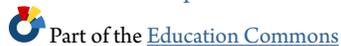

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Narrative, meaning making and personal development: Teachers' storied experience in Montessori, Steiner and other primary classrooms

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Chapter IV

Experiencing the Complexity of the Human Journey

Story forms reflect life's journey in that by affording children and teachers the opportunity to explore their personal narratives in the school setting, we nurture their ability to understand life experiences in a meaningful way. This educative process for deeper understanding introduces a paradox of human identity – every human life cycle contains common elements mirrored by the narrative form. We are born, we grow, we learn, we work and play, we face conflicts and have to make choices, we form relationships and we die. However, despite the repetition of this narrative pattern and the ready identification possible for each of its components, each story is still remarkable in its uniqueness as Marsden (1988) demonstrates in this poem (pp. 182-183).

He walked with his feet on a roadway,
A path that was clearly defined.
But the journey that really had meaning
Was the one that took place in his mind.

Whenever he came to a crossroad
He had his choices to make.
But his legs played no part in the choosing
Which of the roads he must take.

Wisdom lay not in his muscles
Nor in the soles of his feet.
It came from the light of achievement
It came from the mud of defeat.

The further on he walks, the more crossroads.
And the harder the choices become.
In country that's strange or unfriendly
The ignorant soon will succumb.

And there are four different paths to be taken
None can be safely ignored.
Even the one that's been travelled
Needs to be further explored.

For there's always a road to friendship
And there's always a road to fame
And there's always a road to danger
And a road that wants walking again.

This poem indicates that our wisdom – our understanding of the experiences encountered on our life journey – is attained by reflecting on the unique interweaving of our explorations even though the nature of these explorations is common among individuals. We are prepared for our self exploration by being exposed to images and

metaphors that offer symbolic pictures of human life cycle possibilities. Our greatest tool in understanding these images is our ability to process information in at least two distinct ways: logically and narratively. We are further prepared to live the stages of our own narratives by experiencing the patterns and rhythm of our physical, emotional, cognitive and social beings. From in-depth interviews, a literature review and reflection on my own teaching experience, methods were revealed for encouraging students to experience the attributes of the human journey. They included:

- acknowledging the importance of narrative thinking as well as paradigmatic thinking;
- provision for imagery and allegory; and
- provision for rhythm, ritual and memory through
 - lessons in narrative format,
 - rhythm in classroom explorations and recreation,
 - the rhythm of time, traditions, and festivals,
 - oral language and memory, and
 - the rhythm of human lives,

Acknowledging the importance of narrative thinking as well as paradigmatic⁵⁸
thinking

⁵⁸ Paradigmatic thinking - the term used by Bruner (1988) interchangeably with Logico-Scientific thinking.

A classroom that pays tribute to the power of personal narrative is also one that acknowledges the importance of narrative thinking as separate from paradigmatic thinking. Narrative thinking or – in Bruner’s terms “a good story” – convinces us of the likeliness of the events occurring or the characters existing. This is in contrast to the “well-formed argument” of paradigmatic thinking which aims to convince us of truth (Bruner, 1988, p. 99). Using narrative thinking, we find connections in stories or in life events by using our imagination or intuition and without any proof of actual cause and effect although we sense that one action or situation may be the result of another.

In *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* (Winchester, 1998), for instance, we learn that Dr. W.C. Minor had a significant role in the creation of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). Reading his story, one marvels at the fact that his incarceration has resulted in his having spare time and access to books which in turn facilitated his becoming a contributor to the Dictionary. Indeed, the author, Winchester, implies that if Minor had not committed murder, been declared mad and institutionalised, the OED might not have been written. “The circumstances that placed William Chester Minor in the position from where he was able to contribute all his time and energy to the making of the OED began with his horrible and unforgivable commission of a murder” (Winchester, 1998, p. 191). Cause and effect are thus used to create a likely scenario, but there is no proof of the connection. Children need to be able to use this type of thinking to make sense of their lives. “If I share more, will I have more friends?” or “If I practise, will I be a great pianist?” a child might ask. This is clearly cause and effect thinking, but far different than the proof demanded of paradigmatic thinking which might lead to a conclusion such as “Plants need light to be green.”

Robinson and Hawpe (1986) also recognise these two types of thinking, which they refer to as Principle and Story. They claim that one can view an outcome as a result of cause and effect or of a relationship. “Both are attempts to organise and give meaning to human experience, to explain and guide problem solving” (p. 114). The difference is that principles are “general, context-free, usually abstract, and testable only by further formal scientific activity.” In contrast, the product of narrative thought is “context-bound, concrete, and testable through ordinary interpersonal checking” (p. 114).

Gallas (1993) claims that using both these types of thinking can greatly enrich science programs conventionally associated with logico-scientific interpretations.

The cultivation of wonder and its validation in the child (because certainly we know that children come by it naturally) is generally not one of the stated goals of our curricula, but it is one that I believe holds great potential for teachers. By incorporating journals and talks into my curriculum, I hoped to tap into the child’s internal conversations or personal narratives... These conversations with oneself are filled with pondering and surprise; they contain strands of thinking and reasoning rich in association, personification, metaphor and analogy. (Gallas, 1993, p. 13)

Like Gallas, in my 9-12 year old classroom, I discovered the importance of allowing children to use narrative thinking in cultural subjects⁵⁹ when the class decided to do a

⁵⁹ Cultural subjects – Cultural subjects in the Montessori curriculum include history, biology and geology as well as music and arts.

project on The Timeline of Life. Pamela, Sasha, and Catherine decided to write a play about the Paleozoic period. They personified the creatures of this early evolutionary period, the Cambrian. The trilobites were the heroes for doing the best job of cleaning calcium from the ocean to prepare it for other creatures. They lived happily amidst the jellyfish, sponges, and bivalves. Then the Sea Lillies (Crinoids) entered the scene and with a most superior attitude, took over this job with the result that the trilobites left the scene. The Crinoids were the rulers of the Ordovician period and their expert leadership prepared the way for the hardshelled creatures such as starfish and horseshoe crabs who paraded onto the stage in their new fashion. As the girls performed their play, I realised that their personification of the situation made their presentation the least factual of the projects that included reports and dioramas. However, in portraying these human like relationships, they revealed that they had a deep understanding of the interdependence of all creatures.

By not being context-bound, story or narrative thinking is variable according to the circumstances of the teller and listener. “The story incorporates the feelings, goals, needs, and values of the people who create it. Thus, each participant may render the same episode in quite different ways. The story is flexible where the principle is rigid” (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986, p. 115). Narrative thinking thus allows for the co-existence of many accounts without one necessarily being right or wrong. Children exposed to stories begin to understand that every story has a voice; every story is somebody’s story. “All ages gain some extension of thought or omnipotence through identifying characters in stories heard, read, dramatised” (Bruner, 1990, p. 54). Story “accommodates ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes” (Carter, 1993, p. 173). In contrast, a scientific account aims for a single version and is appropriate

for assessing external physical problems, but not for assessing human dilemmas. Polkinghorne (1988) provides a metaphor attributed to Northrup Frye (1963) in which he suggests that one consider paradigmatic thought as a centrifugal force directed out from words and things. In contrast, narrative thought, exemplified by literature and poetry, “moves inward toward an inner imaginative realm and the structure of language itself” (p. 75).

In her interview, Fran (1:135) described how she asked her students to put themselves in the shoes of Jack of *Jack and the Beanstalk* to consider the goodness or evil of his behaviour. She was asking them to use narrative thinking to deepen their understanding of a moral situation. When students in my class wrote about the day in the life of an Australopithecus, a Homo Erectus, and a Neanderthal person, they also moved into an imaginative realm. In this case by taking the point of view of ancient humans, they merged ancient history and contemporary views and experiences of life. Narrative thinking allows us to transcend both time and facts to experience a deeper reality.

Classrooms that herald narrative thinking are much more likely to be process oriented, rather than product oriented. Story does not lead to a single outcome defined by “rules or logical propositions,” but rather story “emerges from action” with a myriad of possibilities for resolution and ending that can be considered by the imaginative realm (Carter, 1993, p. 173). Story is not about reducing variables, but about considering the interplay of all the variables including characters, setting and plot that contribute to a comprehensible whole. In constructivist early childhood classrooms, a play-based curriculum is encouraged. In these classrooms one can identify several of

the elements of spontaneous play which is “intrinsically motivated”, “freely chosen”, “pleasurable”, “nonliteral” and “actively engaged” (Hughes, 1999, pp. 2-3). As children are learning about their world, play is work and work is play. Much of spontaneous play involves constructing narratives that help the child to make sense of his/her experiences. As Torrence (1994) explains, “The affective and interpretive aspects of play make it something which is uniquely significant to the individual player, providing a rich context for personal self-expression” (p. 26).

In Ellen’s Montessori classroom, several 6-8 year olds were involved in constructing their own cubbies. The cubbies were ‘homes’ at first; they then imagined them to be shops. They determined their ‘roles’ in the shop as shopkeepers and customers and devised a currency from leaves and pebbles.
(Ellen: Class Observation 11/98)

Observing the action and listening to the dialogue of the children, I became aware of the richness of learning when paradigmatic and narrative thinking are used concurrently. The children used logico-scientific reasoning to design a structure that would stand and keep the weather out. They used narrative thinking as they imagined their cubby to be a shop, determined their “adult” roles in the play and devised a symbolic currency. They again displayed their concrete operational reasoning⁶⁰ when they made change with their invented money.

⁶⁰ Concrete operational – Piaget termed the stage of cognitive development reached at about 5 or 6 years of age as concrete operational. At this stage the child’s reasoning is still tied to concrete objects but “the child’s mental representations of reality are organised into an overall system of related representations” (Hughes, 1999, p. 106).

Alongside of this group, a 5 ½ year old boy was digging furiously. When he finished, he sat in the hole, peering out and observing the 9-12 year old children in the next class. (Ellen: Class Observation 11/98)

The teacher allowed him this time. Perhaps she recognised that he needed solitude on this day and had worked hard to create a peaceful place. It is possible that he was using narrative thinking to come to terms with binary opposites of quiet vs. activity, solitude vs. interpersonal dynamics.

If a teacher accepts that narrative thinking is separate from paradigmatic thinking, she/he will also appreciate that preschool children, not yet capable of the abstract logical thinking to isolate variables, are still quite capable of narrative abstract thinking. Egan (1986, 1997) suggests that we have done a disservice to children by applying Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory to all curriculum planning. We break knowledge down into sequenced bite-sized pieces because there is much evidence to support the premise proposed by Piaget that concepts are learned in a developmental, sequential way.⁶¹ However, it is important to distinguish that between concepts of the logico-scientific format which explain the relationships of external variables and those that are experiential – providing experience from which

⁶¹ Berk (1997) summarises some of the variables that have been researched that have called the Piagetian age framework into question. For example, the very experience of going to school gives children more practice in seriation, ordering, etc. than those who do not. The phrasing of questions, the choice of objects and the number of objects can all affect success in the task. It has also been noted

the individual constructs his/her own story. Piaget himself clearly recognised that narrative thinking is different from paradigmatic thinking. He described how from 18 months children are capable of symbolic play that represents an abstraction of reality.

In constructive play displayed from around this age, children use one object to represent another. Following closely on this type of play is dramatic play. “Instead of simple object symbols, children use gesture and language to create imaginary roles and situations with complex themes, characters and scripts” (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales and Alward, 1999, p. 29).

Piaget also wrote extensively on the animism present in children’s thought characterised by children endowing natural phenomenon with human feelings and characteristics. Children created images with their language which could only be described as abstract. However, rather than focusing on the remarkable ability of young children to use figurative language so effectively, Piaget underscored the primitivism of these animistic representations. He viewed it as a paradox that the child’s egocentrism made him/her incapable of being conscious of self.

It seems that in the primitive stage the whole content of the infant’s consciousness is projected into reality (both into things and into others), which amounts to a complete absence of the consciousness of self... The same thing constantly happens to us in cases of voluntary imitation, when we identify ourselves with what we are imitating without realising how much belonged

that conservation is culturally affected and thus learned later in tribal societies where equal distribution is not practiced (pp. 239-240).

originally to the thing we are imitating and how much we have ourselves endowed it with. (Piaget, 1929/1973, p. 153)

Montessori also recognised that young children's thinking was characterised by rudimentary paradigmatic thinking as well as narrative thinking. Like Piaget, she viewed animism as an immature, primitive means of understanding the world. She implied that focusing on fantasy with young children might actually be a disservice to them in their development of logical thought processes. For this reason, she encouraged her children's house teachers of 3-6 year old children to emphasise real stories such as those provided by nature as well as focusing on the child's own timeline.

People have always thought that to play with bricks and exercise the imagination on fairy tales, were two of the child's primary needs at this age. The first was supposed to set up a direct relationship between the child's mind and his environment, so that he could know it and master it, thus achieving much mental development. The second was held to give proof of a wealth of imagery which the child poured out in his games. But by having in his [sic] hands something real on which to exercise this powerful force, one may reasonably suppose that he [sic] is greatly helped, for his mind is then also brought into contact with the outer world. (Montessori, 1949/1988a, p. 162)

Steiner philosophy too asserts that in the early years the child gets to know his/her world through sensory activity and imitation acknowledging that the child engages in a type of abstract thinking in forming images at this stage. (Montessori, 1949/1988a; Steiner, 1923/1996) However, Steiner warned against emphasising reading, writing

and mathematics too early believing that young children might be deprived of the rich basis of understanding provided by animistic thought.

Children in this epoch often ask ‘why’ questions. What they seek are not abstract explanations but stories and images that can help them to understand on their own terms that which they question. (Marshak, 1997, p. 40)

Egan (1997), like Steiner, notes that mythical understanding is not just a primitive mode of thought to be abandoned as quickly as possible in the preparation for more rational thought. Egan suggests that humans lose something when they move away from mythical thinking just as modern society has lost some of the key skills of oral cultures including metaphor, rhythm, ritual and memory. When young children construct and understand narratives, they also draw upon orally founded and well developed patterns of rhythm and memory. Renewed interest in the uniqueness of traditional oral cultures (e.g. Ong, 1982; Egan, 1993) has thus given us insight into our own language and cognitive development and given support for Egan’s contention that theories of intellectual development “take current adult forms of thinking as a kind of ideal, with children’s development being measured according to the degree that it approximates adult forms...recognise only gains in cognitive competence, not losses” (Egan, 1997, p. 57).

Caldwell (1997, pp. 40-41) reports that on her visit to a Reggio Emilia school⁶² where children's dialogue was treasured, she overheard these animistic statements by

children being not only accepted, but encouraged by the teacher:

Ale: They are all plants. They are all the same. They like each other's company.

Marina: Do you think these plants are happier here at school or at your house?

Ale: Mine is happier at home because I give it food. But it is also happy here.

Marina: Why is that?

Ale: Because it's happy when you come near because it thinks you are going to give it water. If you don't come near, it will think that you aren't a friend anymore...

Caldwell reports that she was concerned that children were not being encouraged to pursue 'scientifically correct' thinking. However she came to understand the view that "not to attribute feelings to the plants would be unnatural for the children.

I learned that to the educators in Reggio Emilia, animism is not negative, or merely a stage of childhood thought, but rather an approach to the world that offers a way to enter into relationship with that which is considered different than we are. (Caldwell, 1997, p. 41)

⁶² Reggio Emilia – a town in Northern Italy that has adopted a constructivist approach for its 33 preschools. Some of the key features of this evolving approach are projects, the provision of a variety of materials for student's expression and a great respect of the dialogue of children out of which the curriculum emerges (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Caldwell, 1997). (Refer to Appendix C.)

In fact, Caldwell, like Egan, is ultimately persuaded that animism is not an inferior way of looking at things, but a different way that offers a unique understanding of relationships:

Even though Piaget would describe these children's ideas as egocentric because they identify with the leaves' movement and structure through their own bodies, in many ways the sentiments seem to be the opposite of the true meaning of the word egocentric. To identify with the other, to imagine what life must be like for another being, and to see the interconnected nature of all living things – these are among the sentiments and values that we wish to encourage in children and in adults. These sentiments and values are at the root of establishing a deep connection to the natural world and a strong sense of place. (Caldwell, 1997, p.66)

An excerpt from Chief Seattle's famous speech of 1852⁶³, a favourite text of interviewee, Ellen, exemplifies the richness of animism and metaphors in oral culture:

The voice of my ancestors said to me, the shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not simply water, but the blood of your grandfather's grandfather...The water's murmur is the voice of your great-great grandmother. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. (Jeffers, 1991, unnumbered)

⁶³ Chief Seattle's speech - Many give this the date of 1854. There are many versions of the speech supposedly translated by an H.A. Smith. This version is one retold by Susan Jeffers (1991) in *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*. Although the authenticity is sometimes questioned, the metaphor use is characteristic of the images used by the Native Americans.

Steiner, in a lecture originally delivered in 1923, noted the importance of acknowledging the young child's narrative thinking to provide a meaningful educational experience.

If a teacher tries to explain the subjects during the first school years, the children will react by becoming blunted and dull. This approach simply does not work. On the other hand, everything will go smoothly if, rather than explaining the subject matter, one forms the content into a story, if words are painted with mental images, and if rhythm is brought into one's whole way of teaching. (Steiner, 1923/1996, p. 100)

The use of imagery⁶⁴ including metaphors, similes and personification in young children's language, their use of images and rhythm to aid memory and their response to ritual supports the view that humans from preschool age are capable of abstract thought in a narrative sense.

Provision for Imagery and Allegory

Cassirer (1946) sees metaphor as the link between myth and language. Its importance lies not only in the immediacy of the imagery created, and the linking of the symbol of the language with the symbol of the image, but in creating an understanding of wholes and parts. "Whoever has brought any part of a whole into

⁶⁴ Imagery – refers to that which helps evoke images such as figurative language or words that relate to a sensorial experience.

his power has thereby acquired power, in the magical sense, over the whole itself”
(Cassirer, 1946, p. 92).

Do we do our children a disservice by discouraging animistic thinking rich in metaphors, similes and personification? Egan believes we do, referencing a study of preschool children by Gardner and Winner (1979) who found that “the highest number of appropriate metaphors was secured from the pre-school children, who even exceeded college students; moreover, these three-and four-year-olds fashioned significantly more appropriate metaphors than did children aged seven to eleven” (p. 130). Cassirer (1946) noted that narrative thinking fueled by metaphors predominates for awhile, and then is pushed aside by logical thinking also related to the language root. The two types of thinking merge in adult thinking apparent in metaphors used in historical explanations and poetry and, according to Desautels (1998), even in science. A student of Desautels explains how metaphor aids logico-scientific thinking:

Metaphors are indispensable because they allow us to create models of things that it would be impossible to discover otherwise. Metaphors provide the real basis of all conversation, hence of all human thinking. The production of scientific knowledge is obviously no exception to this rule. In order to arrive at some conclusion as to what was contained in the black square, we had to compare the deviations of the emissions with material things with which we were more familiar, such as the deviation of a ball of wood when it hits a wall, for example. We linked all the phenomena which we observed on our screen to things we were familiar with: hence, we continually used metaphors in order to understand. (Desautels, 1998, p. 133)

Consulting architect, Joy Cuming⁶⁵, commented that metaphor has a critical role in deepening the understanding of science such as in architecture. When contemplating a new project, she advises architecture students to consider an organic or artistic metaphor for the design that represents the relationships one wants in the building. She herself has used a tapestry as a metaphor on one occasion and an oak leaf on another. The metaphor emerges from a visualisation of the client's profile of needs and preferences. This image is a constant reminder of the whole vision. Some writing from a six year old who was in my class a few years ago illustrates that young children can be very adept at using similes and metaphors.

I fille lieck a princess today in a butefel dress with perpel and pinck things on it. [sic] (Emily: Age 6)

Today I feel lieck a butterflye with all cinds of kulers on mey. [sic](Emily:Age 6)

Shawn shared a transcript of a classroom conversation in her classroom with extensive evidence of personification in young children.

Nora: We could write it on a sign for the birds *to read* when they fly over here. ...

S: Do you know what they eat?

N: Worms. I saw them in my neighbour's yard. The wife bird was out

⁶⁵ Architect Joy Cuming – a former lecturer at the University of Western Australia. She is currently an Architect with Archstudio in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

there looking for worms for their kids to eat while the husband bird took care of their babies in their nest. (Shawn 3: 104-110)

Egan implies that more young adults would be capable of this facility in thought if educators acknowledged the link between metaphorical thought of early childhood and the logico-scientific thought of formal operations. He notes that although causality as a formal concept does not appear until sixteen years of age, “it grows gradually from the uses we see in earliest stories to the more logical forms we see in history and science. Nor can we call the earlier form simpler than the later; it is rather just less specialised” (1986, p. 23).

The implication from Egan (1986, 1997) is that we will make education more meaningful if we celebrate a child’s metaphorical, animistic thinking rather than belittling it. I observed this occurring in Nigel’s Montessori classroom. He wanted to take the children outside and it was raining off and on. He said to them, “I’ll have to have a talk with the sky” (Nigel 1: 81-82) It is probable that most of the children, ranging in age from 5 1/2-8, were well aware that Nigel did not have the power to make it rain or stop raining, but they all delighted in the personification of the sky in the image he presented to them. He conveyed the message that processing thought through such creative images is quite acceptable.

Montessorian, Ellen, similarly acknowledged the importance of mythical thinking by selecting texts rich in metaphor. On a follow-up interview, she was excited by a new book she had found entitled *Grandad’s Prayers of the Earth* (Wood, 1999). A

Grandad responds in metaphor and personification to a primary aged child seeking to know about prayers.

“A bird prays when it sings the first song of the morning, and it prays in that silent moment just before it sings. And the robin’s last song at sunset is an evening prayer.”

“All the beings of the world pray, “ said my Grandad, “as they slip through the forest or sparkle in the water...as they climb mountain-sides or soar into the clouds or burrow into the earth.”

“Each living thing gives its life to the beauty of all life and that gift is prayer.”

(Wood, 1999, p. 12)

Although urging that images be linked to reality, Montessori (1964) understood that one could stimulate the wonder in children by using imagery they understood.

Montessorians Allison and Carol both used the charts designed by Montessori in telling stories about geography and botany. One of the geography charts entitled *The Cosmic Dance*, for example, demonstrates the cooling of the earth by red angels leaving the earth with hot air and blue angels descending with ice. A botany chart entitled *The Chemical Factory* demonstrates photosynthesis by showing a metaphorical miniature factory where workers use chlorophyll activated by the sun to transform water and carbon dioxide to produce a simple sugar and release oxygen. Montessori herself, in describing the coming of life, uses personification to create vivid images of the earth.

Vegetation has accomplished its adventure with joy, conquering the earth, aspiring to the heavens, gripping the soil with strong roots to support noble

pillars, roofed with interlacing branches and leaves opening millions of hungry mouths to the sunshine for carbon dioxide. (Montessori, 1948/1989a, p. 31)

Steiner teachers have also discovered that acknowledging the type of thinking that characterises a period of a child's life can lead to deeper meaning in learning experiences. When metaphors are used to teach children about the real world, the human being becomes the reality-based metaphor. This is the basis of anthroposophy.⁶⁶ Bernadette explained how the human being is used as a metaphor for understanding both zoology and botany.

Science proper only starts in Class 6, but in the early years, you do nature stories, anthropomorphising. It's always related back to the human being. So in this class, Class 4, we do a lesson on the animals. Again, we look at essentially the three fold nature of the human nature - the head -the intellect, - the feeling based in the mid part of the human being, and the will, the metabolism in the lower part of the human being. We take animals that actually represent those three archetypes. If you look at the sphinx or the four evangelists, those archetypes. The eagle relates to the head that can soar to the heights. You have the cow, the calf which is the metabolic system. The cow is not an awake animal, it's all metabolism. In the middle you have the cats

⁶⁶ Anthroposophy – For Rudolf Steiner, anthroposophy was the basis of his educational philosophy. As he explained in a 1923 lecture, “The anthroposophical approach begins by looking at the human being as an entity, an organization of body, soul, and spirit. It attempts to comprehend the human being not in an abstract and dead way, but through a living mode of observation that can recognise and comprehend with living concepts the human totality of spirit, soul and body (Steiner, 1996, p. 24).

like the lion with tremendous courage. The cats have this rhythmic nature. They can relax so totally and then the next minute, they can be really awake. The lion is representative of that middle system and the virtue of that, of course, is courage. ...Then in Class 5, we do the plant world and we go through simple mosses and ferns and fungi and all of that through to the (flowering)plants. The growth is like the human being. The baby is kind of a mushroom really. There are many ways you can do it. Again the plant has the threefold, - the root nature, the leaf nature and the plant. You don't take it apart. You always look at the plant as a whole and how the different parts of it relate. How it relates to its environment. (Bernadette: 348-352)

Contrary to Montessorians, however, the metaphors used in Steiner education are often fantasy or myth based rather than reality based. The implication is that mythic characters and situations are archetypes.⁶⁷ Waldorf teacher, Sam, describes how he has used fables and fairy tales to connect with the children in his second grade class who have been in what Steiner (1996) and Egan (1997) would propose is an understanding similar to oral traditional cultures.

Well, the basic principle is that the child will go through the same stages in personal development that humanity has gone through in its development. So

⁶⁷ Archetype – “Carl Jung applied the term to ‘primordial images’, the psychic residue’ of repeated patterns of experience.”... The term archetype usually “denotes recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, or images which are said to be identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams and even ritualised modes of social behaviour (Abrams, 1993, pp. 223-224).

that the stories will represent sort of a changing consciousness. So we start with fairy tales which are magic and fantasy. Anything can happen. A forest or a stove can suddenly appear and speak to a character... Characterising the first seven years, is the underlying statement that one works with the children (to show) that the world is good. Children in that time will experience that the world is good. The second seven years is that the world is beautiful so that is the primary school years. They are about beauty. The third seven years is that the world is true, or there is truth. So goodness, beauty and truth are the three works that underpin our education. So in Class1, they are six turning seven so they are still in that phase of life and that 'the world is good' is reflected in the fairy tales. The good is just. The evil gets the punishment. That moral quality is really there throughout the years. We won't preach it. "If you are good, this will happen..." It's just a story. The children just pick that up. (Sam: 100-105)

From my interviews and literature overview, it became apparent that the use of imagery in teaching had been more carefully considered by Steiner and Montessori teachers than by other teachers interviewed. However, the whole language teachers in Government and Catholic schools were also very aware of the meaning making provided by parables and allegorical stories.⁶⁸ Fran (1:51) and Vicky (1:233) both mentioned that *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak,1964) is a metaphorical story about children's fears. Egan (2000a) suggests that rather than being frightened by the

⁶⁸ Allegory (includes parables and fables) – refers to a story that can be interpreted at more than one level. (Abrams, 1993)

monsters, children see them through keen perception as allegories of adults. "What he does through the book is help the child domesticate the fears caused by these ugly looming adults. They aren't so bad really; they can be controlled" (p. 14).

On a visit to Kate's class, I noticed that the children had taken the relationship of Charlotte and Wilbur in *Charlotte's Web* (1952) as a parable for friendship. Likewise, Fran used Biblical parables as an example of stories that could be interpreted on many levels.

In the stories in the Bible, they were trying ...to give a deeper message. A fable of sheep and shepherds wasn't just a story about sheep and shepherds. It was more than that. Yet, you can read it as a story of the shepherd and the sheep. Then you can read it again...(Fran 1: 189)

Imagery also involves appealing to all the senses of the listener or reader. Story teller, Paul Matthews (1994) was named by Steiner teachers Sam and Bernadette and by Montessori teacher, Ellen, as being influential in their thinking about storytelling. Following is an example of a guided imagery exercise:

In the present moment and place (where, hopefully, there is a window), and using your senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, name what is around you – random impressions. Things. The relationship between things. What things and people are doing. Don't pass too easily over the things you cannot name. Try to see what nobody else sees. As far as possible stay with impression rather than expression – i.e. don't at this stage, interpret what you experience. (Matthews, 1994, p. 20)

Matthews (1994, p. 21) emphasises that imagery is very individual. It would thus seem that providing times for sharing imagery would be a way of celebrating uniqueness and differences in the classroom or the staffroom.

Although everyone shared the same place and moment and were set the same task, everyone (being different) will surely have either selected different impressions or described the same thing in their individual way... Try to make conscious what these differences are: i.e. sense used; words chosen for their sounds; individual rhythms; vague or detailed; singular or plural; awareness of colour; interest in nature or in manmade objects; verbs, adjectives or the lack of; use of metaphor and personification; static or dynamic etc., and what might have caused these differences: i.e. position in room; nationality; sex, mood; temperament; previous reading; constitution etc. (Matthews, 1964, p. 21)

Sam shared that his Steiner staff had a workshop where, through guided imagery, each staff member envisioned three tables from their past. They were guided in visualising and then drawing the tables and using their senses to hear, see, smell and feel what memories were associated with those tables.

The exercise was to draw. We had to draw three tables from our lives and then over three days take turns giving them a title and sharing. We looked at tables from their childhood, or tables that they worked at once. These tables were the key to look at someone's life, a little window. Family tables, all sorts of things. It was just a little snapshot. (Sam: 44)

In Montessori education, five great stories⁶⁹ are told in the primary curriculum. They are told in a manner that evokes images and creates impressions.

Well, I think I'd better start with one of the big stories of Montessori because I really think that although I tell them once a year, they tended to launch many subthemes. For example, the Timeline of Life...And I tell it like a story. It's impressionistic to a large extent. (Allison: 59)

During this story, for example, Montessori (1989) describes our planet in the Jurassic period of giant reptiles.

In the next, or Jurassic sub-division of the Mesozoic Period, came the reptiles of the Saurian family, like monstrous lizards, so heavy that they needed the support of water to hold them up, and spent most of their time in swamps.

They had very small heads in proportion to the size of their bodies and were slow-witted, sluggish creatures, always chewing. (Montessori, 1989, p. 35)

As Montessori describes the planet's preparation for the coming of humans, she creates vivid images using metaphor and personification.

The earth was trembling with expectancy and glad foreboding. Her heart moved in sympathy with creation's joy; tremors ran through her frame and emotional tears coursed through her in new streams. Very different was her mood than when of old, in the Permian Epoch, she had waged war on the encroaching waters. Now gentler and quieter, she was moved throughout her

⁶⁹ The Five Great Stories – are *The Story of the Universe*, *The Story of Life*, *The Story of Humans*, *The Story of Language* and *The Story of Mathematics*.

whole being to feel the near approach of man [sic], her destined lord, and gifts were brought forth in new abundance for his [sic] use.

(Montessori, 1948/1989a, p. 41)

Oral storytelling was not a part of any of the Government and Catholic teacher interviewees' programmes and so it is not surprising that there was not as much emphasis on the rich images of oral language that were mentioned by the Steiner and Montessori teachers. In these classes, image creation seemed to be linked for scaffolding poetry. Lynne, for instance, encouraged imagery brainstorming as she got her Year Ones to work with Year Sixes in writing a *Guess What?* Mem Fox's (1988) patterned book about a colourful teacher. (Lynne 1:101)

An excerpt from their creation:

Does she wear odd earrings that dingle dangle?

Guess.

Yes!

Do her bangles jingle jangle?

Guess.

Yes!

Is her lipstick bright and cheerful?

Guess

Yes!

And her fingernails long and pointy?

Guess.

Yes.

(Lynne's class: 1998)

She also used many sensory poems to scaffold image making. Topics included the Royal Show and Christmas. Following is a poem Lynne used as a model of a remembered Northern Hemisphere Christmas. Children were encouraged to write sensory poems of Christmas in the Southern Hemisphere.

Christmas is white like the crisp snow at the North Pole.

It tastes like a candy cane – sticky and sweet.

It smells like a fresh green tree.

It looks like a tree surrounded by presents.

It sounds like Bing Crosby's White Christmas.

I love Christmas! (Lynne's Class Observation: 26/11/98)

“Language development in children leads to the capacity to evoke mental images of what is not present and to feel about them as though they are real and present” (Egan, 1997, p. 61). Children use images to visualise and understand phenomenon in their external worlds such as reptiles moving or trees growing towards the light of nature studies or even colourful teacher characterisations or holiday poetry. Images also help them to visualise and understand relationships as they explore the image of the Biblical sheep and shepherd or the interdependence of Wilbur, the pig, and Charlotte, the spider, or the allegory of good and evil represented by fairy tale characters.

Provision for Rhythm, Ritual and Memory

Egan (1997) notes that oral cultures provide a key to understanding the link between narrative and emotional rhythms by modelling that emotional rhythm “can provide a powerfully engaging access to knowledge of all kinds” (p. 59). Oral cultures have also demonstrated “that ideas or lore put into a rhythmic or rhyming form (are) more easily remembered” (p. 58). Teachers, who have emphasised the importance of noting oral language attributes in teaching, report that the rhythm of life is experienced in the rhythms and rituals of the classroom including lesson explorations in a narrative format, alternating periods of activity and silence, the celebration of the rhythm and ritual of seasons, festivals and life transitions. In addition, children are exposed to rhythmic patterns in movement, music, speech, mathematics and art. Oral language constructions can also be used to connect students to memories, traditions and images.

Lesson Explorations in a Narrative Format

Egan (1985, 1986, 1997) claims that in lesson or unit planning, the method of stating objectives and then listing specific activities towards meeting these objectives (content and method) and finally evaluating or assessing through testing can lead to an absence of meaning in topic exploration. This is due to a multiplicity of factors but includes the absence of a link to individual emotions and interests and an absence of teaching according to the type of understanding of an age group.⁷⁰ He uses the

⁷⁰ Egan views the development of understanding in individuals as paralleling historic development.

Thus the first years with physical prelinguistic understandings are somatic, children from 2/3-6/8 years old are in an age of mythical understanding with a keen understanding of fantasy and metaphor, binary structuring (concepts in opposition), and sensitivity to the images and rhythm of language. Most of the

metaphor of a production line for this sequential activity way of teaching and proposes a story model form as far preferable. A story form has the engaging rhythm of life's narrative with a beginning, conflicts and resolutions and endings. It allows for individual interests and types of understanding and has a whole-part-whole rhythm.

Egan's (1986, p. 41) story form model involves:

Identifying importance:

What is most important about this topic?

Why should it matter to the children?

What is affectively engaging about it?

Finding binary opposites:

What binary opposites best catch the importance of the topic?

Organizing content into story form:

primary and middle school years (approx. 8-15 years old) are characterised by romantic understanding where they have learned to use abstract referencing systems to mediate between opposites, are fascinated by the extremes of reality – great achievements and exotic forms of life, great events and transcendent human qualities. The philosophic understanding (senior high-adulthood) characterised by generalisation, objectivity, connections among things, and an increased understanding of causal chains and networks. Egan adds ironic understanding as a final understanding that may or not be attained by adults. It is characterised by a high degree of metacognition and an understanding that general schemes do not reflect the truth about reality, but, in fact, are merely alternative perspectives. (Egan, 1997)

3.1 What content most dramatically embodies the binary opposites, in order to provide access to the topic

3.2 What content best articulates the topic into a developing story form?

Conclusion:

What is the best way of resolving the dramatic conflict inherent in the binary opposites?

What degree of mediation of those opposites is it appropriate to seek?

Evaluation:

How can one know whether the topic has been understood, its importance grasped and the content learned?

Egan's storyform clearly has curriculum planning implications which will be discussed further in Chapter VIII. However, I include it here to emphasise that for meaning to be effectively achieved in the classroom, children must realise they have their own ongoing story to construct and this personal narrative is influenced by other stories. Lesson plans in narrative format, of which Egan's is one type, provide a structure for this important meaning-making process.

Although I have not adhered rigidly to Egan's story form as a planning model, I believe my thinking about lessons and children was influenced by his work from my first reading of *Teaching as Storytelling* (1986). My facilitation of in-depth studies in

the Montessori classroom was aided by Egan's views. When I had determined what explorations children found interesting and identified the relevant binary opposites, I had a guide for deciding what lessons and resources would cater for the children's understanding. I also had a new sensitivity to the differences of children thinking mythically and those thinking romantically. For instance, on one occasion discussion with 6-9 year old children was focused on the disappearance of dinosaurs. Anna, looking somewhat distressed, commented, "There is never a really happy ending is there? Something is always lost." Her insight led me to recognise that at age 7, she was abandoning mythic thinking in favour of romantic thinking. She was showing an ability to mediate between the opposites. The same insight led me to encourage children in the romantic period of understanding to share their collections, to explore weird and interesting events and to encourage them in their quests to find the longest, highest, and fastest of some category ranging from rivers and mountains to sport stars.

Other Montessorians have also been influenced by Egan's work. Van Groenou (1995) has found using story as a lesson basis is the most effective means of catering for the mythic understanding of her 3-6 year olds.

When a story is presented, it carries with it a re-creation of a reality with all the affective forces important at the time. The children experience reality as a whole with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, as well as emotional ambience created with the situation. And then there is the enjoyment of language that the storyteller can convey to the children. The children experience the effective use of language to create images and metaphors, the flexible use of categories instead of restricting these to only one attribute. (Van Groenou, 1995, p. 19)

Interviewee Carol commented that both she and her Montessori teacher husband were greatly influenced by Egan's work which they have applied to exploring mathematical and historical concepts.

Kieran Egan gave a lecture in Chicago and that made us want (to use story) even more. When my husband does Christopher Columbus, he brings in a tea bag and some spices and says, "This is why we're here." Whets the children's appetite. "What's he doing with all these things?" And then he tells the story of Marco Polo and all the people going to find the spices and wanting to find a shorter route....It touches more the emotional side – seeing how children get excited when you relate stories. (Carol: 10)

The Montessori lesson format itself has a rhythmic quality to it. The first period lesson "This is" represents the presentation/demonstration which serves as an engagement and the beginning of the narrative. The second period or "Show me" invites recognition from the child and would be parallel to the exploration or development of the narrative. The final period, "What is this?" is a transformation period in which the children show ownership of the information to the extent that they themselves can present the information or transfer the concept to other situations. Also part of this period, the conclusion of the narrative, is the opportunity to reflect upon the work in a purposeful way. The rhythmic pattern is also perpetuated by narrative within narrative. Although each study follows the three steps, the understanding of the child might be linked to a stage. Thus, early childhood would equate to the "This is" demonstration stage. Early primary years would be

characterised by the “Show me” stage whereas application and reflection inherent in Stage 3 to respond to “What is this?” would characterise the older child.

Both Lynne and Allison, in their respective interviews, reflected on the influence of whole language instructors Green and Reid (1988) in helping them to appreciate the narrative like movement possible in meaningful lessons. Green and Reid suggested another narrative-like lesson plan, more delineated than Montessori’s, that included engagement, exploration, transformation, presentation, and reflection. Within each of these five stages, the five stages themselves exist so that there would be constant movement within each stage. Thus engagement would have a beginning, development and ending as would every other segment of the lesson or unit. It is this rhythm of movement that underscores learning as a process of construction rather than a product in both Montessori and whole language classrooms. Allison claimed that realising the rhythm of the lesson format changed her teaching:

Well, I began to use prediction myself and immediately changed how I presented stories to children. I realised engagement was really, really important. ...I began to think that way and began to be amazed at how within each stage, there were all the stages again. How very, very important that catalyst was and also the reflection afterwards. I realised that in my reading maybe I had left off the beginning and the end. Even though I was probably doing quite a competent job of presenting a text, I underused it. I didn't engage. And I think how I read things changed. (Allison: 19)

When I visited Sam’s Waldorf class, I noticed that the main lesson (mathematics in this instance) of the morning had a pattern not unlike the whole language engagement,

exploration, transformation, presentation and reflection. The children were told a story about a pixie who was not happy because he didn't know how many crystals he had when he had so many. Exploring the problem, the class suggested that the pixie use bags and put ten crystals in each bag. In this case there were 3 bags and seven left over or 37 crystals. The work was transformed by the children individually as they worked on putting "bags of crystals on the ten shelf" and leftovers on the unit shelf. Work was presented in the main lesson book in crayon. Sam used rhythmic chanting of a verse to reassemble the group. The children then shared their work and reflected on the mental process they had used to complete the morning lesson. When I asked Sam if Steiner education promoted a specific learning plan, he replied, "Not really, but Rudolf Steiner emphasised that periods of concentration need to be alternated with breathing⁷¹ giving the lesson time a rhythm." He also commented that as a teacher he keeps in mind that he "must tap the feelings and imagination first" (Sam: 43) which certainly would constitute an "engagement" in whole language terminology.

It is apparent that time is a significant variable in allowing children to experience the rhythmic pattern. Whole language advocates believe that allowing a long period of time for language exploration (rather than a fragmentation into 20 minute lessons) will lead to greater meaning (Cambourne, 1988). Both Montessori and Steiner also advocated large "block" lessons to allow the rhythm of learning to occur. Steiner referred to these large blocks of working time as 'main lessons'. "These main lessons – much longer than the ordinary lessons, which allow one subject to be studied in

⁷¹ Rhythmic pattern – I have also heard this rhythmic pattern referred to as inbreathing and outbreathing by Steiner educators.

depth – do not distract children, as often happens because of too many subject changes” (Steiner, 1996, p. 183). Uhrmacher (1993) points out that there is also a rhythm in “presenting material in blocks interspersed with extended breaks [which] is like situations in which, when working on a particular problem one may have to leave the task entirely in order to return to it with fresh insight” (p. 93).

For Montessori, there was an emphasis on allowing the child long periods of individual exploration. Interruptions to the personal rhythm of exploration were condemned:

Without being able to give any definite reason, we feel that something precious was lost on our life-journey, that we were defrauded and depreciated. Perhaps at the very moment when we were about to create ourselves, we were interrupted and persecuted, and our spiritual organism was left rickety, weak and inadequate. (Montessori, 1917/ 1964, p. 22)

In all the classes I visited in conjunction with this research, I witnessed a long period of exploration in the mornings. This was often not the case in other classes I had the opportunity to visit during the last few years where there was often a shift in subject as often as every 30 - 45 minutes. I suspect that long periods of work time allow children to benefit from the rhythm of a narrative-like lesson plan pattern in negotiating meaningfully with the material presented.

Rhythm in classroom explorations and recreation

Steiner and Montessori both advocated that the rhythm provided by periods of activity alternated by periods of silence is important for a child’s self-construction.

Steiner saw the rhythm of silence and activity as a doorway to meaning because of its direct parallel to the breathing of our respiration and the heart beat of our circulation. He claimed that if we are attuned to this rhythm, then the student will find learning meaningful and will not tire any more than the heart or the lungs tire (Steiner, 1996). As observed in Sam's class, choral singing and then silence is often part of the morning ritual in the Waldorf class. Marshak (1997) notes that in a Steiner class the day may start with a "ritual of beginning: candle lighting, silence, song" (p. 76).

Montessori trained her teachers to play what she referred to as a "silent game" to enhance the engagement of the senses and children's awareness of their physical and social environment. Montessori's silence game underscores the rhythm of silence and sound, movement and stillness, freedom and inhibition:

The game of silence offers us a means of testing the children's will power. We found that this grew as the game was repeated and the periods of silence became longer. Then we added a kind of "call" in which the child's name was barely murmured, and each child, on hearing his name, had to come up quietly, while the others stayed motionless as before. Those called moved very slowly in their efforts to make no noise, so one can imagine how long the last child had to keep still, while awaiting his [sic] turn!⁷² It was incredible what will power these children developed. The exercise called for an inhibition of impulse as well as for the control of movement... There is, on the

⁷² Gender pronouns – As was the practice at the time she was writing, Montessori uses masculine gender pronouns when referring to the child. The reader should add female pronouns to masculine references.

one hand, freedom to choose and to be diligent, and on the other hand there is inhibition. Children under these conditions can use their will power, both for the purposes of action and of restraint of action. (Montessori, 1949/1988a, p. 239)

Through the rhythms provided by the dichotomies of free movement and control, of activity and silence, the child gains a greater understanding of herself/himself.

“Silence, “ says Montessori, “often brings us the knowledge which we had not fully realized, that we possess within ourselves an interior life” (Standing, 1957, p.226).

Teachers who respect children’s rhythms recognise that there are times when individual children might need a quiet time to observe and reflect. Murphy (1992), in her work on temperaments in children, has suggested that children be allowed to put coloured cards on the corner of their desks – green indicating a need for quiet reflecting time or red indicating that work has ceased because assistance is required. Wolf (1996) has suggested that in open plan classrooms such as Montessori, a quiet corner might serve this purpose. “The child does not speak while in the Quiet Corner; he simply observes and appreciates a few of nature’s wonders” (p. 65). Interviewee, Nigel, had a designated quiet corner in his 6-9 year old class where children could go to work on quiet activities.

You might have noticed that that corner has become a silent corner. From (Aline Wolf's) book, I took her idea of the sand timer.⁷³ They go in there and there are one or two activities they can do in silence on their own and they don't need to be disturbed. That activity is an equal activity to their jobs so if they suddenly have a feeling they want to go and do that, they can. (Nigel: 242)

Ong (1982) commented on the somatic link of oral recitation. "The oral word...never exits in a simply verbal context, as a written word does. Spoken words are always modifications of a total, existential situation which always engages the body" (p. 67). This recognition of the important link between movement and mind was observed by Montessori in 1949:

To give them their right place, man's [sic] movements must be coordinated with the centre – with the brain. Not only are thought and action two parts of the same occurrence, but it is through movement that the higher life expresses itself....Till now, almost all educators have thought of movement and the muscular system as aids to respiration, or to circulation, or as a means for building up physical strength. But in our new conception the view is taken that movement has great importance in mental development itself, provided that the action which occurs is connected with the mental activity going on. (Montessori, 1949/1988a, p. 130)

⁷³ Wolf (1996) suggests using an hourglass (one or three minute timer) for an individual silence game as she observed in the class of Joan Gilbert in Altoona, Pa. "The timer provides a definite beginning and closure enabling the child to be independent" (p. 64).

My observations of Montessori preschools revealed that Montessori's words are generally heeded in The Children's Houses.⁷⁴ One has only to observe children walking on the line to music⁷⁵ or carrying each of the blocks of the pink tower across the room.⁷⁶ However, I didn't see any intentional links between rhythmic movement and learning in the Montessori classes of the older children except when rhythm was being intentionally explored in music or syllables were being clapped in language and poetry lessons. It was somewhat of a revelation to thus come across Claremont's work. Claremont had studied under Montessori and, from her writings, one assumes that primary teachers in her training school are being taught to integrate rhythmic movement with varying activities in the classroom. For example, Claremont (1993b) describes Montessori's suggestion that students move to the choral part of a story or poem in a form of gymnastic metrics. She gives *The House That Jack Built* as an example of a repetitive rhythmic text. Students can make movements as they speak in chorus to emphasise words being stressed. Claremont goes on to show how the

⁷⁴ Children's House – refers to a 3-6 year old classroom.

⁷⁵ Walking on the line – In Montessori 3-6 year old classrooms there is a circular line. This is designed to help children practice securing their balance while walking. They might practise walking heel to toe to the rhythm of music or vary the exercise by carrying something such as bells themselves. (Montessori, 1912/1988b, p. 91)

⁷⁶ Pink Tower – This sensorial material consisting of 10 cubed blocks ranging from 1 to 10 centimetres is designed to nurture the child's observational skills leading him/her to make judgments and comparisons as he/she builds the tower from largest to smallest. By going across the room to obtain the next block, children hold the memory of the sensorial impression in their minds (Montessori, 1965).

bodily rhythmic movement prepared the way for students understanding of patterns in language.

You should start metrics with the children by actually moving, identifying the strong beat with their own movement. If you start them feeling metrics with their bodily movement, they'll never make the mistake of getting a strong stress on a preposition or a conjunction when they come to do metrics on paper...From that, you can go on to vowel colouration. Vowel colouration is one of the most important things in English poetry, because the beauty of English poetry, as distinct from the poetry of other nations, lies in the use of the vowel...You try to get the children to realise that, in English, the mournful, very serious poetry is using heavy vowels...With light poetry you're keeping on the lighter vowels. (Claremont, 1993b, pp. 97-98)

I was struck by the similarities of Claremont's teachings to the eurythmy⁷⁷ and language study of Steiner. However, where this view has seemingly been lost to some Montessori training courses, both Steiner teachers interviewed verbalised their views on the importance of linking rhythmic movement to language and this connection was apparent in my visits to their classrooms. In Sam's class, the morning started with a prayer with hand gestures followed by the children singing chorally a hymn about Saint Michael against the dragon. As a group the children then played two songs on the recorder. After an interruption for photo taking, the children were refocused by a chain movement around the room as they sang "Among the leaves so green oh."

⁷⁷ Eurythmy: "a form of artistic movement that integrates spoken poetry and dance" (Marshak, 1997, p. 23).

There was then some clapping and singing in partners and then silence. Next the children again used rhythm and clapping as they reviewed their two times table using gestures and silence for the in between numbers. Steiner would view the child's eager and capable participation in these rhythmic activities as reflecting a new maturity in the rhythmic system:

There are many other aspects of consciousness that awaken in the school child. Many are related to the maturation of the rhythmic system, for heart and lungs now settle into a regular rhythm, whereas in the younger child they are still quite irregular. With the development of the rhythmic system comes the love of rhythmic games such as jumping rope with verses, rhythmic hand clapping, and throwing balls to the accompaniment of long verses. Moving in a rhythmic way (for example, in counting and recitation) speaks deeply to the school child. (Finser, 1994, p. 231)

In an interview session, Sam pointed out to me that not only is the metric rhythm a key influence in the classroom, but also the rhythm of whole to parts to whole was often realised by moving from large group to small group to individual choral work and back to the large group.

Sam: St. Francis wrote and we've been doing one in class called the Canticale of the Sun.

Gay: Is that done chorally?

Sam: Yes, yes it is.

Gay: That's another difference. The choral speaking.

Sam: Also, we'll take that and do it in a group, and then small groups. So really we take it as a whole and then break it down so we have individuals speaking.

Gay: It's really rhythm of life.

Sam: That's right and the teaching principle of going from the whole to the parts. That's a key Steiner teaching principle. We all do it together, and then down to the group and then down to the individual. The whole to the parts is how they experience the whole world. You also have to go back the other way. Go back from the parts and build up to a whole. (Sam: 400-413)

Steiner Year 4 teacher, Bernadette, found establishing a rhythmic pattern helped children to write poetry. Referring to their participation in writing a play, *Noah's Ark*, in Class 3 she said she invited them to help her write more narrative for the action:

So I started "And then all through the livelong day" and then the children (added) "She went along the wooded way." They could tell, not because I've said it has be this type of rhythm and have so many syllables, but because we've done so much working with rhythms of speech. We actually walk out rhythms. So it might be a short poem. It might be an anapest – short, short, long and they will actually step that out in short steps and long steps. So they get very sensitised to rhythm, because, again, it's being worked through with their whole body. So they were just throwing lines to me. It was just incredible. I would just throw a line out and they would throw a line back. (Bernadette: 236)

In my own class I recall clapping out the five-seven-five pattern for Haiku and how even this rhythmic scaffolding helped the children to write poetry. More complex types of poetry were tried after repeated modelling and reading samples with varying degrees of success. Many children had difficulty with metre and rhyme. On a recent visit to Lynne's classroom, she was experiencing similar difficulties as she scaffolded the writing of a class poem for the school newsletter. I wonder if Lynne and I and other whole language and Montessori teachers might benefit from incorporating more rhythmic movement into the classroom. I also wonder if one of the reasons that we have lost touch with this link to the child is due to the removal of music from the life of the classroom. In my case, music was fragmented into a once a week singing session with my class and a once a week optional recorder lesson. In Lynne's case, music had been placed in the hands of a specialist teacher. Interestingly, I heard no music in any of my school visits except in the Steiner school because I wasn't at these venues in the once-a-week "music" time. Nevertheless, I watched both Sam and Bernadette teaching music to their students in some form on every occasion that I was in their classrooms. Both admitted that they had very little musical background but were learning as they explored rhythm, sound patterns, singing and instruments with the children. The children in Bernadette's class were able to demonstrate their ability in Class 4 to read music, to perform complicated ostinati⁷⁸ and to create their own pieces. In both classes children started playing the recorder in Class 1 and the lyre in Class 3. These instruments often accompanied narrative songs, poems and plays.

⁷⁸ Ostinato – a repeated musical pattern.

Along with other whole language advocates including Kate, Lynne, Fran , Nigel and Vicky, I am convinced that rhythmic, rhyming texts assist children in predicting story content and vocabulary. Many of the books provided for emerging readers in all of these classrooms were cumulative⁷⁹ or circular tales⁸⁰ often with repetitive choral parts.

Oh, what a fuss when the king rides by:
Rockets dance in the starry sky,
Mice in their mouse-hole wonder why,
The people throw their hats up high,
The soldiers stamp and the ladies sigh,
The dogs all bark and the babies cry,
The pussy-cat runs and the pigeons fly,
And the drum plays RAT-A-TAT-TAT!
(Mahy, 1986, pp. 14-16)

Thus, children were exposed to the rhythm, rhyme and repetition of language but it was not linked to their physical rhythmic systems by being an integral parts of their

⁷⁹ A cumulative tale – keeps adding a new concept while repeating all previous concepts. Examples are *There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly*, *The House that Jack Built*, and contemporary stories such as Mem Fox’s , *Shoes From Grandpa* (1989), Mahy’s *When the King Rides By* (1986), Winer’s *Little Brown Monkey* (1987).

⁸⁰ Circular tales – begin and end in the same place after a series of events. The life cycle is an example of this format. Books of the “Home is Best” subgenre follow the circular tale format. Some contemporary examples are Eastman’s *The Best Nest*, Sheena Knowles, *Edward the Emu* (1988), and Gwenda Smyth’s *A Pet for Mrs. Arbuckle* (1981).

daily movements. In visiting Vicky's class, I found that she was beginning to explore the broader possibilities of rhythmic movement in aiding her remedial class to achieve fluency in reading and writing. She prepared the children for work with rhythmic exercises. She was playing carefully selected background music to provide a rhythm for the children's work. She encouraged the children to clap and stamp out syllables. Although she herself admits that she has had very little exposure to alternative philosophies of education, the rhythmic activities that she has discovered to be so effective in reaching her children are very similar to some advocated by Steiner.

Rhyme, rhythm and ritual are also elements of children's games such as circle games, jump rope games and hopscotch games, and small group games with a ritual of procedure and gesture such as knucklebones (jacks) and marbles. Roberts (1980, p. 132) reported that a Birmingham primary teacher observed in an interview that traditional games were not being encouraged in schools "in the name of individualism and creativity." However, she felt that "the structured form of many games and their ritual, repetitive elements offer...a security which modern educational philosophy has rejected." She recommended that teachers be more sensitive to the needs that these games respond to in children.

In my own years of primary teaching I remember being astounded that games from my own childhood could still be so popular including the circle games of *Duck Duck Goose* and *A Tisket a Tasket*. In each case a rhythmic narrative is played over and over as one is touched or has a handkerchief dropped. The conflict is represented by "Who Will it Be?" and the resolution by racing to the vacated place. Jump rope chants often are narratives characterised by rhythm, rhyme and repetition:

Miss Mary Mac Mac Mac
all dressed in black black black
with silver buttons buttons buttons
all down her back back back
She asked her mother mother mother
for fifty cents cents cents
to see an elephant elephant elephant
jump over the fence fence fence
He jumped so high high high
he reached the sky sky sky
and didn't come back back back
til the fourth of July ly ly

or the following for multi jumpers:

I had a little puppy
His name was Tiny Tim
I put him in the bathtub, to see if he could swim
He drank all the water, he ate a bar of soap
The next thing you know he had a bubble in his throat.
In came the doctor, (person jumps in)
In came the nurse,(person jumps in)
In came the lady with the alligator purse (person jumps in)
Out went the doctor (person jumps out)

Out went the nurse(person jumps out)

Out went the lady with the alligator purse(person jumps out)

Clapping games also have universal popularity. I have observed this type of game in Asia, Europe, America and Australia. In fact, Korean teachers commented to me on the popularity in their primary school English classes of *Who Stole the Chickens and the Hens* shared with them in workshop.

Who stole the chickens and the hens?

Who stole the chickens and the hens?

Who stole the chickens?

Who stole the hens?

Who stole the chickens and the hens?

Egan (1997) observed that these games as well as rhyming nicknames and riddles are part of childhood in most cultures. Children delight in playing with words. “Knock, Knock” jokes have been popular in every early primary class I have visited.

Bernadette expressed her feeling that this wonderful interest of children in oral word play should be acknowledged and used in language study in the classroom.

We often have sort of silly sessions where we just make up poems and I’ll give them a line and they have to give the next line. Of course they love it when I say things like “there was a man who met a bear/He was standing in his underwear.” They all roar with laughter. I think it’s great if they also know that they can be funny....And I love it when children parody verses and so on. I think that’s a real skill. And that ability to play with language which

we did a lot of in Class 1 and 2 with rhyming and things. I would say words and they would have to rhyme them or we would do lots of nonsense rhymes and rhythms. (Bernadette: 240-247)

Attributes of oral narrative including rhythm, rhyme and repetition were apparent in poetry, music, movement and play explorations in all the “narrative” classrooms visited including government, Catholic, Steiner and Montessori. Montessori and Steiner teachers noted the importance of providing times of silence and quiet alternated with periods of activity although this was practised as a whole class in the Waldorf school but both as a class and individually in the Montessori environments. Steiner teachers also stressed the importance of linking patterned movements to sound (as is apparent in their eurythmy) to nurture holistic development. Also in the Steiner school, there was far more poetry recitation and in-class music than in the other environments.

The Rhythm of Time, Traditions and Festivals

Children experience the rhythm of time through daily and weekly patterns, seasonal patterns and by a realisation of a past, present and future existing alongside our life cycles. Traditions and festivals celebrate these human linear and circular tales.

Celebrations mark the passage of time in ways which connect to the children’s own pasts (birthdays) and which link us with the rhythms of nature (seasons and solstices). Celebrations repeated over time become traditions. Traditions provide guideposts through a year which reassure children and provide a sense of security. The sense of belonging engendered by their participation in family cultural traditions makes our active support important... Traditions and

stories can make the present more meaningful, the past more believable, and the future more possible. (Mock, 1999, p. 34)

In the Steiner preprimary, until the children are seven, there is an emphasis on rhythm and repetition and reverence. (Stedall, 1992) The children experience the rhythm of days so that they might have baking every Tuesday, craft on Wednesday and painting on Friday. They experience the rituals of lighting a candle and saying a poem or a blessing. If they are told a story, it might be told every day for a week as demonstrated in the film, *Time to Learn*, or it might be performed each day as a puppet show as was happening in the kindergarten/ pre-primary I visited. Steiner stated that at this age the children learn by imitation. By repeated viewing of the teacher baking bread or repeated opportunities to listen to the same stories, the children absorb the process so they can do these things for themselves. Singing the same songs numerous times, playing ring games and using the fingers in plays to illustrate poems and songs all aid the child in “taking the outside world in through the senses to create an inner world of soul” (Alwyn, 1997, p. 18).

The rhythmic nature of the school day continues into primary school. Henry’s description of a Waldorf primary school day clearly describes what I viewed in Sam and Bernadette’s classrooms.

Each day is seen as having a “rhythm”. The day begins with an opening ritual involving the lighting of a candle and students reciting a verse about nature, followed by a two hour main lesson, then cycling through related and integrated areas of study. Activities of the school day, whether lunch time or a lesson, have a completeness of their own, as well as contributing to the overall

rhythm of the day. Transitions from one activity to another are signalled by such routines as children saying poems and verses at various points throughout the daily cycle...Unity is achieved through the repetition and harmony that underpins the school day. (Henry, 1991, pp. 5-6)

Uhrmacher (1993, p. 89) noted that in Mr. Stevenson's 5th grade that he observed, the children presented the morning verse with movements five times – each time getting quieter and quieter:

The earth is firm beneath my feet,
The sun shines bright above,
Here I stand so straight and strong,
All things to know and love.

My observations were also consistent with Uhrmacher's conclusion that there is a rhythmic pattern to each main lesson block centering around a story. In contrast to the pattern of the younger children, the story is a continuous one, rather than a repeated one. The pattern is as follows:

Students recapitulate the previous day's story or lesson. The teacher asks leading questions to prepare students for a new story. The teacher tells an imaginative story (lasting from 5 to 15 minutes). The teacher begins a creative activity (e.g. drawing, painting, sculpting), and / or students write and draw in their main lesson books. (Uhrmacher, 1993, p. 94)

Also in contrast to the younger children, the rhythm of time is not defined by repetition of painting, craft, baking according to days, but is a cycle of 4 to 5 weeks defined by the main lesson.

In the Montessori classrooms, there was no set rhythm to the day that all the children followed except for a gathering either first thing in the morning or before lunch. There was recognition that the rhythm of the day varied for individual children. They had a long work period in the morning. Some children might pursue several tasks in this time and some might concentrate on one. The morning might include a story for all or some of the children, but not daily.

There were rituals and traditions apparent in the Montessori classrooms. Children were greeted by the teacher and shook hands as they entered the classroom. Morning tea was a ritual in that children ate it daily but when they were hungry – not at a set time. In the 3-6 year old classes, they prepared their morning tea, sat if a seat was available at the morning tea table, and afterwards washed up. Lunch in the American Montessori schools I visited was also a ritual in that children participated on a rostered basis in preparing the meal and setting the tables. In Australia, lack of space means that picnic style meals are more common, but some of the sense of the ritual of sharing has been lost in the process. For the younger children, lessons were given as the need for them became apparent to the teachers. However, for the older children, key lessons were often scheduled and became a part of the rhythm of the week.

In Kate's Catholic school classroom, rhythm was established by the variety of activities and the movement of desks to allow whole group work, collaborative work

and individual work. Markings on the floor allowed the children to perform this furniture movement with ease. During my observation, the desks were moved back for dramatic portrayals of story, then in a circular formation for a spontaneous discussion that I had with the children. Following this, we went outside to sketch so there was a movement indoors and outdoors and indoors again. This contrasted with Lynne's class. On my visits to her school, she complained about the cross setting⁸¹ which meant that the class was kept to a rigid schedule. She expressed frustration that she could not let them pursue a subject in a concentrated way because of the switching to banded classes for reading and mathematics. Although the curriculum of Lynne's and Kate's classes was very similar, the fact that Kate was able to make decisions regarding the timetabling of her day, enabled her to establish a rhythm not necessarily dictated by the clock.

I also noticed a difference in rhythm according to terms between the West Australian and American schools. With irregularly spaced holidays in the US (one week in February and April, two weeks in December/January and ten weeks in summer), beginnings tended to be associated with the semester starts in September and January. In contrast, in Western Australia, each of the four ten week terms is followed by a two week break (six week break at Christmas). There is really a 'termly' rhythm in these classes with new explorations commenced, developed and reflected on during the course of the ten weeks. Even in the Montessori classroom, where I did see work continuing on through more than one term, there were always signs of new beginnings

⁸¹ Cross setting – a term when 2 or more classes are regrouped for lessons in a subject (often maths or reading) according to their ability and achievement level.

with the new terms. In Kate's class, she also had a curriculum rhythm over the two semesters which she repeats to different children in subsequent years. This represents her rhythmic pattern of teaching.

The first two terms we concentrate on fiction, and then we move to non-fiction. ...They're doing environment and next week we move on to the rain forest and then the desert. (Kate: 42)

The Government and Catholic school classrooms visited displayed a yearly rhythmic pattern with the beginning of the year designated as a time of getting acquainted and the end of the year as a time for consolidation and reflection. As Kate explained, "Usually in Term 1, we start getting used to each other and in Term 2, we start getting into the nitty gritty" (Kate:5). This was not so pronounced in the Montessori school where only one third of the children were new. Perhaps in Montessori schools it is more like a concerto than the single movement of the government and systemic Catholic schools. In the Steiner school, where the interviewed teachers, Sam and Bernadette, had had their present classes for two and four years respectively and planned to have them for seven years, the rhythm could be described as a sonnet with each couplet corresponding to a new level of understanding of the maturing children. As Sam explained, "We work in seven-year cycles here. Human development goes in seven-year cycles" (Sam: 42).

The passing of time was treated cognitively as well as incidentally in the Montessori schools. Although in all classes, there was a morning announcement of the date and day, in Montessori classes the children have varied activities to underscore their knowledge of the rhythm and passage of time. They begin by representing the

passage of days graphically by putting a tally mark each morning on a long strip of paper with a black line running its width. Children then look at daily calendars. They learn the names of the days and how we got these names. (Saturn was named after the Roman god of farming, etc.) They look at how days are grouped into weeks. They note how weeks are grouped into months and examine many monthly calendars. They investigate the history of the names of months. (January is named after the Roman god Janus, the god of new beginnings, etc.) They note inconsistencies in the names that help us to understand the history of our calendar. For instance, December means tenth month but it is the twelfth month. In the eighth century B.C., the Roman calendar was expanded from ten to twelve months (Montessori Materials Research Foundation, 1994a). Children use timelines to learn about B.C. and A.D. They relate the passage of time to their own lives by making their own timelines. Alongside this study, they experience the passage of time by learning about geography - how the earth revolves around the sun so that we have day and night, seasons and a summer and winter solstice (Montessori Materials Research Foundation, 1994b).

In the Steiner school, the children's first experience of the summer and winter solstice is through their traditional celebration of these festivals. I attended a winter solstice festival. The excitement in the air was palpable as the families expectantly gathered on chairs in the woods. The night was a cacophony of beautiful sounds – sounds of the children meandering through the woods singing and sounds of the children singing winter tribute songs in several part harmony against a backdrop of nature's gentle noises. There was visual magic as well – lantern lights through the trees and the shadow puppet show presented by the high school children. The show portrayed an

African creation myth again with beautiful chanting – this time African songs. Following the shared performance, a bonfire was lit accompanied by more singing. Festivals in the other schools I visited varied considerably although all schools seemed to have traditions as part of their culture. My Montessori school had a grandparents' day, a fathers' night, an end-of-year picnic, an annual bush dance, and an end-of-year concert that coincided with Christmas. Because my school was nonsectarian, we invited children of all faiths to share their festivals and traditions with the rest of the school in some way. We also had activities that became traditions such as the annual wildflower walk and school camp. A weekly tradition was our adaptation of the traditional Aboriginal corroboree⁸² for our school community. All the children aged 3-12 and staff gathered for 30 minutes a week. We opened with a song followed by a time of sharing by volunteers of all ages. The main item was performed by the designated class for the week (Ward, 1997). Ellen reported that at her Montessori school they also had a traditional end-of-year concert. In addition, they had adopted the idea of solstice festivals which brought the community together for performances by the children.

We have at our school, twice a year, a whole school event so we used a story for the winter solstice this year. We based it on the different biomes and our group had the jungle. (Ellen: 200)

The Catholic schools I visited celebrated the Christian festivals as did the Steiner School. In addition, First Communion, Saints' Days and Remembrance Day were

⁸² Corroboree – a gathering of Aboriginal people for ceremonies and celebrations including some dance and music.

important occasions for Catholic students in addition to school concerts and assemblies. In both the Catholic and government schools I visited, classes took turns doing assembly items. Mother's Day and Father's Day also seemed to be a time when gifts were sent home celebrating the life of the child. In Dan's class, for example, he described taking photos of each class member and then making picture frames out of recycled materials for Mother's Day. Sports' race days were also a firmly established tradition to which many children looked forward with eagerness as they moved through the Catholic and government primary schools. Lynne reported:

Sports Carnival. A very big event! We have a junior and senior carnival as the school is too big to have everything in one day. All children are expected to participate. They are organised in factions and each faction marches around the oval with the captain and vice captain carrying the flag at the head of the procession. The factions sit in bays (tents) and children are called out to participate in events. There are two sections to the carnival. One is the racing on the track and the other is more a tabloid of activities which are really more of a race against the clock. (Lynne 3: 21)

In addition to the Sports Carnival, Lynne suggested that important traditions in her government school included an Easter hat parade, the end of year book awards, the parent open day, and the Anzac service:

The whole school sits in a an area adjacent to the flagpole and we have a very short service during which flowers are placed by the flagpole and we observe a minute's silence. We sing the National Anthem and we have senior students read a non-religious [sic] prayer and recite "We will remember them...."

Sometimes the choir sings a special song. This year my class recited the poem, "The Digger's Hat". (Lynne 3: 9-10)

Aside from Anzac Day, I was struck by how many traditional festivals in the government schools incorporated a competitive element and prizes including, in this instance, Sports' Day, Easter Hat Day, Book Week. This was in marked contrast to the Steiner and Montessori schools visited where festivals never involved a competitive element. Interviews with Catholic school teachers revealed a spectrum between these orientations. They all included competition in the upper primary Sports Day but views on other competitive traditions varied from school to school. I believe this is an area that needs to be addressed carefully. We need to ascertain the purpose of our festivals. Are they to celebrate the life journey of all participants or are they to celebrate excellence by putting forth a few models? Might it be appropriate to have some of both? Do group competitions such as faction and house races on sports day and performing arts festival (in the systemic Catholic system) allow for both a traditional celebration (in the sense that they are community building) as well as providing venues for defining excellence?

In all the schools I visited, I was also impressed by the great number of festivals and celebrations compared to my own schooling. My own memory is primarily of neighbourhood holiday and traditional celebrations. At school, we had an occasional concert and a Sports Day but very few traditional celebrations compared to today's schools. It would be interesting to determine if more festivals and traditions are celebrated in schools today and if this might correspond to fewer neighbourhood community activities.

Birthday celebrations are traditions celebrating the life journey of individuals and if competition is involved, it seems to be in home party games rather than at school. I visited a few Montessori schools in America including Shawn's school where a lovely ritual was practised that I understand with some variations is quite common in Montessori schools around the world.

We celebrate birthdays simply. On that day a child is celebrated at our regular meeting. She brings a gift book for the classroom. She carries the globe and circles a candle, lit to represent the sun. Her journey around the candle signifies the trip the earth makes around the sun each year, and we all count as she circles it.⁸³ Then she kneels at the small table that holds the candle. She makes her own wish, then blows out the candle. We sing to her and silently send her many good wishes. Then we read her book to the group. Each time we read her story with the class we read the small dedication that she or her parents have written inside the cover. This typically includes her name, age, and a small message to her class. (Shawn 2: 15)

The two Steiner teachers I visited shared the ritual of birthday poems with me. Each year they would write a special poem for each child in the class. The child would learn the poem and share it as an oral presentation with other class members. The poems are a celebration of the uniqueness of each child, but also a testament to the

⁸³ In my school, the child was invited to show a photo with each circle around "the sun" and to tell a story about herself/himself at that particular age.

close relationship between the teacher and child who are on this seven year journey together.

One of the things we do in the school is write a birthday verse for each child. We tell a story and then give each child a verse which they then say once a week each week for a year... What I try to do is think, "What's an image that might capture where this child is? Where are they and where do they need to go?" In my verse I try to put a little bit about where they are and suggest where they are going. Now I had a girl who joined my class at the beginning of this year who came from a state school. ..Then we came to her birthday. She was very quiet and shy and didn't want to show herself. So I wrote a verse about a girl who has a garden and it's pretty wild, but she weeds it and looks after it. She would go down to see how things are growing. And in the end is the image that she's blossoming in the same way as the flowers. And I gave her this and I didn't hear anything. About a month or two later, I was talking to her mother and she said "Thank you for the verse. Sandra really loves it." What Sandra did was she insisted she had to start a garden. In the holidays, she started to make her own garden. She had never had one before and it just came out of that poem. Then she would go and sit in the garden and say the verse in the garden. I said to the mother, "I'm so glad you told me that."

(Sam: 271-276)

Bernadette wove the foundation mythology of the class year into her birthday poems. (See Appendix on Steiner education and Chapter VII) In this case, her 4th year class were studying Norse Mythology. Steiner teachers feel this mythology in which the

gods are destroyed in a great battle is metaphorical for the end of the security of early childhood.

Many of them (the class birthday verses) have that theme that the battle is coming, but at the end, even though Balder dies, there is a new beginning. Even though we haven't got to that part of the story, I have put him in to the verses because they will – through the year – come to that picture. So that they know that, okay, things are going to get rough. Something is lost, but that gives a possibility for something new to come about. And that gives them a deep sense of security that someone knows that they can see in picture form outside of themselves what they are going through [which they] aren't conscious enough to articulate. (Bernadette: 148)

Two samples of Bernadette's Class 4 birthday poems are as follows:

Through the forest I do ride
With sword and shield both by my side
All around there's danger here
Yet there's nothing that I fear
For my heart is brave and true
As on my brave steed I ride through
My shield is strong, my sword is bright
The dark is overcome by light.

There was a princess true, good and fair
For all her kingdom she did care.

She loved the people in the land
And cared for the sick with her own hand.
She cared for animals great and small
For tiny flowers and trees so tall,
And every day to God above
She offered thanks and her pure love.

Birthdays were acknowledged in the government and Catholic schools I visited but not with the emphasis on personal journey. In Lynne's school, for example, she noted that:

Children's birthdays are announced with daily messages over the PA and the children are asked to go up to the office where they are given a birthday sticker. Staff birthdays are not really recognised – sometimes a 50th might be celebrated by having a cake. (Lynne 3: 30-31)

All of the schools studied seemed to have special traditions for the graduating class. In America primary school goes through to Year Six. In Shawn's school, the Year Six did a year long special project on an area of interest (Breiman, 1997). All the written portions of the presentation were published in a book and the researchers presented to the community at large. In my Australian school, the graduating class of Year Sevens prepared a yearbook and had a special camp as well as giving individual speeches and being presented with a book at the end-of-year concert. Lynne described the graduation at her government school as being "quite a formal affair."

Students march in and take their places at the front of the assembly area. Then one by one they are called out and they walk around the outside of the

audience and down the central aisle whilst their class teacher reads out a short piece about them. They receive a graduation certificate and a photo...The choir always sings a special song and there are speeches from some of the students. (Lynne 3: 17)

Each school marked this life transition in some form. In addition to a ceremony and celebration at the end of the year, the oldest class members were given special jobs and privileges. Ellen, who studied both Montessori and Steiner philosophies felt that the Waldorf educators were particularly aware of the importance of marking this transition as contributing to the meaning of life.

It is not only in the daily rhythm or pattern or even just the seasonal with solstice festivals, but rather the rhythm of life's transitions. (Ellen 2: 3)

In *School as a Journey*, Finser displays his sensitivity to the needs of his thirteen-year-old seventh graders. They are intensely interested in their personal lives, so they explore human anatomy. They are interested in their place in the world so they look at history; at one point Finser (1994) does an exercise to help the children visualise fifteen generations standing in front of the room. He selects inspirational biographies of people who have explored and changed the world that he thinks will help the students address this current transition in their lives. For instance, St. Joan of Arc reaches a stage in her life where she no longer hears guiding voices and Finser thought this appropriate as a metaphor for "self-development and independence"(p. 182).

With the story of Joan before us, I did not have to verbalize it, but this was the time to say farewell to early childhood and to many of the "safe" structures

that had carried them up to this point. The path of individualization calls for a stepping beyond the protective arms of family and teachers. The students needed to begin the process of letting go – including letting go of me – in order to discover self-guidance. (Finser, 1994, p. 182).

Oral language and memory

For traditional oral cultures, thought and memory are related very closely to sound. If something was forgotten by a tribe, it was lost forever. For this reason, oral cultures “have exploited language to aid memory” (Egan, 1997, p. 58). They have discovered that using rhythm and rhyme can help ideas to be more easily remembered.

Mnemonic patterns also include repetitions of words and ideas, alliterations and assonances (Ong, 1982; Egan, 1997, Egan, 2000b). Ong (1982) pointed out that in oral cultures, it was important for there to be a lapse in time before a story was retold as this gave the listener time to formulate personal patterns that would enable him/her to remember the tale. Part of this memory process involved identifying “standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero’s helper, and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form” (p. 34).

Egan believes that knowing that children are in an age of mythic understanding, we could use storytelling much more effectively in education. The power of story can be used for children as it was from oral societies where it was used to aid memory as “lore coded within a story structure...was much easier to preserve. Second, they could orient hearers’ emotions to their contents” (Egan, 1997, p. 62). He further

commented that, in his observations, only the Steiner educators truly understood the power of oral storytelling in education for memory and meaning making (Egan, 1997). In my interviews and observations, I found that several teachers had discovered the power of oral narrative, but this experience was only formalised into a curriculum in the Waldorf school.

Lynne, for instance, discovered to her delight that her remedial class could effectively memorise and present poems orally. She noticed that the children learned the poems by listening and then reciting – not by repetitive writing of the verses. They only wrote them after they could present them orally. These children who had difficulty retelling stories in a written form apparently readily picked up on rhythmic and rhyming cues. It would seem that in trying to reach her class of reluctant linguists, Lynne discovered that she could reach them by catering for what Egan (1997) termed “mythic understanding” (Lynne: 309).

Allison in her Montessori class discovered that objects could serve as mnemonic devices for her 6-9 year old class.

What we did was that we had a story vine and we hung it up. We told stories. ...I would tell one. ...The children would choose an object that typified that story for them. It might have been a cat or a lion or for one of these Ancey stories, it might have been a pan he put on his head. So they had an object on the story vine. Then they would choose a story to practice. We had the parents in and the parents could choose an object and the children could tell the story if they wanted. (Allison: 75)

Bernadette, however, used oral language structure purposely emphasising rhyme and rhythm and relevant images to cater for and to nurture the understanding and memory of her class.

That's right. If you can remember the Iliad, why write it down? You don't need to. As soon as you forget, then writing comes about. So there are different types of memory just as there are different sorts of memory that you see in early childhood. If you go back to the Stone Age, you see that they put up a Stone and that stone reminded them that there was a battle there. And we still do that. We still have obelisks and war memorials and things that are kind of the last vestige of that type of memory. And little children still do that. They'll go to the beach and say, "Remember you fell over here, Daddy? You jumped off that rock and you fell over." But they wouldn't remember that if they weren't there. When they see that rock, the whole thing opens up to them. So little children still have that local memory and you can see why sacred sites can be of great importance. (Bernadette:25)

Bernadette explains that we learn how to cater for children's memory by looking at works that were intended to be preserved by oral transmission rather than through writing.

And then it develops into this rhythmic memory out of which the Iliad and the other epics [like] the Kalevala come. It wasn't remembered in prose; it was remembered in rhythm. The Iliad and the Odyssey have the hexameter which is very, very strong but an also quite fluid rhythm. And if you're coming to Shakespeare, he uses the iambic pentameter which is a very free rhythm. It still has the structure, but it is the closest to human speech. (Bernadette: 29)

Egan claims that since young children are mythic thinkers, they learn most effectively through story telling and therefore teachers should be storytellers (Egan, 1986,1997). However, aside from the Steiner teachers who used storytelling daily, and Montessorians – Nigel and myself – who used oral story telling on a fairly regular basis, there were no interviewees who professed to using this oral technique. This intrigued me because all the interviewees were avid story readers. I wonder if, as teachers become convinced of the power of oral story in fostering meaning making, they will become more avid storytellers. There was some indication that this might happen from some of the Catholic primary school teachers consulted who revealed that in their newly revised religious education program, they are being encouraged to tell rather than read bible stories.

The storytellers' experience, combined with enthusiasm and excitement, can help give a special quality to a story. This is what makes an oral story different from one that is read. A story does not have to be told as precisely as it is written. Word-for-word memorisation is not necessary. Storytelling allows the storyteller to include their interpretation and emphasis, without diminishing the essence of the story. (The Director of Religious Education, 1998, p. 37)

I also wonder if as teachers become more comfortable in oral story telling, they might encourage their students to have more experience with oral story telling as well. I would hope that more teachers would have the transforming experience of Montessorian David Millstone (1997) who, influenced by a Steiner teacher, decided to encourage his class to all become storytellers to tell the Odyssey to other children.

He found that by exposing his class to a variety of storytellers, and by providing them with various exercises, they were able to adopt memory and presentation techniques with which they were comfortable. For instance, after storytellers told him “that they don’t memorise the plot of a story; they work not from words but from a series of images,” Millstone helped his children form images through cartooning, and guided imagery (Millstone, 1997, p. 100). He found that when these budding storytellers could visualise the setting and characters including movement and voice quality, they could bring their stories to life.

The fifth graders’ storytelling styles vary widely. Some tellers rely on singing or dramatic voice characterisations; other concentrate on sights and sounds. Borrowing from Odds Bodkin’s opening, Cyi tells much of this tale in a whisper, Odysseus speaking softly to his men inside the belly of the Trojan Horse. Drawing on Mary Sinclair’s facial contortions, Laurie shows us Polyphemus splattering sailors against cave walls and then stuffing them into his mouth...Molly brings an old piece of cloth to her telling and she dashes back and forth energetically, first acting out Odysseus the bent beggar and, casting off the improvised cloak in one grand gesture, Odysseus the returning hero. (Millstone, 1997, pp. 112-113)

On a recent follow-up visit to Interviewee Vicky’s classroom she demonstrated how she is using guided imagery to help her reluctant readers. We had both noticed in our work with children who have difficulty reading or do not find pleasure in reading, that they often say they can’t “picture” the story in their mind. Vicky responded to this identified problem by trying means – not unlike that tried by Millstone – of guiding children in forming pictures. In the session I viewed, she had the students visualise a

child swimming with an octopus. Afterwards, she asked the students to recall their mind picture through drawing or writing a description or poem. Positive feedback from her remedial students from this exercise has inspired Vicky to stop frequently when reading a story or novel to scaffold children's image making. I would be interested in knowing if memory is further improved by using rhythmic, rhyming stories with archetypes and classic themes. In other words, is memory enhanced by using more attributes of oral traditional storytelling?

I ponder Plato's "reservations in the Phaedrus and his Seventh Letter about writing, as a mechanical, inhuman way of processing knowledge, unresponsive to questions and destructive of memory" (Ong, 1982, p. 24) and I wonder if more attention should have been paid to this warning. We needed writing for "philosophic thinking", but we needed and still need oracy because it is a key to a different type of understanding and a different type of memory.

In a primary oral culture, where the word has its existence only in sound, with no reference whatsoever to any visually perceptible text, and no awareness of even the possibility of such a text, the phenomenology of sound enters deeply into human beings' feel for existence, as processed by the spoken word. (Ong, 1982, p. 73)

Rhythm of Human Lives

According to Egan (1997), "The elaboration of linguistic rhythms to match the patterns of our lives results in those larger forms we call narratives" (p. 59). He implies that language patterns prepare us to experience the binary opposite patterns of our life journeys. Life brings death; youth is tied to age; joy balances grief,

acceptance is cherished because of the experience of rejection, despair alternates with hope; the tears of tragedy are relieved by the laughter of comedy. The poetry, the rhythm, rhyme and imagery of language is affectively linked to the form our lives take (MacIntyre, 1984; Egan 1997).

Rhythm is a characteristic of our life journeys because we are undergoing a passage of time through transitions. The transitions define life pattern movements and each has its own beat, gestures and rituals. Schools use rhythm in different ways to help children on their journey. In the classrooms of all the teachers interviewed, rhythmic, rhyming texts were used to explore language. There was also rhythm apparent in the lesson plans, and in daily, weekly and term schedules. (Although, in many schools this was an imposed rhythm of organisation rather than one of following the child.) The Montessori classes were unique in that the teachers seemed to cater for the differences of rhythm in the children. In the Steiner school, there was recognition that the rhythm varied according to the maturation of the child; the small child responded to rhythm, repetition and reverence while the older children responded to rituals such as candle lighting, choral poetry and festival celebrations. Although the rhythm of poetry, music, movement and play explorations were observable in every school visited, only the Steiner school interwove music, poetry and movement into the daily pattern. Both Steiner and Montessori philosophies address the energising effect of allowing for the rhythm of concentration intermixed with physical movement, periods of activity balanced with periods of silence. Montessori and Steiner teachers seemed to try to cater for this consciously while it seemed to be occurring more incidentally in other schools. Every school visited has traditions and festivals celebrated during the

year with varied purposes including celebration of holidays and historical events, celebration of the seasons, celebration of excellence and celebration of life transitions. Rhythm serves to put humans in touch with their personal journeys by making them aware of the extension of time from birth to death through their own participation in repetitive and life transition events. Through this rhythm, one attains an awareness of the temporality of human life with its beginning, middle and end (Polkinghorne, 1988). Finally, rhythm and rhyme, alliteration and assonance along with repetitive themes and images contribute to the memory of those who, having a mythic understanding, respond to the spoken word in an existential way (Ong, 1982; Egan, 1997). The rhythm of language is a bridge to the rhythm of the narrative of human lives with its binary opposite patterns (Egan, 1997).

We are introduced to the complexity of the human life journey through images and rhythms of our physical and cultural worlds mirrored in the metaphors and rhythms of our language. We begin to experience a paradox: the more we know about the images and patterns of the world, the more we appreciate the unique combination of images and patterns in our own lives and those around us. Our uniqueness is partly endowed and partly a result of choice. This self-discovery process can be enhanced by opportunities for authentic dialogue, exposure to biography and auto-biography and by living in an environment where individual differences are clearly catered for and acknowledged.