

# **Ethnographic Intertextual Voicing in Children's Storyboard Art: Biblical Meal Stories Interpreted through the Practice of Hospitable Pedagogy**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the development and influence of ethnographic intertextual voicing in the ethnography conducted in three mid-western United Methodist congregations by Magrini (2002, 2004). The ethnography focused on children's interpretations of biblical meal stories, reflections on their daily meal practices and their interpretations of their Eucharist experiences. The ethnography applied the hospitable pedagogy approach (Magrini, 2002) with twenty-five children ages five through eleven. The children gave voice to their interpretations and experiences through narrative and storyboard art. The hospitable pedagogy approach created a space in which layers of woven voicing emerged as ethnographic intertextual voicing. The author argues that ethnographic intertextual voicing is influenced by familial, ethnic, and faith contexts.

## **Introduction**

Our group of four children and two adults wandered the maze of hallways inside the large old church one cold December evening. We were enacting the Emmaus story at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While wearing Bible-times headscarves with simple tunics over our street clothes, we became the disciples journeying from Jerusalem to Emmaus while grieving over the death of Jesus. Along the way, we began a conversation with a "stranger," played by eight-year old Barbara. Upon arriving at Emmaus, we entered our home, (the activity room), invited the stranger to stay for a simple meal, and sat on the floor with the stranger. Barbara recalled her experience the next week as she pointed to her storyboard square, (figure one), in which she created her interpretation of the Emmaus story:

Then ah, that's me giving all the bread and that's the journey. And then that's me breaking off the bread. (Child's voice in regular font.)

*Who are you giving it to?* (Magrini's voice in italics.)

The disciples. And then these are them smiling because they think it's Jesus.

*What do you like about that story?*

Uhm, that Jesus came back.

Fig. 1. Detail of Emmaus storyboard section, by Barbara, Hennepin Avenue UMC.

Barbara identified with the group's simple dramatization of the Emmaus story in which she portrayed the "stranger," Jesus. She placed herself in the picture as the character of Jesus "giving all the bread." She identifies herself in the artwork, even with the word "me" written on the picture and an arrow pointing to the character. She describes herself as "giving" and "breaking off" the bread (in that order) to the disciples. Body memory and visual memory of the dramatization function to weave the biblical story and her experience. Through the hospitable pedagogy approach that guided the flow of the sessions with the children, each child had agency in giving voice to his/her meaning-making through sharing his/her narrative and in creating a unique storyboard interpretation of selected biblical meal stories, daily meal practices, and experiences of Eucharist.

This essay will first describe the design of the ethnography conducted in three United Methodist congregations and the process of the hospitable pedagogy approach through which layers of intertextual voicing emerged in the ethnographic text. Second, I will identify the related strands of intertextual voicing in the ethnography. Third, I will argue that aesthetics, specifically the individual storyboard, constitutes a voice of the child given expression as an act of freedom. I will also identify the group voice expressed in the collection of storyboards and in comparisons of individual sections.

## **I. Eucharistic Theology and Practices with Children**

In the United Methodist denomination, a theological study on Holy Communion was commissioned by the General Conference 2000, with the results to be presented at the next General Conference in July 2004. The General Conference is the denomination's international overseeing representative body. The study, which came to be titled, *This Holy Mystery*, has now been presented and adopted by the 2004 General Conference as the denominational theological document and guideline for practices on Eucharist. At the time that the ethnography was undertaken in 2002, I had been in ministry in local churches for thirteen years. Through many conversations with parents and children, Christian educators, and with clergy in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (geographic Episcopal region), it became evident that questions were being raised with greater urgency about a theology of Eucharist for children and implications for practice.

The ethnography seeks to approach these needs in the local church from the perspective of children – voices that often get lost, or are not given a place in the dialogue at all. The ethnography first asks: What can be learned about children's meaning-making from their interpretations of selected biblical meal stories, their daily meal practices, and experiences of Eucharist? Secondly, the study asks: How can a theology of Christian hospitality invite and embrace the whole child at the Table and within the life of the church? This paper will focus primarily on the first question by discussing the media in

which the children's interpretations and experiences were expressed and the influence of context on ethnographic text.

## II. Design of the Ethnography

The ethnography was conducted in two phases. The first phase was conducted in two congregations simultaneously from September – December 2002 from which the grounded theory of the Eucharistic Faith Eco-Sphere, (See Appendix for details of this theory.), was developed and ethnographic intertextual voicing emerged. The second phase was conducted in a third congregation from April – June 2004 to refine the theoretical model. The phase I congregations were both primarily Anglo, with all the children and participating families Anglo. The third congregation, immigrant Latino, was selected for broadening ethnic and cultural diversity as well as greater diversity in faith background and practices. Glenview United Methodist Church (UMC), located in Glenview, Illinois, is a north shore suburban congregation. Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church (UMC) is an urban church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with congregants living within the city and surrounding suburbs. The phase II congregation, La Iglesia de la Fe (Faith Church), is located in Grand Lake, Wisconsin, a resort and tourist community. This is also a United Methodist congregation; however, the adults are previously Roman Catholic in practice or membership and have immigrated from Mexico and Central American countries.<sup>1</sup>

The ethnographic design involved creating a unique series of learning sessions with the children, conducting focus groups with the parents, and participant-observation of the current worship practices and congregational life. The time frame for conducting the complete study in each congregation ranged from ten to fourteen weeks. In phase I, (Glenview and Hennepin Avenue UMCs), children ages seven through nine were invited to participate in six sessions, each focusing on a different biblical meal story for one to one and a half hours weekly. Eight children participated at Glenview UMC. Five began at Hennepin Avenue UMC, however one child did not complete the study.

Six biblical meal stories were selected that reflect eucharistic themes, two from the Hebrew Bible and four from the New Testament. At the conclusion of the six sessions, each child was invited share an individual conversation with me about his/her storyboard. Parents were invited to attend one focus group session at the beginning and one at the end of the study to discuss their own Eucharist experiences and familial meal practices. The study concluded with a celebration of Eucharist to which the whole family was invited, followed by fellowship with refreshments.

At La Iglesia de la Fe, the phase II congregation, a similar design was followed with three changes. The selection of biblical meal stories was adjusted to include three Hebrew Bible and three New Testament stories, and the sixth session story was narrowed in

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the name and location of the Latino congregation. Photographs are included with the permission of the parents of the children in the study. Contextual information is accurate for the actual location and congregation. Glenview and Hennepin Avenue have granted permission for the congregations' names and locations to be used in publications and presentations.

focus. Second, the children shared narratives describing their storyboards once he/she had completed all the Hebrew Bible art and then again after completing the New Testament art so that their experiences and narratives were shared closer in time to their experiences.

The third key difference came about not through design but as a result of faith and ethnic context. Even though the invitation to participate in the study indicated children ages seven through nine, children ages five through eleven and their parents attended the information meeting and the first session. Fifteen children began the study with fourteen completing the sessions. The Christian education director at La Iglesia de la Fe shared with me that the parents of the younger and older children asked her repeatedly to be included. Most of the adults in the congregation come from a Roman Catholic background in their home countries. The parents shared in a focus group that in their own childhood, participating in the “first Communion” ritual was a significant emotional and spiritual rite of passage in their lives. It was important to them as Christian parents that their children learn about Eucharist and receive the bread and cup. The context of the parental and congregational history of faith practices and the resulting value placed on sacramental practices was evident in the commitment to attending sessions and parental affirmation of their children’s learnings and unfolding artwork during the weeks.

Each week there were two adult assistants and various younger siblings attending. There were also two parent focus group sessions. The study concluded with a family Eucharist celebration, an art show of the children’s storyboards and other art created in the study, and desserts. The chart below in figure two correlates the biblical meal story with the session. Figures three and four depict two individually created storyboard art pieces.

Fig. 2. Biblical Meal Stories Corresponding to Session and Storyboard Art.

<p>Session 1 Early church eats together (Acts 2: 43-47) at Glenview UMC, Hennepin Ave. UMC.</p> <p>Abraham and Sarah offer hospitality to three visitors (Genesis 18:1-16) at La Iglesia de la Fe.</p>	<p>Session 2 The Hebrews are freed from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-20).</p>	<p>Session 3 The Hebrews eat manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16).</p>
<p>Session 4 Jesus feeds more than 5,000 people on the hillside (John 6:1-13).</p>	<p>Session 5 Jesus eats with the disciples at the Last Supper (Luke 22:7-23).</p>	<p>Session 6 Mary speaks to the risen Jesus (John 20:1-18, not included at La Iglesia de la Fe); the two disciples meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).</p>

Fig. 3. Storyboard by Pricilla, Glenview UMC.

Fig. 4. Storyboard by Manuel, La Iglesia de la Fe.

### **III. Context of the Congregations**

Glenview UMC, a suburban church approximately twenty miles northwest of Chicago, reports 804 members in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference Journal for 2002 with 98% Caucasian. The United States 2000 census report indicates that ten percent of the residents are Asian.<sup>2</sup> A Korean United Methodist congregation meets in the original chapel of the Glenview UMC congregation. There are diverse family structures in the Glenview congregation with two parent families, single parent families, blended families, single adults, and adult couples without children. Economic level for families with children in the age group for the research are estimated at lower middle-income to average middle-income.

Hennepin Avenue UMC is an urban church in Minneapolis with members living in the city and surrounding suburbs. The families in the study identified the Sacred Journey worship service, a creation-centered spirituality worship that meets in the art gallery, as their primary worshipping community rather than the more traditional sanctuary service. Membership of Hennepin Avenue UMC in 2001 was 2084. Regular attendance at Sacred Journey is estimated at eighty-five. No official figures are recorded, and worshipers are primarily Caucasian. Sacred Journey worshipers are estimated to vary in economic level, from homeless to upper income. Family structures are varied with two parent families, single parents with either mother or father as the parent, gay and lesbian couples, single adults, and adult couples without children.

The third congregation in the ethnography is a Latino United Methodist congregation, La Iglesia de la Fe (Faith Church). The congregation shares a sanctuary, Christian education classrooms, and office space with an Anglo congregation that twelve years ago intentionally sought to be in relationship with a new Latino congregation. Official data on the community's Latino residents is less reliable given the rapid growth in the immigrant Latino population and the difficulty in documenting residents; however, the 2000 United States census for Grand Lake, Wisconsin identifies 14.75% Hispanic population. The Christian education director at the congregation, whose primary job is as social worker focusing on parenting with the immigrant Latino community, identified the key issues of lack of health care, justice in compensation, the need for steady employment, adequate housing, and prejudice issues.

### **IV. The Hospitable Pedagogy Approach**

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<sup>2</sup> Area Connect. [Http://glenview.areacconnect.com/statistics.htm](http://glenview.areacconnect.com/statistics.htm). [Accessed September 15, 2004]. Statistics based on the 2000 United States census. INTERNET.

The goal of the sessions with the children was to create a safe physical, emotional, and spiritual space in which the children could explore and express their interpretations of the biblical meal stories, where they could openly share their daily experiences around meal practices, and voice their own interpretations and responses to Eucharist knowing their voices would be valued and received as sacred gifts. In order to create a safe space that was hospitable for the children, I developed an approach called “hospitable pedagogy,” which guided the process of the sessions with the children. It was with trepidation that I first named this approach and identified particular movements. In the postmodern context I resist linear or segmented methodologies that become rigidly interpreted once they are in practice and presented in scholarship. The nature of hospitable pedagogy itself is to be in process, allowing for evolution in response to the learner and contexts.

An aside if you will permit. Hospitable pedagogy is utilized with children in the study. I have also incorporated hospitable pedagogy into seminary teaching with students at varying phases of adulthood from young adult to senior and of diverse ethnicities. The response has been positive overall, bringing relief to the heavy emphasis on verbal linguistic learning in seminary. Those who are most resistant to hospitable pedagogy are learners who have a strong preference for verbal linguistic learning and/or feel vulnerable in engaging other multiple intelligences, particularly in a seminary classroom context.

The theological foundation of hospitable pedagogy is located in the meal ministry of Jesus. He not only taught and preached the vision of the kingdom of God; he embodied it as a present reality, pressing the societal norms of hospitality and inclusivity, particularly through banquet parables and his own daily meal practices. By sharing a meal with such unlikely characters as Zacchaeus, for example, and breaking bread with the grieving disciples and the risen Jesus at their home in Emmaus, the hospitable grace and self-giving of Jesus is revealed for the transformation of those present towards lives of abundant other-directed love. Thus, hospitable pedagogy is a sacramental approach to teaching and learning that is other-directed in two facets. The educator is the host who invites and welcomes the learner into a hospitable environment, rather than assuming the role of expert authority on a subject. Second, the approach flows between and intermingles a focus on the learner, the educator and community.

The statements above can be summarized as follows: Hospitable pedagogy is a sacramental ebb and flow approach that invites the learner into the freedom to interpret the faith story. Right here there are some who may resist the approach. This is not a “top down” authoritarian approach with the goal of imparting the same biblical truth for all learners. The approach offers a space for ones whose voices are often forgotten or silenced by the dominant culture and dominant theology. It allows them to express their experiences and theological reflections with dignity. Parker Palmer writes in *To Know as We are Known*, “People who write about education often remind us that the root meaning of ‘to educate’ is ‘to draw out’ and that the teacher’s task is not to fill the student with facts but to evoke the truth the student holds within” (1983, 43). This requires that the freedom, power, and dignity of the learner be honored, perhaps for the first time, while also maintaining emotional, physical, and spiritual safety. Again, Palmer’s paradoxes of teaching and learning so aptly wrestle with the tensions of creating a safe space for learning that also is a place of engaging in critical thinking (1998, 74-77).

## Movements in Hospitable Pedagogy

What does the approach look like in practice? The acronym, “CH.E.E.R.S.” is a shorthand way to describe the movements. I find CH.E.E.R.S. an especially appropriate acronym, for it reminds us to affirm the learner in the journey of learning and faith. There are far too many children, youth, and adults of all ages, who have rarely or never had their experiences and expressions received with dignity and their humanity affirmed as a child of God.

Through the specific application of CH.E.E.R.S. in the design of the sessions, the child is valued as artist and storyteller. Each session culminated in the child creating an art response on one of the six squares of an individual storyboard. The ritual of placing a child’s art on the refrigerator or special wall, or framing their creations rather than throwing the art away, (The refrigerator and wall reveal my assumptions of class and culture.), creates a sacred text and sets apart a sacred space in the home that is valued, and as such, honors the child as a valued human being. The child as storyteller is also a key role in the ethnography’s application of the approach. How many times are we too busy or impatient to truly listen to a child whose story is struggling to be told? Richard Lewis, in *Sacred Stories*, describes the ways in which stories might “simmer” or “bubble up” within children:

Some children carry their stories so close to them that they can hardly stop talking; some carry their stories so close to them that they can hardly speak. Some become restless and impatient as they listen to another’s story because their own stories are struggling to emerge. And some children, their stories still hidden from their view, do not always understand what a story is and does (A. Simpkinson and C. Simpkinson, eds. 1993, 135).

Simply stated, CH.E.E.R.S. helps to remember the movements. “CH” begins the approach with a casual check-in question that connects to the participants’ immediate experience. No matter what our age, we come together carrying joys and burdens that influence who we are and how we respond. The check-in is a way to name what we bring with us, should we choose. This creates a transition from being individuals to coming together as a group for the set apart time.

Next, “E” begins the encountering movement when the Bible story is shared through storytelling, through a contemporary reading, simple dramatization, or reading from Scripture. The second “E,” then moves to engaging the themes or details of the Bible story and continues encountering the Bible story as the story is recalled. Here, a range of multiple intelligence experiences may give birth to new questions on the biblical story or on one’s own experiences, or move the focus beyond the self to include tradition, community practices and beliefs.

The “R” movement involves intentional responding and reflecting on life experience, searching for how God is present and calling us to respond in conversation with the biblical story through sharing by raising insights and questions within the group. This is the movement that traditionally may be primarily verbal linguistic. Hospitable pedagogy

values multiple intelligences for providing opportunities to articulate a response in media inclusive of and beyond the written or spoken word.

Finally, the process turns intentionally other-directed as the “S” sends the learners into the world to serve the needs of the others in discipleship, no matter what age or ability. Sending forth blesses the learner by name in the journey of learning and service in whatever manner his/her capacities and gifts provide. A key part of the sending forth is to bless each by name as a child of God. Figure 5 below describes the process from the fourth session.



Fig.5. Children’s Session Four on John 6:1-13, Feeding of the 5,000+.

<b>Hospitable Pedagogy C.H.E.E.R.S</b>	<b>Eucharist Themes</b>	<b>Multiple Intelligences</b>	<b>Experience Description</b>
<b>Check-in</b> Conversation	Fellowship	Verbal/Linguistic	Bring children together and invite them to share about their week.
<b>Encounter</b> the Story: Storytelling	Messianic Banquet Fellowship	Verbal/Linguistic Visual/Spatial	Read, “Jesus Feeds People in the Desert,” from <i>God Speaks to Us in Feeding Stories</i> by Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan
<b>Engage</b> the Story: Write a Letter to Jesus	Messianic Banquet Thanksgiving Remembrance	Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal	Invite each child to imagine he or she is the child who gave Jesus the lunch. As that child, write a letter to Jesus telling him how you felt about what he did with your lunch and what was special about the day.
<b>Engage</b> the Story: Talk About It	Remembrance	Interpersonal Verbal/Linguistic	Discuss how other people must have felt when they saw a child with a lunch and they did not have anything to eat. What happened to the leftovers? Invite children to share from their letters.
<b>Respond</b> to the Story: Storyboard	Messianic Banquet Thanksgiving Remembrance	Interpersonal Visual/Spatial Body/Kinesthetic Intrapersonal	Storyboard art response to Jesus feeding people from a child’s lunch and their own experiences.
<b>Sending Out:</b> Blessing Prayer	Presence of Christ Fellowship	Verbal/Linguistic Interpersonal	Form a circle and invite the children to say a prayer sentence out loud or silently about place and people who do not have enough food. Bless each by name.

## V. Ethnographic Intertextual Voicing

The use of aesthetics in the ethnography allowed the children to create their text and have agency in how they were represented, and in fact to express their voice through a non-verbal medium. The artwork itself became a text as the storyboards gave expression to the children's creative interpretations of the biblical meal stories and their unique personal connections with the story through life experiences. The tactile and drawn art ranges from offering a glimpse, a possibility, and to an open window into the children's daily and sacramental meal experiences from their perspective. Not only do the storyboards become text, the children's narratives about the storyboards contribute one more layer of text that is insufficiently expressed without the accompanying visual and tactile art of the storyboard. The storyboard contributes to the plot line of the narrative and the narrative is most fully expressed within the art. Narrative and aesthetics weave a symbiotic-like strand of voicing. In this ethnography, aesthetics provides the means of scholarly discourse leading to implications for religious education and sacramental practices in the life of the church with children. Aesthetics is both a process of religious education and the subject of religious education. Lynne Westfield applied aesthetics as both means and subject of scholarship:

“In religious education, the aesthetic is taken seriously as the subject of scholarly conversation. Christian educators such as Maria Harris have kept the agenda of the aesthetic in the forefront of scholarly dialogue. I believe that the aesthetic must also be the means of scholarly conversation. To teach with the aesthetic as means of the conversation as well as the subject of the conversation is to teach as Jesus taught” (2001, 116).

How were the storyboards created? A storyboard begins as a blank canvas, with lines pre-drawn to divide it into six sections for this age, and can be a variety of sizes. The storyboards in the study were all 16 X 20 inch oil canvases with a wood frame on the underside. Before a child even came to the storyboard, he/she was immersed in the biblical story and in sharing individual and group experiences. When it came time to work on the storyboards, the children received instructions on which square they were to use for the session (lines were pre-drawn on the canvas to mark off six squares) and shown the new tactile materials that I had brought that week. The children were told they could create their idea of what the story meant to them, something from the group time that was important or anything they thought about the story. It did take a few weeks for some children to realize that they really could do what they wanted. The adult helpers and I would help when asked and refrained from giving suggestions on what to do. The most useful approach was to be in conversation with the child about the story or ask questions that drew out his/her own experiences.

The children in phase I were asked at the conclusion of the study how they decided what to create. The responses were varied. Some sat quietly and thought until an idea came. Some wanted to touch and play with the tactile materials to get an idea. Of course, there were several who replied, “I don't know. I just did it.” More so than in the first two congregations, at La Iglesia de la Fe I observed more peer co-creating – working with

another child to create part of a storyboard. A child would not always decide a square was “finished” at the end of our time and was free to return to work on it the next session. Even when a child decided a piece was finished, there was much returning to previous squares to add just another special touch. When parents arrived at the conclusion of the weekly session, often a child invited his/her parent to the storyboard to talk about the new art creation, or show how the tactile materials had been used to create the art, and thus, the child became teacher to the parent.

Are children’s drawings, their tactile visual pictures or sculptures, and abstract depictions of stories really art? Can a child be called an artist? Is it art if there are twenty-five similar pieces on the classroom bulletin board? There is not space in this paper to address these questions completely at this time. I do want to recognize the importance of the assumed value that is placed on the child’s aesthetic creations in the study and the real world, sometimes cruel, negative or sarcastic response children might receive to their art. Jeri Gerding, in *Drawing to God*, describes an emerging greater openness to how art is defined:

“One thing that can interfere with making art is the ideas you hold about what art should be like, how to do it, and what constitutes good or bad art. Artists of the twentieth century have done a great deal to shake up our ideas about what art is supposed to be like. Art is no longer confined to conventional materials, such as paper and paint, and art is no longer bound by conventional subject matter. Art can exist as words on a screen or as a moment in time acted out in public performance. Art can be made which seems to contain no visible display of technical skill. Artists have forced us to revise again and again the tools by which we measure them. All of these developments can give you permission to share in their freedom and not worry so much about comparing yourself to a standard” (2001, 20).

Thus, the individual storyboards unfolded like the plot line of a novel, yet not always moving forward in time. Sometimes the narrative of a storyboard looped into the past to add another dimension to the plot, resulting in rewriting the narrative on the same individual storyboard as the sessions evolved. So far, two strands of ethnographic intertextual voicing have been identified – narrative and storyboard. The voice of the group became evident when comparing the individual sections of the storyboards by congregation. For example, at Glenview UMC, all the depictions of the Feeding of the 5,000+ prominently include one or more mountains. At Hennepin Avenue UMC, the symbols of bread and fish are featured in some fashion in each. The children at La Iglesia de la Fe discovered how to make people out of flat tiny clothespins and you can see this way of configuring people in nearly every storyboard from this group.

It was particularly poignant to see the fourteen storyboards along with their rock gardens and clay symbols from the Last Supper story spread out and beautifully displayed across four large tables at the concluding art show. The scene reminded me of anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown’s reading of the vodou altars as texts. In her significant work, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, she identifies vodou altars as texts that can be read for greater knowing of one’s nature. She writes, “Vodou altars are texts, there for the reading. They contain a wealth of information about the nature of a

spirit or group of spirits, as indicated in food preferences” (1991, 41). The art show “altars” could be read as the story of our weeks together and all that the children brought to the surface in their interpretations and reflections on our experiences. The voice of the group adds a third strand to the ethnographic intertextual voicing.

As ethnographer, I created a digital library of photos of the storyboards in process of being created and of the finished pieces from all three congregations. As photographer, I bring my interpretation and visual perspective to the children’s creations, thus adding my voice to the weaving as the photography is displayed and arranged into posters and presentation formats. At La Iglesia de la Fe, the only congregation where permission was granted to take photos of the children, there are many photos of the children in action while encountering, engaging, and responding to the stories. I posted them on a display board near the entrance to the room each following week, adding a second display board as the weeks continued. The children created a ritual of bringing in their parents before the session started to show them their pictures on the display board and describe what we had been doing. This set of photos created, in a sense, an altar that told the story of not only the theoretical process, but the development of our becoming and being a community. A fourth strand of ethnographic intertextual voicing, that of ethnographer-photographer has now been added with two varied timbres to the texts.

### **Process Related Intertextual Voicing**

There are five strands of text that emerged during the weeks of participating in the hospitable pedagogy approach. They are: the children’s story, retelling the biblical story, literature, familial participation, and translation. At this point the words of the children will tell their stories.

#### **The Children’s Stories**

The children had moments when our discussion connected with very recent experiences. For example, one evening at La Iglesia de la Fe, while we were deep in conversation on what happens if they have leftover food after a meal at home, five year old Amata turned the conversation towards sharing with someone who does not have any food. This brought up memories for me of times when I had forgotten my lunch in elementary school and I sat without eating because I was too shy to ask for anything to eat. So I asked:

*Have you ever been at school and you’ve forgotten your lunch (Children start laughing like they can relate to this.) or your lunch money?*

Antonio: That’s why I was hungry today. Cause I forgot my lunch today.

*Oh no. You forgot your lunch?*

Antonio: Yup.

*So what happened?*

Antonio: I didn’t get nothing so I just ate at home a lot.

*No one at school gave you anything to share?* (Antonio shakes head no. Another child raises hand.) . . . *Yana?*

Yana: Like I was going to bring cold lunch today. Well, I brought some of it but I didn't bring a drink because I forgot, ahh, bring it. So I brought lunch money but I forgot to bring lunch money for milk.

*So you had nothing to drink? Did anyone share or did you have nothing?*

Yana: I got a drink...from...the fountain.

When Charlotte, at Hennepin Avenue UMC, was asked if there was anything meaningful to her from the story of the manna in the wilderness, she replied at first, "No..." Then a story came tumbling out. She said:

Oh, wait, wait. Yes, there is. There was a bag of m&ms. There weren't very many left and I wanted to save [them] so I could put [them] in my dessert for my lunch. And I ate them all. So after dinner I didn't have any to eat and I was hungry for chocolate. I was sorry that I ate all those m&ms before dinner and I also didn't eat much for dinner.

There were many moments when a child connected a personal experience with the biblical meal story and shared this with the group, sometimes as a piece of a story and other times as a story complete with plot line and problem to solve.

### The Biblical Story

Sometime a child would rewrite a part of the Bible story as they retold it. In this excerpt, Evan's story (Glenview UMC), spewed forth with barely time to take a breath between sentences. He was particularly anxious to tell the story of the Feeding of the 5,000+. At first the plot sequence appeared to be reversed: "There were 5,000 people on the mountains and hills and uhm... they were all laying back and stuff and eating lots of food and they fed so much and there was leftover and Jesus wanted quiet time so he went across the lake on the boat and he just sat there." The story is told in one long compound sentence. When I asked him what Jesus was thinking about in the boat, Evan's reply gave a clue as to how the sequence inversion made sense to him. In Evan's words, while Jesus was in the boat he was thinking, "All these people are so good. I'm glad they're having food and drinking." Evan actually incorporated the beginning of the story that he heard into an ending that made sense to him, rather than reversing the sequence. He had drawn Jesus sitting in a boat on a blue lake surrounded by large mountains and small people at the base.

A child also might put herself into the Bible story as one of the characters when retelling of the story. Charlotte (Hennepin Avenue UMC), wrote a letter to Jesus as the character of the child who gave Jesus the lunch for the Feeding of the 5,000+ story. She reveals honest emotions as that character. Here she is telling what she remembers about the letter she wrote to Jesus: "I remember in the letter I said I was kind of mad because I thought you would have the lunch for yourself [himself]. But then when I saw what you [he] done with it and gave it to all the people I knew it was a miracle and you come to help us. I don't know why I thought you would be selfish and eat it yourself when you

were a miracle from God and you were Jesus.” Her inflections reflected what she visually indicated by underlining, crossing out, and quotations in the letter below in figure six.

Fig. 6. A Letter to Jesus by Charlotte, Hennepin Avenue UMC.

At the end of each conversation with a child I always asked if the child had any questions for me since I had been asking so many questions all those weeks. Once the window into Bible stories had been opened for Tasha, she was hungry for more stories as can be heard in the conversation below:

*Is there anything you want to ask me?* (Magrini)

Uhm...uhm...you had six stories. Are there more? (Tasha)

*In the Bible?*

Yeah.

*There are a lot more stories in the Bible. Did you notice that all our stories had to do with food? (silence) Do you have a Bible at home?*

Yeah, but my brother has it cause it's his.

*Do you get one in third grade?*

Third grade, no, they didn't give us.

*Well, I hope you get a Bible cause there are a lot of good stories. There's a special story about Peter, the disciple Peter, having breakfast with Jesus on the beach after he has risen.*

Oh... I want to read that one.

## Literature

Yana (La Iglesia de la Fe), portrayed a scene from the book *The Matzah the Papa Brought Home* by Fran Manushkin that we had read and actually enacted with motions and words. In her drawing, two people are dipping (her word) their “pinkies” (from the storybook) into the wine cup and counting to ten out loud as a way to remember all the plagues, just like in the story. This was a favorite part of the session that day, as we all got faster and louder each time “we counted the plagues – all ten – by dipping our pinkies again and again” (1995).

One evening at Hennepin Avenue UMC, Barbara declared her storyboard square “finished” much earlier than the other children. The book, *God Speaks to Us in Feeding Stories* was on the art table. On her own she picked it up, opened the book like a seasoned elementary teacher and read it out loud to the group working away in silence,

In another conversation, when Tasha (La Iglesia de la Fe), was asked what her favorite story was she responded by naming two. She named book titles that she was reading at school. The way I had asked the question, I did not indicate explicitly I was asking about our stories in the sessions.

It was not always the storybooks that we read together in the sessions that influenced the children’s artwork. Here, Adalberto (La Iglesia de la Fe), describes his creative process and how the pictures gave him ideas, although he is vague about the connection.

*When I look at your artwork it is so interesting. How did you get your ideas? How did you come up with this? (Magrini)*

Uhm...I have picture books. (Adalberto)

*They give you ideas, too?*

I have a Bible.

*It has pictures?*

I have the first Christmas...

*So you read some of the stories?*

Yeah.

## Voices of Family

Particularly at La Iglesia de la Fe more than the other two congregations, parents and siblings contributed in various ways to the outcome of the storyboard art. For example, Malina describes how she came to draw a horse in her interpretation of the Emmaus story:

This is a horse and is Jesus and the kids and they’re following Jesus. They’re going out to get the bread. The horse, uhm...he’s the one who gave the people the ride because when my sister was here she told me.

Jennifer created a two-dimensional Last Supper scene in which the people, made out of oval and round shaped wood pieces, appeared to be sitting behind a table.

*I was so intrigued how you put the people behind the table. How did you think about doing that? (Magrini)*

My mom think about it. (Jennifer)

*Yeah, how nice to have your mom give you some good ideas. I look at that and I think, they're really sitting behind that table. And what did they have on the table to eat?*

That's the bread and this is the, the cup...that they drink with.

Manuel's mother, shown with her son in figure seven below, asked if she could come to the group several sessions to be with her son and to hear the stories herself. The storyboard (See figure four.), evolved through both of their creativity and interpretations. Manuel missed one session while spending a week in Mexico with his grandmother. His mother took the storyboard home and wrote down the Bible story he would miss. When he returned, his storyboard square was completed for that story.

Fig. 7. Manuel and his mother often worked on his storyboard together.

Juanita and three year old daughter Dolcinea came each week. Juanita provided valuable help during the art time as well as creating their own storyboard together as seen in figures nine and ten.

Fig. 9. Mother Juanita and her three year old daughter Dolcinea.

Fig. 10. Storyboard created by Juanita and Dolcinea, La Iglesia de la Fe.



## Translator as Participant

Pilar (La Iglesia de la Fe), had only arrived in the United States from Mexico with her mother the week before the study began. She immediately was placed in the public school where only English is spoken. All but Pilar and one other child were bilingual in the group. The parents were primarily proficient in English with four of the parents speaking and understanding Spanish with little English. My proficiency in Spanish is sufficient for casual conversation with the children and parents, but I am not at the level of fluency.

This raises questions on my role as a cross-cultural researcher and the use of an occasional translator regarding reliability of my reflections and validity of the data. The nature of the research as cross-cultural was identified and discussed at the beginning of the entrance to the field and in fact, was welcomed by the Latino congregation. There are further issues on authority of the researcher around language; however, for this discussion the use of the translator invites that individual to become a participant in the research. In the second individual conversation with Pilar, another child's father pulled up a chair without me asking him to do so, and began translating my words to Pilar and her words to me. Following are two brief excerpts in which the translator becomes part of the conversation. In the first, he lets me know that the unusual number is from Pilar and not from him. In the second excerpt, the word "Emmaus" was difficult for him to pronounce in English. The translator's voice is in bold font.

**She say that ah, it was a little boy that had the basket of five bread and two fishes, and then she said that it was 5, 000 million people there. That what she said, 5,000 million people.**

*Wow, that's a lot of people.* (My comment directed to Pilar. Pilar's speaking in Spanish is not included here.)

**5,000 million people in there, so ahh, and Jesus pray to the Lord and then they have enough food for all the people.**

A few minutes later Pilar was ready to share about her art depicting the Emmaus story.

**Then ahh, they were walking from Jerusalem to Emm . . .and she just say she couldn't find any more.**

*Right. We ran out of our "people" clothespins.* (My comment directed to translator.)

**They were on their way and they found somebody there and then, ahh, . . . he ask them where they go so they say well, we going to Emm . . . I'm sorry.** (Shaking his head and smiling shyly.)

*No, no. It's okay. Emmaus.*

**And they ahh, say, okay, bye. And then they feel so bad and went back for him and invite him to have dinner with them.**

## VI. Storyboard Art Creation as Act of Freedom

At Hennepin Avenue UMC, Sarah's mode of communicating her interpretation of the biblical meal stories was primarily through the storyboard itself, rather than through talking about the art or her thoughts about the stories. Her artwork was carefully crafted in the artistic sense of crafting. She created detailed images that told a story in themselves. The background in the Emmaus story is a collage of fabrics shown in figure eleven below. The empty tomb is in the background. The foreground portrays what Sarah identifies as the main part of the story with the three travelers on the road.

Fig. 11. Storyboard interpretation of the Emmaus story by Sarah, Hennepin Avenue.

For Pilar and Amata who had little English, the storyboard became a primary means of communicating between us when my Spanish was insufficient and no one translated for us. I came to know their personalities through the selection of materials and the arrangement of the composition, as well as through their body language and expressions in the sessions. When the children realized that I did indeed mean they could create anything in the square, they began to explore further in texture and composition. Public school education often rewards art that meets the teacher's requirements rather than expresses who the child is and is becoming. For all the children, the individual unique creations were honored and valued through our conversations together. However, not all parents affirmed their child's art. My heart broke when I heard a parent say to his eight year old son, "That doesn't look like anything."

The movements in the hospitable pedagogy approach included other aesthetics. Each child created a symbol from clay that had meaning for him/her related to the Last Supper. Barbara (Hennepin Avenue UMC), created a small rectangular shaped table with eleven oval shapes around it. She described the scene as the disciples sitting around the table, but Judas is not at the table. She said the table was meaningful to her because she wished she could have more meals at home sitting down with her family. Aesthetics and the safe

environment in the group gave her a place to express this deep desire for eating with her family, an event that holds lasting and emotional memories into adulthood.

I had an opportunity in September 2004 at a children's peacemakers retreat to guide 115 children, ages eight through twelve, in creating individual storyboards in response to the story of Joseph and his brothers from their estrangement to reconciliation. As I went from child to child asking if any wanted to share a story about their art, many shared stories of sibling rivalry, stories of being punished by being confined to the bedroom, tales of fighting between friends, and stories of forgiveness and happy scenes as well. One ten year old girl pointed to her storyboard that had vibrant red ribbons and buttons on it. She was not able to speak, and as I did not know sign language, we pointed to the art and gestured to one another as our means of communication. Aesthetics provided a way for the young girl to participate and have her contribution valued just as the other children.

The Latino children spoke often about different kinds of bread than what was described in the two Anglo congregations. The process encouraged them to share from their own experience. Emilio is describing his clay bread that he made while he holds it in his hand:

*Does this bread look like any bread you have before? (Magrini)*

Yeah. In El Salvador we had tiny little bread connected together and you rip them off.  
(Emilio)

*Kind of flat like this?*

Yeah.

*Did it have a special name?*

Yeah, but I don't know.

*Reminds you of bread from El Salvador?*

Yeah.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The issue of representing the research participant in ethnography is one of agency and justice. The paper described a pedagogy in which the learner's experiences and reflections are valued. Aesthetics, as a product of the ethnography, became a textual voice in which the children were able to make choices in how their insights and life experiences were represented in the ethnography. Ethnographic text, however, does not come to life in a vacuum. The design of the study created a set apart time in which the participants, primarily children, came together as learners themselves and I participated through the dual roles of educator and learner-ethnographer.

The theological conclusions, briefly described in the Appendix, are influenced by the formation of the ethnographic text. Identifying the layers and inter-related strands of ethnographic intertextual voicing, naming intertextuality broadly beyond a written text, is necessary in validating the theoretical and theological conclusions of the study. I believe, even more importantly I dare to say, than contributing to scholarship for the sake of research, is the dignity, the freedom and the lifting up of voices of children as sacred texts – whether expressed as narrative, art, or other aesthetics, through which we are given a glimpse of the holy, and invited into the divine mystery of a child's world.

## Appendix

To discuss biblical meal stories involved talking about what happens when the family has a special meal at Grandma's house or how a teacher helped a child who did not have any friends in the class form friendships. It meant that we talked about breads from around the world and enjoyed trying out new tastes. The children insisted on voicing their uneasiness that Jesus was identified as a "stranger" in the Emmaus story while they have been told to stay away from strangers. What we spent seven weeks doing together was questioning, sharing, laughing, crying about what it means to live *eucharistically* – for the children, the parents, and as a family of faith.

As the implementation of hospitable pedagogy progressed at Glenview and Hennepin Avenue, it became evident that the children were placing five broadly named themes in dialogue through narrative and art, with Christian hospitality enacted inclusively or exclusively, at the core of their experiences. There emerged a dynamic matrix of dimensions that interact, sometimes cohesively and sometimes in tension, to create an ecology of eucharistic faith. The visual for this concept was discovered at a children's museum store in Indianapolis. On display near the store entrance was a geo-sphere plastic "ball" that contracts and expands, and this provided the inspiration for Eucharistic Faith Eco-Sphere depicted below.

The sphere reflects the praxis dimensions through which children attempt to make meaning based on a eucharistic faith. By praxis, I mean the mutual interaction between the life experience and faith practices reflected upon through theological and theoretical frameworks, and the reshaping of life experience and faith practices, which continues in mutual reshaping and formation. A spherical design reflects the continual mutual interaction between the elements, recognizing that children develop and make meaning not in defined segments but through experience embedded in cultures and in reflection on that experience.

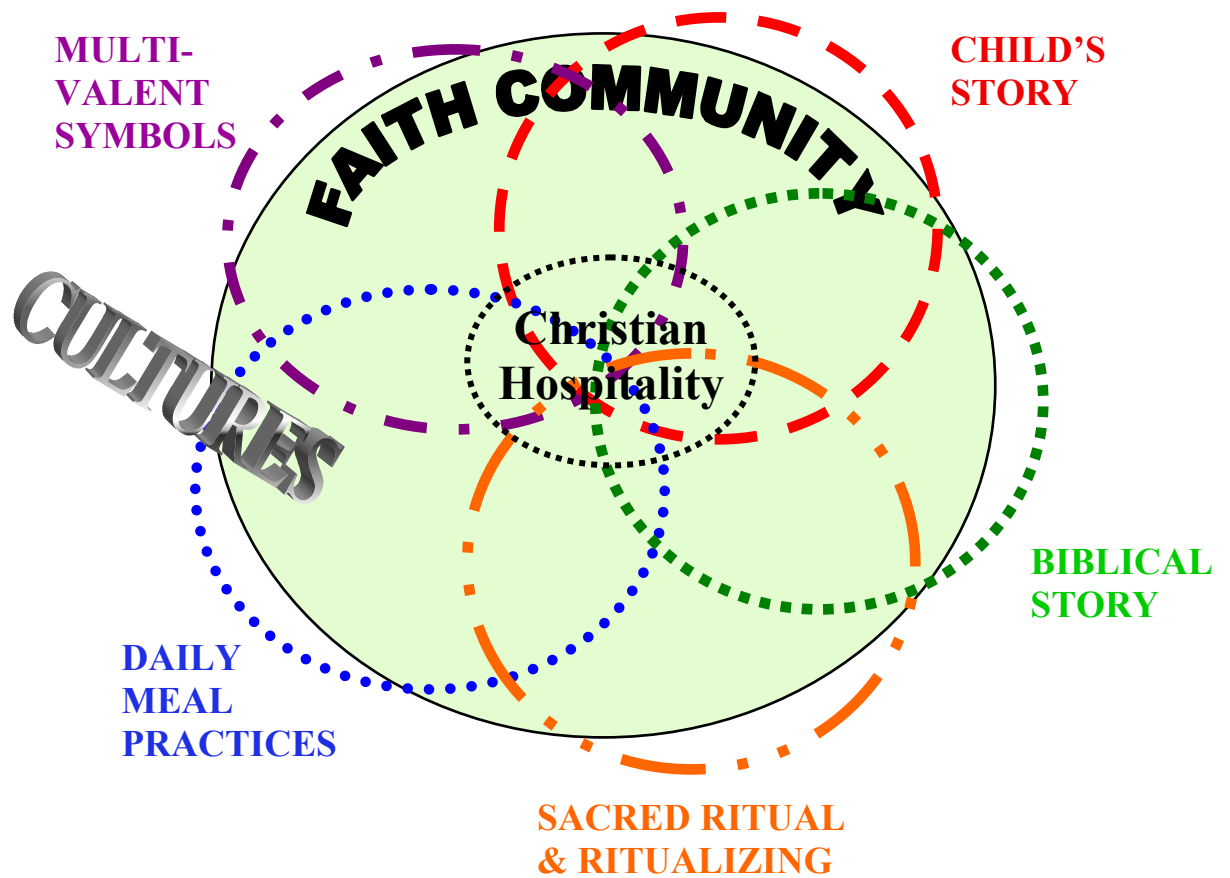
A prominent theme that erupted rapidly at the beginning of the research at both congregations was inclusion and exclusion, being welcomed or being purposefully left out of significant parts of the life of the church, and particularly with Eucharist and the rippling effect of inclusion or exclusion in their lives. As one parent stated in conversation during a preliminary visit to Hennepin Avenue, "If you ask my daughter about inclusion she won't know what to say. But she knows when she is being excluded." Thus, Christian hospitality forms the nucleus of the eco-sphere. The themes of the individual spheres that formed the original eco-sphere are: lived experience, the child's story, the faith story, sacred ritual and ritualizing, and multi-valent symbols.

During the second phase of the ethnography in the Latino congregation, it became evident that the role of family and daily meal practices, whether present or absent, played a crucial role in shaping and expressing both the children's and the parent's interpretations of the faith story and sacred ritual. The components are revised to include the practice and influence of cultural meal practices. It was also evident that there was a fine line between the actual lived experience, meaning the life-experience in the moment, and the child's sharing of experience through dialogue and narrative. There were moments that took place during the study that influenced the direction of the children's interpretations. When identifying the primary themes, the child's own story was more prevalent. Thus, at the conclusion of phase II, as depicted figure twelve, the components f

the Eucharistic Faith Eco-Sphere and the components that intersect in the application of hospitable pedagogy in the study are now revised as follows:

*the child's story,  
the biblical story,  
daily meal practices,  
multi-valent symbols, and  
sacred rituals and ritualizing,  
with Christian hospitality at the core of the model.*

Fig. 12. Eucharist Faith Eco-Sphere.



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