

Tilburg University

A Cognitive-Semantic Engagement with a Biblical Text in Religious Education and Youth Ministry: Designing Exercises to Initiate a Narrative Dialogue

Melisse, Corline; Kienstra, Natascha; van Dijk-Groeneboer, M.C.H.

Publication date:
2022

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Melisse, C., Kienstra, N., & van Dijk-Groeneboer, M. C. H. (2022). *A Cognitive-Semantic Engagement with a Biblical Text in Religious Education and Youth Ministry: Designing Exercises to Initiate a Narrative Dialogue*. Paper presented at 2022 IASYM Annual Meeting, Atlanta, United States.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH A BIBLICAL TEXT IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY: DESIGNING EXERCISES TO INITIATE A NARRATIVE DIALOGUE¹

Corline Melisse, Natascha Kienstra, & Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer
Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Tilburg University, The Netherlands
N.H.H.Kienstra@tilburguniversity.edu
2022 IASYM Annual Meeting, July 11-14

ABSTRACT

Searching for new methods to initiate a narrative dialogue in secondary school classrooms, cognitive semantics is used. The purpose is to create more openness to a biblical text in order that students will actually enter into a narrative dialogue with the story. The text chosen is Genesis 1:1-2:3. A sequence of exercises is developed. This study focusses on two, namely 'mystery' and 'essay'. Through the 'mystery' exercise, students experience that if they know more about the time and culture in which the story was written down, they gain a better understanding of the text and more sympathy (for its meaning). By means of writing an essay, students enter into a dialogue with the story. Several higher order thinking skills are reached by doing the exercises. The paper concludes by elaborating the exercises to enable Youth ministry to initiate a narrative dialogue to enhance Religious Education.

Introduction

Values, religion and institutional commitment of young people are changing in a secularized country such as the Netherlands. Different types of young people can be defined, based on their ways of belonging and on their measure of belief, i.e.: to what extent they are connected to a religious institute and to what extent they are actively involved with religion in forming their identity. Youth ministry can be geared towards different types of youth, when realizing that not only the 'Fortissimos' are to be inspired (compare Van Dijk-Groeneboer 2015). This article presents conducted research on designed exercises providing a rationale for the majority of young people – Fortissimos as well as 'Tranquillos', 'Spirituosos', and 'Legatos' since the classrooms are filled with this diversity - to enter into a narrative dialogue, as well as examples of the exercises 'mystery' and 'essay' in religious education (RE) in the Netherlands. These exercises can become strategies towards fruitful religious education and also can provide interesting elements towards a more future-proof youth ministry.

Conceptual framework

¹ This research is part of a doctoral thesis: Cornelia Jacoba Maria Melisse, "De mens als beeld van God. Een cognitief-semantic studie van Genesis 1:26-27 en van Kolossenzen 1:15; 3:10 en naar het gebruik van Genesis 1:1-2:3 in de klas." PhD. diss. Tilburg University, Enschede: Ipskamp Printing, 2020.

There are four approaches of RE, namely learning in, about, from religion (Grimmitt 1994, 2000), and for religion (Alii 2009, pp. 90-91, 93, 96, 102, 110-112). The acquisition of religious (meta-)concepts and of religious thinking skills is an example of learning about religion (Vermeer 2012). Learning from religion can be achieved by reading the life stories of other people so that students are challenged to examine their own story (Roebben 2015). As a consequence, a narrative dialogue is initiated. Students are considered as active subjects who construct their own world view (see Molenda 2008, pp. 15-16). In this process, they need to be supported by their teacher, namely with respect to the use of scaffolds such as feedback, hints, instructing, explaining, modeling, and questioning (Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen 2011, 46). Based on the revised taxonomy of Bloom, Anderson, and Krathwohl, six thinking skills can be distinguished (Krathwohl 2002, 212). 'Analyse', 'evaluate' and 'create' are higher order thinking skills, whereas 'remember', 'understand' and 'apply' are lower order thinking skills.

Searching for new methods to initiate a narrative dialogue with a biblical text in secondary school classrooms, cognitive grammar was used. *Cognitive Grammar* (Taylor 2002, 4, 9) in relation to exegesis, which can be called cognitive semantics, can be made fruitful for RE. It is possible to follow the starting point of Cognitive Grammar that the meaning of a word is determined by its users. If this helps in obtaining a better understanding of the word, it can also reduce the unfamiliarity that students experience while reading the text in which this word is used and hopefully lowering the threshold for entering into a narrative dialogue with the text.

Based on four design principles for RE (Melisse, Kienstra, & Van Dijk-Groeneboer 2022), we have designed teaching material for five lessons in which Gen. 1:1-2:3 and the meaning of the verses 26-27, which is defined by means of *Cognitive Grammar*, are pivotal. This teaching material consists of several exercises that focus on the acquisition of the religious concept 'image of God', as this emerges in Gen. 1:1-2:3 (the exercises 'maps from memory', 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery'), on the application of this concept (the exercise 'concepts to work with'), or on entering into a narrative dialogue with the text (the exercise 'essay'). In order to acquire the different meanings of the concept 'image of God', cognitive semantics is used. The purpose is to create more openness to the text, in order that students will actually enter into a narrative dialogue with the story.

Sequence of the different exercises

Five exercises are listed in the following order as they lead students to move substantively from reading and interpreting the creation story, to applying the concepts from this story, and finally to relating themselves to the story: 'maps from memory', 'exegetical reading', 'mystery', 'concepts to work with', and 'essay'. Here a build-up in demanded thinking skills is expected, so that the exercises will lead to the development of higher thinking skills as distinguished by Bloom, Anderson and Krathwohl (Krathwohl 2002, 212). The exercises 'maps from memory', 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery' are aimed at understanding and analyzing; applying and evaluating takes place in the exercise 'concepts to work with' and the final exercise 'essay' concerns evaluating and creating.

In the context of doing philosophy in the classroom, Kienstra, Karskens, and Imants (2014, 289, 291-292) identified three forms of truth finding:

1. Doing philosophy as a method of connective truth finding or communicative action

2. Doing philosophy as a type of test-based truth finding
3. Doing philosophy in the form of a juridical debate, which entails judging truth-value and making judgments (i.e., truth-value analysis)

The first form involves doing philosophy as a form of connective truth finding, wherein students search for the truth together using narratives and conversations. The second is doing philosophy as a kind of test-based truth finding, in which students search for scientific truths, as practiced by scientists. The third is doing philosophy as a juridical way of finding the truth and truth-value of the competing/different or opposite claims through analysis by a competent judge and reaching a verdict. In our research, we present these three forms of doing philosophy as a relevant educational context in which teacher and student activities can be understood (Kienstra, Imants, Karskens, & Van der Heijden 2015, 5-6, 10; Kienstra 2016, 37-38).

In an earlier small-scale study of eight philosophy lessons, the juridical debate approach was observed more often in more effective lessons; that is, students engage in multiple philosophical activities that are hierarchically ordered and have increasing levels of difficulty. The approach of connective truth finding was observed more often in less effective lessons; and the test-based truth-finding approach was found in both more and less effective philosophical lessons (Kienstra, Imants, Karskens, & Van der Heijden 2015, 20-21).

A similar study of ten philosophy lessons shows that the first approach is again the least effective. In contrast to the earlier study, this research shows that the second approach is more effective than the third approach (Kienstra & Van der Heijden 2018, 5, 15).

Several exercises studied and classified by Kienstra, Karskens, and Imants can also be used within RE. The exercises ‘maps from memory’ and ‘mystery’, which both are adapted and included in the teaching material, are examples of the first approach of truth finding, while in the exercise ‘(philosophical) reading of primary texts’ on which the exercise ‘exegetical reading’ of a text is partly based, the first and second approaches are important (Kienstra, Karskens, & Imants 2014, 300). The second approach is also important in the exercise ‘concepts to work with’. When students write their own version of the creation story, they enter into a dialogue with the story and, through rewriting the story, reach a verdict on it. In the exercise ‘essay’ the third pattern can thus be found. On the basis of the research of the philosophy lessons, it can be expected that the exercises that were included in the second part of the teaching material will develop higher thinking activities.

Table 1. Five RE exercises mapped against approach, students’ activities, scaffolding, truth finding and thinking skills.

	Exercise	Approach	Students’ activities	Scaffolding	Connected truth finding (Ctf), Test-based truth finding (Ttf), Juridical debate (Jd)	Thinking skills
1	maps from memory	about religion	comparing three works of art on the creation of man	instructing, feedback, hints, questioning	Ctf	analyse

2	exegetical reading	about religion	-reading Gen. 1:1-2:3 -interpreting Gen. 1:24-31 using assignments and questions	instructing, feedback, hints, questioning	Ctf & Ttf	understand and analyse
3	mystery	about religion	solving a mystery and answering some questions about the information obtained in the mystery	instructing, feedback, hints, explaining	Ctf	analyse
4	concepts to work with	about religion and from religion	answering questions in order to apply the concepts of 'worship of images', 'prohibition to make graven images' and 'image of God'	instructing, hints, questioning	Ttf	understand, apply and evaluate
5	essay	from religion	writing their own version of the creation story and arguing for the choices made in this story	instructing, feedback, hints, questioning, explaining	Tw & Jd	evaluate and create

New exercises: Mystery and Essay

'Mystery': why is humankind created as the image of God?

The expectation is that through the 'mystery' exercise, students will experience that if they know more about the time and culture in which the creation story was written down, they can understand the meaning of the concept 'image of God' even better. Indeed, this meaning is determined by the context in which the word is used. The importance of having knowledge of the historical and social context has already been addressed in the exercise 'exegetical reading' and is now briefly repeated in text. Also the most important aspect of the historical and social context is shared, namely that the story was probably written down during or shortly after the Babylonian exile, i.e. in the same time when the ban on images was imposed (Schroer 1987, 12-13). The other information of interest could also be communicated to the students in this way, but in this transfer the students have a passive role. In the 'mystery' exercise, however, the students receive all the information, but have to organize it themselves in order to be able to answer the question why in the creation story humankind is created as the image of God.

The 'mystery' exercise is one of the exercises within the Thinking Through Religious Education spectrum (Baumfield 2002). A question is presented to the students, who are divided into small groups, and all kinds of information is given on cards. Several answers are possible to the question and the students have to determine which information is relevant and which answer

they think can be given to the question asked (Baumfield 2002, 78). The exercise is slightly modified here. In the original exercise, students can give multiple good answers, with one answer being better than the other (Havekes, De Vries, Oolbekkink 2009, 57). In the mystery presented to the students here, the information gives three different answers to the same question. All of these answers are correct and equally correct. By properly organizing the information and discovering which information belongs together, all answers can be found: the information can be divided into three groups and each chunk of information gives one answer to the question posed. These three answers focus on the acquisition of the concept ‘image of God’ and are therefore the different meanings of this concept. In the first place, within the then cognitive worldview, cult images were considered to be the representation of the deity depicted, in which he or she was really present. The statue represented the physical, anthropomorphic form of the deity (Berlejung 1999, 109-111). In Israel’s polemic against cult statues, man stated that the divine was not present in an image and images were meaningless and without power (Berlejung 1999, 141-142; Middlemas 2014, 28, 43). Gen. 1:26-27 makes clear that the image of God is no longer formed by a wooden or metal statue, but by humankind: humankind is the image of God. Secondly, in accordance with the cult statues, humankind resembles God. Thirdly, humankind represents God and may rule the earth.

When solving a mystery, students always work together in small groups. By thinking together about the information given, they are able to order it. To support them in doing this, each group is given four clues as to what orderings can be made.

The teacher has a guiding role in this exercise. In addition to giving the extra instructions, he or she should walk around and list whether all the groups are organizing the information correctly and are able to find the different answers to the question. He or she can give feedback on the categorizing of the information by the students, but also help them further by asking questions or giving an extra tip or clue. Thus, different forms of scaffolding are possible here.

After the mystery is solved, some questions need to be answered. By making these questions the students can connect the answers from the mystery with what they have read in the creation story in the exercise ‘exegetical reading’ and with what they have discovered by studying the works of art in the exercise ‘maps from memory’. It is also made clear to them once again that the meaning of words and texts becomes clearer when one has more knowledge about the historical and social context in which the story originated. The students check their answers to the mystery and the accompanying questions themselves. There is no class discussion afterwards, although the teacher may decide to do this if, during the making of the exercise, merely guiding the students proves to be insufficient.

The student activities that are important in solving the mystery are reading, understanding, and organizing information. By doing them, the thinking skill of analyzing can be achieved.

Table 2. Worksheet of the Exercise ‘Mystery’.

Duration
One lesson.
Introduction
Earlier in the exercise ‘exegetical reading’ you have discovered that in the creation story humankind is created as the image of God. You also read which explanation for this is given in the story. Moreover, you have learned that to trace the meaning of a story, you have to read the story very carefully and that it is useful to know more about the time and culture in which the writer lived and the story therefore originated. We have already taken the first step: you have read the story carefully. Now it is time for the second step: to find information about the time and culture in which the story originated and to connect this information to the story itself. We do this in this exercise.

The story was probably written down during or just after the Babylonian exile. The Israelites (the name for the Jews at the time) were dominated by the Babylonians during the Babylonian exile. The Babylonians didn't allow the elite Israelites to live in their own land, but took them to another area of the Babylonian empire to live. This is called the exile. Since the Israelites were afraid that their own culture and stories would be lost, they started writing down their stories in the exile. Before the exile, these stories were passed down orally from generation to generation.

Because it is difficult and time-consuming for you to search on your own for further information about this time and the culture of the Israelites and that of the Babylonians, this information has already been gathered for you. However, you must determine what information belongs together and which answers provide the information to the question why humankind is created as the image of God.

Assignment

You will be given a number of cards with information by your teacher. In your foursome, study all the information. Determine which information belongs together to form different groups of information. In total, you will be given three groups of information.

Within the groups of information found, place the cards in the correct order.

Using the information found, try to answer the following question: why is it stated by the Israelites that humankind is created as the image of God?

Note: There are multiple possible answers, three in total. You can use each group of information for one answer.

In addition, note that the cards do not literally represent the answer, you must think carefully about how you write down the answer yourself.

To get you started, each of you will be given an additional clue.

If you have any other suggestions for answers of your own, please write the information on the additional blank cards you will receive from your teacher.

Questions

Humankind is the image of God, because

Humankind is the image of God, because

Humankind is the image of God, because

Requirements

In this exercise always per foursome: worksheet with explanation, assignments and questions; the cards with information, blank cards and the instructions (the cards should be cut loose in advance by the teacher), pen (students). Answer template of worksheet (should be handed out by the teacher when the mystery is solved).

Cards

In the creation story in the Tenach, humankind is described as the image of God.	In other cultures, whose rulers often seek to rule over the Israelites, many other gods are worshipped through images.
That the Israelites should only believe in God and not depict him is stated in the Ten Commandments which are also found in the Tenach.	The king is called 'image of God' because it is believed that he was appointed by the deity as king.
However, the king could not be everywhere at the same time. In areas where he was king but could not be present, he placed statues of himself as symbol of his power. Those statues thus ruled on his behalf.	The Israelites should not believe in other gods and worship them through images, but to believe only in God.
The statues (often) have the appearance of a human being: the gods are thought to look like humans.	As the image of God, the king may perform all kinds of tasks that God may also perform, such as ruling.
The statue accurately depicts the deity's appearance.	The other texts of the Tenach in which the word 'image' is used often involve images of other gods.
The word 'image' is used not only in the creation story, but also in other texts of the Tenach.	By describing humankind as the image of God, the Israelites can make clear that they are against the worship of other gods as well as against the worship of images. Thus, they do not agree with the cultures that are trying to dominate them.
Statues of other gods are worshipped because these statues are believed to be the gods themselves. For example, they are given beautiful clothing, food is	

offered to them, and they are given a special place in a temple.	
--	--

'Essay': writing a creation story

The students are given the task to write their version of the creation story, considering the original story and the description of humankind as the image of God. Items of this story can be adopted, adapted or omitted and the students must be able to explain their choices. It is also important that the students can make visible in their story that they have written the story in the present tense, thus applying the principle of Cognitive Grammar.

Students thus engage with Gen. 1:1-2:3 and express the extent to which the story has meaning for them. This creates a simple form of a narrative dialogue. The expectation is that, as a result of the exercises 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery', the students will have more knowledge of the time and the culture in which the story was written and of the meanings of the concept 'image of God', they will also have more sympathy for (the meaning of) the story and actually enter into a dialogue with the text. The thinking skills that are central to this exercise are evaluating and creating: the students write a story themselves (creating), in which they have to determine for themselves to what extent they are guided by the original creation story and what their vision of humankind is (evaluating).

Table 3. Worksheet of the Exercise 'Essay'.

Duration
Two lessons.
Introduction
In the exercise 'concepts to work with' is explained that you can think about the question what the creation story can mean for you. To think about this, you have already made some questions about image worship in our time and you have given your opinion about this. Now you are going to think about the creation story as a whole and about the creation of humankind as the image of God. What is your view on this and to what extent has this view been influenced by the time and culture in which you live?
Assignment
Imagine if you were allowed to rewrite the creation story. What would the story look like? The story should show that it was written by you, in the present. In your story, include the following aspects: 1. In how many days do you think God creates the world? And why, in your story, does creation take place in so many days? 2. In the creation story you have been able to read what God creates/makes and on what day he makes it. What do you think he creates and what does not, and in what order? Explain your choice. 3. In the creation story, humankind is created as the image of God. How does God create humankind in your story? And why? 4. How does the way humankind is created affect him? Please explain your answer. 5. Do you want to add certain things to your story? If so, please elaborate.
Procedure
In the first lesson you will think about the different aspects that should be covered in your story by answering the questions above. In the second lesson you elaborate your story.
Requirements
- Computer or laptop. - Elaborate your story in Word. - Your story is a minimum of half an A-4 and a maximum of 1.5 A-4 with font size Verdana .11 or similar. - Make it a story that reads pleasantly. Also pay attention to spelling and workmanship.

Method

The exercises have been taught in seven classes by four different teachers, and analyzed in a qualitative cross-case analysis in another study (Melisse, Kienstra, & Van Dijk-Groeneboer 2022). The data consists of separate words and texts (Miles & Huberman 2014, 10-11), and are the primary and secondary reflections of the students and the reflections of the observers (e.g. the participating teachers, not executing the lesson they are observing). Since it is studied whether during the lessons the students go through a development from the acquisition of a certain religious concept to the conducting of a narrative dialogue, and the students are compared with each other, there is a case study (Yin 2014, 16-17). Each student is a case and these cases are compared with each other in order to make statements about the possible use of cognitive semantics within RE. To make this part of the research project manageable, six students from each class are selected: two students with the highest grade point average (GPA) grades for RE, two students whose GPA is average and two students with the lowest GPA. As a consequence, the total number of cases is 42.

Results

Twenty-seven out of 42 students adopted elements of the original creation story in their essay and other 27 out of 42 students described the creation of humankind. Twenty out of 42 students were able to show in their story aspects of the present. Thirteen out of 42 students claimed to have more sympathy for (the meaning of) the creation story by doing the exercises ‘exegetical reading’ and ‘mystery’. One student commented: “yes more sympathy I can take lessons from it.” One of the 42 students reflected on the question of life “Who is humankind?” by executing the exercises and stated: “I had actually never thought before, why humankind is an image of God.” Twenty-one out of 42 students declared they entered into a dialogue with the creation story while writing their essay and 11 out of 42 students have changed their opinion about the question of life “Who is humankind?”. Three of them gave an explanation. However, one of these explanations shows that the student's opinion has not changed with respect to the question of life “Who is humankind?”. The other two explanations are: “I hadn't thought before why is humankind an image of God?”, “Man is apparently more than a creature created by God.” Some of the reasons why one’s opinion has not changed are: “The text didn’t make me think about it.”, “I have my own view on it and speculations don’t change that.”, “I don’t believe in the creation story.” and “I don’t believe in God, so I don’t believe that humankind has made in the image of God.” Eighteen out of 42 students believed that they were able to show in their story aspects of the present. To illustrate, two essays are presented below. It concerns an essay that can be considered good and an essay that can be considered less good. The latter doesn’t meet the requirements, as the story doesn’t have the minimum length of half an A-4 and is only partly written in narrative form.

The creation story

When god had to figure out how to create the earth he had already made a very big and clever plan in advance to do everything one by one to make the most beautiful earth possible. When god had already thought up his plan he only had to carry it out and that took him 3 days. First

God makes the core of the earth where gravity works. Then God fills the sides with lots of soil and some pieces of soil he lets stick out a little and those are the continents and then he fills the places where the soil doesn't stick out with water. When he has done this he makes sure that everywhere on earth it is not too hot but also not too cold. Then he makes sure there is an atmosphere around the earth. Finally, God creates humankind and animals. God gives humankind a helping hand and makes sure that they can easily get food and that everything is fertile so that they can make and obtain food and drink. He makes sure that there are enough animals on the earth, makes the ground fertile and makes sure that there are also lots of trees. At the beginning he doesn't let too many people live on the earth, because that's where the people have to figure out how to multiply themselves, because that's what god made them for. God also provides different materials on the earth like stone, sand and wood for example and humankind can then work with that to make a beautiful community. God lets the first people come on earth with a reasonable amount of knowledge and people who can learn quickly and work well to be able to build something beautiful as soon as possible. God maintains the world and often looks at how things are in the first year, so if something goes wrong he will still solve it, but after that year the people are like fully independent and they must then solve these problems. The animals that god brings to earth are all not dangerous and they are many and can adapt to live anywhere. As the years go by the animals change because of their environment and they can become hunting animals and then they can be dangerous.

Student 42

1. God creates earth in 6 days. I believe this because it seems to me that this is the best choice since God then has 2 days of rest instead of 1 day.
2. 1st day: god created earth 2nd day: created the trees and bushes 3rd day: God forms the water 4th day: God creates humankind and light 5th day: God can rest 6th day: God can rest
3. God creates Adam and Eve and they have to reproduce. They do get food from God for a living.
4. None of this has any consequences on God. Very easy, in other words.
5. I don't want to add anything to this except that I don't believe and therefore don't think this is interesting at all.

Student 40

Several thinking skills could be reached by doing the exercises. (Table 1, Thinking skills). By writing their essay, 30 out of 42 students reached the thinking skill 'create'. One of the students answered the questions posed, but didn't turn these answers into a story. Thus, the reached thinking skill is 'evaluate'. One of the students presented the theory of the big bang, without writing his/her own story. This can be evaluated as 'remember'. Finally, one the students chose to write down the creation story from his/her own tradition. The corresponding thinking skill is also 'remember'.

Discussion and conclusions

Since the exercise ‘essay’ was designed to bring about a narrative dialogue, most students actually entered into a dialogue. Therefore, learning from religion (Table 1, Approach) was achieved. However, the students didn’t start this dialogue on their own and the text didn’t exhort to reflect upon its meaning, although the students had read and discussed the text extensively in the exercises that were done earlier. Thus, there seems to be no relation between the questions of life of the students and the possible answers given by the text. Nor did any student indicate that reading the text has led to any new questions. This contradicts Roebben's conviction that there is not only a relation between the questions asked by the students and the answers given to these questions by the religious text, but that new questions and new spiritual experiences also arise in young people when they read a religious text (Roebben 2015, 34, 42-43). This raises the question of how this approach is possible from a didactic point of view and whether lessons RE should have this approach as a goal.

The lessons that had learning about religion as their goal had more results than the lessons that focused on learning from religion. The majority of the students were able to understand the principle of Cognitive Grammar and/or the religious concept ‘image of God’, and to apply this concept, thus achieving learning about religion. Learning from religion was achieved in the exercise ‘essay’ as a result of how the exercise was designed. It can perhaps be concluded that the subject of RE for students doesn’t differ substantially from other subjects within secondary education in which the acquisition of knowledge and skills is central. For example, Biesta (2013, 129) notes that the idea that education is also about subjectification is quite recent.

The student's own learning process can be supported by the teacher through scaffolding, where the teacher has the role of coach. Scaffolding is a concept that stems from Vygotsky's vision (1978). Vygotsky states that learning takes place within the so-called Zone of Proximal Development, the zone of those skills that the learner is ‘close’ to mastering, which means that a learner has a certain range what he or she can do without help and what he or she can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky 1978, 86). He adds that the social and cultural context and parents, teachers and peers are important within the learning process. Although the learner constructs his own knowledge through his own experiences with his environment, this involves influence from those who are present in this environment. In this study, we did include the teacher in the context of the learning process, but not yet the peers. Peer reflections, according to Kennedy (2005), should focus not only on another's contribution, the process, but also on the product.

The aim of the ‘essay’ exercise was for students to enter into a narrative dialogue with the text. As said before, the expectation was that by means of cognitive semantics students would have more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text and would therefore more easily enter into a dialogue. Approximately one third of the students indicate that they have more sympathy of the text. This is a fairly small positive result, on the basis of which it can be argued that the principle of Cognitive Grammar is a religious thinking skill that can be of interest to students in the context of learning from religion.

Since the exercise ‘essay’ was designed in such a way as to bring about a narrative dialogue, the majority of the students actually entered into a dialogue with the text. In this way learning from religion was achieved. However, the students didn’t enter into a dialogue with the text on their own and the text did not stimulate thinking, despite the more extensive reading and text treatment in the exercises ‘exegetical reading’ and ‘mystery’.

If a student is challenged by the other's story, it may result in changing his or her opinion. As a result of the lessons, 11 of 42 students changed their opinion about the question of life 'Who is mankind?'. Six of these 11 students indicated that both indicating the structure of the text and answering questions led to a greater understanding of the creation story. The total number of students who had this opinion was 12. Thus, half of these 11 students had a change of opinion. At the same time, five of the 11 students whose opinion had changed, also felt that as a result of the exercises 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery' they gained more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text, while the total number of students who gained more sympathy was 13. Again, it can be said that for almost half of the students their own opinion has changed. This suggests a relation, as we see that changing one's mind about the question 'who is mankind?' is relatively more often preceded by the opinion that through exegesis one has a better understanding of the creation story and/or has more sympathy for (the meaning of) the text as a result of cognitive semantics.

Table 1 lists the highest level of thinking skills that was expected for each exercise: analyzing in the exercises 'exegetical reading' and 'mystery', evaluating in the exercise 'concepts to work with', and creating in the exercise 'essay'. For the exercise 'exegetical reading', understanding was the minimum level to do the exercise well and the same was true for 'applying' in the exercise 'concepts to work with'. Based on the results described in another empirical study (Melisse, Kienstra, Van Dijk-Groeneboer 2022), it can be concluded that the expected thinking skills could actually be achieved in the exercises. In addition, almost all students achieved at least the minimum level of thinking required in the exercises. Only in the exercises 'mystery' and 'essay' some students didn't achieve the relevant thinking skill.

We conclude that these exercises are useful in a diverse classroom, where many *Tranquillos* and *Legatos* were present. The study showed that the exercises and the narrative dialogue can be strategies for RE also when not only the *Fortissimos* need to be inspired. Therefore, youth ministry can make use of these kinds of investigated exercises, tailored to different types of youth. Since also youth ministry gears towards deepening the faith of *Fortissimos* as well as attracting *Legatos* and *Spirituosos*. *Tranquillos* will not easily find their way towards youth ministry but in these post-covid times one can never be prepared well enough since limitations of 'the sky is the limit' and other hedonistic life goals are very much in the awareness of young people. Values and perspectives are getting more attention since they build your resilience in difficult times, and RE as well as youth ministry can empower young people with their long experience and adding strategies as described are very welcome in dealing with the tremendous challenges our world faces.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) under project number: 023.003.044.

This research was funded by a grant from R.K. L.J. Maria Stichting.

References

- Alii, E.T. 2009. *Godsdienstpedagogiek: Dimensies en spanningsvelden*. Zoetermeer: Meinema.
- Baumfield, Vivienne. 2002. *Thinking Through Religious Education*. Cambridge: Chris Kington.
- Berlejung, Angelika. 1999. "Geheimnis und Ereignis: Zur Funktion und Aufgabe der Kultbilder in Mesopotamien." In: *Die Macht der Bilder*, edited by Marie-Theres Wacker, and Günter Stemmerger, 109-143. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener.
- Biesta, Gert J.J. 2013. *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Grimmitt, Michael. 1994. "Religious education and the ideology of pluralism." *British Journal of Religious Education* 16 (3): 133-147.
- Grimmitt, M. 2000. *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogical Practice*. Great Wakering: McCrimmons.
- Havekes, Harry, Jan de Vries, Helma Oolbekkink. 2009. "Geschiedenis doordacht: Bevlogen verder met het vak." In *Leren denken binnen het schoolvak*, edited by . Jeroen Imants en Helma Oolbekkink, 43-61. Antwerpen-Apeldoorn: Garant.
- Kennedy G.J. 2005. *Peer-assessment in group projects: Is it worth it?* Paper presented at the Australian Computing Education Conference 2005 Newcastle. Brisbane, Australia.
- Kienstra, Natascha, Machiel Karskens, and Jeroen Imants. 2014. "Three Approaches to Doing Philosophy: A Proposal for Grouping Philosophical Exercises in Classroom Teaching." *Metaphilosophy* v45 n2: 288-318.
- Kienstra, Natascha, Jeroen Imants, Machiel Karskens, and Peter G.M. van der Heijden. 2015. "Doing Philosophy Effectively: Student Learning in Classroom Teaching." *PLoS ONE* 10 (9): 1-23.
- Kienstra, Natascha. 2016. "Effectief filosoferen in de klas: Docenten zelf lesontwerpen laten maken in het schoolvak filosofie." PhD. diss., Radboud Universiteit, Enschede: Ipskamp.
- Krathwohl, David R. 2002. "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview." *Theory into Practice* 41 (4): 212-218.
- Middlemas, Jill. 2014. *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and Its Contribution to the Aniconism Debate*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Melisse, Corline, Natascha Kienstra, and Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer. 2022 in press. "Humankind as the image of God: a cognitive-semantic application of Genesis 1:1-2:3 in the classroom." *REA Annual Meeting 2022 Proceedings: Becoming Good Ancestors*, xxx-xxx.
- Miles, Matthew B., A.M Huberman, and J. Saldaña, 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. 3d. edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Molenda, Michael. 2008. "Historical Foundations." In *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* edited by J. Michael Spector, 3-20. 3rd ed. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Roebben, Bert. 2015. *Inclusieve godsdienstpedagogiek: Grondlijnen voor levensbeschouwelijke vorming*. Leuven: Acco.
- Schroer, Silvia. 1987. *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament*. Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Taylor, John R. 2002. *Cognitive Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van de Pol, Janneke, M. Volman, and J. Beishuizen. 2011. "Patterns of contingent teaching in teacher-student interaction." *Learning and Instruction* 21: 46-57.
- Van Dijk-Groeneboer M.C.H. 2015. "Youth Ministry: About Youth?." *Journal of Youth and Theology* 14 (1): 25-44.
- Vermeer, Paul 2012. "Meta-concepts, thinking skills and religious education." *British Journal of Religious Education* 3: 333-347.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*.
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Yin, Robert K. 2014. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks:
Sage.