

The Godly Play Spiral: A Mirthful Coincidence of Threes

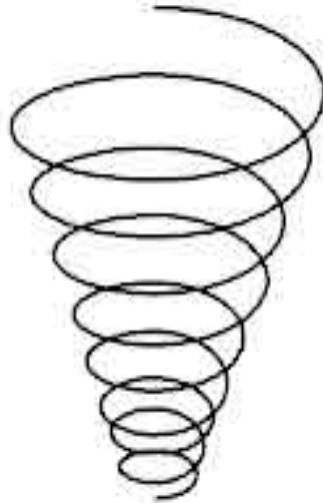
The Spiral moves upward and outward through early, middle, and late childhood.

Adolescence
*An inner working model of the
Christian Language System*

Late Childhood (9-12)
Core Lessons
Enrichment, Extensions & Synthesis

Middle Childhood (6-9)
Core Lessons
Enrichment & Extensions

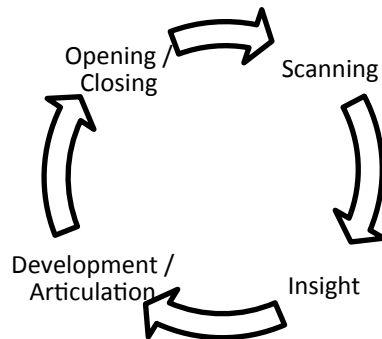
Early Childhood (3-6)
Core Lessons



- **What moves the spiral upward and outward?**

- There are three circles that help generate its energy. As the spiral is pushed upward and outward, the art of how to use the Christian language system to cope with the existential issues with which all individuals grapple.

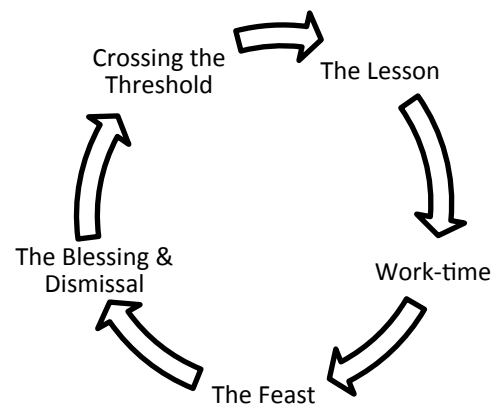
1. The Creative Process



- a. Children and adults tend to prefer certain aspects of this circle, which are related to their personalities.
- b. In Godly Play the mentor attempts to move the children through the whole circle of the creative process, despite personal preferences, so they will have the whole process available to them.
- c. The Imago Dei is often obscured or broken in people, so Godly Play works to counter this by an emphasis on the whole process.

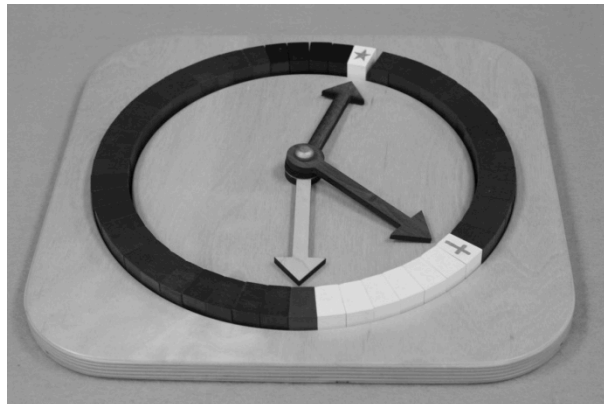
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2. The circle of the dynamics in each class.



- a. This movement follows the deep structure of Christian worship.
- b. It is an indirect preparation for the children to be involved directly in the worship of the congregation.

3. The turning of the circle of the church year.



- a. We can spend a life-time moving around this circle, discovering something new each time if we have the energy, the imagination and the creative support of a community to help us to continue this quest.
- b. It is part of Godly Play's task to prepare the way for this journey.

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- **How do these three circles work together to give energy to the spiral?**
 - It usually takes three encounters with a lesson for children to be able to understand it and its context in the liturgical year.
 - Meeting a lesson three times gives children the confidence and competence to use it artfully to make meaning.
 - In an ordinary parish situation this means encountering a particular lesson once each year, so it typically takes three years for a lesson to become operational in the life of a child for each developmental stage.

What takes place during these three encounters?

Year One: The child sees where the lesson sits on the shelf and learns how to get it out and put it away.

Year Two: The child remembers seeing it before. The teacher might say to a child who comments on this, “It’s good you recognize it. Now comes the hard part. Can you discover more?”

Year Three: The child is comfortable with the mechanics of the lesson and now can focus more on carefully one the words. Now the teacher could expect the child to get the lesson on independently and begin to use it to explore their personal meaning.

What happens next?

- During middle and late childhood a similar process takes place from a different developmental perspective.
- In addition the Core lessons are extended and enriched by the Extension and Enrichment materials now available in the classroom.
- In late childhood the synthesis lessons.

The Godly Play lessons and the way the room is laid out embody the Christian language system. When the classroom and the lessons are internalized, children have available to them a working model of the language system to think with and to use in discussions with others about what is most important in life and death.

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Definitions

“Core lessons” are the key sacred story, liturgical action, parable, and silence lessons. An example from the sacred story genre is “The Days of Creation.”

“Extensions” extend the core lessons. They expand not only sacred stories but also the liturgical and parable lessons. An example is the story of “Ruth,” which helps extend the narratives of “The Temple” and “The Ark and the Tent” by implicitly connecting them. The “Ruth” lesson joins “Samuel” and “David” to do this. Extensions sit on the shelves below the core lessons, since core lessons are displayed on the top shelf in the Godly Play room.

“Enrichment” lessons do not extend so much but enrich or deepen the core lessons. This kind of lesson goes over the same material that is in the core lesson from a different angle or in more detailed way. An example is using the model of Jerusalem to re-tell what was said about Holy Week during the presentation of “The Faces .” This adds detail explicitly and implicitly by setting the story more securely in its geographical setting of valleys and hills.

“Afterwards” lessons involve events and symbols that are not part of the Biblical era. An example is the variety of crosses that have been developed since the original Roman cross Jesus died on. Another example is the lesson about “The Church.”

“Synthesis” lessons make a synthesis of key lessons in the four genres. The synthesis for the *sacred stories* integrates key narratives to make a lesson about the Holy Trinity. The synthesis lesson for the *parables* synthesizes all of the parables from the Synoptic Gospels and the “I-Am” statements from the Gospel of John around a series of questions about the whole corpus of parables and what they create as a whole. The synthesis for the *liturgical action* lessons draws together the liturgical lessons into a series of circles. The synthesis lesson for the *contemplative silence* genre is to take the older children into the church to sit in silence and to see if they become more aware of God’s presence and then to return to the Godly Play room to wonder about what happened.

The *afterwards* lessons are slightly different, since they don’t represent a particular genre of Biblical communication. These lessons build on the four genres of the foundational Christian communication system, but they evoke how this foundation has worked itself out in the history of the church. The synthesis lesson for this kind of communication, then, is to take the older children on tours of the church’s interior and exterior to see how what is inside and outside draws on and evokes both the primary, Biblical communication and what has developed since then. An example is the shape of the church itself and what it communicates in its particular features and generally as a whole.