

**Spirituality Nurturing and Being-Nurtured:
Experience of Sunday School Teachers of Hong Kong Churches
on Children's Spirituality**

by

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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

In most of the Christian churches in Hong Kong, children Sunday schools were established for nurturing children's spirituality. Bible storytelling is the major activity in Sunday school lessons. Sunday school teachers are church goers and serve voluntarily. However, some of them feel frustrated as they have difficulties in engaging children.

Various research studied the characteristics of children's spirituality and the influences of storytelling. Scholars suggested that adults can learn from children. Therefore, the author of this study is interested in the experience of Sunday school teachers on children's spirituality in the lessons. Therefore, a conceptual framework of how the Sunday school teachers or Bible storytellers experienced children's spirituality was established. A qualitative research was worked out and 15 Sunday school teachers were recruited. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the verbatims were the major data. Five observation sessions were also done, providing supplemented data.

This study identified three kinds of Bible stories that are more attractive to children and visualization of the ancient world with suitable teaching materials also facilitated children's engagement. When the children were engaged, the teachers experienced children's spirituality in terms of relational consciousness and characteristics of children as spiritual beings.

For the relational consciousness, teachers experienced the children making meanings of Bible stories to God's stories, self-story and others' story. Interestingly, the teachers also perceived that they experienced spiritual growth in terms of feeling connected to self, God and others.

For the experience of the essential characteristics of children as spiritual beings, it was in terms of simple, wholeness, genuine, and joy. It impacted the teachers and they hoped to be "becoming like a child".

Therefore, this study identified that the teachers were spiritually nurtured in terms of

growth in relationships and being connected to the inner child. They are related to spiritual health and well-being. Such experiences reveal that the teachers can learn from children and the lessons become enjoyable.

Keywords: Sunday school teacher, Bible storytelling, children's spirituality, spirituality nurturing, and teaching experience.



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“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3-4)



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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

There are over 1,300 Christian churches in Hong Kong (Wu & Lau, 2015). In most of them, children Sunday schools were established for nurturing children's spirituality, especially for passing on Christian faith, beliefs and moral values. Although the programs of Sunday schools may be different, Bible storytelling is the major activity in Sunday schools.

Sunday school teachers are volunteers among the church goers and most of them are not professional teachers. They may just have received a few hours of in-service training and start their teaching in Sunday school. They intend to teach the children with Christian beliefs, knowledge and values. Unsurprisingly, many Christians working with children experience “burn out” (Nye, 2009). Moreover, Lam (2018) uses “sunset” to describe the condition of Christian education of children in Hong Kong.

Previous studies on children's spirituality mainly focused on areas including features of children's spirituality and children's responses to Bible stories, seldom on the teachers' perspective of how they were impacted by children's spirituality. Interestingly, researchers reported that adults can obtain spiritual insights by interacting with children (Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008a; Stonehouse & May, 2010). If it is the case, listening and attending to children's spiritual verbal or non-verbal expressions in Bible lessons should nurture teachers' spirituality in some senses and make the Bible lessons more enjoyable. However, minimal

research intended to explore this phenomenon.

Bible teachers are suggested to walk along the spiritual journey of children, as they are pilgrims. Then, what do the Sunday school teachers' experience on this journey? How do they feel? How do the storytellers experience about children's spirituality? Are the teachers also nurtured by the verbal and non-verbal spiritual expressions of children? The proposed research helps to investigate how the Sunday school teachers perceive their experiences of interacting with children in Sunday schools.

1.2 Research Intention

The researcher of this study who has been a church pastor for more than 15 years and a church goer for more than 30 years feel that Sunday schools have been boring the youths recently. They have no more interest in the Bible stories. The experience that shocked the researcher was the scenario as follows:

A mother who has a kid of primary 6 came to my office and told me with distress:

“My son has told me that he will not go to church with me after he has been promoted to secondary school.”

“Why?”

“He said that Sunday school was boring.”

“Did he say that he did not believe in God?”

“No, he said that he couldn't feel that God was nearby.”

Similar scenarios do happen so often in the researcher's experience. Therefore,

experience of brought up shock (Osmer, 2008) evoked the researcher's interest to understand what the Sunday school teachers are really experiencing in Bible storytelling. Do they feel that they are really present with the children in the Bible story world?

Moreover, the church members become less and less willing to be involved in Sunday school. After working for a whole week, they feel participating in Sunday school consumes their remaining energy. It is a both-fail situation. What are the storytelling experiences in Sunday schools nowadays?

Apparently, children love listening to stories and Christians assume the messages from Bible stories have the power in spirituality nurturing. But how does Bible storytelling affect children's spirituality? It is argued that the effect of Bible storytelling depends on the engagement of children's imagination. If the children are engaged, they would be absorbed in the story apparently, wondering occurs and the children would go through a meaning making process. Children's spirituality would be nurtured in that sense. How do the storytellers engage the children during storytelling?

Undoubtedly, the quality of the storyteller has influence on the effect of spirituality nurturing in Sunday school. However, most of the time, the storytellers are volunteers among the church goers and not professional teachers in such settings. They are not well trained in storytelling and do it in their own way. Many of them have difficulties in engaging children during presentation of Bible stories.

Furthermore, the goals of Sunday school teachers often emphasize on learning and knowing the abstract Christian truths. Therefore, the teachers stress on the children's good memory for the Bible stories' details and orthodox teachings. Then children are viewed as passive recipients during Bible storytelling and children seem to have difficulties in being engaged. Sunday school teachers experience burn-out by the way.

On the other hand, many researchers, spiritual and religious educators suggest that children are also spiritual teachers of adults in some senses. Their characteristics of spirituality give adults insights into the daily lives. This may promote adults' spiritual well-being. This study argues that Bible storytelling is an activity of spirituality nurturing and being nurtured for the storytellers. This depends on the perceptions of the storytellers on the children's spirituality and Bible storytelling. This study also investigates the storytellers' experience of spirituality nurturing and being nurtured.

Therefore, the researcher tries to work out a qualitative study and intends to document the experiences of storytellers nurturing and being nurtured by children's spirituality in Sunday school, and how such experiences benefit the storytellers' spiritual well-being.

The interest of the authors on children's spirituality are also influenced by the Scripture: "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew Chapter 18 verse 3)," Christians think the characteristics of childhood may have some "generic elements" of spirituality which are worthy of rethinking and learning by

adults.

Lastly, the researcher has a 6-year old adopted daughter and hopes that she will grow up healthily in spirituality. All these backgrounds motivate the researcher to dig into the problems of Sunday schools in local churches.

1.3 Research goal and questions

The objectives of this proposed research are:

1. To understand the experiences of Bible teaching of Sunday school teachers in Hong Kong.
2. To explore the phenomenon that children's spirituality impacts on the teacher's spirituality.

Therefore, the goal of this research is “understanding the phenomena and the experiences of spirituality nurturing and being nurtured of Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong churches.” This goal is attempted to be achieved by doing a qualitative research which refers to the teachers' perspectives. Therefore, the main research question is “How do Sunday school teachers perceive the spiritual experiences and impacts of Bible storytelling with children?”

This question aligns with George's (2010) suggestion. After studying the children's perceptions of the role of biblical narratives in their spiritual formation, she suggested that further research must be focused on the perception of adult storytellers to investigate their

reasons for sharing biblical stories with children. The reasons given by children and adults can be compared to see the congruency of their perceptions. Although this study did not directly follow George's (2010) suggestion, it focused on the experience of Bible storytellers: Sunday school teachers.

Under the main research question, the sub-questions are,

1. In what ways is children's wondering exhibited?
2. How do teachers interact with, promote or hinder their wondering?
3. How do the teachers perceive the characteristics of children's spirituality by their reflection on their spiritual expressions?
4. How do the teachers perceive their experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?
5. How do the teachers perceive their spirituality nurturing and being nurtured by the experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study focuses on the spirituality nurturing and being nurtured phenomena of adult Sunday school teachers. A literature review on the definitions and notions of spirituality was done.

2.1 Spirituality

2.1.1 Little agreement in the definition

Spirituality means different things to different researchers (Bone, 2008; Chiu, Emblen, Van Hofwegen, Sawatzky, & Meyerhoff, 2004; Hodder, 2009; Lipscomb & Gersch, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Mountain, 2005). Researchers claimed there was little agreement in the definition of spirituality. From 1975-1996, eight themes of spirituality emerged from the findings in health care settings. They are “meaning and purpose”; “connection and relationships”; “God / god(s) / Transcendent Other”; “transcendent Self”; “vital principle”; “unifying force or integrative energy”; “personal and private”; and “hope” (McCarroll, O'Connor, & Meakes, 2005). Moreover, definitions of “Spirituality” are suggested widely from merely search for God to solely secular terms (Trousdale, 2004). The researchers also intended to find culturally specific characteristics of spirituality, including those in Chinese context (Kwan, 2018; Lau, P. C., 2017). They concluded that connectedness, transcendence and existential reality were common characteristics across cultures (Chiu et al., 2004). Nevertheless, it was a long way to go for integrating such ideas.

2.1.2 Major concepts

Researchers identified five epistemological perspectives of spirituality: “spirituality is known practically”; “spirituality is known phenomenologically”; “spirituality is known linguistically”; “spirituality is known in subject experience”; “spirituality is an unknowable mystery” (McCarroll et al., 2005). Nevertheless, it is still possible to put some notions together. The sessions below are going to demonstrate some major concepts of spirituality with the broader consensus.

Essential feature of human subject that is relational in nature

Spirituality is a fundamental quality of human being and an essential human quality. The key part of definition of spirituality is about being, not in the usual way which is recognized in developmental and therapeutic contexts (Nolan, S., 2011).

Spirituality is perceived as an inborn element of a human person and an essential aspect of human development (de Souza, Francis, O'Higgins-Norman, & Scott, 2009; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008a; Westerlund, 2016). Actually, Kendler, Gardner, and Prescott (1997) studied the religiosity of 1,902 female twins (ages around 30 at the time of the study). They defined religiosity in terms of affiliation, devotion, beliefs and found that the participants' religiosity appears to be influenced by both environmental experiences and temperamental factors that are partly under genetic control (p.326). As religiosity and spirituality overlap, the research may demonstrate spirituality as an intrinsic capacity of human being has its

biological ground.

Moreover, Nolan (2011) claimed spirituality is experience of reality and suggested that such experience is observable and emerges as openness to the “more / Greater Self / Transcendent”. In that sense, spirituality is relational in nature and associates to the connectedness to external world. It integrates the rational and emotional domains of a human person, so called relationship with own self (Hyde, 2008c).

Experience of the Self-Transcendence relationship

Miller (2015) suggested that transcendent relationship (self-transcendence relationship) is the core of spirituality, concerns the subject encountering the sacred – a reality greater than the self. Such relationship opens people into a sense of a sacred space with direction and connection that facilitates people searching for connectedness, purpose, meaning and ethical responsibility.

To experience transcendent is a dynamic sense of connection with a supernatural power or sacred reality and to know our selves is part of greater universe, although the identity of the power or reality is perceived differently across nations and traditions. The experiences may be in form of prayers, or feeling of wholeness with the universe, from majestic natural scenes to propelling whales.

According to Miller (2015, p.76), there are three forms of spiritual experiences of transcendent encountering: people’s honor of the ultimate superior power, respect for spirits

in others including all living creatures, and a revived awareness of the view by higher self.

Relating to personal well-being

Holistic view of human must include spiritual domain. It is suggested that spirituality that integrates the rational and emotional domains of a human person (Hodge, 2001; Piedmont, 1999). Therefore, it is highly related to personal well-being.

Spirituality can be articulated and form various secular and religious beliefs and practices in different cultures. As it associates to the connectedness to external world that is other than self, psychotherapists have recognized that concerning some clients' spiritual conditions may be helpful for them (McMinn & Campbell, 2007).

Ivtzan et al (2013) conceptualized spirituality and religion in their research. They claimed that research largely shows that spirituality and religion are strongly associated with psychological well-being and mental health. The common factor of spirituality and religion is “searching for the sacred”, “sacred” referred to a “divine being”, “divine object”, “Ultimate Reality”, or “Ultimate Truth”. Moreover, personal experience of the sacred also benefits psychological well-being.

Furthermore, Piedmont (1999, p. 1009) suggested that spirituality allows people to locate a new individualized centering that binds them with a transcendent reality and creates an experience of joy and security. This experience of union provides coherence to people existence in the midst of many chaotic forces that impact our lives.

Obviously, people are different in the quality of spirituality and means some people have healthier spiritualities than others (McCarroll et al., 2005).

More than religion

Spirituality is tended to separate from religion in the last few decades (Nolan, S., 2011; Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartain, 2006). For example, Scottish Executive (2002) stated, “religious care is given in the context of the shared religious beliefs, values, liturgies and lifestyle of a faith community. Spiritual care is usually given in a one-to-one relationship, is completely person centered and make no assumptions about personal conviction or life orientation.”

There was no explicit distinction between the term “spirituality” and “religion” before mid-1990s. After that, the rise of secularism facilitated the separation of the two connotations. Chiu et al (2004) found that the descriptions of spirituality involving religious terms such as sacred, God or a higher power was decreased from 1990-2000. On the other hand, other words more frequently used were love, forgiveness, hope, fulfillment, peace, creativity. Therefore, spirituality can be understood in secular terms and it contains non-rational and non-material aspects of human life, such as awe and wonder, and feelings and emotions (Hemming, 2013; Trousdale, 2004).

Moreover, spirituality pre-exists and is larger than any form of institutionalized, organized formal religion (Hyde, 2004). Spirituality can be differentiated from religion as

religion is more formal, institutionalized and publicly accessible, such as chapels, temples, mosques, Scriptures, prayer books, religious ministers, wedding and funeral rituals. Rituals are the means or methods for experiencing of the sacred. Nowadays, secular people also associate religions with boredom, stubborn and being outdated. On the other hand, spirituality is viewed more positive because it is always related to love, kindness, inspiration, completeness, depth, wonder and individual devotions such as meditation and prayer. It associates an inner drive to obtain knowledge and experience of the sacred or the world. (Hay & Nye, 2006).

Additionally, Ivtzan et al (2013) used Fry's 5-item index of institutional religiosity (2000) to measure the participants' religious involvement and Piedmont's Spiritual Transcendence Scale (1999) to measure the spirituality. The researchers found that there was lack of a correlation between these two variables. They concluded that the result aligned with the assumption that spirituality and religion are distinct concepts.

Interestingly, Kennedy and Duncan (2006) reported that the teachers' concepts of spirituality seemed to be shaped by the Catholic tradition at the beginning of the research interview sessions. However, as the conversations continued, they explored ideas outside the religious framework and encountered existential quest such as "deeper sense of reality" and "meaning of life and death". Therefore, Sunday school teacher may connect to spiritual resources or concepts outside religious framework. They recognized that it was hard to

eliminate religious language when discussing with children about spiritual ideas and matters because religious language and experience and spirituality were highly interwoven together. They also agreed that spirituality has different layers, teachers must avoid confining spirituality into a narrow definition and keep open to reflect the creative nature and possibilities of spirituality.

Relating to belief system

Later on, Dyson, Cobb, and Forman (1997) worked out a literature review on the definitions of spirituality and found the self, others and “God” (may take different forms) were the key elements of spirituality. In the context of these three key elements, the main themes of spirituality such as “meaning”, “hope”, “relatedness / connectedness”, “belief systems” and “expressions of spirituality” can be articulated.

Gradually, spirituality is viewed as relating to an inner belief system providing strength and comfort for a person. Concepts of spirituality also includes values for construction of meaning and purpose of life, a sense of sacredness in living experiences, an altruistic attitude toward external world, a vision for the betterment of future, and a serious awareness of paradoxical nature of life. Moreover, living out such abstract concepts in relationship with others, nature and transcendence is the core of being spiritual (Houskamp, Fisher, & Stuber, 2004).

Mountain (2005) briefly summarized various concepts and definitions of spirituality of

different scholars and included that it is part of inner psychic life and governs people's emotions and moral decisions. Therefore, it relates to human beings continually searching for meanings and values in life (Hyde, 2008c).

Interested in quantifying of spirituality

Holistic care must include spiritual dimension. Researchers and health care professionals know spirituality is an important predictor of people's well-being. Therefore, the interests in quantifying of spirituality has been growing in last two decades. However, quantifying spirituality is difficult because researchers have different ways to construct the concepts of spirituality. (Bekelman et al., 2010).

There are more than 100 spirituality measuring tools. For example, Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality (BMMRS) was created to measure religiousness versus spirituality constructs. Factor analysis study showed that BMMRS was best conceptualized as measuring the positive and negative aspects of three domains, including spiritual experience, religious practices and congregational support (Johnstone, Yoon, Franklin, Schopp, & Hinkebein, 2009).

One more example, Davis et al (2015) understood spirituality was relational and five sources of spirituality were identified. They include Theistic spirituality, Nature spirituality, Human spirituality, Transcendent spirituality and Self spirituality. The five sources reflect the relationships between human and the Sacred. The Sacred refers to the objects bigger than the

self, including “a Divine Being, a Wholly Other, Ultimate Reality, Universal Truth, Super Ego, the Transcendence”. For researchers with such relational framework, the major characteristic of adult’s spirituality is a sense of or search for relatedness, connection, or wholeness with the Sacred. Therefore, “Sources of Spirituality Scale” was developed to quantify such spirituality construct.

However, it is problematic to synthesize the data collected by the studies using different tools. For example, a study demonstrated although two tools (Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy - Spiritual Well-Being and Ironson-Woods Spirituality / Religiousness Index) claimed they measured the same spiritual domain named sense of peace, the results were weakly correlated. It indicated that they seemed to measure different factors of spirituality (Bekelman et al., 2010).

If spirituality is constructed only as self-efficacy or quality of life, it may be similar to well established areas of psychology. Therefore, researchers recommended that incorporation of a transcendent factor is vital in differentiating spirituality from other conceptualizations. However, the experience of spirituality may be uneasy to articulate, and even more difficult to operationalize for empirical research. Nevertheless, researchers strongly supported that measurement tools must include the assessing of behavioral components of spirituality (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010).

Researchers suggested that the spiritual measuring tool must be culturally diversified

and sensitive as culture nurtures the beliefs and values that give an individual life meaning, purpose and connection. As such constructs were related to religiosity, unsurprisingly, none of the spirituality measurement tools was identified that can measure spirituality as separate from and different than religiosity clearly (Sessanna, Finnell, Underhill, Chang, & Peng, 2011).

Additionally, spirituality and well-being are both multifaceted concepts defined in a variety of ways, depending on the authors' world views. A combination of the two concepts presented as spiritual well-being (SWB) was described as "the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness". Therefore, spiritual well-being measurement must cover four domains: personal, communal, environmental, transcendental. After reviewing all available quantitative spirituality and well-being measures that had been employed with children and youth, Fisher (2009) claimed his SWB measures are the only available instruments which offer a balanced assessment across the four domains.

Chinese cultural context

Although people in different cultural backgrounds have common essence of spirituality, spirituality takes shapes and forms under particular cultural context. Therefore, Chinese culture, tradition and religion do have an influence on the characteristics of Chinese spirituality. The core of the Chinese value system is Confucianism. It concerns the realization

of a social being rather than a solitary individual. Moreover, the actualization of Chinese is to be an ethical and good person, rather than “what God wants of a person” as in Christian thought (Lau, P. C., 2017).

There is a Chinese saying, “Respect the teacher who has taught you just one day as your father for whole life” (一日為師，終身為父) (National Academy for Educational Research, 2021, June 21). Therefore, understanding of the characteristics of Chinese parents may help us to understand the presuppositions of Chinese teachers. Comparing with Western parents, Chinese parents are harsher and more controlling about their children’s behavior. However, they are also warm and loving toward their children (Sun & Rao, 2017).

Confucianism guides Chinese people’s behavior and social interaction. It also influences the Chinese parenting practices and emphasizes conforming to norms, establishing relationships with others and respecting parents and elders (Sun & Rao, 2017). Actually, Chinese are taught to highly respect the teachers. As the father is always the center of a traditional big Chinese family, the teacher is always the center of a Chinese classroom.

Recently, Kwan (2018) pointed out that the concept of spirituality is dominated by Western Christian culture. He mentioned that in hospital settings, Hong Kong people would be confused by the questions such as “How are you spiritually?” or “How is your spiritual health?” Although the questions are elaborated in terms of meaning of life, hope, love, relationality, forgiveness, and so on, non-Christian patients and those with little Western

education would still be bewildered.

Kwan (2018) claimed that such difficulty in communication reveals a deep conflict between a Chinese / Asian conception of spirituality / soul and its Western counterpart. He viewed that the conflict is rooted on the dualistic understanding of spirituality in Western culture, in other words, splitting of the spiritual and the material. However, Eastern anthropology is more holistic and contains no dualism of spirituality / bodiliness, nor of spirit / material.

As this research focuses on the teachers' experience of children's spirituality, the researcher should be aware that their Chinese cultural background certainly has influences on their perception of the experience. However, no study has been done on this area which is how the cultural background affects the interaction of Sunday school teachers with children.

Summary

Christian educators and pastors often overlook the findings of spirituality researches carried out in pluralistic settings and think they are irrelevant to Christian understandings. Stonehouse (2001) suggested that they are also meaningful to Christians. As such researches are looking for the 'generic element' of spirituality, the insights from the results serve as lenses to observe Christian spirituality and Christian faith.

The concepts of spirituality presented in this session can be summarized as three interrelating descriptions. Firstly, spirituality is an essential human quality and more than

institutional religions. In other words, it is ontological and biological reality. Secondly, spirituality concerns a movement toward Ultimate Unity. It involves the spiritual transformation or unfolding of higher levels of consciousness when the individual becomes one with or encounters the Sacred / Ultimate Unity / Other / God / Transcendence. Thirdly, spirituality might be the outcome of searching of purpose and meaning. It is given expression which might be characterized by altruism and acts of selflessness. Therefore, it relates to well-being of human (Hyde, 2008a; Hyde, 2008b).

2.2 Identity and role of Sunday School Teacher

Sunday school teachers are enthusiastic church goers who are interested in teaching Bible stories to children. They are volunteers and usually have no formal training in education. Some teachers teach the Bible stories every week and some teachers once per few weeks. The priority of the Bible stories is usually determined by the Sunday school in charge. The following session reviews the identities and roles of Sunday school teachers.

2.2.1 Educator

Bible teaching is one of the forms of religious education. There are two directions of educational approaches of the religious teachers (Achituv, 2013). The teachers with perception of positivistic educational approach think they can deliver their values and beliefs of the Bible stories to the children. Unavoidably, storytelling process would be teacher focused. They seldom involve the children in the meaning making (Hyde, 2008c). Moreover,

Ratcliff and May (2004, p. 153) stated that when religious schools and faith communities emphasized cognition as the key element to children's spiritual responses, they deviated from the target of holistic spirituality.

On the other hand, teachers with constructivist approach are student-focused and leave rooms for children's personal interpretation and independence. Short (2011, p.322) suggested that the teacher can use the questions which "the inquirer does not know the answers" to facilitate the children to enter the stories. However, the tension between positivism and constructivism is always there.

Neither teacher nor student center, Palmer (2007) suggested that the classroom should be subject-centered. In other words, the learning community in such kind of classroom should focus on the subject matter so called "transcendent third thing". Such thing is present really, vividly, vocally and holds both the teacher and student accountable to something beyond themselves. If a humble teacher is deeply engaged with the subject matter and open to explore, whose teaching would be a courageous act. In the case of Bible Sunday school, the Bible stories should be the subject matter.

Moreover, Freathy and Aylward (2010) reminded that storytellers must always reflect on his or her own motive and be aware of the gap between storytelling engagement and internalization of religious beliefs and values. They found that the students in England, France and America had difficulties in understanding Christian faiths such as Jesus' deity,

miracles as historic events, and resurrection, although they claimed that they had adequate knowledge about Jesus. In other words, children having strong knowledge of major Christian beliefs about Jesus had difficulties in understanding the core Christian beliefs. This may reveal why a lot of teenagers leave the church although they have attended Sunday school since they attended kindergarten. They were taught with a lot of Christian knowledge, but spirituality might not be nurtured.

2.2.2 Spiritual mentor

Sunday school teachers intend to nurture children's spirituality through Bible storytelling. Therefore, they are spiritual mentors in that sense. Bhagwan (2009) suggested that the spiritual development process should be supported by a wise and loving spiritual teacher or mentor, also a wise and loving religious community of spiritual and universal diversity. They should remain open to children's experiences and their interpretations of such experiences, and to respect the insights and strength they obtain from them (Scott, 2004; Trousdale, 2004).

Spiritual mentor must be a good listener. Houskamp, Fisher, and Stuber (2004) suggested that using open-ended questions in children's spiritual experience is obviously more helpful for uncovering the children's perspectives. In other words, the storytellers must have an attitude of wonder and honor children's wonder, and always be ready for the occurring of wondering in the Sunday school classroom (Melchert & Proffitt, 1998).

As a spiritual mentor, the spiritual quality of the teacher is important. The teachers' perception of personal spiritual qualities were "peacefulness, a listener, love of life, love of people, a sense of commitment, non-judgmental, inclusive, generous, caring, compassionate, empathetic, respectful, accepting, just, fair, tolerant, gentle, understanding and Christ-like of spiritual people" (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006, p. 287).

2.2.3 Bible interpreters

Achituv (2013, p.218) claimed that the Bible teachers' understanding of the Biblical stories is "comprised of many elements related to their personalities, to the education they received, and to their own personal biographies." Therefore, the interpretive act cannot be separated from the being of the interpreter philosophically.

The role of storytellers is editing rather than just organizing the stories or plots (Nelson, 1990). Storytellers often edit a received narrative, the Bible scripture in this research. Editing is much more than a matter of hermeneutics and the strategies are omitting, emphasizing, minimizing and relevance making (Copley, 2007). A good storyteller can select what is of relevance and interest to the hearers and the result is audience engagement.

These interpretational activities alter the way of the understanding of the past experiences which cannot be changed and encourage people to participate in the fulfillment of the story promised (Short, 2012). It benefits the spirituality and well-being of the listeners.

Nevertheless, the standpoint of this proposed study is that once the Bible story is retold,

it is interpreted by the storyteller's subjectivity. The process of editing occurs sometimes consciously, however, more often unconsciously.

2.2.4 Trusted adult

Children would identify various storytellers throughout their lives (George, 2010). In school settings, teacher-child relationship determines the effectiveness of the learning in various areas such as physical, social, emotional and spiritual, not only in the classroom lessons and formal curriculum (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006). In the absence of the explicit guidance of trusted adults, the children can only use their available information and meaning making strategies to make sense of their spiritual experiences (Karlsen, Coyle, & Williams, 2014). Therefore, trusted adults can help children to make sense of their spiritual experiences and form a storytelling community which is a stable place for the children to grow.

2.2.5 Shepherd

Nolan (2007) suggested that if a storyteller wants to be successful, he must forget himself and live the story as he tells it. Metaphorically speaking, during the Sunday school lessons, the teachers lead the children to a spiritual space for them to play around freely. The teachers lead and walk along the spiritual journey with the children. The study of Mountain (2007) showed that safe spiritual space created is a place for the children to experience connectedness. The researcher allowed the children to choose an activity such as artwork or role play for giving feedback to the teachers after Bible storytelling, and found the students

showed strong engagement in the creative and imaginative activities after the storytelling lessons. They were so absorbed and accepted the possibilities that the Transcendence might alter the meaning and outcome of the experience.

Summary

Bible storyteller is a Bible interpreter, a religious educator or spiritual mentor. He or she is a shepherd who leads the children to a spiritual space, also a trustful companion on the spiritual journey of children. The identities define the storytellers' relationships with the grand narrative of the Bible and with the children in company.

Nevertheless, Sunday school teaching can be viewed as a form of spiritual education. The role of such identities can be integrated by Wong's (2006, p.77-79) suggestion. He claimed that spiritual education should itself be spiritual. It would be any intended or unintended circumstance or effort that facilitates the development and nurturing of spirituality. In particular, it relates to the capability of and the disposition to transcendence and increased relational awareness. Moreover, spiritual education focuses on the qualities of spirituality including commitment to non-materialistic values; seeking of higher plans and goals; a sense of meaning and purpose in life; perseverance and resilience during facing difficulties; being virtuous; the capacity to feel curiosity, wonder and awe, even in daily living; and openness to relations. Therefore, "spiritual" as an adjective to qualify the term "education" should properly describe the nature rather than only the "content" and "intended

outcome” of that education.

2.3 Spirituality of children

In Kennedy and Duncan’s (2006, p. 285) study of teacher’s perception of children’s spirituality, the key word that came into their mind firstly was “relationship”, the other words with similar meaning were “belonging” and “connectedness”. Other words that were recognized in order of priority were “identity”, “challenge”, “presence of God”, “values”, “moral and beliefs”, “essence or core of being” and “mystery”. As this proposed research focuses on the impact of children’s spirituality on Bible teachers, this session reviews the concepts on children’s spirituality.

2.3.1 Historical background of study in children’s spirituality

Marked by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) that came into force on 2 September 1990, the importance of the children’s voice is highlighted in researches after 1990.

Haight (2004, p.109) mentioned that studies on children’s spirituality and religiosity were highly structured and adult-centered due to utilization of existing developmental psychology framework. The experiment sessions were styled as one-way communication from adult to child. Therefore, children are discouraged from wondering, asking or extending presented material.

Along this line, Beste (2011, p.327-328) observed that since the 1990s, researchers of

childhood studies had begun to rethink the assumptions that children received information passively from adult. It reflects the influence of development psychology which focuses on documenting age-related stages or milestones. Therefore, there was a growing movement of emphasizing children as “active participant” in research, listening to children’s voice and interviewing them directly is essential in data collection.

Moreover, spirituality and religion are not clearly distinguished from each other and viewed as overlapped for children. Measures of quantified religious practice have little help in understanding children’s spirituality because children’s involvement of religious function is largely determined by their families (Houskamp et al., 2004). Fortunately, valuable data was obtained from qualitative researches of children’s spirituality. Children are not viewed as pre-mature adults and they have unique characteristics of spirituality.

Lastly, Mata-McMahon (2016) reviewed the studies on children’s spirituality from 2005 to 2015. The studies can be divided into three main groups according to their areas of study. Firstly, “Child-God relationship”: no matter the religious or non-religious backgrounds of the children, child-God relationship has a strong presence in early childhood and younger children show more positive view of the relation. This relationship consistently is recognized to comfort and even promote children’s well-being. Secondly, “Spirituality in educational field”: researchers identified and applauded the children’s spirituality in classrooms. Therefore, the teachers rethink how spirituality could be integrated into the curriculum and

how it could enlighten the classrooms, while allowing children to freely experience and express their spirituality in the schools. Thirdly, “Identity formation and sense of self”: this category emphasizes the importance of children’s construction of worldview and identity. The differences between various religious and cultural views do have impact on the children about how they live their spiritual selves.

2.3.2 Representative researchers of children’s spirituality

Children’s spirituality was seemed as stage sequencing development before and the understanding of children’s spirituality has been changing in the past 20-30 years. Nye (2009) stated that Christian educators in the 1970s and 1980s were affected by the theories developed by Piaget and Kohlberg and tended to see cognitive learning as a whole. Therefore, the understanding of children spirituality was influenced by developmental psychology in this period.

As mentioned above, after qualitative research method was widely applied, the interest in children’s spirituality has grown since around 1990. This paper is going to present some representative researchers’ works. Many studies are worked out based on the results of these works.

James Fowler

James Fowler (1981) proposed the well-known faith-development theory. Fowler explored the spiritual development of children in relation to the cognitive development theory

of Jean Piaget, moral development theory of Laurence Kohlberg and psychosocial development theory of Erik Erikson. From the viewpoint of the theory of faith development, faith is identified as an integrating process involving the formation of the beliefs, values and meanings that give direction and coherence to human life. Therefore, faith development is perceived in a life-span perspective (Fowler, 1986; Kruidenier, 2017).

According to Fowler (1981; 1986), he identified 7 stages in faith development. They are “Primal Faith”, “Intuitive Projective Faith”, “Mythic-Literal Faith”, “Synthetic-conventional Faith”, “Individual-Reflective Faith”, “Conjunctive Faith” and “Universalizing Faith”. The first three stages are identified as age 0-12 and most related to this study.

At the first stage known as “Primal Faith”, a pre-language temperament of trust forms in the mutuality of infants’ relationships with consistent caregivers. This faith establishes powerful and trustworthy intimacy that offset the anxiety occurring in the separations and threats of negation during infantile development. “Intuitive Projective Faith” is a stage that the children’s meaning making is based on an emotional and perceptual ordering of experience. Construction of faith depends on the symbols and images of visible power and size. Therefore, it gives the possibility of aligning powerful religious rituals and practices with deep and long-lasting emotional and imaginal orientations. “Mythic-Literal Faith” is the stage that generally children aged 6-12 do not construct a personal God. They typically construct the cosmic pattern of God’s rule of the universe. Children believe that goodness

will be rewarded, and evil will be punished.

According to this framework, children's spirituality is shaped by received stories from the very early age. Children aged 3-7 in Intuitive-Projective faith stage are influenced powerfully and permanently by stories because they can grasp the presented stories as powerful images through imagination. Such experiences inscribe the children's intuitive understandings and feelings towards the ultimate conditions of existence. Furthermore, all children can experience kindness, conflict, fear and threat. Bible stories which link to such essential human experiences can be the most powerful way of engaging the children in the stories (Schachter, 1985).

From the perspective of developmental theories, children have the capacity to mature in terms of developing from concrete to abstract thinking (Moore, Talwar, & Bosacki, 2012; Pendleton, Benore, Jonas, Norwood, & Herrmann, 2004). Within Fowler's framework of faith development, children are supposed developed from "Primal Faith", towards highest stage as "Universalizing Faith".

At that time of studying children's faith development and spiritual growth dominated by the developmental framework, little attention was paid to the spiritual formation of the whole child (Stonehouse, 2001). Researchers and educators tended to overlook the daily experience of children's spirituality (Cervantes & Arczynski, 2015). Moreover, Minor and Grant (2014) stated that Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development produces the concept that "children

are unformed adults, as opposed to spiritual individuals in their own right”.

Robert Coles

Coles (1990) worked out a qualitative research with more than 500 participants aged from 6 to 13 from different areas and nations including United States, Central and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Therefore, the participants have 3 great world religious backgrounds: Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and some without religious identities. He released his results in the publication named “The Spiritual Life of Children”. Coles claimed that the impact of his book is the using of narrative style rather than abstract and analytic way for the presentation of the results (p.39).

Coles interviewed the children individually or in groups without structured questions. Participants were interviewed from 1 to over 25 times. He described his job was to listen, record, to look (at the drawings done) and to try to weave the meaning of those experiences (p.27).

Coles found some major psychological themes in the children’s voice including their desires, hopes, worries, fears, moments of deep and terrible despair. Such themes sometimes have distinctive connection with Biblical stories, religiously allowed or prohibited, or with religious practices such as prayer or meditation. Moreover, Coles suggested that one of the psychological dimensions of children’s spirituality is moral attitudes including emotions such as shame and guilt. Therefore, children’s mental life connects to their religious and spiritual

thinking (p.108).

Coles found that children tend to connect to the transcendence. They talk about the definition of God, try to locate Him in time and space, to recognize Him as precisely as possible, to explicate who and what He is (p.147).

Coles also noted that children connect their own personal stories to Biblical stories such as Adam and Eve, Abel and Cain, Abraham and Isaac, Noah and the Ark, Sam and Delilah, David and Goliath as the stories give expression of their emotional reactions towards daily lives, helping them become more mature, more contemplative and confident of themselves (p.120).

Finally, Coles concluded that the expressions of children in his research reflect human nature, in terms of the reasoning of people's behavior, feeling awe towards the mysteries evinced in the cosmos, displaying moral and spiritual power (p.332). In other words, Coles can learn the matters of human reality from his children participants. Therefore, Coles' research gives insight to the researchers to rethink their relationships with the children subjects.

David Hay and Rebecca Nye

Hay and Nye's (2006) research seems to be a watershed of the definition of children's spirituality. They interviewed 38 children (18 aged 6 to 7, 20 aged 10 to 11) with various religious affiliations and grounded the core of children's spirituality as "Relational

consciousness”. According to Hay and Nye (p.109), “consciousness” represents an awareness which is children intrinsic nature. Such awareness is a sense of being objectively aware of the children’s own subject response in relationships. Furthermore, the awareness nourishes a new dimension of knowing, meaning and experience. For the “relational” part, it includes the four dimensions of relationship between a child and the Transcendence, self, others and nature. Relational consciousness as the core of children’s spirituality, they suggested that it can arouse meaningful aesthetic experience, religious experience, distinctive responses to enigma and being, and moral and mystical insight.

Moreover, three categories of children’s spiritual sensitivity were identified by Hay and Nye (2006). Three categories included “awareness sensing” (an awareness and focus on the present and the moment) which concerns an awareness and focus on the present moment, “mystery sensing” (awe, wonder and fascination for the world) which concerns an awe, wonder and fascination for the world and “value sensing” (deep emotion and moral sensitivity) which concerns deep emotion and moral sensitivity.

By using the framework of relational consciousness, the target of spiritual education is re-constructing a relational society. Hay (2006) proposed the aims of spiritual education are twofold, “simultaneously nurturing a natural predisposition and deconstructing a socially constructed individualism which is destructive of human community.” He intuitively believes that religious education has an important role in nurturing relational consciousness.

After Hay and Nye's (2006) findings have been published, those who study children's spirituality seldom bypass their works (Hyde, 2004; Karlsen et al., 2014; Mountain, 2007; Reimer & Furrow, 2001; Trousdale, 2004). Mountain (2007, p.193) stated that relational consciousness is "a kind of inner knowing, but different from the 'cognitive' knowing of formal education". Bhagwan (2009, p.224) mentioned: "individuals do not exist as isolated, discrete or separate entities, but as interconnected beings whose growth, well-being and transformation are shaped by dynamic and fluid relationships between friends, family, the global community and a Higher Spirit within the Universe".

Nowadays, relational consciousness seems to be a basic concept of children's spirituality in English-speaking world. For example, Mountain (2005) adopted the concept of "relational consciousness" as the working definition of children's spirituality for her research into the meaning and function of prayer for the children.

Recently, although Watson (2017) agrees that spirituality has so many definitions according to different people in the "post-secular context", she voiced that interdisciplinary and holistic approaches to children's spirituality will not have good results without a clear, common agreement on the meaning of spirituality. She claimed that she was an atheist. However, she was still satisfied by Hay and Nye's (2006) definition on children's spirituality and recognized that the educational field was influenced by their work in the last two decades.

Brenden Hyde

Hyde (2004; 2008a) developed a framework of concept of children's spirituality. The researcher identified four characteristics of children's spirituality. They are "Felt Sense", "Integrating Awareness", "Weaving the Threads of Meaning" and "Spiritual Questing". The researcher illustrated such characteristics with a qualitative study that the story of Good Shepherd (John Chapter 10) was told (Hyde, 2004; Hyde, 2008a).

"Felt Sense" can be identified as a child's drawing on the wisdom of his or her own body as a natural way of knowing. It is demonstrated by the child being engaged in his manipulation of the teaching materials. It is a sensory and tactile activity.

"Integrating Awareness" was identified as the child repeatedly moving the sheep back to the sheepfold by the Good Shepherd's shoulders. This action has some significance for the child. The researcher suggested that the initial level of awareness of the Felt Sense may have been enveloped by a second wave of consciousness. This is so called "Integrating Awareness".

"Weaving the Threads of Meaning" refers to a child making sense of the environment and events from different frameworks of meaning by using his or her own sense of wonder. The researcher reported that the child in the same study came across the story a few weeks ago. There are always new things to discover when the child come back to a story through wondering. He seemed to attempt to uncover the meaning of the parable for him. He was

weaving the frameworks of meaning together.

“Spiritual Questing” refers to a child being a seeker of a sense of life’s meaning and telos. The researcher mentioned bringing all the sheep back to the sheepfold might show that the child did not want to be alone. Therefore, the researcher demonstrated how to “listen” to the children’s non-verbal spiritual expressions.

2.3.3 Characteristics of children’s spirituality

After the representative researchers of children’s spirituality have been presented, the following session introduces the major characteristics of children’s spirituality proposed by various researchers.

Awareness of reality and sense of timelessness

Powell (2005) claimed that children have important spiritual capacities rarely found in adults. Pre-school children have full awareness of the reality at hand and a sense of timelessness. For example, a little girl can keep still for half an hour watching a line of ants, absorbing in their journey, also a boy rubbing soapy circles on his hands during bathing. Adults of different religions use a lot of time learning to be absorbed in the moment; young children work out easily and welcome adults to join them in wondering and share the pleasure.

At this moment, adults put down the agendas in order to receive the love offered by the kids and prepare to give love. It cultivates the relationship between the child and adult in

love. It is suggested that moral development must be based on love. When young children are invited to pray, their prayers of thanksgiving almost always show their capacity for wonder. It is noted that sense of wondering cultivates the heart of gratitude.

Hyde (2008b) claimed that refers to the intensity and immediacy of bodily awareness of the present moment. Such awareness is called the “felt sense” which leads to attending to the here-and-now of experience.

Freedom to be

Children construct and understand their identity freely. Bone (2010) found children were free to play, free to connect with external entities, free to transform into animals or princess. Bone (2010) labelled this kind of play as “metamorphosis”.

By using Kierkegaard’s (1983) concept, “freedom to be” could be called “ontological freedom”. Kierkegaard affirmed the subjectivity of human being. Every person has full responsibility for his own choice. Kindergarten children actualize such freedom nicely.

Nowadays people struggle for demonstrating his true self in daily life or even become dishonest to himself. By observing children’s daily spirituality, we can meditate the key factors of living as “freedom to be”.

Deep joy and pure wonder

Cavalletti (1992) recognized the main strengths of children’s spirituality were “deep joy” and “pure wonder”. Moreover, Berryman (2013) suggested that “wonder and mystery”

relates to creativity, imagination, play and it must occur in a spiritual space, not only physical space, but also mental. He agrees with Csikszentmihalyi (1988) that sense of “wonder and mystery” is the awareness of experiencing “flow”. It is something beyond language system and logic.

Cervantes & Arczynski’s (2015, p.246) defined children’s spirituality as “an increasing awareness, subjective inner experience of wonder and curiosity, striving for something greater than oneself, believability in unseen forces, and playful transcendence”. Therefore, children’s spirituality relates to the recognition of the mystery and sacredness in life, and more open to unexpected, mystical experiences and events. Children always experience the world in wonder.

Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) pointed out that children are rarely unhappy without good reason. They act spontaneously with total absorption and whole-hearted involvement. Children only feel bored when they come to know and experience that their choices are artificially restricted. Therefore, people always cherish their memory of childhood because they feel the simplicity, peacefulness, undivided participation in the here and now of the early years.

Relational Consciousness

Hay and Nye’s (2006) defined children’s spirituality as “relational consciousness”. The definition of it was introduced in the previous session of “David Hay and Rebecca Nye”.

Additionally, the core of relational consciousness was constructed as “unusual level of perceptiveness” which referred to how the child felt was related to environment, other people, self, and God (or the Other). There were various interfaces of relational consciousness such as interview conversation, playing, drawing, praying, religious rituals, etc. (Hay & Nye, 2006). It provides a preliminary framework to observe children’s spirituality as social and contextual phenomenon (Reimer & Furrow, 2001).

Children demonstrate relational consciousness undoubtedly. They seemed to nicely integrate and adapt to the surrounding in the research. Many of them expressed their relationship with the Transcendent. Children spontaneously sympathized with each other and sometimes showed a special affection to a friend. When a child was hurt or cried, another child always stayed quiet and stared at the crying child with worry (Champagne, 2003).

Moore et al (2012) interviewed 64 Canadian children (ages 6-11) from various religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds on their perceptions of spirituality. It was found that all the participants perceived spirituality as relational, even the non-religious children. The children mentioned the spirituality in the daily lives of their classmates, peers or family members.

Furthermore, Pandya (2017) conducted an online questionnaire research of 1,989 in 108 elementary schools across 12 countries. She found that approximately 76% of respondents expressed that spirituality for children meant nurturing a relational consciousness. Regression showed that Christian female teachers with higher Daily Spiritual Experience Scale scores

from Canada, the United States, European countries and Australia were more likely to perceive the meaning of spirituality for children as nurturing a relational consciousness. With this result, the researcher claimed that the form of values education is relational consciousness nurturing. It was because universal values such as peace, unity, unconditional love and forgiveness were spiritually defined and might not be taught.

Actually, it aligned with the findings of Moore, Talwar, Bosacki's (2012) study. They interviewed 64 Canadian children (ages 6-11) from various religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds on their perceptions of spirituality. It was found that all the participants perceived spirituality as relational, even the non-religious children. The children mentioned the spirituality in the daily lives of their classmates, peers or family members. Most importantly, the Bible stories are literally inspiring. The children weave the plots of the stories and their own personal stories together (Coles, 1990, p.121).

Moreover, the teachers believed this relationship determined the effectiveness of learning in various areas such as physical, social, emotional and spiritual, not only in the classroom lessons and formal curriculum (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006). However, if a teacher cannot recognize the relational consciousness of children, he can bear in mind that some children seemed to keep their spiritual experiences as secret and isolated themselves from people (Karlsen et al., 2014). The Sunday school teacher must be aware of such children's situation.

Response to daily religious rituals, practices, experiences

Nowadays, although the educators have widened the definitions of “spirituality development” from its Christian origins, religion still as one of the forms expresses spirituality (Hemming, 2013). Religious rituals and practices provide religious experiences. Mountain (2005) found that Muslim, Catholic, Christian children have similar spiritual experiences through their own religious rituals and prayers. Such religious rituals, practices and experiences benefit well-being through altering the brain which is plastic in nature (Lovelock & Adams, 2017; Newberg & Waldman, 2009).

Tamminen (1994) worked out an extensive survey research which involved nearly 3,000 Finnish children and adolescents aged 7 to 20 on their religious experiences. The researcher found that the core of aged 7 to 11 children’s religious experiences were general very concrete, and they tend to relate their personal religious experience to their daily life.

Intuitive theism

Kelemen (2004) reviewed cognitive developmental research and found that children around 5 years of age show the ability to view objects in terms of design. It means that children can think about natural objects as not humanly caused. Moreover, children aged 6 to 10 revealed that they concern intentional nonhuman causation for the purpose of the existence. The children’s explanatory strategy demonstrates that they may be characterized as “intuitive theism”.

Moreover, Vaden and Woolley's (2011) demonstrated that children who used God as an explanation for the events showed higher levels of belief in the factuality of those events. Therefore, they pointed out that God's involvement in a story had effects on children's belief in the reality of contents of that story. They found that between the ages of 4 to 6 was the period marked by using religious cue in making reality status judgments developed significantly. In this case, the children seemed to be engaged by the encounters of human with the Transcendence.

2.3.4 Chinese cultural context

In 2000, the Hong Kong Government made known an education reform document which stated that spiritual education was under the category of moral education (Education Commission, 2000). Wong (2005) commented that such implementation of spirituality elements in Hong Kong school curriculum only showed minimal impact due to its ambiguous relationship with religious education in schools which had religious affiliations.

Educators in Hong Kong then tried to clarify what was meant by "spirituality" and "spiritual education". Ng (2008) introduced the Hay and Nye's concept of children's spirituality as relational consciousness to Hong Kong educators. He also pointed out that "spirituality" is more holistic in Chinese culture compared with Western culture, which includes material and non-material parts of human beings (Ng, 2010).

Moreover, Lau (2010a) claimed that different preschools in Hong Kong have different

understandings and applications of spiritual education. She studied the children's concepts of God and spirituality and concluded that children interact with their social world and obtain information in their culture, in order to construct their spirituality. And children's wondering makes them create new meanings from connecting meanings from various sources (Lau, G., 2010b). Nevertheless, western conceptual framework was majorly used in the local studies on children's spirituality. The studies in Taiwan also have the same situation (Chen, 2013; Chou, 2018; Su, 2014).

As this study focuses on the teachers' experience on the children's spirituality, and an indigenous framework of children's spirituality has not yet been established, the researcher relied on the framework which was established to describe the core essence of children's spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006).

2.4 The influence of Storytelling on children's spirituality

2.4.1 Children entering the story world

Opening of spiritual space

Nolan (2007) studied the using of stories in Sister M. Rosalia Walsh's theory of Catholic religious education. The researcher stated that the language used in a story creates the picture in the imagination of the child and a spiritual space would be opened. Therefore, Stories have ideals and values and should elicit wonder, resulted in deepened faith and love. The language used in a story creates the picture in the imagination of the child.

Moreover, Bhagwan (2009, p. 227) pointed out that spirituality of children can be enhanced by creating, sharing and telling stories. And storytelling enables dialogue with children for spiritual issues and allows Bible teachers to interweave spirituality into children's growth and transformation. Therefore, emotion responses, meaning making and spiritual transformation occur at this space. Such relational spaces happen between people who often describe feeling as a strong sense of connection to others (Bone, 2008).

Opening of spiritual space relates to the children's imagination. To explain the relation between imagination and spirituality development through Bible storytelling, Mountain (2007) noticed the idea of Brueggemann (1992) that Jewish people can change the negative concept of captivity into the more positive one called "the exile" through imagination when they retell their ancient history stories. Furthermore, historical imagination allows thinking of better future which is not just the extension or projection of the present. During this process, suffering and joy are woven together as a whole. Therefore, imagination is identified as the root of meaning making, faith and hope.

Furthermore, imagination allows children to "play" in the stories. Trousdale (2004) mentioned a Jewish commenter used a "black and white fire" metaphor to illustrate similar concept. Bible stories are composed of white and black fire. Black fire is the stories in the form of written or printed letters on the pages. The white fire is the spaces between and around the letters. The black fire is unchangeable, and the white fire represents the endless

possibilities for the interpretation of the stories. Listeners' or readers' personal engagement, imagination and meaning making take place in the white fire adjacent to the black fire, the letters. In other words, the listeners or readers "compose" the story in their own brains. This process allows the listeners or readers to play inside the stories through imagination.

Trousdale (2004) found "Godly Play" a useful model which aligns with such theories.

The storyteller of Godly Play lesson affirms the children's responses, paraphrases its essence and waits for other responses. Godly Play allows children to enter the story imaginatively and honors their spiritual insights, play among the "white and black" fire and relate the story to their daily experiences. Furthermore, artistic expression ways are provided after the storytelling time. It encourages the children to continue their imaginative interplaying with the stories.

The imaginative story world is fragile

In Kuyvenhoven's (2009) study, the children knowing well at the beginning of storytelling was the invitation and opportunity for entering the story world. They reported there were two stages of story-listening and imaginative engagement. In the first stage, children picturized the story and made their way into the story world. In the second stage, they just submerged in the flow and experienced their imaginary story world. They reached the state they expected. At such stage, the children imagined and wondered alone with their stories.

However, such moment of engagement is fragile. The children in Kuyvenhoven's (2007) study reported the story-world would collapse if they were interrupted by unexpected noises such as falling water bottle or someone knocking on the door. They felt lost if this happened.

2.4.2 Influence of Storytelling

Hart (2003) suggested at least three sources may nurture children's spirituality including spiritual friends, stories, and the Transcendence itself. Moreover, Moriarty (2014, p.148) suggested that human experience is narrative in nature. Therefore, story reveals people's identity and provides a structure of meaning, coherence, and unity. A good story unites people to what is sacred.

Moreover, in order to provide a firm support for the use of stories in nurturing children's spirituality development, Trousdale (2004) discussed the power of storytelling from various theoretical perspectives. She argued that the mode of thought of modern people concerns verifiable empirical truth in contrast with the narrative mode which concerns the human condition, in other words, more lifelikeness.

Basically, the researcher of this study composed how storytelling can nurture spirituality in terms of five key concepts as follows.

Bridge of head knowing and heart knowing

Miller (2015, p.167) viewed symbolic stories are the bridge of head knowing and heart knowing. Head knowing of the contents of the stories should be undivided from heart

knowing of the implicit beliefs and values. In other words, head and heart are interrelated, not only in physiological sense but in spiritual sense. “Head knowing” and “heart knowing” must expand and deepen together. Although Bible stories, myths, or fairy tales are recognized as fantastical adventure stories for children, for example, the Bible stories of Noah’s ark, they are also lodged with the meanings and values, such as courage, love, faith, higher life plan, and victory against fate. Children integrate both knowing ways into how they perceive, understand and interpret the world. Therefore, Miller (2015, p. 161-162) suggested that children’s natural experience of wholeness, or “unitive empathy”, should be preserved during cognitive development and not need to give up or outgrow.

Moreover, Cavalletti (1992) showed that the very young child responded well to the biblical parable stories such as the Good Shepherd (John Chapter 10 verses 1-16) and Hidden Treasure (Mathew Chapter 13 verses 44-46). She demonstrated that these stories can impact both the practical (more “creativity” oriented, uses knowledge for the sake of action) and the speculative (more “reason” or “logic” oriented, seeks and uses knowledge for the sake of Truth) intellect of the children.

Kuyenhoven (2009, p.161) concluded that “storytelling is a medium of presence”. She explained that “storytelling is a medium that says knowing is done in company and is stored in hearts and minds. The usual authority of text is absent; there is no print refuge, substitute, or weapon. The medium of presence nourishes and emphasizes this understanding”. Along

this thought, storytelling as an activity of being present together, it bridges the head and heart of the people involved.

Allows access to crucial issues

Human being as an existential reality faces existential crises including death, meaninglessness, threat to freedom and isolation. Butenaite, Sondaite, Mockus (2016) identified 31 articles and worked out a literature analysis. The researchers theoretical differentiate three components of those crises. Emotional components include guilt, fear, anxiety, emotional pain, despair, disturbed sense of integrity, emotional vulnerability, helplessness and loneliness. The cognitive components include loss of meaning and telos, realization of own limitations, loss of personal values and decision-making. The behavioral components include restraining actions, health problems, loss of relationships, rituals, addictions, anti-social behavior and the need of therapy.

Nevertheless, children may have emotional responses when they are engaged in the stories due to the contents containing these existential crises. Walker (2010) suggested that storytelling allows children to access such crucial issues and confronts them in a symbolic form.

Moreover, Lovelock and Adams (2017) suggested that children can discuss dark issues and are able to manage fears safely through stories. For example, Worsley (2004) asked 9-10 years old children to retell the Noah's Ark (Genesis Chapter 7) story by art works and found

that they usually focused on the boat and the animals, although the story was about judgement and salvation and almost all the creatures were killed. Nevertheless, Worsley (2004) suggested that the story of Noah's ark is worthy to tell children because it is believed that the terrors and the dark side of adult world can be introduced to the children safely.

Heritage of wisdom

Storytelling in either oral or written forms has an important function on cultural inheritance in many nations; these stories are meaning-lodged narratives (Rossiter, 2010). For example, the creation story in Maori mythology shapes Maori's core worldview as respectful relationship with all creation. Discovery of New Zealand is another dimension of Maori mythology which provides Maori identity (O'connor & Macfarlane, 2002).

Other than Christianity, folklores and traditions are taught in the Seneca Nation through storytelling. The stories having the messages of morals and values were taught orally to the teenagers. Through the story plots, tribal knowledge and wisdom such as identifying right behavior, problem solving, tribal organization and roles of adults such as fighting and hunting (Ollerenshaw, 2006).

Wisdom helps people to face difficulties in life. Stories illustrate the paradoxes in real life experiences and touch the emotions and minds of the listeners. For example, paradoxes that do not set well with American mentality such as, "Triumph grows out of suffering" and "freedom is discovered in obedience." Mere words seems fail to illustrate these obvious

contradictions (Nelson, 1990, p.98).

However, nowadays, commercial mass media such as advertising industries creates a social reality which takes up the role of storytelling in communities. The focus of its storytelling is feeling good individually. It shapes people's concepts of wellbeing or the good life and becomes their dominant spiritual and moral reference point (Rossiter, 2010).

Nurturing effect in family

Hoopes (2013, p.211-212) reviewed empirical, theoretical, and theological literatures related to children's spiritual development and how stories benefit to the spiritual growth of children. The researcher summarized that spirituality is relational and common in human being's experience. It is influenced by children's original family. In other words, it can be nurtured by adults. Such children-adults relationship can be described as pilgrims-companion. Children are pilgrims in life journey. Stories can help children extend their knowledge and deal with hard times, loss and grief on the journey. Stories can also be used to encourage forgiveness and healing. Stories can help children understand and identify with people in different cultures. Once the stories' meanings are internalized, children's behavior is affected.

Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.236) found that people with coherent life themes were always able to recall that their parents told them stories or read from books when such people were very young. When fairy tales, biblical stories, heroic historical deeds or influential family events are told by loving trusted adults, it helps children to construct a

meaning order from their past experiences. On the other hand, the researcher found that persons who never focus on any goal, or accept other people unconditionally, tend to be unable to recall their parents reading or telling stories to them as children. Children television shows with pointless sensationalism are unlikely to achieve the same function.

2.4.3 Children's Spirituality nurturing with Bible Storytelling

The above session focuses on how storytelling influences children's spirituality. This session focuses on how particularly Bible storytelling nurtures children's spirituality.

Moreover, Nye (2009, p.78) suggested that the key of spirituality nurturing of children is being sensitive to call out the good which is immanent in their lives rather than projecting onto them. This session focuses on the spiritual responses of children during Bible storytelling and such responses would emerge as verbal or non-verbal expressions.

Presupposition of the nurturing effect

Hay (2000) claimed that various religions contain culturally agreed metanarrative which is against individualism in postmodern world. Therefore, Biblical stories, as one of the forms among fairy stories, myths, legends, have spirituality nurturing effect on the children and youth (Stonehouse, 2001; Walker, 2010).

Miller (2015, p. 176-177) emphasized the importance of children's spirituality nurturing because researches show that the spiritual qualities of character, including "openness, empathy, compassion, and conscience, are among the most important factors in lifetime

success and satisfaction.” These qualities begin in the children’s earliest years. Therefore, adult Christians present Bible stories to children at very early age.

Bible stories capture children’s imagination

Children engaged by storytelling must involve their imagination. Stonehouse (2001) recognized the finding of Fowler (1981) that a young child can be profoundly affected by a story once his or her imagination is grasped. Imagination is essential for the children to make meaning from the stories (Worsley, 2004).

Furthermore, Stonehouse (2001) also agreed with Berryman (1991) that by entering the Bible stories through imagination, children can affectively and intuitively grasp truths about God that are deeper than if those truths were presented in theological words. Entering a Bible story also allows the children to play with the plasticity of the story and to relate the story to their living situation (Trousedale, 2004).

In the light of Bakhtin’s (1981) differentiation of discourse into “authoritative” and “interior persuasiveness”, she stated children prefer the second type of discourse in the Bible lesson. The “authoritative discourse” is characterized by static, a lack of dialogic possibilities and play. On the other hand, “interior persuasiveness discourse” is more open, unfinished, allowing further creative interaction.

Once the children are engaged in the Bible storytelling by their imagination, wondering occurs and they encounter the existential quests and miracles contained in the stories.

Bible stories elicit children's wondering

Once the children are engaged by the Bible stories, wondering occurs. Children are brought into dialogue between Bible stories and their life stories by “wonder and mystery sensing”(Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2010). This sensing relates to encountering the Transcendence through imagination and is also considered as the awareness of experiencing “flow” (Berryman, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is something beyond language system and logic. It also relates to creativity and play. It must occur in a spiritual space, not only physical space, but also mental. The spiritual space opened by storytelling is an imaginative and indeterminate space. Rowe (1981, p.27) suggested that stories make human sense for unfamiliar concepts by providing contexts. Transition and meaning making occur at such space.

Additionally, Bible contains ancient Israel narratives in the form of poems, Schachter (1985) suggested poetry such as those selected from the Book of Psalms may increase the children's senses of the wonder and mystery towards the Bible.

Moreover, Hay and Nye's (2006) idea aligns with the suggestion of a teacher of another subject. Kur and Heitzmann (2008) suggested that helping the children enter wondering after they have worked out an experiment in science lesson, pulls them into scientific inquiry.

Empirically, Worsley (2006, p.253) tried to observe the phenomena of children's wondering during Bible storytelling. He showed that children at different ages can be

engaged in the wonder of the creative narrative. For example, he noted a moment in the research session that a 7-year-old male child showed a “mischievous grin” facial expression. The child explained that the snake gave a signal to Eve (Genesis Chapter 3) with its tail that she should eat the fruit because snakes could not actually talk.

A bible storyteller as a companion of children on the spiritual journey, should lead them into the wondrous Bible story world and wonder with them.

Children make meaning during Bible storytelling

As human being, meaning and purpose in life raises hope to people existence (Chiu et al., 2004). Although religion provides an important source of meaning of life and insights for existential quests, for most people, meaning is a result of creative thinking and individuals must grasp it and construct their own sense of order themselves (Ivtzan et al., 2013).

Therefore, Bible stories as spiritual resource, construct a theistic world view for the young children and impact on their meaning making. The function of Bible stories telling is “pointing” children to an infinite process of connection and meaning, to God rather than “showing” (Nye, 2009, p. 69).

Children are aggressive and inventive meaning-makers (Short, 2011). Empirically, Short (2011, p.307) demonstrated this idea by her research question: “What meanings do children make of the Bible stories presented in Sunday school?” She reviewed 25 studies involving the response of children approximately aged 6 to 12 to stories. She identified four significant

themes. Firstly, children are vigorous and creative meaning-makers. They are diligent in making the surrounding around them make sense including the stories they read and listen. Secondly, children utilize the available resources in the meaning-making process during contact with the stories. The resources include personal experiences, cultural context and cognitive development. Thirdly, according to the first two themes, the meanings made by the children after storytelling are highly personal and unpredictable. Fourthly, children's responses to the stories increase in volume and complexity with their age which reflect their developmental levels.

Moreover, Walker (2010) claimed that Bible stories have several layers of meanings which are special towards children. For example, the Bible story of Jairus's daughter (Luke Chapter 8) contains multiple layers of meaning for children. In that story, the father asked Jesus to help his dying daughter. However, the girl was dead before Jesus arrived. Jesus held her hands and told her to rise. She awaked immediately. Jesus asked people to give her food and she was healed. Walker (2010) discussed that there were layers of meaning:

1. At Jesus' time, female children had lower status and this story showed female children are also important.
2. At that time, children had less attention and were more helpless. The child was helped in this story.
3. Being able to eat is the sign of being healed. This message encourages children to eat in

sickness when the appetite is lost.

4. According to Jewish regulations, touching dead bodies is not allowed because it causes a status of impurity. However, Jesus demonstrated that no child is unclean or unacceptable.

Therefore, Bible stories have many layers of meanings for the children to explore during their engagement in the stories.

Moreover, the children who wonder in the Bible stories do make meaning by connecting the plots of the stories with their personal stories (Coles, 1990). Mountain (2007) also suggested that if children are engaged, it is assumed to provide the platform of relationship or contact deeply involved in making meaning.

However, it is difficult to differentiate between active meaning making and learning from external sources for older children. Obviously, information from schools, religion institutes, and mass media are also building blocks of meaning making process.

Connect to the “Bigger Other”

Moore, Talwar, Bosacki (2012) found that most of the children reported they had positive experiences as feeling good or happy when thinking about God. They perceived God as helper or listener when they felt sad or alone. Children could discuss God’s abstract nature such as omnipresent which means that God could be encountered by all children at the same time. Children also reported that God affected their ideas, feelings, choice making and

coping. The researchers concluded that “young children can engage with their spirituality and may have more sophisticated conceptions of the divine than was once thought.”

Furthermore, Nye (2009) suggested that children’s spirituality nurturing was looking for being sensitive to the sacred. Having such awareness of wider and deeper connections that invite children into acts of creative meaning making helps them to resist the sense of being void. As spirituality is much more dealing with being and feeling, the children’s spirituality was nurtured in terms of whether they were willing to connect to the “bigger other”.

Children can know they participate in God’s family and the grand narrative

According to Schwartz (2004), Bible stories invite children to participate in God’s family and involve in the relationships with the people. For example, the grand narrative of the Bible includes the stories of the Jewish great ancestors named Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Jewish myth, Abraham is often described as a child with the purest faith. Near his end of life, he has a vision that he become a happy child. There are many other joyful kids approaching him. They play together and listen to the angels’ wonderful songs. They stroll among the trees with good-smelling and sit under the Tree of Life.

Therefore, according to the insight of Jewish tradition, it is important to invite the children to participate in the story. It is believed that children’s spirituality in Judaism is nurtured by the experience of storytelling and those stories which are considered as part of their big family. Nevertheless, Christians believe that they are spiritual descendants of

Abraham by the thoughts of Apostle Paul (Galatians Chapter 3 verse 7).

Although Christian story is challenged by postmodern interpretation of meta-narratives, it is still a meta-narrative of a kind of world view. It provides meanings and values for the faith community. (George, 2010, p.299)

Summary

The previous session has discussed the nurturing effects of Bible stories on children's spirituality. Bible stories engage children's imagination as other fairy tales, legends or religious stories. Once children are engaged, a spiritual space opens and wondering occurs. Then they make meanings by connecting their inner self, personal stories to Bible stories' plots and transcendent. Therefore, children obtain spiritual insights and spirituality transformation may occur. Children experience pleasure during Bible storytelling in the whole process.

Good Bible storytelling encourages imagination and opens a spiritual space. Through imagination, children are led to faith, hope and love. The children would experience the security, love, protection and mystery of the Transcendence. On the other hand, close-mindedness can lead to stress, hopeless, and hatred when ideas are destroyed, aspirations are lost, and fears are expected (Berryman, 1991).

Moreover, as stories have impacts on children's spirituality, George (2010, p. 296) suggested that the entire congregation as a storytelling community and the children would

identify various storytellers throughout their lives, the congregation can be encouraged to become skillful in storytelling and be able to identify teachable moments for storytelling.

2.5 Engaged children's spiritual expressions in Bible storytelling

As this study focuses on how the Sunday school teachers experienced the engaged children's spiritual expressions in terms of wondering and meaning making, this session examines the previous studies on children's spiritual expressions during Bible storytelling first.

2.5.1 Highly individualized

Worsley (2004; 2006) conducted two research to study the responses of children to Bible storytelling. The first one showed three aged 9-10 children's interpretations on Noah's ark story were highly individualized that reflected their daily experience or knowledge obtained from the environment (but un-reflected) (Worsley, 2004). Secondly, Worsley (2006) used hermeneutic phenomenology method to study British educational Key Stages 2, 3, 4 children's responses of creation story of Genesis I-III. He stated, "different Key Stages and different cognitive levels engaging in the wonder of the oldest story ever told" (Worsley, 2006, p.257). Once children were engaged by Bible stories, they were abundant in spiritual expressions.

2.5.2 Children's emotions in Bible storytelling

Gobbel and Gobbel (1986, p.153) stated that children are biblical interpreters, that they

do interpret the Bible, making sense of it and achieving understanding of it. At such young age, children can integrate the stories with their limited knowledge or daily experiences.

Although the children did not fully understand and struggled with questions and wondered about the meanings of the stories, they expressed pleasure in re-visiting the stories and believed in the Bible.

George (2010) worked out a qualitative research in 7 churches in India with children aged 9 to 11 for their perceptions of the role of Biblical narratives in their spiritual formation. The researcher found the children could describe names, events and plots of 62 biblical stories totally. They could recall the stories and found comfort when they faced and identified the emotions such as fear, sadness, isolation, loneliness. It showed that there might be a link between children intellectual comprehension and spirituality.

Furthermore, the study showed that there might be a link between religious emotions and spiritual transformation. George (2010) found that children would develop certain emotion such as happiness, comfort, peace, joy, hope and sadness during listening or remembering the stories. Such emotions induced a desire for transformation. Therefore, the researcher suggested that Biblical stories might stimulate transformation.

Nevertheless, previous research focused on the children's expressions. This study focused on the teacher's experience.

2.6 Teacher's spirituality being nurtured by children's spirituality

In order to be capable of nurturing children's spirituality, the teachers agreed that they must nurture theirs first (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006, p.287). This study proposes that teachers' spirituality can be nurtured by experiencing children's spirituality during Bible storytelling in Bible Sunday school.

After reviewing the topics of adult's spirituality, children's spirituality and impacts of Bible storytelling on children's spirituality, this session investigates the topic on how the children's spirituality is supposed to be able to nurture adult's spirituality.

2.6.1 Don't indoctrinate children

Teachers must be aware that young children are unable to separate from the teachings of other persons about religion beliefs or spirituality as the path to spiritual growth and their own internal spiritual life (Miller, 2015, p.65). Teaching of abstract ideas or concepts may not nurture spirituality of children. They only become head knowledge of Christian beliefs and values.

Moreover, Schoonmaker (2009) recognized that teachers should not impose their meaning on children's responses and should learn to listen to children's preverbal, verbal and non-verbal spiritual expressions. Moreover, teachers' desire to add moralism or "little lessons" to be learned into the Bible stories is not helpful, even destructive to the children in their own engagements with the Bible (Gobbel & Gobbel, 1986, p.143).

In order to restore the spiritual nurturing and being nurtured effect, Jonker (2015) wisely suggested that the storytellers must adopt a meditative storytelling style to encourage children to focus on the Transcendent rather than interrupting the story with explanations. It allows space for silence and cultivates imagination.

Furthermore, in order to facilitate spiritual nurturing and being nurtured, Kuyenhoven's (2009) experience is valuable to be a good reference. Once her class discussed what "heroic" meant after listening to a story about suicide bombing. She discovered that inside the mental space created by storytelling, the children learn to view and think more broadly. They tested their ideas by the meanings of the story and other classmates' opinions. She recognized that good development of an idea needs small incremental shifts including plenty of opportunities and encouragement to reconsider, amend, and develop an idea. The researcher claimed that her spirituality is nurtured by reflecting on the process of discussion of children after storytelling.

2.6.2 Must listen to children

The approach of children ministry called "Reflection Engagement" (Stonehouse & May, 2010) puts emphasis on listening to verbal or non-verbal spiritual expressions of the children. The teachers tell the Bible stories without embellishment and creates a calm and quiet space for the children engaged by the stories. After storytelling, the children have time to choose from a range of activities to respond. For example, they may use the teaching materials and

revisit the story again or pick crayons to draw something that they reflect on the story.

In such situation, the teachers may have the opportunity to listen to the children's verbal or non-verbal spiritual expressions. Actually, Kuyenhoven (2009, p.196) concluded that, "Storytelling is a listening act. A teller listens to her listeners...A storyteller learns about the story in the midst of storytelling." Listening creates space. Mountain (2007) proposed that it is legitimate and necessary to give time for developing imagination through creative experiences. It is important for children's spirituality nurturing.

Furthermore, Hyde (2005) found that insufficient response towards children's spiritual expressions would disappoint children. The researcher reported that a 10-year-old boy said, "It is beyond logic", after listening to an Australian myth. The child entered the realm of mystery where creative fusion occurred with ideas and horizons. However, Hyde (2005) noticed that the teacher failed to follow up the child's expression and his disappointment was shown by his facial expression.

2.6.3 Bible storytelling as restoration of human relationship

From philosophical viewpoint, Hay (2000) pointed out that before Enlightenment, religious teachers engaged the students through oral presentations. They were communicating with each other in the here-and-now situation. After Enlightenment, the influence of literacy on spirituality is that reading on written text becomes one of the spiritual experiences. The consequence of literacy is the diminishing of the relational spirituality or consciousness. Then

accepting Descartes' dualistic view of human nature in 17th Century further favors the development of individualism. As a person takes the view that his most certain knowledge is of himself as thinker, then other types of knowing are secondary. The existence of the external world becomes problematic. It leads to human isolation. The blossom of human spirituality characterized as relational consciousness is suffocated. Therefore, Bible storytelling may revitalize both adults' and children's relational consciousness.

2.6.4 Children are adults' teachers

Children are teachers as people may learn what is essential from watching children's attitudes and actions (May & Ratcliff, 2004; Rowe, 1981). If adults take on the childlike openness, they can learn, grow and make meaning out of this chaotic world through stories (Nelson, 1990). Along this line, adults' spirituality can genuinely be nurtured by children (Nye, 2009). For example, Ferrucci (2002) shared his daily spiritual experiences with two kids in his book and concluded that his kids taught him a lot. They taught him what was living at the present moment and being absorbed, how to creatively break through the rigid thinking framework. The self-awareness of the psychological and emotional situations also increased as they were mirrored by the kids' situations.

Moreover, Miller-Mclemore (2006) reviewed the theories of representative Christian educators with modern to post-modern perspectives. She concluded that whereas researchers who studied childhood in the last few decades basically were motivated by seeking the

understanding of adult development. However, childhood becomes the subject matter in recent researches. The researchers recognize that adults can learn many things from attending to children. This idea agreed with Rowe's (1981, p.30) suggestion that Bible teachers or storytellers might learn something from children.

2.6.5 What children can teach adults spiritually

Firstly, Hart (2003) stated that one of the greatest lessons that adults can learn from children is the power of awe. The researcher mentioned wonder makes people keep sight of the sacred and it is recognized as alive among them. Wonder may occur in different forms and magnitudes, ranging from a small moment of treasuring the sun shining and warming our face to admirable spiritual epiphanies. The special moments of experiencing wonder are timeless. Theologian calls this moment "eternal now". At this moment, boundaries blur between the self and others.

Secondly, Hart (2003, p. 254-261) identified four themes that children can teach adults.

1) See the adventure: Adults recognize that life is hard and serious. Children remind adults that life is an adventure to be lived and teach us to play with it. Being spiritual is to live out your own story. 2) Live everything: Adults tend to hide their feelings due to various reasons and become inhibited. Children feel and express what they feel. They teach adults to be congruent. 3) Be in our bodies: Adults are expected to think abstractly and present rationally. Therefore, they may diminish utilization of body-based knowing, such as gazing at galaxies.

Adults are alienated from their bodies and are familiar with integrating the wisdom of bodies.

Children remind them to notice the pure pleasures of a taste, a touch, or a rhythm. 4) Being vulnerable: Adults try to obtain the feelings of vulnerability and security through such things as money, properties, social status and a safe living area. In contrast, children are naturally thrown into all kinds of unprepared situations. The first time they build sandcastle, play ball, try to ride a bike are all moments of vulnerability. Such moments remind adults to allow themselves to be vulnerable without personal belongs.

2.6.6 Children as spiritual journey companions

Stonehouse (2010) worked out a longitudinal qualitative study on children's spirituality. She did in-depth interviews for 40 aged 5-10 children and also their parents. The researchers engaged the children with various activities designed to facilitate them to talk about God and the Bible. In Stonehouse's (2010, p.129) study, the subject children were asked challenging questions about God, faith, the Christian life, and their own personal problems and relationships. How such questions are handled by teachers, parents, church leaders can make a difference in whether children identify God's story as their own and experience the joy of connectedness with the Transcendence. Those spiritual questions must not be overlooked. Teachers must be equipped to deal with their tough questions and answer them creatively and effectively. Therefore, teachers can join children in exploring those questions and walk along their spiritual journey. As a result, teachers grow in faith and understanding. Therefore,

Stonehouse (2010, p.106) stated that when teachers seek to provide children with the instruction and support what they need, that facilitates the teachers own spiritual growth.

Nevertheless, Stonehouse's (2010) study suggested teachers' spirituality would be nurtured by listening to and interacting with children.

2.6.7 Adults need children's perspectives

Mikkelsen (2005, p.137-180) studied the children's responses of reading fantasy literature. She claimed adults need children's ideas and expressions to complete their readings. When children are invited to respond freely to fantasy literatures, they deal with the complexities of stories and explore personal and ethical choices. Such choices are expressed in their exploratory conversations, drawings, retold or modified stories, engagement in role plays. This is so called "ongoing cycle of response events". Adults and children both can learn more if they work together as response partners in such cycle. In other words, adults can learn "something" from recognize different children's various perspectives of reading and worldview. Because different children have various responses.

On the other hand, Christian educators have a tendency to believe that Bible stories are too difficult for children. They have the responsibility to explain the moral teachings or messages of Bible stories for the children. The result is that the Bible teachers take a linear approach to Bible storytelling. The teachers prepare the lesson with a particular teaching goal, telling the story in a particular "interesting" way, directing the children to a particular

interpretation which involves various teaching activities for exploration. The lesson ends with a brief time of Q & A to assess how well the teaching goal has been achieved. This linear approach to conduct a lesson is not difficult to prepare and gives some security of routine for teachers and children.

Therefore, the teachers having the awareness that they needed children's perspective to complete their reading and those just taking a linear approach make the lessons very different. Children sometimes may not learn in a linear way. They learn through imaginative engagement with the Bible story world, ways that allow them to enter it (Moriarty, 2014, p.186).

2.6.8 Regaining childlike openness

The experience of encounters with children also gives insight to the adults for connecting to the real self. In other words, it is the connectedness with people's childhood and regaining the childlike openness.

Hart (2003, p.266-267) reported that a second-grade teacher in school said, "Once I reclaimed the second grader inside me, I no longer felt like I had to teach these kids. I recovered a part of me—the real me—that I had shut down so long ago. Once I did, I felt like I was both free and myself at the same time. But you know what? I kept teaching second grade, but now I do it with much more pleasure. I let that little girl within me tell me what will help these kids that I teach, and I make sure that I bring her to class with me. I see what

the gifts are that I want to offer, and I love it. I don't know if I'll always do it, but for now it's completely my choice. This is where I want to be. Before it felt like I had to be here.”

If the regaining of childlike openness can be viewed as a spiritual awakened experience, according to de Castro's (2017) idea, such experience can be life changing. de Castro (2017) recognized adults' spiritual experience is similar to children in the sense of awakened experiences. Human development is a process of differentiation of a self and external world. This process utilizes internal experience and the perceptions of the external world to construct ideological framework. The researcher stated that awakened experiences are powerful experiences and can be life changing. Such experiences induce reinterpretation of daily living, give insights into the essence of existence and can also change people's responses towards life and death. In other words, awakened experiences re-frame people's ideological framework.

Actually, Hart (2003, p.104) suggested that adults can spiritually transform from the inside out by nurturing the natural openness in children, animating their big questions, and reserving space for pondering.

2.6.9 Teaching children is a transformative experience

Kang (2013) studied the Transformative Learning Experience of Sunday School Teachers at Korean Evangelical Protestant Churches in Southern California. Among the teachers from eight Sunday schools, eighteen participants experienced moments of

transformation in the lessons and seven participants experienced such moments while preparing the lessons. The participants expressed that their teaching experiences had influenced their lives in terms of enabling them to live what they taught (p.200). One of the participants shared that the teaching experience led her to be a teacher in a secular setting. Furthermore, the participants experienced that their teaching time was a central transformative time for their lives. They claimed that they felt connected to God closely and lived in God's Word in daily life. (p.201) Lastly, the participants with work-centered lifestyle discovered they were transformed to connect to and love people more. For example, the parents had closer relationships with kids. Through teachers' involvement, their relationships with others were grown (p.208-210).

In addition, Wong (2006) suggested that although transcendence is a commonly mentioned issue in the discussion of spirituality, there might be a "spectrum of transcendence" diversifying from the mundane to the extraordinary and leads to different degrees of spiritual sensitivity. Therefore, there would be a continuum of "spiritual phenomena" in this sense, from weak to strong. Wong (2006) believed the weak or mundane forms of spirituality are as valuable as the strong or profound in spiritual education. In this study, Sunday school teaching might not be an extraordinary spiritual experience, but it is valuable to be explored as it is a usual form of spiritual education in Hong Kong churches.

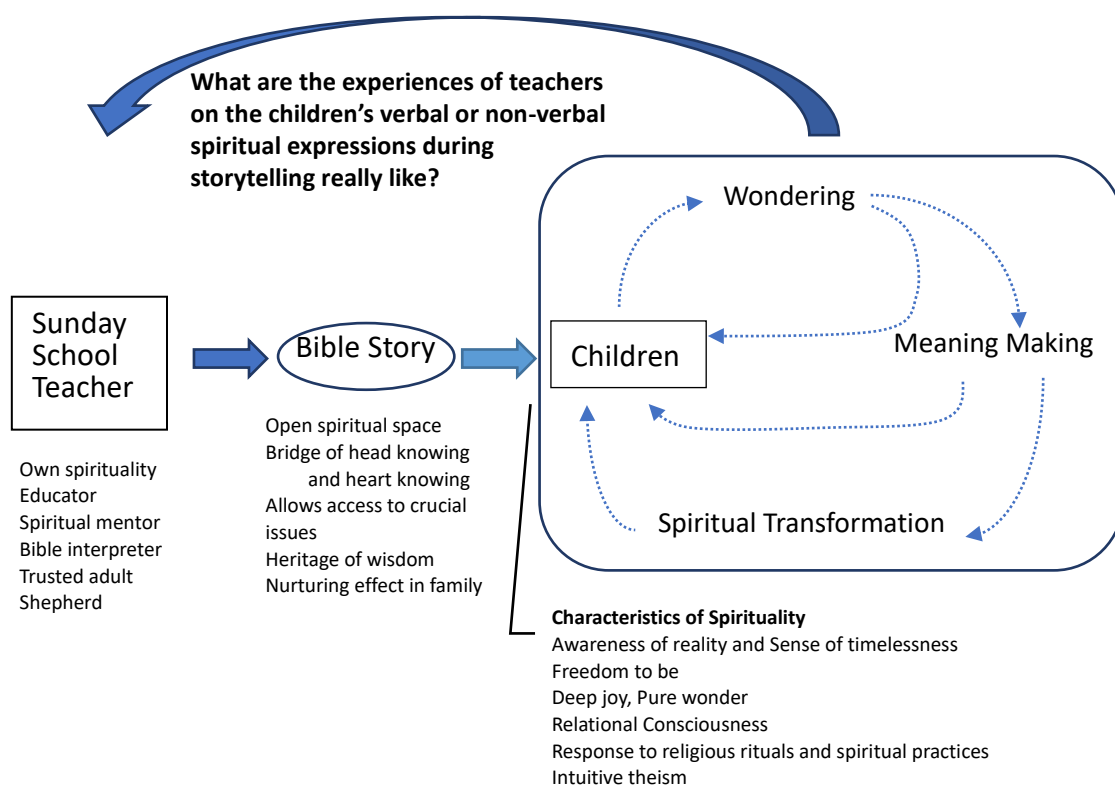
Different from Kang's (2013) study, this study focuses more on the spiritual experience

of Bible storytelling.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

From the theoretical concepts and findings of previous research in the above sessions of literature review, the author proposed the framework of spirituality experience of the Sunday school teachers as the following diagram:

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of this study



A Sunday school teacher presents a Bible story to the children in a Bible lesson with own pedagogy and style according to own perspective of spiritual nurturing including the roles of storyteller, the functions of Bible storytelling, perceptions of children's spirituality. Such perspective may be related to teacher's being. Nevertheless, the presented Bible stories are interpreted by the teachers.

Children engage in storytelling through imagination. The Bible stories are brought into dialogue with children's personal life stories. When children engage in Bible storytelling, spiritual space opens, and they enter wonder-meaning making-spiritual transformation cycle. Each point on this cycle may impact on children's spirituality. The flow of thoughts may not go through all three steps on this cycle. Some children wonder but do not make any meaning. Some children do make meaning but may not be spirituality transformed. There would be no guarantee for the outcomes in spiritual nurturing.

The children's spirituality will be demonstrated by their characteristics of childhood, relational consciousness, playfulness, verbal and non-verbal responses in the Bible lessons. Furthermore, children's spirituality may also be expressed as the process of integration of inner self experiences of questioning and seeking, values and meanings offered by their context, their aspirations for life or longing for better tomorrow (Scott, 2004). These phenomena of spirituality also have "prophetic" messages towards (Creswell, 2013) the storytellers and may have nurturing effects on them.

Nevertheless, the teachers can expect spiritual insights from children and listen to their responses carefully during storytelling, in other words, wondering with the children (Scott, 2001). The framework shows that the author suggested the spiritual expressions may have impact on the teacher's spirituality.

2.8 Project Significance

Search of EBSCOhost and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I was worked out on 22 Feb 2019 by using “Sunday school teacher/s” as keywords contained in the abstract. After the duplicated results were removed, there were 43 publications under “academic journals” category from 1881-2016 shown by EBSCOhost, and 68 items by ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I.

The titles of the retrieved items were read by the researcher for identifying items related to the topic. Abstracts of potential related items were read. Five items seem to be related to the topic of this proposed research. It was found that McOlash’s (1956) study investigated how the training programs delivered by the church impacted on the Sunday school teachers. Murphy’s (1998) study investigated how personal spiritual practices impacted on the teachers. Lin’s (2001) study focused on the sharpening of the interactive teaching-learning skills of the teachers.

Short (2010) studies children’s response towards Bible stories and proposed that the teachers and children could interact together about their immediate experiences with Bible stories. The program leaders and curriculum writers must also listen more closely to their own teaching and to the children's responses. This study may seem to follow this suggestion and investigate how such experience looks like.

Furthermore, Kang’s (2013) study confirmed teaching in Sunday school was a

transformative learning experience. All the participants recognized that their voluntary involvement such as being with students, preparation, teaching, and activities after the classes transformed their perspectives and lives. The target experience being studied in this research was rather broad. The proposal study focuses more on the teachers' experience of children's spirituality during Bible storytelling. In other words, the focus is experience of listening to children's voice as spiritual journey companions.

Therefore, there is no research at all on the influence of teaching on teachers' own spirituality. Furthermore, although researchers discussed the teachers' identity in previous research, no empirical research has worked on how the Bible teachers conceptualize their various identities. Only Whitfield (2013) studied how the religious component of teachers' identity influences their pedagogical practices.

The author of this research established a framework of how the children's spirituality impacts the teachers during the Bible lessons. After examination of the framework by this research, it may be used for the research of spirituality nurturing in other subjects such as religious, moral, life and values education. It may also be used in other settings such homes, hospitals, kindergartens and other institutional schools. For relatively unexplored research topics, the researchers use qualitative methods to collect data for generation of presuppositions. The results are used for the development of a questionnaire, a scale, or more structured interview program (Houskamp et al., 2004).

Another significance of this research is rethinking the borderline between teacher as giver and children as receivers. Schoonmaker (2009) studied the role of teachers and concluded that teachers should learn how to experience spirituality inherent in the teaching processes. Therefore, the researcher suggested that further research needs to be done on the children's spirituality expressions in the classroom settings. As most of the previous research focused on the children's own expressions on spiritual experiences, this research tries to find out what listening to, interacting with, and being impacted by children's spirituality look like. In other words, what a teacher who is sensitive to children's spirituality looks like. Researchers can develop models of spiritual connectedness and interaction of Bible teachers and children. Bible teacher trainers can plan the inclusion of promoting spiritual openness and sensitivity towards children in the training program.

This research may also give insight to the Bible teachers on how to identify moments and events, open the spiritual space, make place and recognize spiritual experiences in classrooms, and also help them to learn from their own experience, in other words, to nurture their spirituality themselves (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004; Hassenfeld, 2016; Schoonmaker, 2009).

The author's interest in this topic began with the problem of burn-out of Sunday school teachers. According to Van Manen (1997), teachers' burn-out may not be caused by being overloaded with work. Burn-out may reflect the hopelessness of the teacher who no longer

knows why and what he or she is doing. Van Manen (1997, p.123-124) suggested teachers can overcome burn-out by renewing the recognition that life is bearable which means teachers are living with hope. Therefore, this research may help teachers rethink their hopes, beliefs, values of being teachers and being present with children in Bible story world enthusiastically. It promotes the spiritual well-being of the Sunday school teachers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Methodology

The aims of the study have been established in the previous chapters and the focus of this research is the experiences of the Sunday school teachers on children's spirituality during Sunday school lessons. The literature review has outlined the epistemological background and identified the research gap. Therefore, the study is contextualized. This chapter reveals and justifies the research methods used in data collection and analysis.

As this study focuses on perceptions and experiences of the Sunday school teachers to find out the essence or reality of the experience of interacting with children of the Bible teachers, this process allows us to grasp the deeper significance, or structure of meaning, of the lived experience it describes (Hyde, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1989). Such inquiries cannot be resolved by numerical measurement, but rather depends on deeper qualitative data. In other words, open disclosure of individual experience is necessary for better examination of the target phenomena and human experiences. Therefore, Qualitative methodology is used.

Moreover, phenomenological study is appropriate because spirituality nurturing and being nurtured during storytelling are lived experiences for the teacher who interacts with the children. Phenomenology is the study of experience, and it focuses on the subject's experienced meaning that constitutes the activity of consciousness (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 1997).

As the targeted phenomenon of this study would be investigated by the proposed conceptual framework, the researcher has his own preunderstanding. Therefore, the research is interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutics is understood as the interpretation of texts which can refer not only to literatures, but also to discourses and meaningful human actions (Hyde, 2005; Van Manen, 1997). Moreover, the process of using thickened language to describe the lived experience is inevitably interpretive. Actually, people perceive the external world through utilizing complex and continuing hermeneutical processes consciously and subconsciously (Lau, P. C., 2017).

Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to describe the essence of the target phenomenon in order that the interpreter might obtain new understanding in relation to the phenomenon. In this way hermeneutic phenomenology produces something new (Hyde, 2010). Therefore, the researcher would be aware of the findings which are new or alien to the proposed conceptual framework throughout the study.

According to the previous literature review sessions and the proposed theoretical framework, the main research question I proposed to guide this study was: “How do Sunday school teachers perceive the spiritual experiences and impacts of Bible storytelling with children?”

And the sub-questions were,

1. In what ways is children’s wondering exhibited?

2. How do teachers interact with, promote or hinder their wondering?
3. How do the teachers perceive the characteristics of children's spirituality by their reflection on their spiritual expressions?
4. How do the teachers perceive their experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?
5. How do the teachers perceive their experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?

3.2 Research design

According to the literature review, no empirical research is available to describe the phenomenon on the topic of Sunday school teachers Bible storytelling engaging with children as spiritual experience. Also, the phenomenon of spiritual nurturing and being nurtured in adult-child relationship of Sunday school.

To answer the major research questions, in-depth interviews were used to obtain the Sunday school teachers' perceptions on their Bible lesson experiences. Therefore, interviews were the main form of data collection. The number of interviews would be introduced in the next session.

Considering the validity of this research, Boyatzis and Newman (2004, p. 168) suggested that it is valuable to use multi-method approach for conducting children's spirituality research. Their major concern is that "different measure yields different

impressions of the same phenomenon under study.” Moreover, Nye (2009, p.35) suggested that researchers must use a “wide net” to catch the different forms of expression of children’s spirituality. Along this line of thought, 5 Bible lesson observations for 5 individual Sunday school teachers were done. These observation sessions provided other forms of data of how children’s spirituality impacted on the teachers.

Van Manen (1997) suggested a tool for reflection on human’s experience and obtain insight into their spirituality according to his perspective on lifeworld existential including “lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality)”. The researcher tended to observe the lived experiences of the Sunday school teachers according to these four facets. The researcher used non-participating observation method to observe the Sunday school classes. Therefore, observation method was the supplemented form of data collection.

Concerning the epistemological position of this study, constructionism was taken. This regards all knowledge or meaningful reality is constructed from the interaction between the subject and object (Hyde, 2008a; Mountain, 2004). That is the relationship between human beings and their environment in social research. Therefore, knowledge is not an end product to deliver but rather be indeterminate. It is understood that the participants coming from different Sunday schools of different churches have many expressions of their idiosyncratic experiences through the interviews.

Moreover, constructionism recognizes knowledge as generated from the relationship between the researcher and the interested object which is being investigated. Therefore, the prior thinking frameworks and understandings of the researcher is viewed as research input in constructionism orientated study, perfect objectivity of the researcher is unnecessary. In other words, the researcher of this study and the life expressions of the Sunday school teachers emerge as partners in the generation of meaning.

3.3 Sampling

The Sunday school teachers who teach primary school children (approximately aged 6-12) are targeted in this study. This range of age is appropriate based on Worsley's (2004) studies of children's responses towards Bible stories, in which his target were children aged between 9 and 10. He claimed this age group are more open to spirituality and express their willingness to engage in wonder, awe and imagination.

On the other hand, teachers of pre-school aged classes are not involved because the experiences of pre-school teachers may be very different from the primary school teachers. It is due to the possible limitations in receptive and expressive language skills of the children (Boyatzis & Newman, 2004). Moreover, teachers in secondary school aged classes are not included because teenagers lose interest to attend Sunday school in Hong Kong (Lam, 2018; Wu & Lau, 2015). Therefore, recruiting of teachers in youth Sunday schools may be very difficult. Unsurprisingly, it is a worldwide trend. The percentage of teenagers who feel bored

to listen to Bible stories increased rapidly in the last few decades (Freathy, R. J. K., 2006).

As the researcher of this study has studied in a Bible seminary in Hong Kong, his classmates serve in different Christian denominations and regions in Hong Kong. Therefore, samples from different Christian denominations and regions were included in the study. The target samples were approached by the researcher through such network.

The participants are Sunday school teachers who have experienced the phenomenon and are interested in this study. According to Polkinghorne (1989), the number of participants varies considerably in phenomenological studies. The number of subjects in the examples given by Polkinghorne (1989) were from 3 to 30. Therefore, this study aimed to collect data from 15 participants.

According to the research proposal, 15 Sunday school teachers were recruited.

Concerning the ethical issues, they were asked to sign consent forms (Appendix A). The demographic data of the Sunday school teachers was collected.

3.4 Data collection

Data collection in phenomenological studies often involves in-depth and multiple interviews with participants (Creswell, 2013). Interviews provide data for understanding the teachers' perspectives on their spiritual experiences and impacts of Bible storytelling on children in Sunday school.

The researcher knows that the teachers' spirituality may be nurtured by other factors

such as satisfaction of delivering service, recognition from the church leaders or insights from the presented Bible story. According to the theoretical framework, the researcher keeps in mind that this research focuses on the phenomenon that the teachers experience children's spiritual verbal and non-verbal expressions, in order to understand the perceptions of the teachers on how such experiences impact on their spirituality. These specific considerations governed data collection.

The areas of questioning for the interviews are as follows:

1. Sunday school teachers' experiences of preparing for and doing the Bible storytelling.
2. Sunday school teachers' experiences and responses towards children's spirituality emerged from the process of Bible storytelling.
3. Sunday school teachers' reflection on the impact of being Bible storytellers on their own spirituality.

The questions being used in the actual interview sessions can be seen in Appendix D.

Questions 1-5 are introductory questions including themes such as why and how the participants were involved in Sunday school teaching. Questions 6-30 are related to the research areas of this study including themes such as participants' experience of Sunday school lessons and interaction with children's spirituality during Bible storytelling, and also their perceptions of how children's spirituality impacted on them. According to the nationality of the participants, the questions were asked in Chinese. The Chinese version of

the interview questions are listed parallel to the English version.

At the end of the interview sessions, the demographical data and background information of the participants were collected. Demographical data included age and gender. Background information included how long the teacher has been a Christian, the number of years of service in Sunday school, whether have kids, the trainings received, occupations. Moreover, the age and the number of children of the Sunday school class being taught and their families' religious background.

The interviews were semi-structured. The interviews were worked out between March and June 2019 and lasted for 1-1.5 hours. They took place in churches and public meeting places. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription. A digital recorder was used by the researcher.

Concerning the observation sessions, the researcher was involved in the lessons as a nonparticipant. The lessons were audio recorded for transcription. The researcher also wrote field notes which was filled up with the reflection of the researcher.

3.5 Participants

Fifteen participants were recruited in this study. The demographical characteristics were outlined in Table 1:

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics	N=15
Gender	
Male	3
Female	12
Age	
41-45 yrs	7
46-50 yrs	6
51-55 yrs	2
Have own child	
None	4
1-3 kids	11
Occupation	
Professional Teacher	6
Housewife	5
Others	4
Church Life Experience	
< 10 yrs	1
10-20 yrs	1
> 20 yrs	13
Church Denominations	
Christian and Missionary Alliance Church (宣道會)	8
Evangelical Free Church of China (播道會)	2
The Church of Christ in China (中華基督教會)	2
Other independent local churches	3
Experience of Sunday School Teacher	
1-5 yrs	6
6-10 yrs	2
> 11 yrs	7
Age Group of their Students (N=14)	6

Primary 1-3 (6-8 yrs)	5
Primary 4-6 (9-11 yrs)	4
Mixed	
No. of Children of the Classes (N=14)	7
5-10	6
11-20	2
> 20	15
Regular Church Attendance	

Additionally, one participant had a lot of teaching experience, but he had not taught Bible classes recently and played a supervisory role in Bible Sunday school of his own church.

Moreover, 5 observation sessions were done in 5 churches, 3 from Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, 2 from Evangelical Free Church of China and The Church of Christ in China. The researcher of this study aimed to observe the phenomenon of engagement of teachers and children in Bible storytelling. Also, how the children responded to the Bible stories and how the participants interacted with the children's responses were aimed to observe. These aims helped the researcher to understand the participants' experience of children's spirituality.

For the ethical issues, permission was obtained from the Pastor-in-charge of the churches recruited for the observation sessions. They were asked to sign the consent forms (Appendix B). Participating children's parents were also asked to sign the forms before the class through the teacher (Appendix C).

3.6 Data Analysis

As perceptions and experiences of the teachers are the focus of this research, their interview transcripts are the main data. The audio records and author's fieldnotes are supplementary data. The interview records, audio records were prepared as verbatim transcript. NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd, Australia) was used for conducting data coding and analyzing.

By following Saldaña's (2014; 2016) idea, the coding process was divided into two steps: First Cycle and Second Cycle. As this study focused on the phenomena of spiritual nurturing and being nurtured of Sunday school teachers, "Descriptive" and "In Vivo" coding was used in First Cycle coding. Descriptive codes were labels which summarized the data chunks in words or short phrases. On the other hand, the participants' own words or short phrases in the recorded data were used as In Vivo codes. Such codes preserved and honored the participants' voices.

In the First Cycle coding, the codes would be modified continuously and develop as more interviews were done. Some codes faded out when the divided phenomenon did not match with the phenomenon that appeared empirically. For example, a descriptive code such as "intuition" was used to describe a child's characteristic of spirituality that was experienced by the participant. As there was just one coded reference, it was modified to "genuine" halfway through the First Cycle coding. On the other hand, if too many chunks got the same

code, subcodes might be used to break down the bulky original code.

In the Second Cycle coding, the codes were building blocks for generating themes. The themes were developed and integrated into a smaller number of categories related to the research questions. The interrelationship of the categories was carefully examined in order to identify and understand the pattern or deep structure of the target phenomenon. Then the categories were refined based on the research questions.

In this qualitative research, the coding process drove the ongoing data collection as a form of early and continuing analysis.

All participants' personal details remained confidential by using nickname and were not identified in the data. Transcripts of the audio records also did not contain such information. In order to protect the participants' anonymity, the researcher maintained using nicknames of participants in the data analysis and report on the results. All recordings and data were stored in researcher's password-set computer. The audio data would be deleted once the research and thesis writing were finished.

3.7 Quality and validity of the data

Concerning the validity of qualitative research, it relies on the relationship of the conclusions of the research to reality and refers to “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account”. No standardized procedures can fully guarantee the researchers have captured this (Maxwell,

2013, p.121).

Creswell (2013) reviewed different perspectives on validation from various qualitative researchers. He summarized that “validation” in qualitative research refers to the endeavor of evaluating the “accuracy” of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, he insisted that such idea of validity must be realized as strategies or techniques (Creswell, 2013, p.249-250).

Along Creswell’s line of thought, this research used data obtained in the observation sessions as different sources to triangulate the data and provide conclusive evidence. In other words, the observation sessions provided concrete examples that could help the researcher to understand the phenomenon of spirituality nurturing and being-nurtured.

However, the validity threat of this research might be the self-report bias. Triangulation did not automatically increase validity as interviews and documents might have same biases and sources of invalidity (Maxwell, 2013, p.128).

Concerning the interviews, the researcher kept the questions open to ensure the interviewees’ description reflected their actual experience (Creswell, 2013, p.259).

Lastly, in hermeneutical phenomenology study, the researcher always raises philosophical assumptions to the topic and such assumptions are very often involved in interpretations of the data. As the researcher of this research is a Christian pastor, he has his own beliefs, assumptions, experiences of spirituality nurturing and he involved in the study as

a research tool in this study. However, the researcher keeps a rigorous check on his preconceptions along the study.

Finally, as the conceptual framework of this study was mainly developed from non-Hong Kong context literatures, the researcher also keeps a rigorous check on how the indigenous perception and experience of spirituality or Christian beliefs shapes the participants' experience on the children's spirituality. Nevertheless, Kwan (2018) recognized that although the meaning of spirituality is still not well confined, churchgoers in general have no communicative difficulty as spirituality seems to be part of daily Christian vocabulary. The interviewer and interviewees are all Christians in this study.

3.8 Pilot Study

Two pilot interview studies were done in context of Hong Kong churches during the development of this research. The interviews were done in Apr 2016. Two Sunday school teachers of primary school children were simply asked to share their experience of being inspired by the children's responses in the Bible lessons. One of the teachers has told a story about an eagle that was brought up by a hen accidentally. The father eagle was a metaphor of Father God in this story. One day, the Father Eagle came and asked the Son Eagle to leave the hen and chickens, although they had grown up together. After that, she asked the children if they were the Son Eagle, whether they would fly away with Father Eagle or not. The teacher reported that she was impressed by the answer given by one of the children who chose to

stay, “Why should I believe the words of a stranger?” The teacher perceived that was a spiritual expression from children and experienced the child’s wondering. This made her reflect on her relationship with God. “How do I know that I have not followed the wrong one?” Her spirituality may be nurtured in the sense that she encountered spiritual insight of the child.

Furthermore, another teacher mentioned that she must be humble to dialogue with the children during meaning making at Sunday school. Otherwise, it is difficult to establish the relationship between the teacher and the children. Such awareness can be another example that the teacher’s spirituality can be nurtured by interacting with the children.

Chapter 4: Teacher experiences children wondering during Bible storytelling

In this session, the teachers' experience of children wondering that occurred after they were engaged by the Bible story is described and studied. It attempts to answer two research questions: 1) In what ways is children's wondering exhibited? 2) How do teachers interact, promote or hinder their wondering?

In session 4.1, the teachers' experience of the media for children to enter Bible story world is explored. The participants found that various kinds of Bible stories and teaching materials could help children to enter the Bible story world. The kinds of stories and the types of materials will be discussed. In session 4.2, how the teachers experienced children's spiritual expressions that were elicited during wondering is investigated. Furthermore, the interaction of the teacher with the spiritual expressions of children wondering will also be reported in session 4.3. The interaction is understood as the teachers wondering with children. In session 4.4, the emotion responses of the teachers being elicited in such experiences is reported. At the end of this chapter, session 4.5 is a session of discussion.

4. 1 Media for children entering Bible story world

4.1.1 Bible story itself

Bible storytelling is the major activity used by Sunday school teachers for children's spirituality nurturing. Christians believe that Bible storytelling is an invitation for the children to enter the Bible story world. Therefore, this theme was identified as the teacher recognized

that the Bible story itself is a medium. The participants reported that certain kinds of Bible stories are likely to make the children enter and be engaged in the story world.

The participants experienced three themes of Bible story that absorbed the children more. The themes are “adventure stories”, “miracles of Jesus” and “stories with existential questing”. Moreover, the children also seemed more attentive when the Bible scenes were visually presented in Bible storytelling. Such teaching method recalls Bible stories.

Adventure stories

The participants named all famous adventure stories in the Bible when they were asked which taught story absorbed the children most and resulted in better responses. The stories included “Crossing the Red Sea” (Exodus Chapter 14), “Exploring Canaan”, (Numbers Chapter 13), “David defeats Goliath” (First Samuel Chapter 7), “Daniel’s friends in the fiery furnace” (Daniel Chapter 3), “Daniel in the lions' den” (Daniel Chapter 6). One of the participants mentioned such stories absorbed children most, especially for young kids:

Anna: At such age range, how the children respond to the stories reflects on the extent of being absorbed during story listening. Children are more absorbed and show the best response to the stories which have strong plots, powerful plots. I have known them since they were in kindergarten, now they are primary 1, I may have another idea when they grow older.

Moreover, if an adventure story has not been heard by the children, a teacher reported it easily engages the children, for example, the adventures of Paul the Apostle.

Miracles of Jesus

The participants reflected that the children were most absorbed when listening to the

miracles of Jesus. Participants experienced children being excited or awed by the miracle stories, especially the young children. They reported that children were most impressed by the “Miracle of the Five Loaves and Two Fish” (Matthew Chapter 14).

Ka: The children were more interested in and excited by the miracles of Jesus. They asked more questions when they listened to such stories.

Interviewer: Any example?

Ka: Um.....For example, in “Miracle of the Five Loaves and Two Fish”, they asked why five? I did not know how to answer them.

The children were engaged, wondered and asked wondering questions ultimately.

Stories with existential quests

In the literature review, it was mentioned all people deal with four ultimate existential concerns including death, freedom, isolation and meaningless. Bible stories may help children to face them safely. Unsurprisingly, participants reported that children were engaged with the stories which touched the existential concern of death, for example, the story of “Moses attacked an Egyptian to death” (Exodus Chapter 2). Children also wondered how Elijah went up to heaven (Second Kings Chapter 2). The Bible tells that he left the world in a whirlwind with the appearance of a chariot of fire and horses of fire. Children listening to the stories about people killing each other in ancient wars asked why they occurred. They were also engaged by the stories with warning messages, punishment and execution.

Interviewer: What kind of stories did they pay most attention to?

Kim: The frightening stories, such as those about punishment. For example, The Old Testament always mentioned God’s requirements, decrees, laws and commands, which

seemed to be serious. People not obeying such rules might be stoned or beaten to death in that era. We see more grace in the era of the New Testament.

Interviewer: Why did you feel that they were most absorbed in those stories?

Kim: They were frightened.

Interviewer: Their facial expression told you, didn't it?

Kim: Yes, I felt that I frightened them.

One teacher mentioned that the children were also engaged by the extraordinary choice of the Bible characters in the stories. It can be viewed as the existential concern of freedom.

Ling: Interesting stories are, ordinary people may not choose to do those things, but Bible teaches children to do, such things against the mindset of children, children are attentive.

Children sometimes verbally expressed their wonderings about ultimate existential concerns. One participant reported that she would not respond to the questions casually if she had no answer. She invited the children to explore together, especially the questions about life and death, or the existence of ghosts.

On the other hand, a participant told the story of Ruth (Ruth) in the observation session. The story brought out an existential crisis that the husband and two sons of Naomi were all dead and she got a son finally by the levirate marriage of her daughter-in-law with Boaz. The children seemed be wondering about the death of all the males in Naomi's family. However, the participant did not support the wonderings of children and directed them to give her expected standard answers.

Mary: Do you remember how many relatives of Naomi were dead? Who?

Child: Two.

Teaching assistant: Two?

Child: Three.

Teaching assistant: Which three?

Child: Her husband.

Teaching assistant: And?

Child: Sons.

Mary: Two sons. So, Naomi has a son now. How does she feel? What do you think?

Child: Happy. Hahaha..... (the children made happy sounds)

Mary: (Seemed to neglect the sounds) How is her relationship with God? How does she think of God? How does she feel after getting a son? Does she feel happy?

Child: Fear God.

Naomi encountered existential crisis of life and death in her family. The children expressed that Naomi should feel happy after getting a son and made happy sounds. The children were engaged by the story and showed good response to the teacher's question. However, the participant neglected the sounds and did not follow up the wondering of the children. Then she directed the children to think what proper relationship with God was. The participant seemed satisfied by the child's answer and the conversation was ended.

On the other hand, one participant said that there was no difference among various kinds of Bible stories for engagement of children. As this participant is a professional teacher and

he felt that he has no difficulties in engaging children in Sunday school.

Visual presentation of Bible story scenes

The participants experienced that the children were engaged well at the beginning of Bible storytelling when they illustrated the Bible scenes or ancient world in visual ways. One participant used video to show how to dye clothes in ancient times for a story of making garments of priest. The children wondered about how difficult it was to dye in ancient times. One participant asked the children to build the King Solomon's Temple (First Kings Chapter 5) with flour. The children wondered how Solomon built the real temple without modern construction machines. The participants found the children were engaged when the story of "Daniel in the lions' den" (Daniel Chapter 6) was being told with a photo of a real lion, similarly for baby Jesus' picture for Nativity. Furthermore, for a familiar story such as "The Prodigal Son" (Luke Chapter 15), the children were engaged by discussing what the robe, the ring, the sandal looked like in the parable and what they meant.

Wai: A child asked why the father gave the prodigal son the ring. Why a ring? I told him because the father gave the identity and position back to the son. The child was astonished. It seems that he never thought that the ring symbolized such meanings.

Additionally, the participants also experienced children entering the Bible world by making Roman military uniform with newspapers, showing pictures of vineyards and grapes treading, explaining ancient cultures such as "heaping burning coals on someone's head" (Romans Chapter 12 verse 20). The children seemed to enter the Bible world by the illustration of the clothing in ancient times.

4.1.2 Teaching materials

The participants were asked to rethink which teaching materials they had used resulted in the best effect of drawing children's attention. This theme was identified as the teacher had experienced certain kinds of teaching materials that could facilitate engagement by Bible stories.

Although Kuyenhoven (2009) claimed that what factors of the settings facilitated the story world coming to life for children were unclear, most of the participants in this study were impressed by the effect on engagement by using teaching materials. By using various teaching materials, the participants found that the children became more attentive. Such materials were used as the means of Bible story presentation. For example, pictorial Bible, video clips, printouts, shadow figures, felt figures and flannel board, soft puppets, paper bag do-it-yourself figures were mentioned. Using such kind of teaching materials set the stage for performing Bible stories. Some participants said if they used figures to present the stories, they sometimes used different tones to present different Bible characters.

Furthermore, one teacher used a map to show the geographical relationships in the Bible story and reported that the children were excited. In some cases, although without teaching materials, the participants reported that when the details of social and cultural backgrounds of the Bible stories were provided, such as the "Adoration of the Maji" (Matthew Chapter 2) and "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" (Luke Chapter 15), the children were absorbed during

storytelling. Therefore, such background information may help the children imagine and enter the Bible story.

In next session, it will report the teacher's experiences of children's spiritual expressions during wondering in the Bible story.

4.2 Teacher experiences children's spiritual expressions during wondering

When the children were engaged by Bible storytelling and entered the Bible world, wondering occurred and the children gave spiritual expressions verbally and non-verbally.

One of the aims of this research is to explore of how the teachers experienced and reflected on the spiritual expressions of children when they entered the Bible story world and wondered.

4.2.1 Non-verbal spiritual expressions of children during wondering

The participants experienced that the children listened quietly during Bible storytelling, more often in junior primary school classes. This phenomenon reflected that the children were absorbed in the Bible story world and it agreed with Kuyenhoven's (2009, p.47) finding.

The researcher claimed that storytelling changed the way of interaction in classroom and created a stream of concentration. It was shown by the children sitting quietly in uncommon still postures.

On the other hand, some participants reported that a few children were not in their seats. They were standing or walking around quietly. The difference in posture of being engaged

may be due to the different settings and regulations between Sunday schools of the churches in this research and the public school in Kuyenhoven's (2009) research.

The participants expressed that the children being engaged and absorbed by the stories was the most joyful part in the teaching experience.

Interviewer: Having been a Sunday school teacher for a long time, what kind of children's performance makes you most happy?

Yee: They listen seriously.

In that case, serious means to concentrate quietly.

As the children may keep quiet just to obey the teacher's instructions, the participants reported that they differentiated by observation of their eye focus. They gazed at the teachers or the teaching materials if they were wondering in the Bible story world.

Mary: During the lessons, their eyes gazed at you sincerely, totally absorbed. Some children were not in their seats. A few of them kept moving.

Interestingly, a participant reported that the children might not engage at the beginning of the storytelling, especially for the stories they had heard. They just wanted to tell the story. However, the children might become quiet and demonstrated being engaged halfway through storytelling. At the end, they showed great involvement in the time for response.

Concerning how long the children keep quiet during storytelling, not many participants answered this question quantitatively and only a participant reported that it was about 5 minutes. It seems that such moments are experienced as timeless, not easy to count.

In addition, only one participant felt the emotional status of children. He reported that

the children were touched by “The Parable of the Prodigal Son” (Luke Chapter 15), especially during the moment when the son wanted to eat the food of pigs because he was really hungry. The father accepting his son back home also touched the children. The teacher picked up the emotional changes with the storyline of children.

Nevertheless, being absorbed and sitting quietly was non-verbal spiritual expression of the children experienced by the researcher in an observational session. The participant told the story of “Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet” (John Chapter 13) with a pictorial story book.

Anna:They (the disciples) never thought Jesus would wash their feet. Right! Jesus kept washing their feet one by one. When it was Peter’s turn, what did Peter say? Peter said, “Oh! Lord Jesus! No way!” Therefore, Jesus replied, “No. If you don’t let me wash your feet, you are not my friend.” Jesus’ saying showed his insistence. Would Peter allow Jesus to wash his feet?.....”

When the participant was telling the conversation between Jesus and Peter in this story, the children were quiet and still. Such gesture expressed that they were engaged and wondering in the story. The conversation seemed be strange to the children. The participant grasped this moment and asked the question, “Would Peter allow Jesus to wash his feet?” The children were very quiet at the very beginning and seemed to fall into deep thinking.

4.2.2 Verbal spiritual expressions of children during wondering

The participants experienced children’s verbal spiritual expressions when the children were engaged and wondered in Bible storytelling. Three themes of verbal spiritual expressions are identified as “Questioning”, “Play in the stories” and “Express opinions”.

Questioning

The participants experienced children's verbal spiritual expressions when they were engaged and wondered in Bible storytelling. Some participants were able to recall the children's impressive wondering questions. Such questions were identified as three sub-themes including "Existential Question" and "Theological Question". In addition, one participant reported that the children wondered the Biblical context with their modern view of daily life. It was labelled as "Out of Context".

1. Existential question

The participants were impressed by children's existential questions. According to the literature review, existential crises are death, freedom, meaning and isolation. If the Bible story touched the issue of death, the children asked the questions of life and death, afterlife and existence of spirit. A participant reported his experience:

Sun: Sometimes the children asked the questions without raising their hands. They just spoke out as a natural response. "Why cannot the Israelites climb up Mount Sinai?", "Why do they want to kill somebody?" They always did not ask you the question directly but just whispered. If you answered their questions, they would follow up your response. "Why did God do or like this?" So, your answer would keep the children asking. Yes, they were attentive.

The children were also concerned with the meanings of choice and deeds of the Bible character during wondering. Concerning about freedom, children were interested in the Israelites' situation of being slaves in Egypt (Exodus Chapter 1). The participant remembered that the children asked, "Why did they become captive?", "What is the meaning of being a

slave?”, “What do slaves do?” Moreover, the children asked what the elder brother’s response was at the end of “The Parable of the Prodigal Son”. It was his freedom to choose how to respond to his father’s graceful act towards the prodigal son.

How did the participant respond to such existential questions? The participants felt that there was no short-cut to the questions. It was difficult to answer the children satisfactorily.

Peter: Let them discuss among themselves first. I did not have the most solid answer for the questions. If you could answer, just answer according to your knowledge. Sometimes the answer was an unsolved mystery. Sometimes you just had no idea.

Therefore, when the children asked existential questions during wondering, the teacher experienced their own limitations.

2. Theological question

The participants also experienced children asking theological questions. Sometimes children just asked such questions out of context. For example, “What does God look like?”, “Why did Jesus die so early in life?”, “What does life in Heaven look like? The teachers claimed they would listen to the children at such moments. Some teachers handled such questions with open discussion. One participant encouraged the child to find the answers by Bible study.

Child: God is present daytime and nighttime. Doesn’t He need to sleep?

Rose: No.

Child: How do you know?

Rose: The Bible tells. So, Bible study is necessary. I don’t know somethings also.

Child: I don't know too. We need to study the Bible, don't we?

This teacher walked with the child on his spiritual journey and supported the child's wondering.

On the other hand, teachers sometimes seemed to be pleased by children knowing the model or standard answer. One participant recalled the discussion of the children as follows:

A: Why cannot God be seen? Can we see Him?

B: No! A sinner will die if he sees God.

Children might ask such questions when the Bible story involved God. However, the answer of another child in this case was so theological and seemed to learn from other source.

Children's theological questions during wondering may provide an opportunity for the teacher to reflect on her concept of God or beliefs. In a case, a child asked, "Why is God so cruel? Why does He bring misfortune upon those people?" The concept of God of the teacher was criticized by such questions and she tried to defend her recognition of God.

Wai: I often respond that God has sovereignty. But there are so many things that we cannot understand. For example, God won't answer all our prayers. He gives us the experience. In the experience of even bad happenings, He still has sovereignty over the happenings. He accompanies you to go through.

At such wondering moment, the belief of God of the teacher seemed to be reconfirmed.

The teacher recognized the child's feeling of God being cruel. She reflected that the children had a different view on suffering from adults. However, the teacher seemed to lose the opportunity which was provided by the child's question to reconsider her concept of God.

The concept was “even when bad things happen, God still has sovereignty over the happenings”.

Actually, such situation also occurred in the observation session. The participant was telling the story of Ruth (Book of Ruth).

Mary: Boaz married Ruth. What was the identity of Boaz like?

Child: Jesus. Like Jesus.

Mary: Where did Jesus die for our sins?

Child: On the cross. He died on the cross.

Mary: This act redeemed our sins.

Child: I just want to ask a question. If Jesus died on the cross, where did He go?

Mary: He was raised from death after three days. Then He ascended to heaven. What is the gift that He has given us?

Child: Grace.

The child had identified Boaz as Jesus in the Book of Ruth. Then he asked where Jesus went to after He had died on the cross. It was a theological question showing that the child was engaged and wondered after listening to the story. However, how the child related Boaz with Jesus was uncertain. Nevertheless, the participant seemed to have an urge to teach an abstract idea that God gives us gifts through Jesus.

Children might express their wondering during Bible storytelling in terms of theological questions. It seemed that the teacher was not aware and did not follow the questions.

3. Out of context

One participant experienced that the children wondered out of the Biblical context with their modern view of daily life. For example, a child asked why Jesus washed the disciples' feet. It is not a good practice of personal hygiene to wash other people's feet. In another case, children asked why the people of the miracle of the five loaves and two fish could not buy food themselves. The teacher felt that the children could not imagine the condition of the wilderness where there was no convenience store as in modern cities.

Additionally, although the participants experienced questioning as children's spiritual verbal expression during wondering, some participants were totally unable to recall the impressive questions. Others recalled some impressive questions and also knew they forgot some questions. Nevertheless, such unrecalled questions were out of teachers' expectations. Children have their unique perspectives.

Play in the stories

A participant reported that children liked to digress from the story being told. However, such digression was not completely free style. It was like a flow of ideas but finally digress very far away from the original story. As an identified spiritual expression during wondering, it is like children's exploration of the boundary of a playground. They seemed to explore the boundary of the story and played in it.

In the observation sessions, the children always played with or played in the Bible

stories. However, the interviewees never recalled such moments in this study. For example, the participant was teaching “The Salt and Light” in “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew Chapter 5):

Helper: What does “salt” stand for?

Child A: Seasoning.

Child B: Man.

Helper: What does “light” stand for?

Child A: Salt.

Child B: Light surely.

Helper: If salt loses its saltiness, is it still useful?

Child: No.

Helper: Do you put salt in your food while cooking?

Child: No. It would be tasteless. You said the salt loses its saltiness.

Helper: How about light? Will you put light under the table?

Child: I won’t put light in food while cooking.

Helper: If put light under the table, what will happen?

Child: Will be light. The legs will be beautiful.

In this example, the helper tried to engage the children to wonder in the story by asking question. The children’s replies were playful, especially when they said, “I won’t put light in

food.” The Bible story became a playground for the children. The children were free to play with the context of the stories.

None of the participants was able to recall such playful moments. They articulated the experience as “children digressed from the story and felt happy”.

Express opinions

The participants experienced that the children expressed opinions on the stories spiritually when being engaged.

A participant experienced that when she was telling “The Miracle of the Five Loaves and Two Fish”, the children wondered how big the crowd was for five thousand people and how long it took for delivering each person a piece of loaf and fish. The participant guided the children to think of the situation in which all students from three schools were packed into one school hall. The children marveled. Then the participant asked the children to pass a few cookies among the classmates and asked them to think of the situation if the action repeated five thousand times. The children marveled again and said, “It cannot be finished by the time of sunset.” The children’s verbal response reflected they realized the miracle story was beyond logic.

The children were able to imagine that the story was against their common sense. According to the literature review, spiritual space was opened at such moment, and it was related to imagination. Such space is non-physical and children’s emotion responses, meaning

making and spiritual transformation occur at this space.

Additionally, in an observation session, a child's spiritual response was not followed up by the participant. The story of "Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet" was told.

Anna: Jesus went to the door, took off his overcoat, then poured water into the washbasin, told the disciples that He wanted to wash their feet. Did the disciples feel awe?

Child: Yes, awe.

Anna: Jesus was not going to eat them. Why did they feel awe?

Child: Feel awe because Jesus is too elegant to wash others' feet.

Anna: Pardon me?

Child: Jesus is too elegant.

The child responded to the story that Jesus was too elegant and should not wash disciples' feet. Spiritual space was opened at such moment as the children were able to imagine the awe of the Disciples. However, the discussion on this topic was stopped at this point. Although the child's verbal response reflected his perception of image of Jesus, this example also showed that the teachers seemed to miss the opportunity for deeper wondering.

4.3 Wondering with children

4.3.1 Wonder what children wondered

The participants not only described the children's wondering, but they also wondered with children and were able to recall the moment.

Firstly, the teachers experienced that the children were engaged by and showed good

response towards an unexpected plot of the Bible story. One participant told the story of Esther. It is a story about a Hebrew woman called Esther who was married to Persian king Ahasuerus. An officer called Haman wanted to kill all the Israelites in Persia because a Jew, Mordecai, disrespected him. Mordecai was the uncle of Esther and asked her to save their nation by asking the king for help. They succeeded at the end. The teacher expected the children would be focused on Esther or Mordecai. However, they focused more on Haman during storytelling and wondered on the plots of Haman. The teacher also wondered why they focused more on Haman. The teacher commented it was not the “right tract”.

One participant experienced the children wondering the details of the miracles. For example, the children wondered about “The Miracle of the Five Loaves and Two Fish”, “why are there five loaves, not six?”, “why two fish, not three?” Moreover, for “The Transformation of Water into Wine at the Wedding at Cana” (John Chapter 2), the children wondered, “why did not Jesus use other things to change? Why not Coke?” The teacher found that it was difficult to respond to such wonderings and needed to rethink the details of the stories. They also wondered what the children wondered.

In another case, the teacher told the story of Exodus chapter 19 which was about Moses going up to Mount Sinai. The teacher reported that the children perceived an idea that human beings could not come close to God. However, God allowed Moses to come close to Him in this chapter. The children wondered the relationship between God and the people had

reverence for God. The teacher was impressed by the concentration of children and also wondered such special relationship between Moses and God.

Moreover, a participant mentioned that the children were engaged by the story of Samson (Judges Chapter 13-16) and the teacher asked them what they thought about the body shape of Samson.

Kim: I asked the children what they thought about the body shape of Samson. They replied that Samson was powerful. He must be tall and strong. From my point of view, a tall and strong person working out powerful things just seemed to depend on himself. If Samson was thin and weak and he still had his destructive power and killed so many people and sheep, you would know the power of God, not depending on people. The children awed. God can use the most ordinary one.

Interviewer: What is the response of the children?

Kim: They felt like having a new discovery. It seemed that they never thought about God using a thin Samson.

Interview: When did you get the idea of thin Samson? When were you preparing the lesson or during the lesson?

Kim: When preparing. But the Bible does not mention. I read the Bible and thought. For a big and strong person, people easily get frightened by his action obviously. On the other hand, if Samson was a thin person with common face, people will praise God.

The teacher reflected on the story creatively when preparing the lesson. The children also wondered such creative explanation. She wondered the insight with the children once again in the lesson. The teacher felt that the children experienced a new discovery. It might be her experience during preparation too.

4.3.2 Diminish children's wondering

On the other hand, a teacher used standard sayings to respond to the wondering

expression of the class in the observation session. They were discussing the Exodus Chapter 20 verse 5, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me”, after the storytelling time:

Jade: God may punish people for the sin to the third and fourth generation.

Child A: Yes, for the sin of idolatry.

Child B: Verses 5 and 6.

Jade: Yes, verses 5 and 6.

Child C: God punished people not because of to his anger.

Jade: Yes, I think you are right.

Child C: He is not mean. Punishing people does not imply God is mean.

Jade: Because people sin against God.

Child A: Just like you punish us, not because you are mean.

Child C: It is not necessary for God to punish to the third and fourth generation, is it?

Jade: God is doing this because it is good for people. Therefore, don't hate me when I punish you next time. It's good for you.

Children: Really?

The child wondered why God punished to the third and fourth generation. God seemed to be too harsh. However, the teacher did not wonder with the children and inculcated in them a belief that God's deed is absolutely good for people.

In another case, the participant just neglected the child's answer during wondering. She told the story of "Moses raised the Bronze Snake" (Numbers Chapter 21).

Don: God asked Moses to make a bronze snake. Was the snake real or fake? Was it able to move?

Child: Yes, it was able to move.

Don: Was it able to move? Who think it was able to move? Raise up your hands. Was it able to move? No! It was fake. It was made by human hands. It was put up on a pole. God sent venomous snakes to bite the Israelites. Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.

The child responded interestingly that bronze snake could move. The teacher did not wonder with the child and rejected her answer. This was so called a "pseudo-reflective process" (Nye, 2009, p.47). The teachers use questions which have definite answers. The children would try to guess what the participants really wanted them to say, then wondering would not occur.

4.4 Teachers' emotional response of engagement and disengagement of children

The participants were full of joy when the children were absorbed in the storytelling, but only one participant clearly recalled the emotion of joy during their experience of children's wondering. It aligned with Kang's (2013) finding that he studied the transformative learning experience of Sunday school teachers and found that the teachers were happy when the children were actively involved and responded to what they taught with enjoyment.

However, sometimes children were not engaged by the Bible stories in the lessons.

Therefore, the participants experienced children's non-verbal and verbal expressions when

they were unable to enter the stories. It might be due to many reasons such as the emotional status of the children, the preparation of the teachers as well as the classroom settings.

Nevertheless, the participants have emotional response and described the emotions as “Anger” and “Unhappy”. Obviously, Bible storytelling was an invitation for the children to enter the Bible story world with the teacher. Somehow, sometimes the children were not engaged by the stories and are distracted. The participants’ emotions might be caused by the rejection of the children.

The participants mentioned that the children’s disengagement non-verbal expressions included “ignoring the teachers”, “non-response”, “looking absent-minded”, “unsteady sitting”, “doing things for self-entertainment” and “disturbing other classmates”. Finally, the participants perceived that the class became out of control.

The common verbal expressions of children during disengagement were “It’s boring”, “I have heard this before”, “This story again”. Two participants reported that when they began to tell the story and started a few words, the children interrupted and spoke out the story briefly.

In one of the observation sessions, the teacher used a computer to tell the Bible story instead of live storytelling. The children could not answer her questions about the story afterwards. The children seemed disengaged and could not enter the story. The participant seemed frustrated and played the audio file once more.

4.5 Discussion on major themes of teachers' experience of children's wondering

4.5.1 Engaging children's wondering

In this study, the participants experienced children's wondering with certain types of Bible stories including adventure stories, miracles of Jesus and stories with existential quests. Furthermore, visual presentation and certain kinds of teaching materials also helped the participants to engage the children. According to Kuyvenhoven's (2009) result that the teacher's choice of stories have effects on the facilitation of children's imagining, the participants in this study experienced that such types of Bible stories and teaching materials helped children to picturize and enter the story, then to be engaged by and to wonder in the story.

In this study, the participant experienced children's non-verbal and verbal spiritual expression when wondering occurred. Nye (2009, p.38) suggested that wondering as response to Bible stories is important. Because wondering rather than explaining invites children to enter a spiritual space where they explore what they think and feel. Therefore, the eliciting of spiritual expressions in Bible storytelling reflected the children were engaged by the stories.

Adventure stories and miracles of Jesus have strong and powerful plots. The participants reflected that the children showed best responses. They experienced that the children seemed easier to construct the imaginative story world and then to be engaged into it. Then spiritual expressions of wondering were elicited.

Moreover, stories with existential quests always expose the children to existential crisis of human beings including freedom, loneliness, meanings and death. Children show good response towards this kind of story. It shows that they care about their existential crisis even at an early age.

The grand narrative of the whole Bible as salvation history is strong and powerful. It also contains existential crisis of human beings. Therefore, Bible stories can engage children certainly and wondering occurs.

Teachers should not hinder such process during Bible storytelling. For example, interruptions might be caused by the teachers such as not fluently flipping the pictorial Bible or being unfamiliar with the operation of the teaching materials. Therefore, storyteller preventing disruption is important for children experiencing imaginative engagement. The teachers need to practice the presentation in order to support the children's wondering.

4.5.2 Teachers insufficiently support children's wondering

Although the participants had definitely experienced children's wondering and wondered with children, the teachers seemed to insufficiently support children's wondering. One participant commented that the children's response was not on the "right tract" when they focused on the villain in the story of Esther. Another participant expected the definite answers from the children. Moreover, in the observation sessions, the participants did not follow up children's spiritual questions and attempted to indoctrinate children in abstract

Christian beliefs. The participants seemed to diminish the children's wondering during Bible storytelling and did not maintain the construction of imaginative Bible story world for the children.

This study also found that the participants experienced the children asking theological questions as spiritual expression. It aligned with Gobbel and Gobbel's (1986) results that the children in middle childhood had the concern to the facticity of the biblical stories and would ask they were true or not. The researchers suggested that the adults should respect and honor the children with such inquiries. They must have the freedom to struggle and wonder with their own questions. The children's relationship with Bible is affected by how the adults' answer reflects the authenticity of Bible stories. When adults are not afraid of children's unresolved questions and ambiguities and refuse to give a close ended answer, they can encourage children to have new engagements and explorations.

Furthermore, children's playing in the stories was observed in the observation sessions. However, none of the participants mentioned such moments. As playfulness is a characteristic of children's spirituality, it provides flexibility for children to play with ideas, allowing them to respond to stories or situations personally and internally. In such process, children use their acquired language naturally and not likely alien religious expression (Hay & Nye, 2006). The participants seemed seldom to respond to children's playful expression in their acquired language. Such playing might emancipate one's spirit so that it moves outward toward the

sacred. Then joy comes from “external” as a person gives his whole attention to his experience of play (Johnston, 1997). How to play with the children in the Bible stories may be a key of making the lessons become joyful.

4.5.3 Emotion of teachers

This study documented that the participants rarely recalled their positive emotional experience during children’s wondering. The teachers felt angry or unhappy when they experienced that the children were disengaged in Bible storytelling. Therefore, it would be a vicious cycle that disengagement of children led to their disappointment, children’s disappointment led to negative non-verbal and verbal expressions, then it led to teachers’ negative emotions.

Nevertheless, previous research showed that children experienced pleasure and thoroughness if they were engaged in Bible storytelling (Stonehouse, 2001). Therefore, it seems that in order to break the vicious cycle, the teachers must engage in the Bible stories with children rather than handle an issue of classroom order or behavioral problem of a particular child. In other words, if a storyteller wants to be successful, he must forget himself and live the story as he tells it.

Moreover, Short (2011) explained that if children find difficulties in engaging in Bible storytelling in Sunday school, it may be because the children cannot experience the Biblical narratives as stories as they are not asked and expected to respond in their own ways freely.

The researcher suggested using the questions which the storyteller does not know the answer.

Summary

This section explored the Sunday school teachers' experiences of children wondering when being engaged in Bible storytelling or teaching. This research found that the teachers recognized that the adventure stories, miracles of Jesus and stories with existential quests are more attractive to children. It is easier for the children to enter the Bible story world by visualization of ancient world with suitable teaching materials. When the children are engaged by the Bible stories, the teachers experience children's verbal and non-verbal spiritual expressions. The children are absorbed and very attentive. They may also show verbal expressions in terms of questioning, play in the stories and express opinions.

Some participants recognized such moment and wondered with children. Adult Christians sometimes take their religious virtues or beliefs as unquestionable truth. Children's questioning may help adults rethink their assumptions and reconsider their understandings. Therefore, wondering with children is beneficial to the teachers and their spirituality was nurtured in that sense.

On the other hand, the teachers feel angry and unhappy when the children cannot enter the story due to some reasons. Disengagement is an uncomfortable experience for Sunday school teachers.

Chapter 5: Teacher experiences children's meaning making during Bible storytelling

According to the theoretical framework, children start to weave meanings together after they have been engaged by Bible stories and have elicited wondering. In this chapter, it is going to describe the experience of the participants encountering the children's meaning making.

In session 5.1, the participants' experience of the children relating the Bible stories to different stories is described. When the meanings of different stories were weaved together, the children created their own and new meanings. In session 5.2, the interaction between teachers and children is described. After that, the emotional responses of the teachers are reflected in session 5.3. At the end of this chapter, there is a discussion session 5.4.

5.1 From Bible story to different stories

The participants experienced spiritual expressions of children during their meaning making. According to the literature review, the sources of those meanings are obtained in daily life such as teaching in schools, information from parents, messages from social media. Interestingly, four categories of meaning making are identified. They aligned with four dimensions of relational consciousness. They are “from Bible story to God's story”, “from Bible story to own story”, “from Bible story to other's story” and “from Bible story to nature”. The participants experienced the children relating the Bible stories to own stories in great details. Lesser participants experienced the children relating the Bible stories to others

and none experienced the children relating the stories to nature.

5.1.1 From Bible story to God's story

When the children were engaged by Bible story and made meaning, the teachers always seemed to intend to guide the children to extract the knowledge of God from the Bible stories. However, the meaning making process could not be totally controlled by the teacher. The teacher experienced children's active meaning making, and the spiritual expressions were out of their expectation. The participants experienced the children trying to weave the perceived Bible story meaning with the meaning of God's story. God's story included story of the Bible and story of the living God of Christians. Two sub-themes were identified including the children relating the told story with another Bible story, and with communicating with God.

To another Bible story

This sub-theme was identified as the children relating the told story with other Bible stories. No clue was given to the children. How the children made such relationship was uncertain.

One participant told the story of "Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet" and tried to illustrate servant-leadership. She asked the children who leaders were and expected the children would answer teachers, Daddy, Mama. The teacher was surprised when the children answered "Moses". The children seemed to relate the story just heard to another Bible story.

One participant taught the story of “Israelites at Mount Sinai” (Exodus Chapter 19). God requested the Israelites to purify themselves before they came close to Mount Sinai. In order to explain God’s request, the teacher used the example of an interview for a job. The children recognized that people should well prepare their outlook for the interview. Therefore, the teacher stressed that people must have better preparation for their encounters with God. The teacher felt that the children were engaged and got the point.

Sun: I was impressed that the children were surprised when only Moses was allowed to climb Mount Sinai, other Israelites must stay at the base of the mountain. I told them if they wanted to visit a king, they could not do just according to their will. They fully understood this. They could not visit their king just as they liked. Therefore, I taught the children that they could not pray to God just according to their availability. God was not an idol who was controlled by them. In this case, God was not God, and they became God. The children seemed to understand. Hong Kong has anti-authoritarian atmosphere now. They did not respect authority figures. However, at last they knew the Israelites could only stay at the base of the mountain when there was thick cloud thundering and lightning uphill.

Then the children realized the difference in position between God and human beings. They were absorbed. Therefore, after more Bible teaching, I told them that was why Jesus was so important. We need to finish our prayer in the name of Jesus because we are unworthy to worship God. The children noticed a special point that God killed some Israelites. Why? I told them that we are sinners, and I am a teacher in school. I used the examples of hidden bad behaviors of my students such as lying, shouting and deceptive accusation. What would they feel? Were they worthy to worship God? If they disliked such people, how would God feel? Therefore, salvation of Jesus is important. That is why we pray in His name and follow Him. Jesus leads us through, just like Moses led the Israelites to the mountain and represented them to climb up and listened to God’s words.

In this case, the teacher experienced that the children realized the difference in position between God and human beings. Then he weaved the meaning of the revelation of God on

Mount Sinai onto salvation of Jesus when the children were engaged by the horrible plot of God appearing and only Moses being allowed to climb up the mountain. The teacher taught the children that salvation of Jesus made people worthy to communicate with God.

To communicate with God

This sub-theme was identified as the children wanting to communicate with the living God after listening to a Bible story. Christians perceive that the spiritual practices such as prayer is a form of communicating with God. Christians hope to receive guidance and comfort from communicating with God.

One of the participants stressed on encouraging the children to pray. She told the story of “Young Samuel Grows Up at the Tabernacle” (First Samuel Chapter 3). Eli was the very old priest and Samuel was his helper. The key message of the story was that Samuel was able to hear God’s voice in the tabernacle, but Eli could not. However, God’s voice was strange to Samuel, and he recognized it as Eli’s voice by mistake. He went to Eli’s bedroom and asked why he called him. Eli just replied no. It repeated three times and Eli finally was aware that it should be God’s voice. He taught Samuel how to reply to God. Then the teacher applied the message to teach the children how to pray.

Mary: I am a person who like to pray very much. Therefore, along with the teaching of this story, I taught them how to pray, how to keep quiet. I might use music, or no music and just practiced quiet time to listen to God’s voice. These things were not included in the curriculum. God told me how to listen to His voice and these were my ways.

Then, I used the inner tube of a toilet roll as a sound transmitter to play a game. I asked

the first child to say, “God spoke to Samuel.” Then he called the second child. After that the second child went to the third child who pretended to be Eli and asked, “Have you called me?” This process repeated three times and finally the child said, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Therefore, the children knew and experienced the story completely. Then I asked them when they had heard God’s voice. Some children replied that they had heard God’s voice when they were facing difficulties, such as falling on the floor. I asked them whether they always wanted to hear God’s voice or not. They said they did. Then we prayed and kept quiet for five minutes. We practiced listening to God. Of course, they did not tell me that they heard God’s voice at that moment immediately. I just showed the way how they could make use of quiet time to live out the story. The story told me that we must not only hear God’s voice but also remember it and live it out. So I taught about quiet time and practiced once for the children.

In this case, the teacher’s meaning was weaved with the meaning of the story. She recognized that Samuel did not pray and listen to God in the story. God played all the active role in the relation with Samuel. She was also interested in listening to God and teaching children how to pray. The children were engaged. They expressed that they had heard God’s voice and wanted to hear God’s voice more. In other words, they wanted to be like Samuel who was involved in God’s story. Afterwards, the teacher derived the importance of prayer from the story of Samuel.

5.1.2 From Bible story to own story

If wondering occurred when Bible stories were told by the Sunday school teachers, the children might weave the perceived meanings with their own stories. Such phenomenon can be experienced by the teachers if the children expressed the meanings verbally. The participants recognized that the children would speak a lot if they could relate the Bible

stories to their daily life.

Two sub-themes of own story were identified including “story in daily life” and “story in school”.

Story in daily life

This sub-theme was identified as the children relating the told story with their own stories in daily life. The children were very active in relating these meanings. The Bible stories provided a framework for the children to obtain the meanings of their daily lives.

One participant told the story of “Moses killed an Egyptian” (Exodus Chapter 2). In this story, Moses was a Hebrew adopted by the princess of Egypt and grew up in the palace of Egypt. When he became an adult, he saw an Egyptian bullying a Hebrew and got angry and beat the Egyptian to death. Moses was afraid and fled into the wilderness. The teacher made the point that what you saw affected what you did. Then the teacher asked whether the children had such experiences or not. The teacher remembered some children replied that video games were affecting them. The children related the meaning of the Bible story to their own daily life.

As the story moved on, Moses helped some girls he met in the wilderness by driving away some shepherds who had been oppressing the girls. Although seemed unrelated, the teacher made a meaning of the story that for the people who does not know Jesus, he may probably be a bad guy. The teacher recalled that the children were absorbed in the story and

then disclosed their naughty and improper behaviors to her. They also seemed obedient and cooperative at the end of the lesson.

On the other hand, the children always connect ancient Bible world with nowadays living world during meaning making. One participant was surprised when the children could imagine using modern technology in Bible story world.

Ka: You as modern people who use modern technology, after you jump into [Bible story world], sometimes you need to walk a long distance to go home for gathering with other family members. You never think of using modern technology. However, children can think of using the mobile phone. I have not told them and have not stressed on modern technology. I just open the discussion. I never think that they would use mobile phone in role play. They suddenly took out the phone and dialed.

They also asked why Jesus did not use Coke instead of water in the miracle of turning water into wine. They used to drink soft drinks and also think of it in Bible world.

Moreover, one participant mentioned that when she told the story of “The battles of King Saul, King David, and King Solomon” (Samuel and Kings), the children were absorbed, especially for the story of “The battles between King David and King Saul” (I Samuel). King David was the successor of King Saul. Saul wanted to kill David. However, David showed kindness towards the offspring of King Saul after he ascended the throne. Then the participant discovered that the children had been playing an on-line game about kings fighting for hegemony. Therefore, they were interested in the stories of King David which was similar to their game. The participant reported that she smiled to them and said, “Oh! The online game may copy from the Bible. So, you need to read the Bible more seriously.”

The children recognized the teacher's idea. They came across the online game first and found that the Bible also had stories of battles between kings. They agreed with the teacher that the online games may be inspired by the Bible.

In this case, the teacher weaved the meanings of the story into children's daily life and the things that they found interesting. The participant identified the building block of meaning of the children. Nevertheless, the virtual world may be a reality of children's daily life nowadays.

Additionally, sometimes the children animatedly shared their experiences related to the Bible stories and also wanted to know whether the teachers had such experience. A participant reported that after a story about forgiveness was told, the children actively shared their stories of forgiveness in real life. Some of them expressed that forgiving was difficult. Some of them asked whether the teacher had forgiven someone or not. The children actively weaved the meaning of the Bible story with their personal stories.

Story in school

This sub-theme was identified as the children relating the told story with their own stories in school. The children were very active in relating these meanings. The happenings in school were the core of the living experience of the children.

One participant recalled that after a Bible story of confession was told, she asked the children who wanted to admit their own fault and wanted to receive God's forgiveness. A

child revealed that he had cheated in a dictation test by copying from others.

For the topic of forgiveness, one class of P6 children shared their conflicts in school, such as the classmates who ignored each other, who disgusted them, who made them angry for a long time. It was difficult to forgive some of them. The children shared their secrets.

Moreover, one participant told the story of the friendship between King David and Jonathan in the last session (First Samuel Chapter 18). They were the best friend of each other. King David kindly adopted the son of Prince Jonathan after Jonathan was killed in a battle (Second Samuel Chapter 9). The children actively shared their stories in school. The teacher mentioned,

Joe: David was merciful. Therefore, a child told the story about how he helped his classmate. Helping others is mercy. He wished his classmate would not be bullied by others.

Interviewer: Did the child tell this spontaneously?

Joe: Yes.

Interviewer: How was his classmate bullied by others?

Joe: He was ignored by other classmates. My student wanted to voice out. Moreover, the school arranged the students to different classes according to their academic performance. This also made the children have bad feeling. They wished the school should not do this.

Another participant also used the same story and asked the children to share the relationship with their best friends in school. Good responses were obtained. Children seemed easily to relate the Bible story to their school situations. They weaved the meanings together.

5.1.3 From Bible story to other's story

If the children are engaged in Bible stories, sometimes the meaning making involves the relationship with other people. The meanings of the Bible stories are weaved with another person's story. The participants experienced the children expressing such meanings. For example, the children are familiar with the story of "Jesus was nailed on the cross". This story teaches children that Jesus forgives all sinners. The children relate this meaning to their acts of forgiving other children.

Ling: Some children in my class are very naughty. However, the others are nice. When they see the naughty children pushing each other and fighting, they won't follow. I asked them, "Why are you so nice? Why don't you get angry as they are pushing you?" They replied that they had to forgive, just like Jesus. Although they were junior primary school students, they knew clearly what was right or wrong.

Moreover, one participant also experienced that the children did not get angry for other children's rude behavior in the class. Another one reported some children did not have good relationship with their siblings. However, they still tried to forgive. Forgiveness seemed to be a major topic in meaning making.

Additionally, one participant told the story of "Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet" and asked the children to serve each other, such as doing massage on shoulders for classmates. At first, the children were embarrassed and resisted to do so. After a while, they talked with each other and discussed who would do or receive massage first. If the activity is meaningless to them, it would be very difficult to get them involved. Therefore, serving the classmate with massage had some meanings related to the story at that moment for the children.

5.1.4 From Bible story to nature

According to the theoretical framework, spirituality is relational and reflected in four dimensions including being with God, self, others, and the nature. In this project, only one participant mentioned she experienced the children's expressions of weaving meanings of Bible stories and the nature.

Yee: If you teach the children that God is the creator who creates all things and many many stars, they will ask, "What is the name of the galaxy?" "How far is the galaxy away from us?" It stretches into infinity! "What is the end of infinity? Does it mean outside the Solar system?" They are engaged and asked such questions. In another case, a teacher mentioned people can shout but insects not. "Does it really mean that insects cannot shout? Sometimes they make sound." They were more concentrated. It is good.

As the children weaved meaning with the knowledge of astronomy in the lesson, the teacher said that she became interested in studying the solar system. This was an area that she had not touched before. She then talked with the children about the planet Jupiter in the next lesson. She felt the children admired what she had prepared. She was touched and felt connected to children. Therefore, children's meaning making has impact on teachers and it will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.2 Teacher's interaction with children during meaning making

This session examined the involvement of the teacher when the children were being engaged by Bible stories and making meanings. The teachers experienced that the meaning making process was uncontrollable. The expressed meaning was always out of the teachers' expectation. However, the teachers intended to control and direct the meaning making

process. In other words, they tended to deliver abstract Christian beliefs to children.

5.2.1 Uncontrollable

The interactions between teachers and children during meaning making were observed in observation sessions. Only a few teachers could recall such interaction in interview sessions.

A participant told the story of “Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet”. The children being engaged was observed. Then the teacher discussed with the children and made the meaning of this story as loving each other. Then the teacher asked the children how to practice loving each other in daily life. The teacher gave them an example that they could say hello to the South-East Asia maids in the lift lobby or public areas in the morning. The children expressed that they would not do this because the maids are strangers, or they might not understand English.

The teacher was impressed and mentioned their expressions in the interview session. The teacher claimed that she had never thought of these two answers before. She just wanted to induce the meaning of “Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet” story in terms of loving the neighbors. The children opposed the meaning made by the teacher. Their meaning might reflect a kind of parents’ teaching at home. Talking with a stranger is unsafe. The teacher could not control the outcome of meaning making.

5.2.2 Tending to control

In this study, the participants tending to control the outcome of meaning making was observed. For example, in an observation session, the teacher told the story of Naomi in the Book of Ruth. Naomi was the mother-in-law of Ruth. The whole family emigrated to the nearby country of Moab and all the men in the family were dead after ten years. Naomi and Ruth became widows who had difficult lives in ancient time. They returned to the homeland of Bethlehem for survival. The story was about how God blessed them through the marriage of Ruth and Boaz who was a wealthy man. At the end, the teacher directed the children to reflect on God's abundant supplies. Unexpectedly, the teacher pointed out that the role of Boaz in the story of Ruth was similar to Jesus Christ.

Although the teacher had not much explanation on this point, one girl spoke out, "When grace is used, Jesus gives back to us." The researcher does not know what this statement exactly meant to the girl. However, the girl seemed to make meaning by relating Jesus Christ with a kind of teaching that she heard before. The teacher seemed satisfied.

Then the teacher provided 10-15 minutes free drawing time for the children after Bible storytelling in the lessons. Children were allowed to express their meaning making through artwork. The teacher reported that the children found it difficult to make up their mind and draw something at the well beginning. She gave a clue to the children by asking them to draw what they wanted for Jesus. After a period of time, it seemed easier for the children to draw

pictures for Jesus now. The teacher said that the children sometimes listened to the voice from Jesus and expressed in their drawings. Nevertheless, the participant's clue directed the children to relate the meaning of the story to Jesus.

After the free drawing time, the teacher asked the children to introduce their drawings. One girl drew a girl standing by the side of a cross. It might be because the teacher mentioned Jesus at the end of the lesson. The cross is always used to symbolize Jesus. The drawing showed that the child was feeling close to Jesus obviously. "Jesus loves me. He stays with me when I am studying." Another child drew a dolphin and said that Jesus created dolphin. His artwork seemed unrelated to the story of Ruth. However, the teacher seemed satisfied when the child mentioned Jesus. Moreover, a child drew an ear and a big question mark. He told the teacher that he could not hear any voice from Jesus.

On the other hand, one child drew some arms of robots. The teacher's feeling was not good. He did not share in front of the class for the meaning of the arms. The teacher remembered this and claimed that the child was disengaged and got lost during storytelling in the interview session. This case showed that the Sunday school teachers may criticize children's spiritual expressions during meaning making.

5.2.3 Tending to teach abstract knowledge of God

More than just controlling the meaning making process, it was found that the teacher tended to teach abstract knowledge of God or Christian beliefs during the process. Therefore,

the opportunity of making meaning openly with the children may not be grasped by the teachers. Teaching abstract knowledge seemed to be important for the teachers.

One participant told “The Parable of the Prodigal Son” and asked the children a wondering question, “What will you do if you have lost all your money in a foreign country?” The children expressed that they would go back home. They would ask father for help and would work for him. The children’s thought aligned with the younger brother in the parable. According to the literature review, spiritual space was opened, and the relationships between the stories of the Bible, the teacher and the children were established in such space. However, the teacher indoctrinated the children that God’s love is unconditional. He never wants people to do somethings for atonement. God just accepts and loves people. This case demonstrated that Sunday school teachers sometimes urge to indoctrinate the children with legitimate Christian abstract beliefs.

Moreover, one participant felt that the children were frightened by the Old Testament stories. God’s punishment in the Old Testament seemed more serious and criminals violating Mosaic Law would be stoned to death. The spiritual space was opened as the children were being absorbed and their emotion was stirred up. However, she indoctrinated the children that they did not need to be afraid because the New Testament era was an era of grace. Jesus Christ shouldered all the human sins. He received the punishment in place of us.

5.2.4 Easier to go further with own children

Participants seemed often to have difficulties in recalling the interaction with the children when they were showing spiritual expressions in meaning making. However, it seemed easier for the teachers to recall how they made meaning with their own children during the interview. For example, one participant compared the difference between the experience of children's meaning making in Sunday school and at home. He mentioned that he felt he could go further with his own children as he knew his son's story. Once the teacher told the story of "Lazarus rose again after death" (John Chapter 11) for bedtime story. He made meaning with his son by asking questions. "Can Jesus raise up your grandfather from the dead? Is being raised up the best thing for your grandfather? Who governs people's lives ultimately? Do you feel that God kept an eye on you as on Lazarus when you got fever two months ago?" The teacher recalled that he could not asked such questions in Sunday school as he did not know the children's personal stories.

Therefore, if the teacher is familiar with the children's personal stories, the teacher can ask questions that are more related to the children's life situations during meaning making. Then the conversation for meaning making might be more relevant, deep and rich. The teacher would have more confident to walk along the spiritual journey with the children.

5.3 Teachers feel joyful when experiencing children's meaning making

In this study, it was found that the teachers experienced joy when they interacted with

the children during meaning making after they were engaged and wondered in the Bible story. In the research interviews, the participants mentioned that they felt joyful, and the feeling reflected that the teachers were actively involved in the interaction with children. Such experiences are positive experiences for the teachers.

One participant felt happy when the children asked questions during meaning making with the Bible story. Moreover, the teachers felt joyful when they felt the children received their messages, and the children's verbal responses reflected that they really understood. The flow of the lessons was "smooth". When all things went smooth, one teacher said that he was touched.

The participants felt joyful when the children shared their experiences of prayer.

Rose: I asked them questions. They thought for a while, then told their own stories, and what the stories really were. They shared. I was impressed. It also happened in the past. They shared how Jesus listened to their prayers, in great details. I was really happy.

Lin: I was happy when the children shared the experiences of how God listened to their prayers. Some children prayed that their family members would stop quarrelling. Some prayed for the relatives who got sick. I felt really happy when they shared such experience. They experienced God themselves. It made me happy.

In another case, the teacher felt joyful when the children related the meanings together after a child shared his experience of tending to cover up his own fault.

Wai: I remember once, we were sharing. I asked my son to share his experience of facing his fault. He wanted to hide his fault. After his sharing, the children were active to disclose they had similar experience before, and how they hide their fault.

Interviewer: What is the kind of fault of your son? Can you tell?

Wai: Once upon a time, my son was at his grandma's place. He had been playing with the mobile phone for a long time. He was told to stop. Grandma and Grandpa were

waiting for him to have meal together. He was unhappy and walked into a room. There were small blocks of Lego. He put one block into his ear hole and got stuck. He was scared. He went out crying. Actually, no one had blamed him. He knew his fault. Then we helped him to remove the Lego block. I discussed with him and told him the reason of stopping playing with the mobile phone. We visited Grandparents and had meal with them. We should not focus on the phone. We shared with the children. Let them know I did not blame my son. He just felt uncomfortable himself.

During meaning making, the teaching process became joyous when the children shared their own stories.

One of the participants felt joyful when the children presented alternative responses of the Bible story characters in the role-playing activity following storytelling, and the responses were connected to their daily lives. The participant told the story of the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke Chapter 10) and asked the children to act different characters in the parable. They were free to choose one of the characters.

Ka: Would they save the seriously hurt traveler? They had different responses. One of them was funny. He just walked pass, like the religious people in the parable who did not lend a helping hand. They reflected on what they would do and repeated the play. They took turns to perform their imaginative responses.

Interviewer: You mean they performed one by one for saving or not saving the traveler, do you?

Ka: Yes. Their role plays incorporated modern elements such as using mobile phone. They made it funny. Of course, the Bible story was adapted for it. But it didn’t matter. I remember that they incorporated modern technology such as iphone. It was interesting. They were completely involved. I was impressed.

The teachers felt joyful during meaning making with children, especially when they shared their own story. One participant elaborated such kind of joy includes being trusted by children. The experience of children’s open heart and being brave to share also brings joy to

the teacher.

Additionally, the teachers felt joyful as they perceived that the children had made meaning according to the stories and experienced their change in the classrooms. One participant felt joyful once when the children were willing to pray for other children at the end of the lesson. The teacher said that the children always keep silent during the prayer time. Another participant remembered that he told a story to teach that children must fear God. He said that the children were absorbed and became quietest ever in the lessons. The teacher felt that they grasped his message and were trying to fear God.

In the observation sessions, the participants seemed to feel pleasure and joy when the children showed good response towards the wondering questions and made meaning with the participants.

5.4 Discussion on major themes of teachers' experience of children's meaning making

In this study, it was found that the participants experienced the children relating the meanings of the Bible stories with God's story, own stories, stories of others and the nature. The process of meaning making occurs in the non-physical spiritual space. Bible storytellers must bear in mind that they always work with three kinds of stories at the same time including Biblical story, personal story of the child and adult's story (Gobbel & Gobbel, 1986).

5.4.1 Teacher experienced children connect to “The Bigger Other”

Although the identity of God is different in different religious backgrounds or non-religious educational systems, children seem to be willingly connected to something that is “bigger than themselves”. In this study, it was found that the children frequently identified the “bigger other” as “Jesus”, “Heavenly Father”, “The Cross”. They always related the meanings of the told story with God’s story in terms of another Bible story.

The typical case in this study was that the children related the revelation of God on Mount Sinai with the salvation of Jesus. Although it was clued by the teacher, the children were absorbed. When the told story was about the rescue or liberation of the characters, the children easily identified it with God’s work or help from Jesus. Children with non-Christian background might use other identifications of “The Bigger Other”. This study could not differentiate that the children just made such correlation by themselves or were taught by the teachers. However, the children were intuitive theists obviously.

Being connected to the Transcendence is important for the spiritual health of people. It helps people to reflect on moral and value system of themselves. It also promotes the acts of altruism. When the teachers were impressed by the connectedness of the children with the Transcendence, it facilitated the adults to rethink their spiritual conditions.

5.4.2 Teacher experienced children connect to own stories lively

In this study, the participants experienced the children actively relating the meanings of

Bible stories with their own stories, especially stories in schools. The teachers experienced that the children shared their personal stories animatedly if they could relate the stories to the Bible stories. The children would speak a lot at such situations. The Bible stories became meaningful as they were related to the children's stories. It was also an opportunity for the teachers to know the children. Therefore, the connectedness among the teachers, the children and the subject: Bible was strengthened in this sense.

Furthermore, being connected to own stories means being connected to self. It is related to the wholeness of a person. The participants experienced the children's connectedness with their selves, and they revealed themselves actively and honestly. According to the literature review, it reminded the teachers what they might have lost in their growth stage.

Actually, religious or spiritual development is more often facilitated by features of peoples' personal context, rather than passive invoking by a church-led agenda.

Unsurprisingly, the participants recruited in this study recognized that the children sometimes told their stories in great details (Kruidenier, 2017).

5.4.3 Teacher seldom experienced the children connect to nature

In this study, the participants rarely mentioned they experienced the children weaving meaning with the nature. However, it is one of four facets of spirituality. It may be due to the fact that the participants are unable to capture any expressions of children related to natural environment, or the children really have not a piece of building block of the meaning about

natural life. It may be one of the characteristics of spirituality of children who grow in urban areas such as Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, Moriarty (2014, p.32) claimed that children wonder the awesome and mysterious creation. Sometimes they like to speculate about the origination of the earth and its creatures. In faith-based institutions, children engaged by the topic of creation are likely to accept the concept of Creator and creation is meaningful and purposeful.

5.4.4 Teacher tended to indoctrinate children with religious abstract

According to the theoretical framework, teachers weaving meaning with children being engaged by the Bible storytelling is precious moment of spirituality nurturing and being nurtured. In this study, sometimes the participants tended to obtain standard answers from the children during meaning making. The tendency was also observed in the observational sessions. The teachers urged to teach the knowledge of God in terms of abstract concepts or statements.

For example, in a case of this study, although the child expressed through drawing a picture of robot's machine arm which seemed unrelated to the story, is it really unrelated? The adults tended to conclude that children misunderstood the Bible story, if such story evoked a response from children which was different from adult, or determined as outrageous, undesirable, wrong (Gobbel & Gobbel, 1986, p.87). The teacher may use a wider framework such as Hyde's one to grasp and understand the children's meanings in order to

walk along with them on the spiritual journey (Hyde, 2004; Hyde, 2008a).

Nevertheless, teachers tending to indoctrinate children seems to be common in Sunday school in Hong Kong. It is also a major theme in this study as various data was obtained in the interview and observation sessions. The teachers tended to neglect the spiritual expressions elicited in wondering, control the meaning making process, and teach abstract Christian concepts and beliefs.

5.4.5 Meaning making is on the way of spiritual journey

The teachers experienced the children making meaning with their own stories actively. They seemed to invite the teachers to walk along with them on the spiritual journey. It aligned the theoretical framework of the identity of storytellers.

Nevertheless, teachers making meaning with children walk along the spiritual journey with children. It embarks upon an exciting adventure marked by unknowns, unexpected turns, and delightful surprises. Such adventure is demanding. Otherwise, the adventure can quickly become routinized, repetitive, and frustrating. A sense of void and feeling of disappointment settle in. The work becomes burdensome (Gobbel & Gobbel, 1986).

On the other hand, if the meaning making process was able to give the encouragement and freedom to do as the children were able, to play with the Bible with whatever abilities and experiences they had, to articulate and to share their stories, and to express their quests and pose responses, they have already participated in the adventure with the teachers (Gobbel

& Gobbel, 1986).

Therefore, if the teachers can keep walking along with children on this spiritual journey, the teachers will be impressed by the children's spiritual expressions and spirituality being nurtured.

Summary

This section has explored the Sunday school teachers' experiences of children's spiritual expressions in meaning making during Bible storytelling and also in the lessons. The participants in this study also experienced the children relating the Bible story to God's story, own story and story of others. The participants recognized that the children's spiritual expressions of meaning making might be out of their expectations. The process of meaning making was not totally controlled by the participants.

Most of the time, the children weaved their own stories with the Bible stories actively. The participants found that children were rich in responses. Sometimes the participants went further along their own stories, especially with their children in home settings.

Sometimes the participants urged to deliver the presupposed key messages of the stories to children. The messages always were abstract concepts of God, Christian beliefs and values. The result of this study suggests that Sunday school teachers rethink the spiritual nurturing effect of such kind of teaching motives and ways of Bible teaching.

Chapter 6: Teacher experienced children's spirituality in Bible Sunday school

In this study, the focus is how the teachers perceived their experience of children's spirituality in Sunday school. Teachers reflected such experience within the whole lesson including the storytelling time. In this chapter, the teachers' perception of characteristics of children's spirituality that impressed them is described. At the end of this chapter, there is a discussion session.

There are two themes of impressive characteristics of children's spirituality in this study: "essence of spiritual children" and "relational consciousness". According to the literature review, children are spiritual beings. The being has special qualities that impressed the teachers. Such qualities are described in session 6.1. In session 6.2, another characteristic of children's spirituality in terms of relational consciousness that impressed the teachers is described. It aligned with the literature review.

6.1 Essence of children as spiritual beings

This theme was identified as the characteristics of children as spiritual beings. This study found that four essences of children as spiritual beings that impressed the participants: "simple", "wholeness", "genuine", and "joy". Such essences can be viewed as characteristics of children's spirituality. Such essences are described from sessions 6.1.1 to 6.1.4 severally.

6.1.1 Simple

Most of the participants who were impressed used the term "simple" to describe the

characteristic of children. The researcher would ask them what children's simple means to them. They described that the children were pure and innocent. Such qualities would be lost after they have grown up to be adults. Adults become "complicated". It is opposite to "simple". They cherished the memory of being children.

For these participants, "simple" does not mean foolish but pure and innocent. When the participant used simple as an attribute of love, it means being not calculative. The participant perceived that the children lived out the teaching of Jesus obviously.

Jade: The teacher introduces the Bible stories, and they just simply receive. Our world is more complicated than children's world. Sometimes we, as adults, have heard those stories for so many times. However, we gradually lose our pure and innocent hearts of being children.

Joe: From children's response, I feel simple love, pure love. Human beings are always complicated. Our love has limitation. Children's simple love is explicit about the teaching of Jesus on being pure in heart. We should not have thoughts that are too complicated in our gloomy days.

On the other hand, another teacher experienced children's simplicity in their spiritual expressions in terms of prayer. Children's expressions of prayer reflecting their faith and relationship with God are labelled as "simple". They were impressed by their faith and relationship with God.

Anna: I shared my own story that I was unhappy in my job. My boss treated me badly. He treated all colleagues badly. I was really unhappy. Then a child told me, "You should pray. Through prayer you can let God know." The child was simple and straightforward, and thought that I was too complicated. What can I learn from children? The answer is their simple and pure faith. Children do not have much distracting thoughts, selfish motives, interests, and plans. In fact, we have been teaching them since they were very young. We taught them that they must seek God in all circumstances and follow His will. Although they are young and have not much experience in the society, they do have

simple and big faith.

Moreover, for other participants, children's "simple" also means that they distinguish right from wrong clearly or they believe God will cure illness following their prayers and God will provide a fine weather for their picnic.

Additionally, one participant mentioned that the experience of children's simple and pure heart provided him with the feeling of God's presence. It did not mean that the children were equivalent to God. The teacher meant that when he connected to someone who was simple and pure, he felt God's presence in such kind of relationship.

6.1.2 Wholeness

Participants were impressed by the wholeness of children. The participants perceived the children's wholeness in terms of the unity of their knowing and doing. The teacher felt that adults failed to do as what they said. The child practicing daily devotion impressed him.

Sun: A child practiced daily devotion and told me that he used the Bible for the devotions. He also shared which book of the Bible he was reading. It made me think that as a teacher who taught them to do devotion daily, my consistency was not so remarkable as theirs. This child was very consistent in his studying, doing and saying.

In another case, the unity of the child's religious moral judgment and the action of pointing out the wrongdoing of the classmate impressed the participant. The participant thought that adults hesitated to express their standpoint in a group. The behavior of the child reminded the participant that a person must live with wholeness.

Lin: Children know what God dislikes. They distinguish right from wrong clearly. I really appreciate children for this point. However, adults always perceive a large grey area. Once I passed the offering bag to collect offering in the lesson, there was a naughty

child. He put a piece of toilet paper into the bag. Another child told him that as these were offerings, he should not do that. I did not expect that a child would speak out in this way.

Furthermore, other participants experienced children's wholeness in terms of the unity in their thinking and expression. The teachers experienced children articulating their needs in prayer, answering teachers' questions enthusiastically, sharing about the loss of grandma. The participant was impressed by the children's wholeness as the unity of saying and feeling.

Jade: A girl was willing to share the news that her grandma had passed away. "My grandma was back to heaven", she said. Some children are straight forward. They just tell what has happened. However, although not so many, some of them are willing to express, with no fear of adults' response.

Another participant was impressed by a child who reached about the gospel after the teacher had shared her own story. The child weaved the meaning of the teacher's story with her own meaning and became enthusiastic in preaching about the gospel. The transformation of the child is out of the expectation of the teacher.

Anna: The mother told me that her daughter gave thanks to me. The girl told her mother that I shared my experience of visiting a home for the aged with my two sons as voluntary workers. The girl told her mom that after listening to my story, she must pay more effort to preach, especially to her family members and friends. She is always ready to give out gospel leaflets. I told the mother that I feel ashamed for hearing this.

In addition, recitation of Bible verses is a common teaching activity in many Sunday schools. It reflects the value of Bible words. One participant experienced a child trying hard to recite Bible verses until he could do it. Although the child might just want to finish the task, the teacher was impressed and thought that the child was more than that.

6.1.3 Genuine

The participants were impressed by the genuineness of children. The teachers mentioned children's genuineness in terms of being straight forward, un-pretended, and frank, especially in their prayer. The children also expressed their emotions directly.

Yee: Their kind of being simple towards God should be learned by us. They are genuine. They are genuine in their expressions and do not use polished words. They do not consider too much on what they should say or answer. They just tell plainly. I get along with them comfortably. You would not feel that they are hypocrites.

Kim: In children's prayer, there are no polished words, no jargons. They just talk causally to their target, God the Father. Jesus is their friend, not a supreme image. In their prayers, they do not ask for help. They just use words of genuineness. It is their usual way of talking.

The impression of genuineness was related to children's verbal expressions. Teachers were impacted by children speaking from heart directly. The participants admired the children for their frankness with God. On the other hand, the participants felt that the adults tended to veil themselves.

6.1.4 Joy

Participants were impressed by the experience of children's joy emanated in Sunday school. Such joy may not be related to the Bible teaching directly. The children just like to go to Sunday school and enjoy the relationship with the teacher. In the case of Kim, the child invited his parents to attend the church as he felt happy there.

Anna: The child is extremely happy when she sees the teacher. She likes the teacher. She is quiet and does not always talk with the classmates. I think that the whole Sunday school environment is a place where she is familiar with. There are people who love her and make her feel comfortable. Therefore, she is joyful.

Kim: A child has non-Christian parents. He invited them to attend church activities. It impressed me. Most of the children just follow their Christian parents to go to church. The condition in this case is the opposite. It is because the child loves to attend Sunday school, then she brings his parents to church. The parents attend Sunday worship and then wait for their children to finish the class. I was curious to know why she loved to attend Sunday school. She just said she felt happy to do it.

Some children do like to attend Sunday school nowadays joyfully. The teachers may not know why and are just impressed by the children's joy in Sunday school. The teachers easily feel happy once the children have joy in the lessons.

6.2 Relational consciousness

Children demonstrate their spirituality characteristic as relational consciousness in the Sunday schools. According to the framework of relational consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006), it has four dimensions in terms of children's relationship with God, self, others and environment. In this study, all participants were impressed by the expressions of children's relational consciousness, mainly "Child-God consciousness" and "Child-Others consciousness".

6.2.1 Child-God relational consciousness

The participants experienced the children revealing their Child-God consciousness. Three sub-themes were identified including "empathy with God", "keen to know God" and "prayer". Therefore, the participants experienced that the children were lively related to God in terms of feeling what God feels, wanting to know Him more and connecting with Him through prayer.

Empathy with God

The participants were impressed by the children who had empathy with God. They imagined Jesus' feeling of crucifixion and felt God's feeling for people worshipping idols.

Wai: I remember that I told the story of Passion around Good Friday to Easter. There was a child who drew something. He drew a cross, and there was another cross. I asked him what it meant. He told me that he did not want Jesus to be crucified. It was painful. I felt he loved Jesus so much. I was touched.

In another case, a participant told the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments (Exodus Chapter 20). The second commandment is prohibition against worshipping an idol or a graven image or likeness of God. The teacher remembered that a child expressed if a person did this, he would be unhappy. The child explained that because the person made an image like him and worshipped it. This would make him unhappy. The teacher was impressed that the child expressed such feeling in first person of God. The teacher felt the child was very smart.

Jade: I was impressed by a boy's speaking. He stated that if a person made an idol and worship it, he would be unhappy. The child spoke out in first person from the perspective of God. If a person makes an idol to substitute him, he would be sad. I felt that the child was smart. He impressed me so much.

In addition, the other participants experienced the children's relational consciousness to God when they were amazed by God's power in the Bible story and praised God for different reasons. It might be related to their personal experience of the sacred.

Keen to know God

Some children showed that they were keen to know God. Their enthusiasm in seeking

God impressed the teachers.

Fanny: The child is very active and hard working. Sometimes she asks me, “Which part of the Bible are you talking about? I want to write it down.” Then she wrote down in a notebook. She is serious and hard working in studying the Bible.

Moreover, another participant also mentioned that a child liked to jot notes. He wrote down notes of the participant’s teachings. The participant felt the child was very serious. The participant mentioned he never jotted notes. He thought he must learn from his seriousness in Bible learning.

On the other hand, one participant recalled that the children were touched by the message that God loves them in spite of their appearance. The teacher was impressed that the children were touched by the message of God’s acceptance. The children were not just brain-knowing but heart-knowing. Therefore, the teacher was able to feel their emotional status.

Wai: I remember that I told a story called Six Noses. It was not a Bible story. The message is that you do not need to apply cosmetics. You are the best in God’s eyes. Some children embraced the message and said, “No, no need to apply cosmetics on the nose. God loves your original face.” I felt that the children were touched from their facial expressions. They were joyful from their heart.

Although the story was not a Bible story, it was used to illustrate a Bible story that was taught in the same lesson.

Prayer

Not all the children like to lead prayers in Sunday school. In this study, the participants were impacted by the children’s relationship with God through their prayers. The teacher felt the children’s relational consciousness of God. The participant experienced the children to

take the initiative on praying for the sickness of her father, and also for the weather.

Lin: My father was sick. The children prayed for him. I did not expect them to pray for my family members. Later, they gave a celebratory card to me when my father was baptized. They asked me to give it to my father.

When we looked out through the window, the sky was dark. The children suggested to pray immediately. They are so sensitive. I always learn from them.

Moreover, once a child got constipated at home and felt very uncomfortable. The parents told the teacher that the kid cried and shouted, “Jesus! Help! Save me!” Then the child was able to defecate finally and felt Jesus had listened to his prayer. The teacher related the praying action of the children to the teaching of the Sunday school. They not only prayed for themselves. Another participant knew that the children prayed for their family members for healing from sickness or becoming Christians. The teacher claimed they practiced the teaching of the stories and felt that children’s faith was strong.

6.2.2 Child-Others relational consciousness

The participants experienced the Child-Others relational consciousness including “Child-Teacher relationship” and “Child-Child relationship”. Relationship with others is a dimension of relational consciousness. This study found that the others mainly included teachers and classmates. Unsurprisingly, they are the persons that are present with the children in Sunday school.

Child-Teacher relationship

The participants experienced children’s expressions of Child-Teacher relationship. The

teachers recognized their relationship with children when the children were able to remember their names, teachings, personal stories, or got involved in after-school activities, and the most important was the feeling of walking along the spiritual journey together. The teachers are surprised by their relationship with children revealed in such issues.

One of the participants likes to share personal stories with Bible stories. The children loved his stories and were absorbed when they were listening. The participant felt being connected with the children.

Peter: Stories of your past may touch the children. For example, my experience of being close to death in a traffic accident. I shared how I prayed at that moment. I asked God to keep on watching me. I was peaceful. Another time I got abdominal pain, severe pain to faint. I also shared how I prayed at that time. The children were absorbed when listening to these stories. They would ask follow-up questions. Moreover, I shared the experience of dating a girl, and how to ask God for a marriage partner. They would also listen out for this issue.

Interviewer: Which story touched the children most?

Peter: True stories. I could differentiate whether they were touched by their responses, such as whether they were absorbed or not. Then I encouraged them to keep trusting, and to live out the faith in daily lives. Nevertheless, they remembered my teachings. A few weeks later when they came back, they still remembered. Then I knew they really valued the stories I told.

Actually, a moment of a child asking the teacher a personal question was caught in an observation session. The teacher told the story of “Jesus Washing His Disciples' Feet” (John Chapter 13). It was interesting that the participant claimed that she disliked going to beach when she was a little girl. A child asked her again whether she disliked going to beach or not. The question seemed to ask the teacher about her condition now. The child was connected to

the personal story of the participant.

Teacher: There was a sandy road. Very dry. They (Jesus and His disciples) had been walking outside all day long. What do you think?

Child: So dirty. They need to wash their feet.

Teacher: Yes. Their feet were dirty.

Child: And stink.

Teacher: Right. We are wearing socks now. If we take off our socks, our feet.....

Child: Very stinky.

Teacher: So, they did not wear socks, and a lot of sand. Have you been to a beach before?

Child: Yes.

Teacher: Woo! How are your feet after you have gone to a beach?

Child: Stink.

Teacher: Besides being smelly, you put off your shoes, what have you got a lot?

Child: A lot of sand. Tingling.

Teacher: Can you clean them all? You think you have cleaned them all. However, they are still there. I disliked going to beach when I was young. I hated that sand sticking on my feet and it was difficult to wipe away all the sand. You must wash thoroughly.

Child: Do you dislike going to a beach?

Teacher: I dislike when I was young.

Child: I like going anyway.

Moreover, one participant felt her relationship with children was established gradually as time went by.

Ling: I have just taught him for two lessons. Then every time we meet in church, he remembers my name. “Auntie Ling, when will be your next lesson?” I feel very happy because he remembers my name. He seems to look forward to my lessons.

Once in a group activity, a child refused to involve. Then he was punished by somebody and required to sit aside. He sat alone and cried. I came close to him and talked to him. He leaned on my shoulder and kept on crying. He told me that he was feeling unhappy. I felt he trusted me. Something was changed. From such small motion and our interaction, I perceived that the child knew you cared about him. Relationship was established.

On the other hand, in an observation session, children used a strategy to keep connecting to their teacher. They shared their stories enthusiastically. The teacher taught the story of Ten Commandments and was discussing “do not worship another God”. Then the child talked about her parents trying to convert their grandparents. Her story engaged the participant and the researcher felt that they were connected.

Teacher: Your parents are Christian. They won’t burn incense to false gods, will they?

Child: I want to say something.

Teacher: You want to say something.....

Child: Last week, my parents argued with my grandparents on an issue. “You lose nothing if you believe Jesus right now. We will go to heaven as we keep our faith. But you will go down to hell if you have no faith in Jesus.” They were arguing. Then, “Please believe in Jesus for your own sake. Being a Christian is good.” They argued about this.

Teacher: Oh! What happened finally? Argument on this issue is difficult to stop.

Child: My grandparents just said that my parents could make the decision for them if they liked. They did not want to argue any more.

Teacher: Oh! Can such decision be made by other persons?

Child: They were so talkative. I was watching television with my sister in the living room. Then they started arguing. Their voices were very scary to me. I was frightened. My grandparents were hawkers before. They sold clothes. Their shouting frightened me.

Then we went into the bedroom to watch television.

Teacher: Right! I suggest that we don't argue in such situation. We just want to preach, to introduce the gospel to our relatives and friends who have not yet been converted. Therefore, try not to argue with them. Give them time to think about it, right?

Child-Child relationship

The participants experienced children's expressions of Child-Child relationship. The teachers were impressed and felt happy if the children demonstrated that they loved and helped each other. The participant perceived that love was demonstrated as the children were willing to share their stationaries.

Anna: I feel great and happy for small things. Children need to bring their own stationery since they joined Primary 1 Sunday school class. You can see the big difference among the children. Some of them were selfish and held their stationery tightly. On the other hand, some children approached other children voluntarily and asked, "You haven't any pencil, have you? Let me help you." I deeply appreciated these children. They worked out good behavior.

Another participant experienced the children being willing to share the toys, but they had not done this before. The teacher felt happy because the children began to connect to each other.

When the children weaved meaning with their own stories and other children's stories, the participant could also experience the child-child relationship. In this case, the children were connected as they compared the difference among their schools. Then they recognized that their teachers in school had many ways to get their jobs done.

Jade: One of the children liked to talk about his school. He always shared the happenings in school and other children were interested. They liked to compare their schools. They sometimes said, "Your teachers are good. You are free to do this." "No, they are harsh. They sometimes shout at us and punish us seriously." It was interesting

because they knew the difference among their schools. Then they thought their own schools were not so bad. A teacher just works out the job in one way, and there are many other teachers, who work in many other ways. This is interesting.

In addition, one participant assumed a situation and asked them how to comfort the classmate who had failed in the examination. A child answered, “I am poorer than you.” It surprised the teacher.

Ling: Sometimes children’s responses make you happy. For example, once I asked them, “If your classmate fails in an examination by just one mark, would you comfort him? Or would you just think that he is stupid?” The children took turn to respond. A child said that he would tell him that his result was poorer, “I got just a few marks!” I have never thought that a 6-year-old child is so considerate to other children. Each child had a difference answer. All the answers were interesting. This let me know them more. Children have kindness from the heart at such young age.

6.3 Discussion on major themes of teachers’ experience of children’s spirituality

6.3.1 Teachers experience children’s essence of spirituality

In this study, the participants experienced children’s spirituality in terms of encountering their essence of spirituality including “simple”, “wholeness”, “genuine” and “joy”. It aligned with Hart’s (2003) idea that children have the intuition that they always go straight to the core of an issue. They can discern injustice, hypocrisy, suffering immediately. They have the wisdom to recognize what is important, not through calculations or analysis. As a result, they often spontaneously express their compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

The participants were impressed by and admired the characteristics of the essences of the children’s beings. They sighed that they were not so simple, wholeness, genuine and joyful as children. As the participants said, “What can I learn from children? The answer is

their simplicity and pure faith. Children do not have much distracting thoughts, selfish motives, interests, and plans.” “I get along with them comfortably. You would not feel that they are hypocrites.”

Therefore, the experience of encountering with children’s spiritual characteristics is always positive to adults. It makes the adults to rethink what have been lost in their adulthood. It facilitates the adults to touch with their real selves. It clearly has the benefits on spiritual well-being.

6.3.2 Teachers experience children’s relational consciousness

The teacher experienced that children’s spirituality is relational in nature. With the framework of relational consciousness, only two dimensions of relational consciousness were experienced by the participants including “Child-God consciousness” and “Child-Others consciousness” in this study.

The participants were impressed by the expressions of children’s relational consciousness in terms of “Child-God consciousness”. The children were able to imagine the feeling of Jesus when he was crucified. They also suggested to pray to God for the sickness of the teacher’s father and the weather. Such expressions became lived human experience of the teachers.

Actually, in Kuyvenhoven’s (2009) study, some children reported there was a sense of presence or a force other than themselves within their imaginative engagement. And

spirituality always relates to the personal experience of the sacred (Ivtzan et al., 2013).

According to the result of this study, children in Sunday school clearly demonstrate such experience to teachers. It stimulates the teachers to seek to experience the sacred personally.

Concerning “Child-Teacher” relationship, the participants enjoy building relationship with children. Actually, when the children were engaged in the wondering and meaning making with the teachers after Bible storytelling, they would speak a lot. On the other hand, sometimes the teachers dislike talkative children. However, Kuyenhoven (2009) named three kinds of participating of storytelling, “talking”, “thinking”, and “imagining”. Listeners participating as talking were acknowledged as present and connect with the others. Therefore, the teachers need to appreciate different forms of connection of children with them.

Moreover, the participants of Fisher’s (1999) study agreed that the teachers play a very important role in helping children to nurture the relational consciousness. The teachers perceived that spiritual health is the capacity of the students to establish strong relationships with self, others, their environment and a Transcendent Other. Therefore, how to nurture the relational consciousness of children in Sunday school must be rethought.

6.3.3 Teachers experiencing children’s spirituality may be affected by cultural background

The previous session has mentioned that the teacher seemed insufficient to support children’s wondering and indoctrinate children during meaning making. It was obvious that the teachers paid most effort to finish their teaching activities in the observation sessions.

However, children's spiritual expressions were often neglected. It seemed that Chinese Sunday school lessons are tended to be teacher centered.

The participants might perceive their roles as teaching knowledge of Bible, Christian beliefs and values, just like traditional religious educators, instead of spiritual mentor or shepherds. If it was the case, the teachers viewed children as passive knowledge receivers. It hindered the teachers from experiencing children's wondering and supporting them. And they also tried to indoctrinate children during meaning making in order to ensure that the children had learnt the orthodox Christian beliefs and values. As mentioned in the literature view, conforming to the norms is one of the Chinese traditional values which is influenced by Confucianism.

Moreover, if the children were disengaged during storytelling, it signified that they did not remain "passive". The expressions of disengagement told the teachers that something went wrong in the storytelling. It might be perceived by Chinese teachers as disgraceful or disrespectful and induced negative emotional response.

The teachers experienced relational consciousness and connectedness with children in Sunday school. It matched with the expectation that relationships would be established in Sunday school. However, such expectation was produced by the teachers perceiving that they bear parents' image under the influence of Confucianism, or they are in a big spiritual family with the children under the influence of Christianity. The difference was subtle.

Summary

The participants were impacted by the children's essence of spiritual characteristics including "simple, wholeness, genuine and joy". The characteristics were demonstrated in the interactions of children with Bible stories and the teachers throughout the lessons. The teachers recognized that these characteristics were "good things" of childhood. Therefore, the participants hope for relearning such kinds of "good thing".

Moreover, the participants experienced that children's spirituality was relational in nature, so called "relational consciousness". This experience reminds the teachers that religious education or spirituality nurturing is always not to indoctrinate abstract religious idea or constructs with children. Due to such consciousness, the children make meaning with Bible stories and teachers' stories in four dimensions, with transcendence, self, others and nature.

Therefore, Bible storytellers must be aware that spirituality nurturing is also relational in nature. In other words, Sunday school teaching has relational dimensions and becomes a transformative learning process (Kang, 2013). Once this is understood, the spirituality of the teachers will also be nurtured as they relate to self and the external through the engagement with children in Bible lessons.

Chapter 7: Teacher perceived spirituality nurturing and being nurtured in Bible storytelling experience

The previous session explored and discussed how the spiritual expressions elicited by the children in Sunday school lessons impressed the teachers. They perceived that such encounters did nurture both children's and teachers' spirituality in a sense. In session 7.1, how the teachers perceived that the children were spiritually nurtured in Sunday school is described. The participants believed that their teachings did have effect on the spiritual growth of children. In session 7.2, it is going to explore and discuss teachers' experience of spiritually being nurtured. According to the theoretical framework of children's spirituality, the core is relational consciousness. Unsurprisingly, through the eyepiece of relational consciousness, all the participants felt that their relationship with God, self and others were nourished. At the end of this chapter, there is a discussion session 7.3.

7.1 Teacher perceived the children were spiritually nurtured

As mentioned in the above sessions, after the children were engaged by Bible stories, spiritual space was opened, and the children might go through the spiritual transformation cycle. The cycle includes wondering, meaning making and spiritual transformation. The children might leave the cycle at every single point. On the other hand, if the children completed the cycle, the children might have some "changes". This session explored the teachers' perception of such change.

The children being nurtured spiritually were perceived by the teachers or the parents after the lessons. They recognized that the children changed in a few days, a few weeks, one to two years, or at the age of teenagers. Although such transformations may not occur right after the Bible storytelling, the teacher thought it was related to their teachings.

The participants perceived that the children changed after the Bible class. For example, after listening to the stories of confession, some children were willing to apologize for their wrong doings to others. The teacher thinks that confession is always one of the key messages of the Sunday school lessons. In another case, after telling the story about loving and serving each other, one of the teachers found that the children were willing to tidy up the classroom and worked together cooperatively. They also more accepted the child who had special educational needs. Another teacher experienced the children becoming more involved in the church life. For example, there was a parent-child day and the church members made a wooden Jesus figure for decoration. The Sunday school children were willing to polish the figure and helped to wrap the presents, and also distributed the leaflets in the street. The teacher felt that the children were changing gradually in the recent one to two years. Moreover, one mother teacher mentioned that her daughter asked her what she could help in the night after the lesson. The child then was willing to do housework and the mother teacher felt that she was like an angel that night.

Interestingly, a class of children were asked to design a game for the elderlies of their

church. The teacher found that they designed a maze with large old paper boxes. There was an entrance and an exit. One way led the elderlies to God and another to Devil. The children asked the elderlies to think which way they wanted to follow. The teacher thought that the children used the message they grasped in Sunday school to design the game.

One participant mentioned that the children of her church may study abroad at the age 15-16. Before they go to foreign countries, they want to be baptized. The teacher thinks it may be due to the influence of growing up in Sunday school. Actually, the participant's daughter attends church with the parents. The participant commented that her daughter is good-natured. She applied for baptism around age 18. The participant said that her daughter was challenged by the baptism board. They commented on her that she seemed to inherit her parents' Christian belief without personal critical thinking. They urged her to own her own faith. Then the teenager reflected on her origin of faith and went through an emotional upset. At the end she confirmed herself that she was a true believer and was baptized. Therefore, the participant experienced her daughter's spiritual transformation in terms of how she overcame external challenge and recognized her own faith. She viewed that such transformation was rooted in Sunday school teachings.

However, one participant experienced the children becoming more challenging when they became adolescents. They responded to storytelling as follows, "I know." "Just usual." "It's not real." "Just your sayings. I don't believe in that."

Nevertheless, the participants mentioned that they experienced the children “changed” after a period of time. They perceived such change may be caused by their Bible teaching and felt satisfied.

7.2 Teacher perceived spirituality being nurtured

In this study, it was found that the teachers experienced the characteristics of children’s spirituality as relational consciousness. They also perceived that their spirituality was nurtured in terms of their relationships with God, self and others. It aligned with the dimensions of relational consciousness.

7.2.1 Teacher-God relationship

The participants perceived that their relationships with God were nurtured. Three themes were identified under this category, “Becoming a child”, “More interested in God’s word”, “Feeling connected to God”. The teachers recognized that they must understand the Bible from children’s perspective, and this refreshed their relationship with God. Moreover, they also perceived that they became more interested in God’s word. It is believed to reflect the condition of spirituality of a Christian in the faith community context. Lastly, the teachers felt that they connected to God subjectively.

Becoming a child

This theme was identified as the participants claimed that they tried to think and understand from children’s point of view, and to treasure children’s spiritual characteristics.

In a case, the participant was aware that her teaching method was not suitable for children before. She felt that the children did not learn much in her lessons. After a training course, she began to understand children from their point of view. Although the teacher received the idea of understanding Bible stories from children's perspective in a teacher training course, she actualized the idea by practicing and trying to experience the Bible story world as a child.

Fanny: I used to teach children with the ways for adults. I just followed the teaching guide straightly. Later I tried to think from the children's point of view. Actually, they did not understand my teachings. They received only a little. I reminded myself that I should focus on the main point. Visual teaching materials or teaching activities could impress children and could make them remember more. Using their point of view to understand was what I could learn in that lesson.

Interviewer: When did you have such change?

Fanny: After the training, almost 3 years ago.

Moreover, another participant mentioned she needed to use children's point of view when she used the teacher guidebooks for preparation of the lessons. Another one shared that he paid an effort to think of the examples that can be understood by children for Bible stories illustration.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned he wanted to stay with Jesus as a child.

Ka: Children always want adults to stay with them, and go to find Papa, Mama, or other adults at once when they face some difficulties. If you put Jesus in such position in your heart, you just hope that Jesus can be with you all day, or you can be with Him all day, accompanying each other. Then you will tell Him all your things.

Another participant articulated that her spirituality became like a child's one along her interaction with them. She felt that she had joined them. Interestingly, then she seemed to

have the faith in God that would resolve her problem of facing injustice.

Mary: Myself and my spirituality has become like a child. It is due to a lot of contact with the children. My hands, my legs, and myself are in child mode as a whole integrating with the children. We learn together, recite Bible verses together, throw balls together. We integrate together.

Every day I come to God as a child. I pour out my heart. Maybe I also cry with Jesus like a child. Jesus knows that I always experience injustice. He will solve it, won't He?

In addition, one participant claimed that she wanted to be simple and obedient as a child.

More interested in God's word

The participants have experienced that they became more respectful for God's word.

This theme was identified as the teachers perceived that they were more interested in understanding the Bible and the children's understandings inspired them. The participants used "new discoveries", "never thought in this way before" when they mentioned such experience. The teachers were willing to pay more effort in studying the Bible themselves.

Wai: I think that being a Sunday school teacher has a profound effect on me. I become more serious in studying the Bible. I really enjoy it. When I read the Bible, I seldom looked into the details before. Now I study the Bible when I prepare for the lessons. It's very rewarding. It's the biggest discovery really.

The participant also mentioned another reflection,

Wai: I think that we need to know how to ask questions when studying the Bible. I have had the faith for so many years. I realize that I take it for granted for the understanding of the Bible. I was seldom excited by Bible reading and fell into deep thinking. The children's questions stimulated me to think more. How? Why? They stimulated me to learn.

The teachers looked into the details and background of the Bible stories more seriously and they prepared for the wondering questions of the children.

Ka: I felt the difference after I had studied the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

This helped me to grow in Bible knowledge, to view from different angles. Although I come across similar topics in preaching, or article reading every year, I do not really understand. Listening is just listening. If you need to teach, you must study it. Therefore, you will have a new angle of view on your basic knowledge of the Bible. You might not encounter such angle before. It is good. It is really good. You have a broadened mind. I remember that I once taught manna eight to ten years ago. I searched a lot of information. Then I knew more about manna in great details. I just totally forgot its meaning right after I heard of it at the first time. My knowledge was increased.

The participant becomes more interested in God's word. According to Christian belief, a Christian being more interested in God's word is viewed as being closer to God. The experience of being a Sunday school teacher facilitates the teacher to read or study the Bible more seriously. The increase in Bible knowledge makes them feel closer to God.

Feel close to God

The participants experienced that they felt close to God. This theme was identified as the participants perceived that they were used by God, God spoke to them or inspired them when they were preparing the lessons. The participant felt that God gave her the message of the lessons through her daily life. Her awareness of God was increased by being a Sunday school teacher. Her story connected with God's story.

Yee: I repeatedly read the Bible verses which was going to be taught, then paid attention to the happenings and information received in that week. God might give me the message of the coming lesson through my daily life. Therefore, I always waited, to see what would happen. It would be the message to teach in the coming lesson.

Furthermore, the participant felt closer to God in the preparation process of the lesson. She might not experience God's voice auditorily. Her perceived closeness was in terms of familiarity of the Bible. It is the common factor of all the participants included in this theme.

Yee: I must keep preparing the lesson until I feel that I became more familiar with the Bible than the children. In other words, I kept on studying the Bible verses until I fully understood, then I would be capable to present them. Therefore, my relationship with God and the Bible was closer. And I have better understanding than before. If I don't need to teach the Bible, I just read it superficially, for less than two times. However, if I need to teach, I will read, study and pray. I pray for what God will use me to teach, and how to teach, also how to make children understand. I think of such issues more than before.

Moreover, one participant felt that she was being involved in God's work.

Kim: When I am a Sunday school teacher, I keep preparing. Therefore, I feel my relationship with God becomes closer. I am actively involved in God's work, not just receiving the message passively.

In another case, the participant perceived that she was inspired by God for a small game which had good effects in the lesson.

Mary: I give thanks every time. God's guidance is more than I ask. Sometimes I just had only one way to teach which was boring. Eventually another way came up. For example, I used three balls last Sunday. Similar to ball throwing game in a funfair, the children had three chances to recite the key Bible verses of last week and the week before last week. They competed to recite. God told me to play the game which I had no idea originally. They were excited by the ball throwing game and recitation of the Bible. I felt that they were so cooperative in that moment. The children were all concentrating on the activity.

This experience not only made the teacher felt close to God. It also influenced the teacher's knowledge of God. The participant perceived that God is flexible. It is a facet of relational consciousness according to the theoretical framework.

Mary: Jesus can use many ways. Therefore, I cannot be rigid when contacting children. According to this principle, although Jesus has a plan for me, I cannot use a rigid framework to confine myself. God is flexible and gives me a lot of freedom and space.

7.2.2 Teacher-self Relationship

The participants experienced that their relationship with self was nurtured by being a

Sunday school teacher. Two themes were identified as “self-knowing” and “self-being”.

“Self-knowing” was identified as the teachers knew more about themselves. “Self-being” was identified as the teachers perceived they were becoming better persons.

Self-knowing

The participants experienced that they reflected on their personal characteristic and had better knowing of themselves. The participants always reflected on what had happened right after the lessons.

Rose: After I had finished the Sunday school lesson every Sunday, I had a meal, took a rest, for my inner life. When I left my church, I would reflect on my performance in the lesson automatically. Did I miss something? Did I do something wrong? What were the good things? I always remembered the good things, and I would tell the children in the next lesson if I had missed something this week.

Moreover, the participants’ spiritual space was opened by Sunday school teaching. The participants knew their limitation through their reflection. They knew that they were insufficient in love, humbleness, knowledge and prayer.

Anna: I always reflect whether I have sufficient love. Sometimes I felt being dried up in my teaching and I just did it as a task only. However, I remind myself by an old saying: each life affects another.

The participant also reflected on her humbleness. She reflected that she was arrogant at the beginning of serving as Sunday school teacher in this church and reminded herself to be humble. She reflected that she was too task-oriented when she compared herself with other Sunday school helpers. It is a kind of self-knowing.

Anna: I was arrogant at the beginning. Because I am a mother and have teaching experience in Sunday school of another church. I feel that my lessons are good. I can

learn from other teachers. Anyway, God reminds me in my heart [be humble]When I cooperate with other teachers, they function as a piece of mirror which reflects my image. You should not be arrogant. You must be humble.

The participant gave supplement response in the latter part of the interview.

Anna: I felt that I gained a lot. I said previously that I had a lot of reflection. If I was not a Sunday school teacher, I might not be challenged to reflect so frequently. As a mother, as a Sunday school teacher, what should I be? What is my being? Sometimes I felt ashamed when I was unable to answer children's questions. Is it my problem? This challenges me to reflect on my teaching quality. How can I have better communication with children? I feel that such kind of reflections have great influence on me.

The participant always reflected on her being after serving as a Sunday school teacher. It might lead her to approach the inner self and increased her self-knowing.

One participant recognized that her Bible knowledge was insufficient in her teaching experience.

Joe: I understand that the children just ask questions. Surely, I cannot know all things. I think that I must tell the children honestly that I don't know. I hope that I can help the children to keep asking.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that she knew her endurance in the service. She also knew that her involvement in Sunday school was not purpose driven. Her goal was to serve God.

Fanny: I just want to serve. In other words, I just do my part. I will not see the outcome immediately. I understand this. Therefore, I will not be disappointed.

The Unity of Knowledge and Action

The participants perceived that their awareness of living out the unity of knowledge and action was increased. This theme was identified as the teachers recognized that they need to pay the effort for living out what they teach the children in Sunday schools.

One participant clearly reflected on the message which she had taught.

Ling: For example, God let me teach the children to love their enemies. Then I reflected whether I loved my enemies. Do I just love the people who I like? Do I really love my enemies? I need to reflect before I teach the class. When I was preparing for the last lesson, I reflected whether I had forgiven the one who had offended me. Therefore, God would enlighten me first. I deeply reflected on that, not just how to teach, am I able to work out what I teach?

Another participant stressed that he must practice what he had directed the children to practice. After serving as a Sunday school teacher, the participant knew that the self must grow towards the unity of knowledge and action.

Wai: You must practice your teachings. You must practice them naturally. Even though you just try. For example, I asked the children, “Have you invited your classmates to attend the evangelistic gathering?” You must try to do it first.

Another participant mentioned that the teachers’ unity of knowledge and action served as a model of faith. She embraced the message that she taught. The God followers could do things beyond their limitations just like King David. The teaching experience encouraged her that if she wanted to manifest God’s power in terms of doing things beyond her limitations, she must trust and obey God as King David did. The participant reflected that her teaching experience helped her to live out the unity of knowledge and action.

Ling: You taught that King David defeated Goliath because of David’s faith. If I do not believe this, it is difficult to teach children to believe too. David had the faith and relied on God. Therefore, he could do something beyond his limitations. I must obey God first.

Additionally, two participants experienced that their notion of living out the unity of knowledge and action came from some kinds of Sunday school teacher training. Such training may be organized by teachers’ own church or some Christian institutions. The

teachers mentioned that the training emphasized the importance of the qualities of the teachers. The qualities included their spiritual life, relationship with God, personal life as testimonies to their faith. The teachers perceived that such qualities would definitely influence the children.

Therefore, although the teachers were impacted by the Sunday school teaching experience and had the goal of growing towards the unity of knowledge and action, this study found that teacher trainings may also have effects on this point.

7.2.3 Teacher-Others Relationship

The participants experienced that their relationship with others was nurtured by being a Sunday school teacher. In this study, it was found that the “others” included children mainly and then other persons. It also aligned with the framework of relational consciousness.

Teacher-Children Relationship

The participants reflected on their relationship with children. Their awareness of the closeness with children seemed to increase along with their teaching experience. One of the participants reflected that she might overlook some of the children.

Anna: In recent months, I might have less attention towards some children in my class. I felt that I had less intervention with them. I had only superficial impression for some children. My teaching became one way. I felt that I had not asked them to answer my questions or just to give any response. When I had this reflection, I would find some ways to give them more attention. I missed them. I could not interact with them unless they gave some responses. Although it was good that they sat quietly and orderly, it was not communication. I just did not know what they got. It did not work.

Especially the quiet girls, they sat at the corners quietly. I was aware that I did ignore

some of them. They were quiet and well-behaved. I did not need to worry about their behavior. They just listened quietly. When I asked a question, they seldom raised their hands. Therefore, I would not call their names, I called the one who raised the hand. I have been alerted to this recently.

The participant had increased the awareness of the closeness and connectedness with the children of her class. Her spirituality was nurtured in terms of relational consciousness.

The participants also expressed that the experience of feeling connected to children was joyful.

Mary: Every time after I had conducted the lesson, I felt extremely happy.

Yee: As I have been a Sunday school teacher for a longer and longer time, I become more and more happy. I look forward to teaching every time. God is changing me. I could not face many people before. I felt scared and was absent minded. Now I love to teach, and I love to stick together with children.

Another participant viewed that the relationship established with children in Sunday school was a gain and it could be long lasting.

Kim: There is nothing more important than the children being willing to talk with their teachers when something has happened. From both teacher's and children's perspectives, I think it is a good gain, or growth.

Jade: If I teach the children, and then they understand, I will have satisfaction. Although they may not totally follow my teachings in the future, the faith has been gradually implanted in their hearts. I think it is the ultimate goal. I don't know whether it works or not. I have tried my best.

The long-term teacher-children relationship can be viewed as the teachers walking along the children's spiritual journey. They can experience the growth of children. This experience gives a feeling of comfort to the teachers.

Mary: I had spent time on their behavior. When they told you honestly that they had done something wrong, they were willing to change afterward. I felt comfort deep in my

heart. I achieved my goal.

The nurtured teacher-children relationship provides the teachers with positive experience in Sunday school teaching. Furthermore, there were two sub-themes including “sympathy with children” and “accommodate children.” These two sub-themes reflected the awareness of the participants on their relationship with children.

1. Sympathy with children

This sub-theme was identified as the teacher felt what the children felt. This reflected the quality of teacher-children relationship. They were present with each other. The participants included in this sub-theme feeling the children’s pressure of homework and examinations.

Yee: I felt painful in my heart when I saw a child being pushed by homework. I asked him, “Can you quit the lessons after school?” He replied that his mother just said no because he had got only 70-80 marks in the assessment. He knew that he needed to prepare for the promotion to secondary school. Therefore, I made my lessons interesting and comforting to benefit them. It was life matter.

Jade: At the beginning of each lesson, we always asked the children, “How are things going on this week? What are your needs that I can pray for you?” They might not show positive response at the beginning. And they always just said, “I will have examination.” “I will have dictation.” They seemed so worried. I wondered why they talked about things that would happen in June. It was just April. Easter was coming. It proved that they were so worried. I felt that either they were responsible for their academic performance, or they were just pushed by their parents.

Furthermore, one participant felt the children’s feeling when they were pointed at by teachers’ fingers.

Joe: Some children said that some teachers pointed at them with fingers. The feeling of being pointed at by somebody was uncomfortable. I did not know this until they told me. Then I reflected on that: had I also pointed at them with fingers? In fact, I had seen some teachers pointing at children with their fingers. I tried to remind them not to do that. The

teachers might be aware and stopped. Therefore, if the children are willing to express, we are willing to change. I think it is good. The children would then feel happy when they attend the Sunday schools.

When the teachers perceived and experienced that their teacher-children relationship was nurtured, they showed sympathy to children's feeling. They might also reflect on their interaction with children. Such process made Sunday school teaching more enjoyable.

In another case, the participant was sympathetic towards children who had difficulties to love or to be loved.

Lin: The children might come from single parent families, or both parents were absent. They were being brought up by grandparents. Therefore, I always thought about how I could help them to learn to love and to accept others. How could they learn about love if there was no love in their lives? Bible stories might be too far away from them. Although they knew Jesus loved them, they still had great difficulties in loving others. The difficulties were due to their insufficient experience of love in daily life. Therefore, we needed to let them experience love, otherwise all the teachings were in vain. We recognized this fact, but it was also difficult to carry out. Therefore, I always thought about how such children could experience love and give love.

The participant's sympathetic heart was nurtured by her interaction with the children.

Although it seemed not related to Bible storytelling directly, the teacher implicitly expressed that the children needed to experience Jesus' love, not only knowing the stories about Jesus' love.

2. Accommodate children

This sub-theme was identified as the teachers recognized that they needed to interact with the children according to children's ways. The participants knew that Bible teaching in Sunday school was not a delivery of abstract Christian doctrines. The teachers recognized

that the children might not understand abstract religious language.

Jade: The teacher's guide was clear. And the most important thing was that although the teacher could present the materials to children directly, it could not be applied straightforwardly on children. So, after I had studied the Bible stories, I always just taught the main theme of the Bible stories to children. Because part of the content of the teacher's guide might be too deep for children. It might be only suitable for teachers only. If my words were too abstract, the children would not understand. I would simply use my ways to teach.

Ling: The children could only receive the messages that were concrete and simple. For elder children, their thinking was more advanced. You could give them more challenges.

Moreover, the teachers who accommodated children also learned from children.

Peter: What did the children teach me? They taught me not to be long-winded. We must consider their patience. You must know how they learn. When you become humbler and change the way you teach, you would find that they are different from adults and adolescents.....The challenge is bigger for teaching younger children. How can you use the right vocabularies to teach in a simple way? These were what they taught me when I used their ways to teach.

Teaching is also learning. The participant's way of accommodation was inspired by children.

Teacher-other people relationship

The participants experienced that their relationships with other people were nurtured.

Two participants claimed that the experience of nurturing children in Sunday school made them become better parents who knew how to nurture their own kids. In other words, communicating with Sunday school children enlightened them on how to communicate with their own kids.

The participants recognized that they needed to live out the unity of knowledge and action cognitively. Such notions nurtured their relationships with their own kids and other

parents. The teachers' awareness on their own attitude of being parents was increased. They also began to understand other parents more. The participants described such enlightenment had an effect on her interaction with other parents.

Anna: I always told other parents, "God leads the way." "Let God handle it." When things happened, I asked myself, did I also let God handle it? What were my difficulties in letting go and letting God? I have always reflected on this since I was a Sunday school teacher. I advised other parents to let go because their situations did not really concern me. When such things happened to my own kids, I might be more nervous. Instead of letting go, I held firmly and would not let God handle it. The actualization of "let God lead your way" made me struggle. When I looked back, I knew that God had led my kids' way. Every time I was distressed by some problems of my kids, God opened doors for me to go through, especially for my elder kid. After he went through some problems, we thought that we would let God handle his life afterwards. However, when another problem came, I just held firmly and struggled again. Then I realized how differently I treated my kids and other Sunday school children. Therefore, I understood more on the parents' responses to my sayings.

Furthermore, the same participant mentioned that she appreciated her partner teacher.

Anna: I appreciated that she could draw the children's whole attention. And her teaching style was different from mine. I tended to focus on the teaching work. Her applications of the stories were more lively than mine. I observed that the children's response was good. Her teaching was attractive. Applications were feasible. Don't just tell stories. I learned that I should not be arrogant.

The relationship between the participant and the partner teacher was nurtured in terms of her appreciation for her partner's works. She felt that they were connected and became closer.

Another participant experienced that the children's parents became Sunday school teachers after the child had graduated. The participant treasured such bonding in Sunday school.

Kim: After some children had grown up, their parents stayed and became Sunday school teachers or helpers. We prayed together before the classes most of the times. When we held evaluation meetings for the school, we had a lot of time for sharing, sometimes more than the time for praying. Therefore, teachers formed a fellowship, a cell group,

helping and supporting each other. We not only prayed for the children, but also voiced out our difficulties in our lives and prayed for each other. I felt that the bonding between us was genuine.

In the above cases, the relationships of the participants with other people were nurtured.

7.3 Discussion on major themes of teachers' experience of spirituality nurturing and being nurtured

7.3.1 Teachers experienced children's spiritual growth

This study found that the participants experienced the characteristics of children's spirituality were relational in nature. It echoed with Moriarty's (2014) suggestion that spiritual nurture must facilitate the child to establish healthy relationships with the Transcendent, others, the natural world and Self. This kind of nurture roots on relationships with the school, the family, the faith community and the external world in which the child lives.

The participants reported that their children showed spiritual growth. According to Kang's (2013) finding, the teachers' motivation of teaching had changed as time passed. The teachers were motivated by experiencing students' spiritual growth, the willingness to grow themselves, and responsibilities as parents. Therefore, the teachers' spirituality may be nurtured in that sense.

7.3.2 Becoming like a child as spirituality being nurtured

These teachers have the experience that they used children's perspective to understand the Bible stories and to prepare the lessons. They perceived that they became like children

spiritually. If adults can revisit their own innate spirituality through the eyes of children, it may facilitate their spiritual growth (Hart, 2003, p.174).

As one of Jesus' famous saying, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew Chapter 18 verse 3), the participants would perceive that they were closer with the Father in Heaven. It was related to the relationship with the Transcendence. Therefore, the teachers would perceive that their spirituality was nurtured in such sense.

Furthermore, the participants also expressed that they wanted to be simple and obedient as a child and wanted to stay with Jesus as a child. According to the literature review, the participants really experienced that children were learners in Sunday school who ultimately became teachers.

Nevertheless, becoming like a child is an interesting experience of spiritual growth.

7.3.3 Childhood openness

Unsurprisingly, the teacher's interaction with children in Bible storytelling and teaching nurtured teacher's spirituality. They tried to view and think from the angle of children. They had sympathy for children and were willing to accommodate them. The teachers perceived that they must "use their ways to teach" and they learned the "ways" from the children. They became open to children's perspective. Nelson (1990, p. 97) suggested that if adults take on the childlike openness, stories can nurture their relationships in life by uniting people with

nature and pointing out commonalities of humankind.

Furthermore, childhood is unique and valuable. People usually do not recognize the meanings of childhood at the beginning of human lives until they know what that childhood means which come at the end of them. Therefore, the value of childhood is to be rediscovered throughout our life span. Childhood is opened in that sense. Adults bravely and trustfully maintaining an openness in all situations which seem to make them close themselves is the attitude of mature childhood of the adults. In other words, the process of human maturity is a wonderful adventure of remaining a child forever (Rahner, 1971).

As spirituality is perceived as an inborn, naturally developed capacity which has a possibility of being suppressed and denied by cultural environment and socialization processes (Hay & Nye, 2006), the childhood spirituality in terms of “freedom to be” is set free.

7.3.4 Feel close to God when preparing the stories

The participants recognized that they needed to well prepare their Bible storytelling in order to engage the children. A teacher mentioned that she repeatedly read the Bible verse which was going to be taught. Another teacher kept preparing the lesson until she felt that she became more familiar with the Bible than the children. Therefore, the participants studied the Bible and felt close to God in the preparation. It aligned Kang’s (2013) result of his study.

The researcher reported that the participants claimed the preparation and teaching time were

both as crucial as each other. They meditated on God's word and felt close to God during preparation. Actually, people experienced their spiritual life being nurtured by stories in their personal growth (Kuyvenhoven, 2009). Definitely, the teachers could be nurtured by the Bible stories.

They also demonstrated their deeper desire to connect to God, to know more about Him, and to become mature in Christian life. Furthermore, they experienced being emotionally and spiritually sympathetic with the foreseeing of children's pleasure and engagement during preparation of the teaching activities.

Therefore, the preparation activity may nurture adults' spirituality in terms of the teachers connecting their stories to Bible stories and children's stories, it does not just concern the knowledge or hard facts of the Bible Scripture.

7.3.5 Increased awareness of the Teacher-Child Relationship

In this study, the teacher became more aware of their relationship with children. One of the participants reflected that she might overlook some of the children. The children just sat quietly in the classroom and seldom raised their hands for answering questions. The participant found that her awareness of children's conditions was increasing with their Bible teaching experience. Actually, she felt that she became closer with the children. She loves the children more.

This aligned with the thought of Westerhoff (2008, p.359-361), adults should view

childhood as a “characteristic of life” and do things with them, not only do things to them according to their chronological age and do things for them referring to their developmental stages. This leads to create a model in which adult and children both have something to offer each other. Therefore, adults and children need each other. This helps people regain the sense of being relational in this era of individualism. Being spiritual is being relational.

Therefore, adults put down the agendas to receive the love offered by the kids and prepare to give love. It cultivates the relationship between the child and adult in love. It is suggested that moral development must be based on love (Powell, 2005).

7.3.6. Be a reflective teacher

The teachers who experienced spiritual nurturing were more reflective on their relationships with God, self and others. The participants always reflected on what had happened right after the lessons. They knew their limitation through their reflection. They knew that they were inadequate in love, humbleness, knowledge and prayer.

Actually, Van Manen (1997) pointed out that no learning theories, teaching methods, or reading models can tell teachers what is suitable for a child in this moment. Teacher with reflective power can be with the child in a real way, to discern what is appropriate here and now for this child or these children. Van Manen (1997, p.149) said, “We need to act in the lives we live, side by side with our children, but then also wonder, always wonder whether we did it right.”

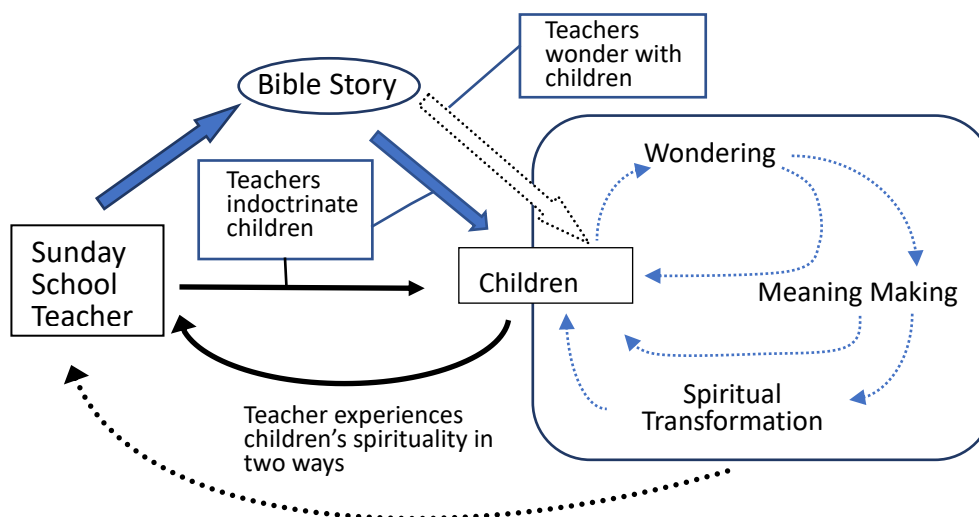
To be a reflective teacher may be spiritual transformative. The experience implies epistemological paradigm shift that includes the change of a way of thinking and therefore results in spiritual transformation as a lifelong process. The participants in Kang's (2013) research perceived three areas have transformed: 1) challenges to view multi-dimensionally, 2) increased meaning and value to serve in Sunday school, and 3) growth of their spiritual lives.

7.3.7 Revision of the conceptual framework

After discussing the findings of this study, the researcher reflexed on how the findings deviated from the original conceptual framework and challenged his preunderstanding.

Therefore, the framework was revised as follow:

Figure 2 Teachers experience of children's spirituality



In the Sunday schools, the teachers do Bible storytelling (the blue arrow). If the children are engaged, the children enter the wondering, meaning making and spiritual transformation

cycle (the blue dotted arrows). The teacher can walk along with the children in the cycle as spiritual journey. Spiritual expressions will be elicited and have impacts on the teacher (the dotted black curve). Such expressions reveal the children's essence of spirituality and relational consciousness. This process was shown by dotted line because the participants have some difficulties in recalling the children's spiritual expressions during Bible storytelling.

In addition, the teachers might try to indoctrinate the children after Bible storytelling and both of them will not enter the wondering cycle. However, as children are spiritual beings ontologically, the participants also experienced their essence of spirituality and relational consciousness (the black arrows) in the classroom. In such situation, the Bible stories were not involved. Although the Teacher-Child relationship was established, the children might not experience the impacts of the Bible stories.

Summary

This session described the experience of the participants' spirituality being nurtured by interacting with the children in Sunday school. In other words, teachers nurturing spirituality of children were being nurtured. They treasured children's connectedness with God and their perspective of Bible stories. Such issues inspired the teachers and they wanted to restore their youthful and playful hearts. The nurturing was also perceived in terms of their reflection on their growing relationships with God, self and others. It aligned with the framework of children's spirituality as relational consciousness.

Although the teachers seemed to seldom relate the experience of being nurtured to Bible storytelling directly, they viewed the Bible teaching experience as a whole implicitly related to the message of the Bible stories. They perceived that deeper understanding of the messages would draw them close to God and they needed to live out the messages according to the ideal of the unity of knowledge and action.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Discussion of the Findings in Relation to Research Question

The main research question identified in this study was: “How do Sunday school teachers perceive the spiritual experiences and impacts of Bible storytelling with children?”

In order to address the main question, the following sub-questions were suggested to guide this study at both theoretical and operational levels:

1. In what ways is children’s wondering exhibited?
2. How do teachers interact with, promote or hinder their wondering?
3. How do the teachers perceive the characteristics of children’s spirituality by their reflection on their spiritual expressions?
4. How do the teachers perceive their experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?
5. How do the teachers perceive their spirituality being nurtured by the experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?

8.1.1 Research Question One

In what ways is children’s wondering exhibited?

Bible storytelling is the major teaching method in Christian children Sunday school. The teachers experienced that the children were engaged and entered the Bible stories. Once the children were engaged, an imaginative spiritual space was opened, children wondered in the

Bible story world.

The participants differentiated whether the children were engaged by their gestures, eye focus and verbal spiritual expressions. The children expressed their wonderings by asking three kinds of questions including “existential”, “theological” and “out of context”. Non-question expressions included “play in the stories” and “express opinions”. These expressions were always out of the expectations of the participants and surprised them.

Once wondering occurred, the participants also experienced that the children demonstrated that they weaved the meanings of the Bible stories to various stories including “God’s story”, “own stories”, “other’s stories” and “the nature”. It aligned with the concept of “relational consciousness” as children’s core characteristic of spirituality. The children were most lively when they weaved the meanings of Bible stories to their own stories.

In this study, the participants recognized that they experienced children’s wondering and meaning making when they were engaged by Bible stories.

8.1.2 Research Question Two

How do teachers interact with, promote or hinder their wondering?

In this study, the participants experienced that “adventure stories”, “miracles of Jesus” and “stories with existential questing” could engage the children more easily. They were also absorbed in the teaching activities in which the ancient Bible world was visualized. Such stories and activities seemed to have better effect to promote children’s wondering. It may be

because they provide space for imagination and approach the existential crisis of children. It aligned with the characteristic of children's spirituality.

In this study, children's wondering seemed to be supported when the participants wondered what the children wondered. Sometimes they found it difficult to respond to children's wondering questions and opinions. However, it prevented teachers from giving immature comment or judgment that would diminish the magic moment of wondering of the children. Wonder what the children wondering is an appropriate attitude to support children's wondering. In other words, the teachers must also be engaged by the Bible stories, enter the spiritual space and walk along children's spiritual journey. If this is the case, the teachers would feel happy and joyful.

Moreover, teachers can ask open questions to support children's wondering theoretically. In this study, the participants seemed to be unable to recall such interaction with children and it was not observed in the observational sessions. They might ask open questions to weave the meanings of the Bible stories with daily life, but not when children were wondering. Nevertheless, they tried to teach according to the spiritual expressions of the engaged children who were wondering during Bible storytelling.

On the other hand, the participants in this study seemed to intend to deliver knowledge of God to children intellectually rather than concerning with children's spiritual experiences and feeling in the obtainment of knowledge of God.

If wondering is a kind of game that children play in the Bible stories, Bible storytellers must also be present in the Bible story world and play with the children. The spiritual space will be opened for meaning making.

8.1.3 Research Question Three

How do the teachers perceive the characteristics of children's spirituality by their reflection on their spiritual expressions?

In this study, the participants perceived that children as spiritual beings have the characteristics in terms of “simple”, “wholeness”, “genuine”, and “joy”. The participants’ experience of such spiritual characteristics seemed to be positive. On reflection, the participants recognized and valued the essence of children.

Moreover, the participants also perceived that children as relational beings have the characteristic of spirituality in terms of “relational consciousness”. Such consciousness is a sense of being objectively aware of the children’s own subjectivity response in relationships (Hay & Nye, 2006). The participants experienced that the children actively weaved the meanings of Bible stories with other stories including the stories of “God”, “Self”, “Others” and “Nature”. However, the children seemed to be rarely related to the nature in this study.

8.1.4 Research Question Four

How do the teachers perceive their experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?

The participants were full of joy when the children were engaged by the Bible stories and showed good response to the teachers. They were in the presence of and connected with each other. Such connection cultivated the relationship between the teachers and the children. Some participants perceived such relationship could be life-long. On the other hand, the participants felt “anger” and “unhappy” if the children were disengaged. The negative emotions may reveal the teacher’s perception of the children being naughty or un-cooperative. Moreover, such emotional response might be originated from the Chinese cultural background of the teachers. The teachers expected that they were the center of the classroom. Their teachings were the norm of the Christian belief. On the other hand, the children might be in distress when they were unable to enter the Bible story world.

Furthermore, the children being nurtured spiritually were perceived by the teachers or the parents after the lessons. They recognized that the children had been growing spiritually within a few days, a few weeks, one to two years, or at the age of teenagers. They perceived that some children showed the change of behavior at the end of the lessons. Others showed that they remembered the teaching of the Bible lessons. Some of them wanted to be baptized when they were teenagers. Nevertheless, the participants mentioned that they experienced the children “changed” after a period of time. They perceived that such changes might be caused by their Bible teaching and felt satisfied.

8.1.5 Research Question Five

How do the teachers perceive their spiritual impacts by the experiences of spiritual nurturing of children by Bible storytelling?

According to the findings of research question three, the participants experienced the essence characteristics of children as spiritual being and relational being. The participants treasured such characteristics and recognized that their direction of spiritual growth might be in terms of “becoming like a child”. In other words, they sought to live out the real selves. Such process might be transformative for adults’ spirituality. Therefore, the learners became teachers.

Moreover, the participants recognized that if they wanted to spiritually nurture the children by Bible storytelling, they must be nurtured by the Bible stories first. Therefore, they became more serious in Bible studying for preparation of the lessons. They felt that they became closer to God. Being connected to the Transcendence is also a kind of spirituality being nurtured.

Furthermore, the participants also realized that their connection to others and external world had grown due to their involvement as Bible storytellers in Sunday school. Therefore, it might help the teacher to understand that nurturing children’s spirituality always involves the interaction of the Bible stories, teachers’ stories and children’s stories. They are weaved and interpreted by each other. The participants became more aware of their own stories.

Listening and connecting to one's own self is a kind of spirituality being nurtured.

8.2 Implication

8.2.1 Becoming like a child

In this study, the participants experienced the reality that children as spiritual beings have the characteristics in terms of “simple”, “wholeness”, “genuine”, and “joy”. In addition, the participants wished that they could study the Bible from children's perspective, in order to understand children's response towards the Bible stories. Therefore, the participants expressed that they wanted to be “becoming like a child” as their direction of spiritual growth.

Although it was commanded by Jesus, “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark Chapter 10 verse 15), the participants did not relate their thought with this Bible verse.

On the other hand, “becoming like a child” can be understood by the concept of “inner child”. Inner child is described as a phenomenon that human lives are impacted by their life journey including all the past hidden ages (Sjöblom, Öhring, Prellwitz, & Kostenius, 2016; Sjöblom, Öhring, & Kostenius, 2018). It was suggested that the inner child is present throughout the lifespan. And the relation of the phenomenon of the inner child to health and well-being is reflected in adults' experience of childhood events.

If childhood has strengths and beauties that should be brought into adulthood, adults

may lose such characteristics of childhood and disconnect with their inner child. As the participants of this study voiced out that they longed for “becoming like a child”, they seemed to seek to connect with their inner child again. The teachers were recalled by the children that they once had the strengths and beauties of childhood. It becomes a source of development that can promote health and well-being.

All kinds of activities that interact with children may have the same effect, but Bible storytelling provides a special spiritual space for the interaction of adults and children. They are present together in the Bible playground.

8.2.2 Restore the childlike sense of wonder

Most of the participants experienced the children being engaged by the Bible stories. They wondered and played in the imaginative Bible story world. Spiritual expressions were overflowed in the lessons. In order to spiritual nurture the children and the teachers are being nurtured by the children, the teachers must support the wondering and meaning making. They need to walk along the spiritual journey of children.

However, the teachers neglecting or providing abstract Christian knowledge towards children’s wondering questions was easily observed in the observation sessions. Actually, Csikszentmihalyi (2013) mentioned that most of adults lose the sense of wonder, the feeling of awe in encountering the majesty and variety of the world. Moreover, Hart (2003) stated that the contemporary society and even the educational system tends to repress wonder and

desire for control for different reasons. In school, for example, there may be no rooms for teachers to wonder with children openly and such outcome is uncertain. Therefore, the teaching activities direct children away from wonder and head to measurement tools such as multiple-choice examinations. The result of this study reveals that the Sunday school teachers must restore their childlike sense of wonder.

Gobbel and Gobbel's (1986) suggestions may be a good start for supporting wondering of children. They stated that Bible teachers need to engage with the Bible and children lively and creatively in order to nurture the children with the Bible.

The researchers listed five points about how to respond to with children's spiritual expressions during Bible teaching. First, adults should not pretend to possess all the answers of spiritual questing. Therefore, adults do not need to worry about the necessity of giving children a definitive and final answer of "true" or "untrue" in their engagements with the Bible. Second, children make their own interpretations of a Bible story. Such interpretations as belonging to the children will be highly authentic and concrete and should be accepted and honored by adults. Third, adults must listen carefully to children's stories. Only by listening can adults discern the sources of a child's story and how the child puts them together. Forth, the adults must challenge the children to play again, and to think, feel, and muse anew about a biblical story. Then the children may create new stories or interpretations that will continue to be authentic and concrete. They may not be finished with that Bible story that have just

been told. And fifth, adults can offer a gift to children in terms of witness bearer. It means that in telling adults' stories will direct the child's attention to certain elements of the Bible story, to ways of valuing, thinking and feeling about the story.

8.2.3 Spiritual nurturing and being nurtured is relational and benefits the well-being

The participants experienced children spiritual characteristic in terms of relational consciousness. They also perceived that their relationships with God, self and others had grown after serving as Sunday school teachers. Spiritual nurturing and being nurtured occurring in Sunday school is relational in nature. This is a transformative experience.

Such transformative experience of relationships may have positive effects on the spiritual and psychological well-being of the teachers. The Harvard Study of Adult Development is a longitudinal study that lasted over 75-years (Mineo, 2017). It has traced the physical and emotional well-being of 724 people: 456 were ordinary people who grew up in Boston from 1939 to 2014 and 268 were male graduates from Harvard's classes of 1939-1944. This study revealed that people were kept happy throughout their lives by close relationships, more than prestige or wealth. Close relationships are found to be better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. The result was proved in both the Harvard men and the inner-city people groups. The reporter quoted the saying of Robert Waldinger, current director of the study, "Good relationships keep us happier and healthier." The scientists explained that it might be due to having close relationships helping

people to relax their nervous system, maintain brain health, delay mental and physical decline, and relieve both psychological and physical pain. Therefore, the relationships nurtured in Sunday school classroom may benefit the spiritual health and well-being of the teachers.

Moreover, God is a relational being from the Christian theological perspective (Fretheim, 2020). This relational transcendent Creator has totally freedom for entering into relationship with the creatures. He also has created this world in which all creatures are interrelated. Being relational is aligned with the creation order of God. Unsurprisingly, good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Therefore, the participants experienced their growth in relationships as being Sunday school teachers was always positive to their spiritual health and well-being.

Therefore, the training of Sunday school teachers can include two elements: develop their relationship with God, self and others, and how to experience transformation of relationships in their lives.

8.2.4 Effective pedagogies for promoting Bible storytelling

This study was an exploratory research and did not utilize experimental design. The focus of this study was not to quantify the output of Bible teaching and find the correlation with various elements of pedagogies of the Sunday schools involved. However, it was still worthy to suggest effective pedagogies for promoting Bible storytelling according to the

results of this study.

Firstly, in order to engage children with Bible storytelling, the participants in this study experienced that the children showed better response towards certain kinds of Bible stories, including adventure stories, miracles of Jesus and stories with existential quests. Therefore, the weekly arrangement of storytelling must be carefully considered.

Secondly, concerning the applications of teaching materials or activities, children showed better response towards those that illustrated the Bible scenes or ancient world visually. Therefore, teaching materials or activities should not only be used for drawing children's attention. They are used to facilitate children to engage and enter the imaginative Bible story world. Children will wonder and make meaning in such spiritual space.

Thirdly, the teacher must be sensitive and open to children's spiritual expressions which were elicited when they were engaged. Teachers can use open questions which they have no concrete answers to support children's wondering. In other words, the teachers wonder together with the children in the stories. Storytellers are also listeners at the same time. Teachers must confine their intentions to teach children the abstract Christian beliefs and values. Therefore, teacher training must include reviving the teachers' sensitiveness and openness towards others, and also the acceptance of children's uncontrollable responses.

Fourthly, effective pedagogy also implies that the teachers are familiar with God's story and own story. Therefore, besides listening to children in the Bible lessons, the teachers must

also listen to God's story during preparation and their own stories in daily life. The teacher becomes aware that Bible storytelling is an interaction of God's story, teacher's story and the child's story.

Finally, teachers by themselves as pedagogical substance, their condition of spiritual well-being also has impact on the effectiveness of Bible storytelling. Their relationships with God, self, others and nature are models for the children. The teachers must be competent shepherds, trusted adults, spiritual mentors and journey companions.

8.3 Contributions of the Study

This study proposed a theoretical framework of interaction between the teachers and children during Bible storytelling for data collection and guided the data analysis. The framework can be used in further study on similar topics.

Probably, this study is the first one that explored and documented the experience of Sunday school teachers on children's spirituality when they were engaged by Bible storytelling. This study also found that the teachers experienced the characteristics of children's spirituality in terms of essence of children as spiritual beings and relational consciousness. And they perceived that they were spiritually nurtured by experiencing children's spirituality. Such nurturing was also relational in nature.

Therefore, this study documented the phenomenon of Bible teaching in Sunday school that the learners can also be the teachers. Bible teaching is not just delivery of knowledge but

connection of teachers' stories, learners' stories and the subject matter's story: The Bible stories.

Lastly, this study documented the phenomenon that the teachers might not give enough support for the children's wondering and meaning making. Such phenomenon seemed to be common. The finding reveals how to improve the training of Sunday school teachers.

Although it was suggested that the training courses should include how to listen to children or how to respond, this study provided empirical data that might support such suggestions.

8.4 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation is found in the demographical characteristics of the sample group. The experiences of the samples with particular characteristics may be dominantly reflected in the result. Firstly, look into the gender ratio, twelve female and three male participants. Therefore, the perspectives of female participants may be dominant. Actually, it may be due to the fact that more females are involved in serving as Bible Sunday school teachers. Secondly, all the samples are over age 40. The result of this study reflected the experience with perspectives of roughly middle-aged adults. Additionally, concerning the participants' church life experience, thirteen participants are more than 20 years. Therefore, the perspectives of teachers with rich church life experience may be dominantly reflected in the result. They may have more presuppositions on the teachings or messages of the Bible stories. How this has an effect on teachers' experience of Bible storytelling is uncertain.

The second limitation is the selection of samples. During the interviews and observation sessions, the researcher of this study realized the difference in the programs and methods of Bible storytelling in Sunday school of Hong Kong Christian Church. Some participants played a lot of games. The games might be related to the Bible stories taught on that day or just for ice breaking. The teachers seldom told the stories merely and usually used visual aids. The extreme case was that one of the participants used a computer to tell the electronic Bible story. Some participants might use a lot of teaching materials and others might use none. Moreover, the participants' ways of storytelling might also vary among their lessons. In this study, participants with all types or ways of storytelling were recruited. Therefore, this study did not explore the effects of different methods of storytelling on engaging children, neither different experience of the participants according to their different methods of storytelling.

The researcher knows that in order to seek the participants' views of the credibility and judging the accuracy of the findings and interpretations, member checking can be used in this research. Creswell (2013, p.252) agrees that it is the most critical technique for obtaining credibility of qualitative research. However, the period of developing categories and themes was unexpectedly elongated. Member checking was not worked out. The researcher kept in mind that he must remain objective in the coding process and one more coding cycle was done finally.

Moreover, the researcher also knows that the reliability of this study can be increased if

the transcript data is analyzed by 2 coders. The procedure will follow Creswell's (2013, p.254) suggestion. However, due to the limited scope of this study, it was difficult to recruit another coder to work together with the researcher.

Lastly, researcher and participant potential bias is also the limitation of this study. The researcher has the background of training in church ministry, and it provides an ideology framework to understand the experience of the participants. Such framework was reflected throughout the research project. The researcher involved as a research tool could still have influenced the participants in the interviews. On the other hand, the participant sometimes tended to share their concepts and ideas on Christian education. However, this research focused more on the experience of the adults.

8.5 Recommendations for Further Study

Several recommendations for further study on Sunday school teachers' Bible storytelling or teaching experience as spiritual nurturing and being nurtured are suggested.

Firstly, as this was an exploratory study, replication of the study in other settings by using the same theoretical framework is recommended. Other settings include primary and secondary schools, children hospitals, or Christian organizations, where the adults tell Bible stories to children. This study can also be replicated in other religions such as Catholic, Islam and Buddhism. Such religions have their own religious stories. Moreover, the study can be replicated by recruiting samples with a more specific criterion, such as teaching children in

the same age group or coming from a specific denomination. It would be valuable to replicate the same study if similar themes emerge.

Secondly, this study investigated the phenomenon of spiritual nurturing and being nurtured from teachers' perspective. Further study can be done in order to understand the phenomenon from children's perspective. To the best of the knowledge of the researcher of this study, research on the children's experience in Bible Sunday school is lacking in Hong Kong.

Additionally, in order to understand the factors affecting the teachers' supportiveness on children's wondering and meaning making when they are engaged by Bible stories, research using quantitative or mixed method can be considered.

Conclusion

This study has explored Sunday school teachers' spiritual nurturing and being nurtured experience in Bible storytelling. The study was conducted with fifteen Sunday school teachers. They experienced that the characteristics of children's spirituality emerged during wondering and meaning making when they were engaged by the Bible stories.

This study identified three kinds of Bible stories that are more attractive to children, including adventure stories, miracles of Jesus and stories with existential quests. Visualization of the ancient world with suitable teaching materials also facilitated children's engagement. After that, the children demonstrated spiritual expressions in terms of

questioning, playing in the stories and expressing opinions.

The teachers also experienced children weaving meanings of Bible stories to God's stories, self-story and others' story. Therefore, children's spirituality is relational in nature. The teachers also perceived that they experienced spiritual growth in terms of feeling connected to self, God and others.

Moreover, in the interaction with children in Bible Sunday school, the teachers experienced the essential characteristics of children as spiritual being in terms of simple, wholeness, genuine, and joy. It impacted the teachers and they hoped to be "becoming like a child".

Therefore, this study identified that the teachers were spiritually nurtured in terms of growth in relationships and being connected to the inner child. They are related to spiritual health and well-being.

Children reveal their characteristics of spirituality in Sunday school and such characteristics were experienced by the teachers. In order to be present, play and nurture each other with children during Bible storytelling, the teachers must be sensitive towards children's spiritual expressions and supportive to the construction of imaginative Bible world. Therefore, the Bible storytellers are also listeners who can also grow in Bible teaching.

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Appendix A
THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Department of Health and Physical Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Spirituality Nurturing and Being-nurtured: Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong Churches experience children's spirituality

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by Prof. CHOW Hung Kay and conducted by Mr. TONG Wai Kuen, who are staff and student of Department of Health and Physical Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Spirituality Nurturing and Being-nurtured: Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong Churches experience children's spirituality

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. CHOW Hung Kay and conducted by Mr. TONG Wai Kuen, who are staff and student of Department of Health and Physical Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

This study aims to understand the teaching experiences of Children Sunday school teachers in Hong Kong Churches. Participants are recruited for this study because they are Sunday school teachers of primary school students.

This study will recruit 15-30 participants. They are introduced to the researcher by their Pastors of their churches. The researcher will interview the participants for 1 hour approximately. The interview will be audio taped. The participants may be asked to do multiple interviews to understand their experiences more deeply. Observation sessions of Bible lessons will be done before the interviews for five participants. Such sessions will be audio taped.

No potential risks will be involved in this study.

Your participation in the project is voluntary and has no compensation. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

The result of this research may be published in academic journal or presented in seminar. The data will only be disclosed in the format that particular personal raw data could not be identified.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr. TONG Wai Kuen at telephone number or his supervisor Prof. CHOW Hung Kay at telephone number

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

香港教育大學
健康與運動學系

參與研究同意書

靈性培育與被培育：香港教會主日學教師經驗兒童靈性

本人_____同意參加由周鴻奇教授負責監督，唐偉權先生執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學健康與運動學系的教員及學生。

本人理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表。然而本人有權保護自己的隱私，本人的個人資料將不能洩漏。

研究者已將所附資料的有關步驟向本人作了充分的解釋。本人理解可能會出現的風險。本人是自願參與這項研究。

本人理解我有權在研究過程中提出問題，並在任何時候決定退出研究，更不會因此而對研究工作產生的影響負有任何責任。

參加者姓名:

參加者簽名:

日期:

有關資料

靈性培育與被培育：香港教會主日學教師經驗兒童靈性

誠邀閣下參加周鴻奇教授負責監督，唐偉權先生負責執行的研究計劃。他們是香港教育大學健康與運動學系的教員及學生。

這研究的目標是了解香港教會兒童主日學教師的教學經驗，參與者被招募參與這研究是因為他們是小學級兒童主日學的教師。

這研究將招募 15-30 位參與者，是他們教會牧者介紹給研究員，研究員會進行約一小時的訪問，訪問將被錄音；為了深入了解參與者的經驗，參與者可能需要接受多於一次的訪問。研究員會在訪問之前，觀察當中 5 位參與者的聖經課，這些課堂將會被錄音。

參與這項研究將不會有潛在危險。

閣下的參與純屬自願性質，及沒有任何報酬。閣下享有充分的權利在任何時候決定退出這項研究，更不會因此引致任何不良後果。凡有關閣下的資料將會保密，一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

研究結果可能會在學術期刊中刊登或在學術會議中發表，而資料只會以不能辨認個人身份的形式下披露。

如閣下想獲得更多有關這項研究的資料，請與唐偉權先生聯絡，電話
或聯絡他的導師周鴻奇教授，電話

如閣下對這項研究的操守有任何意見，可隨時與香港教育大學人類實驗對象操守委員會聯絡(電郵: hrec@eduhk.hk；地址:香港教育大學研究與發展事務處)。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

唐偉權先生
首席研究員

Appendix B
THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Department of Health and Physical Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (FOR CHURCH)

Title: Spirituality Nurturing and Being-nurtured: Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong Churches experience children's spirituality

My church hereby consents to participate in the captioned project supervised by Prof. CHOW Hung Kay and conducted by Mr. TONG Wai Kuen, who are staff and student of Department of Health and Physical Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the personal details of my students'/teachers' will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My students'/teachers' participation in the project are voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

Name of Church-in-charge*:

Post:

Name of Church:

Date:

(* please delete as appropriate)

 (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss*)

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Spirituality Nurturing and Being-nurtured: Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong Churches experience children's spirituality

Your church are invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. CHOW Hung Kay and conducted by Mr. TONG Wai Kuen, who are staff and student of Department of Health and Physical Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

This study aims to understand the teaching experiences of Children Sunday school teachers in Hong Kong Churches. Participants are recruited for this study because they are Sunday school teachers of primary school students.

This study will recruit 15-30 participants. They are introduced to the researcher by their Pastors of their churches. The researcher will interview the participants for 1 hour approximately. The participants may be asked to do multiple interviews to understand their experiences more deeply. Observation sessions of Bible lessons will be done before the interviews for five participants randomly. Such sessions will be audio taped.

No potential risks will be involved in this study.

Please understand that your students'/teachers' participation are voluntary. They have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to your students'/teachers' will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

The result of this research may be published in academic journal or presented in seminar. The data will only be disclosed in the format that particular personal raw data could not be identified.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr. TONG Wai Kuen at telephone number or his supervisor Prof. CHOW Hung Kay at telephone number

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

TONG Wai Kuen
Principal Investigator

香港教育大學
健康與運動學系

參與研究同意書

靈性培育與被培育：香港教會主日學教師經驗兒童靈性

本_____教會同意參加由周鴻奇教授負責監督，唐偉權先生執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學健康與運動學系的教員及學生。

本人理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表。然而本人有權保護本校學生/教師的隱私，其個人資料將不能洩漏。

研究者已將所附資料的有關步驟向本人作了充分的解釋。本人理解可能會出現的風險。本人是自願讓本教會學生/教師參與這項研究。

本人理解本人及本教會學生/教師皆有權在研究過程中提出問題，並在任何時候決定退出研究，更不會因此而對研究工作產生的影響負有任何責任。

簽署:

教會代表*姓名:

職位:

教會名稱:

日期:

(*請刪去不適用者)

_____ (先生/女士/小姐*)

有關資料

靈性培育與被培育：香港教會主日學教師經驗兒童靈性

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這研究的目標是了解香港教會兒童主日學教師的教學經驗，參與者被招募參與這研究是因為他們是小學級兒童主日學的教師。

這研究將招募 15-30 位參與者，是他們教會牧者介紹給研究員，研究員會進行約一小時的訪問，為了深入了解參與者的經驗，參與者可能需要接受多於一次的訪問。研究員會在訪問之前，觀察當中 5 位參與者的聖經課，這些課堂將會被錄音。

參與這項研究將不會有潛在危險。

貴教會學生/教師的參與純屬自願性質。所有參加者皆享有充分的權利在研究開始前或後決定退出這項研究，更不會因此引致任何不良後果。凡有關 貴校學生/教師的資料將會保密，一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

研究結果可能會在學術期刊中刊登或在學術會議中發表，而資料只會以不能辨認個人身份的形式下披露。

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或聯絡他的導師周鴻奇教授，電話

如閣下對這項研究的操守有任何意見，可隨時與香港教育大學人類實驗對象操守委員會聯絡(電郵: hrec@eduhk.hk; 地址: 香港教育大學研究與發展事務處)。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

唐偉權
首席研究員

Appendix C
THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Department of Health and Physical Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Spirituality Nurturing and Being-nurtured: Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong Churches experience children's spirituality

I _____ hereby consent to my child participating in the captioned research supervised by Prof. CHOW Hung Kay and conducted by Mr. TONG Wai Kuen, who are staff and student of Department of Health and Physical Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., our personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. Our participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of Parent _____

Signature of Parent _____

Name of Child (aged 9-12 needed) _____

Signature of Child (aged 9-12

needed) _____

Date _____

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Spirituality Nurturing and Being-nurtured: Sunday school teachers of Hong Kong Churches experience children's spirituality

Your child is invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. CHOW Hung Kay and conducted by Mr. TONG Wai Kuen, who are staff and student of Department of Health and Physical Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

This study aims to understand the teaching experiences of children Sunday school teachers in Hong Kong Churches. One observation session of Bible lessons will be done before the interviews for five teacher participants. Children are recruited for this study because they attend the Bible lesson of the participating Sunday school teacher. There will be around 50 children involve in this study.

The Sunday school teacher is introduced to the researcher by the Pastors of his/her church. The researcher will observe his/her conducting of one Bible lesson. The child just attends the lesson as usual. The lesson will be audio taped.

No potential risks will be involved in this study

Your participation in the project is voluntary and has no compensation. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

The result of this research may be published in academic journal or presented in seminar. The data will only be disclosed in the format that particular personal raw data could not be identified.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr. TONG Wai Kuen at telephone number or his supervisor Prof. CHOW Hung Kay at telephone number

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

香港教育大學
健康與運動學系

參與研究同意書

靈性培育與被培育：香港教會主日學教師經驗兒童靈性

本人_____茲同意敝子弟_____參加由周鴻奇教授負責監督，唐偉權先生執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學健康與運動學系的教員及學生。

本人理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表。然而我們（或本人及敝子女）有權保護我們的隱私，我們（或本人及敝子女）的個人資料將不能洩漏。

研究者已將所附資料的有關步驟向本人作了充分的解釋。本人理解可能會出現的風險。我們（或本人及敝子女）是自願參與這項研究。

本人理解我倆有權在研究過程中提出問題，並在任何時候決定退出研究，更不會因此而對研究工作產生的影響負有任何責任。

家長姓名:

家長簽名:

兒童姓名: (9-12 歲需填寫)

兒童簽名: (9-12 歲需填寫)

日期:

有關資料

靈性培育與被培育：香港教會主日學教師經驗兒童靈性

誠邀貴子女參加周鴻奇教授負責監督，唐偉權先生負責執行的研究計劃。他們是香港教育大學健康與運動學系的教員及學生。

這研究的目標是了解香港教會兒童主日學教師的教學經驗，觀察當中 5 位教師的聖經課，兒童被招募參與這研究是因為他們出席參與兒童主日學教師之聖經課，約有 50 位兒童參與這項研究。

兒童主日學教師是他們的教會牧者介紹給研究員，研究員會觀察他們進行一堂聖經課，兒童如常上課，課堂將會被錄音。

參與這項研究將不會有潛在危險。

你們的參與純屬自願性質，及沒有任何報酬。你們享有充分的權利在任何時候決定退出這項研究，更不會因此引致任何不良後果。凡有關你們的資料將會保密，一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

研究結果可能會在學術期刊中刊登或在學術會議中發表，而資料只會以不能辨認個人身份的形式下披露。

如閣下想獲得更多有關這項研究的資料，請與唐偉權先生聯絡，電話
或聯絡他的導師周鴻奇教授，電話

如閣下對這項研究的操守有任何意見，可隨時與香港教育大學人類實驗對象操守委員會聯絡(電郵: hrec@eduhk.hk；地址:香港教育大學研究與發展事務處)。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

唐偉權先生
首席研究員

Appendix D

1. How long have you been a Sunday school teacher?
你作了兒童主日學教師多久？
2. What drove/inspired you to become a Sunday school teacher?
當初什麼驅使/啟發你要成為兒童主日學教師？
3. What was your own experience, if any, in Sunday school experience when you were a child?
如果有，你自己上兒童主日學的經驗如何？
4. What kind of preparation have you done for being a Sunday school teacher?
你作了什麼預備去成為兒童主日學教師？
5. What do you think are your characteristics that make you suitable to be a Sunday school teacher?
你認為自己有什麼特質讓自己適合作兒童主日學教師？
6. How do you prepare for your Sunday school lessons?
你如何預備兒童主日學的課堂？
7. Besides Bible storytelling, what do you usually do in your lessons?
除了講聖經故事外，你在課堂中還會經常作什麼？
8. Can you tell me about your last Sunday school lesson?
請講講最近一堂主日學的情況？
9. What are the characteristics of the children you teach?
你教的那班小朋友有什麼特質？
10. What kinds of Bible story do you favor most to tell the children?
你最喜歡跟小朋友講哪一類聖經故事？
11. Among the Bible stories that you have told, which one elicited the best response from the children?

你教過的聖經故事中，小朋友對哪一個有最好的反應？

12. What kinds of teaching materials have you used that you think the children showed the best response?

你用過哪一些教材，你覺得小朋友有最好的反應？

13. What do the children ask or express usually?

小朋友在堂上通常會問什麼問題或表達什麼？

14. How do you handle when the children ask questions or express their ideas?

小朋友問問題或表達時，你如何處理？

15. Can you tell me about the last time you were impressed by a student's response?

你能否告訴我，最近一次兒童在堂上令你驚訝的回應是什麼？

16. Did the children say any prayer that impressed you?

小朋友有沒有作一些禱告是你深刻的？

17. Did any individual student impress you?

有沒有個別的小朋友令你深刻？

18. What are the children's performances that make you happy?

兒童上課有什麼表現令你開心的？

19. What are the children's performances that make you unhappy or frustrated?

兒童上課有什麼表現令你不開心或感挫敗的？

20. Have you ever followed up the children's question after the lessons? Please tell me.

有沒有試過課堂後要處理小朋友問的問題？請說。

21. Have you ever not understood children's responses towards the Bible? Please tell me.

有沒有試過不明白小朋友對聖經的反應？請說。

22. How do you describe your interactions with children in the lessons?

請形容一下你與小朋友在課堂上的互動。

23. If you have children, what do you think are the differences between Bible storytelling to kids at home and to children in Sunday school?

若你有小孩，你感到在家中跟子女與在主日學中跟兒童講聖經故事有什麼不同？

24. What do you think are the differences between boys and girls in the response towards the Sunday school lessons?

你認為男孩子與女孩子在課堂上的反應有什麼分別？

25. What do you think are the differences between younger children and older children in the response towards the Sunday school lessons?

你認為較年幼的孩子與較年長的孩子在課堂上的反應有什麼分別？

26. For you, what is the meaning of “being a spiritual Sunday school teacher”?

對你來說，作為屬靈的兒童主日學教師是什麼意思？

27. How do your personal religious practices influence your spirituality?

你個人的信仰操練如何影響你的靈性？

28. What are the influences of Bible storytelling for children, or being a Sunday school teacher on your spiritual life?

給小朋友講聖經故事，或作為兒童主日學教師，對你的靈性有什麼影響？

29. In what aspects do you need to improve in order to be a better Sunday school teacher?

有什麼地方要繼續進步去成為更好的主日學教師？

30. Jesus said, “Unless you become a child.....” What do you think have you learnt from your Sunday school children?

耶穌說要：「你們要回轉像小孩」，你認為你從你的主日學學生身上，學到什麼？