

# OutoftheBox

## Trust, Play and Transformation in OutoftheBox and its Benefits in Schools



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## **Trust, Play and Transformation in OutoftheBox, and its Benefits in Schools**

A journey of trust and a spirit of play is leading to transformation and facilitating the creation of OutoftheBox by a community of storytellers around the world.

OutoftheBox uses story and play to promote personal and community wellbeing. It has been inspired by the principles and storytelling methods of Godly Play and Deep Talk. One box of beautifully crafted materials (or in fact any objects the storyteller has to hand) can be used to tell any number of stories on a circle of cloth, in a circular bag of sand or on the ground. A core set of 49 Wisdom stories are in development, and stories from six other genres are following. OutoftheBox stories are being used with children and adults in a range of contexts, including schools, care homes, hospitals, workplaces, faith communities, community groups, therapeutic settings and in spiritual accompaniment.

OutoftheBox Training is a not-for-profit organisation that is equipping and empowering storytellers to use the OutoftheBox approach to serve the needs of their particular context. A community of storytellers from across the world is collaborating online and face-to-face to co-create what OutoftheBox is becoming. A one-year pilot phase from June 2021, involving over 20 schools in the UK, was instrumental in refining the OutoftheBox approach and the ways by which OutoftheBox Training supports and collaborates with storytellers. The pilot also generated evidence of how OutoftheBox complements the school curriculum and supports children's wellbeing.

Section 1 is an overview of the journeys of the co-founders of OutoftheBox, Kathryn Lord and Kate Caroe, in which multiple circles of the creative process can be seen as contributing to the emergence of OutoftheBox. Section 2 considers how the OutoftheBox principles and methods are built on trust and play and we see how OutoftheBox is intentionally nurturing a community of storytellers where the creative process is at work. Section 3 and the Appendix provides anecdotal evidence of the relational creative process at the centre of the children's play in the OutoftheBox sessions in schools. Section 4 considers the way ahead to enable the continuation of the creative process in the OutoftheBox movement.

## 1. The Backstory to OutoftheBox

### 1.1 The Context

OutoftheBox was developed from the desire to find a playful storytelling approach to support personal and community wellbeing in UK schools as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It evolved from the understanding that story and play are the primary languages of children and are the means by which children can learn, find connection and make meaning. Godly Play, a well established<sup>1</sup> imaginative approach to religious education<sup>2</sup> created by Jerome Berryman, has been offered in UK schools for over twenty years. The influence of Maria Montessori's educational principles is to be found in Godly Play, which uses a carefully prepared environment with sensorial materials<sup>3</sup> and the "Help me to do it myself" motif of the Montessori pedagogy. It was felt by some Godly Play practitioners and trainers that a similar approach, but without the exclusively Christian religious language of Godly Play, would be beneficial for schools.

Godly Play had been the inspiration for a storytelling method called Deep Talk<sup>4</sup> developed by the Finnish Godly Play trainer, Tuula Valkonen. Deep Talk uses short wisdom stories from all faiths and none, and was originally developed for adults in workplace settings. Since 2015 it has also been used with children aged 2-6 in day care centres; researchers in Finnish schools have data on how Deep Talk supports children in storytelling, language development and in their social and emotional wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> OutoftheBox developed from discussions about how UK schools could similarly benefit from this kind of Deep Talk storytelling, although it was recognised from the start that OutoftheBox could also be used in many other contexts other than schools, and with people of all ages.

### 1.2 The Creative Process

Godly Play, Deep Talk and OutoftheBox are related approaches to give space for the creative process to work through 'imagination in action' (Berryman 1991, pp. 93-97) to bring about 'the transforming moment' as coined by James Loder.<sup>6</sup> All three approaches have themselves been birthed through the creative process.

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<sup>1</sup> The foundational literature for Godly play can be found at <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/research/foundational-literature>

<sup>2</sup> Berryman, J. (1991) *Godly Play - An imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, Minneapolis MN, Augsburg Fortress.

<sup>3</sup> Berryman, J. (2002) *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: How to lead Godly Play Sessions*, Revised and Expanded, Vol. 1, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Berryman, J. (2013) *The Spiritual Guidance of Children - Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future*, New York, Morehouse Publishing, p. 160. Berryman refers to Deep Talk as a diffusion of Godly Play.

<sup>5</sup> The research process involved teachers, parents/carers and children. Deep Talk: A dialogic instruction method for enhancing the sense of belonging (research in process) Juli-Anna Aerila, Maiju Kinossalo, Mari Siipola, Piia Laaksonen, Anu Lamminen & Tuula Valkonen

<sup>6</sup> Berryman, J. 'The Transforming Moment and Godly Play' in Wright, D. and White, K. (eds.) (2014) *The Logic of the Spirit in Human Thought and Experience: Exploring the Vision of James E. Loder*, Pickwick Publications, pp. 105-130.

The creative process is illustrated well in a Godly Play story called the Parable of the Deep Well.<sup>7</sup> A person crosses the desert and finds a well, but the water is so deep that there seems no way to get to the water. The person takes time and walks around discovering golden strands and a rusty object like a big cup. Eventually they tie the golden strands together and use them to lower the bucket into the well. They draw forth the refreshing water, and when they taste the water they are changed. There are two endings given for the story. In the first ending, before the person goes on their way, the bucket and strands are left tied together, so that the next person can also taste the water. In the second, the golden strands are untied and scattered, so the next person can figure things out for themselves. Perhaps both endings are necessary. We can learn from what others have done before us but we also have to discover things for ourselves and for our unique situations.

There is also a third way that has been crucial in the OutoftheBox journey: communities of people working things out together in a relationship of trust. OutoftheBox has emerged through the creative process of a collaboration of Godly Play and Deep Talk storytellers and this paper explores that journey.

### 1.3 Kathryn's Journey

Kathryn was working as a Science teacher in a secondary school and leading children's work in a church when she was introduced to Godly Play in 2006. The approach turned her thinking about her role as a teacher upside down, both in the context of school and church. Over the next 16 years Kathryn was to learn how to let go of control in order to trust people and trust the playful creative process. She began by setting up a Godly Play classroom and, as well as storytelling on Sundays for 14 years, regularly offered Godly Play to a community school and to a Church of England school over a period of six years.

After becoming a trainer for Godly Play UK in 2008, Kathryn trained and supported over 70 storytellers in Sheffield and Rotherham over 12 years, and was instrumental in setting up eight new Godly Play classrooms, two of which were specifically used for visiting school groups. This included a project that ran for ten years known as 'The RE Team' which involved volunteers from six churches offering Godly Play to local schools.

Whilst recognising the immense value of offering children a place where they can enter into stories and have the space to play, including the spiritual nurture that comes from offering such a space,<sup>8</sup> Kathryn also experienced the problems of using Godly Play in the school context. Godly Play has been developed as a confessional approach to teach the Christian religious language system within a Godly Play classroom,<sup>9</sup> in which the stories are connected together to form a spiral curriculum. Whilst it *may* be possible in some schools<sup>10</sup> to adapt

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<sup>7</sup> The parable of the Deep Well can be found in Berryman, J. W. (2002). *The complete guide to Godly Play* (Vol. 3). Denver, CO: Living the Good News.

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Nye writes about key values of nurturing children's spirituality - Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, Trust in Nye, R. (2009) *Children's Spirituality*, London, Church House Publishing.

<sup>9</sup> Berryman, J. (1995) *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Vol 2, New York, Church Publishing, pp. 5-10.

<sup>10</sup> Jenny Wang describes how a Church of England School with a strong Christian ethos offers every class a Godly Play session every fortnight as part of their collective worship in Wang, J. 'Upstairs at Holy Trinity' in

the stories for a non-confessional context, it remains a challenge for many UK schools. For contexts where 'one-off' Godly Play stories are offered, some of the meanings of the words, objects and gestures may be lost because the children have not experienced the many other stories with which they are linked in Godly Play's spiral curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

Through supporting storytellers, Kathryn was also aware of the practical limitations of Godly Play in a UK school context, such as the preparation time required to memorise lengthy scripts and the need to obtain the materials specific to the story. She knew of the difficulties of bringing children to a Godly Play room in a church or of setting up a Godly Play space in the school. Godly Play did not continue in the two schools after Kathryn and her colleagues stopped volunteering, because no one from the schools or the local churches was able to commit the time needed to prepare for and deliver the sessions. The 'RE Team' project stopped for the same reasons, and their two Godly Play rooms and the story materials are no longer used for schools' work.

In the meantime Kathryn was beginning to adapt Godly Play for other non-confessional settings. After sharing the Godly Play story of the Great Family (a Biblical story about Abraham and Sarah) to a support group for asylum seekers, she felt that a non-religious story was more appropriate for this setting, especially since many of the women were Muslims. So the sand bag and the wooden people, which are the materials for the Great Family story, were used the following week to tell the story of 'The Precious Stone'<sup>12</sup> with the open-ended 'wondering'<sup>13</sup> as well as personal 'response time'<sup>14</sup> which are elements of Godly Play.

In 2013 Kathryn was introduced to Deep Talk by Tuula Valkonen and found it resonated with her experience of 'The Precious Stone,' which itself then became a Deep Talk story. In Deep Talk, small groups gather in a circle for stories told on sand<sup>15</sup> with principles borrowed from Godly Play including the importance of non-verbal language using objects, gestures and silence. In Godly Play each lesson has its own materials set out in a classroom in order to teach the Christian religious language system, but in Deep Talk only minimal objects are needed, all stored in a small basket, as the aim is simply to enable dialogue and participation.

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Steinhäuser, M. and Øystese, R. (eds.) (2018) *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research*, Munster NY, Waxmann, pp. 355-358.

<sup>11</sup> An example of how the lessons are connected is the Mystery of Pentecost. It is in a red box that is the same size and shape as the parable boxes with an underlay that matches the size and shape of the underlay used in the Parable of the Good Shepherd and with twelve brown strips that match the strips from the Parable of the Good Shepherd. The disciples are represented by shields which are used in the lesson Jesus and the Twelve. Berryman, J. (2003) *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Vol 4, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> The source of 'The Precious Stone' is unknown. A version can be found here <https://www.stillnessspeaks.com/wise-womans-precious-stone/>

<sup>13</sup> Berryman, J. (1995) *Teaching Godly Play - How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Berryman, J. (1995) *Teaching Godly Play - How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup> Deep Talk uses sand as the medium to tell stories which has many benefits, not least because of the therapeutic properties of sand. Kalf D. (1980) *Sandplay: A Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Psyche*, Hot Springs AR, Temenos Press.

“The simplest dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. However a real dialogue includes, for example, respect for others, being able to tell your opinions, intensive listening to others, waiting for your turn and creating a shared understanding of issues.”<sup>16</sup>

As in Godly Play, Deep Talk recognises that children are spiritual seekers.<sup>17</sup>

“The child and educator are equal. In Deep Talk and Godly Play this is the key point for dialogicity and respect for humanity. Our inner mind, language of values and ethics grows only in freedom, security and peace of our own growth.”<sup>18</sup>

In 2014 Kathryn worked with Jeremy Clines (an Anglican chaplain at the University of Sheffield) and Kate Cornwell (also a Godly Play trainer) to form Mutual Blessings, a Sheffield expression of Godly Play with the purpose of "offering spiritually enriching practices using the method and principles of Godly Play to people of all ages or needs, but especially those who may be on the edge of the church's ministry." One of the initiatives was to try out Deep Talk in different settings in Sheffield, which included Deep Talk sessions to explore a variety of topics at the University of Sheffield (with student and staff groups), drop-in sessions at a sanctuary for vulnerable and homeless people and Deep Talk sessions in workplace contexts. Deep Talk training courses over two days in the UK, Ireland and Australia were also offered to Godly Play storytellers during this time.

Jerome Berryman believed that children already knew God and that “what they needed was an appropriate language to construct their own personal meaning about that reality.”<sup>19</sup> The language of Godly Play is a Christian religious language and for a Christian context this is appropriate. Mutual Blessings was offering “spiritually enriching practices” and recognised that some people were seeking a secular “language of humanity”<sup>20</sup> to explore existential issues. Sometimes what people might need is both religious *and* secular language and so the two day retreats that Kathryn led with Alison Seaman (a retired Godly Play trainer) included both Godly Play and Deep Talk stories.<sup>21</sup>

Another initiative of Mutual Blessings was a three year national project (2016 - 2019) working with practitioners to adapt Godly Play for older people, including those living with dementia, which later became known as Stories for the Soul.<sup>22</sup> Similar challenges to those experienced using Godly Play in schools were found when using Godly Play in care settings,

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<sup>16</sup> Valkonen, T. *Deep Talk: Theory and Practice*, available as an online article at <https://deep-talk.blog/journal-of-deep-talk/p.4>.

<sup>17</sup> Csinos, D. (2011) *Children's Ministry that Fits*, Eugene Oregon, WIPF and Stock Publishers. In comparing faith-nurture analogies of production line (the empty vessel) and greenhouse (seeds yet to mature), Csinos favours a third analogy of pilgrim; children are active agents in the world who make meaning for themselves with adults as co-learners.

<sup>18</sup> Valkonen, T. *Deep Talk: Theory and Practice*, available at <https://deep-talk.blog/journal-of-deep-talk/p.3>.

<sup>19</sup> Berryman, (2009), *Teaching Godly Play: How to mentor the spiritual development of children* (2nd ed., rev. and exp.). Denver, CO: Morehouse Education Resources.p. 14

<sup>20</sup> Valkonen, T. *Deep Talk: Theory and Practice*, available at <https://deep-talk.blog/journal-of-deep-talk/p.5>.

<sup>21</sup> For examples of how OutoftheBox can provide a greater diversity of material for meaning-making with scripture. <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/god-outofthebox>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.storiesforthesoul.org/>

including the practical limitations, the religious language and the particular form of religious language found in Godly Play.<sup>23</sup>

Between September 2020 and July 2021, during times of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Kathryn offered six online training courses in Deep Talk to a total of 58 Godly Play storytellers and trainers, mainly from the UK but also from Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Sweden, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Each course comprised six Zoom sessions over three months. Kathryn was intentional about facilitating training based on peer learning and was inspired by Brené Brown's work on brave leadership.<sup>24</sup> Brené Brown defines a leader as "anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes and has the courage to develop that potential." Deep Talk storytellers enable people to find their potential through story and play, and Kathryn also wanted the storytellers to have the courage to find the potential in the Deep Talk process for their own contexts. This was a rich time of mutual learning, creating new stories and adapting the Deep Talk process as a peer learning community.

## 1.4 Kate's Journey

Kate worked for an international media agency before having children. She was then involved in setting up a parent and toddler group at her church in Bermondsey, London, where she told Bible stories to the group using a style of storytelling that she learned from a Steiner playgroup. She moved to Sheffield in 2006 and went on a day's Godly Play workshop led by Kathryn, which resonated with the style of storytelling she had used in the toddler group. Kate started telling Godly Play stories at a parent and toddler group based in her home but, as accessing the resources needed for each Godly Play story was a limiting factor, she experimented with making up her own stories based on the Bible and also on folk-tales and Steiner stories, using materials she had at home.

In 2011, when the first of her children became a chorister at Sheffield Cathedral, Kate was delighted to find they had a Godly Play room; she became involved and eventually led the team. She found Godly Play to be as spiritually nurturing for herself as for the children, loving the openness, the space to question and the unexpected power of the stories. Kate later experienced some Deep Talk stories at the Cathedral and began to use Deep Talk as a way of creating space for rich conversations in the Godly Play team.

Kate has home educated her six children, inspired by the British education philosopher and reformer Charlotte Mason<sup>25</sup>. Over the years this has radically changed her way of thinking about how to be with children. She is learning how to trust that children have a natural love for learning that is to be nurtured through the creation of a positive learning atmosphere where curiosity and play are encouraged. Mason encourages the use of 'living books' as the main vehicle for learning, where children are emotionally engaged in a story. They are given the freedom (as well as a structure) in which to respond to the story themselves without

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<sup>23</sup> Lord, K. 'The Spiritual Care of Older People in Care Settings - Experience and Reflections on the Use of Godly Play' in Steinhäuser, M. and Øystese, R. (eds.) (2018) *Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research*, Munster NY, Waxmann, pp. 345-354.

<sup>24</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/hubs/dare-to-lead/>

<sup>25</sup> See online article at <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>

judgement from the adult, so as to make their own connections and meaning. And home education also gives children plenty of time for free play. She noticed many similarities between Mason’s philosophy and that of Godly Play, for example in terms of trusting and respecting the agency of the children, creating a playful and curious learning atmosphere, and using stories and a time of free response.

In 2020, when the UK went into its first Covid-19 lockdown, the clergy at Sheffield Cathedral asked Kate to make recordings of Godly Play stories that they could share on the Cathedral’s Facebook page. As she didn’t have access to the story resources in the Godly Play room she adapted the stories using materials in her home, and she and Kathryn worked together to develop them. Kate also started to wonder what stories the Cathedral choristers might need to hear, and she began to develop stories about the history of Sheffield Cathedral and the English choral tradition, using a storytelling style inspired by Godly Play.

During lockdown, Kate attended Deep Talk training online with Kathryn and Tuula, and started to use Deep Talk stories with adults and children in the choir. Kate worked with Kathryn to develop stories to help the children explore the choral tradition.

## 1.5 DoBeDo

The Covid-19 pandemic brought the need for both personal and community wellbeing into sharp focus. Kate and Kathryn had found an atmosphere that nurtured wellbeing that was common to Godly Play, Deep Talk and the Charlotte Mason philosophy. They wanted to encourage people to take these ways of doing and being into all sorts of places and contexts, and so in November 2020 they founded DoBeDo in the hope of creating a community of people collaborating together to develop stories, and approaches to sharing stories, that nurtured relationships, valued playfulness and enabled transformation.

“DoBeDo is a way of action and contemplation that re-enchants life and deepens our connections. It helps teams and individuals in the contexts of workplaces, family, education, nature, health and local communities. It enables people of all worldviews to come together to share stories in a way that nurtures relationships, values playfulness and invites openness to change.”<sup>26</sup>

“The DoBeDo way is about being open to learning about life from beyond our usual circles. Hearing a variety of different voices is like a healthy biodiversity in our lives. Many traditions have stories that communicate values that are common to many worldviews, while other stories may challenge us.”<sup>27</sup>

It was essential to Kate and Kathryn that the values of Godly Play and Deep Talk in which there is trust, vulnerability and a sharing of power in the circle were also central to the atmosphere of the DoBeDo community on Facebook and they sought to model this as administrators of the Facebook group.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.do-be-do.org/>

<sup>27</sup> For the full description of DoBeDo see ‘About’ on the DoBeDo Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/804902780071700>



## 2. OutoftheBox

### 2.1 The Box

In March 2021, Kate and Kathryn began experimenting with new ways of presenting Deep Talk stories, making them more user-friendly for a school context, and were soon collaborating with other Deep Talk and Godly Play practitioners and trainers both within and outside of the UK.

During the two-day Deep Talk retreats that Kathryn and Alison led between 2017 and 2020, they noticed that the participants chose to express themselves by placing objects that they found around them in the room into the sand. When developing resources for OutoftheBox, it felt important to gather a variety of natural and beautiful pieces with which to tell the stories which could also enable participants to respond and make their own meaning from the stories. The resources needed to be 'to hand' for the storyteller and the participants and easy to transport. In addition the cost of the resources should not be prohibitive. Consequently, materials were chosen and designed (144 pieces of felt and 94 wooden and natural pieces contained in baskets and bags) that could be stored in one round box to tell all of the 49 Wisdom stories - which gave this new approach its name and OutoftheBox was born!

OutoftheBox has been created so that all the stories can be told on cloth or sand using objects from the same round box. Having the same items used across different stories allows people to make connections between the different stories. And having all the items available for the response time means people can continue to make connections across all the stories as well as create their own stories. OutoftheBox stories can be told anywhere and using any medium, for example: on the woodland floor with twigs and leaves, on a pub table with beer mats and glasses, or with objects found in a classroom. Rather than have specific materials for each story as in Godly Play, the objects are played with as 'loose parts' and each object can represent different things, depending on the story and the imagination of the participants.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.2 An OutoftheBox Session

Stories can be shared with individuals or groups in sessions that last from 10 minutes to up to an hour or more. There is permission in OutoftheBox for the storyteller to choose which elements are needed by the group for any particular session, depending on the time available and the needs of the group. Whilst usually not a religious space, an OutoftheBox session can be considered to be a pilgrimage<sup>29</sup> where a different language is spoken and a different atmosphere is held, and so it is important to mark the thresholds of coming in and

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<sup>28</sup> <https://early-education.org.uk/loose-parts-play/>

<sup>29</sup> Urban T. Holmes (1976) *Ministry and Imagination*, New York, Seabury Press, pp 134-136.

going out in some way. The elements of an OutoftheBox session are thus bookended with thresholds:

**Building of the circle** to ensure that everyone is ready for a story.

**Sharing of the story** with care, slowing down the pace, and opening it up to the imagination.

**Wondering** using open questions in a space where we let go of judgement.

**Community Play** to reflect together about something of particular interest or importance to the group.

**Creative response** as an opportunity for people to continue to play, e.g. create new stories with the OutoftheBox materials, paint, build, write, dance, walk in the woods.

**Celebration with food and drink** to allow people to connect socially and offer a threshold to move on from the OutoftheBox session to the rest of the day.<sup>30</sup>

All of the elements apart from Community Play are from the Godly Play approach. The Community Play comes from the Communal Play of Deep Talk in which:

“participants are able to mould the reality of their community by using the tools of the story. The guide of the Deep Talk session leads the work gently. She or he offers some topics from the story which can be handled in communal play. It is very important, however, that the group decides or brings up the topics the play is heading to. The leader just follows.”<sup>31</sup>

As outlined above, OutoftheBox has been inspired by Deep Talk, which was itself inspired by Godly Play, and all three approaches have relationships and play at their heart to give us

“... at any age, room to make discoveries about a whole web of relationships - with self, others, nature, and God - to nourish us all our life. The quest for this larger reality continues all life long, but the answer does not come to us as a product of this creativity. It comes to us as the process of the creating itself. The play is the constant and not some formula that reduces this experience to a single part of its process.”<sup>32</sup>

## 2.3 Genres and Contexts

The opening of the creative process in OutoftheBox was in response to finding a way of supporting wellbeing in UK schools. The team of storytellers looked for stories that would act as springboards for children to discover their own wisdom and the wisdom of their peers. Hence the first genre was named Wisdom stories. The source of inspiration for these

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<sup>30</sup> This information is taken from the OutoftheBox website [www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about](http://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about)

<sup>31</sup> Valkonen, T. *Deep Talk: Theory and Practice*, available at <https://deep-talk.blog/journal-of-deep-talk/p.8>.

<sup>32</sup> Berryman, J. (1991) *Godly Play - An imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, Minneapolis MN, Augsburg Fortress, p. 12.

stories comes from children's literature, different religious or folk stories, and the intention was to keep the context open and inclusive. 49 stories are being developed.<sup>33</sup>

It was soon realised that OutoftheBox could enable play and emotional connection with both stories of wisdom as well as with other genres: History,<sup>34</sup> Arts, Nature, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and Religions. This means that OutoftheBox offers a variety of languages that can enrich core curriculum subjects in schools in ways that can be measured by the school inspection process.<sup>35</sup>

A seventh genre of OutoftheBox stories is in development. This is called Faith and is for confessional, faith community settings, not schools. The Faith genre will have several sub-genres, the first being Christianity because that is the background of the vast majority of our initial storytellers ; we hope that others such as Islam, Judaism and Hinduism will follow as our storytelling community becomes more diverse. In OutoftheBox the storytellers and the stories themselves are not presented as authoritative (please see Section 2.4), but that the atmosphere remains curious and questioning, with an emphasis on how we feel about the stories.

OutoftheBox is being used in a range of settings, including schools, care homes, hospitals, workplaces, community groups, parenting groups, play groups, families, therapeutic settings and faith communities.<sup>36</sup> In the first 12 months of operation there were two pilot studies - one for the school context and another for all other contexts. Section 3 outlines the findings from the Schools' pilot.

## 2.4 An OutoftheBox session - Trust, Play and Power

The attractive multi-sensory narrative and the atmosphere of OutoftheBox is designed to be seductive (as is the case with Godly Play and Deep Talk) but not coercive. Stories are carefully chosen and crafted to 'turn things upside down' and raise questions - OutoftheBox is a form of existential education. Storytellers must be very mindful of the power dynamics in OutoftheBox. Biesta<sup>37</sup> suggests that the teacher should challenge, but leave people free to make their own choices. Herner Sæverot writes from a Kierkegaardian perspective about

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<sup>33</sup> For example, the Donkey story was inspired by a Jewish story, in which the people ask the 'wise rabbi' to tell them what to do. In the OutoftheBox version the people say 'Let's ask our leader.' The story can be viewed on Youtube and the script downloaded at <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about>

<sup>34</sup> The OutoftheBox team worked with Lord Alf Dubs to develop the story of his flight from Nazi-occupied Prague at the start of World War II. *The Children's Train* can be found at <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about>

<sup>35</sup> Caroe, C., Caroe, K., Lord K., and Fytche, J. (2021) *OutoftheBox Links to the National Curriculum, Ofsted and SIAMS Inspection Frameworks*, paper available from <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>

<sup>37</sup> Biesta, G. J. J. (1998). Say you want a revolution... suggestions for the impossible future of critical pedagogy. *Educational Theory*, 48, 499–510.

“making them aware of and perhaps interested in another perspective which challenges their present attitude to life.”<sup>38</sup>

The stories are not presented as ‘truths’ to be defended but rather as springboards for each person and the community to discover their own connections and meanings. Like the stories and parables that Jesus told, as well as Buddhist koans, and Sufi stories, OutoftheBox stories are intentionally paradoxical and participants are given agency to make their own meaning. They are invited to say what they like, what they don’t like and what the story reminds them of, as well as being given permission to take the story apart and put it back together in a new way (sometimes literally by using the loose pieces found in the box).

## 2.5 OutoftheBox Training as an Organisation - Trust, Play and Power

In September 2021, OutoftheBox Training was co-founded by Kate and Kathryn as a not-for-profit company supporting a movement of story and play to promote personal and community wellbeing. To date, there are over 240 members accessing training, ongoing support and online resources, which includes the scripts and videos of stories. Trainer-led training consists of 14 hours' training in a small cohort either face-to-face over two days or online over three months, and the Members’ Page of the website offers resources for self-led learning, including recordings of OutoftheBox sessions.

The co-founders view their key role as upholding the values and principles of OutoftheBox in the organisation itself. It was essential to Kate and Kathryn that the values of OutoftheBox in which there is trust, vulnerability, a sharing of power in the circle and therefore an openness to change and transformation, were also central to the community of storytellers. They were influenced by the radical management book of Frederick Laloux called *Reinventing Organizations*<sup>39</sup> which describes how to create ‘teal’ organisations, which Laloux defines as one where the management is based on worker autonomy and peer relationships.

The trust, play and transformation that is at the heart of OutoftheBox Training is reflected in the logo, which was inspired by Theory U by C. Otto Scharmer.<sup>40</sup> The seven dots represent the principles of OutoftheBox - breathe, trust, listen, feel, wonder, play, love.<sup>41</sup> The dots remind us of the discs that are used when telling OutoftheBox stories on cloth to represent a pathway or a journey, and the shape of the curve shows us that the journey is one of descent and re-emergence. The descent down the left side of the curve symbolises brave trust: a letting go of control and settling down into being present to our interior conditions through breathing, trusting, listening and noticing our feelings (the first four dots from violet to green). The



<sup>38</sup> Sæverot, H. Kierkegaard, Seduction, and Existential Education. *Stud Philos Educ* 30, 557–572 (2011).

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.reinventingorganizations.com/>

<sup>40</sup> Scharmer, C. O. (2018) *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

<sup>41</sup> See Section 4.1 for the seven principles of OutoftheBox

journey back up the other side represents the transformation and new awareness that emerges through the creative process of wonder and play (yellow and orange). The gap before the last red dot represents the risk that we take as we learn to love, as well as the freedom, creativity and momentum that can come when escaping expected structures and instead thinking 'out of the box'. It is implied that the dots could continue to make a full circle and that "the process will begin again, for it is the very stuff of life"<sup>42</sup> In the same way, OutoftheBox Training is itself 'making the pathway by walking' and heading off on a journey into an emerging future.

OutoftheBox Training is supporting a movement which is continually evolving as a result of the participation, collaboration and reflective practice of the members. Only the principles and values are on 'tablets of stone' - everything else is open to change and transformation. Having the stories and training materials online rather than published makes this possible. Bi-monthly Members' Chats on Zoom give opportunities for peer support and the sharing of ideas, and these sometimes have a particular focus with the learnings written up as blogs.<sup>43</sup> Storytellers are trusted to find ways of using OutoftheBox that are appropriate for their contexts. Storytellers also have the opportunity to join Story Development Groups (online and face-to-face)<sup>44</sup> to co-create new stories. Even in the trainer-led training the atmosphere is one in which the peer learning group can make suggestions to how to improve the stories and, indeed, the training itself.<sup>45</sup>

Central to OutoftheBox are communities where every person can show up as themselves and be heard. There are different expressions of community in OutoftheBox: the small training cohorts either online or face to face; the online Members' chats; the Story Development Teams; and the community of associated trainers. We are beginning to see local communities of storytellers meeting as OutoftheBox Circles in homes, pubs and woods. Our way of building community has a long tradition in the 'Talking circle' or 'Way of council' of Native American communities:

"When you find your place inside the circle, you are surrounded by a community that practices a willingness to provide you with a patient, loving, compassionate understanding of who you are, and the circle is committed to a relationship with you, and with each other, that will help you on your life's journey."<sup>46</sup>

By creating safe and brave spaces there is the potential for trust and vulnerability. One way of doing this is to give space for people to share how they are feeling, whenever we meet.

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<sup>42</sup> Berryman, J. (1991) *Godly Play - An imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, Minneapolis MN, Augsburg Fortress, p. 96.

<sup>43</sup> In the first year there were members' chats with a focus on schools, working in care homes with people living with dementia, using OutoftheBox in play therapy and OutoftheBox for spiritual accompaniment.

<https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog>

<sup>44</sup> The collaborative creative process in the development of the Creation story can be read here <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/the-collaborative-creative-process-in-the-development-of-the-creation-story>

<sup>45</sup> During the Community Play after the story of The Donkey when asked what are the blocks in OutoftheBox a participant said that she found working as a large group of 12 difficult. As a result we have introduced more breakout room time for people to share their reflections in smaller peer-led groups without a trainer present.

<sup>46</sup> Jeanette Acosta, California Traditional <https://waysofcouncil.net/>

We might ask 'What has been the heart of your day?' There are three intentions: speak from the heart, listen to the heart and get to the heart of it and two rules: complete confidentiality and no fixing. These intentions and rules chime with the way the storyteller creates a safe and brave space in an OutoftheBox circle.

Tuula Valkonen models trust and a most generous spirit in how she has shared the gift of Deep Talk. For example, when asked at an online meeting of Deep Talk trainers "Who is allowed to train people in Deep Talk?" she answered "Anyone who has been trained in Deep Talk." This willingness to let go of control has inspired the OutoftheBox movement. At the start - in order to control the quality of OutoftheBox - only those who had received trainer-led training by an associated OutoftheBox trainer were given access to the 49 stories on the Members' Page. In August 2022, with growing resources to support self-led training, the co-founders made the decision to offer the option of membership without trainer-led training. This has allowed those who are interested in OutoftheBox but not in a position, either because of time or finances, to embark on the full 14 hours' trainer-led training. A storyteller now has the choice to use the self-led training resources and/or to receive trainer-led training through OutoftheBox or elsewhere. Storytellers are trusted to make their own journey, through self-led, peer-led and trainer-led learning. Whilst training will always be offered by the associated trainers, the organisation is moving towards equipping and empowering storytellers to support and train colleagues in their communities and places of work, for example a lead teacher offering support and training to colleagues in their school<sup>47</sup>. It is hoped this freedom to allow anyone to offer support and training will mean those in the OutoftheBox movement will be able to respond to the needs of their local contexts.<sup>48</sup> Story Circles are beginning to emerge and this will be a natural way for people to learn the art and atmosphere of OutoftheBox through experiencing it for themselves and through the sharing of good practice.<sup>49</sup> The associated reduction in the cost of Membership (which is currently a one off fee of £49) means that OutoftheBox is accessible to many more people and organisations.<sup>50</sup>

### 3. OutoftheBox in Schools

#### 3.1 The Pilot

The purpose of the pilot in schools was to enable reflective practice both for the storytellers and for the team developing OutoftheBox. Participants were asked to submit feedback

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<sup>47</sup> On seeing the benefits of OutoftheBox to children there were a number of schools in the schools' pilot who wanted their staff to use OutoftheBox but the trainer-led Membership fee of £320 per person was prohibitive, especially given the current financial crisis.

<sup>48</sup> Kathryn Lord has been invited by the Church of Ireland to train - over two days in November 2022 - the 12 Church representatives responsible for developing and supporting churches in their diocese in Children and families ministry. The representatives will continue to be supported and equipped by OutoftheBox trainers as they support churches in the OutoftheBox approach to storytelling.

<sup>49</sup> The story of how a participant in a Story Circle become a storyteller can be read here <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/an-outofthebox-journey-from-participation-to-storytelling>

<sup>50</sup> We are moving towards a 'pay as you can/pay as you feel' Membership fee and are encouraged that of the first ten people to sign up to the new Membership, half wanted to add a donation to give bursaries to people in countries where there is interest in OutoftheBox, like South Africa, but where £49 would be unaffordable.

through a questionnaire using Google forms. There were nine open questions including one question on educational impact and one on wellbeing.<sup>51</sup> The online survey informed participants of how the data would be used and that data would be reported anonymously. Data was gathered between June 2021 and June 2022 from 52 feedback forms and from seven recorded interviews which took place in May 2022.<sup>52</sup>

Participants were encouraged to submit up to five forms. There were 19 storytellers working in over 20 church and community schools in the UK. The storytellers attended a 90 minute online session in June and July 2021, which gave training in how to share OutoftheBox stories and lead wondering.<sup>53</sup> Some of the participants also chose to attend a 'Going Further with OutoftheBox' 90 minute training session on Zoom during the pilot year to enhance their skills. There was no training in Community Play although some storytellers had already been trained in Deep Talk and included this playful tool in the sessions. Participants identified themselves as teachers, teaching assistants, governors, chaplains, ministers, children and family workers and volunteers in their school settings. 18 out of the 19 storytellers were already trained in Godly Play.

The sessions ranged quite significantly in length from less than 15 minutes to over an hour. Approximately 50% of the sessions were between 15 and 30 minutes, 20% were between 30 minutes and 45 minutes and 20% were between 45 minutes and an hour. The context also varied quite widely but the majority identified story time and circle time as the chosen opportunity to carry out the OutoftheBox session.

- 48% involved learners from Key Stage 1 (Years 1-3) with children aged 5-7
- 34% involved learners from Key Stage 2 (Years 4-6) with children aged 7-11
- 10% involved learners from Preschool with children aged 3-5
- 8% of the stories took place with a mixed group of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

## 3.2 Children as key stakeholders in research

Measuring the impact of storytelling approaches for children raises the important question of how the voices of children are captured in feedback of this kind. They are key stakeholders. However, research ethics rightly demand high standards of good practice, ideally signed off by an ethics panel in a UK context. Without expertise in conducting research with children, this pilot has approached storytellers to be the research participants, gathering their perceptions only.

Yet research actively involving children in the research process is a growing area of interest for sociologists in childhood studies with understandable emphasis on the need to reflect critically on the issues raised.<sup>54</sup> Berryman warns researchers that “one needs to be patient and wait for [children] to reveal themselves at their own time and in their own way” and

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<sup>51</sup> See Appendix A.12 for the full set of questions

<sup>52</sup> Six of these interviews can be watched by going to

<https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/interviews-with-people-using-outofthebox-in-schools>

<sup>53</sup> The storytelling included time for the story, wondering and creative response.

<sup>54</sup> Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds) (2014) *Understanding Research with Children and Young People* London, Sage. p. 1.

particularly so when they do not have “the words to say what they mean,”<sup>55</sup> which presents a dilemma for researchers required to work within time and budget constraints. There is also the well-known difficulty of the researcher’s presence disrupting the ‘normal’ environment being observed, especially in a contemplative context such as this, where approach and atmosphere are key.

### 3.3 The benefits of OutoftheBox in the pilot schools

The language that Brené Brown uses for safe and brave classrooms where children can turn up ‘to be seen, to be heard and to be curious’ chimes with OutoftheBox.

“We are ethically called to make our schools and classrooms places where all students can walk in and, for that day or hour, take off the crushing weight of their armor, hang it on a rack, and open their heart to truly being seen.”<sup>56</sup>

Whilst acknowledging that this is not academic research, the anecdotal evidence from the storytellers’ feedback and the video interviews with storytellers gives a good indication that OutoftheBox is having a positive impact on the wellbeing of children in schools and can fit within the school curriculum. The findings from the feedback forms are summarised below and more details with quotes from storytellers can be found in Appendix B.

OutoftheBox:

- uses materials that draw children into the story
- creates a calm atmosphere in the classroom
- models good relationships in the class
- enables children to process emotions and express feelings
- develops empathy and strengthens values
- OutoftheBox gives children agency and provides a springboard for play and creativity.
- encourages in depth thinking
- uses simple stories that are easy to tell
- is inclusive of children with SEN/EAL or of those who often opt out or who tend to be quieter
- becomes more effective over time

### 3.4 The way forward in schools

The benefits to children’s wellbeing that OutoftheBox is bringing points to the opportunity to grow this young movement so that there are more OutoftheBox storytellers operating in schools. Whilst the feedback focussed on the positive impact of OutoftheBox on the

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<sup>55</sup> Berryman, J. (2002) *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: How to Lead Godly Play Sessions*, Vol. 1, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, pp. 116-117.

<sup>56</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/hubs/daring-classrooms-hub/>



social-emotional wellbeing of children, there is much to be explored about how it can also support children in other ways. For example, language development is fostered when children co-create stories. In the pilot schools, children were naturally drawn to using the loose parts of OutoftheBox materials to make their own stories and play freely with their ideas. OutoftheBox seemed to provide teachers with a mechanism to stimulate children's creativity, a cross-fertilisation of ideas and sense of personhood and agency. Further work, perhaps in collaboration with researchers from Finland,<sup>57</sup> as well as UK researchers, is needed.

Only stories from the Wisdom genre were piloted, so the links to the academic curriculum were limited. Stories from the History, Arts, Nature, STEM and Religions genres are being developed so that stories can be a springboard to 'thinking with the heart' about all subjects, as in the Charlotte Mason philosophy. As the movement grows we hope to have more Story Development Groups who will lend their expertise to the creation of new stories in different genres.

### 3.5 OutoftheBox in other contexts

On hearing about OutoftheBox, Godly Play and Deep Talk storytellers wanted to try out this new approach in the many different settings in which they lived and worked. So a year's pilot with feedback forms for contexts other than schools was carried out to support the reflective practice of the storytellers and to contribute to the development of OutoftheBox. Data has been gathered from over 100 feedback forms<sup>58</sup> from diverse contexts including care homes for older people, intergenerational family groups in the home, one to one mentoring or spiritual accompaniment, a community drop in for homeless people, church meetings, a Lent group, Sunday school, a toddler group, hospital chaplaincy, a support group in sheltered housing, an after school club, with the uniformed groups of Rainbows and air squadron cadets, peer support group for volunteers and well being sessions for people experiencing homelessness, housing issues and associated problems with addiction and mental health.

The value of this kind of storytelling in all sorts of contexts is clear. This was the original idea of the Mutual Blessings project in 2016-19 which aimed to offer "spiritually enriching practices using the method and principles of Godly Play to people of all ages or needs." OutoftheBox caters for people of all ages and in all sorts of contexts. The storyteller is trusted to make any adaptations needed to meet the needs of their community, and this intrinsic flexibility helps more people enjoy the benefits of OutoftheBox's reflective storytelling, play and dialogue.

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<sup>57</sup> Since 2015 Deep Talk has been used with children aged two - six in day care centres and researchers in Finnish schools have data on how Deep Talk supports children in storytelling, language learning and in their social-emotional wellbeing

<sup>58</sup> Feedback was collected through a google form <https://forms.gle/KwovSWJKLhXUe3xn9>

## 4. The Way Forward through Trust, Play and Transformation

### 4.1 OutoftheBox Principles

OutoftheBox is a movement of story and play which clearly is much broader than simply using OutoftheBox stories. With this in mind the trainers have created in-service training for schools and other contexts called Wisdom, Wonder and Wellbeing workshops. As they experience OutoftheBox for themselves, practitioners are helped to understand the principles and values of the OutoftheBox approach and how they can be applied to any activity, not just when sharing OutoftheBox stories.

The OutoftheBox principles and values can be described through the seven elements of trust and transformation which are the dots in our logo: Breathe, Trust, Listen, Feel, Wonder, Play, Love.

**Breathe** - taking time out to pause and be still

**Trust** - thinking about what it means to build up trust in each other and how that makes things feel different

**Listen** - actively listening and being present to each other

**Feel** - being attentive to how we feel

**Wonder** - being curious and open to questions

**Play** - valuing playfulness and creativity

**Love** - recognising that all we do is an attempt to learn to love better

In many and varied contexts and activities it is valuable for the storyteller to be aware of the journey of descent and re-emergence. The Wisdom, Wonder, Wellbeing workshops facilitate a conversation about this and the potential it has to change people's experiences in their workplace or everyday life.

### 4.2 OutoftheBox's Future will emerge through the creative process.

The above seven ways of being and doing have been essential for members of the OutoftheBox Team<sup>59</sup> as they work together on the creative process of developing OutoftheBox. The heart of OutoftheBox Training is about trusting people and being open to being transformed.

Key to the movement are supportive communities of practitioners. This may happen where people live and work (for example in a school); local 'OutoftheBox Circles' are beginning to emerge. In addition, an OutoftheBox online community through the platform *circle.so* is being established where people can meet together across the world, including in different interest groups.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Any member is welcome to be a part of the OutoftheBox team to help create stories as well as to play a part in developing and supporting OutoftheBox

<sup>60</sup> <https://outoftheboxtraining.circle.so/home>

So how does the OutoftheBox work move forward? There is an OutoftheBox story called "Ideas"<sup>61</sup> that illustrates the collaborative creative process at work.

"There was once a person who had an idea. It felt good but they weren't sure what to do with it - it didn't seem to fit in. The person walked away from the idea - but it followed them. Some people didn't like the idea, so the person tried to hide it away. But this made them feel sad and anyway the idea wouldn't stay hidden. So the person took the idea somewhere safe. A place where they could lie on the grass, gaze up at the stars and dream. The idea needed lots of attention. The more the person cared for the idea the bigger it grew. Others were interested and they brought their own ideas. Together they played with all of them. The ideas helped them to see things differently and to do things differently."

Empowering a supportive network of reflective practitioners in which the creative process is encouraged and supported will inevitably impact on OutoftheBox practice - which always needs to be prepared to adapt and be transformed! Trusting the playful creative process means not keeping things in boxes and being willing to take OutoftheBox itself out of the box!

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<sup>61</sup> To watch a recording of "Ideas" please go to <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/papers-written-on-outofthebox-practice>

## Appendix

OutoftheBox was piloted in schools between June 2021 and June 2022. Storytellers gave feedback on their experience of using OutoftheBox in the classroom and their observations of its impact on the children, particularly in relation to:

1. The OutoftheBox materials
2. The calm atmosphere
3. Its impact on relationships
4. The opportunity to process and express feelings
5. The opportunity to strengthen empathy and good values
6. Play and creativity
7. In-depth thinking
8. The ease of telling OutoftheBox stories
9. Its inclusiveness of children who don't normally engage
10. Links to the curriculum
11. Its growing effectiveness over time

Section A12 lists the questions that were asked in the schools' feedback form.

### A.1 OutoftheBox uses materials that draw children into the story

The box created a sense of anticipation, wonder and curiosity. The visual stimuli offered by the materials helped pupils find meaning in the stories. The pupils were intrigued by the materials, wanted to play with them, raise questions about them, and use them to create their own stories.



“Being natural somehow engenders a feeling of calm.”

“The sensory aspect of them is very appealing to the children who couldn't stop playing with them.”

“The children loved touching the figures and the cloth.”

“They are beautifully made and very tactile.”

“They make intriguing sounds as stories are told and they look lovely.”

“I love all the pieces for playing and storytelling myself, they are tactile and fun, but thinking particularly about using them with younger children; the felt pieces and larger wooden pieces are great for the children to play with.”

“Lots of excitement and anticipation of what was in the box”.

“Children were very engaged. Able to seat them so all could all see despite whole class and smaller classroom. Children responded to wondering questions well and made really interesting suggestions about where they as a class might be in the story. Able to link to learning in the morning. Excited to hear what would 'come out of the box' next time.”

“There was a sense of anticipation and wonder.”

“Children were excited at the box coming out, with one child saying "What's in the box today?" to everyone!”

“The other teacher couldn't believe how quiet the children were during the story and how engrossed they got.”

“Even though there were more children they were all more engaged and really paid attention to the story itself.”

“The way the children incorporated parts of the story that I had told into the one they then told me afterwards showed they had been focussing and engaging and they were able to relate the story to other stories they already knew.”

“I decided to share the monster story as it is about conflict and the children are talking a lot about the conflict in Ukraine and I thought it was good to talk about how we treat each other.”

“The children had not heard a story for a while and were so excited when they saw the box. One child who struggles with reading said 'I love these stories' when he saw the box. He has not seen a story since before the summer holidays so it shows the impact they had on him. Another child asked me where she could buy the box from. They were extremely engaged and focused. They responded really well to the questions and many shared their thoughts and ideas.”

## A.2 OutoftheBox creates a calm atmosphere in the classroom

It was often noted that the class or group was more focused and calmer than usual. The importance of a quiet undisturbed environment was noted. Storytellers found that large groups need more time to prepare the OutoftheBox space e.g. ensuring all can see, allowing enough space for storytelling materials to be laid out.



“Children were calm and focussed, engrossed, intrigued in the story and were reflecting on each character and their actions. They were very calm after the story had been put away which is unusual for my lively class of 20 boys and 9 girls! Children continued to discuss so I gave them some reflection time for a drink and to continue their conversations.”

“Opportunity for a calm time.”

Calm atmosphere aided thinking and responses. “Teachers plant the tree and we rest on top of it” “We are the roots holding it all together” “The child is like our parents”

“One child said that they liked that they felt so calm during the story.”

“It really felt like a space in time where the children (and I) could just be in that moment.”

“The children are calmer whilst the story is being told and some of the children will come and chat with me during the response time. These children are the ones who are seeking adult attention, needing a bit more emotional support.”

### A.3 OutoftheBox models good relationships in the class

The process seemed to be helping the children to re-build relationships in the classroom (post Covid-19)

“During the wondering you could see the children listening to each other's perspectives and sometimes affirming each other or adding to what the others had said. It gave them a safe place to say what they really thought and felt ie. non-judgemental environment with freedom to interpret the story for themselves.”

“Another boy who had become very upset after a fairly minor incident and put himself in the corner of the room put himself back into the circle after the whole class invited him to join

us. He decided to sit next to me, and chose to tell his own very involved and elaborate story. His energy levels were very positively lifted for the rest of the afternoon.”

“I think it gives them an opportunity to focus on themes of wellness, but also gives them a time just for them - a time just to be themselves. The storytelling that they do can give them a chance to process big feelings and make emotional connections with their friends”

“This was steeped in wellbeing language, care and empathy. The children worked together to bring wellbeing to one another, so the child who struggled to engage was encouraged by another member to join in.”

“These children will always have challenges with concentration so seeing the children so absorbed was amazing. Afterwards three children who do not get on together asked to walk together to create their own story. The teacher videoed it. It was about being friends and being there for each other - something they would never get on paper... This is a huge step forward in the wellbeing of the children in the school environment.”

“They worked well together, they came up with clever answers and empathic answers. There was a natural leader in the group who gathered all the ideas together, but she also enabled other less verbal and assertive children to say what they thought and kept making sure they felt included. She was very playful and would make a natural storyteller!”

#### A.4 OutoftheBox enables children to process emotions and express feelings

OutoftheBox sessions gave children confidence to be themselves, process their feelings e.g. the opportunity to take the lead, freedom to choose how to respond to the story in a safe, non-judgemental space.



“One boy made a rainbow cube out of bricks. His friend made a hollow rectangle with bricks as his precious stone and attached it around the cube. A girl made a house to surround her mother's grave, 'but it fell down'. In the discussion time she'd said that her precious stone was the bracelet charms her mum had given her before she died. A boy drew the darts his grandma had given him two weeks before she died, and the football shirt belonging to his

cousin he'd been given after his funeral. Possibly a quarter of the group had experienced the death of a close family member. The session enabled them to speak about them and say how precious they remained."

"It gave them a safe place to say what they really thought and felt ie. non-judgemental environment with freedom to interpret the story for themselves."

"The storytelling that they do can give them a chance to process big feelings and make emotional connections with their friends"

"The children responded thoughtfully, including one boy whom I had worked with last year, following the death of his father. He said he didn't like that one person had an easy path, while another had to go up mountains and down valleys: it wasn't fair."

"Children were asked how the story made them feel... "peaceful," "felt like a lifecycle," "I liked the birds landing on the tree." "I felt sad." "It gave a home for the birds." "All the stories remind me of my mum because she's nice to me. People are kind in the stories"

" "You can have a little emotion and if people pull at it it gets bigger. The monster is all the mean stuff. Kindness takes away all the mean stuff." This was from a child who had previously been bullied. It was fantastic to watch her discuss how she felt emotions can manifest and felt the monster was the visualisation of that"

"The monster growing I liked the best" This child has behavioural issues and struggled to settle down at first. He was very fascinated by the monster and identified strongly with it." "The teacher felt that it was fantastic and really helped connect their emotional response to their thinking processes in a creative way. She may come and train."

"The child who identified with the donkey was angry and talked about personal space and respecting space - this was important for her wellbeing. I noticed this group of children compete with one another rather than work together and listen to one another."

"The children really understood the idea of the story. They talked about the 'lost childhood' of the first character and shared their own experiences of times when they had felt both happy and sad for different reasons."

## A.5 OutoftheBox develops empathy and strengthens values

The stories help children to see things from another perspective and to focus on values.

"The children were great at discussing why it is good to be kind to people."

"Children very much on the side of the child throwing the starfish back - one child introduced another passer-by to help and support the child and help them to stand up to the first passer by."



“Children realised that the monster wasn’t as big when the people were kind to it. They said the story was showing that you should listen to others and care for others even if they are different to you.”

“A child linked story to school’s values of compassion and respect.”

“Great story, I chose this because my class are struggling with making the right choices so used this as a basis for our circle time and how we all have choices and can ask for help if we need to.”

“There was a move in the wondering time picked up by myself and the teaching assistant from the children wanting to solve the situation from their perspective to wanting to see the situation from the donkey’s perspective. P wanted to talk to the donkey and find out if it was lost and stuck. The children were beginning to empathise with the donkey and listen to one another.”

“Most children had compassion for the monster and wanted the people to change their ways to be kind and not mean to the monster. We talked about how this might be like issues at playtime.”

“The listening that emerged brought empathy and together trust as they listened to each other. Wellbeing came through the telling of a personal story for moments, deep listening, and integrating each other’s stories.”

“Real conflicts emerged for the children as they responded to their lived experiences in recent times. Learned that different children lived differently but all were welcome, just as the donkey was in the end by having a shelter built and food provided.”

“They talked about the child being kind, thoughtful, loving, and learning to live well (the school values are learning, loving, living). These were attributed to the story, they also talked about gratitude that one child was so thoughtful to try to save as many starfish as possible and discussed that this would be a good way to be, whether in a group or on your own.”

“The ability to work together cross-culturally, the healing and understanding that came from this. Children from the travelling community spoke of understanding and working with animals showing respect and finding out what was wrong, others wanted to kill the donkey - but learnt it was better to do things differently.. Some children felt they needed to build shelters and hiding places as they thought the villagers were scared... The UK children from the school showed how they could build a new way with a different pathway, listening to the leader who could be trusted.”

## A.6. OutoftheBox gives children agency and provides a springboard for play and creativity.

When the OutoftheBox session included time for creative response the children often chose to play with the materials to co-create new stories and to tell their own stories. The loose

parts of OutoftheBox were also used in circle sharing to enable children to talk about their feelings and a description of this has been recorded in an interview with a Deputy Head teacher.<sup>62</sup> Many storytellers reported that there was maximum impact when more time was given for this creative response (an hour seemed to work well).



“I think the level of freedom and control given to the children gave them confidence and focus I do not always see - one boy in particular is generally very anxious about any kind of failure. There was no way to fail at this activity and he seemed to thrive when given the opportunity to tell a story. I think rather than being able to "tick boxes" in this instance it felt more like a gift I was giving the children. A time where they would not be micromanaged, and they could take the lead.”

“They took the initiative to want to become storytellers themselves and they worked together to tell me their story.”

“This group in recent weeks queried whether there is any point to a school council as they felt it was pointless for various reasons. The school asked me to do some story telling with them to help. The children identified with the adult and not the child in the story. They felt it was pointless. In the discussion they began to see small things made a difference, they saw a new perspective from that of the child... By the end the school council began talking about how small things they do or say makes a big difference in school life.. Inspiration and motivation began to grow. The first step of a long journey.”

“The children were very engaged in the story as I told it, and were very keen to create their own stories in the response time. They loved the opportunity to freely respond and use the paints.”

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<sup>62</sup> To watch the interview [https://youtu.be/Lo\\_460j\\_HDw](https://youtu.be/Lo_460j_HDw)

“I allowed them to play with the pieces afterwards to make their own pictures and stories and they spent a lot of time engrossed in that. Speaking with the staff afterwards they said they were surprised at how engrossed the children were playing with the pieces and making their story pictures. I was only meant to stay half an hour and ended up staying for a whole hour as they just wanted to carry on being creative and curious.”

“The children also loved the chance to explore the pieces afterwards and be creative with them making their own stories and pictures.”

“After the story and wondering questions, one child created a picnic story and another a story about a mysterious forest and the adventures of a young boy in the forest. The child actually wanted to tell me their story (mysterious forest) and I sat and listened. It was brilliant! The imagination and creativity too was wonderful and spontaneous. It was very detailed and descriptive.”

“In creative response: once again the same two children from the first session wanted to create and tell me a story using the resources. The one child spoke about planting seeds to grow poppies-watering seed but not seeing any change (link to Acorn story and Remembrance Day) and went on to elaborate on growing other things and so on in their story. The second child also spoke about trees in their story and mystery once again and trying to work things out. A third child created a story too but did so quietly. I felt that through their storytelling that they were processing and thinking deeply about things as there was a lot of detail and thought that went into their stories. The reason I say that is that after their storytelling they opened up about some personal feelings of what they were going through in their lives. Also a lot of drawing and making with play dough.”

## A.7 OutoftheBox encourages in depth thinking

The story and the wondering questions engendered in-depth thinking and discussion, responses, and reflections. Children made connections between the story and their own experiences in school and at home, between the story and other stories (not just OutoftheBox stories)



“Superb conversations between themselves about what might be happening in the story. Detailed responses at the end of the story and in-depth thinking.”

“Children responded thoughtfully and respectfully. Most of the children placed themselves in the role of the child saving the starfish. They believed that they could make a difference. Collective response that they as a whole class would be trying to make a difference.”

“The children's response to the story was striking. Nearly all the class wanted to be a starfish and one child said "we all need to be loved and saved." Another said she wanted to be the sea because she “could wash away people's problems” “

“The children were enjoying a discussion about why a good leader would leave in the first place and what makes a good leader.”

Some of the children's responses: “The leader was trying to test the people when he went away to see how they would respond to the monster,” “the leader was a good example to the people,” “the monster could be symbolising hate and depending how you deal with it how it will grow,” “treat others as you want to be treated,” “the monster was being discriminated against and they didn't even try to get to know it,” “be kind with your words,” “this links into our values of compassion and respect.” Some wanted to be the monster, others the leader. One child wanted to be in the crowd so he could be a positive influence on the other people to treat the monster better. Wondering where they saw their class in the story - “we are all different -so tricky to say” and “we all try to be there for each other.”

“The children were great at discussing why it is good to be kind to people. They all tried to make up an ending as they wanted it to finish.”

## A.8 OutoftheBox uses simple stories that are easy to tell

Feedback from the storytellers suggest that OutoftheBox works for them because it is easy to remember and the preparation time is short.

“Short story but very effective - easy to learn and deliver.”

“The story was simple but powerful. It was easy to remember and fun to tell. I liked the fact the image created was bright and colourful but also not over busy and also that it filled the whole story circle. I liked the fact that it was something that the children could all relate to in their own lives.”

## A.9 OutoftheBox is inclusive of children with SEN/EAL or of those who often opt out or who tend to be quieter

The storytellers and other adults in the room noticed that children with special educational needs or English as an additional language were able to access the story and that children who tend to be quiet were participating both verbally and non verbally.



“Wondering about the story is a good way of encouraging children to express their thoughts and ideas: some quite shy children responded (who don't usually say anything in response to questions in Collective Worship with me, for instance)”

“Lots of contributions including several from children with SEN.”

“Children were engrossed including SEN/EAL”

“I noticed that a child who often 'opts out' started to add things to the beach and say what they were. They enjoyed the fact that they could be in the story and change the story. When I emphasised this, it promoted more exploration of the materials.”

“The teaching assistant commented that one of the children who responded to the questions would never normally contribute in that way”

“They worked together well, they were creative, they were happy and the quieter children were included in a really great way by their peer group.”

## A.10 OutoftheBox links to the curriculum

A paper outlines how OutoftheBox supports the core curriculum subjects in ways that can be measured by Ofsted and SIAMS (and so does not need to be limited to extra-curricular activity or PHSE only).<sup>63</sup> During the pilot only stories in the Wisdom genre were available but over time there will be many more links to the curriculum as stories in the genres of History, Arts, Nature, STEM and Religions are developed.

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<sup>63</sup> Caroe, C., Caroe, K., Lord K., and Fytche, J. (2021) *OutoftheBox Links to the National Curriculum, Ofsted and SIAMS Inspection Frameworks*, paper available from <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>



“Teacher took notes of responses: very helpful! These will go in class Reflection Journal, part of the school's RE provision (each class has a journal, where the teacher/ TA or individual children note reflections and responses to spiritual activities)”

“Children made links between the stories and the environment.”

“During the creative time afterwards two of the children talked a lot about the acorn growing into a tree and crouched down to be an acorn and then 'grew into a tree'. The staff are going to follow up on the story with their topic work as they are looking at nature and the environment so they have said they are going to reflect back to the story as they do activities throughout the rest of the week.”

“Children are very aware of environmental impact - most responses to questions about where they see themselves in the story (often as a class). “The boy helped the environment,” “Not just the tree growing but the child growing too,” “Boy didn't play with the acorn but planted it,” “Circle of life,” “boy made a difference.”

“Children linked the story to life cycles, fairy tales, forest school work on growing, nature. They were asked what the story might be teaching us... “To look after nature, like our story from forest school” “To care for the world” “I'd like to be one of the boys who planted a tree” “I'd like to be one of the birds and sing beautifully and explore” “the story is about looking after nature and not chopping so many trees down””

“Children linked to knowledge of the environment and importance of trees to give animals homes - saw creatures as innocent and in need of a home.”

“Children made links between the story and the environment and the need to plant more trees.”

## A.11 OutoftheBox becomes more effective over time

In schools where repeat sessions were held, the children were enthusiastic and wanted more. They soon became familiar with the OutoftheBox process e.g. they became more confident with wondering. Storytellers often noted that they, and the pupils, 'settled into the process', storytellers gaining confidence with setting up the space, getting familiar with the materials and pupils gaining confidence with wondering, discussing and responding.

"I think especially with younger children there has been a real benefit in doing a string of sessions rather than a stand alone one off session. If I had only done the first session on its own then I would have been left thinking that it isn't as effective with younger children but as I've done more I have seen them learn the flow of sessions better which helped them grow and engage better."

"They were much more confident in using their own imaginations to tell their own stories this time. Their attention span was also much greater this time."

"This is the third time I have done OutoftheBox with these children and they have really begun to understand the pattern of a session. As soon as I walked in they were all very keen to know what was in the box and began clearing a space for the story circle. There were less children there today so we decided to try again with the whole group rather than a separate smaller group. Even though there were more children they were all more engaged and really paid attention to the story itself rather than the pieces. None of them tried to touch or take the pieces until I allowed them to after the story and the only calling out was in reaction to the story, for example making gasping noises and saying things like 'oh no' when the monster got bigger."

"Children very engaged - second story they had been told and this seemed to help as they were excited but knew what to expect."

"One child said ' I wish I could do this everyday.'"

"It's been a real privilege to be part of this pilot and I feel I have been growing and learning too, alongside the children."

## A.12 The questions on the OutoftheBox schools feedback form

The participants of the schools' pilot were asked the following questions in the feedback form.<sup>64</sup>

1. Job title / role within school (teacher, teaching assistant, head teacher, RE lead, chaplain, volunteer, minister from local church)
2. Date of session
3. Your role in the session
4. Year group
5. Number of children in group
6. Other adults observing or present to the group (eg teacher, teaching assistant, volunteer)
7. Story shared
8. Length of session
9. Context of session
10. What went well?
11. What didn't go well?
12. What might you do differently next time?
13. Reflecting on the children's responses - what did you notice? Quotes from the children or short vignettes are helpful. Also observations from onlookers.
14. Reflecting on the impact in terms of education that this session had - what did you notice? Quotes from the children or short vignettes are helpful. Also observations from onlookers.
15. Reflecting on the impact in terms of wellbeing that this session had - what did you notice? Quotes from the children or short vignettes are helpful. Also observations from onlookers.
16. What do you think about the story materials?
17. Please provide your feedback on the particular story you shared.
18. Any other comments?
19. Name (optional)

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<sup>64</sup> 'Feedback from OutoftheBox session in schools' google form can be viewed here: <https://forms.gle/CqKAGvtJBtvxKL2J6>



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