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Talking Faith: Empirical Perspectives on the Communication in Children's Services

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Abstract

In a study on children's services in the Netherlands I analyzed observed conversations using an analysis based on the speech act theory of J.R. Searle. We found four important patterns in the conversations: exam patterns and the conversation, sermon and social talk pattern. These four correspond with four modes of addressed or expressed faith of the children: knowledge, reflection, moral and social aspects of faith. In the conversations found in protocols of children's theology the reflective aspect is heavily stressed.

1. Children's services in the Netherlands

In the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) the most common type of Sunday school is the (simultaneous) children's service. The children's service is for children at primary school, from four to twelve years old.

It is held during the Sunday morning service of the congregation. The children start the service together with the congregation. In this first part of the service, there usually is some 'attention for the children'. The minister may have a small talk with (or to) the children, a story might be told, a children's song may be sung; maybe an activity like a play or game is done.

Then the children go with their leader(s) to their own room (or rooms if there are more groups). They will be welcomed, a (bible) story is told and they will take part in some kind of work-up by means of a creative or other activity. If there is more time

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(this depends on the length of the service in church) the children may pray or sing as well. Perhaps they memorize a bible verse. The children take part in the collection in the main or in their own service.

In most congregations the children return to the service before the end. They might rejoin at the last song, or just before the blessing.

According to the leaders, children's services aim at faith. Their conceptualizations of faith vary according to their modality. Some may centralize the meaning of God and Jesus, while others simply want good conversations. Reflecting these varying conceptualizations of faith are the following statements of leaders of children's services:

> 'I hope to give those children what the Lord Jesus and God mean for them.' (Henny)
> 'Yes, you have to replace the sermon for them' (Hanneke)
> 'When I told the story (of Pilatus) I saw it really touched the children.'... I want the children to understand and think along and feel along with what I intended.' (Renske)
> 'We are not doing just anything, it is about God, and we come together because of our faith in God.' (Elise)
> 'We sometimes have very good conversations that really are profound.' (Joke)

I want to ask the question if this aim, faith of the children, is recognizable in children's services. To find an answer to this question we will take a closer look at the children's services themselves.[1] Children are subject in our research, because of the focus on children's faith. An important part of children's services is talking. From these talks it is possible to know something about what the children are busy with. I have analyzed some of the conversations in ten observed children services with an approach that is based on J.R. Searle's speech act theory.[2] Searle describes very detailed how the different speech acts work and which intentions are inherent to committing the different speech acts. With this detailed description of the conversations in children's services,[3] as earlier[4] the language in lessons in mathematics and religious education was good describable.

Searle describes language as bound by rules. If you say something, you mean something –automatically, bound by rules. If e.g. you say a certain rose is red, you mean (among other things) that you are convinced the rose *is* actually red. Being convinced about a certain state of affairs is important in assertions, the speech acts in which we state something about a state of affairs. It would be very strange if you say the rose is red, and that you tell later you are colour-blind and can't discern between red and green. The question then pops up how you can be so convinced about the rose being red. To be convinced about the truth of an assertion or really want to know what you ask are examples of the sincerity rule of speech acts. Of course, one can commit insincere speech acts, but the speech act then is defective.

In children's services, and in schools, the different speech acts are easily recognized. By far most common (more than half of the speech acts) in children's services are assertives, followed by real questions and exam questions (each about one-tenth of the speech acts). The speech acts in children's services occur in more or less fixed combinations. I call these combinations patterns.[5] Patterns are a distinguishable part of the actual communication in children's services, they consist of two or more speech acts. Usually a pattern is (part of) a conversation between two main speakers (sometimes more) in front of a larger group. In a pattern conditions of the constituent speech acts are followed. The essential condition of an exam question is that the (first) speaker wants to know whether the hearer knows 'the answer'. So after an exam question you expect 'the answer', usually an assertive. Of course, expectations might not be met. If a conversation doesn't follow the expectations, it is usually possible to discover more of the intentions of the first speaker. In the case of an exam question that is not answered correctly, the first speaker (the leader of the children's service) might do different things. If she asks another child the same question, the question was a pure exam question: the leader now knows the first child doesn't know the correct answer and she now wants to know whether the second child does. She might also try to elicit the answer from the first child, e.g. by hinting. The intention then is that the child learns the answer, it is being taught.

> This was seen in the Sunday school *Namiddag* (children from 5-6 years old):
> Leader: What happened to the Lord Jesus? Do you know that? On Christmas, he was b...? (acts as if he is cradling a baby) Emily?
> Emily: Gone to heaven?

Leader: No, on Christmas, you know. What happened on Christmas?
Child: Born.
Leader: Born, very well.

Many patterns have a central speech act. This speech act is central in the sense that the whole pattern has to do with it. The conversation might be centred round the essential condition of the central speech act, it might lead towards the essential condition of the central speech act, or it may be derived from the essential condition of the central speech act. A couple of patterns exists with an exam questions as central speech act (such as the repetition pattern, see below), real questions are central in (real) conversations.

2. Conversations in children's services

In the following I will show four important patterns in the conversation in children's services. I will explain the constituent speech acts and look into the essence of the pattern.

a. Exam patterns

Exam questions and patterns round exam questions are very common in children's services.[6] As already mentioned, leaders ask exam questions in order to get to know whether a specific child knows what is being asked. The most usual pattern is *exam question-answer*. The speech acts are an exam question, followed by an assertive. When uttering an assertive, you commit yourself to the truth of it.

An example[7] of an exam question-answer pattern is:

A children's service in *Rondom* with children of 7-8 years old. Together they look at a colouring picture[8] of the crucification.

? Leader: What other people do you see? Jonathan.
A Jonathan: Priests.
A Leader: Yes.
? And what do they look like?
A Jonathan: That one with the scroll.

Figure 1

This *exam question-answer* pattern is very often extended with some reaction of the leader on the child's answer (in the examples 'Yes'). Very often, the leader simply repeats the child's answer. This is a repetition pattern. This pattern is also very common in schools, as shown in van der Veen (2004).[9] In repetition patterns the leader repeats the child's answer literally.

I'll give two examples of the *repetition pattern*. The repetitions are underlined.

The first one[10] is from a math lesson in a primary school, the children are 11-12 years old.

?	Teacher: The first sum on page 43, how much interest do you have to pay?
	Linda.
A	Linda: 20 %.
A	Teacher: 20 % interest.
?	Because in the table stood 20 per?
A	Linda: 100.
A	Teacher: Per 100.

The second example is from the children's service in the *Inktlaankerk*. The children's service (children from 10-12 years old) has just started.

?	Leader: Who does know what time of year it is?
A	The minister just said it, it is a special time.
	Bonny, tell me.
A	Bonny: Eh, the Lent.
A	Leader: The Lent, very well.
A	Child: 2007.
A	Leader: Yes, that is also true, it is the Lent in 2007.

Normally repeating the answer would be a superfluous speech act. That makes me think. For what reasons is the assertive repeated? Some reasons apply. One of them is very practical: in children's services (and in schools) the children often speak

indistinctly. Repeating the answer makes it accessible for the whole group. Another reason lies in the sincerity condition of assertives. The sincerity condition of an assertive is that the speaker ('really') thinks that what he stated is true. By repeating an answer, the leader adds herself to the persons that really thinks something is the case. Adults (leaders, teachers) have more authority, so if they 'really' think something is true, that counts more than when a child does so. That is very clear in those cases where a child gives a very halting answer, only half sure if it is correct. Sometimes the answer even sounds like a question.

Repeating answers can also function as a way to keep control over the communication in the children's service.[11]

The conversation following an exam question can also take an unexpected turn. Then we have an *exam question – no reply pattern*, in which the children don't answer, probably because they don't know the answer. The children might also give a wrong answer in the *exam question – wrong answer pattern*. The leader then corrects the wrong answer with an assertive. This looks like the repetition pattern (exam question – assertive – assertive), but the two assertives do not have the same content. The second assertion here is fully functional, as can be seen in the following example.

In the children's service in *Fundament* (children from 4-6 years old) the leader lists points for the prayer. Daisy told about her new clothes.

?	Leader: Hey Daisy, are we going to pray for it or thank for it?
	Daisy: Ehm...
?	Leader: What do you think?
A	Daisy: Ehm, pray for it, then?
A	Leader: Thank for it, because you got it, didn't you?
A	Daisy: Yes.

In all these cases the leader of the children's service is like a teacher. She (in most cases) knows and she tells the children how it really is. In this teacher-pupil-relation the children have little influence on the content of the children's service. The teacher decides what questions she will ask.

Faith in these exam patterns seems to be a question of knowing facts: how a bible story goes, about the life of the church, about the meaning of words.

b. Conversation pattern

In this pattern a conversation is held in which both children and leader have initiatives in input. Both commit sincere speech acts. Exam questions are absent in this pattern, it consists of real questions, assertives and expressives.

In this pattern the children and leader reflect on something, they think further. Very often this pattern starts with a question from the leader. This might very well be a 'second' question in a series that started with an exam question. The leader continues to ask, but with real questions, questions on which she doesn't know the answer. The central speech acts is a real question. Also expressives appear in these patterns. An expressive is a speech act in which the speaker expresses in a psychological state (specified in the sincerity condition) about a certain state of affairs, e.g. he thanks for showing the way, she tells she's feeling sad about a broken love affair. The essential condition is the same as the sincerity condition that is that you really are in that psychological state.

I give two examples:

The conversation in the *Inktlaankerk* (10-12 years olds) drifts towards Good Friday.

¿	Bonny: But that is a bad Friday?
A	Leader: Yes, That's always, I must honestly say I thought about it for years and I still don't understand sometimes.
A	That is true.
?	Because what happened on Good Friday?
A	Child: Then Jesus dies.
A	Child: Then he is killed, on the cross.
E	Bonny: And that is called good, that's what I think strange. ...
¿	Leader: So you think Good Friday, how can that be?
¿	What Good Friday?
A	Child: Yes.
E	Leader: That is terrible.
A	Laura: Yes, because he died for us.
A	Leader: Died for us...

E Bonny: But I still don't think it's good.
¿ Leader: What do you mean?
¿ Do you have other ideas on that, Bonny?
E Laura: I think it is pitiful.
A Bonny: Maybe it is Good Friday because he regains life?

In the children's service in *Rondom* with children of 7-8 years old the group still talks about the colouring picture of the crucification.

¿ Leader: Hey, and if you were there, you weren't, that can't, but imagine...
A Child: Then I would be with the soldiers.
¿ Leader: Yes?
A Child: Yes, I would want to untie him.
A Leader: Yes? ... But, if I would have been there, I think I would have stood a bit in the back.
E I would have been scared.
E I don't think I would have dared to stand in front.
A I don't know.
A I could draw my own head into the picture,
A I would be right in the back.
A Child: I would perhaps ... run a bit faster.
A Leader: O yes.
E Child: I would like to be one of the friends.
A Leader: That's also possible.

These two examples aim at different kinds of reflection. In the first example, the children and their leader reflect on the meaning of 'good' in Good Friday. In the example from Rondom the leader invites the children to fit themselves into the picture and the story. This is a more emotional reflection.

In both examples the leader is present as a believer, who has problems with the meaning of the Passion herself, who would be scared herself. She presents herself as a believer, just as the children. By presenting herself like that, the children are invited to join her in reflecting and believing. The leader is an exemplarious believer.

Faith in these examples has a reflective aspect. The conversation is about more than the state of affairs, it is also about what the children and leader think about it, feel about it. Bonny considers some fact strange, the children of Rondom are invited to step into the picture. Faith here is personal and reflective, both for leaders and children. That is why the leader can (and probably should) be in it as a believing person, as mentioned above.

c. Sermon

Sermons in church are not for children, they go to the children's service during the sermon. Though this might –in practice- be true, there are also sermons in children's services. This pattern is clearly recognizable.

An example is:

In the children's service in *Harmonie* (6-7 years old children) the leader concludes the conversation after and about the story as follows:

A Leader: But there are countries in which you are not allowed to do that [speak about God].

A There are countries where you go to jail if you tell that you believe in the Lord God.

A There still are.

E That is terrible.

E Luckily we live in a country where you can sing in the streets if you want and can tell without any problem.

C That's why we have to tell a lot so everyone can hear it.

Sermons are always held by one of the leaders. Sermons have a kind of conclusion, in the example above 'That's why we have to tell a lot so everyone can hear it'. This conclusion always is an action: spread the good news, think about each other, give something to someone poor, etc. The corresponding speech act is either a directive or a commissive. These speech acts both are act-oriented. Directives are uttered by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. 'Open the door' is typical. In commissives, like promising, the speaker commits himself to doing something: 'I will bring you home'. In sermons you often see a kind of plural commissive 'We will do our best not to

quarrel'. This is both a commisive and a directive. It is a commissive because the speaker promises not to quarrel. It also is a directive because the hearers are told not to quarrel. This commissive or directive is the central speech act of a sermon. In fact, this is the conclusion of the (moral) reasoning in the sermon, in which the preceding assertions are premises.

Sermons are also characterized by a distinct emotional flavour, achieved by using (many) expressives and/or by using repetitions. This emotional flavour stresses the sincerity condition of the concluding commissive or directive, it motivates the hearers to do it.

As in church, the sermon is reasoning, usually from the bible story or the theme towards a moral conclusion. Because a sermon-pattern is quite short for a sermon, though not for a pattern, it is quite fast paced and condensed reasoning.

Sermon patterns are so related to the sermon in church, and when 'preaching', the leader is taking a role like a minister. Important is that the act-oriented aspects of the sermon include the leader. Faith in this pattern has to do with what you do and have to do. The sermon pattern concerns the moral aspects of faith.

d. Social talk

In the *social talk pattern* the conversation partners talk with each other as equals. Very often it is a conversation between two partners, with the rest of the group listening. Another child may be partner in a next instance of the pattern: the leader talks 'social' with consecutive children. The communication in a social talk pattern is sincere and its aim is in the conversation itself. The partners express their feelings, tell about something that is the case, ask about what the other told etcetera. They are concerned about each other. The function of a social talk pattern is like that of an expressive: express oneself about a certain state of affairs. Speech acts that occur in a social talk pattern are real questions, expressives, assertives.

I'll give two examples:

In the children's service of the *Jozefkerk* (children from 10-12 years old) there has been a name-round and a collection. Then the leader asks:

¿ Leader: Then I'd like to know from you, does anyone want to tell something before we start?

¿ Do you want to tell a story, do you want to know something from me?

Fay.

A Fay: It's my grandmother's birthday today.

¿ Leader: Whose birthday?

A Fay: My grandmother's.

E Leader: Okay, how nice.

¿ And are you going to have coffee there after the service?

¿ At your grandmother's?

A Fay: Yes.

A And right after the service because I came here alone.

A Leader: O.

¿ Are your father and mother not here?

¿ And Joyce not either?

A Fay: No.

A They stayed at home, because they didn't feel like it.

In the children's service in *Fundament* (children from 4-6 years old) the leader lists points for the prayer. Several children have told something.

Leader: We will continue with Philip.

A Philip: That I got, I got a sticker, a football book.

E Leader: O look.

A Philip: And I already got some stickers, but I won't get it complete.

¿ Leader: No?

A Philip: No.

¿ Leader: And from what, from Dutch football or foreign?

A Philip: All of it.

A It is just a football book and you can stick stickers into it,

A but it is only until next week, that campaign and then it's over.

E Leader: O. Pity.

A Philip: But my sister says the campaign will be back soon.

C Leader: O. Well, let's hope that.

Conversation in the social talk pattern is like the conversation at a reception. People talk to each other for a short while, and when they exchanged what they wanted to, they go on to a next conversation. Usually, you talk to people you know. By talking you get to know each other better. It is like that in the social talk pattern: people notice each other and know a little bit more from each other. They are part of each other's social network. The conversation is between equals, perhaps even like between friends. The leader is the continuous factor in a series of conversations: she asks who wants to tell something, she moves over to another child.

Faith is not always clearly present in the social talk pattern. It can be present, as in the second example, where the leader listed points for prayer. If you look closely, Philip starts his first sentence with 'that' – short for 'I want to thank for that I got a football book'. In that case, the social talk is in the eyes of the leader and children in front of God: he is listening into it. This does not seem explicitly the case in the first example, though for this leader community is important in her faith. She gives attention to that aspect of her faith by these social talks.

3. Faith in conversations in children's services

The four described patterns in the conversation in children's services each stress a different aspect of faith.

In exam patterns knowing facts is important for faith: how does a bible story run, what about the Ecclesiastical year, what do certain words mean?

In conversation patterns reflection is important for faith. By asking the leader invites the children to reflect on their faith or on a bible story. Faith is about what the children feel or think about the subject. In the given examples, the leader is present as a believer herself, just as the children are. Faith is in these patterns personal and reflective, for children and leader.

In the sermon pattern, faith is about the moral aspects of believing. To say it in the words that were theme of one of the children's services: faith has consequences. The pattern in which these moral aspects appear is dominated by the leader. She tells the children what the consequences are. Theoretically, the children are able to reason morally themselves. I have not seen that in the observed children's services.

Faith is not always clearly present in the social talk pattern. It can be directly present, as in the second example, where the leader listed points for prayer. It can also be indirectly present: by using a social talk pattern, the community in the children's service, as part of the community of believers, is strengthened.

These broadly varied modes of conversation refer to likewise varied modes of faith. We have seen that faith in the conversations in children's services has aspects of knowledge, aspects of reflection, moral aspects and social aspects. That faith has these aspects (and more) is not a new conclusion, but that this is clearly reflected in the ways children and leaders talk, is. Apparently children's services fit in with a broadly varied view of faith.

As a rule, the leaders have more influence than the children, especially so in the exam patterns and the sermon pattern. In these cases leaders try to transfer knowledge and moral rules. As the exam pattern is very common, this seems contradictory to what the leaders want to do in children's services: touch the children (characteristically by a bible story). This is not a strict antithesis: transferring knowledge is seen as laying fundaments for reflection and touching. I have seen in the children's services fluent transitions between exam patterns and conversation patterns. The children switch easily between the two modes.

4. Talks in children's theology

In some of the children's services we have seen, the children talk about God, they practice theology in the non-academic sense of the word. In the German speaking countries 'Children's theology' (*Kindertheologie*) is a relatively new and important approach in the pedagogy of religion. Children's theology takes the children serious as subject of their own faith and opinions.[12] This can be done in three ways:

- Theology *for* children: adults provide the children with fine tuned explanations from academic theology. The theology is adapted, made suitable for children. Many good children's bibles are examples of this approach.
- Theology *with* children: children and adults are together looking for answers to a theological question (usually provided by the adult). This could be a conversation about the meaning of e.g. Easter.

- Theology *by* children: children develop their own images and thoughts. In research especially theology *by* children is important. Szagun[13] uses diverse creative methods to investigate the development of images of God in children.

These three processes are in fact interrelated, it can be necessary to give some information (theology for children) in order to stimulate the thought of the children. Kuindersma[14] calls this scaffolding: you use a scaffold to be able to build higher.

Since 2002 every year a yearbook of children's theology (*Jahrbuch Kindertheologie*)[15] has been published. These books are, among other, a rich source for protocols of children's theology in diverse situations and on diverse themes. When reading these protocols it becomes clear that even very young children are able to theologize for themselves. They formulate perspectives on God, on death, blessing or on bible stories that are refreshing and theologically relevant. From these yearbooks I derive two fragments. I will analyze these with the above described method.

The first fragment[16] is from a Sunday school in Moritzburg that uses the Godly Play method.[17] The story of exile and return was told and shown, using figures and a model of Jerusalem. Afterwards the eight children (6-11 years old) talk about the story, they talked about the protection the city walls of Jerusalem give.

¿ Teacher: What did you like about it? ...

E Charlotte: That was quite in the beginning. (*points towards Jerusalem*)

¿ Teacher: That here (*points towards Jerusalem*), that they were in the protected city, that what you liked?
Charlotte nods.

A Teacher: With the city walls.

A Charlotte: Yes.

A Mike: They were not protected - the city walls didn't bring about it.
(...)

¿ Teacher: So they wouldn't have had to build it up again?

A Mike: Yes, however, because the next opponent is perhaps as stupid as the ones in the beginning.

A Teacher: Oh, you mean the Assyrians.

A	Mike: Yes, those who gave up right away. (*laughing and mumbling*)
¿	Teacher: So it wasn't so bad the city walls were there?
A	Mike: Yes, but they didn't protect them very well.
A	Teacher: Not against the Babylonians. (...)
¿	Teacher: Is there something else, where you say, that has to do with me in the story?
A	Ruth (*points to a figure in Jerusalem*): I am here.
E	Teacher: In the city, protected.
A	Heike: I am the red one, I am the red one.
E	Peter: I am protected here.
A	Ruth: I am the striped one.
¿	Mike (*to Peter*): Hey? But Moritzburg is not protected – yes because they, because they can march right into Moritzburg. (*The children talk through each other*)
A	Peter: That is true, you can march into almost every town, that is no problem. (*They talk about the technical possibilities*).
A	Teacher: Because Moritzburg doesn't have city walls.
A	Lea (*pointing to Jerusalem*): But here are city walls.
A	Peter: I don't know whether you know a place that has such city walls.

The conversation then continues about the Wall and its breakdown. This Wall was meant to keep people in.

In this fragment only conversation-patterns appear. The teacher asks only a few questions that are all real questions. The children reflect further. This is mainly an emotional reflection on the personal meaning of the story and aspects of it. The expressives in this fragment are scarce, but talking about being protected is closely related to expressing the feeling of being protected. The children connect an aspect of the story, that Jerusalem was protected by walls with their own experiences of living in a town without walls, and with part of the recent history of Germany, the fall of the Wall in 1989.

Compared to the earlier fragments the role of the teacher in this conversation is restricted, even the only order-statement is made by one of the children. The conversation as such is dependent on the telling of the story, which of course was an initiative of the teacher (and the concept of a Sunday school).

The second fragment is from a Swiss Kindergarten.[18] Four children (five and six years old) and their teacher talk about time. They use 'philosophy with children' as a method for the first time. They read the picture book *Where time lives* and then talk about time, where it lives, what it looks like, whether children or adults have more time, what would happen when there was no time anymore. They have mentioned that there is the time of the clocks and time you can't see.

A Teacher: So time is important, so that we know when we have to eat ...
A Sophie: ... Yes, and that we know what time it is.
¿ Teacher: Mmm, and why is time also important?
¿ What do the others think?
A Peter: So that it is not always day or night.
A Thomas: And so that we know when we have to go to kindergarten.
A Otherwise, everyone would come at some time, and our teacher could never do something with all together.
A Anton: So that we know when we have to sleep.
A Peter: But for that we don't really need a time, because it gets day, night, day, night,
A and when it gets dark, you know it is bedtime.
A Thomas: Also to know whether it is time to eat, you don't absolutely need a time.
A When your tummy rumbles, then you know you have to eat something.
¿ Teacher: So for you, time is not so important?
A Anton: In fact not.
A The time on the alarm clock, you don't really need that.
A Because every man has his own clock, you know, for the time you got to live.
A This clock shows you when you have to eat or sleep.

A And this time tells you when you have to learn to swim or to cycle.

¿ Teacher: And when do you get this clock?

A Peter: The Lord God gives it to you when you are born.

A And the Lord God has all those clocks in heaven.

A He has a big heaven like this (*spreads his arms*) and all the clocks have a place in there.

This conversation (and even the longer one it is a fragment of) consists also entirely of conversation-patterns. In this case, the reflection is on the meaning of the concept 'time'. The teacher just helps the conversation along, she hardly asks questions. Even the summaries are partly formulated by the children. The children distinguish between time as measured by clocks and time as an ongoing process. This process is connected to natural processes and growth. Peter connects God with this kind of time. Also in this case the conversation as such is dependant on the initiative of the teacher. This is normal, children hardly ever converse theologically among themselves, without impulses of adults.[19] Adults as a rule also need impulses from outside to theologize.

The faith aspect that is addressed in these conversations is the reflective aspect, which is completely in line with the central point of children's theology: children are able to do theology. The relatively small role of the teacher in these fragments is also in line with that accent. In the observed children's services, the role of the teacher was larger. Apparently, children can do without the presence of an exemplarious believer. I do doubt whether an exemplarious believer is counter-productive: in the children's services the influence of the leader as a believer herself was definitely not a brake on the reflective process.

In order to be able to reflect, children do need an impulse: stories, questions or otherwise. This was provided by the teachers (or leaders), within (usually) the structure of a children's service in a church.

If we compare these children's theology fragments with those from the children's services, we see that from the four aspects of faith we found in children's services, only one is found in children's theology: the reflective aspect. We didn't see an aspect of knowledge or knowledge transfer in the above cited fragments. I suppose the impulses that precede these fragments have aspects of that element of faith.

The moral element is not found in these fragments, nor in any other protocol from children's theology I read. As the moral element in children's services is usually an one-way traffic from the leader to the children, it does not fit in with the central position of the children as subjects in children's theology. It would be pity if we threw the moral baby away with the bath water. Children can be seen as moral subjects, and a moral conversation that justifies their subjectivity is theoretically possible, though not found in the observations.

The social aspect of faith was not present either in the fragments of children's theology. As this aspect usually found its place in the beginning of children's services, that is not surprising. The strong focus on reflection and content in children's theology might cause less attention for these aspects in publications.

The radical choice of children's theology for the subject child seems to lead to a somewhat unbalanced approach of the faith of these subjects. The reflective aspect is stressed, maybe even over-stressed. In order to balance the faith of children, children's theology should and could develop adequate approaches to, amongst others, the moral and social aspects of faith as part of the subjective theology of the child.

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NOTES

[1] In this research project we have chosen for using observations instead of interviewing children. Interviewing children about the children's service is possible. We tried that, but we didn't create a setting in which this was fruitful. Just asking children in the hustle-bustle after a service is not enough; a space should be created in which they feel free to talk.

[2] Most important for my work are: Searle, J.R. (1969), *Speech Acts: An essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press and Searle, J.R. (1979), *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[3] I have chosen for an analysis based on Searle, because this is a descriptive theory. It (only) explains how the act of speaking works. Most theories on conversation are normative, they state (implicitly) that e.g. open questions are better than closed questions, that conversation-making is of less value than sharing opinions.

[4] Veen, A. van der (2004), *Professionaliteit en geloof: 'Dat kunnen wij wel'. Een onderzoek naar het leraarperspectief op godsdienstlessen in het rooms-katholiek basisonderwijs*, privately published doctoral dissertation KU Nijmegen.

[5] By focusing on patterns in conversation, I leave Searle's theory of speech acts (which in the first place was not meant to be empirical but philosophical). The analysis is based on a description in speech acts of the actual communication, but the patterns are higher-order concepts. Patterns are less fixed than speech acts: not all of them are characterized by a univocal order of speech acts. Variation is possible.

[6] Almost half of the found patterns are exam patterns.

[7] In the examples in this article I add codes for the speech acts in front of each sentence. These codes are:

?	exam question	A	assertive
¿	real question	E	expressive
C	commissive	!	directive

[8] Figure 1, found at http://www.bijbelkleurplaten.nl/joh19.gif (21-1-2009)

[9] There called the standard pattern.

[10] Cited from Veen, A. van der (2004), *Professionaliteit en geloof: 'Dat kunnen wij wel'. Een onderzoek naar het leraarperspectief op godsdienstlessen in het rooms-katholiek basisonderwijs*, privately published doctoral dissertation KU Nijmegen, p. 106.

[11] Another reason is that exam questions in children's services can shift towards presentation questions. The intention of presentation questions is that a random child gives the answer to the question in order to let the group hear the answer. By means of a child the content is presented. The leader (or teacher) decides what the content is. Analogous to exam questions the leader knows 'the answer', but with presentation questions it is intended that the whole group hears this information, not that the leader knows whether a specific child knows the answer. Repeating a child's answer is also presenting it for the whole group.
An analogous shift exists between real questions and exam questions. In real questions the speaker doesn't know the answer, he 'really' wants to know that. In an exam question he only wants to know if a certain child knows. In presentation questions the speaker wants the answer to be presented (by a random child).

[12] This can be connected with the Lutheran faith and doctrines on baptism, i.e. that the (baptized) child has the full seed of faith, though this is not necessary (according to Espen Hasle (University of Oslo) speaking of the Norwegian situation). Faith in children is both present and developing, and some theological opinions stress the 'present' aspect, some (e.g. in congregations where adult baptism is the norm) more the 'developing' aspect.

[13] Szagun, A.-K. (2006), *Dem Sprachlosen Sprache verleihen: Rostocker Langzeitstudie zu Gottesverständnis und Gottesbeziehung von Kindern, die in mehrheitlich konfessionslosem Kontext aufwachsen*, Jena: Edition Paidei.

[14] Kuindersma, H. (2008), 'Van kindervragen naar kindertheologie. Een introductie van een nieuwe godsdienst-pedagogische aanpak', *Praktische Theologie*, 1, pp. 5-18.

[15] Bucher, A.A. e.a. eds. (2002-...), *Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie 1-...*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag.

[16] Cited from: Steinhäuser, M. (2007), 'Godly Play als Instrument subjektiver Theologie' in Bucher, A.A. e.a. eds., *>Mann kann Gott alles erzählen, auch kleine*

Geheimnisse< Kinder erfahren und gestalten Spritualität, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, pp. 65-79, my translation.

[17] Berryman, J.W. (1995), *Teaching Godly Play. The Sunday Morning Handbook*, Nashville: Abingdon Press.

[18] Cited from: Zoller Morf, E. 2004, 'Philosophieren mit Kinder über die Notwendigkeit der Zeit' in: Bucher, A.A. e.a. eds., *>Zeit ist immer da< Kinder erleben Hoch-Zeiten und Fest-Tage*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, pp. 159-164, my translation.

[19] In Zimmermann, M. (2005) 'Methoden der Kindertheologie. Zur Präzisierung von Forschungsdesigns im kindertheologischen Diskurs' in http://www.theo-web.de/zeitschrift/ausgabe-2006-01/Zimmermann_Kindertheologie-END2.pdf (27-11-08) the author states on p. 108 that everyday situations in which children theologize are very rare.