not defined from the start. In addition, Mountain's cross-faith study and this thesis, which looks solely at prayer in a Christian environment, are not directly comparable as they are trying to answer different questions. Part of Mountain's thesis is mentioned rather dismissively in Spilka and Ladd (2013) due to fundamental methodological differences. Spilka and Ladd refer to this research as soft research in comparison to the hard research of a scientific approach which is both judgemental and implies a lesser regard should be paid to Mountain's work. This, I believe, is misguided as, while Mountain's study is relatively small scale and attention is paid to individual children's subjective ideas, it is nonetheless valuable in contributing to an understanding of how children understand prayer. Furthermore, it demonstrates that a qualitative approach to this question can fruitfully be employed, the quantitative approach of earlier studies being concerned more with *how* and *what* questions (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967; Woolley and Phelps, 2001).

Humphrey, Hughes, and Holmes (2008) noted that prior studies focused primarily on religious thinking among children from European backgrounds in contrast to their work centred on African-American children. Humphrey, Hughes, and Holmes (2008) doubt there is a developmental aspect to children's understanding of prayer, and question whether stages of faith development could be replicated across cultures. Utilising semi-structured interviews, these researchers concluded that for the sample of African-American children scrutinised (drawn from the Baptist community), in contrast to their predictions, younger and older children both understood prayer as a way to build relationship with God and were able to interpret abstract material. These authors claim that this had not been seen in other studies up to this point and suggest that,

Overall, the consistency of these core ideas across age groups may suggest that a developmental progression is not straightforward. Many factors other than age may account for how the children understood a religious concept, such as prayer. Age does not seem to be the best indicator of the desire to build a relationship or seek forgiveness through prayer. Nor may age be a

good indicator of religious socialisation or greater exposure to religious concepts (p. 325).

This fits with prior research (Southward, 2015) which concluded that the ages suggested in the literature for the development of prayer understanding in children were very much dependent on context and family background. However, this present research did not investigate a developmental aspect to prayer, particularly as the sample of children from which the data were drawn were all aged seven or eight, but looked for different ways in which children of this age may understand prayer. Additionally, the context of this thesis, the study by Humphrey, Hughes, and Holmes (2008) and the contexts of earlier papers (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967, for example) are not comparable. It is of note that in the limited literature about children's prayer Humphrey, Hughes, and Holmes (2008) is the earliest indication that prayer may not be developmental and may be relational. This observation is borne out by Ola (2018), discussed next.

Investigating the meaning of prayer for children in Nigeria, Ola (2018), in common with Long, Elkind, and Spilka (1967) and Woolley and Phelps (2001), assumed that a child's understanding of prayer is developmental. This study, which used a small sample of children aged 7 to 8 and 11 to 12, aimed to find out whether there were differences between the two age groups in how they talked about prayer. The study is predicated on an assumption that prayer exists and should be done in 'the right manner' (p. 76), or according to a particular interpretation of biblical texts as illustrated in the first paragraph of the article (pp. 62 – 63). The author may have had a preconceived idea of how children understand prayer. Using semi-structured interviews, sentence completion activities, conversations based on a picture and writing a letter to God to generate the data, themes were identified for each age group. These included how children understood prayer, how children think about prayer, and what children were taught about prayer.

Similarities were found between Ola (2018) and Mountain's (2004) study despite the differences in samples. Ola notes a cultural limitation in the sample used by Mountain (Ola, 2018, p. 65) which she aimed to fill by working with children from

Nigeria, although these children were exclusively Christian in contrast with those in Mountain's study which were drawn from a variety of faiths. Similarities in findings included children having a positive attitude towards prayer and that prayer, for both older and younger children, is 'an act of communicating with God' (Ola, 2018, p. 76). Ola notes different types of prayer identified by the children including prayers learned by heart. She also comments, 'the significance of prayer for the children was it is a relationship builder. Prayer brings about intimacy between them and God, and it is the identity of a Christian as the children noted that the person who does not pray is not a real child of God' (p. 77). While Ola found some differences between the understandings of the older and younger children, the most significant finding for the argument in this thesis is younger children in Ola's study 'do not have a full grasp of language and are not able to understand abstract terms they use... and can only understand the meanings if they are explained with an item' (p.69). This is because the younger children in Ola's study were the same age as the children who participated in this present research, so her observations about the language used by children of this age, and about prayer being a relationship with God, will be returned to in section 5.1.1. Ola sums up her findings as follows:

The findings of this research discovered that children understood prayer in a richer way. They understood it to be a means of experiencing a relationship with God, also meaning of gaining God's guidance as they listened... Therefore, as curriculum writers define prayer in books and literatures for children, they should look for definitions that can convey prayer as a relationship with God. The common definitions of prayer as activities, asking for something, or due to location or even talking with God should be reconstructed because as this study has discovered, children understand prayer to be more than its textbook definition. (p.79)

This will be returned to in the findings of this thesis.

The most recent study about children and prayer focused on the approach of non-religious children to prayer in the primary school (Shillitoe and Strhan, 2020). In this

research, Shillitoe and Strhan drew on ethnographic studies in three schools (a Church of England School, a special school for children with additional needs, and a community school) and focused on children who professed to be non-religious and how they negotiated, and in some cases subverted, times of prayer (see also, Hemming, 2015; 2018). The authors comment on how some of the children used prayer time to communicate with relatives or pets who had passed away (as did Day, 2009). Some children also used the time to think about family or friends and issues pertaining to them. Shillitoe and Strhan state, 'the children experienced prayer as highly relational and their constructions of belief were rooted in the everyday worlds they inhabited and the people they knew and encountered' (p. 9). While this point is not expanded, I consider it to be significant in light of the arguments of this thesis as to how children understand prayer, in particular that prayer is 'relational'. This is because the idea of a relational aspect to prayer for children links not only with prior research on children's spirituality and relational consciousness (Hay and Nye, 2006) and with Ola's 2018 study, but also with the findings, exemplified in chapter 4, of this thesis.

In conclusion, the limited literature on how children understand prayer has relied heavily on psychological theories of mind to study the phenomenon of prayer in a scientific manner until more recent studies such as those of Mountain (2004), Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes (2008), Ola (2018) and Shillitoe and Strhan (2020). This, I argue, leaves a gap in the literature for examining how children understand prayer using a qualitative approach, similar to that of Mountain, Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes, and Ola, who bridged the gap between the scientific approaches of Long et al (1967) and Woolley and Phelps (2001) by employing semi-structured interviews and structured writing tasks along with illustrations. It is the aim of this research to employ a research method which allows for greater freedom of response from the children.

2.3 Where is this research positioned in the literature?

Given the above, I situate this present research, and that of Mountain (2004), Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes (2008) and Ola (2018), towards the qualitative end of a spectrum and position Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) and Woolley and Phelps (2001) towards the quantitative end. In contrast to the quantitative approach, I intend to

investigate how children understand prayer through subjective, wondering questions and craft activities. Data gathered will be used to generate thick description (Geertz, 1993) rather than for statistical analysis. In common with Mountain (2004), I intend to use Grounded Theory to analyse the data gained, but in contrast to Mountain this study will focus on one age group within a Church of England and Roman Catholic setting.

2.4 Reviewing the literature: adults and prayer

There is a plethora of literature concerning prayer and adults. Within this are many different definitions of prayer, for example Fenton (1939), Leonard (2013), Friel (2018) and Cotterell (2010) who agree that prayer is to effect change either in the person praying or in the world. There are different opinions as to the relationship of the person who is praying with God, for example an unequal relationship (Fenton, 1939) or one of family or friend (Cotterell, 2010; Leonard, 2013; Friel, 2018). Within a Trinitarian understanding of God, relationship is with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit both as one and as separate entities. Within a human / Holy Trinity relationship, communication is important and some authors speak of prayer as dialogue between God and human (Browne, 2001). Different types of prayer are identified in the literature including prayers of blessing and adoration, petition, intercession and thanksgiving (Cotterell, 2010; Leonard, 2013; Friel, 2018); only Cotterell (2010) writes of prayers of contrition, to the best of my knowledge. A Dutch study (Janssen *et al.*, 2000) differentiated between religious prayer, meditative prayer and psychological prayer. Sixteen different types of prayer across seven studies are identified and summarised by Ladd and Spilka (2002) who categorise them broadly into intrinsic, extrinsic and quest prayers. The typology suggested by Ladd and Spilka (2002) links with Foster (1992) who described prayers as being inward, outward and upward.

The brief summary above shows the range and scope of literature about adult understandings of prayer. For this thesis, I decided to focus the literature review on studies involving children under the age of 12. This was partly to bound the literature review and partly as this thesis is not a comparative one. By making use of constructivist grounded theory, I constructed a substantive theory of how the children in this sample understood prayer from the data collected. This meant I was not testing the children's

understanding of prayer against an adult understanding of prayer derived from the literature, so I argue that the brief overview of the research undertaken into how adults understand prayer is sufficient here.

2.5 What is Godly Play?

Godly Play is a pedagogy for teaching children about the Christian faith which involves creativity and ritual actions and routines. Created by Jerome Berryman (Berryman, 1991; Berryman and Hyde, 2010; Berryman, 2017a) the Godly Play movement was brought to the UK by Rebecca Nye as an extension of her work on spirituality in children (*Trainers - Godly Play UK*, 2019). The scope and influence of Godly Play is encapsulated in the two quotations below:

The result of a lifetime of research and practice by theologian, author and educator The Rev. Dr. Jerome Berryman, the Godly Play method is a curriculum of spiritual practice exploring the mystery of God's presence in our lives. The Godly Play curriculum engages what is most exciting about religious education: God inviting us into—and pursuing us in the midst of—Scripture and spiritual experience. Godly Play practice teaches us to listen for God and to make authentic and creative responses to God's call in our lives.

(Godly Play Foundation, No date)

Godly Play is the original work of the US theologian, Jerome Berryman. Since its inception in the 1970s, it has been used worldwide with children in schools and churches and adults in many contexts, including care homes, prisons, all age services, hospitals and theological colleges. With origins in Montessori education, Berryman was looking for an approach that capitalised on children's imaginative and spiritual nature.

(The Salvation Army, 2020)

A typical Godly Play session entails a welcome, guided storytelling, wondering and a time for free response at the end before a feast is shared. In its purest form, as described by

Berryman (1991), it is a non-judgemental, non-assessed and undirected, yet structured, time for children and adults to explore Biblical stories in their own time and in their own ways. The pedagogy is based on Montessori methods and Berryman makes claim that 'this approach would honour children's experience of God without distorting it, and yet involve them to use an appropriate existential language of depth to develop what they already knew by experience' (Berryman, 2018a, p. 131). In other words, Godly Play gives children a language system to use to try to construct meaning from what they already know of the world through experience and which they may not be able to express in other ways. Symbols and concrete props are used to help children make meaning from the stories being presented.

The storytelling ritual involves structured scripts (see Berryman, 2017b for example) which a storyteller memorises and retells to a circle of participants, usually seated on the floor. The stories are told using high-quality props and are colour coded according to their place in the Bible – parables are kept in gold boxes to show their worth, for example. By moving the props slowly while telling the story and by focusing entirely on the props, the storyteller can draw the participants in. At the end of the story the storyteller can make eye contact with the circle to signal that the story itself has ended, then the wondering begins, through carefully structured questions. Participants are free to engage or not as they wish and silence is just as much valued as oral responses are. The response, or work, time involves participants being invited to engage with the resources provided in any way they wish. This could involve craft or art activities, reading the Bible or other storybooks, working or playing with the props for one or other of the stories or simply taking time to think and reflect. It is a time of free expression and play. After the response time comes a feast. The participants are invited back into the circle and a small snack, such as dried fruit and a drink, is shared. This mimics the sharing of bread and wine at the Eucharist (Berryman, 1991, p. 60). The Godly Play session ends with a prayer, which can be formal, spontaneous or silent, and individual farewells.

Berryman (2002) writes:

Godly Play uses craft activities, but uses them differently from most curricula. Rather than have children create something pre-packaged, each child creates an expressive response to what is individually thought and felt after receiving the parable or sacred story in a group setting. The children have the opportunity to enter the story, wonder about it and *then* create meaning for their own lives. (p.19, italics in original)

The strength in a Godly Play approach lies mainly in the wondering time where the participants can share their ideas freely enabled by the storyteller (Nye, 2008; Lamont, 2007), but also in the play element of the response time where ideas are extended and deepened through craft activities. This creation of personal meaning is vitally important for children and adults who engage in a Godly Play session. Having used Godly Play in a classroom setting and trained as a Godly play practitioner, I am familiar with the depth of response which can be prompted from the children I have worked with during this time.

2.6 What is the underlying theory of Godly Play?

Godly Play is a pedagogical approach for teaching about the Christian faith. It has also been adapted for other faiths and situations (see Chapter 6 in Berryman, 2013). However, the underlying assumptions of the method do not rely on data-transfer methods of teaching; rather the children (or participants) are encouraged to make their own meaning. In Godly Play, Berryman (Berryman, 1991; Hyde, 2013) argues that the way in which new understanding is generated is through a creative process which he typifies as being a break, or rupture in understanding, followed by scanning to find a new understanding, social checking of new meaning to see if other people have insights which may be helpful and finally closure which accomplishes a 'new circle of meaning' (Berryman, 1991, p.96). The majority of this happens in the wondering phase, where participants are encouraged to respond to open-ended questions designed to promote independent responses and discussion, but also during the response time, where the participants have free rein to work independently or with others to create their own meanings inspired by the stories in which they have participated.

The Godly Play system is predicated on an underlying structure which mimics both the holy Eucharist (Berryman, 2017a; Berryman, 2013; Hyde, 2013) and that of a creative process: flow, play, love and contemplation (Berryman, 2018b; Hyde, 2013). Berryman makes the point that the four dimensions of the creative process map onto the four aspects of humanity which makes us human: a psychological aspect, social, biological and spiritual aspects which come together in a central core (Berryman, 2013). This core is both complex and simple as it brings together all the aspects of a human. Within the centre resides spirituality, which is non-verbal and brings together all the aspects of human nature. Berryman's task, then, is to give children a system of language in which to speak about matters spiritual. As this thesis is about children, the term children is used in this section. However, the implication is that all participants in Godly Play, adult, child or elderly, are included.

These spiritual matters are on the edges of knowing and understanding – existential ideas of birth, death and illness which constitute the difficult questions of life. Berryman's premise is that by giving children a language and opportunity to talk about such matters and to make meaning for themselves then children will be accessing both their own spirituality and encountering God the Creator (Berryman, 2017a). Creativity comes from both within the child, and from a God who created humans. This leads to a mirrored process of creation; that is, the child is creating meaning in a similar way to that of God who created the world (Berryman, 2017a). Given this, children are engaged in constructing meaning for themselves. They are not being told what to think or do. In terms of a pedagogy, this means that children are not being required to absorb and regurgitate meaning or content but need to work for themselves and create their own meaning (Hyde, 2013; Berryman, 2018b). The role of the educator/facilitator is to provide materials and stimulus to assist the process, rather than imposing meaning on a situation. The way of knowing, for Berryman, is thus radical constructivist (see section 3.3.1) as meaning is residing in the children and their reasoning rather than in a text.

Texts are seen by Berryman as static and holding no ultimate meaning. This includes the Bible:

The difference between texts and talk is dramatic. With texts, the words are present but the people are absent. With speaking, the people are present but the words disappear as soon as they are spoken except for memories, which can differ. (Berryman, 2018b, p. 23).

Berryman contrasts reading with telling, noting that reading does not operationalise the context of the words as they were first intended as they are trapped on the pages of a book. However, telling, or putting Biblical stories into spoken words which are encountered in a particular context, at a particular time and in a particular way, allows for a holistic meaning to be made from the words as they are meant in that moment by the speaker. The children are then free to make the meaning that they choose from this story in a contextually bound way, allowing their own family life, health etc. to be taken into consideration in the meaning that they are making.

Print...trivializes the communication domain of religion by trapping it in a metaphor of editors and publishers for its sacred texts and gives priority by this metaphor to what was written and the writing process over the oral aspects of the tradition. (Berryman in Hyde, 2013, loc. 1326)

There is a tension here as the scripts used in Godly Play are written down and it is expected that they are learned verbatim. This seems at odds with Berryman's stance that texts hold no ultimate meaning but does allow for an oral tradition where stories are altered slightly in their retelling and made the storyteller's own, even though this is sometimes down to misremembering the script! Berryman (2013) highlights, '*when content is over-emphasized the lesson becomes distant or irrelevant history and the words are worshipped instead of God*' (p. 21, italics in original).

This approach, where children make their own meaning, avoids what Berryman called a double bind (Berryman, 2018b; Berryman, 2017a; Hyde, 2013). This is where children want to make meaning from a story but this meaning may be different from the meaning an adult makes. Thus, an adult suggestion of meaning can conflict with a child's meaning. This leads to a tension between a child wanting to please an adult and agree with the adult's interpretation or having to make a choice between that and keeping

true to their own interpretation. Berryman comments, 'Adults also need to be aware of their own frame of knowing so that they do not project it onto children as if it were the only possible means for religious expression' (Hyde, 2013, loc. 3571) which returns to the role of the adult in the Godly Play session as facilitator rather than transmitter.

Wondering questions are very important in the meaning making process. Closed questions are not conducive to children making meaning and wondering, according to Berryman, is not something that can be done about something which is already known (2018b, p. 13 footnote); this is not a claim with which I agree because wondering about known objects or ideas expands the possible meanings which can be ascribed to them and is how some learning takes place. Wondering is, according to Berryman, natural and self-motivating as children explore their ideas and play at the edges of their understanding in order to make new meanings. As Berryman (in Hyde, 2013) states, 'a wondering question is one that the adult cannot answer for the child' (loc. 4303). In terms of the creative process, wondering opens this cycle by identifying a rupture in understanding then looking for a way to assimilate this into a current world view, thus creating meaning. The storyteller in Godly Play is not trying to get the children to guess a meaning or answer which is predetermined, but to make the meaning – and ask the questions – themselves. Black comments,

In Berryman's Teaching Godly Play, wondering is distinguished from the Socratic method by the fact that, in one case, the teacher asking the questions knows the correct answer to the question or knows where the line of questioning is leading. Wondering is different. As Berryman puts it: 'If you think you already know the "answer" to a wondering question, you are not wondering!' (Black, 2020, punctuation as in original)

Play is the social part of human nature which creates meaning. It allows for children to explore ideas in a creative and positive way in their own time and in their own manner. The meanings ascribed by any one child to a Godly Play story and subsequent response time will probably be very different from those given by another child in the same

session and is dependent on context and the place that the child is at in their learning and faith.

Despite being criticised by Hyde for relying too heavily on stage theory such as that of Piaget or Fowler (Hyde, 2013, Loc. 209), Berryman explains that he considers development of a child to be like a ramp and graduated rather than stairs with distinctive steps. Given this, he proposes that development is linear but moves away from distinct stages. He interprets Fowler's (1991) work on stages of faith as being the development of a language in which to speak about faith rather than the development of faith itself. Given this, the Godly Play pedagogy rests on children learning and becoming familiar with, and manipulating, a language system specifically to speak about religious and faith matters. The acquisition of this language system does have a developmental aspect to it, argues Berryman (2013, p. 141), and there may be as many different points of development in a room as there are children. However, he goes on to argue that the open nature of Godly Play and the making of meaning which is individual for each child ameliorates this and allows for children at different points in the language acquisition process to come together and to make meaning together; each child will take what they need from the session.

This amalgamation between a psychological theory of development and a theory of creativity at first seems difficult. It is putting together aspects of two different systems of understanding and genres of academic study. However, I consider that it does work in Godly Play, yielding a coherent pedagogy straddling the two disciplines. This, I argue, makes Godly Play ideal for filling a gap in the literature identified in section 2.1 about how children understand prayer, which is not scientific or psychological, but which does acknowledge the work done prior to this study. This will be discussed further in sections 3.4 and 5.

2.7 The four-fold approach

One aspect of Berryman's work which is of great interest in this thesis is his definition of what he thinks religious education is: 'play – play with the deep self, with others, with nature and with God' (Hyde, 2013, Loc. 2103). This is because this four-fold

approach occurs frequently in his writings (for example, Hyde, 2013; Berryman, 1991; Berryman, 2018b) and resonates with the findings in this thesis about how children understand prayer. This will be returned to in the discussion of the findings of this thesis where I shall consider whether Berryman's model is borne out in the data collected for this study.

2.8 Summary

As argued in this section, Godly Play is based on the creation of meaning by children at a specific time and in a specific context. This is based on the acquisition of a special language system for talking about existential matters. Wondering questions are used to stimulate the creation of meaning. Texts are not used to transmit meaning as they are static, in distinct contrast to the flexibility of Godly Play which allows children to make meaning and take risks in a playful manner. Instead, the stories are told by a storyteller, although the requirement to memorise static scripts does seem at odds with this approach. The creativity of Godly Play, both in making meaning and in the response time, come from a Creator God who created creativity (Berryman, 2017a). This allows children to encounter God the Creator in a close manner and also links with the Creator God who made nature. Humans and God are thus co-creators and the process of Godly Play allows participants to 'know intimately the creator' (Hyde, 2013, Loc. 2103).

3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction and research questions

There are two research questions in this thesis:

- 1) How do children understand prayer?
- 2) What adaptations need to be made to utilise Godly Play as a research method?

In order to answer these questions, there needs to be a coherent research design and underlying philosophy (Crotty, 1998). In this section I intend to consider the underlying realist ontology and constructivist epistemology (section 3.2) before discussing the different types of constructivism inherent in the thesis (section 3.3) and considering how this links to the research method, Godly Play (section 3.4). In addition, the use of Constructivist Grounded Theory to analyse the data (section 3.5) and a robust ethical framework for the research (section 3.6) will be discussed. Figure 1 summarises the approach:

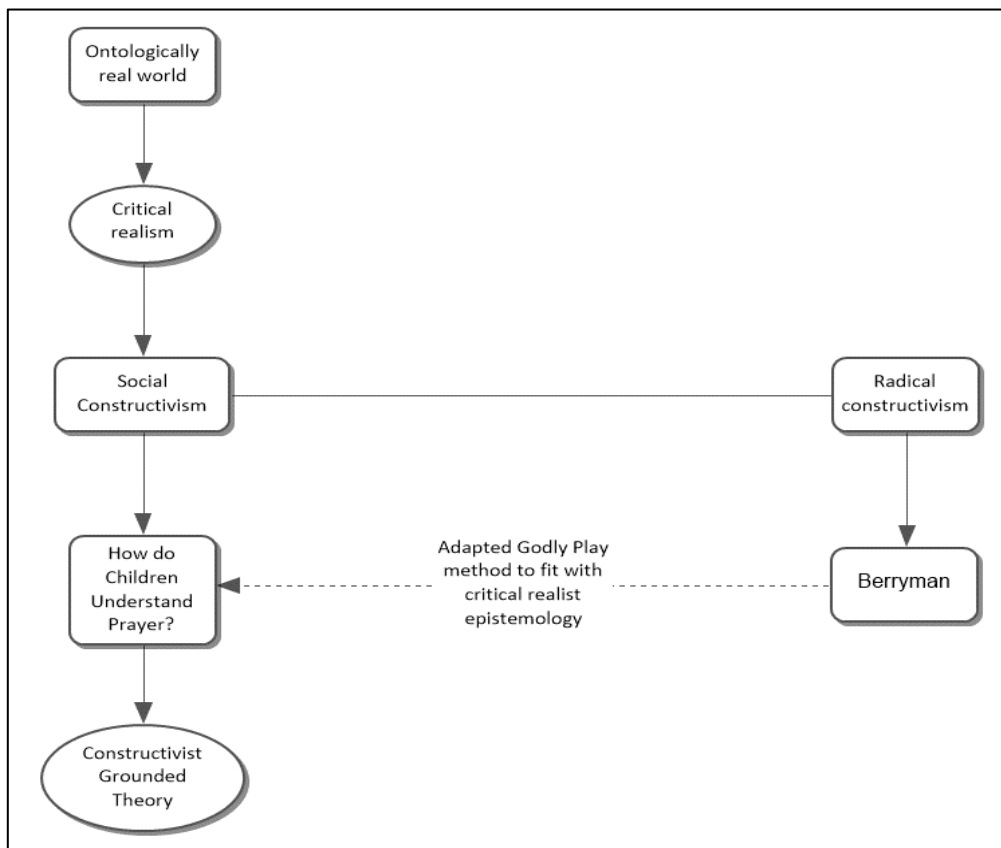


Figure 1- Research Design

3.2 What is the underlying ontology and epistemology for this study?

This research starts from the premise that there is a world which exists independently of people's minds and constructions of it (for example, Wright, 2013; Shipway, 2013). As Wright expresses this, 'Ontological realism asserts that reality exists for the most part independently of human perception' (2013, p. 9). That is to say that the children in this study, and the researcher, are accessing a real world based on their experiences and what is being researched are the constructions the children have made from their experiences of prayer. Ontologically, the world is, in Ernest's words, 'a world out there supporting the appearances we have shared access to, but we have no certain knowledge of it' (Ernest, 1996, p. 343). Importantly, knowledge of the world is not just a construction of the human mind but is based on a reality which is external (Shipway, 2013). Knowing the world is problematic. There is no one privileged vantage point (Ernest, 1996) from which to view the world objectively. Given this, humans within this world must try to make their own understandings of it. These are constructed both individually and socially through the shared medium of language (Hyde, 2015) and are epistemically fallible; that is, they are potentially wrong (Fox, 2001) and this needs to be acknowledged through epistemic humility (Ernest, 1996; Shipway, 2013). This is important for this study as the children and researcher are accessing the same, ontologically real world, but in different ways. The interpretations of the world that the children have are real for them, just as my interpretation of the world is real for me as a Christian and a researcher. In contrast to a purely subjective epistemology, where reality is constructed and exists in human minds rather than pertaining to an external reality, what is perceived *is* there, just known partially and potentially incorrectly. Thus, there is the possibility of being epistemically wrong (Shipway, 2013). It is necessary to acknowledge a need for epistemic humility in that not all perceptions of the world are accurate reflections of reality and that the conclusions drawn in this thesis are only one possible interpretation of the data gained, albeit what I believe to be the best-fit possible.

In order to come to a working, coherent understanding of the world, knowledge must be built on previous understandings (Ernest, 1996; Vygotsky, 2004; Hyde, 2015).

Hyde remarks that 'the purpose of constructivism is, then, for the individual to construct her or his own meanings out of the elements of individual experience...and then to adapt these meanings so as to form a coherent world view' (p. 294). This is done through a process of disturbances in understanding brought about by new experiences of the world, which are assimilated into an individual's world view (Hyde, 2015). This being so, new knowledge becomes formed through experiences, individual or social, which are perceived through the senses, including *sensus divinitatis* or divine sense (Pritchard, 2014), and which are then constructed into an individual's world view. Within this study, children are considered to be as capable as adults of constructing their own world view from the partially accessed ontologically real world. This includes religious understanding. My own view is that prayer is a real encounter with God based on biblical and experiential revelation. This is important for this thesis as it is also the underlying faith position of the church school being studied (see section 1.2). However, it is the children's constructions and understandings which are being considered, not mine. The research is not trying to understand the reality of prayer as I understand it, but the children's constructions of prayer. There is no direct access to the ontological reality of prayer and this is why Godly Play was chosen as a research method in order to try to reveal the children's conceptualisation of prayer through my interpretation as researcher.

However, there is an element of criticality in accepting or rejecting new understanding in order to maintain a coherent world view (for example, Shipway, 2013; Wright, 2013). This means that individuals can assess new understanding critically enabling them to decide whether that particular interpretation of the world fits within their current understanding. This then allows assimilation or rejection of the new idea which has been reasoned through by the individual. In this study, criticality on my part as researcher is vital to scan for any biases or assumptions being made in accessing the children's understandings. However, criticality on the part of the children was not required as the children's views were being sought, not their critiques of their own ideas. In addition, the Godly Play method does not ask criticality of the children. Critique of myself while accessing children's viewpoints, partially and fallibly, was an integral part of the research process (see section 3.6.4) and is another reason why my views on

prayer, while not an object for research, are important in showing a transparent, critical and reflexive approach to this study.

Given this, the research question, how do children understand prayer, is answered by acknowledging that there is a real world which is accessed by children and adults who construct an understanding of this real world. This occurs through ruptures in understanding which are assimilated by individuals into their coherent world view. This is a suitable underlying ontology and epistemology for this study concerned as it is with the children's constructions of prayer; this also links with the underlying ontology of the chosen research method – Godly Play – which presupposes a real world about which the children construct their understandings and realities. The process of meaning making in Godly Play mirrors that outlined above where ruptures in understanding are discovered, solutions are sought and fitted into a schema and then critically assimilated into a new understanding (Wright, 2013); the main differences being that in Berryman's 'circle of meaning' (Berryman, 1991, p.96) the critical element is not explicitly stated but rather implied as different possible interpretations are evaluated and rejected or included by the participants and that meaning is constructed by the children rather than being transmitted by adults. However, when considering the second research question - what adaptations need to be made to utilise Godly Play as a research method - the underlying epistemology of Godly Play which is Radical Constructivism, and the Critical Realist/Social Constructivist approach of this thesis do not match and this will be considered in the following section.

3.3 Methodology – Different types of constructivism

Constructivism is a broad term and, as Schwandt remarks, 'particular meanings are shaped by the intent of their users' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221). Constructivism is used in four different ways in this thesis, all of which have similarities, but there are some significant differences too. This section explores these similarities and differences, and they are summarised in *Table 3*, page 47. What is similar about them is that they all posit that in order to understand the world, individuals must construct meaning; in other words, 'knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 236). In this section I intend to discuss Radical Constructivism, Social Constructivism,

Constructivist Grounded Theory and my own, personal constructivist outlook on life, all of which are important strands within the thesis. Given this, the aim is not synthesis, but a coherence of approach which acknowledges both similarities and differences.

3.3.1 Radical Constructivism

Radical Constructivism is, as the name suggests, a more extreme version of constructivism than that employed in Social Constructivism, Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) or by me, either personally or as a researcher. These will be explored in later sections. One of the main proponents of Radical Constructivism is Von Glasersfeld (1995) who explains that Radical Constructivism...

...starts from the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it be defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. What we make of experience constitutes the only world we consciously live in. It can be sorted into many kinds, such as things, self, others and so on. But all kinds of experience are essentially subjective, and though I may find reasons to believe that my experience may not be unlike yours, I have no way of knowing that it is the same. The experience and interpretation of language are no exception. (p. 1)

Given this, it would seem that people can only know what they themselves experience. Put another way, Schwandt explains that 'we cannot know such a thing as an independent, objective world that stands apart from our own experience of it. Hence, we cannot speak of knowledge as somehow corresponding to, mirroring or representing that world' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 239). Here, Radical Constructivism departs from other forms of constructivism by assuming that a real, objective world, although it exists, cannot be known, even partially; only personal constructions of this world can be known.

Radical Constructivism is an important standpoint to discuss as this is the approach which Berryman, who created Godly Play, takes. Godly Play is based on the premise that the children (and adults) make meaning for themselves and that the

storyteller's role is to enable the wondering of or questioning by the children in their quest to make the story their own. The response time following the story allows children time and space and resources to make meaning for themselves. '[The children are] given permission not only verbally but also nonverbally to work on existential issues with this special language [of symbols]' (Berryman, 1991, p. 58). Berryman's stance – that ultimate meaning resides in the children as individuals ('wondering invites us to join together in our wondering even though we will likely arrive at different responses' Berryman, 2018, p. 13 footnote) – is described by that of Von Glasersfeld (1995). This is because, according to Von Glasersfeld (1995), meaning made from an experience has to be individually constructed. This also means that, in Berryman's view, the children's work carried out in the response time cannot be truly understood by another person, even if the child describes it to them: 'jumping to adult conclusions about children's art puts the children in the position of having to choose between being true to their own interpretation of personal experience and true to what their parents say the experience means' (Berryman, 1991, p. 46)

This epistemological stance has an impact on the use of Godly Play as a research method. The underlying constructivist philosophy of the research design in this study and that of Godly Play are incompatible, hence adaptations were required to the epistemological foundations of the pedagogy of Godly Play. In this study, the work the children produced and the discussions during the wondering time were used as data. While meaning was made together in the session, the children also had their own meanings, some of which were verbalised and recorded. This means that in order to use Godly Play as a research method, the children's meanings – and those of myself as researcher – had to be available and shared. This, as described above, is not part of Radical Constructivism.

3.3.2 Constructivism in the research design

Social Constructivism differs from Radical Constructivism due to its commitment to meaning making both on an individual level and through social means: 'the purpose of constructivism is, then, for the individual to construct her or his own meanings out of the elements of individual experience...and then to adapt these meanings so as to

form a coherent worldview' (Hyde, 2015, p. 294). This is done 'as a result of the individual's action and interaction in the world either alone or with others' (ibid., p. 289). In this view, communication is possible and shared through social interaction and partial (and fallible) access to a shared real world. There is no privileged view that is ultimately right (Ernest, 1996) and, while all knowledge is problematic, socially acceptable knowledge is 'that which is lived and socially accepted' (Ernest, 1996, p. 343).

However, there is a caveat. The different meanings made by individuals could be wrong in that they may not be an accurate reflection of the real world. This is impossible to explain, given that there is no privileged view that is right (except maybe God's), but individuals can – and do – make judgements about which interpretations of the world work for them just as societies also make collective judgements about constructions of the world which allow them to function as a coherent whole. Given this, if a judgement is made, this implies a level of criticality being brought to bear on the issue as different constructions are considered and rejected in a process which starts with an existing schema which is disrupted, reviewed and finally altered to accommodate the disruption.

The underlying assumptions for this research design come from the Critical Realist school of thought; that is, people, including children, construct their worlds by critically evaluating different ideas before assimilating them into their own world view (for example, Hartwig, 2012; Wright, 2013; Shipway, 2013). This rests on a realist ontology – there is a real world to be known – and a fallibilistic epistemology – people could well be wrong in their constructions of the world, and that some constructions are better than others in allowing both an individual to lead their life fruitfully and coherently, and to allow society as a whole to function. In this philosophy, in contrast to Radical Constructivism, it is possible to construct meaning together, although it can never be known finally if this construction is an accurate representation of the real world or of another person's personal constructs. This is different from Berryman's approach to gaining meaning through Godly Play, which is subjectivist and individualist, and is why the epistemology of Godly Play had to be adjusted in order to assume that

meaning can both be made by children *and* understood by a third party, i.e. the researcher. This also meant that the data had to be analysed using a method which was sympathetic to this epistemology and, given this, Constructivist Grounded Theory was chosen.

3.3.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Given that this research is based on a realist ontology and constructivist epistemology (see section 3.2), I argue that Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2008; Bryant and Charmaz, 2010; Charmaz, 2013) is the most suitable methodology to employ to analyse the data. There are many different types of Grounded Theory, but Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014) fitted best with the underlying constructivist approach. This is because in CGT concepts are constructed rather than discovered (Evans, 2013); the data are worked with and meaning is constructed from them by the researcher. Given this, the construction of meaning by the researcher and the method for doing so – i.e., Constructivist Grounded Theory – lead to the same end; a descriptive, substantive theory (see section 1) which has been constructed from the data available and by the researcher. The main difference between Constructivist Grounded Theory and other versions is its reflexive focus on both researcher and participants, meaning understanding my own positioning and how this affected the data sets was vital (Charmaz, 2008; Oliver, 2011). This approach was criticised by Glaser (2002) for ‘predetermining one particular lens through which to analyse data’ (Breckenridge *et al.*, 2012), but I feel that this could also be its strength as if the underlying epistemology is constructivist, as with this study, then a methodology which has constructivism at its core is a natural fit. Constructivist Grounded Theory is also concerned with context (Charmaz, 2013) and, given this, fits well with this small scale, local and time bounded research project.

Constructing a theory from raw data may also have other parallels with the method used in this research – that of Godly Play. To develop a theory it is necessary to play with the data and to be open to creative possibilities inherent in that data for a theory to be constructed (Thornberg and Dunne, 2019). This playful construction of meaning is mirrored in the Godly play pedagogy where participants play with meaning

and create their own interpretations of the story they have heard (Berryman, 1991). In addition, as Thornberg and Dunne comment,

...neither data nor theories are discovered, but rather are constructed by the researchers as a result of their interactions with the participants and the field. They co-construct data together with the participants, while their social, cultural and historical settings, academic training and personal worldviews inevitably influence these data, the analysis thereof, and the 'emergent' theory.

(Thornberg and Dunne, 2019, p. 6)

If researchers and participants are constructing understanding in a research context and they are both constructing meaning in a Godly Play context, then I contend that the methodology of constructivist grounded theory and the Godly Play method can be fruitfully employed in this research context.

3.3.4 Constructivism – a personal view

As a researcher, it is impossible to bracket myself out of this thesis completely (Bolton, 2018), although it is the children's understandings which are important and not mine. However, my own views on how the world is known and constructed are important background for the thesis in showing how a reflexive stance has been adopted, considering how my own ideas may have influenced the final interpretations. In order to do this, I will return to the personal view about prayer expressed in section 1.1. In that section I have written a first-person account of my understanding of prayer. This section aims to analyse that writing to elicit my own view of what constructivism is.

Firstly, in saying that 'prayer is a communication between humans and God' (see section 1.1 - and similarly for following quotations) there is an assumption that God exists. What this reveals about an underlying ontology is that there is a real world and God which exist independently of humans. This is because a belief in a real God is demonstrated through the expression of prayer as a communication between humans

and God who, for this to be effective, must exist. My personal constructivism, therefore, is predicated on there being a real God, in a real world, with whom it is possible to communicate.

Secondly, however, this is not a blind faith in God as, in giving the example of a bereavement, doubt is expressed. Despite a belief in a 'benevolent God' this does not explain suffering in the world ('darkest of dark times'), for example, and the phrase '...I know I have a personal relationship with God, tentative, faulty and patchy as it is' expresses some measure of uncertainty in how God can be known. This reveals a fallibilistic epistemology where God and the world can be known partially and with an element of being able to be wrong. This is because, in my view, it is possible to have a partial, personal relationship with God but it is possible that I may be wrong and that there is no God or that God is not the being that my experience of Him purports Him to be. Epistemologically, then, this demonstrates how this understanding of the world could potentially be wrong and always partial.

Thirdly, as mentioned above, this is not a faith or world view which I follow without critique. In the writing in section 1.1 the phrase 'it works for me' is employed several times. This reveals an underlying assumption that faith is constructed in a way which allows a person to function both in the world as a social being and personally. This is also demonstrated in, 'I also believe that there are many routes to God – mine happens to be Christian' which acknowledges that there are other routes to the same God. However, the choice to follow a Christian path is one made partially by upbringing ('I was christened early') and partially through personal choice; other choices could have been made in a quest to construct a meaningful understanding of the world and of life. In addition, in section 1.1 there are many questions posed which demonstrate an analytical and querying approach to life. This critiquing stance, taken with a realist ontology and fallibilistic epistemology, reveals a personal constructivism which is predicated on there being a real world which is known partially, and where decisions about what to include in this particular world view are taken critically and tested against other sources of understanding. These sources could be scriptural or within the Christian community, but they are not taken as being the only way in which to view the

world; rather, ones which need critiquing and analysing before being fitted into a coherently, constructed world view that allows for a reasoned life to be lived.

Given this analysis, it can be concluded that, for me, a personal understanding of constructivism is based on a construction of the partially known real world where choices made are critically evaluated in order to build a coherent world view which works. This includes a Christian faith, where a real God is also known partially and fallibly.

3.3.5 Summary

In this section Radical Constructivism, as espoused by Berryman, Social Constructivism inherent in the research design, Constructivist Grounded Theory, used for the analysis of the data, and my personal understanding of constructivism have all been considered. There are similarities and differences between them:

	Ontology	Epistemology	
Radical Constructivism	A real yet unknowable world.	Only subjective experiences of the world are real	Personal constructions of the world above all other; only personal constructions of the world are possible. Found in Berryman's Godly Play
Social Constructivism/ Critical Realism	A real world – this is the children's understanding of prayer.	Accessed partially and fallibly	Social constructions of the real world are shared in order to make meaning. Found in the research design.

	Ontology	Epistemology	
Constructivist Grounded Theory	A real world – this is the children’s understanding of prayer.	Accessed partially and fallibly	Data analysis constructs meaning and conclusions from interrogated data sets. Utilised for data analysis.
My Personal Constructivism (Critical Realist)	A real world	Accessed partially and fallibly	Critical engagement with the real world, personal and social constructions in order to build a coherent world view. Found in personal vignettes (in italics – sections 1.1 and 6).

Table 3 - A summary of different types of constructivism

As can be seen from Table 3, the constructivist approaches outlined above share a realist ontology and an understanding that the world can be accessed partially. However, the four approaches then split with radical constructivism being the most extreme – i.e. people can only know their own constructions of the world – and the other three types of constructivism being less radical in their commitment to some shared constructions and a fallibilistic epistemology. As the research design is predicated on Social Constructivism and my own underlying constructivism is Critical Realist, then it can be seen that Berryman’s Godly Play pedagogy, based on Radical Constructivism, requires some adjustments in order to be utilised effectively as a research method within this thesis. These adaptations will be discussed further in section 3.4.

The aim of this section is not to synthesise the four different forms of constructivism within the thesis, but to acknowledge that they are present and to describe their features. Each is found in a different section of the thesis but given their underlying shared ontologies and partially shared epistemologies I contend that they work together in order to present a coherent research project.

3.4 Method – Godly Play and Video-Based Analysis.

The use of an innovative research method, Godly Play, in conjunction with use of video recordings has required courage. Godly Play has been used, to the best of my knowledge, twice before as a research method (O'Farrell, 2016; Frady, 2019). O'Farrell used Godly Play as a methodological tool for finding out about children's spirituality in an Irish context and the main data came from tasks following the Godly Play sessions themselves. Frady used Godly Play one to one with two-year-old children to talk with them about their theological understanding. However, my use of Godly Play as a method with groups of children directly generating the data is, to the best of my knowledge, original. Godly Play was chosen as an innovative research method due to the depth of response which can be elicited from the participants who are encouraged to be 'active seekers, not just passive receivers' (Stonehouse, 2001) and the Christian, play based pedagogy which underpins it. This is an important point as the way in which Godly Play is purported to create new meaning for those who engage with it is through ruptures in understanding and new meaning being created (Berryman, 2017a). This reflects the underlying pedagogy of Godly Play and underpins the analysis using grounded theory where knowledge is constructed from data. However, adaptations of the Godly Play method were required to fit within a critical realist epistemology, and these are discussed in the next section.

3.4.1 How was Godly Play adapted as a research method?

Research presented at a conference in Latvia (Steinhäuser and Øystese, 2018) discusses a variety of aspects of Godly Play, including whether or not Godly Play itself should be utilised as a research object (Berryman, 2018a). Godly Play as a pedagogical method has been evolving for many years and has not been, and still is not, a stable

entity to be researched as it adapts dynamically to different situations and participants (Berryman, 2018a). This does not lend itself well to empirical research. Berryman states,

The challenge of respecting both Godly Play's integrity as an object of research, and the integrity of the great scientific tradition of empirical research, as the means for research, are both relevant to the future of Godly Play research. (Berryman, 2018a, p. 139)

This implies that there is a tension between scientific empirical research traditions and the integrity of Godly Play. Further, in the introduction to the book of the proceedings (2018), Steinhäuser lists reasons why empirical research into Godly Play has often not been fruitful, including the need to maintain trust between adults and children, the unpredictability of the sessions and the ethics of researching Godly Play with children (see section 3.6). In this thesis, Godly Play is both an object for research (in terms of how it can be adapted as a research method) and utilised as a method by which to gather data. As an object in this thesis, the research into the adaptation of Godly Play is qualitative in nature. I contend that a qualitative approach to Godly Play could be more fruitful than an scientific empirical approach, and this is also suggested by both Steinhäuser and by Øystese and Steinhäuser in the proceedings of the same conference (Steinhäuser and Øystese, 2018) and by Berryman (2018a) who stopped trying to research Godly Play scientifically and quantitatively during its development and, instead, focused on more qualitative empirical case studies. By being involved in the Godly Play community, both having trained as a Godly Play practitioner and being directly involved in the research sessions as storyteller, I consider myself to be an 'insider' (Steinhäuser, 2018, p. 33) thereby 'demonstrating a long term commitment to practising Godly Play in children's groups' (ibid). Given this, the Godly Play sessions which I ran and which form the basis for this thesis are approached from an insider's perspective. This is an important point as my own perspectives and practice are significant both in the execution of the sessions and in the analysis of them.

Further to the discussion of the underlying epistemology of Godly Play in section 2.6 and the discussion of where this piece of research is located ontologically and

epistemologically in section 3.2, I return to the diagram in Figure 1 which shows that the ontological foundations for both this study and Godly Play are similar, being on the same continuum of constructivism (also see *Table 3* and section 3.3). However, they have different epistemologies in that Berryman considers meaning to be made exclusively by the child rather than being constructed from a shared reality. Given this, it was necessary to adapt the Godly Play method in order to fit with a realist epistemology. This meant adapting the wondering questions and response time to elicit the data required in order to answer the research question in the understanding that the meanings constructed by the children and researcher were constructed socially and thus able to be shared. Epistemologically, then, constructed meanings lay with the different groups of children as well as with the individual children themselves. As storyteller and researcher, some of that meaning inevitably lay with me and in the analysis of the data this was also the case. While it could be argued that these adjustments disrupt the integrity of the Godly Play approach in its purest form, this was a necessary and consciously decided adaptation in order to access shared meanings (see also section 5.4 for a discussion of the limitations of this).

Given this, the style and presentation of the session followed the structure of Godly Play but it was not a full session, missing out the feast and being held in a non-conventional circle round a table rather than on the floor for practical reasons. Using the script and wondering questions the children involved were invited to join in with the story (in this thesis, the term script refers to the Godly Play script used in the session. The term transcript refers to the transcripts of the sessions in appendix 1). The questions were taken from the Godly Play script and one further question was added to in order to give the best possible opportunities for children to express their ideas about prayer:

Original questions	Added question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wonder what you like best about this prayer? • I wonder what you think is the most important part of this prayer? • I wonder where you are in this prayer or which part of the prayer is about you? • I wonder if there is anything in this prayer we could leave out and still have all the prayer we need? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wonder what prayer is?

Table 4 - Questions used in the wondering session.

While these were used to scaffold discussions, the wondering time was for the children to create their own meaning. This is a tried and tested Godly Play technique and allows for children to construct meaning at their level, in their own time and in a safe space. The role of the storyteller – myself – was to facilitate and acknowledge contributions in an impartial manner. To the best of my ability, no value judgement was placed on any response made, negative or positive, and all ideas were valued equally. During the response time, the children had free rein to respond as they wished. No censure was made in whatever way the children decided to respond to the story or, indeed, to a different story, and the responses were included in the study’s data sets. All the children drew or made something, and all allowed me to take photographs of their work before leaving. The range of craft materials available to the children was considered carefully. Initially, Lego was chosen as a suitable medium to use especially due to its flexibility to create with and the low level of dexterity required at an entry level (Gauntlett, 2014). However, one of the joyful aspects of creating in a Godly Play session is that completed work can be taken home and that would not be possible with Lego. Instead, paper, card, modelling clay and a range of pens, pencils and glue were provided for the children to make use of as they saw fit.

Due to the requirements for the storyteller to be totally involved in the storytelling and wondering, no notes were able to be made during the session, hence the use of video recording using 2 cameras (see section 3.4.3 and figure 2) plus a Dictaphone to allow the sessions to be captured. In addition, photographs were taken of the artefacts produced alongside video recordings of the children talking about their creations on camera. In a Godly Play session, children do have the opportunity to share their work if they wish, but this is not required. Asking them to talk about their creations on camera is an adjustment to the Godly Play pedagogy in order to adapt it to a research method. However, without asking the children about their creations, valuable meaning making may be lost as the children's own interpretations and words are extremely important for creating a theory about how they understand prayer (Bucknall, 2014).

3.4.2 Why choose the Lord's Prayer?

A Godly Play session requires a script and resources to enable the storyteller to present the story. Much time was spent considering whether to write a script specifically for this research but in the end a presentation developed by Sue Doggett (found in Moore, 2012) was selected. While this is not in the main canon of Godly Play stories as developed by Berryman (2002; 2017b, for example), none of these was deemed suitable as they were not focused on prayer explicitly, although the whole Godly Play endeavour can be said to be implicitly prayerful. There is the ability within Godly Play to create new scripts, based on the principles of the originals (Privett, 2009) so this is not outside the scope of Godly Play as a broader movement, although there are guidelines given for the development of new stories (see Privett, 2009).



The script itself was adapted, not through a conscious decision but because it had to be learned off by heart. The structure and many of the words were the same, but there were changes as I made the script my own. Godly play scripts are carefully worded but there is also the scope to adapt and amend them as they are learned by heart and presented to different audiences and in different contexts. As noted above (see section 2.6), meaning for Berryman resides in the spoken word rather than the written word as it is operationalised in a specific context. This meant that while the structure and spirit of the script was kept to, some minor adaptations were made in all four sessions. It was



very hard to repeat the same script accurately four times and my changes were due to nerves and difficulties in recalling the words. This is a limitation of this method and will be returned to in section 5.4.

The storytelling materials were created from the instructions given (Moore, 2012, p. 107) to create high quality resources. A gold box was made and decorated and the whole kit was stored in it. The colour of the box shows how important the story inside it is.

A summary of the materials used is below along with a short commentary as to the meaning ascribed to each section by the script:

The Lord's Prayer:	Picture of Godly Play materials:	Commentary:
Our Father, who is in heaven...		<p>The script focuses on the love which God has for Christians, 'even more than a hen loves her chicks' (Moore, 2012, p. 108).</p> <p>The underlay is green and a small model of a hen with chicks is placed on top.</p>
...hallowed be your name...		<p>Here the script focuses on the meaning of hallowed – holy – and that God is everything, including light.</p> <p>The underlay is black and a lit candle is placed on top.</p>

The Lord's Prayer:	Picture of Godly Play materials:	Commentary:
<p>...your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...</p>		<p>The script focuses on the love God has for all people, 'in every corner of the world...north...south...east.... west...' (Moore, 2012, p. 108).</p> <p>A red underlay has four red hearts placed on top at the cardinal points of the compass.</p>
<p>...give us this day our daily bread...</p>		<p>Here the script focuses on God giving Christians all that they need through the metaphor of bread: 'not just the toast we have for breakfast... or the honey sandwich we have for tea. No, it's everything we need...our friends...our families...our homes...clothes to keep us warm...food and love to nourish us' (Moore, 2012, p. 108-9).</p> <p>A yellow underlay has a small basket of bread placed on it.</p>

The Lord's Prayer:	Picture of Godly Play materials:	Commentary:
<p>...and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us...</p>		<p>The script focuses on God's love and forgiveness for Christians, and that Christians are commanded by God to forgive each other.</p> <p>A purple underlay with a large, gold heart placed on it.</p>
<p>...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil...</p>		<p>Here the focus is on being forgiven by God for doing something wrong. The stone is the symbol of things which are difficult and trip people up; the rainbow of God's love and forgiveness for all.</p> <p>A grey underlay with a stone placed first, followed by the rainbow.</p>



The Lord's Prayer:	Picture of Godly Play materials:	Commentary:
<p>...Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory...</p>		<p>This part is the doxology, so not in the Biblical version of the Lord's prayer.</p> <p>A blue underlay with:</p> <p>An orange triangle – 'yours is the kingdom'</p> <p>Red feathers – 'the power'</p> <p>A gold crown – 'the glory'</p> <p>(Moore, 2012, p. 109)</p>
<p>...for ever and ever, Amen.</p>		<p>This is the final part of the prayer.</p> <p>White underlay with bubble mixture which is used to blow bubbles towards the children on saying Amen.</p>

Table 5 - Godly Play materials and how they link to the prayer

The children were able to make their own meaning from the materials. However, as the prayer was familiar to them, some meaning was already ascribed to the prayer in advance of the session. In accordance with the aims of Godly Play, the children made use of the language system of the presented symbols to help them make meaning (see section 4.1).

3.4.3 Why use video-based analysis?

Video recordings were chosen to be able to replay the sessions and to code and recode iteratively the children's discussions and their representations (see section 3.5.3 and following for a discussion of coding and section 3.5.2 for choice of software to facilitate this). Video allows for close documentation of what the children are saying and doing and for repeated viewings, samplings, and coding (Derry *et al.*, 2010, Goldman, Zahn and Derry, 2014). Videos can be revisited, and this allows the researcher to return iteratively to the data to interrogate it and to form theories about what is happening and why; this has strong parallels with critical realist theory and with a grounded theory methodology. This is because in critical realist theory people test their assumptions iteratively against the real world in order either to fit new ideas into their world views or to reject them. Similarly, grounded theory methodology goes back and forward to the data and theory being developed in order to ground the theory in the data. Using video enabled me to see who was speaking and any gestures they made towards the model or representation they created. It also allowed for context to be considered (Hearn and Thomson, 2014) and for iterative access to the data during analysis.

Choice of videoing technologies was considered carefully to allow for as much data as possible to be captured. Two cameras were used, both as backup and to allow data capture from different angles (see Figure 2). A Dictaphone was also employed to ensure that the children's voices were captured; this was particularly important as some children have quiet voices, especially in unfamiliar situations. Close attention was paid to the storage of the data on a backed-up home computer and on university cloud-based storage especially as children were the main subjects (Derry *et al.*, 2010).

Due to the technicalities inherent in the use of video to record the sessions it was decided to run a test session at a different school. Permissions were obtained for the session to be recorded in order to check the equipment, uploading to the cloud storage and importing into NVivo; once this had been accomplished, the recordings and pictures were all deleted. Testing the equipment and trialling the session proved a judicious decision. During the trial, it was discovered that one of the proposed cameras had a recording limit of just 29 minutes and was thus not suitable for recording the session, which ran to about 45 minutes, and would need to be replaced. The second camera was found to be good quality. It took about 15 minutes to set up the space ready for recording but small details were missed such as ensuring that the tightly fitting plastic was removed from the plasticine before the children needed it! It was also decided that the Godly Play materials should be put away completely before the response time as I had left them out and this seemed to influence the way the children thought about their responses and almost constrained them. This is discussed further in section 4.1. In addition, the placement of the cameras was a dilemma so that they recorded mainly the children and did not miss anyone. The use of a Dictaphone to record voices only was also trialled and as this worked well and picked up some dialogue which the cameras did not, it was decided to add this into the plan.

3.4.4 Selection of participants and data collection

Treeforth Primary School (pseudonym) is a joint Anglian and Roman Catholic Primary school. It was chosen for the research partly due to this unusual foundation, but also because of convenience. In discussion with the head teacher, children for this study were drawn from the two year 3 classes (children aged 7 and 8 years old) and were chosen by the school both on the basis of consent being gained and their ability to speak out in front of cameras.

Four groups of between 5 and 6 were worked with, and of the 11 children selected from each class (22 in total) there were 14 girls and 8 boys. The sessions took place on Friday afternoon by request of the school, and this certainly had an effect on one group in particular who were initially unsettled and distracted by missing Golden Time. The data were gathered over the course of two consecutive Fridays and on the third Friday

I worked with the two year 3 classes in their entirety and repeated the activity to ensure all children had the same opportunity. These final sessions were not recorded and the responses not included in the data.

The sessions were held in a room in the middle of the school. The room was set up with the cameras pointing towards the children from either side of the chair where I was to sit.

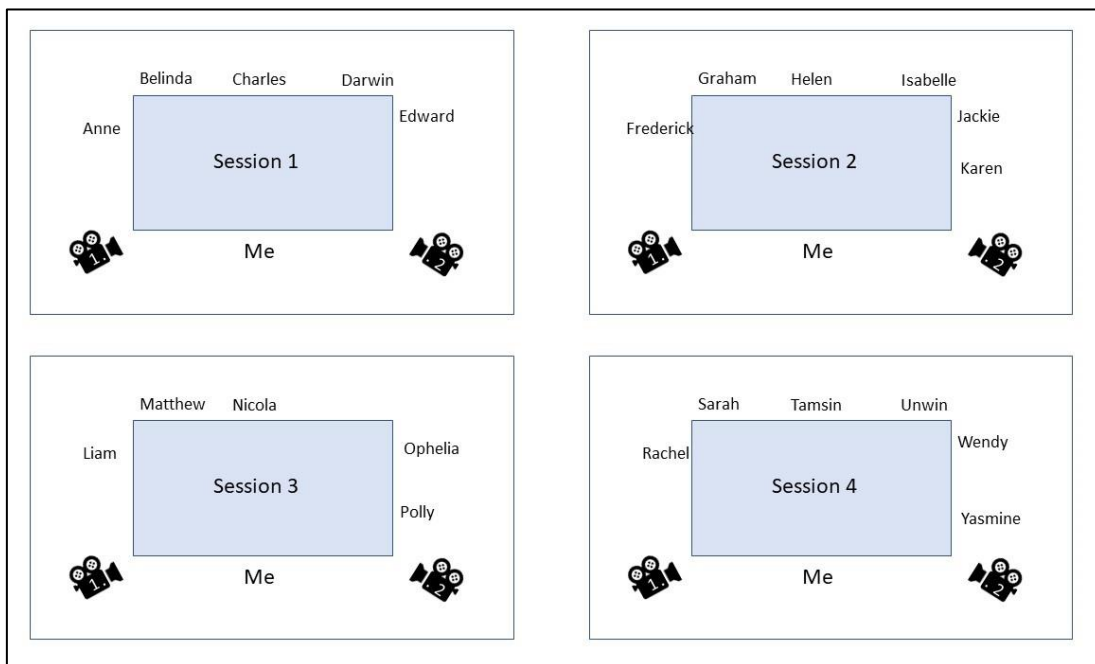


Figure 2 - Seating plan (names are pseudonyms)

The children were collected from the classroom and taken to the room, which was unfamiliar to most of them. A few minutes was taken to settle them down, talk through ethical matters and gain consent from the children, talk about the recordings and how they would be used, introduce and turn on the equipment and to help them feel comfortable with new surroundings, an unfamiliar adult and a new activity.

During the Godly Play session the children were keen to handle the materials and to respond. I chose to use a table for the materials, which is not usual in a Godly Play session as it traditionally takes place in a seated circle on the floor. This was partly so that the cameras did not have to be moved halfway through the activity, but also so that the children would be in a fairly consistent place for the recordings to pick up their voices

and actions. This also meant that the response time could be in the same space without the children wandering off. There was only one incident of a child tripping over the tripod on which camera 2 was mounted and after a while in each session (apart from session 2) the children appeared to be unaware of the cameras and several children commented at the end that they had forgotten that they were there. In session 2, the children were very aware of the cameras all the way through and enjoyed making faces into the lenses.

During the response time, the children were provided with a variety of different materials to use. These were:

- Plasticine
- Card – coloured and white
- Paper – coloured and white
- Coloured pencils
- Coloured pens
- Glue
- Scissors

The children could use as much or as little of the resources as they wished and were told that they were allowed to take home anything that they made, once it had been photographed with the children's consent. The modelling clay was the most popular material and many of the children chose this medium. It could be that the tactile nature of the clay was significant when considering prayer, or possibly it was something less familiar for the children to use in school. Several children combined different media such as card and modelling clay. We also discovered that it was prudent to make use of paper under the clay or else it stuck to the table and could not be removed without spoiling the model.

All four sessions were very different, although the children appeared to enjoy themselves, as did I. The head teacher of Treeforth Primary School came to see what was happening in sessions 3 & 4, which was tricky to ignore and carry on regardless, despite his silent arrival and departure. However, the children did not seem to be

thrown by his appearance. The sessions lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each and the hardest part was getting the children in the second and fourth groups to stop their activities as they were so engrossed.

As soon as the afternoons were completed the data were transferred to the University cloud storage and deleted from the SD cards in the cameras. This ensured that the data were backed up and held securely.

3.4.5 Challenges

There were challenges to be faced both when carrying out the data collection and when preparing the data for analysis. Firstly, the children – naturally – talked over each other which meant that despite the three different sources of recording (camera 1, camera 2 and the Dictaphone) some data were lost. On realising this, in the later sessions I took to repeating what the children had said to ensure that their contributions were recorded as my voice was better picked up than many of theirs.

Some children were extremely enthusiastic and this presented challenges in managing behaviour while conducting the Godly Play session. Ideally, in a Godly Play session, there is a doorkeeper who helps to manage behaviour so as to leave the storyteller free to focus on the story and props. However, this was not possible. On watching the video, it is clear that there were times when there was a struggle between a need to keep the storytelling on track and dealing with children who were noisy and/or touching the materials disruptively. This is not an aspect I think I dealt with particularly well and would certainly be an area for change if Godly Play was used as a method like this in a different study (see also section 5.5).

Due to the children talking concurrently, it was not possible to take advantage of any automatic transcription services, such as NVivo's transcription service or Otter.ai (an app which records and transcribes interviews), both of which were considered. However, a decision to transcribe the sessions myself rather than asking a third party to do so was made in order to retain control of the material and to immerse myself in it. For the same reason, I decided not to code the video directly. I also wanted to have

transcripts available due to the necessary deletion of the video recordings after 5 years under GDPR requirements.

3.5 How were the data analysed?

The data sets consisted of the video and audio recordings plus the photographs of the children's work produced in the response time. The analysis of these data required a methodological basis, Constructivist Grounded Theory (section 3.5.1), and was helped by the use of NVivo, (CAQDAS software – see section 3.5.2). In this section I intend to review the choice of Constructivist Grounded Theory and NVivo and to discuss and describe how the coding was achieved (sections 3.5.3 to 3.5.6).

3.5.1 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a methodology which allows the researcher to elicit a theory from the data collected which is grounded in the data itself. It was developed initially by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who defined it as 'the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 2). More recently there have been parallel yet separate developments within the methodology leading to three major distinct versions (Evans, 2013; Hallberg, 2006): Classic Grounded Theory (Glaser), Straussian Grounded Theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory (note that there are other versions of grounded theory, including feminist grounded theory but that the three referenced above are the main ones found in the literature, to the best of my knowledge). It is thus necessary for the researcher to consider carefully the different epistemological and ontological perspectives of each to elicit the best fit for the research in hand (see also section 3.3.3).

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, Charmaz (2014) proposes the following model for analysing data sets:

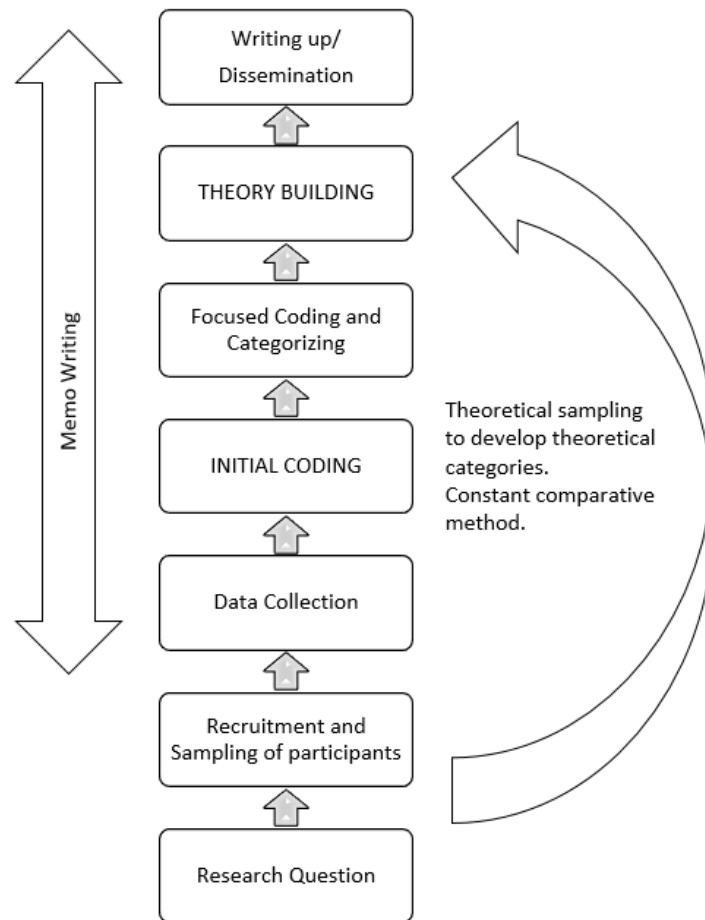


Figure 3 - How to analyse data sets in Constructivist Grounded Theory (adapted from Charmaz, 2014, p. 18)

This process is both interactive and iterative as the researcher moves between codes, categories, data and theory. Charmaz’s approach differs from that of other forms of Grounded Theory as she argues her Grounded Theory Methods are constructed by the researcher as part of the study rather than being fixed procedures: ‘it is our view: we choose the words that constitute our codes’ (2014, p. 115). Charmaz comments, ‘my approach differs from axial coding in that my analytic strategies are emergent rather than procedural applications. The subsequent categories, subcategories and links reflect how *I made sense of the data*’ (2014, p. 148, italics added).

Given this, utilising a constructivist grounded theory, I aimed to construct a theoretical understanding of these children’s understanding of prayer using the children’s perspectives and my own. Any theoretical conclusions reached are thus a

substantive theory rather than a complete theory given that they are context specific (see Charmaz, 2014, p. 344 and Urquhart, 2019) and limited to a particular group of children in a particular school at a particular time.

In the sections following, I set out the stages of coding, categorising and theorising which took place according to the above model proposed by Charmaz (2014) and show the development of a substantive theory from the data.

3.5.2 Why use CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software)?

CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) refers to 'software packages which include tools designed to facilitate a qualitative approach to qualitative data' (Lewins and Silver, 2009, p. 3). They are not intended as a replacement for manual coding; however, they do act as 'project management tools' (Silver and Lewins, 2014, p. 8) intended to assist with the organisation and analysis of large amounts of data. Such software can help with managing a variety of different types of data such as textual, images, video and audio in one place. Silver and Lewins (2014) comment that:

The use of customised software is not *required* in order to conduct robust analysis. But its use enables us to be more transparent in how we go about analysis because the tasks we engage in, their sequence, role and documentation can be more easily illustrated than when working manually.
(p. 5)

Therefore, there are distinct clerical advantages to using CAQDAS to help manage large data sets in addition to the sophisticated query tools which sit behind the data once coded. These allow for complex relationships to be investigated neatly and clearly. Visualisation tools, such as mind mapping, are also helpful in tracking thoughts and developing theories. There is some concern that QDA packages may lead the analysis rather than the researcher applying themselves to the data (see Friese, 2019), and this happened to me in being constrained by the mapping capabilities of NVivo. However, this can be ameliorated with proper attention to the creation of analytical memos and linking concepts and by making use of other programs which have more flexible graphical capabilities.

In this piece of research there are several different types of data including video footage, still images and text (transcriptions). This had a bearing on the choice of software to be used to assist with the organisation and analysis of varied data sets. After considering QDA Miner Lite, which I have previous experience of using, this was rejected as it cannot handle audio-visual data. NVivo was chosen for the analysis for its ability to handle a wide range of data types, to code directly onto audio and video and for its flexibility in coding strategies and memo writing.

While the flexibility of the software made it the first choice for coding data using the grounded theory approach as outlined in section 3.5.1 there are limitations. Only one memo can be linked to any one source; this can be overcome by putting all related points into one memo which is attached but this does rely on gathering associated ideas together manually. The program cannot handle more than one video source simultaneously as there is not the facility to synchronise video shot from different angles, for example. In addition, it is only possible to view one project item at a time – a source, node or query for instance - limiting the flexibility when trying to make links. However, 'you are the master; the software is the tool' (Friese, 2019, p. 38) and, while NVivo is useful in managing data sets, it does not replace, or automate, the manual coding and immersion in data necessary to generate theory.

3.5.3 Initial coding

In order to analyse the 6 hours of video and 3 hours of back-up audio, plus the pictures of what the children produced, NVivo was employed to help manage the data and to enable sophisticated searches and queries to be performed. The first task was transcribing the audio and video. I decided to concentrate on transcribing from camera 1 and to focus on a full transcription of the Godly Play session itself and partial transcription of the response time. This was because the Godly Play session contained a wealth of comments from the children in response to the storytelling and the wondering. The response time was not structured and the children talked over each other meaning that it was near impossible to achieve a meaningful transcript. However, individual comments which were pertinent, such as the children describing their work or questioning each other, were transcribed. While transcribing, I discovered that the

two cameras and Dictaphone had picked up different children more clearly than others. This meant that each transcription from camera 1 had to be checked and rechecked against camera 2 and the audio recordings to ensure, to the best of my ability, that nothing was missed. It was necessary to cross-reference the recordings, especially where children's voices were very quiet or, as in the case of session 2, there were two very boisterous children with loud voices who drowned out the others on camera.

Once the transcriptions were completed, the data were then coded. Initially there were 114 codes (called nodes in NVivo) which were cross-referenced with the pictures and transcripts. Any ambiguities when looking at the pictures were checked against the transcript to see how the children had described what they had done. In addition, asking children at the start to try not to talk over each other was a strategy used successfully in sessions 3 and 4 following the difficulties in hearing individuals in session 2.

While it was onerous to produce the transcripts, Charmaz comments that 'coding full transcripts gives you ideas and understandings that you otherwise miss' (2014, p. 136). I would concur with this statement as, after spending many hours transcribing, I felt I had immersed myself in the data and had a much better familiarity with it than if I had used a transcription service or coded the video timeline directly.

After the first round of coding, a concept map (see Appendix 2) was produced using the tools in NVivo. This had all the codes on it and attempted to group similar codes into themes, apart from a few codes which did not fit anywhere easily. Key areas were raised to categories. The concept map shows both the number of codes and the main themes which were starting to emerge from the raw data.

3.5.4 Theoretical coding

The next step was to group the codes into the categories suggested by the concept map. I took the decision that some codes, which were in more than one category, would be present in both as duplicates. This was so that I could see easily connections between the codes and categories. These included codes such as Earth or Land which were both in the Place category and in the Nature category. Once grouped, the coding was amalgamated to the core categories. This was further refined to create a final model

from the data (see Figure 8, page 125) which will be exemplified and discussed in the following chapters. The final model was not produced using the tools in NVivo, but in PowerPoint. This was because the graphical tools in PowerPoint are much more powerful and flexible than in NVivo and I realised that the limitations of NVivo were limiting my thinking. This is a good example of the use of CAQDAS being a hindrance rather than a help and an illustration of the restrictions of this type of tool when developing ideas.

3.5.5 Integrating theory and literature

...the substantive theory can and should be engaged with existing theories – in grounded theory, existing theories can also be seen as slices of data which help build the theory (Urquhart, 2019, p. 4).

The role of the literature in grounded theory methodology is contested (Urquhart, 2019). In contrast to Constructivist Grounded Theory, Classical Grounded Theory advocates not using the literature in the beginning of a grounded theory project in order to not contaminate the emerging theory with existing theories. However, Dey writes that 'we need to use accumulated knowledge, not dispense with it' (Dey, 1993, p. 63) and thus a back-and-forward approach to the literature has been adopted in this study. This follows steps advocated by Thornberg and Dunne (2019) where an initial scan of the available literature locates the researcher; a further, ongoing literature review is carried out, informed by the raw data; and the final literature review contextualises the theory which has been constructed and compares it with other, established theoretical ideas. Further, as indicated by the opening quotation in this section, literature and existing theories can also be seen as data to be used to help ground the new theory.

In practice, this meant that further reading on prayer and consideration of models of adult prayer from the literature were employed to help consolidate the model of children's prayer which emerged from the data. However, an initial attempt to compare children's understanding of prayer with an adult understanding of prayer was not included in the final thesis as it did not contribute to answering the specific research question, how do children understand prayer. Despite this, it merits mention because it

was an important cul-de-sac to go down and undoubtedly helped to clarify my thinking about how children understand prayer in comparison to adults.

3.5.6 Thick description – exemplifying the findings

Thick description (Geertz, 1993) is a way of writing about data including much detail and context in order to give as full a picture as possible of the incident being described. It is useful as a means of describing one aspect of the data sets in depth and to exemplify a specific point. In this research, a thick description focusing on Charles was carried out. This is because Charles came across as very thoughtful, openly grappling with his puzzlement and verbalising his thought processes. Writing the thick description allowed for exemplification of the model of children's prayer which emerged from the data through the analysis.

3.6 Respecting children: ethical considerations

There were several ethical considerations in carrying out this research, both in working with children and in adapting Godly Play to allow for the use of the work the children produced as data (see also section 3.6.1). Children are now recognised by many to be competent social actors who are able to comment upon their own lives and those of others (James, 2001; Punch, 2002; Christensen and James, 2017). As experts on their own lives (Soffer and Ben-Arieh, 2014), children are just as involved in shaping and constructing their lives as adults (Eder and Corsaro, 1999). Given this, it is important to allow the children's voices to be heard and listened to (Roberts, 2017) in order to allow their constructions of the world to be communicated. In this study, the aim was for the children's voices to shine through in the respectful use of their contributions as data and in the analysis of these data. However, given that I was also involved in the research both as storyteller and analyst, this implies issues relating to power dynamics. As an adult, and teacher, I was keenly aware that I was potentially in a position of power with children telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. To ameliorate this, I approached the children as someone who wanted to learn with them rather than a knowledgeable adult who wanted to teach them. This was helped by the underlying premise of Godly Play that children make meaning from the story and are not taught content. However,

there was some flexibility in the role in which I presented myself to the children, which could have been confusing for them. While I was working as a researcher, I chose to introduce myself as a teacher and also took on the role of story-teller, behaviour manager and facilitator at different points during the sessions. My role thus developed and changed throughout the work, but at no point did I pretend to be a child. Using video recording (see section 3.4.3) allowed for freedom in responding to the children and faithfulness in capturing not only their words but also their gestures and body language. In this way I hoped that the children responded confidently with their own beliefs and world views rather than amending them to suit the mixed roles which I was projecting, and that I was able to both 'listen to them' and 'hear them' (Roberts, 2017).

Regarding claims about truth (see also section 5.3), the children's voices and their truths are important, as well as those elicited afterwards by an adult researcher. If children are experiencing a real world and constructing meaning about this world then it follows that what is true for any given child (or adult) makes coherent sense to them (Bridges, 1999). This may seem illogical to others who do not share the constructed world that the child inhabits. It is the researcher's job to try to understand from a child's perspective and to make the links which the child has made. Given this, working with children requires humility on the part of the researcher to accept that a child's view of the world is just as important and logical as an adult perspective and that children's voices need to be heard, not just listened to.

In order to do this, the permission was sought from the children themselves along with parents and guardians for the data collection process to take place and for their images and work to be used as data in the research. Consent was sought through email or letters, plus phone calls from the head teacher to the parents and guardians and verbal consent from the children (see appendix 4). All children in the two classes were approached and the set of children selected was drawn from those who responded positively; this led to a convenience sample of children. Both children and adults were aware that consent could be withdrawn at any time. Children are deemed capable of granting consent for their opinions and ideas to be used in research (see British Association for the Study of Religions, (BASR), 2019). Given this, the children who

participated in the study were briefed verbally at the start, before the recordings started, so they were aware of their rights. Time was taken to settle the children before the sessions began, especially as they were in an unfamiliar room and with an unfamiliar adult.

Videoring young children presents challenges. While the use of videoring technologies was chosen to facilitate the data collection and analysis, it must also be acknowledged that this does present a potential risk to the children involved. To safeguard the children, the video recordings were only accessed by myself and my supervisors and children's names were disguised to protect their identities; pseudonyms were used. However, permission was sought such that short excerpts from the recorded discussions may be used in conferences or for illustrative purposes with the children's faces and/or names obscured. The video recordings were stored on a home computer and backed up on the cloud-based University storage (OneDrive) – both password protected.

Some children chose not to participate in the sessions. They were not included in the videoed sessions or the final data set. However, a whole class Godly Play session was offered to the school and carried out so as not to disadvantage any children who did not want to be included in the videoed sessions and therefore all children in the class selected for the research had the opportunity to participate in the general activity.

Anonymising the school presented a challenge as it has an unusual foundation, Anglican and Roman Catholic, and could, potentially, easily be identified. Therefore, the location was anonymised and a pseudonym for the school (Treeforth Primary School) was used to mitigate against this; however, the joint Anglican and Roman Catholic foundation was of particular interest and thus needed to be acknowledged in the contextual data. Maintaining anonymity for the children was managed by allocating them each a pseudonym. This was done in alphabetical order (of the pseudonym) to aid the analysis. Any real names which the children had written on their work were edited out. In the transcripts, any real names were replaced by pseudonyms if the child was in the session and omitted if the child was not present.

3.6.1 A consideration of the use of children's work as data

An ethical dilemma was posed by the proposed use of children's work from the response time. This, as noted by Zimmermann (2018, p. 259), is a difficulty as in Godly Play the work produced in the response times is not required to be presented to adults or other members of the group unless the child wishes to do so. Zimmermann argues that to use this work, without consent, is against the principles which underpin Godly Play of respecting the children's autonomy to make meaning in their own way and time.

The respect for the children's own insights and meaning making, regardless of whether or not these appear strictly 'orthodox' to our ear (and that may simply reflect their expressive limitations in any case), is carried over into the way the adults interact with the children during the 'personal response' period. This is when the children will be playing 'in their own way' with the story sets or undertaking some creative work. They are not told how to play (other than not in a way that injures or disturbs others), so the story may undergo some significant variations in re-telling, usually as the children project themselves into the narrative exploring important personal issues and emotions they need to bring before God. In this way they are both deepening their understanding of the sacred story and of themselves. Children engaged in art or craft work are not directed 'what to do' either. The adults in fact are very cautious about interrupting or pre-judging the children's work. The emphasis is on inviting the children to comment on what they have done and find their own words for what is meaningful or of value, rather than teacher commentary (Nye, 2020).

As this quotation from the Godly Play UK website states, adult intervention during the response time is not part of the approach. Neither is directing the children what to do. Employing Godly Play as a research method potentially would need data from the Godly Play response time to be used and in my research design this is the case. In order to avoid some of the problems inherent in using the children's responses in this way, the children were informed beforehand and permission asked from them to use their work if they agreed. Parents and guardians were also aware of the intended use of the work

as data, but the final assent rested with the children. At the end of each session, I again asked the children's permission to take the photographs of what they had made and all assented. If any had not assented, I would have respected this. The photographs were of the work itself and not of the children, thus protecting their anonymity. Almost all the children chose to take their work away with them. The child who left their work with me was asked if I could keep the work and they said that I could.

Although the children assented and their work was treated with respect, this does cross a boundary in terms of the privacy of the response time in Godly Play. It is fair to say that while the sessions carried out were in the style and spirit of Godly Play, the response time was partially directed. This meant that the work produced in that time was, by necessity of the research process, somewhat constrained by asking the children to make, write or draw what they thought prayer is, although the freedom of allowing them time and space to respond to that question in any way they wished was given. In addition, the children and I were on camera so that all the discussions and chatter were recorded for future analysis. However, whether this is consistent with a conventional Godly Play approach is uncertain and will be returned to in the discussion (section 5.1.6).

3.6.2 How to interpret the children's work?

[...] children's drawings are particularly suited to those questions that focus primarily on understanding the perspective of the developing child (Walker, 2007, p. 99).

Use of art techniques to elicit data is a tried and tested method, especially with children (Soffer and Ben-Arieh, 2014). The advantage of using art or crafts is that it takes the pressure off children who may find writing onerous or difficult and who may not be able to access questionnaires. Also, the activity is freer in structure and therefore potentially in outcome. It is likely that the children – in common with adults – may know more than they can tell (Polanyi, 1966), therefore, the hope was that using artwork may help the children to communicate deeper meanings that they may be unable to verbalise without additional scaffolding. Using artwork as a key to unlocking children's ideas provided this support. Shortcomings of this method depend on the dexterity of the person who is

creating the artwork (Klaus-Peter and Silke, 2013) and perceived inadequacies at drawing or other artistic expression which could undermine the confidence of the producer and thus restrict or change the art which is able to be produced. Given that everyone, including the researcher, is starting with a blank page – both physically in terms of the materials provided, and metaphorically in terms of the data produced and, given this, the theory which emerges from the data – this helped create some feeling of equality between the researcher and subjects.

However, the real value in the artwork produced is not necessarily in the static work itself but more in the discussions to be had during and after the product is made. It was important that the children talked about their ideas rather than writing them down to allow all children to participate and not be restricted by lack of literacy skills; a contrasting study where written commentaries were asked of the children did not always clarify the drawings adequately (Bland, 2012). However, children asked to tell about their drawings can report much more than by telling or drawing alone (Gross and Hayne, 1998). Given this, the process needs to be attended to as well as the final outcome (Einarsdottir, Dockett and Perry, 2009; Günther-Heimbrock, 1999). Use of video footage allows for this, as discussed in section 3.4.3.

To analyse the artwork produced, grounded theory principles, where the categories for analysis arise from the data, were used iteratively to code the pictures directly and the transcripts of the video recordings. What the children said during discussions and what they produced in the response time were equally valued as sources of data. It was important to consider simultaneously the verbal descriptions and the creations themselves so as to glean the meaning that the child ascribed to them as far as possible rather than assuming a completely adult interpretation (Bland, 2012). Use of computer software aided greatly in the management of different data types as discussed in section 3.5.2.

3.6.3 How is the research design trustworthy?

Being sincere and showing humility about research includes ensuring that the work is trustworthy. While it is vital that the data needs to be collected in a rigorous

manner, it is the theory pertaining to the relationships between the data and between the theoretical concepts espoused by the researcher which must be trustworthy (Maxwell, 2012).

I would argue that as this study is located in one cultural arena, namely Christianity, and given my own background as a Christian and the foundation of the school in the study, the interpretations which are made of the data by both the children and researcher are grounded in a broadly Christian tradition. This is not to say that the research is trustworthy because it is based in Christianity. Rather, a claim for consistency and coherence may be made because the researcher, research context and subject are located in the same cultural area. However, it must also be acknowledged that the same data evaluated from a different perspective, atheist, for example, may well come to a different conclusion. Following the principle of epistemic humility (Ernest, 1996; Shipway, 2013), this research is one possible interpretation of the data, albeit the best fit possible for those children, at that time and in that place. However, as a researcher, it is necessary to ensure coherence and strength in the theoretical arguments tendered to ensure that the resultant theory is true to the data and valid within the confines of the overarching theoretical approach.

Ensuring that research is as trustworthy as it is possible to be is vital when designing a study and when analysing the data collected. Quantitative research, such as laboratory testing, is potentially easier to replicate and thus verify than qualitative data, which is much more context bound. Lincoln and Guba (1985) make the point additionally that conventional terminology as applied to the credibility of quantitative research is not suitable for qualitative studies. They propose an alternative model of ensuring that qualitative research is trustworthy, given that it is dealing with people and context and therefore difficult to repeat in order to verify results that way. They go so far as to suggest that the role of the researcher is not to try to future-proof the research as it may be applied in different contexts, but to 'provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers' (p. 316). This has meant acknowledging from the start that this research project is contextually and time bound and the potential insights generated from the data are also contextually sited rather

than generalisable to a wider population. This is particularly important when considering the unusual foundation of the school.

Grounded theory has its own checks for trustworthiness built into the methodology itself. In Charmaz (2014) she discusses four criteria for grounded theory studies, which build on Glaser’s criteria of ‘fit, work, relevance and modifiability’ (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337). Charmaz proposes the following criteria for trustworthiness, which are shown below with their main features:

Criteria	Main features
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with the setting or topic • Data sufficient to merit claims • Systematic comparisons between data and categories • Categories cover a wide range of empirical observations • Logical links between data and argument and analysis • Sufficient evidence for the reader to form an opinion about the claims and agree with those claims
Originality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh categories offering new insights • A new conceptual rendering of the data • Social and theoretical significance • Theory should challenge, extend or refine current ideas, concepts and practices.
Resonance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categories portray the fullness of the studied experience • Revelation of liminal and unstable taken-for-granted meanings • Links drawn between collectives and individuals when the data indicates • Theory makes sense to participants
Usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis that offers interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds • Categories to suggest any generic processes • Tacit implications examined • Work contributes to knowledge and a better world.

Figure 4 – A framework for establishing trustworthiness, adapted from Charmaz, 2014, pp. 337-8

Using this framework, this study has endeavoured to demonstrate trustworthiness through credibility, such as checking children's meanings by asking them to describe their creations on camera for later analysis and discussions of the data and potential hypotheses with peers. In addition, a detailed and transparent description of the research process, thick description of the data, and contextual details have been given in order to situate the research in time and place. Memos and notes, managed and linked together in NVivo, serve as an audit trail. Claims for trustworthiness of this study will be returned to in section 5.3.

3.6.4 Reflexivity

Part of being a good researcher is the ability to reflect on the actions being taken within the research and ensuring that there are reasons for actions, not just an awareness of motivations (Macfarlane, 2009). There can also be a conflict between values-in-practice – those used to make decisions on a day to day basis – and espoused values – those which the researcher purports to hold – which can result in tensions that need to be resolved by the researcher (Bolton, 2018). While it is easy to know espoused values, or those we think we hold, it is less easy to identify values-in-practice and even harder to admit when they do not match with each other. Bolton argues that 'professional integrity can be defined as having values-in-practice as close to the same as espoused values as possible' (Bolton, 2018, p. 27).

There are two reasons why it is difficult to be reflexive. The first is that we risk finding out things about ourselves and our practices that we do not like – for example, that while an espoused value is to be honest, a value-in-practice may be to embroider the truth. The second is that this understanding is tacit knowledge rather than explicit (Polanyi, 1966; Macfarlane, 2009) and thus hard to access. Macfarlane comments that 'reflexivity is a skill, and also a virtue, that can make our tacit knowledge explicit' (Macfarlane, 2009, p. 125). In this research, it is both the children's tacit understanding and my own understanding which need to come under scrutiny, as well as my own journey as a researcher. Critical engagement with the process, decisions and

assumptions made needs to be foremost and explicit. It is for this reason that I have chosen to include autobiographical and personal reflections to try to ensure that the resulting work is as honest and sincere as possible and written with integrity.

Reflexivity is also a key part of a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Mills, Birks and Hoare, 2019). Thus, 'researchers must think about what they themselves are doing, be explicit about how and why they are doing it and consider the effect they are having on the data and eventual findings' (p. 6). Use of memos and a research journal are techniques which can help the researcher to reflect on their own assumptions and context and have been employed in this research. A reflexive journal was kept, initially online as a blog and, later, on paper. This allowed for consideration of my own role in the research and choices made. By utilising these techniques, I have aimed for a theory which I have constructed with the biases and assumptions inherent in my life considered and accounted for, as far as is practicable. My own context, plus the very specific context in which the research was carried out, means that the theory produced is a substantive one rather than a formal theory; this means it is specific to this context and these children and not generalised to a wider population.

3.7 The research design – a summary

In this section, I have argued that the research design is coherent based as it is on a constructivist epistemology and realist ontology and employing an innovative, adapted method, Godly Play. In adapting Godly Play as a research method, changes have had to be made to its underlying methodology to allow it to function as a tool and not a pedagogy. This will be discussed further in section 5.1.6. Different types of constructivism utilised in this thesis have been explored and, while synthesis of the different approaches is not possible, I contend that the underlying constant – that people construct meaning about the world in which they live and act – allows for the differing approaches to work together, with some adaptations as described above. I also argue that the use of Constructivist Grounded Theory as a tool for analysing the data is a suitable approach for constructing meaning from the children's constructions of prayer because it allows the data and the children's voices to guide the analysis rather than imposing an analytical structure or predefined categories on the data. Ethically, the

children's voices were respected, both in obtaining informed consent for the research and in the way that the data were handled in the analysis stage. The children's voices were honoured by utilising direct quotations from them in the description and analysis of their ideas. This meant that it was their understanding of prayer which was important, not mine as an adult Christian. This will be discussed further in section 5.1.1. The benefits of the research for the children involved (and their peers in the two classes with whom I repeated the Godly Play sessions, unrecorded) were having the opportunity to think about prayer and discuss this in a safe space, and to have access to a rich Godly Play experience, including a free response time. It was important that this was a positive experience for the children and their keen participation and cheery thanks and goodbyes at the end demonstrated this.

4 Findings

Once the data were analysed, subsequent reflection and analysis yielded a model of how children understand prayer (see Figure 6). In this section I exemplify the model, discussing the children's responses and the interpretations of their constructions of meaning from the storytelling sessions. It is important that the children's voices shine through and to this end quotations from the transcripts are included (see appendix 1, section 8 for the full transcripts). These are referenced as, for example, 2:89 - the number before the colon represents the session number. The number following the colon is the line of transcript being referred to. Thus, 2:89 is session 2: line 89. This convention will be used in the following sections

4.1 How did the children respond?

Godly Play gives children a language to enable them to access and discuss aspects of faith (Berryman, 2018b). This is empowering, as it frees children to play with the symbols, symbolic meanings and ideas. Many of the symbols used in the presentation materials were replicated and discussed by the children in the response time. This shows that they used the symbols to help them think through their ideas and also drew on them to make links with other Biblical stories and Church rituals.

The diagram below shows the symbols which appeared most frequently in the children's discussions and responses:

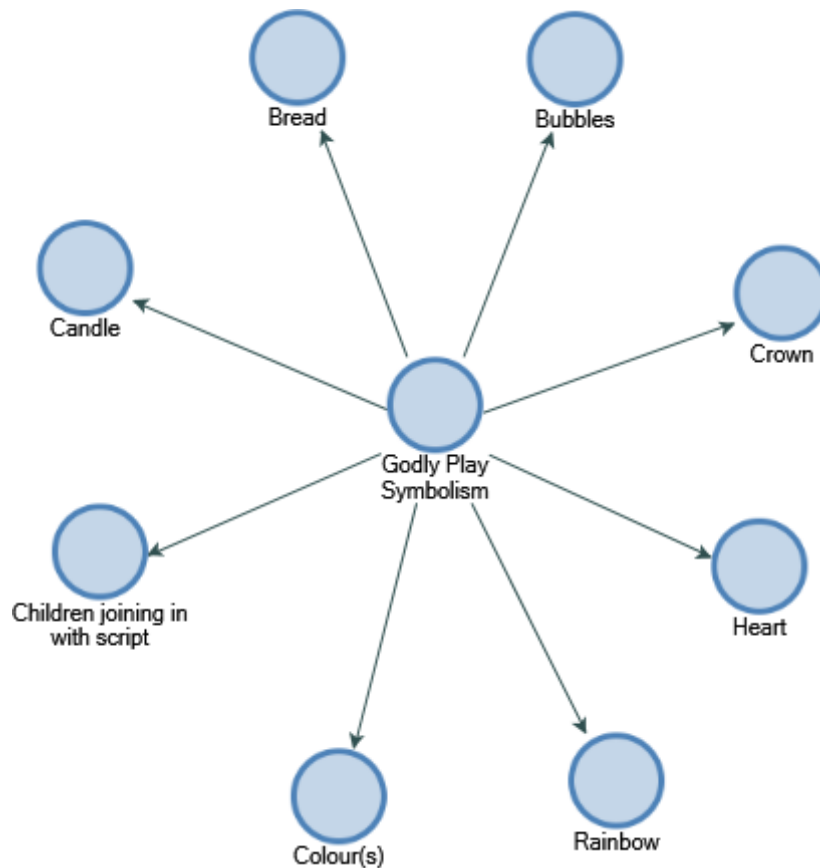


Figure 5 - Extract from concept map: elements of Godly Play symbolism

The children’s willingness and enthusiasm for talking about their thoughts on prayer using the symbolism of the Godly Play session was evident. They picked up and developed themes such as hearts/love and candle/light. While the symbolic language of Godly Play helped some children express themselves, there were a number of other themes which emerged that are considered in the next sections. The wider symbolism of the objects used in the storytelling was not lost and was replicated by a number of the children in the response time. Some talked about how the symbols related to prayer; some just liked the symbols and wanted to use them in their responses. Given this, I argue that the Godly Play session did influence the way the children responded to the question of what prayer is. This is because the children were able to read the symbols and allocate meaning to them in a variety of ways. In Godly Play, the children’s responses are all valued, even if they seem completely off topic, and the assumption is that the children are working through something even if they are unable to explain what this is.

4.2 Core categories

A core category (with first letter capitalised in this thesis to demonstrate their importance) is one which links together all the subsidiary categories in a simple manner. In order to find the core category, the categories which had been elicited in the analysis of the data were manipulated, explored and refined until a single, overarching category was found. In this section I intend to exemplify each of the categories – God, Self, Others, Creation and the Natural World, The Bible and The Church - with examples from the data explaining how they were populated and to examine what the children said when they were asked directly what they thought prayer is, which led to the operationalisation of the relationships in the model through Love.

4.3 A model of how children understand prayer (Southward 2020)

From the analysis of the data from the four Godly Play sessions, the following model was created:

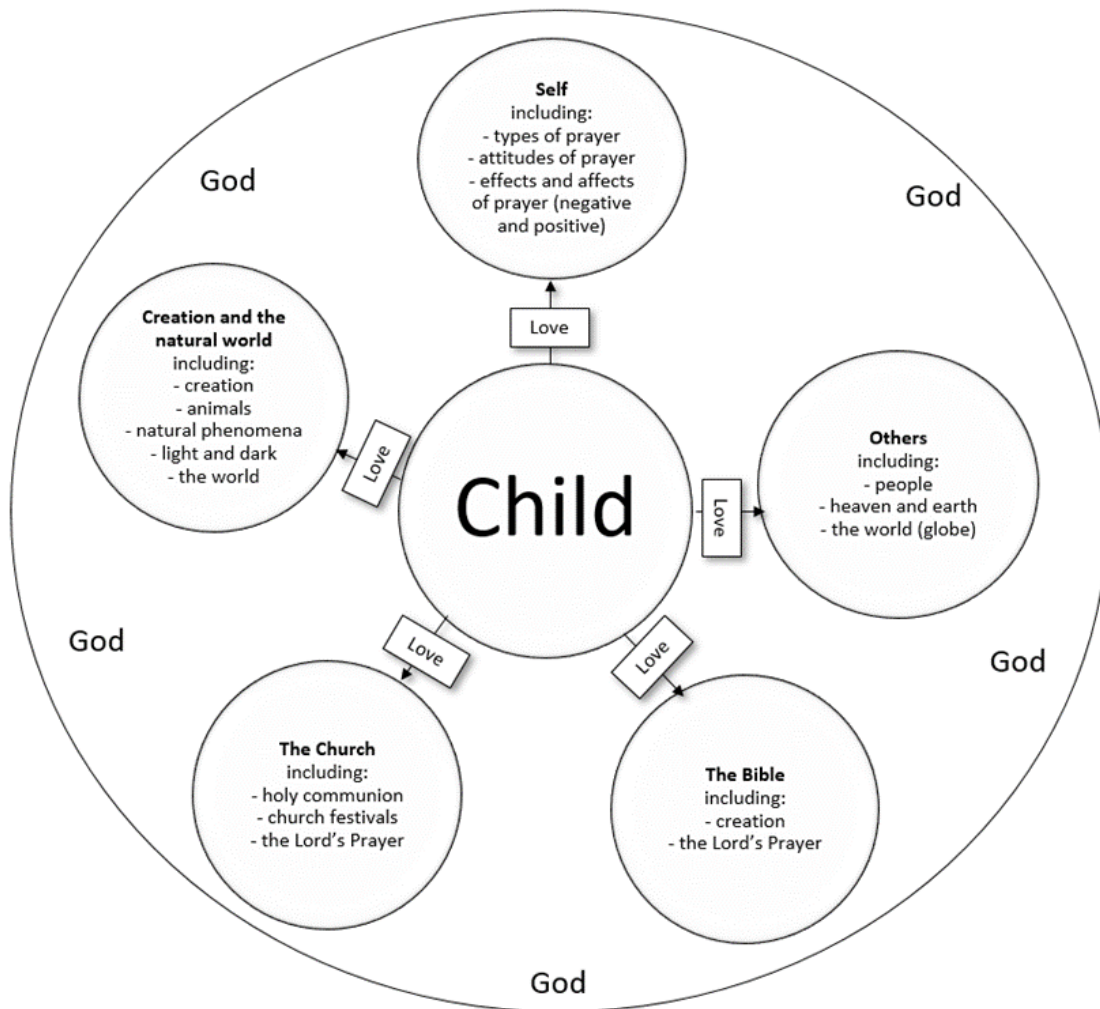


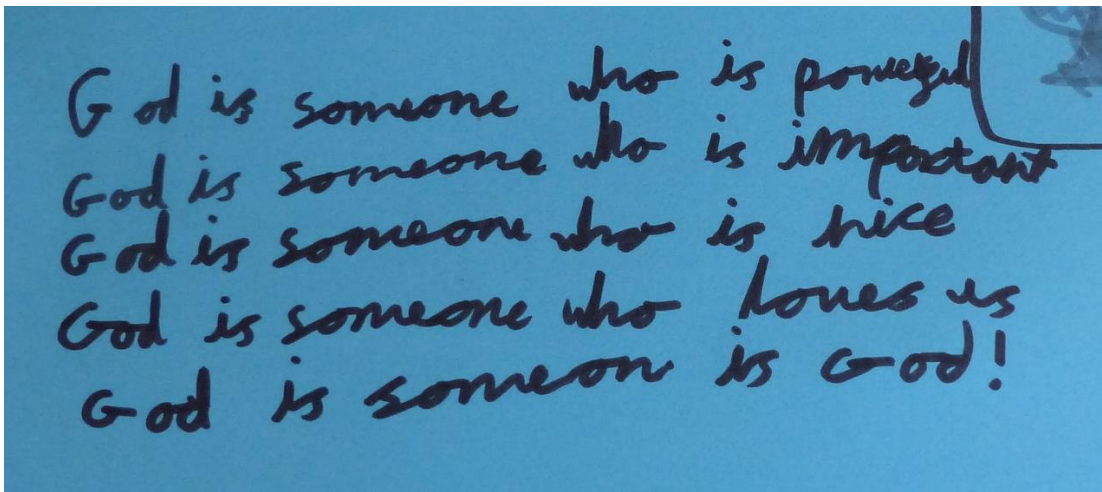
Figure 6 - A model of how children understand prayer (Southward, 2020)

Within this model, the child is centre and surrounded by the categories which were of importance to them, namely Self, Others, Creation and the Natural World, The Church and The Bible. The relationship between the child and these categories is shown as being Love: i.e. love for self, love for others, love of creation and the natural world, love of the church and love of the Bible. The whole is surrounded by and rooted in a belief in God who is present in all the categories. In the following section these categories will be exemplified and discussed.

4.4 God

The children seemed clear that prayer, for them, is directed to God. In the Godly Play script, God is referred to as being a Father and benevolent ('Our Father' and 'Give us this day our daily bread' are two examples from the Lord's Prayer). In the art works, 12 of the 22 children mentioned God either by name or in drawing or dough. God was depicted as being up on high (Rachel's picture for example, see Appendix 5, page 204 c.f.) and the children had no inhibitions about using God's name.

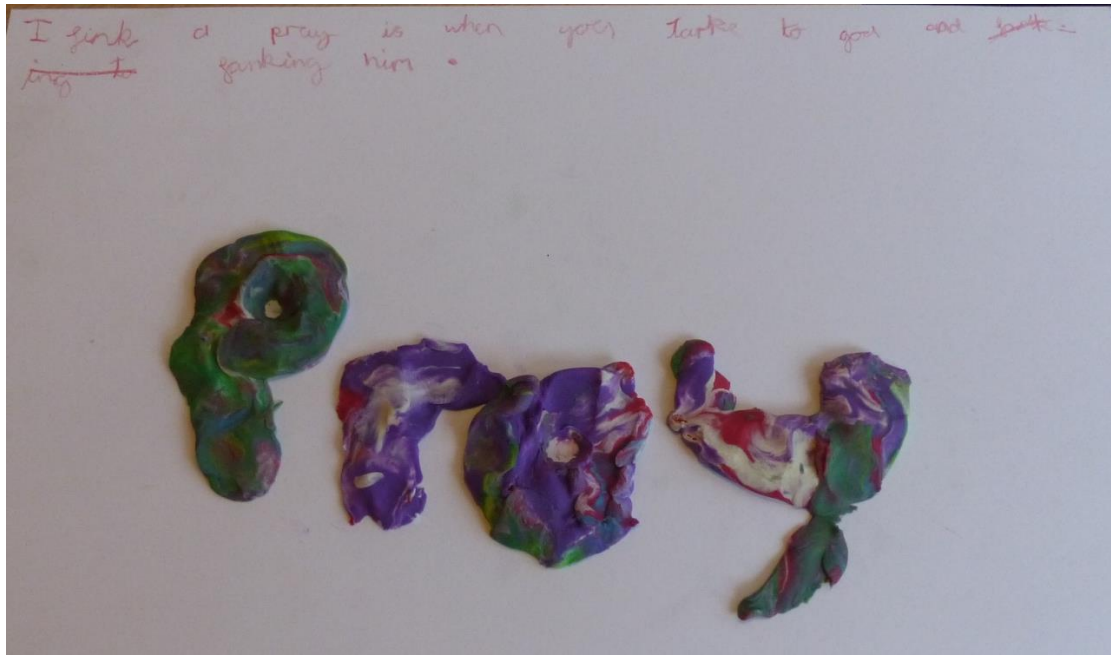
Ophelia's writing showed she was working through who God is for her:



Picture 1 - Ophelia (cropped)

Reading her writing, it seems that God is, for her, a benevolent and 'nice' God who 'loves us'. She also acknowledges that he is 'powerful' and 'important'. The final line is puzzling but also neatly sums up the paradox of God who, in the Christian faith, just is.

Edward made a large dough word, pray, and wrote along the top 'I fink a pray is when you tarke to god and fanking him' (I think a prayer is when you talk to God and thanking him):



Picture 2 – Edward

4.4.1 Why is God important for these children?

Given the above, God is an important figure for the children with regards to prayer and they demonstrated this through Biblical references, links to Holy Communion and other Church festivals and also with the role of the Amen (see section 4.9.1). They focused prayers on God rather than Jesus (although in Trinitarian Christianity they are one and the same as well as being distinct) and addressed God when writing prayers. The children associated prayer with God and assumed that God was listening to them. This led to the model of prayer as understood by these children showing God as all-encompassing of the child and the aspects which were important to them.

4.5 Love

The notion of Love came through strongly during both the storytelling and in the responses the children made (see appendix 3, page 197, for the code book). The children seemed to identify with the idea of love being shown as a heart and used this symbolism in their own responses. They also talked about loving other people and pets. Helen

responded, 'God has lots of love for you' (2:89) and also talked about her Grandma who had died (2:31).

4.5.1 Hearts

Hearts were the symbol from the Godly Play storytelling session that the children reproduced the most. In the Godly Play materials, they appear twice – once as red hearts on the cardinal points of the compass, and once as a gold heart on a purple background. Each time the script mentions love, it does so in connection with the symbol of the heart and the children made this connection readily. I would suggest that they already understood a connection between a heart and love as this is in much popular culture and is an accepted symbol, so this was not alien to them. The difference was that within Godly Play and this script, the notion of love refers specifically to God's love and to the love that Christians have between themselves and for others.



Picture 3 - Tamsin's representation of what she thinks prayer is

Tamsin (see picture 3) created hearts out of plasticine and supplemented these with her drawings. Her caption, 'love is with you', demonstrates a linking of the heart symbol with love. She was not sure, when questioned, why she had made hearts (and commented that she had not had enough time) but did know that she had created crosses because Jesus had died on the cross (not shown in Picture 3) as she had explained this to me. From this, I surmise that she was linking Jesus and his death with love in some way; however, she did not articulate this in speech.

Sarah was clear that she had made herself, and a heart which shows love (picture 4 below). She had also drawn a tree and a rock because she liked them. While whimsical,

this shows that Sarah was engaging with the Godly Play materials, even if she was not able to articulate what they meant to her other than a liking.



Picture 4 - Sarah's multicoloured heart with a self-portrait by the side

I also wonder if the colours were also significant for Sarah. She made a nested heart using four colours of dough. The colours in Sarah's heart seemed to reflect the rainbow from the Godly Play session.

During the Godly Play storytelling session, Sarah commented that the gold heart was Jesus's heart (see below). She also commented that the purple underlay was love. The children at this point were trying to guess the meanings of the different underlays and objects. This was spontaneous and shows that they were attempting to make meaning from what they were seeing and hearing.

[Yasmine] Purple is...

[Sarah] Love!

[Wendy] Are we going to be making things?

[JAS] We might be in a bit but we'll do this first.

[Sarah] lungs

[Tamsin] advent

[Unwin] royal

[Sarah] That's Jesus's heart!

(4:33-37)

Other children also identified the hearts as love. Sarah identified the gold heart as Jesus's heart (4:37) and Yasmine said 'I like the golden heart because Advent is when Jesus was born and when it's Christmas and you get presents' (4:86). This is an example of the children widening out the context of the prayer and using their Biblical knowledge to make connections. Jackie directly identified the heart as love:

[Jackie] That's Jesus and that's a heart.

[JAS] A heart. Why did you make a heart?

[Jackie] Because that's love

(2:90)

Polly drew a heart with arms and legs which she labelled God (picture 5). In discussion with the other children she revealed that this was a superhero:

[JAS] Why have you made it into a superhero? (to Polly)

[Polly] Because it's a super heart and a super rainbow

[Liam] Does it represent God?

[Ophelia] Or a heart

[Polly] God is a superhero in my heart

(3:149)



Picture 5- Polly

There were a few instances of children linking superheroes with God. Graham's picture showed a green superman with a kneeling figure. He was unable to explain why he had created this. My conjecture is that he was trying to work through something to do with power and God and possibly his relationship with a super-power, or he may like drawing superheroes. Graham was the least focused in the group sessions and, initially - and incorrectly - I dismissed what he had done. However, experience with Godly Play responses has taught me that there is always something being worked through in what the children produce and therefore Graham's creation was just as much an expression of where he was in his thinking at that moment as anyone else.

One child, Helen, linked the gold heart with her family '...my Grandma died and everyone said she had a heart of gold' (2:31). This was such a beautiful expression of something personal to her that I was both touched that she had shared it and curious about the link between her own ideas and feelings and the symbolism of the heart. I did not press her for an explanation as this felt too personal. However, I suggest that it is a way of showing how the Godly Play format can bring such personal and emotional responses from the children, especially bearing in mind that the children had only just met me. Similarly, in the following quotation, Nicola considered the role of love in her life and faith:

[Nicola] (*thinks*) I think I would be here (*points to the purple with the gold heart*) because it like, it shows God's love, Jesus's love and it shows that other people love each other and if they've done like something wrong people still forgive them though because they still might have some love left in them so they might still have a bit of good left in them but they might not show it though but they still might like each other. (3:109)

4.5.2 Why is Love important for these children?

From the above examples, it can be surmised that the children equated hearts with love, and they used this symbol in their responses (see section 4.1 for a discussion of the way in which the Godly Play materials may have influenced the children in this research). The strong emphasis in the sessions on love for others, nature, pets and God from the children is significant because it appears to tie together how the children related to these different aspects of their lives. It is relationships which are key for the children in the study and for their understanding of prayer. This is shown in the model (Figure 6, page 83) as the linking force between the child in the centre and the different aspects of prayer which were important. It also connects the child with God, who is shown as all-encompassing as discussed above.

4.6 Self

The self is both at the centre of these children's understanding of prayer and a distinct category within it. While the child resides in the central part, they also have a relationship with themselves and their needs. In this section, I intend to discuss the positive and negative nature of prayer, positions of prayer (attitudes) and types of prayer that the children identified as being important to them.

4.6.1 Affects of prayer: positive and negative

(Affect as a noun means feeling, emotion, or specific emotional response. (Grammarly Inc., 2016))

The children talked about both positive and negative aspects of prayer during the Godly Play session and the response time afterwards. Positive attributes included having 'A time to just think about God' (Unwin, 4:123) and 'time to go alone with God' (Tamsin, 4:126). This links to an understanding of prayer involving God. Unwin made a model of himself in a house with a cloud up above and a cross standing in the sky nearby. He was not able to explain what he had done and why but it could be extrapolated that Unwin was thinking about God as his picture was similar to other children's in its composition with the symbolism of Jesus's death plus clouds which other children linked to Heaven and God. The writing on Jackie's picture said, 'so you can think of Jesus and God' (Jackie, session 2, picture 638) further linking prayer with God.

Other aspects of prayer identified by the children included happiness, blessings, comfort and joy. Liam commented, 'I think if a prayer is like for example there's something you wanted or didn't want to happen which did happen you kind of bless it, you kind of bless it' (3:137) indicating that he associated amelioration of difficult aspects of life with a blessing brought by prayer. Anne talked about the comfort that was brought by God (1:9) and Wendy of the peace that talking about God brought her (4:129).

More negative effects of prayer included sins, pain, crying, worries and illness. The children talked about saying sorry for sins (including an amusing list of examples as they gently insulted each other under the guise of giving examples of sinning (3:44-54)) and seemed to see prayer as a way of atoning for and gaining forgiveness for themselves. The worries the children discussed were mainly about other people who were ill and those who had passed away. Helen commented, 'Talk to God, tell him your worries and the worries vanish' (2:72). This indicates that, despite dealing with some tricky emotions, prayer was seen as a way to help themselves and to help others. I suggest that this also shows love for self and for others.

Given the above, prayer can be said to be seen by the children as something positive in their lives. They prayed for comfort and forgiveness and both for themselves and for others. They were agreed that prayers usually went to God, commenting that prayer was talking to God.

4.6.2 Attitudes of prayer

There were several assumptions by the children about how they should pray. Matthew commented, 'a prayer is like a special way to talk to God. The reason you put your hands together and your eyes closed is so you don't get distracted by anything and it's just a special way to speak to God. It is' (3:139). He was adamant that to pray hands should be together and eyes closed. This was also reflected in the work the children produced. Darwin drew hands on both pieces of work he produced (Pictures 627 and 628 – see page 204 and following for pictures referenced which are not in-text) and wrote, 'I think praying is about putting your hands together to speak to God' (Picture 628). When asked about the hands, which were a late addition, Darwin said, 'to say like it was someone praying' (1:124). Isabelle made a model of a child kneeling with hands together to show that she was praying (picture 635).

Kneeling was another attitude of prayer that the children used. Liam made Jesus walking into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday out of dough, and commented:

[JAS] Can you tell me who all the characters are?

[Liam] ...that one's a priest because he knows how to bow down in front of Jesus because when he was coming along on the donkey they kneel down and maybe he doesn't know that but he might know he has to kneel down but he forgot to. He thought it was no time but he just sat down.

(Session 3:151)

This, along with the other kneeling figures (Graham, picture 636 and Isabelle picture 635) could indicate that the children associated kneeling down with prayer. They did not talk of being in any other attitude in order to pray, such as standing or sitting.

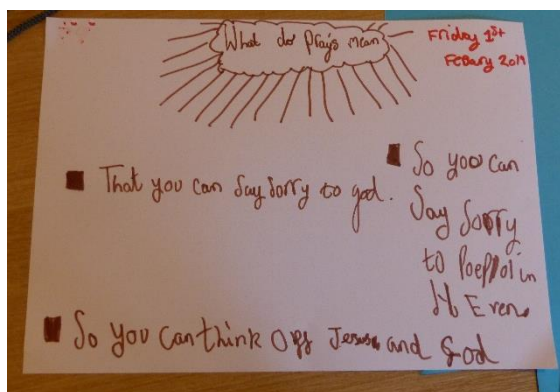
Darwin was clear in what he thought about prayer: 'I think praying is about putting your hands together to speak to God' (Picture 628). In this extract he both shows a certainty that prayer is to God and that communication with God is possible, and also that to pray he had to have his hands together.

Given this, the children seemed to think that there were certain, possibly stereotypical, attitudes that they should adopt when praying.

4.6.3 Types of prayer

[Ophelia] I think that prayer is something like you can get wisdom prayers, you can get thankful prayers, sorry prayers, please prayers and basically they are just asking for something and like say if you were doing a please prayer then you just like, say if someone was dead and you wanted them to come back to life then that's a prayer. (3:133)

The children identified different types of prayers that could be said. Ophelia's contribution above neatly summarises this. Both Darwin and Edward included thank you prayers in what they made (Pictures 619, 626, 627, 629) and Darwin explained further that, 'There's like two different types of prayers, like thank yous...and thank you prayers and sorry prayers...thank you for your food, thank you for your homes and all that stuff sorry for like...' (1:105). Sorry prayers were also important. Jackie wrote,



What do prays mean (sic)

That you can say sorry to God

So you can say sorry to people in heaven

So you can think of Jesus and God

Picture 6 - Jackie

This indicates that Jackie, along with Isabelle, considered that prayer is about being forgiven; interestingly, she says that this is also saying sorry to people in Heaven which implies that she thinks prayer is communicating with those people who have died as well as God. Other children talked of forgiveness too, including Isabelle and Karen:

[Isabelle] If someone's been bad to them you can forgive them in your heart by praying. (2:76)

[Karen] Praying can mean that if God knows about something that they shouldn't that they can forgive them about that. (2:78)

The final type of prayer that Ophelia identified was a please prayer. Here the children were asking for things for others rather than for themselves, for example, Anne's prayer, written in modelling clay, asked for her brother to get better from chicken pox (Picture 621). Only Graham showed any doubt that prayers are answered, commenting that prayer is '...where we're talking to God and hoping that it comes true' (2:69).

4.6.4 Why is Self important for these children?

The Self is important for children when considering prayer. They appear to gain much from prayer, including absolution, comfort and blessing. They consider that it is necessary to have particular attitudes when praying, such as putting hands together and closing eyes, and they identified different types of prayers, all of which have the child at the centre, either asking for something on behalf of others, asking for forgiveness or saying thank you for something personal.

4.7 Others

While the self is important for children when praying, other people appeared to be important too. Relationships were discussed and, when coded, found to include earthly, supernatural and power relationships. In this section I intend to discuss the different people mentioned by the children as well as the different types of relationships to others that were presented.

4.7.1 People

Different people were identified by the children as being of importance in prayer. The most common drawing or model was a self-portrait, which links both to the self being important and the relationship between self and others. Other people identified can be categorised into church, priests and bishops, familiar people, such as teachers, and family, such as parents, babies or teenagers.

4.7.2 Earthly relationships

The people identified above all come into the category of earthly relationships. These are relationships in the earthly realm and ones with which the children can identify. They are generally people who are well known to the children, with the possible exception of the Bishop; the children had recently been to the local Cathedral to participate in a Christingle service at which the Bishop was present and this was in their minds.

Family, friends and pets were also mentioned as being important, and in one of the spontaneous prayers that the children wrote in the response time, Edward wrote, 'Dear God, thank you for our homes and families Armen [sic]' (Picture 626) indicating that he wanted to say both thank you for the things he has and that they are special enough to him to warrant a prayer.

Discussion of children and adults who were poorly also featured. The children commented that they could pray for them:

[Charles] It's kind of like a holy sentence a prayer...I think it's like when you're speaking to God and saying like when somebody is in hospital you could say please may you help them in hospital.

[Edward] Pretend [...] my friend's mum [...] is in hospital and I might pray for her because I don't want [...] to be sad (names removed)

(Session 1:102-3)

This altruism demonstrates that other people are important to the children when praying, mainly in terms of helping them. Edward stated this repeatedly saying, 'helping them' in response to Anne's comment that prayer is to 'help us' (Session 1:94-98).

4.7.3 Supernatural relationships

Supernatural relationships are with those who are not on earth but elsewhere, often described by the children as Heaven. This includes angels, Jesus and relatives and pets who had died. Death was an important topic for the children in relation to prayer. They wanted to pray for the people who were in Heaven:

[Edward] Yeah, not like...you're allowed to pray for...pretend my uncle died, I'm allowed to pray for him or if I had a pet they died you are able to pray for them say they are close to you (1:97)

[Edward] Yes because they are close to you people you know and your friends that are in heaven they might be really close to you so you want to keep them you might want to pray for them. (1:99)

[Liam]... and then you ask God to keep it safe (gestures to his heart) for example, my bunny died and if I prayed for it I would say God please look after it in heaven, that's what a prayer means. (3:138)

There was also some evidence of wishing and hoping that someone who had passed away would be able to come back to life with prayer:

[Nicola] Help my hamster to come back to life.

[Ophelia] I want three of my gerbils to come back to life, my baby brother, and my grandpa.

(3:134-135)

Both Nicola and Polly drew angels when responding. Neither was able to explain exactly why they had drawn them. Graham made a figure out of dough and placed it on a

background highlighted yellow around the figure. He claimed this was a 'superman'. While this was one of the more obtuse responses to the session, and he was unable to explain why he had done it, I wonder if this was referring to a broader superpower, possibly God, as it was placed near a self-portrait of a kneeling figure:



Picture 7 - Graham

There were many references to Jesus as distinct, in the children's minds, from God. This was mainly in response to the storytelling where the children identified Jesus as 'the light of the world' (Edward, 1:2; also Liam 3:107). In the models the children made, Jesus was shown with a sash, 'because he's important' (pictures 630, 631 and Jackie, 2:84). Ophelia drew John the Baptist and Jesus together, although she was not sure why. Rachel made and drew the creation below:



Picture 8 - Rachel

Rachel placed Jesus in the middle of the paper. Below are humans on the earth (drawn) and above is God on the clouds. Jesus is on a cross. This representation could show an understanding of Trinitarian Christianity where the route to God is through

Jesus and the Holy Spirit. However, she was not able to verbalise exactly what she had been thinking as she was making it.

4.7.4 Power relationships

Something the children struggled with was the notion of power. The children interpreted the word power in the Lord's Prayer as being human power over others and in session 3 (3:118-130) the children discussed what earthly power over others might look like. This led to discussions of bullying and of unkindness and swearing. The children did not think it was right that one person should have power over others. This was also the part of the prayer that had the most discussion over whether it could be omitted and still have all the prayer necessary. For example:

[Matthew] I would take away the power bit because people have more power than others there's just going to be one person bossing everybody around life would just get really boring.

[Liam] [indistinct]... and that's why the love bit stands out as well.

[Matthew] So if the person who had more power loved everybody then wanted to use his power that would be fine

(3:121-123)

However, power was also attributed to God and Jesus at different points. For example, in response to being asked which part she liked best, Anne replied:

[Anne] The power and the glory...

[JAS] The power and the glory? Why's that?

[Anne] Because it shows us that He has all the power to comfort us

(1:9)

Whereas the power attributed to earthly people was negative, Anne thought of the power of God in positive terms, as in comfort.

4.7.5 Why are Others important for these children?

It seems that relationships with others are very important for children when considering prayer. They gave examples of praying for others and about others and this included earthly and supernatural figures. With regard to the model proposed, there is a link between the self and others and that link is mitigated by love – love for other people, for people who have died and for Jesus. Power was also important to the children. They were concerned that power given to others should not be used inappropriately but found it harder to attribute power to God.

4.8 Nature

Nature is a theme which came out strongly in the analysis of the transcriptions from the children. In this section I intend to consider how nature came through in the children's ideas and suggest why it may be so important for them.

4.8.1 Natural phenomena

As discussed in section 4.8.3, one of the symbols the children used to explore their ideas about prayer was a rainbow. There were other natural phenomena which the children also drew and made: rocks, trees and clouds. The rock was one of the symbols used in the Godly Play session and, as with the heart and the other resources, may have influenced the children's responses. The children loved the stone itself; Ophelia asked if it was real and banged it on the table to check, and Sarah talked about liking rocks. In Sarah's image she drew a tree and a rock 'because I like rocks' (4:144) but was unable to explain further exactly why. This was combined with a heart made out of rainbow dough and a self-portrait on top.



Picture 9- Sarah

Yasmine made a tree along with a duck pond and ducks.



Picture 10 – Yasmine

She was clear that she associated prayer with 'nacher' (nature) and also included a cross on rocky ground. Yasmine wrote 'holly' (holy) across the picture in dough and a list of people that she loved headed by the word 'plant'.

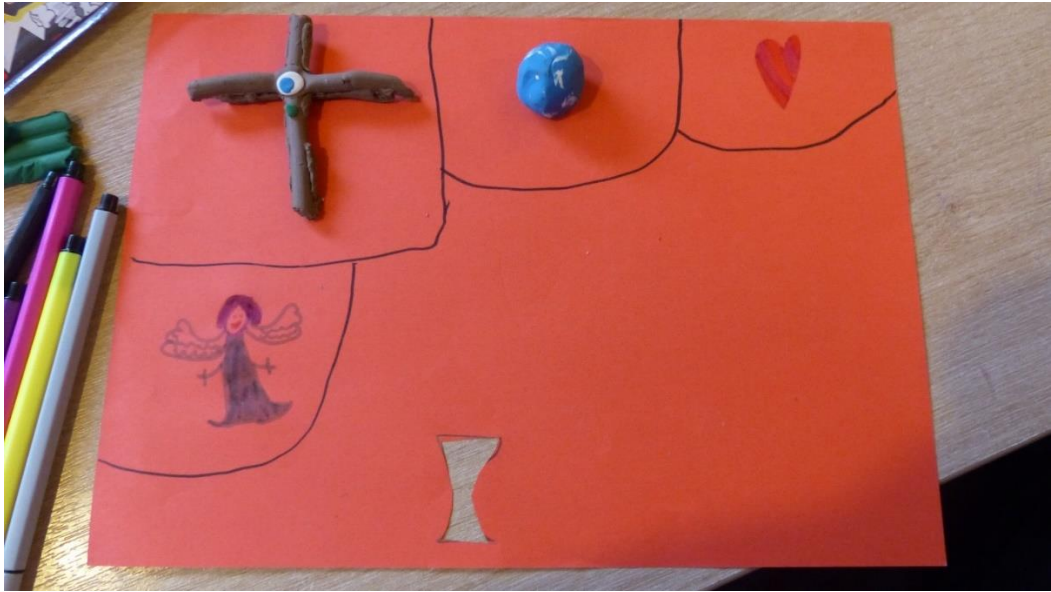
Clouds were also a symbol which recurred in the children's artwork with five of the children including them.



Picture 11 – Frederick

Frederick's picture showed clouds with light coming down from above and a dove descending. The clouds in this picture seem to be representing the sky. Rachel drew God standing on a blue stripe with clouds on it. It seemed from the children's drawings that they associated clouds with the sky and used them as a symbol to represent this.

Ophelia made a representation of the globe out of dough and this was the first of the items she made and drew in the session. Nicola also made a globe. She commented, '...I've no idea what they are, but I just added them for some reason and I done (sic) the world and a heart to show God's love and an angel' (3:152).



Picture 12 – Nicola

These representations of the world as a globe contrasted with the children's ideas about Heaven. In their work, Heaven was always shown at the top of the page above Earth. They talked about people in Heaven who had passed away and how prayer could allow them to communicate with them, or that prayer could possibly bring them back to life. Polly commented, 'I think prayer is when you put your hands together and pray for something like someone dying or something about God and if your pet's poorly and going to the doctors' (3:132).

Other natural phenomena involved animals. The children included animals in their prayers, asking for hamsters, gerbils and kittens to come back to life (3:134-136). Yasmine's duck pond and the two representations of doves (Helen and Frederick) showed that animals were important for the children and part of their understanding of prayer. The other animal mentioned was the chicken with the chicks from the first section of the Godly Play materials. One child playfully asked if the chicken could be called Olive (4:42) and it is to my shame that in the moment I said no. In Godly Play, comments like this from the children should be absorbed, not dismissed. This is a case of human error which I was aware of as soon as it had been said but it was, by then, too late.

4.8.2 Light

In the materials used to present the Lord's Prayer to the children the second, black felt square was topped with a lit candle. Nowhere in the script did the symbolism of light being associated with Jesus or the light of the world appear. Therefore, it is of note that the children picked up this association spontaneously because they were not led to think this through the storytelling.

When asked which part of the prayer she wanted to take away, Helen replied:

[Helen] The candle.

[JAS] Why do you want to take the candle away?

[Helen] Because we are all the light of the world and we don't need a real light.

(2:60-62)

This seems to indicate that Helen understands the teaching of Jesus that all Christians are lights in the world and the symbolism of the light. She eschews the need for an actual light, instead picking up the metaphor of light.

As the materials were being put out the group in the third session were trying to guess what was coming. This led to an interesting debate about what the candle and the black underlay signified. Ophelia was puzzled – 'it's **not** darkness' (3:23 - emphasis added) – and Nicola related the light to Heaven. Liam picked up the symbolism of the light shining in the darkness being God shining in the world.

[JAS] And the next thing he said after saying our father in heaven...Our father is...

[Ophelia] not darkness (looking at the black felt)

[JAS] ...light

[Nicola] Heaven?

[Liam]...shines in the darkness (3:22-26)

Matthew chose to use the symbolism of light in what he made. He carefully constructed a Christingle orange being held by a Bishop; this followed a Christingle service at the local Cathedral where he had seen and made a Christingle for himself. He commented, 'The people in the church they bring up the candles the big candles and this is the man I saw in the cathedral, {name omitted} cathedral, he was holding a shepherd's these are the sweets on the stick and this is the orange' (Matthew, 3:152). He also made another candle on a stand and noted, 'I'm making the last bit here, so there's the candle at the back of the church, the Easter candle, I've just made an Easter candle. I need to make it a bit shorter' (Matthew, 3:153). Here he is relating what he has seen in church to both the Godly Play materials and what he thinks prayer is.



Picture 13 (left) - Matthew's representation of a Christingle

Picture 14 (above) - Matthew's representation of the Easter candle in church.

Picture 15 (right) - Matthew's representation of an acolyte holding a candle in church.



When discussing what the children were going to make, Matthew was clear that he wanted to make an acolyte, although he did not know the correct terminology for this. He knew that there were 'big candles' and that they were important in the service.

[Matthew] I'm going to do a priest holding a candle and ...

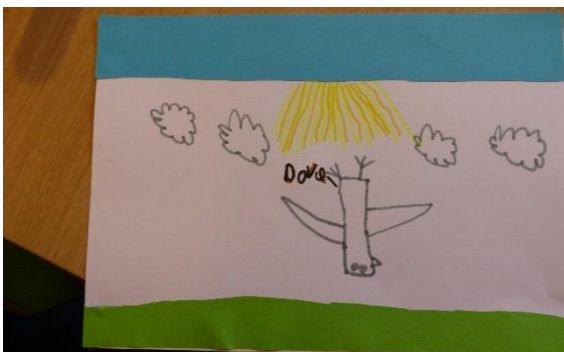
[JAS] Why a candle?

[Matthew] Actually, I'm going to make two people one that's holding like a shepherd's stick thing and cos I go to the {name omitted} church and there are little people in white robes holding big candles I'm going to do one of them.

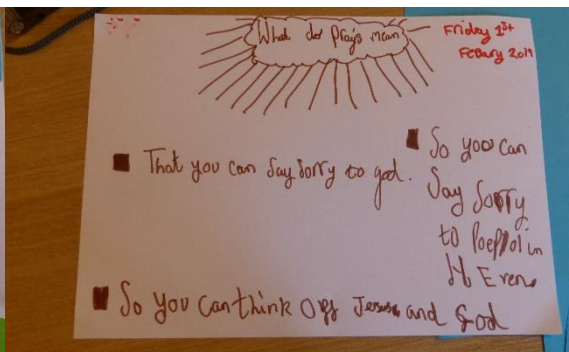
(3:142)

Liam also utilised candles in his response. He made the story of Jesus being welcomed into Jerusalem with the palm leaves on the floor and included 3 candles on a dais. He commented, 'these are going to be candles because they are celebrating him coming...'
(Liam, 3:153). This seems to link candles with celebrations.

The idea of light being associated with God or Heaven was also used by the children. Both Frederick and Jackie drew beams of light seemingly coming from the sky:



Picture 16 – Frederick



Picture 17 - Jackie

Liam tried to explain his thoughts about Jesus being the light of the world:

The reason why I think the light, the light represents Jesus and all the people that like the Romans and the Vikings they or the Anglo Saxons versus the Vikings they weren't being nice, but Jesus might have...so they helped Romans get along to each other and not separate and be all unhappy and not doing what they should be doing. Jesus might of [sic] helped the people being the light of the world.

(3:107)

Polly also commented that light '...is like you're having friends and happiness' (3:105) which, along with Liam, shows the metaphor of light being associated with good in the world.

The children made links with other uses of candles as seen above quite readily. While none of them expressed overtly that they thought that light or candles were to do with prayer, the fact that they were included in the responses that the children made to the storytelling and the question, what do you think prayer is, seems to indicate that the children associate the symbolism of light and candles with God and prayer.

4.8.3 Rainbow

The children made associations between the rainbow and God and used the rainbow symbol in their responses. Rachel's picture (picture 19) seems to show a rainbow linking Heaven and Earth. Edward immediately made a link with the story of Noah's Ark (1:4) while Karen commented, 'I thought God always lives on top of the rainbow' (2:17). Polly associated God with a rainbow in her picture and Rachel used a wide variety of colours in a rainbow pattern on hers.



Picture 18 – Polly



Picture 19 - Rachel

4.8.4 Why is Nature important for these children?

The inclusion of so many references (see appendix 3, section 10.1) to nature in the children's responses, both in the wondering and in the artwork produced is significant for this study. This is because the children readily linked prayer with nature and creation and used this to help them express their understanding of prayer as being associated with the natural world. While there is limited data in this category, its presence cannot be ignored as, for this group of children, it was important.

4.9 Biblical references

Biblical references included Jesus, John the Baptist, Noah's Ark (the rainbow), the story of Creation, the Feeding of the Five Thousand (bread) and references to the Bible itself. References to Jesus often included the symbol of the cross. This was not referenced in the Godly Play materials and was one of the symbols which the children used spontaneously from prior knowledge and understanding. Nicola made a cross with an eye in the middle of it. This led to an exchange between Ophelia and Liam:



[Ophelia] Look she (Nicola) put an eyeball in the cross

[Liam] That's not holy!

[Ophelia] Wait, is it God peeking through the cross? (3:148)

Picture 20 - Nicola

Here, Ophelia is attempting to make meaning from another child's piece of work. Nicola was not sure why she had put an eye in the middle of the cross but did not refute Ophelia's interpretation.

Seven of the children included a cross or crosses in their work assuming that it had something to do with prayer as they understood it.

4.9.1 Amen

The children in session 1 had a lively discussion about which of the parts of the Lord's Prayer could be taken away and still have all the prayer we need (1:22-100). They initially decided that the bubbles (Amen) could be removed. However, when gently challenged (1:39) there was great shock as they realised this meant no Amen on the end of the prayer. Much discussion ensued, concluding:

[Anne] Yes I think that this one {Bubbles} is the least important

[Charles] Yes but we do need Amen, Amen because it's not really called a prayer if you don't have Amen on the end...you, you wouldn't call it a prayer because

[Anne]...it would just be like a conversation

[Charles]...yeah but we wouldn't know

[Edward]...when it's finished

[Charles]...or if it is a prayer or if she is just saying something about God or something

(1:65-70)

The role of the Amen was also discussed in session 4. Rachel commented, 'I like the bubbles as well because in them I think God's in them. Then when we pop them his love comes down' (Session 4:88) and Yasmine, 'I think the love is inside the bubbles because when you pop it they go whoooo God' (4:90). The bubbles captured the children's imaginations, and all but one of the children enjoyed them being blown towards them and popping them.

The need to have an Amen on the end to make it a prayer was evident in the artwork produced too. Several of the children decided to write prayers, either on paper or etched on dough, and all of these ended with Amen. From this, I conclude that, for these children, it is necessary to have an Amen on the end of a saying or thought to make it into a prayer.

4.9.2 Why are Biblical references important for these children?

Biblical references were important for these children as they seemed to show an awareness of prayer in a larger context, such as in Biblical stories and texts. The Lord's Prayer itself comes from the Bible so the source material was itself Biblical. The children readily made links between different Bible stories and the presentation of the Lord's Prayer, which implies that the Bible is important to them in considering prayer. The stories they linked with were diverse, coming from both Old and New Testaments, and this could show the flexibility of the Godly Play approach in allowing links to be made between stories, prayers and the children's lives themselves.

4.10 The Church

The children also associated prayer with the great Church festivals of Easter, Christmas, Palm Sunday and a Christingle service which they had attended recently. Karen linked the gold box storing the Godly Play materials to the presents given by the three wise men in the Christmas story – ‘Frankincense, myrrh and gold’ (2:3 and 2:4-10). Frederick associated the orange underlay in the Godly Play materials with the Christingle, saying, ‘I think I know what this is now...orange, Christingle, it's the Christingle because of the orange and red... Jesus the King...that's the blood and that's the world probably...’ (2:18). Matthew made a Christingle out of dough (see *Picture 13*) and related this to his recent trip to a local cathedral to attend a Christingle service.

Liam focused his efforts on Palm Sunday and made an enactment out of dough of Jesus walking into Jerusalem:



Picture 21 – Liam

On the right of the picture is the road Jesus walked down with Jesus on the road and kneeling people either side. He noted that the kneeling people were crying as they were so happy that Jesus was coming (3:147). In the foreground is a dais with candles and a microphone in the middle for Jesus to use to address the crowds. Liam was not clear exactly why he had chosen to make this. However, he associated prayer with the story of Palm Sunday and was eloquent about what he had made. I suggest that he

associated prayer with Jesus and, despite not making the palm leaves 'because they are really hard' (3:143), identified the happy occasion with prayer.

4.10.1 Holy Communion

The children discussed this in all four sessions linking the small basket of bread used in the retelling of the Lord's Prayer to Holy Communion – 'The wine is the blood and the bread is the flesh' (Ophelia 3:38) – and to Biblical stories such as the feeding of the five thousand. Belinda and Charles both made baskets of bread and Charles added a cup for wine. Edward linked the death and resurrection of Jesus to the cup:

[Edward] It's a cup

[JAS] Why is a cup important?

[Edward] Because Jesus died on the cross

[JAS] Why is that important?

[Edward] because he rose again into life

(1:123)

Here the children are extending the meaning of the symbols used and widening the context in which they understand them. The children were able to draw out additional meaning of the symbols and to relate them to aspects of their lives – school, church and family – which demonstrated a deep understanding.

4.10.2 Why is the Church important for these children?

Church seemed to be important to these children as it is a regular part of their lives at Treeforth Primary School and at home. There were also instances of the children talking about their own churches and experiences in different churches. The children seemed to think of church as a normalised part of their lives, particularly the sacrament of Holy Communion.

4.11 Thick Description – Charles

Charles is a boy who was in session 1 of the Godly Play. He was very thoughtful from the start about the session and engaged with the Godly Play and the wondering afterwards. He was the first to give an answer when asked what he thought was in the box ('something to do with the Godly Play?' (1:1)). He was then quiet during the session until the wondering started. The first question – 'I wonder, which bit of this prayer do you like the most?' (1:5) – he answered, 'I like the candle because it shows that God is the light of the world' (1:7). This immediately showed he understood the symbolism of the candle and was drawing on his prior knowledge to make sense of the objects.

The second question – 'I wonder which part of this prayer is particularly about you?' (1:16) – was also answered first by Charles. He was definite in his reply, 'I think the one with the rock and the rainbow because you said that even if there's rocky parts in your life, God will still forgive us' (1:16). Here he is creating meaning for the stone as being representative of the difficult times in life or misdeeds and seemed to find some comfort in the idea that God will still forgive, even if something has gone wrong.

The third question – 'I wonder, is there any part of this prayer that we could take away and still have everything we need?' (1:22) – generated a lot of discussion, of which Charles was at the centre. He was trying to work through what he would leave out and it was here that his thoughtfulness came to the fore. Belinda pointed to the bubbles and said they could be taken away (1:23). Charles then commented that '...it doesn't really mean anything. It doesn't have like a very big meaning' (1:25 and 26). Belinda countered, 'it still does have a meaning' (1:27) at which Charles amended his reasoning to say, 'but it doesn't have the biggest meaning' (1:28). Belinda agreed with him. Charles further extended his argument to say, 'and Jesus didn't say it in the prayer' (1:30) which referred to the part in the script where the end of the Biblical version of the prayer and the addition more recently of the doxology was acknowledged. He later extended this to argue:

[Charles] I think the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours we could take away.

[JAS] Can you tell me why you would take that away?

[Charles] (thinking) ...and again I don't think he said that in the prayer he said to his friends to I don't think it's as important as those six.

(1:32)

Charles showed through this a respect for the Biblical version of the prayer. He seemed certain that the words Jesus said were more important in the prayer than those which have been added since. He then went on to suggest that the bubbles and the power were not as important as the other parts of the prayer (1:34) which Edward countered, suggesting that the power was important '...because you know that even when you die he's going to be up there in the Kingdom of God and if you've still got the power within you and in heaven you will as well' (1:35). Charles agreed with Edward (1:36) but then reiterated 'I think we should have the bubbles took away mostly' (1:38).

I then gently asked 'So you don't need the Amen on the end then?' (1:39). All the children were horrified, especially Charles who immediately said, 'you need Amen at the end of a prayer' (1:42). He had been focusing on the bubbles themselves rather than the meaning that they were supposed to portray – that of the Amen. Hereby followed a discussion between the children about other parts of the prayer which could be taken away (1:43 – 46) until Charles said, 'I think they are all kind of like important too...I think we need all of them.... I just don't know' (1:47 and 50). There followed a summing up by the children: Edward said that they should definitely keep the light, Anne the love, Charles the hen and Edward the power. However, Charles then suggested that, 'I think there's a couple that are more important than others...because they are all important in different ways' (1:62 and 64). Anne then suggested that the bubbles were the least important, which is what Charles had been saying at the start. He agreed, but modified his argument:

[Charles] Yes but we do need Amen, Amen because it's not really called a prayer if you don't have Amen on the end. You wouldn't call it a prayer because...

[Anne] ...it would just be like a conversation

[Charles] ...Yeah, but we wouldn't know

[Edward] ...When it's finished

[Charles] ...or if it is a prayer or if she is just saying something about God or something.

(1:66-70)

This seems to show that Charles was differentiating between a prayer and other speech, saying that 'it's not really called a prayer if you don't have Amen on the end' (1:66).

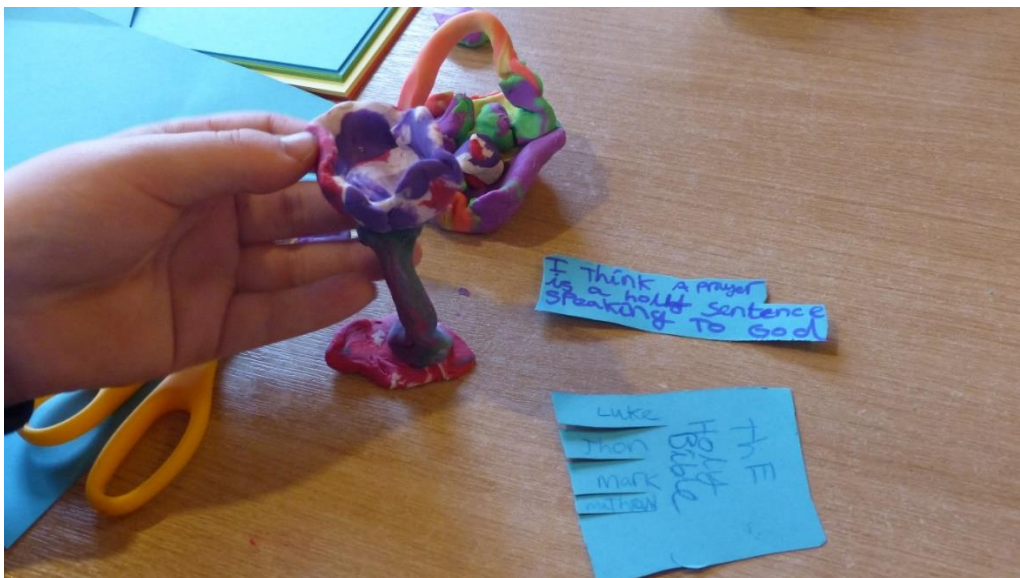
The discussion continued with Charles summing up: 'so I think there's four, five that we should definitely keep and three...these three that we're not quite sure about' (1:76). Edward suggested keeping all of them. Charles reiterated that 'we need Amen on the end' (1:83) and once again summed up for the group, 'I think we're having a problem between these two (the power and the bread)' (1:84 – see appendix 1, section 8 for the convention used in the transcripts regarding brackets), having seemingly decided that the bubbles/Amen were definitely needed, despite his earlier ideas. Charles had changed his mind and explained his thinking as he went along.

The final question – 'I wonder what you think prayer is?' (1:92) – Charles was thoughtful as the others suggested helping others, praying for others and differentiating between asking for appropriate things or for 'five pounds!' (1:93-99). Charles, however, said 'I think prayers are like a holy sentence that you say' (1:100). The children were distracted by their class going to the computer suite, but Charles came back to his idea shortly after and expanded it: 'It's kind of like a holy sentence a prayer...I think it's like when you're speaking to God and saying like when somebody is in hospital you could say please may you help them in hospital' (1:102). This linked back to what the other children had said about prayers helping others. The children discussed children who had been in hospital. Charles then added, '...you could say sorry for...if you were doing something like very naughty like...or like at school you were just bullying someone or

something' (1:106). The discussion then turned to the children's experiences at playtimes.

It came time to put away the Godly Play resources and Charles asked, 'Are they in the order of how important they are?' (1:110), asking later, 'is there a reason they're in that certain order? When Jesus made the prayer is there a reason he's done it in that certain order?' (1:111). This was a fabulous question and one which really made me think. I did not give an answer, replying instead, 'I wonder...that's a really interesting thought, isn't it?' (1:111) but this statement from Charles is testament to the curiosity and deep thinking that he showed throughout the session, and especially in the wondering time.

After hearing the task, Charles was initially nonplussed as to how to go about it. However, he started by writing down his original thought about prayer, that it is a holy sentence. He then worked through his ideas, first drawing the Bible, specifically the Gospels, then relating this, and developing it, to Holy Communion and a basket to hold bread and a cup to hold wine.



Picture 22 – Charles

He commented,

[Charles] I'm going to draw the whole of the Bible.

[JAS] Why are you making the Bible

[Charles] Because it's a holy book and I think it's quite important.

(1:117)

However, he did not elucidate as to why he thought the Bible was important and why, out of all of the scripture, he had chosen the Gospels.

A further exchange revealed that Charles equated prayer with both Catholicism and attending church:

[JAS] ... I have another group that I'm doing this with.

[Charles] Is it in the other class? Do you know who you are going with?

[JAS] I don't at the moment.

[Charles] I think {name omitted} will because he's a Catholic and he always goes to church.

(1: 121)

The session then drew to a close with Charles making no more contributions to the discussion.

4.11.1 How does the example of Charles exemplify the model of prayer in figure 7?

As seen in the above thick description (Geertz, 1993), Charles is a deep-thinking boy who contributed much to the discussions in his group. He explained many of his ideas and seemed to amend them as he went along in response to the contributions of others. His idea that prayer is 'a holy sentence that you say' (1:100) showed an understanding of prayer as something divine and something that potentially had power

to help others. He linked this to both the Bible and Holy Communion and also to going to Church, especially children he knew who were Roman Catholic.

Mapping Charles’ responses onto the model of prayer developed in Figure 6 yielded the following diagram:

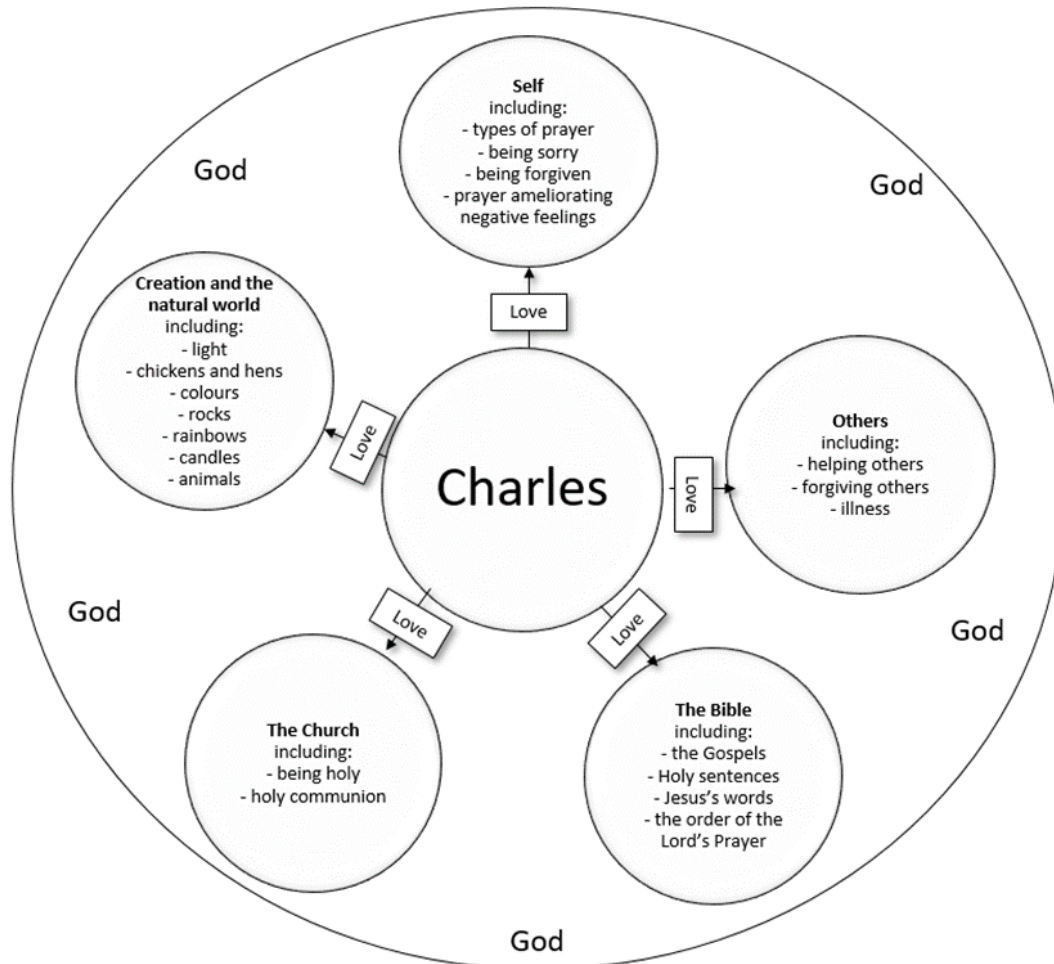


Figure 7 – Charles’ responses as mapped onto the model of children’s prayer

As the diagram shows, Charles’s understanding of prayer maps onto the model of children’s prayer developed by Southward (2020 – see Figure 6) and exemplifies the model. He talked about all the different aspects of prayer – Self, Others, The Bible, The Church and Creation and the Natural World – and show how this model of prayer could be employed to analyse the manner in which a child thinks about prayer. The ways in which this may be useful for practice is discussed further in section 5.3.4.

4.12 What is prayer?

When asked the question, 'what is prayer?', the children were agreed that it is a way of communicating with God. Some also mentioned people and animals who had died, but it was unclear whether they were asking God to look after them or trying to communicate directly with the passed being through prayer. They did not talk about communicating with Jesus through prayer, just God.

Some of the children talked about different types of prayers. Prayers for help, forgiveness, blessing and saying sorry were all mentioned. Many of the children were altruistic in praying for other people. One child mentioned that he 'hope(d) it comes true' (2:69) which indicates that he thought that prayer has direct and identifiable results. Another child, in the same session, talked about worries vanishing when she prayed. The children also identified prayer as being a positive experience using words like 'joyful', 'bless' and expressing a feeling that it was a special time to 'talk to God' and 'be alone with God'. The children also used the word 'love' referring to loving God and others, and God loving them and others.

Given this, for these children prayer seems to be a communication between themselves and God, predicated on Love and focusing on the five core categories which were elicited from the data: Self, Others, The Bible, The Church, Creation and the Natural World.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

In this section I intend to consider what this study has found out (sections 5.1 and 5.2), how this is trustworthy (section 5.3), limitations (section 5.4) and next steps (section 5.5).

5.1 What has this study found out?

5.1.1 Research question 1

How do children understand prayer?

Previous research into children and prayer (see section 2.2) concluded that children had particular ways in which they pray and particular things that they pray about (Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967); that prayer is, in its early form, akin to wishing (Woolley and Phelps, 2001); and that there are stages of development in prayer which children go through (Goldman, 1964; Long et al, 1967; Woolley and Phelps, 2001). Further research by Mountain (2004) concluded that, for a sample of children across different faiths, prayer is a communication with God, related to feelings and hopes, affected by environment and that communal and personal elements plus ritual and symbol are seen as important (see Table 2). Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes (2008) suggested that children's understanding of prayer was not developmental and that for the African-American children in their study, prayer was building a relationship with God. Ola (2018) also found that for children in Nigeria prayer was relational, and there were many elements of ritual in memorised prayers and actions. These studies challenged earlier works which had been based on samples drawn from Western children (e.g Long, Elkind and Spilka, 1967; Woolley and Phelps, 2001)

For Long et al. and Woolley and Phelps, a psychological, quantitative methodology was employed in order to generate data. This, I contend, is not a suitable approach for getting to the heart of what children understand as prayer, given that the nature of prayer is nebulous and a methodology which tries to reduce this to statistical modelling (Long et al., 1967) may not be as fruitful as other, qualitative methodologies. Mountain (2004) filled a gap in approaching prayer from a more qualitative perspective and by

employing grounded theory. Her study focused on the meaning and function of prayer for children across different faiths. Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes (2008) and Ola (2018) made use of semi-structured interviews to generate data in a specific cultural setting. My study is, to the best of my knowledge, unique in that it aims to capture children’s understanding of prayer in a Christian setting, that of a Church of England and Roman Catholic church school (see section 5.3.2). Further research (Stern and Shillitoe, 2018; Shillitoe and Strhan, 2020) concluded that, for children, prayer is relational and they linked this to previous work on children’s spirituality by Hay and Nye (2006) who proposed a model of relational consciousness. However, Stern and Shillitoe (2018) took relational consciousness as a starting point and this approach differs from the Grounded Theory method employed in my thesis.

The children in my study understood prayer as being a communication between themselves (or others) and God. This corroborates findings in Mountain’s work (2004), exemplified in the following table which show how Mountain’s findings and my conclusions match up:

	Mountain (2004, p. 156 cf.)	Southward (2020)
Finding One	Prayer means connection or communication with God	Prayer is a communication between the child and God.
Finding Two	Prayer is related to the Image of God	The image of God was prevalent in the children’s artwork.
Finding Three	Prayer continues within the secular environment	To some extent; Children use the secular vernacular (such as hearts) to explain the sacred.

Finding Four	The meaning or prayer is an inner aspect of life related to feelings and hopes	Prayer is relationship with self, related to positive and negative feelings and the management of these.
Finding Five	The meaning of prayer is affected by the environment	Prayer, for these children, was very much linked to the natural environment.
Finding Six	Both communal and personal elements are involved in the meaning of prayer	Communal meaning and personal meanings are constructed and assimilated by the children in understanding prayer.
Finding Seven	Ritual and Symbol are part of the meaning of prayer.	Rituals, such as putting hands together, are important for children but are not necessary when praying.

Table 6 – Southward and Mountain findings amalgamated

This corroborates Mountain’s findings because the children spoke spontaneously about God and how they would ask Him for something, or say thank you for something and included images of God and the word God in their pieces of work. Given this, God is seen in the model in Figure 8 as all encompassing. The children also spoke about their relationship with God. For the children, relationships were important between Themselves, Others, God and Nature and also with the Church and the Bible. This adds to Humphrey, Hughes and Holmes (2008), Ola (2018), and Shillitoe and Strhan’s (2020) point about prayer being relational. The relationship with the Self was expressed as asking for forgiveness or for a particular need and showed some of the positive affects the children felt when praying. Relationships with others included those who had died and showed an altruistic concern for the wellbeing of others. The children appeared to gain comfort from prayer, especially when faced with difficult circumstances such as

bereavement or illness. Relationship with nature was expressed through a concern for animals and plants. The children seemed to identify with these as being part of God's creation and thereby an important part of prayer for them. This could be because they are able to see creation and appreciate its beauty and wonder and this gave the children a way of partially understanding the nature of God as beautiful and wonderful. Relationship with the Church and the Bible focused mainly on Holy Communion and services they had attended. The children did not think that prayer only happened in church, as the focus on nature and other situations shows, but the church was still important for them as a regular place where prayer was to be found. Given this, the children understood prayer as a relationship between Themselves and God which encompassed their relationships with Others, Nature, the Church, the Bible and Themselves.

The children were also clear that they thought that the use of Amen at the end of a statement was essential to make it into a prayer (see section 4.9.1), evident both in the prayers the children wrote in the response time and also in their discussions. This was particularly important when discussing which part of the Lord's Prayer could be left out and still have all the prayer we need. The bubbles used to symbolise the Amen in the Godly Play materials were initially seen by the children as superfluous when considered along with the rest of the prayer. However, as the discussion in session 1 showed, the children were horrified when they realised the deeper meaning of the bubbles (as Amen) and they were adamant that they needed to be there. Given this, for these children, a prayer, 'a holy sentence' (Charles 1:100), was not a prayer unless it had Amen on the end. This also indicates a division between everyday conversation and prayers which the children seemed to separate. This is important as the children used their own vernacular when talking about prayer (see next paragraph) and the Amen served to differentiate between prayers and general dialogue.

In terms of the language and concepts used by the children when discussing prayer, they tended to use concepts with which they were familiar. This indicates that the children were making meaning in their own vernacular, making use of their own experiences in their lives to help them understand something which is difficult. Examples

of this are shown in the reliance on Nature, superheroes, pets, family, their own church experiences, and familiar Bible stories to explain their thoughts. Given this, children's understanding of prayer is strongly linked to the constructions they have made of their own worlds, rather than being something which is external to them and imposed on them. As the children made meaning in their own ways, this was difficult to analyse as, if the meanings the children made were closely linked to their own life experiences, then these experiences were difficult to access as a researcher meeting the children once. This meant that, while the children's voices were very important and shone through in the analysis by utilising quotations from them and their own work, some more speculative interpretation was necessary. My own constructions of the meanings the children had made about prayer from their own lives were, within limits, as faithful to the children as possible, although my own perspective as a Christian and as a researcher inevitably came into play. In addition, some of the children found it hard to verbalise their ideas and so some interpretation of their pictures was required. This was done through a Christian lens and also taking meaning from some cultural symbols, such as hearts and their wider meaning. However, it is the children's words which are important and is another reason why faithful transcription of the sessions was required.

The relationships which the children described between Self, Others, God, Nature and Creation, Church and the Bible were spoken of in terms of love. The children talked about love and care for others and for God, for God's Creation and Nature and of their connections with the church and stories in the Bible which had particularly interested them. This is why the relationships in the model in Figure 8 are shown to be ones of Love. The children constructed these ideas of prayer from their own experiences, such as bereavement or worries, and from the stimulus of the Godly Play story of the Lord's Prayer. The symbols used in the story telling were imbued with meaning by the children, and they drew on their ideas from popular culture, such as that of the hearts, to help them make meaning from them. The constructions that the children made about their understanding of prayer were elicited from their discussions both in the wondering time and in the work/response time, and from the work that they produced. These were then interpreted by myself as researcher; a tricky task as, while I undoubtedly brought some of my own assumptions and context as a Christian into play, it was important to let the

children's voices shine through. This can be found in the thick description of Charles's contributions and in the discussion of the contributions of the other children in the four sessions. Utilising constructivist grounded theory allowed for the data themselves to lead the analysis and, through repeated engagement with the data through the production of transcripts and intensive coding, for a model of how children understand prayer to be constructed. Given this, the research findings from this data in this particular context, and analysed by this particular researcher, yields a substantive theory. This is summarised below:

5.1.2 Key research findings – part 1

For these children:

- 1) Prayer is a communication between themselves and God.
 - a. Prayer is connected closely with the natural world and creation.
 - b. Prayer is predicated on relationships between Self, Others, The Bible, The Church, and Creation and the Natural World.
 - c. These relationships are ones of Love.
 - d. Children make meaning about prayer in the vernacular of their own experiences.
 - e. The word Amen is important for making a sentence into a prayer.

5.1.3 Model

The findings of this research comprise a substantive theory which emerged from the data which were gathered and analysed using constructivist grounded theory. From this substantive theory, a model was produced (figure 8). A model, according to McGregor (2019), is '... a visible or tangible rendering of an idea that is difficult or impossible to display just in words' (p. 40) and which is derived *from* a theory rather than leading to a theory. The model in figure 8 is derived from the findings in section 5.1.1 and aims to illustrate. The benefit of using a model is that it can represent complex ideas simply and can be an 'inspiring mental image' (p. 41) which is easily memorable for the reader.

This study has found that the children in this study understand prayer as being the relationship between themselves and Self, Others, The Bible, The Church, and Creation and the Natural World, mediated through Love and all encompassed by God. This is represented by the model in figure 8.

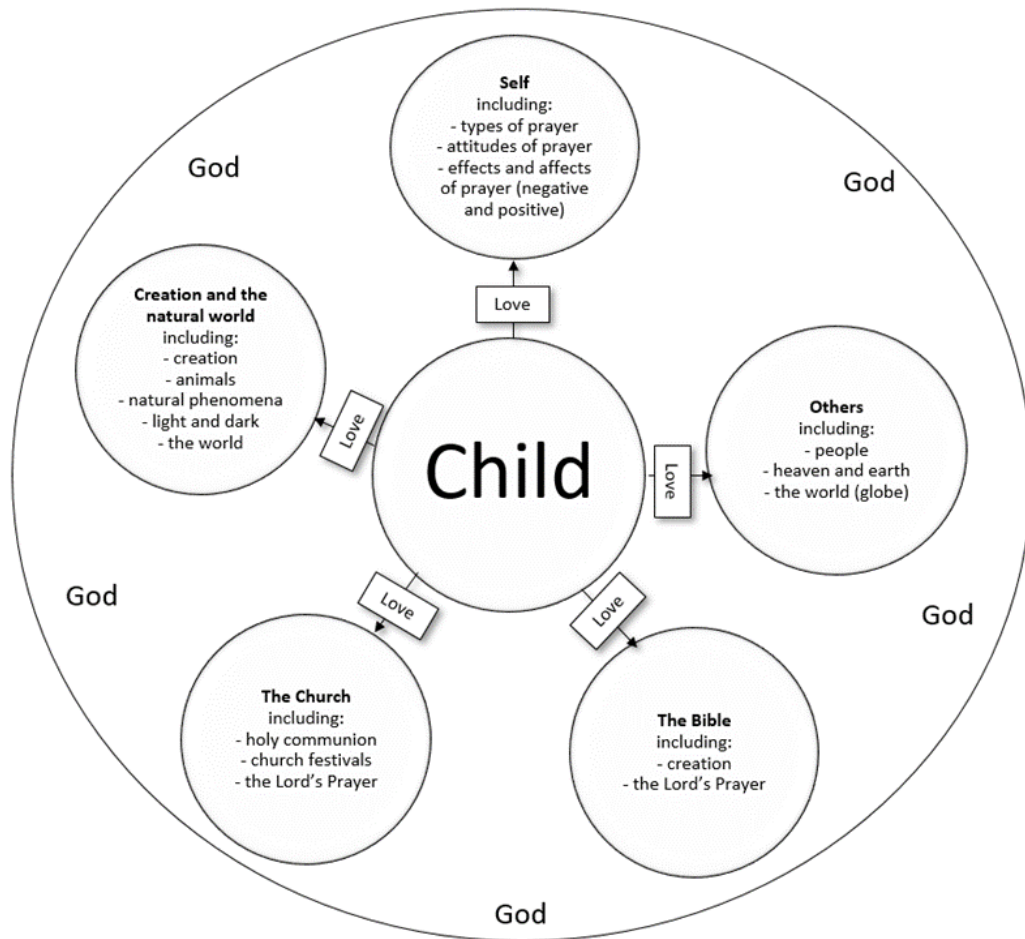


Figure 8 - Children's understanding of prayer (Southward, 2020)

The child is at the centre of the model, surrounded by Self, Others, The Bible, The Church, and Creation and the Natural World. There are relationships between all areas of the model with Love as the overriding force which binds it together. Love is going out from the child in the centre to Self, Others, The Bible, The Church, and Creation and the Natural World. This model has come from the data elicited by the Godly Play sessions. Below is a bar chart showing the number of times each core category was coded which demonstrates that Self, Others and Nature were the most populated categories:

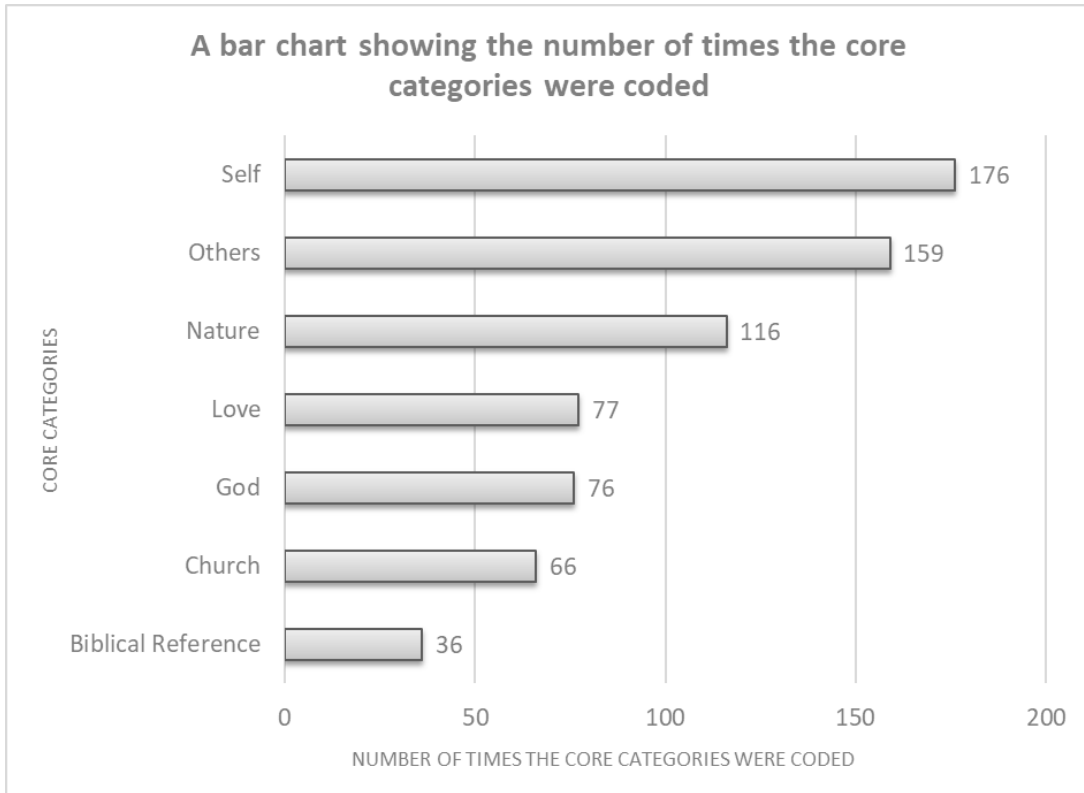


Figure 9 - A bar chart showing the number of times each core category was coded.

The core categories were an amalgamation of subsidiary codes (see appendix 10.1 for the full code book). For example, the Nature and Creation core category can be shown thus:

Nature (including the following)				
Animals	Light	Earth or Land	Clouds	Creation
Chicken or Hen	Candle	Heaven	Rainbow	
Dove	Darkness	Sky	Rock	
Heaven and Earth	Stars	Natural Phenomena	Tree	

Table 7 - Nature and Creation core category

5.1.4 What does the similarity with Berryman's understanding of Godly Play tell us?

It can be seen that the children in this study considered the natural world very important. There are parallels here with Berryman (1991) who commented that

The *goal* of Godly Play is to play the ultimate game for itself. The *players* are God, the self, others and nature.

(Berryman, 1991, p. 8, italics in original)

This quotation is one example of the four aspects of relationship which Berryman returns to in his writings (see also Hyde, 2013) and is a way in which he envisions the individual can 'be in relation [with the Creator God] in a complex living system of relationships with self, others, nature and the Creator' (Hyde, 2013). Berryman's theory of how a child can experience a relationship with God is similar to the model which has emerged from this study, although Berryman does not include the Bible or the Church in his fourfold representation.

In acknowledging that there are similarities between Berryman's ideas and the model developed in this thesis, there are two arguments as to what this may demonstrate. Firstly, while Berryman talks of being in communion with a creator God, he includes God in a model alongside the self – i.e. the child. This implies that he is putting God and the child on the same level. In epistemological terms, the construct of God and the construct of the self which have been made by the child are given equal weighting. This is different from the model which is in this thesis and has a different epistemological underpinning. In the model in Figure 8 the underlying epistemology is a less radical form of constructivism than Berryman has employed. Thus, God is external to the child and part of a real world, which also contains Others, Church, Bible and the Natural World, about which the child constructs meaning. The child is at the centre of their construction of the world and can only know the world partially and fallibly. Given this, the constructions made by the children in this study about prayer are partial and fallible too.

Secondly, the similarities could be said to confirm Berryman's idea of how Godly Play works, given that the method for obtaining the data was a modified version of Godly Play. In this case, while the epistemological differences must be acknowledged, the method (or pedagogy) itself does seem to yield some similar results, without the Bible and the Church in the model of this present study. In his seminal work (1991) Berryman talks of research which he carried out in the 1970s from which Godly Play was developed and refined. Much of the discussion in the book is anecdotal and descriptive rather than a focused research project as such. Berryman himself commented that 'Godly Play developed out of teaching experience and theorizing about what we were doing. Theory and practice constantly informed and checked each other' (Berryman, 2018a, p. 133). Given this, Berryman could be said to have founded his model of understanding how children work with the Christian faith on experience and anecdote rather than as a robust research project. In any case, the scientific empirical approach, suggested by Berryman himself (2018a) does not seem to match with the constructivist paradigm within which he is operating. I would suggest that a qualitative approach to researching Godly Play or utilising Godly Play as a research method could be a far better match epistemologically.

Given this, my research, although it was carried out on a small scale and with a limited number of children, does seem to confirm Berryman's ideas of how children are in relationship with God. This is because we have both theorised that children make meaning through relationships between God, Self, Others and Nature, and, in the case of this study, between the Church and the Bible too. This means that this research both confirms and extends Berryman's model.

5.1.5 Key research findings – part 2

- 2) Berryman's understanding of how children are in relationship with God is confirmed and extended from the results of this research.

5.1.6 Research question 2

What adaptations need to be made to utilise Godly Play as a research method?

As detailed in section 3.3.1, Godly Play is predicated on the basis of a Radical Constructivism held by Berryman. This means that in order to utilise Godly Play as a research method in this thesis, which is based on Critical Realism, adaptations had to be made so that the underlying epistemology and ontology were compatible with each other. Berryman's underlying assumption for Godly Play is that the children make meaning from the stories presented and that these constructions are all legitimate, even though they may be different. Within the underlying epistemology of this thesis, the constructions made by the children are based on a real world, partially known and can be evaluated critically by the child (and others) in order to amend and build a world view. The children were not required to be critical of each other or themselves during the Response Time; however, this did happen naturally at some points where the children discussed and commented on what they and each other were producing. Berryman's underlying assumption is that the Biblical stories presented are a stimulus from which children and adults can construct their own meanings. However, this does not allow for the possibility for any debate or of being wrong, given that all interpretations are deemed to be valid. Given this, the aim of a Godly Play session is to stimulate personal constructions of meaning rather than the transference of meaning.

During the Godly Play sessions in this research, it was important for the children to build and express their own constructions of prayer. The underlying assumption of the use of the Lord's Prayer as a stimulus was that prayer exists, both for the children and for the researcher, and none of the children queried this. Given this, the epistemology of the session presented to the children in this research was of a different type from that of Berryman's radical constructivism. This is because the children were constructing meaning about something which was assumed to exist externally of the child rather than constructing a reality from their own inner world with no constraints imposed by an external reality. The significance of this is that adapting Godly Play in this manner, as a research method, requires a shift in epistemology (see also section 3.4). Consequentially, in its adapted format, Godly Play becomes something a little different

from Berryman's original intentions. Berryman maintains that children are the ultimate meaning makers about their own lives; a view which may be mistaken. If the epistemological foundation is that the children are accessing a real world and making meaning from this in a shared manner (Social Constructivism, Constructivist Grounded Theory and my own, personal view of Critical Realism), then the children are still making meaning for their own lives but bounded by and guided by social practices and an external world. While this appears to run contrary to Berryman, it does allow for Godly Play to be employed fruitfully as a research method within a Critical Realist research design.

In its adapted format, the structure of the session was broadly the same as a Godly Play prescribed session, but certain changes had to be made to this to enable the approach to be utilised as a research tool. Firstly, the sessions usually take place with the participants sitting in a circle on the floor, although there is precedent for Godly Play sessions to take place with participants seated on chairs (when working with elderly people, for example). Because of the camera positions, the children were seated round a table; this enabled the cameras to remain in a constant position and for the Dictaphone to pick up the children's voices. In addition, the response time was also held in the same positions, with the resources being brought to the children rather than the children being able to go and find what they wanted to use. This was for the same reason as above. The wondering questions were slightly adapted in order to enhance the use of this time in answering the research question. The addition of the question 'I wonder what you think prayer is?' was necessary in order to elicit what the children thought about prayer itself, although this is not one of the prescribed questions from the Godly Play approach. However, the question was put to the children in the form of a wondering rather than a straight question and this tapped into the freedom of response which a Godly Play session encourages and allowed the children to express the meaning that they were making from the presented story.

Furthermore, the Response Time was both recorded and partially transcribed. This meant that the meaning that the children made from the activities was part of the research, and an important part at that. As discussed in section 3.6.1, there is a debate

about the ethics of utilising the children's responses in this way. However, in order to gain the data for the research, the children's responses, both verbal and pictorial, were considered. This is not within the remit of a Godly Play approach, which tries to preserve the sanctity of the children's responses. In a Radical Constructivist view, this makes sense as the children are making their own meaning and not communicating this to anyone else. They are also always right. In this research project, however, the children are making meaning, but as this meaning is about a shared, real world, some conclusions about that real world can potentially be drawn from the constructions the children have made. In order to draw conclusions from the data gained, in order to make this research project meaningful, there has to be some consensus between children and researcher about what prayer is; this allows for some conclusions to be drawn as to how these children understand prayer. If, as with Berryman's Godly Play method, the children are constructing their own ideas which cannot be adequately shared or explained to another person, then this negates the research agenda. Given this, the change in epistemology for this research project was necessary in order to allow for the constructions expressed by the children in their responses, verbal and pictorial, to be utilised as research data by the researcher and to allow for a construction of what the children understand to be made by the researcher. While Berryman does not think that children's work should be used in this way, he does, in fact, do just that in his own writings, giving examples of children's work and their responses and a commentary on his understanding of these (Berryman, 1991). This does open the door for making use of children's responses, albeit with humility and appropriate ethical approval.

While Berryman holds that the making of meaning is individual and that texts hold no ultimate authority, there is a fundamental inconsistency in his insistence that the words and actions of a Godly Play session are followed verbatim, as far as possible, from the written texts. Here Berryman is asserting that the texts he has developed have authority, although the meaning that is being made from the texts is fluid. This implies that his interpretation is the ultimate one, despite each retelling being, itself, an interpretation. This reveals a paradox in his argument where in a Godly Play session constructions are not critiqued or challenged as they are individually created but textual

authority is both present, as an assertion that the scripts are learned by heart, and absent, in that texts hold no ultimate meaning.

5.1.7 Key Research Findings – part 3

3) Godly Play can be adapted as a research method

- a. Modifications to Godly Play were justified in relation to my own knowledge paradigm (i.e. Critical Realist).
- b. The pedagogy helps children to develop and express their understanding of the world through social interaction.
- c. There is an inconsistency in Berryman’s knowledge paradigm (i.e. Radical Constructivist) in terms of textual authority.

5.2 What are the implications of these findings?

5.2.1 Research question 1

How do children understand prayer?

This study potentially has important implications for current practice in Church schools and Christian places of worship which work with children. While the study is limited in its scope (as discussed in section 5.4) if, as this study claims, children understand prayer in a particular way (see Figure 8), then this needs to be understood by people working and praying with children. If, as suggested, children find a way into prayer through the natural world, then this could be used more in prayer situations with children to help them to develop their own prayer life. This could help reform the practice of adults leading prayers in worship and open the way forward for children’s voices to be heard and their conceptualisation of prayer acknowledged. This will be discussed further in section 5.3.4.

5.2.2 Research question 2

What adaptations need to be made to utilise Godly Play as a research method?

As discussed in section 5.1.6, Godly Play can be adapted successfully as a research method with some adjustments. The implications of this are that the storytelling and

wondering followed by response time structure is well suited to eliciting rich data from children. While changes had to be made to the underlying philosophical assumptions of Berryman's pure Godly Play pedagogy, these changes still allowed children's voices and constructions to come to the fore. Given this, adjustments made to the pedagogy of Godly Play, which are made within the broader philosophical arena of constructivism and a Critical Realist theoretical lens, allow for the approach to be utilised as a research method rather than a pedagogy. This is best suited to situations where rich, thick descriptions are required and the constructions made by the children are of prime importance.

5.3 How is this study trustworthy?

In order to be trustworthy, Charmaz (2014) recommends that a study should demonstrate credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. These will be considered below in relation to this study.

5.3.1 Credibility

This study demonstrates familiarity with the topic of prayer both from a theoretical perspective through the literature and through the analysis of the children's data. This is a limited, bounded study and within this setting and at this point in time, for these children, the data gathered are sufficient to warrant the claims made of them because the data were scrutinised in-depth and categories and observations were compared with the help of the Grounded Theory methods. The children's responses, both verbal and selected photographs of their work, are available in the appendices to this thesis for assessment of these claims. The transcripts are not full as extraneous chatter was not transcribed in the play sessions at the end (see section 5.4). This was to focus the analysis on pertinent data rather than confusing the argument. This was a conscious, analytical decision and was consistent in all four sessions.

5.3.2 Originality

Originality is the ability of the study to demonstrate that it has concluded something new and contributed to wider knowledge about the topic. Wellington (2013)

proposed several ways in which this can be demonstrated, four of which are exemplified below:

Firstly, there is the building of new knowledge. This study has contributed new understanding about how children understand prayer. This is because the conclusions which this study has come to with regard to the way in which children understand prayer are, in part, different from those which have come before, and also, in part, confirmatory of what has been written before. Differences are the focus by the children on Nature and relationships between the Child, Self, Others, Nature, the Bible, and the Church. Similarities include the discussion in section 5.1.3 about how the findings in this thesis confirm Berryman's ideas of how children have a relationship with God. To the best of my knowledge, these conclusions have not been reached before about children and how they understand prayer.

Secondly, the use of an original approach to the problem. In this thesis, the use of Godly Play as a research method is innovative and in line with current developments in Godly Play where the method is both being researched and used to help research (for example, Steinhäuser and Øystese, 2018). The experiences and practicalities of utilising Godly Play in this way can contribute to the body of literature about Godly Play as well as that of how children understand prayer. In section 5.1.6, a discussion of the changes required in order to utilise Godly Play as a research method concluded that, with some alterations to the underlying philosophy of Godly Play, this approach could be employed fruitfully to elicit rich data from the children. This is borne out in the resulting data from the Godly Play sessions which were held as part of this research. Both the verbal contributions to the discussion and the work the children produced were used as data and were a rich source of information about how the children constructed their ideas about prayer.

Thirdly, revisiting an existing debate about children and prayer, this study offers a new insight into how the children in this study understand prayer. This builds on the work of Goldman (1964), Long et al (1967) and Woolley and Phelps (2001) by approaching the question in an original way, namely through the use of a qualitative

method. It also extends the work of Mountain (2004) as some of her conclusions are mirrored in this study (see Table 6). Here the originality comes from the use of a novel research method and a different approach to the subject of how children understand prayer which is qualitative in nature.

Fourthly, this study creates new syntheses between the work of Berryman and this study by adding to the model held by Berryman of how children experience God (see section 5.1.3). In addition, this thesis also offers a connection between the conclusions drawn here and those of Long et al (1967), Woolley and Phelps (2001), Mountain (2004) and Shillitoe and Strhan (2020). This, to the best of my understanding, brings together the main papers on the topic and adds new knowledge through the use of an innovative method. Originality is shown in the synthesis of these different ideas and offering a new way of thinking about how children understand prayer.

5.3.3 Resonance

Resonance demonstrates that the researchers have constructed concepts that not only represent their research participants' experience, but also provide insight to others. (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2020, p. 13)

The resonance of this study relates to the way in which it addresses both liminal meanings (see next paragraph) and is cross-checked to ensure that the data are internally consistent. In order to demonstrate this, the method by which the data were gathered generated rich findings and enabled thick description of the children's contributions. The categories which emerged came from the application of robust Grounded Theory methods and a system of cross checking between different video and audio streams and across the four separate sessions. Themes emerged from considering the contributions of all the children as a collective and separately. This means that the themes and categories are grounded in the data and are able to be traced back through the transcripts and pictures.

Liminal meanings are those on the boundaries of understanding. Coming from the Latin *limin-* (*limen*) (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014) meaning threshold, the word implies meanings which are on the edge of current knowledge or on the threshold of

new knowledge; this can also be seen as originality. This study contributes to new knowledge in the following ways: firstly, in addressing a gap in the literature concerning how children understand prayer and secondly, by proposing a model of children's prayer. As the research was conducted using Grounded Theory, claims of reliability are limited to the interpretations elicited from the data by the researcher in partnership with the children. This has the corollary that if the same research design was utilised by another researcher with different children, the conclusions drawn could be very different. This links to an underlying understanding of the world as partially accessible by humans who interpret the world in different ways. Given this, the research conclusions are limited by context and in applicability to the wider world (see also section 5.4). This does not, however, mean that the research is worthless as it contributes to the canon of understanding about prayer, which, it could be argued, is itself liminal being on the edges of understanding between humans and a divine God. The thick description inherent in this research illuminates the way in which these children understand prayer and may ring true with other practitioners in their contexts. In that case, this research may well resonate with these practitioners and be a catalyst for change and reflection.

5.3.4 Usefulness

The usefulness of a study relates to both the way in which it can be utilised in everyday life and the contribution it may make to the wider research community. This study could be particularly useful for people working with children in Church School settings, churches, diocesan leaders and clergy. This is because an understanding of how children understand prayer is of importance when worshipping with children. This understanding needs to be acknowledged in both daily acts of worship in schools and for Church School policy and practice as well as for adults working with children.

- 1) Children see prayer as holistic and relating to many parts of their lives – for example, nature and the natural world as well as themselves, others, God, the Church and the Bible; they understand prayer in terms of their own lives and experiences. Given this, collective prayer about concepts which are alien to the children may not be fruitful as the children may not be able to understand. This

means that prayers with children should be respectful of their lives and the vernacular they use to communicate in order to help children access prayer.

- 2) Deeper meanings may be being expressed through prayer requests which may seem inappropriate for adults. An example of this may be a child wanting to pray for an animal or a well-known character from popular culture. The child could well be working through something profound for them but expressing it in the vernacular with which they are familiar.
- 3) Prayer can be a way of rationalising and dealing with bereavement (see also Shillitoe and Strhan, 2020). This could be very helpful when dealing with a bereavement in school or in a family. This is because the children in this study thought of prayer as a way of staying close to people or pets who had passed on. They also found prayer a comfort in difficult situations. Given this, in a church school where prayer is said regularly, this aspect of worship could be of comfort and help to the children when approaching conversations about death and loss.

Godly Play

- 1) As this study has demonstrated, the Godly Play approach is particularly helpful when working with children both for settling them into an activity and giving them time and space to express themselves. This is because the structure of a Godly Play session allows for creativity within it and all responses are honoured. The origins of Godly Play were to allow children to explore existential questions and to make meaning for themselves about these in response to an encounter with Bible stories (Berryman, 1991). This original intent, plus the findings of this research project, imply that the Godly Play approach could be widened and used fruitfully for helping children to cope with other life events, even if not necessarily based on a Bible story.
- 2) The wondering technique and the free response time elicit rich data from the participants. This implies that, with the correct ethical considerations, the Godly Play approach is fruitful when used as a research method. This could be made use of more widely when working with children in a research situation in order to honour their voices, allow them space and time and, within the safe structure,

to wonder about other concepts. I would suggest that mimicking the approach taken in this thesis, with appropriate ethical permissions and considerations, makes Godly Play style sessions ideal for helping children express their ideas.

5.4 What are the limitations of these findings?

There are limitations to this study which mean that the theoretical model generated is a substantive theory rather than a formal theory (see section 3.5.1). Firstly, the model relates specifically to the 22 children involved in the sessions, at that time and in that place. Secondly, the time frame was significant as two of the groups were very unsettled by the sessions being at the end of a Friday afternoon. Thirdly, the place is significant as it was a Church of England and Roman Catholic Aided school. This has, by its nature, a particular understanding of the Christian faith and of prayer and the children had been steeped in this understanding during their time there. In addition, the admissions policy of the school is to admit children from families who worship in local churches from both denominations as a priority. Although the children were not asked about their denominational affiliation or church attendance, the implication of the admissions policy is that the children in the school are drawn from the wider Christian community and this will also have influenced the results in this study.

While working with the transcripts I became aware of instances of leading questions, or questions which were phrased in such a way as to elicit a specific response. These mainly occurred in session 1 and both led the children and had implied meanings.

The questions identified were:

a) 'Do you think it's something special?' – This implies that there is something special about the golden box which the children needed to recognise. This could have led the children to think that there was something special in the box and raised expectations, rather than letting them create this meaning for themselves. This also links prayer to something special, implying that there is indeed something special about the box and the children need to recognise this.

b) 'So I wonder, what you think prayer is? You said it needed an amen on the end.'
– The children had already said that a prayer needed an amen on the end. This was repeating the phrase that they had come up with and the repetition could have heightened the importance of the phrase unduly. However, repeating back what the children have said is also a strategy used within Godly Play in order to try to remain impartial by reusing the words which the children themselves have utilised.

c) 'Is it perfect as it is?' (phrase came up twice) – These were two instances of putting words into the children's mouths. They were struggling to express what they thought, and I jumped in and suggested an idea before they had had time to think it through.

d) 'Why's that important to you?' - Implying that it is important, or should be important, to the children.

These phrases and questions may have influenced the children to answer or think in a certain way. It was not intentional leading, but it must be acknowledged that this may have affected the data gathered. They thereby required reflexive consideration as to the potential effects that they had on the children's responses.

The choice of script itself also may have affected the results. If a different script had been chosen, then the data and the conclusions drawn from them may have been different. Choice of script was key and, given that the focus of this study is prayer, a script which had prayer implicit in it was chosen. In retrospect, this had many assumptions inherent in it and another script may have been a better choice. On checking the transcriptions, I noticed a use of the first-person plural - we - several times in the Godly Play session. While this usage is central to both the Godly Play script and the Lord's Prayer itself, it has some assumptions behind it:

Firstly, at no point in the session or before did I ask the children or the parents whether they were Christian or not. This was an assumption, given the context of the school, and is one which may not have been correct. The Godly Play pedagogy is designed specifically to teach Christian beliefs and Bible stories so there is an implicit

assumption in the script that those listening subscribe to the ethos and beliefs being spoken about. The use of the first-person plural – we and our – assumed that the children, and me as storyteller, were included in a specific community of belief. It implies a complicity of beliefs and that prayer is something good that we should be doing in imitation of Jesus. Returning to the point made in section 1.2, the children at Treeforth Primary School were in a covenanted relationship between the family and the school in that the Christian nature of the school community was known before entry and the parents made aware of this. This implies that the children were being educated in a Christian setting by choice and that the families as a whole subscribed to the ethos. This also implies a tacit inclusivity in the school community to which the children belong, and, given this, using an inclusive form of prayer was appropriate.

Secondly, the use of we and our implies an exclusivity as well as inclusivity as described above. While Christians believe that they are loved by God, an implication is that others may not be; hence, exclusivity. Given that the children did not say outright that they were Christian it could be argued that children who were not Christian may have felt left out or ostracised by the whole session. However, I would counter this by saying that none of the children refused to join in and they all produced something in the response time. Graham's response was possibly the least obviously focused on prayer, and he was unable to explain what he had made so some assumptions, based on the contributions of the other children, were made. He could have been working through something big for himself, but, to paraphrase, he may know more than he can tell (Polanyi, 1966). Exclusivity – others – is a flip side of inclusivity – ourselves – and needs to be acknowledged.

Thirdly, neutrality – While the aim of a researcher is to be impartial, the Godly Play session used in this research could not have been neutral due to the phrasing of the Lord's Prayer itself. The prayer is written in the first-person plural and is designed to be cohesive. If the Godly Play script itself was rephrased, then the prayer itself would not be honoured and it would have changed the relationship between me as storyteller and the children. For example: Our Father would become Your Father, and the phrase in the

script, 'God loves us as much as a mother hen loves its chicks' would become, 'God loves you as much as a mother hen loves its chicks'. The use of the second person sets up a barrier between the children and the storyteller, implying that the storyteller is somehow distant from the prayer and the storytelling rather than in the story with the listeners.

Another limitation was due to human error. The Godly Play sessions followed a script which I had done my best to learn but on watching the videoed sessions I realised that I had not remembered it exactly. This could have affected the reliability of the results as none of the sessions were identical; this, however, is characteristic of the Godly Play approach, allowing for adaptations for each specific group. Not having a doorkeeper to help manage behaviour was an issue as I had to manage this at the same time as remembering the script and being keenly aware of the cameras. Nerves played a part in this too. While I took the time to settle the children at the start of the sessions, including going through ethical matters verbally with them, they were with an unfamiliar adult. It would, perhaps, have been better to have had the time and opportunity to meet with the children at another time to be more familiar to them rather than a stranger. In sessions 3 and 4, the headteacher of the school came into the room to observe short parts of the sessions. I was pleased for this to happen, both from a safeguarding point of view and how it demonstrated an openness to what was happening, but it was distracting both for me and the children. Furthermore, limitations in the recordings where the children talked over each other and made it very difficult to transcribe their ideas was a difficulty. The two cameras and Dictaphone worked well together but there were still moments, especially in session 2, where the responses were masked by extraneous noise.

5.5 Further research areas

Further research into the potential links between children's spirituality and prayer could be fruitful. There could well be a connection between Relational Consciousness (Hay and Nye, 2006) and a relational understanding of prayer which has been posited by Shillitoe and Strhan (2020) and exemplified in the model of prayer in this thesis. In

order to investigate this link, and to extend the understanding that these children have of prayer, use of videoed Godly Play sessions plus a verbal protocols approach, where the participants watch the film back critically and make comment on what they have said and done (Riordan, 2020), could be employed.

A point to note for another time would be to take a short video clip of the pictures with the audio of the child describing so that the two were tied together much more tightly for analysis. This would not involve taking a picture of the child themselves. This would have helped both the analysis and the children's voices to be physically heard and honoured. I would also have a doorkeeper to help with the management of the children and resources.

Other improvements to the study could be made by using a different script to stimulate discussion. The Lord's Prayer had assumptions behind it (see 3.4.5), not least that prayer exists to begin with. More time for the responses, especially in sessions 2 and 4 which were constrained by the home-time bell, would also be advantageous to allow the children to explore fully the topic and materials.

Use of more sophisticated recording equipment (for example, a 360-degree video camera and a 360 microphone, or a boom microphone) may help to avoid the problem of capturing quiet voices and distinguishing children who talked over each other. In addition, use of software such as NVivo for Teams would enable researchers to collaborate on coding the data, even when working remotely from each other, enabling triangulation and checking of the coding.

Finally, an investigation, using the same techniques as utilised with the children (Godly Play) into how adults understand prayer would be an interesting comparison with how children view prayer, particularly in a church school setting.

5.6 Conclusion

5.6.1 Why was this research needed?

Much of the prior literature about prayer has been from an adult perspective, with a few exceptions. Long, Elkind and Spilka's work (1967) was a catalyst for my interest in how children understand prayer as this was not defined in their paper. Woolley and Phelps (2001) replicated the study and concluded, along with Long, Elkind and Spilka, that there could be a developmental aspect to children's understanding of prayer. Both studies link this to a psychological theory of mind, but do not illuminate how children understand prayer. A more recent study by Mountain (2004) focused on the meaning and function of prayer for children, but the conclusions she drew are not comparable with this present study as the contexts are very different. Stern and Shillitoe (2018) and Shillitoe and Strhan (2020) drew comparisons between relational consciousness (Hay and Nye, 2006) and children's understanding of prayer; however, they started from the premise of relational consciousness rather than building a grounded theory and they surveyed children and adults in both religious and non-religious schools. Hence there is a gap in the literature concerning children's understanding of prayer in a Christian context such as a church school in England.

5.6.2 How were the research questions investigated?

The question of how children understand prayer has been investigated using a Godly Play style, video-based method which was analysed using a Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology. This came about because, to the best of my knowledge, there is a gap in the literature as to how children understand prayer. Godly Play was chosen as an innovative research method, partly due to the richness of responses it can elicit, but also in line with a growing trend for using Godly Play in and for research (for example, Steinhäuser and Øystese, 2018). The use of video recording allowed for iterative analysis using grounded theory methods and an ability to see who was speaking; it also allowed for data capture to be managed in such a way that checking between cameras and audio was possible. NVivo 12 was used as a data management and analytical tool and was chosen for its ability to handle multiple videos, audio and picture data.

The theoretical basis for this study was founded on there being one ontologically real world, to which humans, including children, have partial and fallible access. Knowledge and understanding of this world are constructed by humans and critically evaluated so as to confirm or amend their worldviews. I have argued that this theoretical understanding of the world is mirrored in the underlying philosophy of an adjusted Godly Play approach, and also of constructivist grounded theory.

5.6.3 What has this study found out?

5.6.3.1 Research question 1 – How do children understand prayer?

This study has found out that the children involved considered prayer to be a relationship between Themselves and God. They also considered that relationships between Themselves and Others, Nature and Creation, the Bible and the Church were important for being able to explain what they thought prayer was. These relationships are ones of Love (see Figure 8). Children make meaning about prayer in their own vernacular, pertaining to their own constructions of their lives, and this means that, when praying with children, respect for their ideas about their own lives and the vocabulary and concepts with which they are familiar is key.

5.6.3.2 Research question 2 – What adaptations need to be made to Godly Play to utilise it as a research method?

In order to adapt Godly Play as a research method for this study, the underlying epistemology was adjusted to fit with a Social Constructivist paradigm. This meant that meaning could be shared between the participants and contrasts with Berryman's stance that meaning rests solely with the child and cannot be adequately shared. In addition, utilising the children's responses both in the wondering time and their work from the response time required close ethical attention so that the children were fully aware of how their work would be utilised and that they would be on camera. This meant that the Godly Play sessions were in the style of the original Godly Play as developed by Berryman but not full sessions including a feast.

5.7 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this study has found that for these children a model of prayer focusing on relationships between Self, Others, The Bible, The Church, and Creation and the Natural World, and operationalised through love for each of these exemplifies their understanding. Given the limited nature of the study, and the specific location in a Church of England and Roman Catholic aided school, this is a substantive, bounded theory. However, as a research model using Godly Play and in terms of children's understanding of prayer, this study is both innovative and significant for work with children in Christian church schools and places of worship, and further develops an understanding of how children understand prayer.

6 Postscript – My Reflections

Conducting this study has been both a joy and a frustration. A joy for the delight in finding out new things about the world, about myself and about the children, and a frustration as I realised how little I actually know and how much there is still to discover.

Speaking reflexively, I have found increased confidence in myself through this process. The act of both carrying out the fieldwork and writing up as well as immersing myself in data and defending my ideas in tutorials and at conferences has been liberating. I now understand that study is a strength and my enjoyment. I discovered that I had been deliberately omitting my contributions from the transcripts and overcoming my distaste of seeing and hearing myself on film was hard. However, to be accurate, this needed to be done. I did it!

Working with children has always been a joy and their sheer enthusiasm for an activity which was difficult and at which many adults who I explained it to balked, was an amazing experience. To be trusted by the children with some difficult and personal revelations was an honour and I trust I have done their courage justice in the transcripts, as well as ensure their anonymity is secure.

Learning more about prayer has also been a deep, personal journey. I have, as stated earlier, always prayed, but having to consider both how others pray and my own relationship to prayer has been fulfilling and disquieting at the same time. When I am asked my research topic, I have sometimes been asked how my prayer life is? Well, I have to admit it is as rosy and hit and miss as anyone else's. Despite all the book learning and the conversations with the children, it is still a difficult area. I think that is why it needs practice and patience.

This study is, I hope, the beginning, not the end. It has certainly raised more questions than it has given answers! I look forward to the development of this interest and the opportunities it may bring.

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8 Appendix 1 - Transcripts

Conventions used in the transcripts:

[JAS] – The researcher

[name] – Name of child speaking (pseudonym)

(clarification) – clarification from the camera, e.g. which colour underlay being pointed to

{action} – action made by the children or the researcher

8.1 Session 1 transcript

Line No.	Content
1	<p>[GP Session] [JAS] What do you think's in the box? Ooh, big question. Yes? [Charles] Something to do with the Godly Play? [JAS] Something to do with Godly play - you're absolutely right. Now, Jesus knew a lot about prayer and prayer's something we're going to be talking about this afternoon. He knew an awful lot about prayer. Jesus used to go on his own to pray, sometimes he went with other people to pray, sometimes he went with children to pray and he used to reach out his hands and bless the children. So, one day Jesus's friend came to him and they said, Jesus, can you teach us how to pray because we don't know. And he said, yes of course I can. {put out underlay and green felt} [JAS] When Jesus said God loves us he said God loves us as much or even more than a hen might love her chicks. So that's why when we start this special prayer that Jesus taught we say Our Father</p>
2	<p>[Edward] That's the candle to show Jesus is the light of the world.</p>

3	<p>[JAS] It could well be, yeah, because Jesus said that's he's holy, God is very, very holy, that's why we say hallowed, hallowed be thy name, really holy and the light of the world just as you said.</p> <p>{putting out next square of felt}</p> <p>And God loves everybody, He loves all the people in the north, all the people in the south, all the people in the east and all the people in the west.</p> <p>{Children spontaneously joining in with GP script}</p> <p>Everyone in the world, God loves. For thy kingdom come and thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.</p> <p>Now, God has promised to give us everything we need, even our bread. And it's not just the bread that we eat for breakfast in a honey sandwich or marmite sandwich, not just that bread but everything that we need to nourish us and keep us going. Give us this day our daily bread.</p> <p>{putting out next felt square}</p> <p>Now God also knows it's not that easy to be good all the time...not that easy, even for adults it's not that easy.... it's really hard, and so God promises to love everybody even if they do something wrong. Forgive us our sins. And this part of the prayer is about what we can do for others, forgive those who sin against us.</p> <p>{putting out next felt square}</p> <p>Sometimes there's rocky bits that are difficult to get over. Lead us not into temptation. But God says he will always forgive...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. God sent the rainbow as a sign that he would always forgive.</p>
4	<p>[Edward] Noah's Ark (referring to the rainbow)</p>
5	<p>[JAS] Noah's Ark, yes. Now that bit is the end of the prayer that Jesus taught his friends but there's a little bit more to it these days. So, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen. I'll put the bubbles there.</p> <p>That was the special prayer that Jesus taught his friends. I wonder, which bit of this prayer do you like the most?</p>
6	<p>[Edward] I like that bit {pointing to the 4 red hearts} because it shows that God loves all of us</p>
7	<p>[Charles] I like the candle because it shows that God is the light of the world</p>
8	<p>[JAS] Thank you. It's a lovely light shining there isn't it? Which bit do you like the best?</p>
9	<p>[Anne] The power and the glory...</p> <p>[JAS] The power and the glory? Why's that?</p> <p>[Anne] Because it shows us that He has all the power to comfort us</p>
10	<p>[JAS] Oh that's a lovely thing to say. Do you know which bit you like the best?</p>

11	[Belinda] I like the one with the hen and chicks on there [JAS] Why do you like that bit the best?
12	[Belinda] Because it shows that he loves us all each and he loves us like more than he said
13	[JAS] Thank you. I'll put it back on the green...back in the field. [JAS] Do you know which bit you like the best? [Darwin] I think I like this bit best {pointing to the red underlay with the hearts}
14	[Darwin] I think I like this bit best [pointing to red underlay with red hearts] because it reminds us that God loves us even when we are being naughty or being good.
15	[JAS] Thank you. I wonder, I wonder which part of this prayer is particularly about you...oh that's a big question isn't it...I wonder which part is particularly about you?
16	[Charles] I think the one with the rock and the rainbow because you said that even if there's rocky parts in your life God will still forgive us.
17	[Belinda] I think it's the one with all the hearts on...I don't really know [JAS] It's just the one that attracts you the most?
18	[Edward] I like the one that (Charles) liked because I have a sister that's younger than me but she distracts me when I do my work it's really tempting and it's like a really rocky part of me but sometimes I do it but sometimes I don't but I know God will always be there to forgive me if I do
19	[JAS] A special rainbow
20	[Darwin] I think I agree...yeah...my brother is a bit annoying sometimes
21	[discussion about annoying siblings and being tempted!]
22	[JAS] I wonder, is there any part of this prayer that we could take away and still have everything we need? What do you think?
23	[Belinda] I think it could be [points at the bubbles after a long pause thinking]
24	[JAS] - the bubbles? Take those away...why don't...why do you think we don't need that bit?
25	[Charles] Because it doesn't really mean anything

26	[Charles] It doesn't have like a very big meaning
27	[Belinda] It still does have a meaning
28	[Charles] But it doesn't have the biggest meaning
29	[Belinda] It still has a meaning but it is not as important as all the other ones. [bubbles]
30	[Charles] And Jesus didn't say it in the prayer. He said his friends he didn't ...[indistinct]
31	[Edward] I think we could take away that one [points to purple underlay with gold heart] this one's kind of saying that he loves people in the south west north and east [gestures to red underlay with red hearts] even if they do kind bad things. That one [red] is kind of saying that one but that one is saying more but that one [purple] s saying both the same things. But that's not just for one bit but for all the compass bits. [focused on the red hearts; take away purple and gold heart].
32	[Charles] I think the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours we could take away [JAS] Can you tell me why you would take that away? [Charles] {thinking}...and again I don't think he said that in the prayer he said to his friends so I don't think it's as important as those six...
33	[Darwin] What Jesus said I think is like the most important parts is what he actually said
34	[Charles] Yeah, and then those two {power and bubbles} aren't the most important.
35	[Edward] I think that one's quite important because you know that even when you die he's going to be up there in the Kingdom of God and if you've still got the power within you and in heaven you will as well.
36	[Charles] Oh yeah!
37	[Edward] So that's why I wouldn't take that one away.
38	[Charles] I agree with [Belinda] I think we should have the bubbles took away mostly
39	[JAS] So you don't need the Amen on the end then?

40	[shock!!]
41	[Charles] Oh no!
42	[Charles] You need Amen at the end of a prayer.
43	[Edward] I think the one that...
44	[Belinda] There's one that I think that maybe isn't really important it's like a [?]... it's the one with the bread on. [Points to yellow underlay with bread on]
45	[Edward] So like that one says give us our daily bread that means we're not getting Jesus's body so Jesus can't come into us so I think we should keep that one on, don't you?
46	[Anne] I think we should take that one away because it is they are basically repeating [Anne points to the purple underlay with gold heart] ...
47	[Charles] I think they are all kind of like important too...I think we need all of them.
48	[Darwin] Important when he says he loves everybody...
49	[Belinda] I think we should keep that one...
50	[Charles] I just...I just don't know...
51	[Anne] I don't either...
52	[Belinda] It's really frustrating...
53	[JAS] Maybe we need all of it.
54	[Charles] Yeah, that's what I was thinking.
55	[Edward] We should definitely keep the light because there is always one light that shines in the darkness
56	[Charles] Yeah
57	[Anne] And we should definitely keep the love
58	[Charles] We should keep the light and the hen.
59	[Charles] I think we definitely need to keep that as well.

60	[Edward] Yeah me too.
61	[Edward] There's some that we really do need to keep Amen, we need to keep the power. That one I'm not sure about {gold heart on purple underlay} I think we should keep all of them.
62	[Charles] I think there's a couple that are more important than others
63	[All] Yeah
64	[Charles]...because they are all important in different ways
65	[Anne] Yes I think that this one {Bubbles} is the least important
66	[Charles] Yes but we do need amen, amen because it's not really called a prayer if you don't have Amen on the end...you, you wouldn't call it a prayer because
67	[Anne]...it would just be like a conversation
68	[Charles]...yeah but we wouldn't know
69	[Edward]...when it's finished
70	[Charles]...or if it is a prayer or if she is just saying something about God or something
71	[Anne]...so we should definitely keep ...this is quite important even though we don't think it is.
72	[Edward] Yeah
73	[Belinda] This is definitely important even though we don't think it is.
74	[Edward] I think we should keep all of them.
75	[Edward]...God loves us even more than a hen loves its chicks.
76	[Charles] So I think there's four...five that we should definitely keep and three...these three that we're not quite sure about.
77	[Charles] ...
78	[Edward]...no I think we should keep them all.
79	[Anne] Yeah I think we should

80	[Anne] which ones
81	[Belinda] There's just two
82	[Belinda] like this one and this one
83	[Charles] Yeah, but we need amen on the end
84	[Charles] I think we're having a problem between these two. (power and bread)
85	Yeah
86	[Edward] No I think we should keep the kingdom and the power and both of them
87	[Belinda] I think we should take all of them
88	[Edward] I don't think we should take any away
89	[Charles] And it looks very colourful as well.
90	[Belinda] Everyone loves colours, I mean who doesn't like colours?
91	[All]... [debate about colours]
92	[JAS] So I wonder, what you think prayer is? You said it needed an amen on the end.
93	[Edward] I think a prayer is when you are talking to God and you are saying like please help us to do that so he knows what you want him to do...not like please can I have five pounds
94	[Anne] It's like helping us
95	[Edward] Helping others.... helping others
96	[Charles]...please can I have five pounds for a prayer?!
97	[Edward] Yeah, not like...you're allowed to pray for...pretend my uncle died, I'm allowed to pray for him or if I had a pet they died you are able to pray for them say they are close to you
98	[Anne] Yes, like please help them in heaven

99	[Edward] Yes because they are close to you people you know and your friends that are in heaven they might be really close to you so you want to keep them you might want to pray for them.
100	[Charles] I think prayers are like a holy sentence that you say
101	[...distracted by class going to the computers!]
102	[Charles] It's kind of like a holy sentence a prayer...I think it's like when you're speaking to God and saying like when somebody is in hospital you could say please may you help them in hospital.
103	[Edward] Pretend [...] my friend's mum [...] is in hospital and I might pray for her because I don't want [...] to be sad (names removed)
104	[discussion of child who was sick in hospital]
105	[Darwin] There's like two different types of prayers, like thank yous...and thank you prayers and sorry prayers. ...thank you for your food, thank you for your homes and all that stuff sorry for like.
106	[Charles]...you could say sorry for...if you were doing something like very naughty like [...] or like at school you were just bullying someone or something
107	[Edward]...or in year 6 and swearing...in year 6 people swear a lot.
108	{Discussion of basketball etc} [Belinda] Sharing is caring
109	
110	[Charles] Are they in the order of how important they are?

111	<p>[Charles] {pointing to the rainbow} That one should be second.</p> <p>[Edward] {pointing to yellow and purple} I think they're both important because it shows that Jesus loves us.</p> <p>[Belinda] I think that these are important...</p> <p>[Darwin] Is it in the order of the song?</p> <p>[Belinda] No, it's in the order as a prayer.</p> <p>[Charles] In the order of the prayer...Is there a reason they're in that certain order? When Jesus made the prayer, is there a reason he's done it in that certain order?</p> <p>[JAS] I wonder...that's a really interesting thought isn't it?</p> <p>[Belinda] There probably is, because you wouldn't just make up a prayer that's like...you wouldn't just make up one.</p> <p>[Charles] He wouldn't just make it up and say random things!</p> <p>[Belinda] He might say dear God please help this random person you don't know but died at Christmas you wouldn't just make up</p> <p>[Charles] And there might not even be a real person who died at Christmas</p>
112	<p>[Belinda] Dear God, please help all the people who has lost the people they love during Christmas</p> <p>[JAS] Now I have a lot of craft things for you and what I would like you to do is to make what you think prayer is...so you could make it or draw it or write. What do you think prayer is?</p> <p>[Belinda] Why is the stuff in a golden treasure box?</p> <p>[JAS] Why do you think it's in a golden treasure box?</p> <p>[Anne] Because it's special?</p> <p>[Anne] Because it is treasure for all of us (referring to the prayer).</p>
113	<p>[Charles] I don't know...I don't know...how would you create a prayer using dough?</p> <p>[JAS] That's going to be a challenge isn't it?</p> <p>[Charles] Literally, it is going to be quite a challenge</p>
114	<p>[Darwin] Is this just about the Lord's prayer or can it be about...</p> <p>[JAS] Any prayer...</p> <p>[Charles] I had an idea about doing the dough.</p> <p>[JAS] What was your idea?</p> <p>[Charles] I was going to use a pencil to write a prayer on the dough but when I started it didn't really work.</p> <p>[Anne] Can you write a prayer?</p> <p>[JAS] You can.</p>
115	

116	<p>[Edward] Dear God thank you for our homes and families Amen</p> <p>[JAS] Ah that's lovely!</p> <p>[Belinda] I'm going to make a basket and with this bit I'm going to make the bread and I'm going to put it in the basket and then I'm going to use this bit as the heart and the handle</p> <p>[JAS] That's a good idea</p>
117	<p>[Charles] I'm going to draw the whole of the Bible.</p> <p>[JAS] Why are you making the Bible</p> <p>[Charles] Because it's a holy book and I think it's quite important.</p>
118	<p>[Anne] Help my ... get better from chicken pox. {reads out prayer very quietly to JAS}</p> <p>[Charles] Holy Bible...</p> <p>[Charles] {thinking out loud} It's John, Luke, Mark and ...Matthew!</p> <p>[Charles] ...and I've done Luke, John Mark and Matthew on there.</p> <p>[Charles] What has that basket got to do with Holy prayer?</p> <p>[Belinda] Remember the basket with the bread on...</p> <p>[Charles] Oh, clever!</p> <p>[Edward] A prayer basket. You write a prayer...</p>
119	
120	<p>[Charles] Oh no, I have to make a cup. How do I make a cup out of dough to make the wine?</p>
121	<p>[JAS] So what have you made?</p> <p>[Charles] I'm trying to make a basket of bread.</p> <p>[JAS] ... I have another group that I'm doing this with.</p> <p>[Charles] Is it in the other class? Do you know who you are going with?</p> <p>[JAS] I don't at the moment.</p> <p>[Charles] I think {name omitted} will because he's a Catholic and he always goes to church.</p> <p>{discussion of other children who might be involved in the second group including their church-going habits}.</p>
122	
123	<p>[JAS] (to Anne) What have you made?</p> <p>[Anne] A cup</p> <p>[Edward] It's a cup {looking at Anne's work}</p> <p>[JAS] Why is a cup important?</p> <p>[Edward] Because it's Jesus's blood</p> <p>[JAS] Why is that important?</p> <p>[Edward] Because Jesus died on the cross and rose again to new life.</p>

124	[JAS] Can I ask you why did you add hands on? [Darwin] to say like it's someone praying
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8.2 Session 2 transcript

	Content
1	Introductions
2	[JAS] What do you think might be in the box?
3	[Karen] Frankincense, Myrrh and gold
4	[JAS] Why do you think that?
5	[Karen] Because that's what the presents...the three wise men gave to Jesus
6	[Graham] And it looks like the chest they gave
7	[Helen] It might be a box that represents the special holidays of the church
8	[Helen] It looks like the same chest they gave when they were there.
9	[JAS] Who were there?
10	[Graham] The wise men.
11	[Godly Play session] [JAS] The wise men? Right let's see...it's playdough. You'll find out later. {children distracted by art materials} You'll find out why in a minute. So, when Jesus was alive he knew a lot about prayer...and sometimes he prayed on his own, and sometimes he prayed with his friends and sometimes he prayed with children and he reached out his hands and he blessed them. On one day, Jesus's friends came to him and said, Jesus, we don't know how to pray. Can you teach us? And Jesus said, yes I can and this is what he taught them. {put out underlay and green felt} So Jesus said, that God loves everyone in the world as much as a chicken loves her chicks. So that's why Jesus taught when we start the prayer we have to say Our Father.
12	[Karen] It was darkness and then it turned into light. [?] at the start there was no light [Graham] It was Star Wars. [Graham] It's not a real one (candle) [Jackie] It's a bit warm.

	[Graham] You get a switch to turn it on
13	<p>[Godly Play session]</p> <p>[JAS] So Jesus said ... {Much discussion of candle} So Jesus said that God was really holy is really holy so he's the light in the world. Which is why we say hallowed be thy name or holy be thy name.</p> <p>[Karen] I said that!</p> <p>[JAS] Now God loves everybody in the world. He loves everyone in the north, and everyone in the south, and everyone in the east, and everyone in the west. {children distracted and talking over each other}</p> <p>[] It's a flower!</p> <p>[] It's a clover!</p> <p>[JAS] Now Jesus also said that God gives us everything that we need. He gives us all our bread.</p>
14	<p>[Graham]The bread is the body</p> <p>[JAS] And it's not just the bread we have in a sandwich but it's everything that we need</p>
15	<p>[Karen] and the wine is the blood.</p> <p>[JAS] Now God also knows that sometimes it's a bit difficult to behave and sometimes it's really hard but he still loves you. And God will always forgive...so forgive us our sins. And this is also what we can do for other people. Forgive those who sin against us.</p>
16	[Karen] It's a prayer...it's a song.
17	<p>[JAS] God also knows that it's very difficult to behave and sometimes there are things that get in the way. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us...and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. So God sent a rainbow so that we know that God will always forgive.</p> <p>[Karen] I thought God always lives on the top of the rainbow?</p> <p>[JAS] That's the end of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, his friends, but there's a bit more. For thine is the kingdom, the power {Frederick and Graham acting out putting a crown on their head at this point} and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.</p>
18	[Frederick] I think I know what this is now...orange, Christingle, it's the Christingle because of the orange and red... Jesus the King...that's the blood and that's the world probably...
19	[JAS] I wonder which part of this prayer you like the best?
20	[Frederick] {pointing to the crown} I like this one

21	[JAS] Why?
22	[Frederick] Because it's got like a crown and it's different colours
23	[Karen] I like the basket
24	[JAS] Why?
25	[Karen] Because God gives us food to eat.
26	[Jackie] {pointing to the red hearts} because it is Jesus's blood
27	[Jackie] I like that one. [JAS] Why do you like that one?
28	[Isabelle] {pointing to the red heart} I like the bread because it reminds me of the story where Jesus fed the five thousand.
29	[Helen] This one {pointing to the gold heart}
30	[JAS] Why do you like this one the best?
31	[Helen] because my Grandma died and everyone said she had a heart of gold.
32	[JAS] what a lovely thing to think. That's beautiful. Which bit do you like the best? {looking at Graham}
33	[Graham] {points to the green and hen}
34	[JAS] The first one? Why do you like that one the best?
35	[Graham] That's the creation
36	[JAS] I wonder where you are in this prayer?
37	[Frederick] I think I'm here {pointing to the Kingdom, Power and Glory}
38	[JAS] Why do you think you are there?
39	[Frederick] errr
40	[JAS] Not sure? {Frederick shakes head}
41	[Karen] I think I'm here {points to the hen and chicks}
42	[JAS] Why do you think you are there?

43	[Karen] because I am alive
44	[Jackie] I like that one because there's love going round {points at the red hearts}
45	[JAS] Love going round...beautiful.
46	[Isabelle] {Pointing to the red hearts} Because Jesus loves me
47	[JAS] Because Jesus loves you?...you think this one? {to Helen who is pointing at the gold heart}
48	[Helen] Because of my grandma again, it feels like I'm with her
49	[Karen] I know something Jesus died on the cross and I am a cross {stands with her back to camera 2 and arms crossed over her chest}
50	[JAS] I wonder if there is any part of this prayer we could take away and still have everything we need?
51	[Karen] Yes, the bread
52	[JAS] The bread. Why?
53	[Karen] Because we have other bread at home
54	[JAS] Who gives us that bread? [Karen] Jesus [JAS] Do we need that?
55	[Jackie] I think that stone
56	[JAS] You think the stone? Why do you think the stone?
57	[Jackie] [indistinct]... So we can have love
58	[Frederick] I like the crown
59	[JAS] So we can have love. Which one do you think we could take away?
60	[Helen] The candle.
61	[JAS] Why do you want to take the candle away?
62	[Helen] Because we are all the light of the world and we don't need a real light.

63	[JAS] ...What about you? What do you think we could take away? [Graham gestures to the white with bubbles] Why? Why do you think you could take those away?
64	[Graham] We're already having those things
65	[JAS] We've already got them?
66	[Jackie] I think that it's joyful and we talk to God
67	[JAS] OK. I wonder, I wonder what you think prayer is? What is prayer?
68	[JAS] Joyful and you talk to God? What do you think?
69	[Graham] I think it's where we talking to God and hope it comes true.
70	[JAS] ...and hope it comes true?
71	[Graham] Yeah, when you talk to God.
72	[Helen] Talk to God, tell him your worries and the worries vanish.
73	[JAS] Ah that's really important isn't it.
74	[Jackie] So you can say sorry to God when you've sinned
75	[JAS] Oh, say sorry. [discussion about groups] [JAS] What else do you think prayer is?
76	[Isabelle] If someone's been bad to them you can forgive them in your heart by praying.
77	[JAS] Thank you
78	[Karen] Praying can mean that if God knows about something that they shouldn't that they can forgive them about that.
79	[Jackie] You can say to God that...you can say to God about the people in Heaven.
80	[discussion about cameras]
81	[Packing away GP resources] [JAS] Now, I've got some craft materials, I would like you to make or draw or write what you think prayer is.

82	[JAS] So, I wonder if you can make, or draw, or write what you think prayer is?
83	
84	<p>[Helen] It's basically God</p> <p>[Karen] God obviously needs a head!</p> <p>[JAS] So what's this bit?</p> <p>[Helen] It's a sash that means he's important</p> <p>[Karen] God's a VIP to the whole world.</p> <p>[Isabelle] Jesus is the light of the world</p> <p>[JAS] What are you making?</p> <p>[Karen] An outfit for Jesus</p> <p>[JAS] Oh right!</p> <p>[Karen] Jesus is not wanting to be naked</p> <p>[Isabelle] They didn't have any pants in that time!</p> <p>[Graham] We'd have all been naked if Adam and Eve didn't eat the fruit!</p> <p>[JAS] So what have you made?</p> <p>[Graham] A superman one</p> <p>[JAS] How does that relate to prayer?</p> <p>[Graham] I haven't done that; it just looks like that.</p>
85	<p>[Helen] {talking about her creation but indistinct}</p> <p>[Isabelle] Jesus is the light of the world.</p>
86	[Karen] Jesus is ... (indistinct)
87	<p>[Karen] I've done Jesus!</p> <p>[JAS] Why have you made it kneel?</p> <p>[Isabelle]??</p> <p>[Helen] Some people wear special clothes to pray</p> <p>[JAS] Do you wear special clothes to pray?</p> <p>[Helen] ...But mostly I pick out a dress and mostly I pray in that dress</p>
88	
89	[Helen] Well I've basically got this dove and then God...because that's one story about Jesus and I feel like it's also for pray. When Jesus prays the heavens open up and it comes swooping down...and it's sent by God...and then God has lots of love for you [showing the green heart made of dough].
90	<p>[Jackie] That's Jesus and that's a heart.</p> <p>[JAS] A heart. Why did you make a heart?</p> <p>[Jackie] Because that's love</p>

91	[Helen] {explaining her creation but not picked up on the recordings} [JAS] A heart and God and a dove

8.3 Session 3 transcript

Line No.	Content
1	Introductions
2	[JAS] What do you think is in the box?
3	[Liam] Characters from the Bible?
4	[JAS] Characters from the Bible? That's a good guess. Anyone else?
5	[Polly] Erm
6	[JAS] Oh have you forgotten. Yes? What do you think?
7	[Ophelia] Maybe the same as (Liam) but maybe plastic characters or wooden?
8	[Matthew] I think maybe wooden sculptures.
9	[JAS] Wooden sculptures? Let's find out...
10	[JAS] Jesus knew a lot about prayer and Jesus used to say lots of prayers. He used to go into the desert on his own to say prayers, and sometimes he'd say prayers with his friends. And sometimes he'd say prayers with children.
11	[Liam] In the Bible when he got killed at Easter when the people came to get him he prayed down in the forest.
12	[JAS] He did, yes. And when he prayed with children he used to reach out and bless the children and one day, his friends came to him and they said, Jesus, can you teach us how to pray because we don't know how to pray and Jesus said, of course I can, and this is what he taught them.
13	{put out underlay} [JAS] So the first thing Jesus said to them was your father in heaven loves everybody as a hen loves its chicks!
14	[Ophelia] I thought you were going to say the hen loves us?

15	[JAS] Oh...no. God. God loves us.
16	[Matthew] So we are the chicks and the chicken is God?
17	[Liam] The chicken's like Jesus and we are all its chicks like it says in the Lord's prayer. Yeah, we are all your children
18	[Ophelia] How come there's only three children? {pointing at chicks}. [JAS] I don't know. [Ophelia] I saw in a picture of...this is a big coincidence...I saw a picture, I looked on the Internet on my iPad and I googled up pictures of Jesus blessing the children the reason I don't know why I was bored and I saw three children.
19	[Matthew] The chicks represent us all
20	[Ophelia] But except they were all standing there.
21	[Liam] Yes and Jesus is probably bowing down to bless everyone
22	[JAS] And the next thing he said after saying our father in heaven...Our father is...
23	[Ophelia] Not darkness {looking at the black felt}
24	[JAS] ...Holy and light.
25	[Nicola] Heaven?
26	[Liam]...Shines in the darkness.
27	[Liam] It's like a representation of a real (candle)
28	[JAS] It is!
29	[JAS] So hallowed be thy name, or holy be thy name.
30	[Ophelia] Oh you're saying the words of a song we sing in school
31	[JAS] Ah what's that?
32	[Liam] The Lord's prayer
33	[Matthew] I'm going to do my Holy Communion and I ...
34	[Ophelia] Your kingdom come your will be done

35	[JAS] Jesus said, our father loves everybody...in the north, and the south, and the east and the west {Children joining in with GP session}. You're quite right - your kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Now, Jesus also said...can you remember?
36	[Liam] Is it give us today our daily bread?
37	[JAS] Give us today our daily bread. Now it's not just the bread that we have honey on, honey sandwich, or when we have toast, it's the bread that means we get everything we need. {children joining in the GP script and reciting prayer}
38	[Ophelia] The wine is the blood and the bread is the flesh
39	[Liam] Is his body.
41	[JAS] Give us this day our daily bread.
40	[Ophelia] Forgive us our trespasses
42	[Liam] Forgive us our sins?
44	[JAS] Now, Jesus knew that it's a bit difficult so Jesus said God wants us to love everybody no matter what they have done. And this is also about what we can do for other people. See, it's forgive us our sins but also help us to forgive those who sin against us.
43	[Matthew] Sin means being bad.
45	[Ophelia] Like bullying each other and stuff?
46	[Liam] For example if I punch (Matthew) that's kind of a sin because it's being bad to [Matthew]?
47	[Ophelia] If I said something like (Nicola) you look really ugly in that sweater today or something that would be a sin
48	[JAS] Mmmm it would be.
49	[JAS] But don't forget, God said he would forgive everybody but that also means we can forgive everyone too.
50	[Matthew] And Jesus said...he made a choice he said you must forgive every single ...but it isn't seventy-seven but he didn't mean seventy-seven but he meant a lot 'cause seventy-seven is a lot.

51	[Polly] And if I said to [Ophelia] you're not really good at playing the violin that's sinning
52	[Matthew] Sin's very bad {indistinct}.
53	[JAS] Do you play the violin? [Ophelia] Yes, we play strings and that in school but I don't really understand it.
54	[JAS] Now...does anyone know the next bit?
55	[Polly] God in Heaven
56	[Ophelia] You art in heaven?
57	[JAS] Not quite...does this help?
58	[Matthew] As we sin against us
59	[JAS] as we forgive those who sin against us.
60	[Matthew] {indistinct}
61	[Liam] Don't lead us into temptation
62	[JAS] Don't lead us into temptation...so Jesus know that it's very difficult to avoid...
63	[Liam] yeah doing something you shouldn't. I've been tempted to do what I shouldn't have done but so I was on the way to get my football I had some money in my hand well on the way home I had this ball ... I was holding... and I was tempted to just throw it out of the window but then I ... put it on the floor in front of me so I wouldn't even get to touch it or throw it out of the window.
64	[Ophelia] I've been tempted to do a lot of things cos once I was going to get one of my dolls so I could play with it and erm someone came round my house she's like, she came from a different country her name was (Jill) and she was like why don't you throw it out of the window like.. no, she said why don't you chuck it in a bowl of water to see what happens if you leave it there ... and then I just said no I won't do it because I don't want to be mean
65	[Matthew] Don't want to risk it.
66	[Ophelia] 'Cos I don't want to get told off for anything.

67	[JAS] So lead us not into temptation but then God promises to help us avoid temptation because God sent the rainbow as a promise. Now that, actually, is the end of the prayer you will find in your Bible. But today we have an extra bit.
68	[Ophelia] it was so loud {the wind}
69	[Liam] I think I know what it is
70	[JAS] What do you think it might be?
71	[Liam] but deliver us from evil?
72	[JAS] Deliver us from evil is this bit {points at rainbow} for thine is the kingdom,
73	[Nicola] the power and the glory
74	[JAS] the power and the glory
75	[Ophelia] Why did you put red feathers?
76	[JAS] Why do you think?
77	[Ophelia] Because it's the power?
78	[JAS] why might that be a symbol of power?
79	[Liam] because red's a very powerful colour because it's a really dark colour.
80	[JAS] What comes on the end?
81	[JAS] For ever and ever...Amen
82	[JAS] So, I wonder, which part of this prayer do you like the best? What's your favourite bit?
83	[Polly] I love this one {pointing at the black with the light}
84	[Polly]...and that one because I like the candle bit and I like blowing bubbles
85	[Ophelia] You did say a bit and I say this is a bit but all of it
86	[JAS] All of the...?
87	[Ophelia] {gesturing to the whole layout} all of this

88	[JAS] All of it? You like all of it do you? What do you think?
89	[Liam] I like that one {pointing at the grey underlay with stone and rainbow} because it helps us not to do things that we shouldn't be doing.
90	[JAS] We have a very hard stone there, haven't we?
91	[Ophelia] Is that a real stone? {JAS hands stone to Ophelia who taps it on the table} It looks like a fake stone.
92	[JAS] what's your favourite bit?
93	[Nicola] Erm, I would say that one {pointing to red with red hearts} because it shows that God loves us.
94	[Matthew] I would say all of it
95	[JAS] All of it? Why's that?
96	[Matthew] because I just like all of them and I can't choose which one individually
97	[JAS] Is it perfect as it is?
98	[Matthew] {nods}
99	[JAS] OK. So, I wonder where you are in this prayer? Where are you?
100	[Ophelia] I think the white one and that one (purple) and that one (red) ... because this one, because I love my whole family and God and everything and this one (purple) because...and the bubble one is because...so this is a saying someone told me erm, so when you blow a bubble and when it pops then usually you get more happiness.
101	[JAS] Oh that's lovely. Not heard that before.
102	[Liam] I think not that one {pointing to blue, orange and red feathers} because at school nobody can boss other people around... Like me, I wouldn't boss other people around but I would I'd be in the red one because I even though people say girls hate boys and boy hate girls I don't say that because I like everybody, not just two or three or four people.
103	[JAS] Thank you

104	[Polly] I'm here {pointing to the red} and on the black one {pointing to the black} because I think I really like my cat and my whole family and ...
105	[Polly] {thinking}...because light is like you're having friends and happiness
106	[JAS] Oh. It's not easy to explain sometimes is it? What do you think?
107	[Liam] The reason why I think the light, the light represents Jesus and all the people that like the Romans and the Vikings they or the Anglo Saxons versus the Vikings they weren't being nice, but Jesus might have...so they helped Romans get along to each other and not separate and be all unhappy and not doing what they should be doing. Jesus might of helped the people being the light of the world.
108	[JAS] {to Nicola} Do you know where you are in here or do you not want to answer?
110	[Matthew] I'm in all of it.
109	[Nicola] {thinks} I think I would be here {points to the purple} because it like, it shows God's love, Jesus's love and it shows that other people love each other and if they've done like something wrong people still forgive them though because they still might have some love left in them so they might still have a bit of good left in them but they might not show it though but they still might like each other.
111	[JAS] Thank you. Now, I know you said you think it's perfect as it is but if we had to take a piece away, which bit would we take way and still have everything we need? I wonder...what do you think?
112	[Nicola] {points at the white}
113	[JAS] That one? Why do you think that one?
114	[Nicola] I'm not sure...erm {thinks}...don't know.
115	[JAS] Don't know? OK. What do you think?
116	[Liam] That one {pointing to the dark blue}
117	[JAS] This one? Why?

118	[Liam] Because I think we should take away that half {pointing to the orange triangle} because if you took away that half because everybody can still do what they can do but and nobody's got any more power than anyone else God's got power but like, so (Matthew) hasn't got any more power than what I do because everyone's got the same amount of what they can do so nobody's got more power not that they would want to be so God has the most power but Jesus has as well but everybody else hasn't.
119	[JAS] OK. We could take that away. I'll put it back for the moment {replaces orange triangle and feathers}.
120	[JAS] We could take that bit away...what would you take away?
121	[Matthew] I would take away the power bit because people have more power than others there's just going to be one person bossing everybody around life would just get really boring.
122	[Liam] (indistinct)... and that's why the love bit stands out as well.
123	[Matthew] So if the person who had more power loved everybody then wanted to use his power that would be fine
124	[JAS] Mmm. OK. What do you think?
125	[Ophelia] Errm, I think we should take away the stone because making sins and forgiveness is OK but in the first place we shouldn't be making sins
126	[JAS] We could take the stone away, yes?
127	[Polly] I think we should take the red feathers away
128	[Liam] The power
129	[Liam] ... and he wouldn't let me, he can't do that because he's not the boss of everything but I think we should take away the power.
130	[Polly] The power because like if one person was powerful and bosses everyone around ... if they won't let you play with boys then that would be boring. And if it was a girl they would let boys play with dolls and people and if it was boys they would let girls play football. and that would be wrong.
131	[JAS] OK. Now I have another question for you. I wonder what you think prayer is?

132	[Polly] I think prayer is when you put your hands together and pray for something like someone dying or something about God and if your pet's poorly and going to the doctors.
133	[Ophelia] I think that prayer is something like you can get wisdom prayers, you can get thankful prayers, sorry prayers, please prayers and basically they are just asking for something and like say if you were doing a please prayer then you just like, say if someone was dead and you wanted them to come back to life then that's a prayer.
134	[Nicola] Help my hamster to come back to life.
135	[Ophelia] I want three of my gerbils to come back to life, my baby brother and my grandpa.
136	[Polly] And I want my little kitty to come back to life because ...I was really sad.
137	[Liam] I think if a prayer is like for example there's something you wanted or didn't want to happen which did happen you kind of bless it, you kind of bless it
138	[Liam]... And then you ask God to keep it safe {gestures to his heart} for example, my bunny died and if I prayed for it I would say God please look after it in heaven, that's what a prayer means.
139	[Matthew] A prayer is like a special way to talk to God. The reason you put your hands together and your eyes closed is so you don't get distracted by anything and it's just a special way to speak to God. It is.
140	{Putting away the GP materials. Children helping}. [JAS] What I'd like you to do is make or draw or write what you think prayer is. [Jackie] How are you meant to make that?!
141	[Liam] White is Jesus's colour [Matthew] I'm going to make a dress like clothing out of purple. I'll need brown as well after.
142	[Liam] ...you remember when Jesus came into Jerusalem and then people were waving the palm leaves I'm going to try and do that bit. [Matthew] I'm going to do a priest holding a candle and the little... [JAS] Why a candle? [Matthew] Actually, I'm going to make two people a priest that's holding like a shepherd's stick thing and cos I go to the {name omitted} they use little people in white clothes to hold the candles. I'm going to do one of them.

143	<p>[Liam] I don't think I should make the palm leaves because they are really hard!</p> <p>[Ophelia] I'm trying to make the earth with the clouds</p> <p>[JAS] Why are you making the earth?</p> <p>[Ophelia] because...I'm making lots of little things about it like one part, one, part, one part...</p>
144	<p>[Ophelia] You could make God saying a prayer like...</p>
145	
146	<p>[Matthew] {talking about the figure he has made} I made my priest. I need to do the cross on his belly.</p>
147	<p>[Liam] He's crying because Jesus is coming!</p> <p>[JAS] Why is he crying?</p> <p>[Liam] Cos Jesus is coming and he didn't know he was coming.</p> <p>[JAS] So is he happy or sad?</p> <p>[Ophelia] Is it happy crying?</p> <p>[Liam] Oh look I've made a little arm.</p>
148	<p>[Ophelia] I'm going to draw John the Baptiser</p> <p>[JAS] Why are you drawing John the Baptist?</p> <p>[Ophelia] I don't know.</p> <p>[Ophelia] Look she put an eyeball in the cross (Nicola)</p> <p>[Liam] That's not holy!</p> <p>[Ophelia] Wait, is it God peeking through the cross?</p>
149	<p>[JAS] Why have you made it into a superhero? {to Polly}</p> <p>[Polly] Because it's a super heart and a super rainbow</p> <p>[Liam] Does it represent God?</p> <p>[Ophelia] Or a heart</p> <p>[Polly] God is a superhero in my heart</p> <p>[Ophelia] Does Jesus have green eyes or blue eyes?</p> <p>[JAS] I don't know!</p> <p>[Nicola] What colour is an angel's hair? {referring to her drawing}.</p>
150	

151	<p>[Ophelia] I've drawn Jesus and John. Now I'm going to draw an angel.</p> <p>[JAS] Can you tell me who all the characters are?</p> <p>[Liam] ...That one's a priest because he knows how to bow down in front of Jesus because when he was coming along on the donkey they kneel down and maybe he doesn't know that but he might know he has to kneel down but he forgot to he thought it was no time but he just sat down</p> <p>[JAS] And they're kneeling aren't they? Fantastic.</p> <p>[Nicola] (Matthew) is making a Christingle.</p> <p>[JAS] Are you?</p> <p>[Liam] It was my idea to make the Christingles...it was my ideas because it reminds me of the Cathedral.</p> <p>[Ophelia] God wearing armour, bronze armour</p> <p>[Liam] I think I've got a better idea now. I think we should make...</p>
152	<p>[JAS] Can you tell me about what you've made?</p> <p>[Matthew] The people in the church they bring up the candles the big candles and this is the man I saw in the cathedral, {name omitted} cathedral, he was holding a shepherd's kind of stick.... these are the sweets on the stick and this is the orange</p> <p>[JAS] Can you explain what you've done?</p> <p>[Nicola] ...I've no idea what they are, but I just added them for some reason and I done the world and a heart to show God's love and an angel.</p> <p>[Liam] So Jesus was coming ... and up to his seat</p>
153	<p>[Matthew] I'm making the last bit here, so there's the candle at the back of the church, the Easter candle, I've just made an Easter candle. I need to make it a bit shorter.</p> <p>[JAS] {to Liam} So is that Jesus?</p> <p>[Liam] No it's a microphone!</p> <p>[JAS] Oh a microphone, sorry!</p> <p>[Liam] It's for Jesus when he walks round there to make a speech he's saying that... he's going to make a speech and he's going to say thank you for letting me come here and then he's going to come down there then these are going to be candles because they are celebrating him coming...</p>

154	[Liam] ... I would have had another ideas [JAS] What would your other idea have been? [Liam] I think that in church and I could have done little seats then they could be watching you {talking about Matthew's work}. [Matthew] If I had lots and lots of time I would build a whole church
155	[Liam] He's kneeling, he's kneeling, he's kneeling at Jesus!

8.4 Session 4 transcript

	Content
1	Introductions
2	Introductions
3	Introductions
4	Introductions
5	[JAS] What do you think's in the box? A nice gold box here, what do you think's in the box?
6	[Yasmine] Modelling clay
7	[Rachel] Arts and crafts
8	[JAS] Arts and crafts?
9	[Unwin] Playdough
10	[JAS] Playdough
11	[Wendy] I can't think
12	[JAS] Ah yes. Do you think it's something special?
13	[All] Yes!
14	[Yasmine] It must be really special...it must be from the olden days
15	[Rachel] Because it's a gold box with jewels on

16	[JAS] Yeah
17	[JAS] So, Jesus knew a lot about prayer. And Jesus used to pray on his own, in the desert, and sometimes he used to pray with people and sometimes he prayed with children and he reached out his hands and he blessed the children. And sometimes he prayed with his friends. And one day his friends came to him and they said, can you teach us how to pray Jesus? And Jesus said, yes, of course I can. And this is the prayer that he taught them. {children mimicking actions}
18	[Sarah] Is it a prayer?
19	[JAS] Ooh, don't unroll it anymore. Leave it there. So the first thing Jesus said to his friends was that God loves everybody. He loves everybody so much that when we start a prayer we need to say Our Father. He loves everybody as much as a mother hen loves her chicks. {children giggle}. So that's why we start by saying Our Father. And then he said it's really important to know that God is holy. God is...the light
20	[Rachel] Like stars in the sky?
21	[JAS] So that's why we need to say Hallowed or holy is his name.
22	[JAS] {put the red underlay out} The next bit...
23	[Wendy] Love!
24	[Rachel] Love!
25	[JAS] Why do you think it's love?
26	[Wendy] Because hearts are red and that means love
27	[JAS] And Jesus said God loves everybody, everyone in the north, and everyone in the south and everyone in the east and everyone in the west. [All] Never Eat Shredded Wheat! [Sarah] I know a different one...Naughty Elephants squirt water [JAS] Yeah, So, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. {Children mimicking GP actions and words}
28	[Yasmine] I know this because my brother goes to toddler group and he sings this.
29	{Put out yellow underlay} [JAS] The next bit...

30	[Yasmine and Rachel] Sun! Easter! Sun!
31	[Rachel] Like bread and wine
32	[JAS] Jesus said, God gives us everything that we need. Not just the bread that we put honey on or have Marmite sandwiches...not just that but everything that we need. Give us this day our daily bread.
33	[Yasmine] Purple is...
34	[Sarah] Love!
35	[Wendy] Are we going to be making things? [JAS] We might be in a bit but we'll do this first.
36	[Sarah] lungs [Tamsin] advent [Unwin] royal
37	[Sarah] That's Jesus's heart!
38	[JAS] Jesus said that it's very difficult when people sin against us but God will always forgive anyone who sins. And it's about what we can do for other people as well because we can forgive other people who sin against us. So, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. [?] Give us our daily bread [JAS] Give us our daily bread, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us and
39	[JAS] {put out stone} Sometimes there are things which are really difficult for us. They are things that it is very difficult to get over, they're hard like a rock
40	[Sarah] Nature!
41	[Sarah] I love rocks, I collect them all the time. [JAS] Jesus said, God sent a rainbow to remind us... [Rachel] A pot of gold! [JAS]... that whatever difficulties we have God is always there.
42	[Yasmine] Can we call this chicken Olive? [JAS] Not at the moment
43	[Wendy] Because We've got a white chicken in the hen ... called Olive.

44	[JAS] Now that's the end of the prayer that you'll find in your bible. But there is an extra bit {put out blue underlay}
45	[Yasmine] Water! [Sarah] Blue! Colours!
46	[Yasmine] The glory of yours, now and forever...
47	[JAS] For thine is the kingdom, [Unwin] It looks like chicken's beak! [JAS] The power and the... {Children joining in with the prayer}
48	[All] For ever, and ever and ever ...Aaaaaamen!
49	[JAS] For ever and ever.... Amen
50	[JAS] So, I wonder, I wonder which part of this prayer you like the best? ... one at a time, let's hear why...why do you like the hearts the best?
51	[Yasmine] {pointing at the hearts} I love it because I love Jesus.
52	[JAS] Why do you like it?
53	[Wendy] {pointing at the red hearts} I love it because I love everyone just like Jesus does.
54	[Unwin] {pointing to the dark blue and crown} This one.
55	[JAS] OK
56	[JAS] This one? Why do you like this one?
57	[Unwin] Because it's about Jesus...I don't really know.
58	[JAS] Do you know which bit you like the best?
59	[Tamsin] I don't know
60	[Sarah] I like the rock because I like rocks. Does that make sense...there's a rock there and I like rocks and the colour red
61	[Yasmine] So do you like crystals as well because they're rocks?
62	[JAS] Which bit do you like best?

63	[Rachel] I like the hearts
64	[JAS] The hearts? Why do you like the hearts?
65	[Rachel] because I love God and everybody
66	[JAS] So, I wonder where you are in this...where are you?
67	{all reach to touch the underlay} [JAS] Let's go round one at a time...so in the hearts? Why do you think you're in the hearts? Are you in the gold heart or the red hearts?
68	[Rachel] The red hearts
69	[JAS] The red hearts, why's that?
70	[Rachel] Because I have a red heart.
71	[JAS] OK. What do you think? Where are you?
72	[Sarah] I still like the rock.
73	[JAS] The rock?
74	[Sarah] I still like rocks...that's interesting.
75	[Tamsin] I think I'm there {pointing to the red hearts}
76	[JAS] The hearts? Why's that?
77	[Tamsin] Because people love each other
78	[Unwin] {reaches out to touch the bread}
79	[JAS] People love each other. Ok.
80	[JAS] The bread! That's interesting. Why?
81	[Unwin] Because in the Bible one of the stories Jesus gave bread and wine to the disciples.
82	[JAS] Where do you think you are?
83	[Wendy] The bubbles

84	[JAS] The bubbles. Why do you think you're the bubbles?
85	[Wendy] because it's nice to say Amen at the end of a prayer and because I can't remember
86	[Yasmine] I like the golden heart because Advent is when Jesus was born and when it's Christmas and you get presents.
87	[JAS] that's true.
88	[Rachel] I like the bubbles as well because in them I think God's in them. Then when we pop them his love comes down.
89	[JAS] Ah, that's nice.
90	[Yasmine] I think the love is inside the bubbles because when you pop it they go whoooo God.
91	[JAS] I wonder, if we could take away part of this prayer and still have everything we need. Which bit would you take away and still have everything you need?
92	[All] Bread
93	[JAS] The bread! Why would you take the bread away?
94	[Wendy] The chickens.
95	[JAS] One at a time...Why would you take the bread away? ...Who said bread? Why do you want to take the bread away?
96	[Rachel] I don't know.... just because...I just don't know.
97	[Yasmine] I didn't say bread because you need it to survive and you need to have health and...
98	[Rachel] You can eat the chickens. It's food.
99	[JAS] Ok, so does someone think something different? What do you think different?
100	[Sarah] The bubbles because I don't like them.
101	[JAS] The bubbles?
102	[Sarah] because they don't do anything.

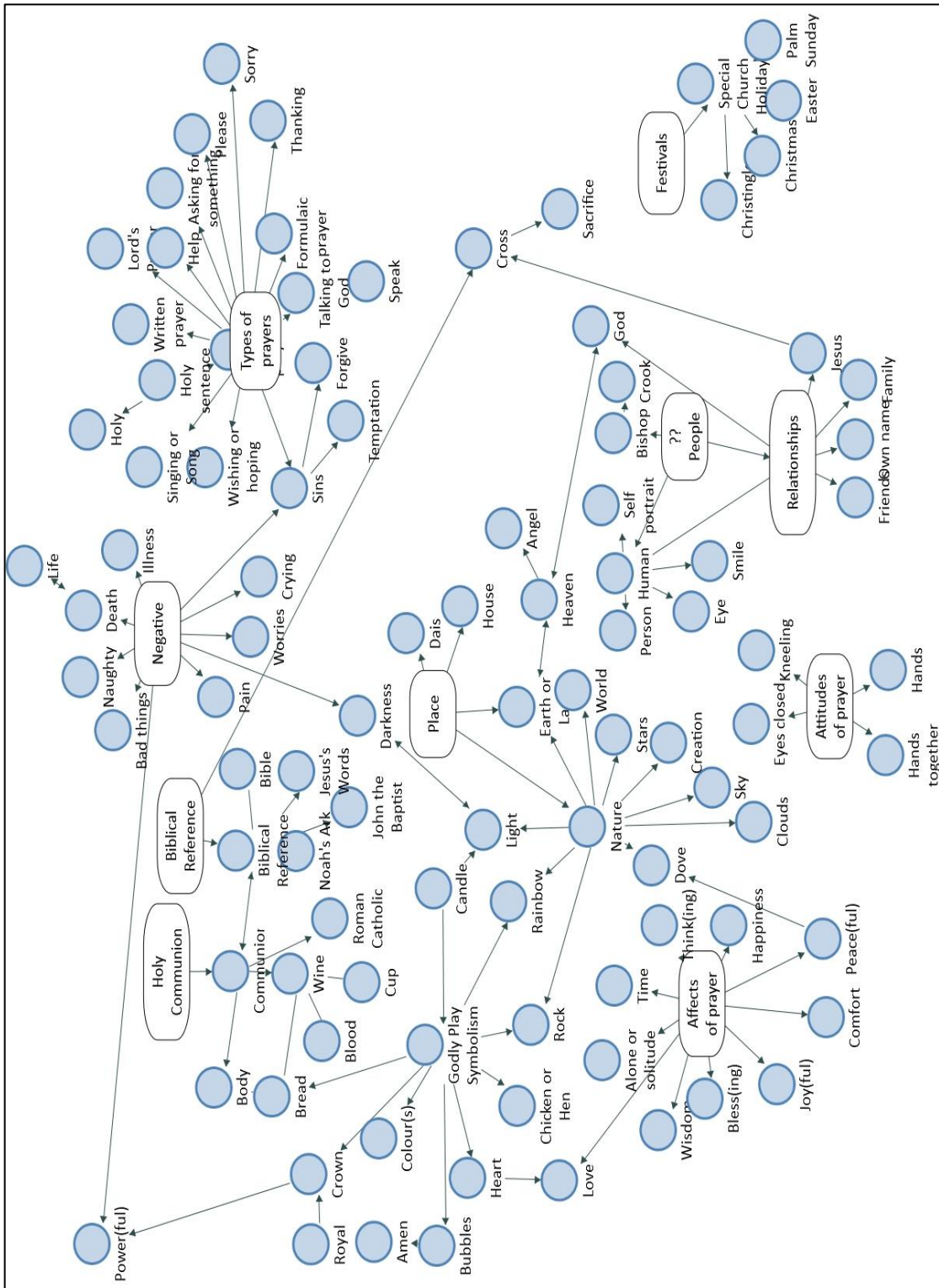
103	[Unwin] But that's the prayer
104	[Yasmine] I would take away the rock
105	[Sarah] Noooo!
106	[Yasmine] Yes because it's boring.
107	[Sarah] I like the rock
108	[Wendy] I'd take away the rock
109	[Unwin] I'd take away none
110	[JAS] The light?
111	[Unwin] No, None
112	[JAS] None. You think it's perfect as it is?
113	[Wendy] I want to take away the rock
114	[JAS] Why would you take the rock away?
115	[Wendy] Because it's hard and like sometimes nature... sometimes like nature's like mean because sometimes you can hurt yourself on nature because it's like different kinds of species and sometimes they can hurt you.
116	[Sarah] Yes I quite agree because stinging nettles can be mean
117	[JAS] Would anyone take the chicks away?
118	[All] Nooo!
119	[Sarah] They're cute!
120	[JAS] We'll leave that in the prayer. I wonder what you think prayer is?
121	[Sarah] It's a message to God
122	[Yasmine] Our messages to God and he loves...and we love him.
123	[Unwin] A time to just think about God
124	[Tamsin] ...

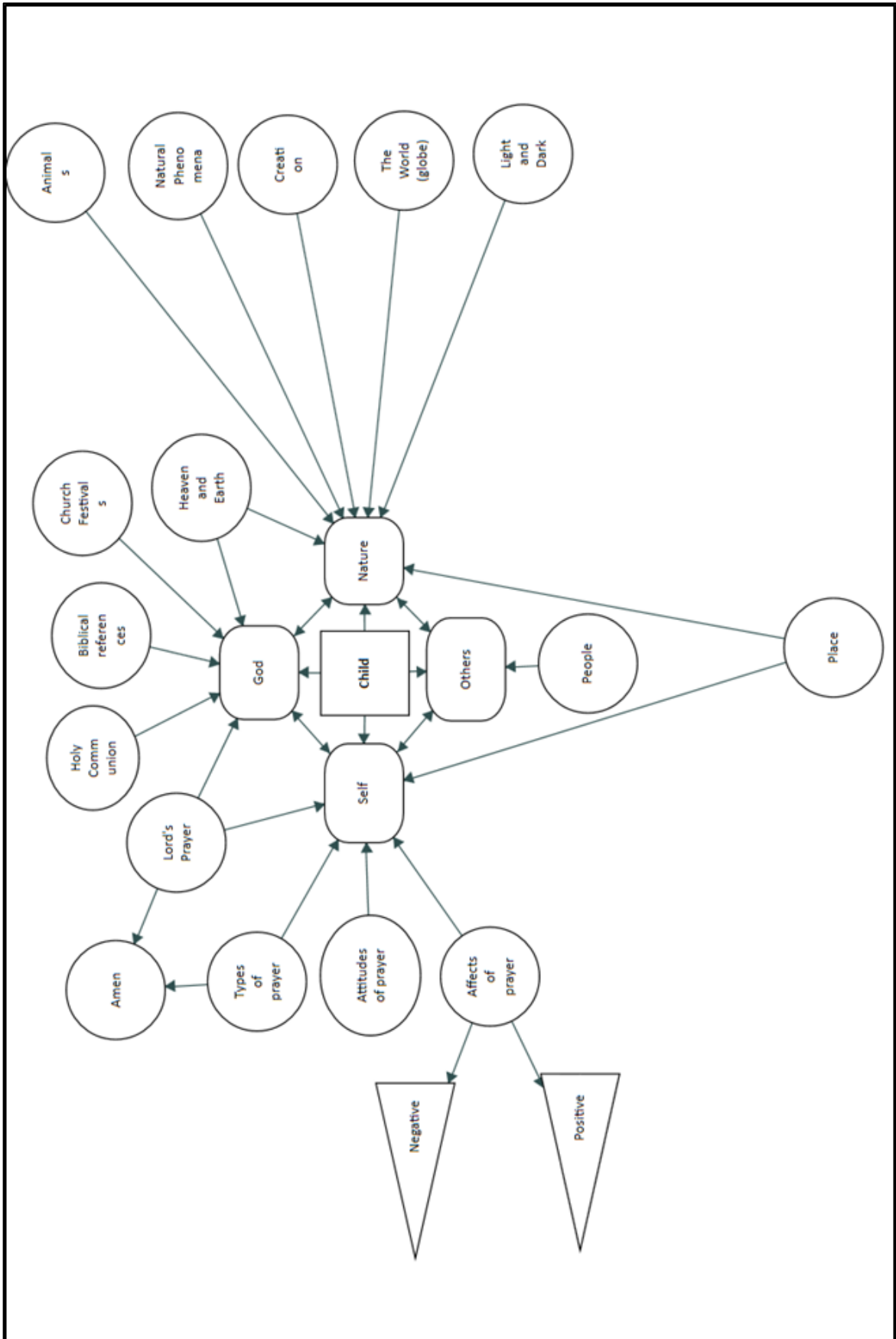
125	[JAS] Hang on, one at a time...say that again.
126	[Tamsin] It's time to go alone with God
127	[JAS] Time to be alone with God?
128	[Yasmine] That we need to have time to Jesus and this is like us and you {pointing to the hen and chicks} and everybody else of course.
129	[Wendy] and I think it's peaceful because we're talking about God when like I mean Jesus because we all love him ...
130	[Yasmine] There's our class there! {Children distracted}
131	Packing up GP session Children helping and saying the colours in reverse order.
132	[Yasmine] Sharing is caring [JAS] I would like you...hang on, you don't know what you are going to be doing yet...I would like you to make or draw or write what you think prayer is.
133	
134	[Wendy] I just want to play with it (the dough) then write something about the prayer. [Rachel] Is it ok if I do this for God? {indicating her work} [Wendy] Is it ok if I pretend this is grass then the tree? [Sarah] I want to do my name inside a heart. [Sarah] I'm making a rainbow heart because... {doesn't finish her sentence; thinking out loud} [Rachel] I want to do a rainbow
135	[Wendy] I'm making a tree with apples on it [JAS] Why are you making a tree with apples? [Wendy] I don't know [JAS] How is that linked to prayer? [Wendy] It's kind of like...I'm pretending it's... [Unwin] Nature! [Wendy] Yeah, Nature! [Sarah] How come everyone you had last time did Jesus on the cross? [Wendy] I'm doing a lake with chicks in and I'm pretending it's...
136	[Rachel] That's God {pointing to her picture, figure at the top}

137	[Wendy] I'm doing a duck and nature... (to Yasmine) - that's not how you spell nature!
138	
139	[JAS] Who have you made? (to Unwin) [Unwin] I've made me [JAS] Why have you made you? [Unwin] (indistinct) [JAS] Ah, it's you by the cross and praying?...Ah with closed eyes? Yes. [Rachel] This is the worst prayer ever...I love you! [JAS] Why do you think it's the worst prayer? [Rachel] I know because it isn't really a prayer. [JAS] Why isn't it a prayer? [Rachel]??? {shrugs}
140	[Sarah] How am I going to make me if it doesn't stand up? {making herself} {Unwin making a cross for Yasmine} [Unwin] This is going to be the hardest bit. How am I going to make a house?
141	[JAS] {to Wendy} What have you written there? [Wendy] Jesus sacrifice [Unwin] Now I'm doing my hands together...oh no, my praying hands fell off!
142	[JAS] What are you making? [Rachel] A rainbow [JAS] Why are you making a rainbow? [Rachel] I just like rainbows [Unwin] ... me inside of the house. [Sarah] {made herself}
143	[Yasmine] Can I just write holy on the model? [Wendy] I've made Jesus's Cross! [JAS] What does it say going down? [Wendy] Jesus's cross. [JAS] Oh right [JAS]...can you explain what you've done? [Unwin] I made myself and the cross. [JAS] Right...why did you do that? Why's that important to you? [Unwin] Because the cross is a sign of Jesus (indistinct)

144	<p>[Sarah] I made me and a heart</p> <p>[JAS] So the person's you is it? Why did you do a heart?</p> <p>[Sarah] Ermm...love</p> <p>[JAS] Why did you do a tree?</p> <p>[Sarah] Because I like trees. And I did a rock because I like rocks.</p> <p>[JAS] Can you tell me about what you have made?</p> <p>[Rachel] I've done a rainbow God Jesus and it isn't a prayer {added later that she didn't know why it wasn't a prayer but couldn't explain fully}.</p>
145	<p>[Tamsin] I made some hearts and some crosses where Jesus died then I did these but I didn't have much time. And that's Jesus.</p> <p>[Yasmine] A prayer, plant and human, baby, teenager, teacher, love you, (name omitted), then I wrote Holy and a tree for nature and a cross for Jesus's sacrifice.</p>

9 Appendix 2 - Interim models during data analysis





10 Appendix 3 - Coding

10.1 Code book

Node Name	References
God	178
Amen	34
Bubbles	7
Biblical Reference	36
Apples	2
Bible	3
Cross	13
Eye	3
Jesus's Words	3
John the Baptist	3
Noah's Ark	1
Church	226
Communion	46
Blood	5
Body	4
Bread	19
Cup	3

Node Name	References
Roman Catholic	2
Wine	5
Festivals	20
Christingle	5
Christmas	8
Easter	2
Palm Sunday	2
Special Church Holidays	1
God	37
Holy	3
Love	77
Heart	30
Nature	116
Animals	15
Chicken or Hen	9
Dove	4
Heaven and Earth	30

Node Name	References
Creation	1
Earth or Land	23
Heaven	16
Sky	4
Light	43
Candle	15
Darkness	2
Stars	3
Natural Phenomena	22
Clouds	4
Rainbow	9
Rock	5
Tree	4
Others	159
Earthly Relationships	9
Family	6
Friends	2
People	24
Baby	2

Node Name	References
Bishop	3
Crook	1
Human	3
Person	3
Priest	2
Self portrait	7
Teacher	2
Teenager	2
Power Relationships	70
Crown	1
Dais	1
Power(ful)	38
Royal	2
Special clothes	8
Armour	1
Sash	4
Superpower	6
VIP	2
Supernatural Relationships	56

Node Name	References
Angel	5
Death	27
Life	1
Jesus	20
Sacrifice	2
Self	176
Affects of prayer	52
Negative	27
Bad things	0
Crying	3
Illness	7
Pain	1
Sins	12
Temptation	7
Worries	4
Positive	25
Alone or solitude	2
Bless(ing)	3
Comfort	2

Node Name	References
Happiness	3
Joy(ful)	2
Peace(ful)	2
Think(ing)	3
Time	6
Wisdom	2
Attitudes of prayer	22
Eyes closed	3
Hands	4
Hands together	7
Kneeling	8
Places	4
Church	1
House	3
Types of prayers	96
Asking for something	3
Forgive	9
Formulaic prayer	1
Help	9

Node Name	References
Holy sentence	5
Lord's Prayer	4
Order (of prayer)	4
Please	5
Singing or Song	4
Sorry	11

Node Name	References
Talking to God	18
Speak	2
Thanking	9
Wishing or hoping	3
Written prayer	11

11 Appendix 4 – Consent Letters

11.1 Consent letter to the parents and guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian

Re: Project – Faith Matters

My name is Miss. J. Southward and I am a doctoral research student at Canterbury Christ Church University. I also teach at The Cathedral School in Chelmsford. I have been a primary school teacher for 20 years. I am doing a project about how children understand aspects of the Christian faith. I would really appreciate your help with this project by allowing me to talk to your daughter or son about her/his ideas about the Christian faith. Students don't need to prepare anything and I hope it will be interesting and useful for them.

I have planned to do an activity with a group of six students for up to an hour. I will video record the activity to help me remember what they have said and to help me write a report. However, the discussions will be confidential and the only people who listen to the interview will be myself, my supervisors and my examiner, who will be checking my work. Short excerpts from the discussion may be used in presentations to other academics and teachers. Photographs of what has been made will be taken and may be used (this will not include the children's images). No-one will be named in the report.

If you are happy for your son or daughter to take part, I would be very grateful if you could sign the attached form and return it to the school office.

If you would like to know more about the project, please contact me or the Head Teacher at the above addresses or at j.a.southward1001@canterbury.ac.uk.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter and for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Miss J Southward

I am happy to let my son/daughter* (print name)
take part in the project "Faith Matters"

- I agree that the activity and discussion can be video recorded.
- I understand that the activity and discussion will be confidential.
- I understand that short excerpts from the activity and discussion may be used in presentations to academic audiences.
- I understand that my daughter/son can stop the activity and discussion at any time.
- I understand that if my son/daughter does not want to take part, it will not affect him/her.

Yes, I consent to the above statements

Signed..... (Parent/Guardian).

Please print your name

Please return this form to the school office as soon as possible

11.2 Consent letter to the school

Re: Educational Research Project – Faith Matters

My name is Miss Southward and I am a Doctoral research student at Canterbury Christ Church University. I also teach at The Cathedral School in Chelmsford. I have been a teacher for 20 years. I am doing a project about how children conceptualise prayer in a school setting. I'm writing to ask your permission to do some educational research with a class of Year 3 or 4 students from your school. Students don't need to prepare anything, and I hope it will be interesting and useful for them.

I would like to talk with a group of six students for up to an hour. I will video record the session to help me remember what they have said and to help me write a report. However, the interview will be confidential and the only people who listen to the interview will be myself, my supervisors and my examiner, who will be checking my work. Short excerpts from the interview may be used in presentations to other academics. Photographs will be taken of the artefacts produced – these will not include children's images. No-one will be named in the report. With your permission this first activity and discussion could take place on a Friday towards the end of January 2019 (to be discussed) and I would be coming to your school to repeat the research with a further group of students on subsequent weeks. I have offered to return later to give either individual feedback on the results of my work to the teacher involved and head teacher, or to run an INSET session for any teachers who might be interested in this research.

If you are happy for this research to go ahead, I would be very grateful if you could let me know. If you would like to know more about the project, please feel free to contact me at the above addresses or at j.a.southward1001@canterbury.ac.uk. Letters to parents and to the students have been prepared. If you would like me to forward you copies of these please just say.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter and for your help.

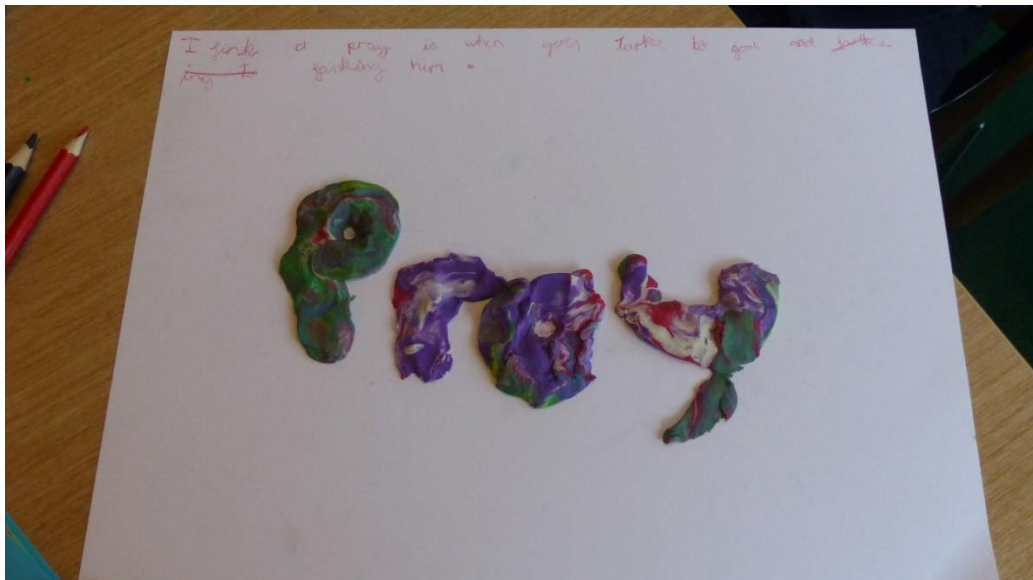
Yours sincerely,

Miss J Southward

12 Appendix 5 - Photographs referenced in the text



Picture 658 - Rachel



Picture 619 Edward



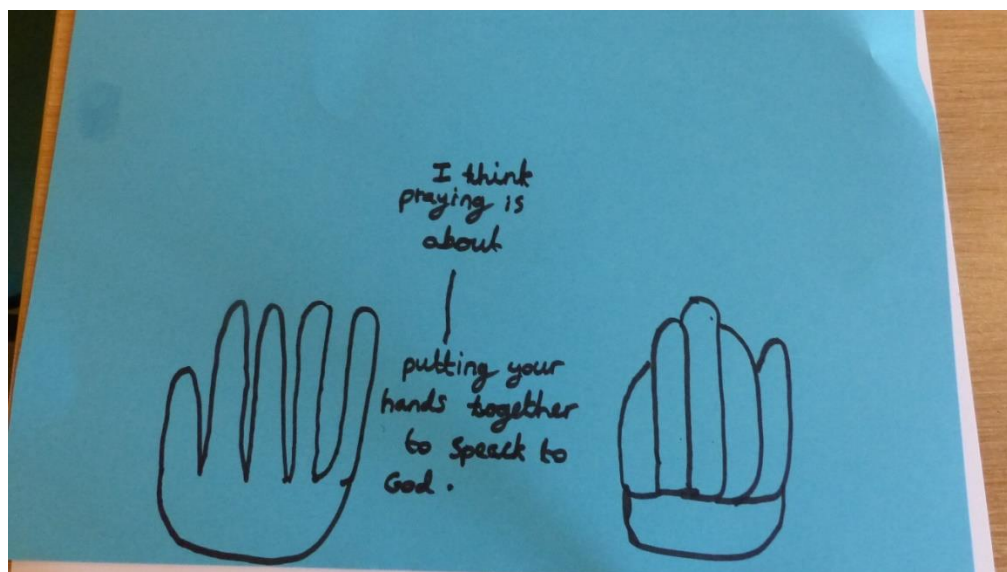
Picture 621 Anne



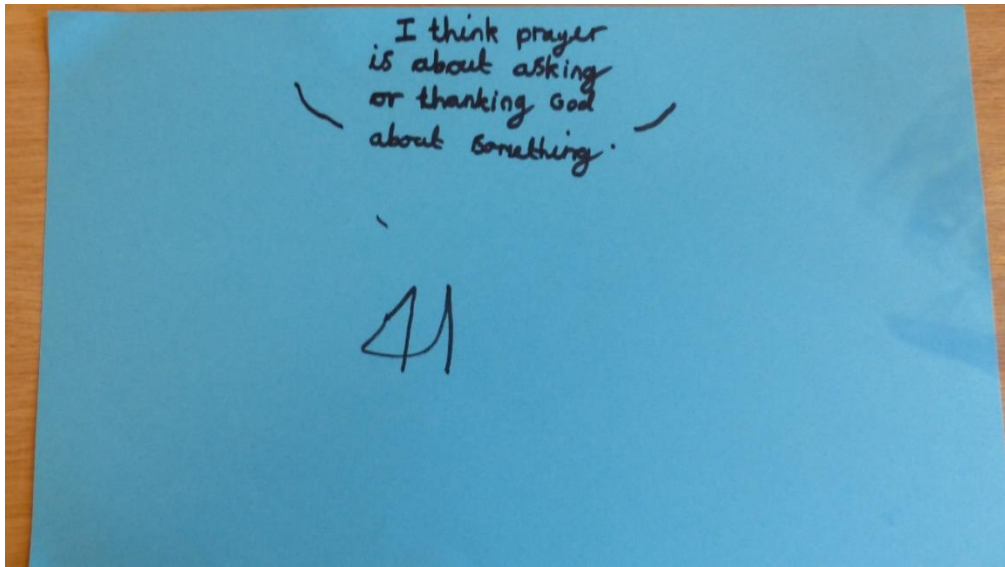
Picture 626 Edward



Picture 627 Darwin



Picture 628 Darwin



Picture 629 Darwin



Picture 630 Karen



Picture 631 Jackie



Picture 635 Isabelle



Picture 636 Graham