

Deep Talk Research meeting No. 1

18th June 2026, online

Minutes amended on 11 August 2026

Present

Dr Olga Boiko, Shannon Schuster, Dr Juli-Anna Aerila, Aiveen Mullally, Marianne Mielikäinen, Judyth Roberts, Dr Cora O Farrell, Tuula Valkonen, Kathryn Lord, Diane Koehoorn-Koster, Paul King

Minutes taken by Diane and edited by Kathryn

Welcome to everybody. Everybody introduces herself or himself.

- Olga, UK: researcher at the University of Birmingham. She has funded research that is soon to start in the U.K. Poland and Portugal which will use Deep Talk as a method for hearing children's voices who are about to be screened for Type 1 diabetes and who have been diagnosed with the disease. Two stories have been developed for this research
- Shannon, Australia: retired teacher who used to be a Godly Play trainer and OutoftheBox (OOTB) mentor, Australia.
- Juli-Anna: Finland, University of Turku. Uses Deep Talk for educational goals. Stories, literacy education. Dialogical approach. Early childhood and primary education. Teacher of University Teacher Students.
- Aiveen Mullally: a teacher educator in the area of RE working in early childhood education and also teaching about the spirituality of the young child.
- Marianne Mielikäinen: school social worker (school kurator)
- Judyth Roberts, Australia: Trainer of Godly Play and Deep Talk. Early childhood, spirituality of the child. Interested in existential meaning making through spirituality education.
- Cora, Ireland: teacher educator. Deep Talk trainer. Early childhood, spirituality of the child. Interested in existential meaning making through spirituality education.
- Tuula, visiting from Finland: glad with the good results of Deep Talk in investigations done on the method for example by the University of Turku.
- Kathryn, UK: was a Godly Play trainer, from there onwards to Deep Talk. Co-developed OutoftheBox and has since stepped away from that role. Now a Deep Talk mentor
- Diane: visiting from the Netherlands, Primary School teacher, Godly Play Trainer, Deep Talk trainer, Out of the Box mentor. Taking notes.
- Paul (later during the meeting), Ireland: came to know Deep Talk through Cora. Has done research on Deep Talk. Finds that people are often surprised about the method and the process.

Tuula asked: 'What are the expectations for this online meeting?'

- To understand the new way Deep Talk is being used as a methodology for hearing children's voices compared with 'normal' Deep Talk sessions.

- Expectations for this meeting: a whole new network of researchers and practitioners is forming.

Tuula began with a Deep Talk story. The one that she and Kathryn were proposing to use for the research: the fence.

'Are you ready for a story?'. Story about a child standing next to a fence. One day he decides he wants to go over the fence.

'Now I wonder: How do you go over the fence? What do you need?'

- I'd like to have a peak over the top: what is there?
- I am short, I would like to walk along the fence to see where the lowest part is, or use stones to help me get over the fence.

There are many ways to get over the fence. Tuula takes the child and the fence away. Closes the sandbag. We were asked to change places. Opens the sandbag again and says: 'Now we will just make our day. How is your day? What do you want to put here, what do you need?'

- Waves for everything that needs to be done for the holidays.
- A picture of the beach, coffees, friends, the water of the ocean.
- A bed for a sick child who needs mommy to take care of her/him.
- A road with curves.



Tuula says: 'for everything that is here, and for everything that is not said aloud, but is also here.'

Everybody changes places.

Tuula opens the sandbag. Makes a fence in the sand 'imagine if we have a big fence here, a fence of research. What do you need to get over it, to get the results?'

- Ethics.
- To follow the path to where the fence ends, but we need a path to the end. As in the story, it can be dangerous to cross it.
- What would happen if we work as a team, stand on each other's shoulders. 'we are all over the world: people helping each other.' Tuula: 'What other people do you need? You need like minded people, with similar passions, interests and wisdom.'
- Values, knowledge, skills and motivation.
- The reason for doing this. Will this make a difference to children, people? If not, I am not interested in the research.

- Honest discussions, a trustworthy circle. A community that practises the Deep Talk way

Tuula puts down a circle of wooden figures: 'this is the team. How would this work out in research?'
 'We have the method. It starts with ethics, doing research in an ethical way. But when you are on the other side and have crossed the wall. What do you find there?'

- Importance of an ethical approach to the research: the impact it will have on children, etc.
- Turku 'paper on ethics', does that get a place here?
- Massive! Over the fence means getting your research approved, especially with children.
- I wonder: 'does the research need to be with children? Or could it be with teachers or early childhood practitioners?'

Tuula: 'Who needs to be in the team?'

- The team is clear: the currently present people.
- Needed is Advisory capacity in the team.

The practitioners of the research

Olga talked about the method (Deep Talk) that the trainers will use. It is important that the trained adults will use exactly the same way of telling the story, using the props, etc.

- Needed for the research are persons who understand children. So that the children are safe and they can trust the people who are leading.
- The practitioners should be selected for their ability to work with children and hold space.

Olga explains more on the research:

- There will be two stories used. A beautiful space will be created. To encourage sharing from the child, instead of asking questions that often do not get much response. Important is that the researchers will be doing exactly the same thing. So that the results can be compared. Thus a very detailed and specific method is needed.
- It will be a multi sided project, with 3 researchers in Poland, Portugal and the UK.
- Deep Talk as the methodology to investigate the reactions of children.
- We invite children to talk about diabetes in these sessions.

Kathryn: Important to remember that children won't just talk about diabetes, but about other things, and some will be symbolic.

A mosaic approach will be used. Also drawing, storycrafting. Deep Talk is about feelings, getting calm and getting in connection with the people. We won't depend on one method, we need a bag of tools.

Discussion on the stories and practicalities:

- Materials: originally the researchers thought about using the materials Kathryn has from OutoftheBox. But it was decided that sand is better. Again: it is important that it is similar in every place where it will be used.
- Question: Is OotB easier to take with you, is it perhaps more 'toy like', and more interesting for children?

- Kathryn tells that the experience is that almost all children, also boys, are very much into the story and very engaged.
- Kathryn and Tuula think the original story, with not a fence but a river, might provoke other thoughts by the children that may be unhelpful. For example: I am not allowed to go into the river by myself, or my mother has to come with me, I cannot swim, etc. Thus, a fence might be better: something to cross without water.
- Olga explained that the board has already decided on the Story WITH water. It should stay that way.
- Will hospitals allow sand? Yes, sand is clean. You can make sure to not make a mess, by bringing an extra cloth. And a sandbag of good quality. The researchers will be going into the homes of children, not into hospitals.

Thirdness: Tuula tells about a new theory that seems to be of importance to Deep Talk. The background of Thirdness. In Christianity The Holy Spirit. Thirdness is a psychoanalytic concept developed by [Dr. Jessica Benjamin](#) that describes the shared mental space between two people.

It would be very interesting to get some research on this in the future.

Some discussion on forming a network.

- Deep Talk is open, but we need some kind of open structure
- Network of practitioners
- Practitioners need input about the method to improve their practice. And the other way around towards the researchers.
- A guidance network
- Evidence based: schools don't pay or invest to have their teachers trained, unless they see evidence based results of Deep Talk.
- Are there guidelines for Deep Talk? Yes, in the book.
- How accurate is the book?
- Website needs updating.
- Copyright?
- Knowledge can be free.

Tuula remembers us of the three different groups, still standing in the sand, on both sides of the fence. There are people on both sides: researchers and practitioners. Some people will only tell a few DT stories during their lifetime. Others, like the ones on this Zoom, form a team. And do research.

Tuula: 'I wonder, is this good enough? What do you need to finish this session?'

- Deep Talk journal? No- too much work.
- Agreement on starting small, with a working website, with links to interesting Deep Talk material, research and so on.

- The domain 'Deep Talk' is no longer owned by Tuula. Kathryn bought the domain 'Deep Talk Stories'. For now this will do.
- We have each others' e-mails. Let us keep in contact.
- Let's get together on a monthly basis.

Tuula: 'Here we are. A big network. We are all together. There is a fence. There are both sides. We will meet once a month, whenever. We will meet again.'