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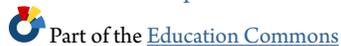
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Narrative, meaning making and personal development: Teachers' storied experience in Montessori, Steiner and other primary classrooms

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Chapter VII

Transformation – Making Connections

For events in the plot of one's life to contribute to meaning-making and personal transformation, they need to be prioritised.   To do this, one must not only reflect upon and evaluate the experiences, but often one must make choices to resolve conflicts. In fact, some conflict in discourse or experience usually precipitates change. When positive change is embraced and viewed in terms of bettering the life of the individual as well as his/her world, then it can lead to the transformative experience of cosmic interdependence. The literature and interview data provide suggested means for aiding students and teachers in obtaining:

- conflict and resolution strategies - overcoming obstacles to achieve change through

    transformative learning and emerging from woundedness,

    empowering children to resolve their conflicts by

        using peer mediation,

        retelling and redrafting the story,

        developing self-understanding through archetypal story

        construction, and

        acknowledging binary opposites and the existence of

        'the trickster'

and

- a narrative conclusion –the realisation of connectedness through

  connecting with others and communal responsibility, and

  connecting with the cosmos and environmental responsibility.

Conflict and Resolution – Overcoming Obstacles to Achieve Change

The mouse, Haw, in Spencer Johnson's (1998) modern fable of *Who Moved My Cheese?* initially resisted change to his lifestyle with the result that his existence became meaningless.   Then, in danger of starvation, he began to change his perspective. Employing the narrative property of temporality, "he reflected on the mistakes he had made in the past and used them to plan for his future. He knew that you could learn to deal with change." He also "envisioned himself – in realistic detail – finding something better – much better" (p. 71). Having found his direction, he was then ready to confront obstacles, make decisions and resolve conflicts to enable him to find a new world or ample cheese. He was motivated to face these challenges because he had freed himself to embrace change.

As demonstrated in this fable, change entails some type of conflict and resolution. Mentors, new knowledge gained in discourse, critical incidents or woundedness can all precipitate a sense of disorientation that requires strategies of resolution.

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Constructing or reconstructing stories can help to define possible resolutions. When the conflict is philosophically based and the resolution involves experiencing a paradox, then the transformation is a spiritual one implying connections beyond the logical and observable.

Transformative Learning and Emerging from Woundedness

Mesirow (1985a, 1985b) and Carrigg (1997) claim that the element of discourse is necessary for adult learning to occur because through verbal or written communication, frames of reference are altered. This can lead to a personal disorientation and the beginning of a reflective process that often results in transformation in thinking. My experience interviewing teachers has led me to believe that those teachers who are constantly striving to learn, to make new connections themselves, are also the ones concerned about empowering children and helping them to find their own uniqueness. It is those who are on a learning journey themselves who can help others to find the signposts.

For Fran and Vicky, mentors precipitated an emancipatory process (Mezirow, 1981) by helping them to resolve conflicts that had troubled them for several years. Fran described her conflict as a frustration she experienced as a young teacher.

> One little boy stays in my mind with my first year of teaching. At my desk, trying to get him to blend. And he couldn't do it so I would try again. And really, I should have known more to know how to help that boy. I was unable to assist him at that point with what I knew. (Fran 3: 60)

At a reading conference in 1979, she was influenced by presentations based on the work of educators, Frank Smith, Kenneth Goodman and Bill Martin, Jr., whose words gave her insight into dealing with literacy problems (Fran 1: 8). She went on to pursue a graduate diploma and through exploring the ideas from this conference with mentor Ross Latham and reflecting on her own ideas, she gained confidence in her ability to resolve her conflict.

> Ross Latham had studied in Canada or America under Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith and set out this graduate diploma based on what he had learned over there. It was powerful. For me, it was extremely powerful….I started to understand that I had my own thoughts and that my own thoughts were valid. I was sort of working on what I had been taught but not free enough to apply what I knew. (Fran 3: 60)

Ultimately, she felt she knew how to help that child whom she hadn't been able to help as a young teacher and her teaching was transformed.

> Frank Smith said, "Let's look at successful readers. What do they do?" and then guide children to do what they do….Looking at that process, I was just overwhelmed with being able to find solutions. Because I have such a strong belief that all children matter and that all children are capable…You are only a successful teacher if all children in your class progress so really the challenge is to assist the children experiencing difficulties. So that's my transformation. (Fran 3: 64)

Vicky described a similar frustration. She felt many children were not learning in the traditional system and began to explore alternatives.

> I think I just felt frustrated with the system. The kids had to obey bells, had to do this, had to do that when patently it wasn't what was needed. And in those days I was reading John Holt, Ivan Illich. I think I've always known that there are more efficient ways of learning. That's why MI sits so well with me and I just felt frustrated. I could see that these kids needed something different. I could see that they were intelligent and they needed some sort of base that they could come to – to actually get what they needed…I guess that the strength of some of the teachers I had empowered me to know that I could actually do it. You know – that I was a strong enough teacher to go out by myself. (Vicky 4: 32)

For both Fran and Vicky, the solution to helping children with literacy problems involved using rich narrative as a base, acknowledging their individual capabilities and scaffolding the reading and writing process according to their individual needs and strengths but always in the context of the whole. Both Fran and Vicky's perceived transformation involved altering how they viewed children's potential, the learning process, and their own capabilities.

For those teachers who have elected to teach in the philosophically based alternative Montessori and Steiner systems, this choice represented part of their transformation and quest. Nigel seeks to be a successful human being and is drawn to a philosophically based child-centred school to help them feel successful too. To him

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the *virtues* programme, a reading of *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman 1996) and a

narrative workshop were all instrumental topics of discourse contributing to his

realisation of what makes a successful human being. Other keys he identifies are

achievements, role models and stories and the practice and skills to honour nature,

name emotions, and engage in optimistic problem solving and conflict resolution (Ipp,

1998).

Nigel explains that receptivity to mentors is important in moving him towards his goal

of being a balanced, "successful" human being.

> I do want to say, though, that I do believe and I do try to practice
>
> the philosophy that every moment is a teachable moment and each moment is
>
> your teacher and everyone who comes in to your life is a teacher in a very
>
> cosmic sense and part of that journey that one is on. I do try to, in a sense,
>
> have that kind of respect for people and life. My awareness and my receptivity
>
> to my awareness of the moment - that sense of being receptive to the present.
>
> (Nigel 2: 55)

Nigel's own mentor is a leader in the philosophic movement he supports and

embodies the qualities that Nigel himself feels are the ultimate realisation of the

human journey. In a sense, he represents a real archetype for this teacher.

> This particular teacher whose life I've examined carefully through a variety of
>
> sources over the years … and so far he's lived up to my expectations of
>
> someone who is at that highest level of human endeavour, highest level of

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human ability. If I try to apply some kind of rational scientific approach to it I consider it to be ideals of human behaviour and relationship under extreme examples like extreme stresses and pressures and those sorts of things. He's a model I can use for all the virtues I look at and that's just the physical aspect of his life. (Nigel 2: 41)

For some, positive transformation and a sense of resolution comes out of a reorganisation of our lives after woundedness. This rebirth requires a reconnecting of experiences. The same components that made us wounded can be reconfigured to make us regard the human journey as meaningful.

I think it's interesting if you relate to a story like *A Fortunate Life* (1985) where there's enormous hardship and suffering and you look at the whole series of broken relationships that Facey has with his family except with his grandmother, the hardship he experiences from the people into whose homes he goes and then the enormously awful experiences of Gallipoli and getting wounded and losing his brother. But the ability to cast all of that into a framework that says, "This has made me who I am," and not see it as negative but to see it as things that have offered their own opportunities. I think that is just a remarkable characteristic. (A. Zubrick and Gay discussion: 276)

Interestingly, several interviewees shared an experience of "woundedness" that had helped them to subsequently find meaning in their teaching. Bernadette found Steiner

when the training responded to her needs after experiencing acute disappointment at how little stimulation or inspiration she received at university.

> I went to university straight out of school. I was seventeen. I was
> so disappointed in university.   I was so disappointed in the strictures
> of it. I had gone to university wanting wisdom and instead, I was just
> so disappointed in the narrow definition of what was admissible and what
> wasn't. And very soon after that I discovered Steiner through my brother who
> was studying art and his teacher was an anthroposophist and gave him painting
> lessons at home. And he went along and told me about it and so I went along.
> And we would through that group do puppet shows and things like that. And
> that was how I got into it. I went to training in England when I was about 23.
> I would never have become a teacher, I don't think, in the State system. I
> don't think it would have given me what I wanted. And the possibilities to be
> creative in the Steiner system, and to have this whole integrated philosophy so
> you can always go deeper and always discover more. (Bernadette: 292)

Bernadette was attracted to the Steiner alternative by discovering a forum for some of her own creative gifts. It is part of the Steiner training course that they go back as children to rediscover their own capabilities and aesthetic responses to art, music, movement, and drama. Similarly, Sam found a resolution for what he viewed as the dichotomy of Teaching vs. Creativity in the Steiner philosophy.

> I worked at a school centre. I didn't really feel that that

was enough. I enjoyed that work but I wanted something that had more

direction. I felt the lack of focus and direction in what I was doing and some

sort of philosophy. I was looking around in the paper for positions and one

that caught my eye said "Creative Teacher Required" at Rudolf Steiner

method.. And I had never linked those two words together - Creative and

Teaching as that wasn't a feature in my experience as a student. I didn't see a

lot of creativity. So I liked both of those things. I wanted to teach. (Sam: 5)

For Government school teacher, Dan, the primary teaching provided a creative way

out of woundedness for him to help children have a positive schooling experience.

Well, all the things I teach them are all the things that I was

hopeless at. …People are different. I know all those things because I

experienced them all myself. Bullies. I used to be beaten up and picked on …

So I try to put it in perspective for them. And, we've had a lot of bullying in

the class between two boys. So we sit down and we discuss it. (Dan: 214)

In my own reflections, I have two episodes of woundedness that were instrumental in

helping me make meaningful positive choices in my life. My choice of Montessori

teaching resulted from a sadness that my own children were experiencing the same

boredom and fragmentation that I had as a child. Re-evaluating what my educational

goals were helped me to make completely new educational choices for them and for

myself. On another occasion, I suffered harassment as a result of a political and

philosophic schism in a school community. I was so determined to stand my ground

that, for a time, I failed to see that my family and supportive colleagues were

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suffering as acutely as I was. One doesn't lose the grief caused by a situation like that…but one does come out wiser and rebirth can result. In my case, my creativity was nurtured in two ways: I developed improved conflict resolution skills and I assumed a different educational position having realised that my mission was down a different pathway (Journal 12: 38).

This rebirth after woundedness would be viewed by some as a spiritual or emancipatory experience (Mezirow, 1981; Houston, 1996). Interviewees from all four educational contexts indicated that in teaching they found a pathway out of a negative experience and were in someway transformed. This type of resolution doesn't seem to be more characteristic of one type of methodology than another. Dan found he could help children feel good about themselves in the Government system. Fran found a venue for reaching children through meaningful language in both Government and Catholic schools. Vicky found that starting her own support school was a venue for her creativity. Nigel and I both found Montessori a place to practise our child-centred education direction. Bernadette and Sam overcame their despair in education in discovering the Steiner emphasis on aesthetics and philosophy.   What all these teachers had in common was extensive experience in teaching and evidence that they engaged in educational discourse and reflective practice. Some also had supportive mentors. In some way, each of these teachers felt they improved their teaching practice and their lives by reconnecting the components of their lives in new formations.

Rebuilding

Stick by stick

I take the house of myself

apart, pull nails, strip shingles,

melt the mortar in the chimney,

the side walls, the foundation itself.

Carry it all away, brick by brick,

block by block, carry it

down one hill and up another,

and another, till the spot's just right

and the sun shines just the way I want it.

Then I take those sticks and bricks and blocks

and start rebuilding,

putting it all back together, new,

something I can live with -

crawlspace turned basement,

two story turned one,

set down solid on the ground,

tied down tight to bedrock

standing there sure and still against the sky,

and I nail it, and I glue it,

and I paint it bright as a child's eyes,

and I find a tiny rainbow from the gutter,

hold tight to hope and to the promise

of beginning - stick by stick - once again.

(L. Robbins, 1998)

Empowering Children to Resolve their Conflicts

Peer Mediation.

There is increasing interest in peer mediation in primary schools. It can foster a sense of responsibility and community in the schools and reduce bullying. It can be a genuine forum for discourse and mentoring. Peer mediation is about effectively communicating stories in a safe, non-judgmental environment and giving children responsibility for helping each other solve problems. In my upper primary class, all class members practised techniques to generate and evaluate problem solutions including brainstorming and DeBono's (1986) techniques of PMI (Plus Minus Interesting) and The Six Hats.[106] In addition, peer mediators met regularly to practise reflective listening skills and assertiveness. The mother of one of my former students confided that being a peer mediator had really helped her daughter in relationships because she could listen objectively and had the courage to assertively state her own views. Nigel also placed a high priority on fostering peer mediation and

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[106] DeBono's Six Hats: A parallel thinking strategy where each member of the group considers the problem from the perspective of each designated hat: blue hat –process control; white hat – information; yellow hat – benefits; black hat – caution, critical judgment,; green hat – creativity, new ideas; red hat – feelings. (DeBono, 1986)

conflict resolution skills and reflected on his own challenge in this area as a motivating force.

> I find that when in communication there's breakdown and I put a lot of care in trying to say what I really mean, I get very easily frustrated. ...I usually try two or three times to talk very pleasantly. When I get responses that are unfair, unreasonable, unkind, I can go from a very peaceful, fun loving person to a very frustrated one. …So that's a big challenge for me. (Nigel 2: 11-12)

During my first observation of Nigel's class, he was scaffolding the process of peer mediation and conflict resolution without mediation by getting children to practise listening to each story in a non-judgmental way and brainstorming solutions. In a later visit, these 5-8 year old children were handling problems in a very mature way. I observed two boys and a girl resolving a disagreement that had arisen over one of the boys taking a girl's hat. They each told their story, brainstormed the solution and then came to Nigel with a summation.

> Nigel: They've learned the skills in the school in general - how to sort out their problems, so to speak and almost always, I can sit them down together and say, "Sort it out" and they'll come back and give me the summation, and I'll say, "Is it all sorted out?" and I don't even need to hear the detail, and they'll walk away feeling okay.

Gay: That's really progress.

Nigel: I find it very useful. I've worked hard for that and I do it on a daily basis. We work hard for them to take that responsibility. It involves assertiveness and safety. It's a key element that each child feels safe. They know that if they are assertive in a ...way, that they do have recourse - they can come back for support. (Nigel 2: 35-40)

Retelling and redrafting the story.

In her Waldorf class Bernadette acted as the mediator, but she also scaffolded the process of each person telling their story in a nonjudgmental, safe environment and then collectively reconstructing it so that the conflict was resolved.

I try to go over exactly what happened and everyone can have a turn. If there's been a big bust-up in the playground or something. They all have to sit down. They know they are not going to get into trouble and they have to tell me what happened. So they all have a say and I write it down and I retell it. I say, "Then this happened and then that happened and then that one did this..." It's amazing how accurate it is if everyone has a chance to have a say. They will tell you and it does make sense. You can form a coherent narrative out of it, actually. I'll go to a point and then I'll say, "Well, do you think there is something else that you could have done there? If he punched you and you kicked him back. Is there something else you could have done?" Without saying, "Now that was a silly thing to have done." or "Would you like it if someone did that to you?" and all that sort of ridiculous stuff and you can just

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see their eyes sort of glaze over. Try and get them to work out, well first of all to see what they've done and then what the consequences of that are. And then to sort of retell the story as if something else had happened. So in a way, that's even in narratives. (Bernadette: 176-177)

While visiting Nigel's class, I observed him employing a similar technique. He had recorded all the conflicts he had observed at camp for his early primary class. Now he asked them in small groups to recreate the eleven situations so that they had positive outcomes without any participant feeling hurt. Some of the situations were as follows:

You are about to play spotlight and your friend really wants to be a spotter. Unfortunately he or she is not picked. Write some words for each of you and act out how you help him or her to handle the situation and go out and hide together.

Your friend is very upset because they [sic] wanted to be in the other bicycle group. They think they are a good enough rider. Write some words for each of you and act out how you help them sort it out.

You and your friend are eating at the camp table. Your friend is showing off and you don't like it. Write some words for each of you and act out how you sort it out so that your friend stops. (Nigel Class observation: 21/9/1999)

In this way, Nigel encourages children to reflect on emotions and virtues as well as the nature of the responsibility that they have for each other.

<u>Self-understanding through Archetypal Story Construction.</u>

Creative Writing can also be a means of getting children to gain insight into their lives. As discussed above in Journalling (Refer to Chapter VI), it is important to realise that most children do not explore their inner thoughts through writing until upper primary. However, as one moves towards adolescence, it is timely to help students develop "a whole language for inner things" (Matthews, 1994, p. 55).

Mellon (1992) has written a manual for teachers to encourage the meaningful construction of stories. She reflects a strong Steiner and Jungian influence in using archetypes in the situations presented. These scenarios represent universal themes and help the storywriter or storyteller explore the unique aspects and the universal aspects of the conflicts they are experiencing. She suggests moving the protagonists through earth, air, water and fire as they face trials necessary to find fulfillment. For a challenge through air, she might ask her students to "create a story in which a courageous hero or heroine is unable to breathe, live and move according to human design. Think of an important way in which you yourself are immobilised – perhaps through many generations your family had been held under an 'enchantment' " (p.74). When she asks the writer to picture himself/herself moving through water she will advise that "the resistance of the waves, winds and undercurrents are like aspects of yourself that you cannot control until a penetrating and balanced force is found within you, which when it is awakened, knows the best way forward" (p. 71). In addition to nature's archetypal symbols, she uses human construction symbols such as doorways

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and towers. "Create a story about someone locked in a dark tower who needs to be set free. It is probably best to focus on yourself at first in order to experience directly the benefits of an imaginative leap to freedom" (p. 49).

Although there is much evidence of students being given interesting situations to stimulate creative writing in primary schools, only the Steiner teachers in my sample were exploring archetype situational creative writing. In Bernadette's class they wrote first person stories about facing danger and uncertainty on the oceans.

> Well, this is the first time we have done a first person account and
> it seemed an appropriate thing to bring in with Vikings and for them to
> imagine themselves out in those circumstances with all that danger and
> uncertainty. (Bernadette: 100)

Evidence from people who have experienced this type of archetypal scenario work suggests that helping teachers and students create conflict resolution images is an area for further exploration.   Three different educators mentioned how moved they were following the Presbyterian Ladies' College staff millenium service. The Chaplain had them visualise being on a mountain peak in a range of mountains that acted as a divide between the contrasting landscapes of past and future. Participants were asked to examine the landscape of the past and consider what mattered to them about what they were leaving behind. When they looked at the landscape of the future, they had to envision what they wanted to do. I believe this story creation exercise was so powerful because it used a universal metaphor to individually engage each person who supplied the details of his/her story.

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Another powerful example of using archetypal story construction for self-understanding was provided by Consultant Richard Durgin, a middle and high school teacher at Nauset Regional High in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He used mythological archetypes relating to students' observed conflicts to integrate language skills, literature, and creative writing.

After studying *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, the students commenced writing their own seven chapter journey story.   The three problems encountered on their travels to maturity were self-doubt, peer pressure and laziness. Each of these problems is dealt with in two chapters – one ends when the trait is epitomized and the experience of conflict is the greatest and the next resolves it.

In the first chapter, the protagonist is in the swamp of self doubt and in the second he/she gains the strength to conquer the problem. To do so he/she discovers a symbol (simile or metaphor) of freedom. For peer pressure island, the students read *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) and then design their own islands where they are engulfed by peer pressure and later have to break away. For laziness, they are in the desert where they create their own utopia. There is evil in the landscape, however, and the protagonist has to escape. In the conclusion, they meet a wise person and have to relate three things they have learned in their journey. Their conclusion is a reflection on the journey. One of the students told me this was one of the most exciting classes he had ever taken and he would never forget what he had learned. The students are empowered by exploring universal predicaments and finding that each solution is in someway unique reflecting their own individuality.

Author and former Steiner teacher, Paul Matthews (1994), also attests that helping young people to link their feelings to natural archetypes can help them gain insight into their inner beings and human journey. He quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson in saying that "Every natural fact is the symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of mind that can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture…the whole of nature is a metaphor for the human mind" (Emerson, 1962).

One suggested activity is to write these metaphors as "I am" (e.g. *I am the green hill that rolls down to the sea*) or as "I have been" (e.g. *I have been the sunflower stretching towards the light*) poems (p. 56). Matthews further suggests that some of these "I am" images might be made into names. Naming helps define our uniqueness. (See Chapter V). One of my undergraduate students wrote the following:

> I am fluid because I am ever-changing; I am changing form to mould to
> whatever confines I am in. In a way, I am a fantasy figure…
>
> > (Female student, Age 20, 1999)

These insightful lines led to a discussion about how we change ourselves to meet other's expectations.   That class made me realise that more can be done with upper primary and high school children's creative writing to help them to understand themselves.

Encouraging the writing of self or situational metaphor poems and stories, as Matthews and Mellon recommend, would be part of this initiative. Finding time to individually discuss a child's work whom I know is in pain would be another priority. Sometimes the choice of images invites a discussion that might be healing for them. This might be with peers, the teacher, or another qualified professional depending on the nature of the experienced conflict.

Jessica, one of my 11 year-old students, wrote a story with an uncharacteristic theme of anger. I was aware that this child had reason to be experiencing strong emotions. She was growing up in what the world viewed as 'the perfect family' with three siblings and devoted parents. However, recently and suddenly, her parents had separated. Jessica refused to discuss her feelings about the situation and both parents were extremely concerned and asked that I try to communicate with her about the situation. Clearly, her story was a metaphor for her feelings of anger. In retrospect, I realise that I probably could have helped this child sooner if I had discussed her story individually with her. Alternatively, I might have created a archetypal setting for story writing that might have helped her create a metaphor of healing – asking the child how it felt to be abandoned on an island and how she might get back to being with family and friends.

On another occasion, I had an eleven year old male student, John, who just after the death of his father ended a story about a surfer in the following manner:

He was gone and the wave knew it.

It tossed his helpless body onto the rocks like broken glass.

Gashes were on every part of his body.

He had been taken by the sea,

Taken to his bloody doom. (John, Age 11, 1996)

As identified by the Steiner educators, students of this age often experience a vulnerability and concern with the transience of life. To lose a parent at ten or eleven years old might well contribute to a child's feeling of powerlessness. Through his story, John was showing that he was musing on death and finality. In retrospect, I believe he had created an opening for caring mentors to help him in this aspect of his spiritual journey.

Binary Opposites and The Trickster.

The Trickster is another archetype that may aid students in resolving personal, communal, and philosophic conflicts. The following poem was written by Tania, age 12, who had been the victim of personal violence. I shared this poem with her therapist. At the time I thought the verse might be a suicidal message but later realised that it was a metaphor for her emerging hope after months of deep depression. It also reflects a mature understanding of the paradox of the interdependence of life and death.

Yesterday when the world began,

The land was rich and full.

Death rides on its back.

We see it as a burden, but it isn't.

It's a part of life.

Life goes on after death.

(Tania, Age 12, 1995)

At a very young age, Tania is displaying the ironic understanding that life and death exist together and in fact depend upon each other. The archetype for this understanding is the trickster present in all mythologies. The raven of the Northwest Canadian indigenous people was part of creation but also helped to destroy what he created. The trickster of the Plains people is the coyote (Boa, 1989). Mercury and Hermes are also "lords of the in-between" (Hyde, 1998, p. 6)

In short, Trickster is a boundary crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries of which groups articulate their social life. We constantly distinguish – right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead – and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. (Hyde, 1998, p. 7)

The trickster is the metaphor for a realisation that solutions don't fall easily into the dichotomies of the good vs. evil of fairy tales studied by a Steiner Class One. In fact, we would not have an appreciation for goodness without evil, and life without death would not have value. In Jungian terms the trickster mediates between our shadow self – the challenge we carry within – and our realised selves. "When these shadow qualities are recognised and reconciled, a person often experiences a movement to greater maturity and depth of personality (Houston, 1996, p. 104).

> The members of one's family are the ones that press one's buttons and they are the ones that make one most aware of one's stuckness, or perceptions or one's shadow….My son has been the most difficult for me to live with in the last five years. …But then, he has been a teacher in a way. Trying to be aware what it is inside me of him, try to grow in me that which can bring back harmony. (Nigel 2: 63)

Essentially, an understanding of the trickster is an understanding that conflicts aren't to be avoided, but to be resolved. They are inevitable and drive humans forward on their life journey.

> Heraclitus said strife is the creator of all great things. Something like that may be implicit in this symbolic trickster idea. In our tradition, the serpent in the Garden did the job. Just when everything was fixed and fine, he threw an apple into the picture. No matter what the system of thought you may have, it can't possibly include boundless life. When you think everything is just that

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way, the trickster arrives, and it all blows, and you get change and becoming

again.   (Campbell and Moyers, 1998, pp. 219-220)

Kieran Egan's (1986) story form for curriculum recommends that programming begin with a definition of binary opposites involving universal themes. Curriculum choices in every discipline will be those which can help children find a resolution to the conflict created by the existence of these opposing forces.   As children mature in understanding, they will discover more details on the spectrum between the binary opposites – they will begin to appreciate the metaphorical trickster. As mentioned in Chapter V, Montessori interviewee Carol was influenced by Harvey Hallenberg who dramatised slavery so vividly in the classroom. Hallenberg demonstates how studying this binary/opposite can speak to the inner needs of a child from a very young age by noting that children entering school begin to experience slavery vs. liberty as soon as they have to take orders from teachers or experience playground bullying (Hallenberg, 1997). Every film, story and discussion on this binary opposite thus has personal relevance for the student as he/she begins to understand the complexity of freedom with a possible realisation that there is no freedom without responsibility.

That's the important thing to realise in life. You don't have to be quit of your

bondage in order to experience the release. The two go together. (Boa, 1994,

p. 122)

Influenced by Egan (1986) I launched my class on an exploration of order vs. chaos with the Montessori great story of The Formation of the Universe.   As we enacted the

order and chaos in the universe, children began discussing what creates order and chaos in the classroom, the community and their lives. A focus on rules, governance and community values resulted. One could say that the trickster was present in this upper primary class where children began to accept that the resolution to this conflict was not clear-cut; order emerges from chaos and coexists with chaos.   This philosophic understanding also applied to their social interaction. Conflicts did not necessarily have to result in win/lose or a compromise. Sometimes solutions could be found that answered both parties' needs (Bolton, 1986). With this realisation, creative solutions started being found for playground problems. For instance, students proposed that rather than dividing the playground into age-related areas, they try interest areas.

Conflict resolution is a developmental process that can be scaffolded. Peer mediation encourages students to listen non-judgmentally and to brainstorm and evaluate solutions. Redrafting troublesome situations with new outcomes or constructing stories based on archetypal scenarios can also help to resolve personal uncertainties and contribute to positive transformation. As students mature and are able to comprehend the nuances between binary opposites, they are able to be more creative problem solvers.   When they are able to understand the archetypal trickster, they discover that the boundaries between opposites are blurred and in fact each orientation depends on its opposite for existence.

A Narrative Conclusion – Realisation of Connectedness

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Experiencing conflict and resolutions drives a person forward to deeper transformation. Understanding that our unique conflicts are played out against a universal backdrop helps to give transcendental meaning to a person's struggles. This is a powerful paradox – to be one in a vast universe and yet to be unique. Corresponding realisations include understanding that freedom demands responsibility, and that individuality requires working for the well-being of a community. For some these spiritual connections that defy cause and effect are fostered by religious experience. For others they are realised by cosmic[107] education.

Connecting to Others and Communal Responsibility

To think in terms of individualism is to fragment human life. To be truly fulfilled one must realise human connections. These connections provide humans with their history and social identity (MacIntyre, 1984; Bellah et al, 1985).

> Communities, in the sense in which we are using the term, have a history – in an important sense they are constituted by their past – and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a "community of memory," one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community.

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[107] Cosmic- Montessori referred to the primary curriculum as a Cosmic Plan (Montessori 1948/1989a). In this integrated curriculum plan the great stories of man and the universe are central to the child's explorations in all disciplines.

(Bellah et al, 1985, p. 153)

The human journey in its narrative form has the power to transcend the limitations of our immediate body, mind and space but this entails assuming responsibility for our fellow beings with whom we are connected as well as for our communal history.

> For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from the past in the individualist mode is to deform my present relationships. The possession of a historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 221)

Rudolf Steiner poetically describes this same interdependence:

> The healthy social life is found
>
> When, in the mirror of each human soul
>
> The whole community finds its reflection
>
> And when, in the community,
>
> The virtue of each one is living.
>
> Rudolf Steiner (2000)[108]

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[108] Rudolf Steiner quote - original date unknown.

Scott Fratnowna, lecturer in Multiculturalism at Curtin University in Western Australia, suggested in an ALEA keynote address (2001) that Aboriginal students had a much better chance of integrating with a multicultural community if a knowledge of their historic identity and traditions was part of their identity. Change is not about eliminating the past, but about remembering and celebrating what has made us unique as a community. Amalgamation occurs when rich histories are interwoven, not obliterated. Scott demonstrated his respect for his own traditions by thanking the elders of the local tribes for supporting his work in Western Australia – in a sense, allowing him to work for change outside his tribal area. He also shared a song created in a school in Arnheim land for an Aboriginal version of *Home Among the Gum Trees* – a song that celebrates a very different life that the inland Aboriginal children had experienced before. A song that opened their eyes to a different Australia was able to create a transformation in understanding because it was linked to their own history, language and art. Interviewee Fran's experience at an Aboriginal Mission school supports Fratnowna's experience and the words of Bansel (1998) that "teachers are dealing with more than the child before them – they are dealing with their history and their history of personal relationships" (p. 15).

> Fran: Also, I was seeing children at Gigalong Mission. The teachers there were teaching the children in a very formal way that didn't link to what those children knew already. I went on this tour with one of the Aboriginal education advisory teachers. We drove to Gigalong Mission through the back lot. I don't know how we knew where we were. There was a group of teachers. The little children would come one day and not the next day. I suppose the idea I was trying to get across was that they should

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understand the children's prior knowledge and teach to that so we went down

to the creek and took the lesson down on the creek using a language

experience. What they saw, what they knew. Gathered that language for them

to read, making booklets, taking photos to dictate the sentence that should go

under that. It was language experience strategy. Teaching out in the children's

environment and also valuing each of them. (Fran 3: 65-67)

It is somewhat of a paradox that to prepare for change, one must have a firm sense of

cultural identity. This can be fostered by the rituals and traditions discussed in

Chapter IV , the intergenerational and multiculturalism discussed in Chapter V and

the acknowledgement of unique history suggested by Fatnowna and Interviewee Fran

Poole. Their views are reminiscent of MacIntyre (1984) who suggested that we

revisit the idea of individuality and view it as a unity. Each of us has a unique history.

Our actions make sense in the context of our lives and our lives make sense in the

context of our communal histories. Our narratives histories support a moral

accountability that fights against a hedonist individualism. This is a complex view of

morality implying that we incorporate our histories into our present moral decision

making. It is also a narrative view supporting Fatnowna's insistence that future

change depends on an acknowledged past. As suggested in Chapter I, perspective can

be changed and reconciliation achieved through revealing an accurate history.   The

history of Aborigines and early Australian settlers and that of the Native Americans

and early American settlers are examples of perspective altered through increased

awareness of historical narrative.

It is also ironic that for one to feel personally fulfilled or in flow, one must be connected and take responsibility for one's community. The discovery of this ironic truth has been a key to teaching, not only in Christianity, but in most other philosophies of spiritual transcendence. In a current guide to meaning in life, Bill Adams (2000) describes the lessons of his Indian spiritual mentor, Sangratan. The fifth lesson is to live harmoniously with other people by developing self-knowledge, understanding of one's own value, respect for others, conscious giving to others and openness to others. If the ultimate meaning in our journey quest is fostered through respect and giving to others, what is being done in schools for our children to discover this meaning?

Montessori and Steiner curriculums that will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter VIII respond to the developing social consciousness of the child. Historical narrative in Montessori helps create the wonder in early childhood that leads to the desire for experimentation in middle primary. The upper primary child has the cognitive skills to analyse the cause and effect of relationships and environment and, as mentioned above, is also able to appreciate the nuances of conflict. The middle school age child, empowered by his/her knowledge of community and history is motivated to participate in positive changes to the community.

Steiner curriculum reflects a similar belief that the child's view of himself/herself as an agent of change is developmental. The mythologies studied reflect this expanding consciousness. In Year 5, for example, children study Indian philosophy; through studying the myth of Prince Sidhartha, who became Buddha, they are exposed to the

paradox that a person may need to make great sacrifices to achieve his/her life purpose.

> Because Sidhartha's heart was full of pity and compassion for all the suffering people in the world, he wanted to find a way of bringing some comfort and help to all those people. But in order to do that he had to give up his own happiness; he had to give up his family and his life of pleasure at the palace. And this is something you will find again and again in history; that great men and women, who have helped thousands of others, often had to give up or sacrifice their own happiness. (Kovacs, 1990, pp. 83-84)

Also, in this mythology, they are again exposed to the message that a person's fulfillment depends on caring for others.

> When Sidhartha saw the glory of love and kindness that is the soul of all mankind, it was as if his mind was flooded with light. At last he knew that answer to his question: the soul becomes free of evil through love, kindness, compassion and pity; by caring more and more for others. (Kovacs, 1990, p. 87)

In the Steiner curriculum, biblical stories are viewed along with many other philosophies. In the Catholic system, the Christian message is revisited at increasing depth using biblical stories and parables. The paradox of becoming through giving is

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embodied in the stories of Jesus Christ. Like Montessori and Steiner, there is a recapitulationist assumption that at each hearing, the child will have deeper understanding of his/her own spirituality and a greater understanding of the paradox of becoming through giving. Stories such as the Good Samaritan are visited first with a message of friendship and kindness. Later "love your neighbour as yourself" becomes a message of personal transcendence (Luke 10: 28)

Both Steiner and Montessori educators profess the view that narrative is the most effective way to scaffold social awareness and communal responsibility. Both traditions consider that in expanding social consciousness, one should carefully heed developmental indicators (Wilkinson, 1993; Scott, 1997).   Montessorian Judith Scott (1997) influenced by Berry (1988) emphasised that children need to be engaged by the world, before they are ready to take on the problems. She outlined the development of social and environmental responsibility according to the following three phases:

     3-8 years: story should incite wonder or empathy.

     9-12 years: story should inspire experimentation

     12-15 years: story should incite community activism and responsibility.

Montessori teacher, Ellen, who has also completed some Steiner training concurs with the view that children should engage in some social activism, but should not be disempowered by exposure to difficult problems too early.

     I like to introduce them to humane people through story. Also, we do respond

     to crises in the news. Recently, we had a car wash to raise money for New

Guinea and we participated in the Walk Against Want. However, I agree with

Steiner and Montessori that students shouldn't feel too early that they have to

solve the earth's problems. It just makes them feel powerless. (Ellen 3: 5)

Shawn felt that the classroom for the primary child should be a microcosm for

expressing communal values.

The atmosphere in the classroom, the freedom to create, respectful

communication, a strong sense of community, and an absolute intolerance for

punishment/pressure/stereotyping – these are some of the essentials. (Shawn

4: 26)

In the Montessori school where I taught, social consciousness was scaffolded by

dealing with issues close to home. Having special needs children integrated into the

classroom was a wonderful learning experience and helped the students to experience

empathy. I have had positive feedback from three separate high schools regarding

children formerly in the Montessori primary school where I taught complimenting

their ready acceptance of children with differences. One deaf student commented,

that "Joe treats me just like everyone else. He's the only one."

Similarly, a selectively mute student in Sam's Waldorf class, was fully accepted by

his peers who delighted when he made some progress in class participation.

I have this boy in my class who isn't speaking. Oh, he speaks to other

children but he doesn't speak to me. He's never spoken to a teacher, ever.

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Anyway, in the eighteen months that I've had the class, he's made tremendous

progress. At first, he wouldn't join in anything, wouldn't move. But now he

does just about all the movement we do in the class. The children will say,

"Oh look, he wouldn't do that before and now he's doing it." (Sam: 78)

In Lynne's Government school class, I observed an autistic child receive the

respectful attention of a class of fourth graders as he carefully explained the

greenhouse effect. (Lynne's class observation 4/2000). With a move to integrate

children with disabilities, it is likely that in the Government schools more and more

children will develop this appreciation through concrete experience for the

Curriculum Council value to "have respect and concern for others and their rights"

including:

> 3.1 Compassion and care: Each person has a right to receive care and
>
> compassion and have a life of dignity, free from harassment and
>
> discrimination. (Curriculum Council, 1998)

The Catholic schools observed were also following the *Curriculum Framework.*

However the value of care for others is a strand throughout the RE curriculum which

is being used as a tool in achieving the curriculum outcomes.

> With our literature programming – always the first link is to R.E. because the
>
> thing about men and women is that we are social beings; we use language as a
>
> tool because we are social….We do need to communicate with each other for
>
> our health because of our nature. (Fran 3: 89)

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All four traditions would agree with Martin Luther King that "in order to live creatively and meaningfully, our self-concern must be wedded to other concern." Montessori, Steiner and the Catholic tradition use narrative extensively in this aspect of guiding children in finding meaning in their journeys – historical narrative in Montessori, mythologies in Steiner and biblical literature in Catholicism. In the Government schools, values of caring for others are demonstrated, but not usually explored through any specific narrative literature.

Connecting to the Cosmos and Environmental Responsibility

Transformation in a spirtual sense requires that education promote a merging of scientific and philosophic narratives to help Earth inhabitants realise their connectedness to the planet and responsibility for other life forms. By fostering an educational climate in which these connections can be made, students are provided an opportunity to explore meaning-making in a cosmic non-material sense. Some critical variables in creating this climate for interconnectedness are revealed by reviewing the challenge that is faced and the means in which Montessori and Steiner teachers are responding. A focus on religious and other spiritual pathways is also relevant in understanding how personal narrative can be linked to universal patterns of meaning.

The Challenge.

The expanding social consciousness of students and consequent communal responsibility is paralleled by a realisation of connectedness with the universe and environmental responsibility. Here the context of narrative is important; it "summons

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us to participate in a moral universe" because " the demand for closure in the historical store is a demand…for moral meaning" (White, 1987, p. 21). White (1987), Berry (1988) , Sandlos (1998) and Swimme and Turner (1999) suggest that taking responsibility for our planet and its inhabitants requires a merging of the scientific and spiritual perspectives. They support Steiner's statement that scientific positivism divorced us from our own experience.

> Having revealed more and more of outer nature, science has, at the same time, alienated human beings from themselves. (Steiner, 1996, p. 8)

We lost sight of where our human narrative was headed in the fragmentation of isolated economic decisions and a search for objective truth. "Most contemporary narratives reinforce the decontextualised, anthropocentric construct of Western individuals by depicting them as participants in an endless antinarrative of economic growth and progress" (Sandlos, 1998, p. 3). This disengagement is reflected in classrooms where "the context of experience" has been removed from learning in the classroom (Sandlos, 1998, p. 3). What is required is that spirituality in the form of an appreciation and value of the interdependence of life replace consumerism as a motivating force of existence.

> As more and more people regain spirituality based on an appreciation for the divine presence in nature, a sense of moral responsibility for the universe will increase…This spirituality is grounded in the basic characteristics of the universe as manifested from the beginning: the unique and irreplaceable

qualities of the individual and the inseparable bonding with every other being

in the universe. (Berry, 1988, p. 120)

Sandlos rues the fact that "gone are the rich, metaphor-laden narratives that connected

traditional societies to the place/spirit/ecology that provided them with sustenance"

(Sandlos, 1998, p. 1). To reconnect students with the universe, Berry (1988), Gough

and Kesson (1992) and Sandlos (1998) suggest revisiting our history beginning with

the myths and metaphors of traditional oral cultures that particularly highlight our

relationship with the universe. This is also what Egan (1997) is advocating when he

says we must not lose our mythic understanding and Steiner educators when they

emphasise that each human life parallels historic human understandings and thus

traditional oral narrative is an important base for our spiritual consciousness.

Although narratives of all kinds (written or oral) are fundamentally moral in

nature, it is the traditional, oral, and local narrative that tends to frame ethical

principles within a wide, ecocentric web of relationships. These narratives are

embedded in their place of origin so deeply that they are themselves an

embodiment of a 'man plus environment' ecology of ideas. (Sandlos, 1998, p.

3)

None of these educators is suggesting that we regress to a time of animism. Rather,

they are advocating that we incorporate all of our history into a new understanding of

spiritual interconnectedness with the planet. From oral cultures, we will regain our

metaphors for connecting to the planet as well as the aesthetics of art, music and

drama that provide multiple avenues of relating to the universe (Berry, 1988; Swimme

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& Turner, 1999). Once again, humans will experience the connectedness with the planet expressed in this recent article by Vega (1991):

> I was born in the Andes, in the colonial city of Cuenca, Ecuador. The mountains have been my lifelong companions, and I still make my home at their feet. To those of us who are their children, they are alive. We listen to them, learn to read their moods, and respect their power. Sometimes they welcome us with their solid embrace. Other times they shake with fury, and we know to stay away. Still sacred to some, they speak to the souls of all, reminding us how vulnerable we are. (Vega, 2001, p. 6)

The oral traditional times taught humans to connect to the universe and the classical eras celebrated our human power. Humanity requires empowerment to solve problems discovered in relating to our planet. From the scientific-technological era of the last few years we gained the knowledge to understand how our actions affect our planet. "We have discovered the dynamics governing the Earth and the cosmos…Now the human species moves into the fourth era, what we might call The Age of the Earth" (Swimme & Turner, 1999, p. 26).   To understand *The Age of the Earth,* one needs to incorporate the story of the last three eras of understanding. We have come so far in our scientific explorations that we have discovered the miracles and paradoxes that can only be explained by philosophy. When science and philosophy are united, we will once again acknowledge responsibility for the results of our discoveries. (Berry, 1998; Swimme & Turner, 1999). This is an educational challenge actually articulated by Steiner in a 1923 lecture.

Yet today a new insight into human nature is called for, insight based on a scientific mode of thinking, and one that will also shed light on the nature of the entire universe. (Steiner, 1923/1996, p. 9)

Montessori teacher, Nigel, also views spiritual realisation as connecting two forces which might be termed scientific truth and narratives of connectedness.

I really do believe that there is like a twin parallel set of forces. One is the focus on the truth and the exactness - one is this almost scientific approach to truth. Truth that can be verified without any question. Then there is the other side which is compassion and love and forgiveness and all of those sides, those things in which often the forgiveness of it all is much more important than worrying about the details of the truth….Finding a way in your life in which you can work with both and in a way merge those two things - that's my aim, that would be my life path in a way - the ability to merge those two extremes. The Hindus call it Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. You have truth on the one hand and bliss on the other and you have consciousness unifying them. That's quite a powerful ancient image. (Nigel 2: 45-49)

The Montessori Response to Interconnectedness.

Both Montessori and Steiner professed that their methodologies would encourage the unfolding of the child towards a spiritual realisation of his/her interconnectedness with the universe. Both make frequent references to spirituality as an aim to be fostered by education. In *Education and Peace* (1949/1992), Montessori rued what

she viewed as "the emptiness of men's [sic] souls" which resulted in wars and inequities plaguing our world. Her challenge to educators was to "cure humanity" (p.46).

> This human being who has harnessed every kind of physical power must now tame and tap his [sic] own inner powers, become the master of himself and the ruler of his own period of history. In order to do so, the value of individuality must be released and put to good use. Its power must be experienced. Man must be taught to see the world in all its grandeur, to extend the limits of his life, to make his individual personality reach out and touch those of others" (Montessori,1949/1992, p. 46).

Montessori (1949/1992) identified a connection between educational methodology and spiritual growth. She referred to the child as a "spiritual embryo"(p. 30) whose intrinsic value was not recognised in the competitive and suppressive educational systems of her time . She lamented that "in traditional systems of education…the child bows to the cruel necessity of hiding himself, burying in his subconscious a life force that cries out to express itself and that is fatally frustrated" (p. 17).

Montessori expressed her view that spirituality and world peace could be enhanced by drastic educational reform. "The child is richly endowed with powers, sensitivities, and constructive instincts that as yet, have neither been recognised nor put to use. In order to develop, he needs much broader opportunities than he has been offered thus far" (p. 27). The environment she designed to nurture this spirituality had

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opportunities for autonomy and decision-making as children selected concrete work in keeping with their developmental needs. They were encouraged to explore the beauty and order of their natural world. Relationships with teachers and other students reflected a spirit of working together rather than competition or domination of one over the other (Montessori, 1949/1992; Wolf, 1997).

For the elementary children Montessori (1948/1989a) devised what she termed 'cosmic education' to help them discover their spirituality through a realisation of the connectedness of everything in the universe.

> His [sic] intelligence becomes whole and complete because of the vision of the whole that has been presented to him, and his interest spreads to all, for all are linked and have their place in the universe on which his [sic] mind is centred. The stars, earth, stones, life of all kinds form a whole in relation to each other, and so close is this relation that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the sun!…The laws governing the universe can be made interesting and wonderful to the child, more interesting even than things in themselves, and he [sic] begins to ask: What am I? What is the task of man [sic] in this wonderful universe? Do we merely live here for ourselves, or is there something more for us to do? (Montessori, 1948/1989a, p. 6)

One of the central stories in Montessori is the *Time Line of Life.* A Montessori interviewee describes how it can assist the child in forming meaningful connections on the learning journey by touching on universal themes. The scientific study of species is not separated from the story of interdependent relationships.

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For example, the *Timeline of Life*....it might get into not only ecology and our

responsibility for ecology, but also our responsibility for each other.

Sometimes we talk about what it's like to feel that you're a loner, that your

world is changing very quickly. In this way, although we're looking at the

Timeline of Life, we're looking at one species or organism. Look at this

creature and everything around it. (Allison: 59)

In the Montessori curriculum the young child's explorations centre on the wonder of

the universe and then the interdependence of the universe. In upper primary, students

begin to appreciate "the interrelated geosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, biosphere

and neosphere that make up the living organism of the earth" (Berry, 1988, pp. 18-

19). As discussed above, when students get to middle school age armed with a

knowledge and appreciation for the interrelationship of planetary life, they are ready

to act. Judith Scott (1997) reported on the success of one school class in getting

McDonald's to stop using styrofoam packaging. In a community I visited a few years

ago, Montessori middle school children transformed a wasteland into a park. These

incidents illustrate how education can turn a consumer-focused society into one that

values the interdependence of life.

The Steiner Response to Interconnectedness.

Like Montessori, Steiner believed in the possibility of transformation through

education which he described as a process of human 'unfoldment' (Marshak, 1997).

He viewed the "human being as an entity, an organisation of body soul and mind" (Steiner, 1996, p. 23). He recognised a human energy that was capable of moving towards the divine (Marshak, 1997). Like Montessori, he did not believe in indoctrinating children, but felt that education should nurture self-discovery (Wilkinson, 1992; DeManett, 1988; Montessori, 1992). The teacher could best prepare for this by developing his/her own spirit. (Montessori, 1992; Wilkinson, 1992; Marshak, 1997). His views differed from Montessori in that he drew clear parallels between individual unfolding and the evolving of the human species.

> Another key element in Steiner's vision is the belief that each human life embodies a dual process of personal unfoldment [sic] and species evolution. Unfoldment is the growth of the individual toward the manifestation of full potential. Evolution is the same kind of growth for the human species. Humans as a species are evolving, even within historical time, not so much physically as energetically. Each individual unfolds according to his own personal path, and the sum of all personal unfoldment comprises the ongoing evolution of the species, toward divinity. (Marshak, 1997, p. 36)

Steiner interviewee, Bernadette, explained how each mythology studied guides the child in his/her self and world understanding. These mythologies roughly equate to the ages of understanding outlined above by Swimme (Swimme & Turner, 1999).

> So one of Steiner's tenets of philosophy is this evolution of
> the human consciousness …The Ancient Greeks didn't have the same
> perception and didn't have the same type of thinking that we do now and the

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further back you go, the more different it is. If you look at mythologies, you

will always have this picture of a Golden Age and there is some kind of fall

away from the Gods. In Christian, or Judeo-Christian philosophy, there's the

Fall. We have the state of paradise and then there's this intervention of this

being and then the fall from grace. As soon as you get this fall, everything is

kind of a duality. In paradise, it's all kind of a oneness. They are living at one

with God. And the Gods walked among men as they would say in theological

terms. And then there's this fall and suddenly there's good and evil and there's

heaven and earth, and life and death. They fall into a material sense of

existence and [in] lots of other mythologies you have this. Ovid talks about a

Golden Age, a Silver Age, a Bronze Age. The Golden Age was the time when

human beings were at one with the Gods. But in more modern terminology, in

Steiner's

terminology, we would say that human beings at that time had a faculty of

perception where they could perceive directly the spiritual world, spiritual

beings. (Bernadette : 13-14)

Steiner interviewee, Sam, emphasised that this is the philosophic basis for the

Waldorf school curriculum. However, the children come to these understandings

through experiencing mythologies that address where they are in terms of historical

consciousness.

In Class 4, the Norse Gods. You look at some of the behaviours of the Gods

and the mind boggles. Gods are fading away as the human being stands up and

has to take some responsibility. That leads to the Renaissance and the

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explorers on unchartered waters studied by the teenagers who are pushing their own boundaries. (Sam: 269)

Sam also identified reincarnation as a key Steiner spiritual tenet. He suggests that children subconsciously grasp this difficult concept by observing metamorphosis in the natural world. This is reminiscent of Montessori's suggestion that children can best learn about the cosmos by observing their external world.

I think it was there in the early understanding of Christianity. It's something that's being refreshed. However, Rudolf Steiner certainly brought that in. We see ourselves and ourselves as incarnating and we are trying to help them find their place on the earth and their task in life. But we don't know what karma they use or what karma they bring with them, what they've got to work on. So I mentioned that in conjunction with stories of flying and living forever. Because that is an aspect you could explore even in a spiritual way. Could we live forever? How could we live forever? …the soul could live forever. The children here are very open to that. We don't say to them "We believe in reincarnation" But they've had stories. In kindergarten Rudolf Steiner gave them the picture of the butterfly, the caterpillar that dies…and he talks about it like the soul being reborn. (Sam: 556-564)

Religious and Other Spiritual Pathways.

Interestingly, Marshak in _The Common Vision: Parenting and Educating for Wholeness (1997)_ includes Steiner as a visionary but leaves out Montessori explaining that she did not sufficiently consider the elements of spirituality. He felt that she did not deal with the realms of emotions and feelings or explore the interrelationships of the subsystems of the child including "physical, vital, mental and spiritual" (Marshak, 1997, p. 225). Steiner (1996; Marshak, 1997) describes four bodies in the human person : physical or sensorial related to a body of matter; the etheric – life force energy that shapes the body and moral development; the astral body which is energy of the soul and contains the thinking, willing and feeling of the inner life and finally the body of the spirit. Other creatures can have an astral body but only humans can have the body of the spirit which is divine. Montessori also focuses on the qualities that are special about humans but her presentation of evolution is a horizontal one whereas Steiner's also incorporates a strong vertical view of spiritual evolution. Montessori expresses a hope that humans can evolve to achieve peace in the world whereas Steiner speaks of divinity. In studying the historic narratives of civilisations, Montessori encourages children to explore how each culture caters for its spiritual needs as well as physical needs whereas Steiner views the order of study as extremely important as it mirrors the evolution of human consciousness (Demanett, 1988; Montessori, 1992; Marshak, 1997).

Steiner made a considerable effort to explicitly describe how the human's spiritual potential could be reached in each seven year developmental period and devised a curriculum accordingly. (Refer to Chapter VIII and Appendix B on Steiner Education) Marshak commends Steiner because he provides a clearly guided pathway to

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expanding spiritual consciousness but it is for this same reason that Steiner education was condemned by some US magnet and charter schools as being too religious. They objected to the anthroposophic pathway leading to understandings including spiritual understandings as well as to the celebration of Christian festivals (Boston, 1996; Mealey, 1997). Montessori did not provide explicit procedures for spiritual development and this partially explains why there is such variation in how Montessori teachers interpret catering for the development of the spiritual embryo. It may also be that the formative work of her methodology occurred in countries with strong religious traditions– first Italy, and later India so there was a strong religious component in the environment of the children. There is less structure for nurturing spiritual development in secular schools and communities.

Montessorian, Aline Wolf, has made it her life mission to help teachers find ways of catering for spirituality in their non-sectarian classrooms.   She claims that a misunderstanding of the nature of spirituality led to this aspect of the human journey being severely curtailed with the clear separation of church and state in American Government schools. She explains that religion is a pathway to spirituality, but not the only one.

> Spirituality is a basic human energy that gives meaning to our lives. The
> practice of a particular religion is the way that many people choose to give
> voice to their spirituality. (Wolf, 1998, p. 20)

Wolf (1998) further elucidates the difference between religion and spirituality by explaining that religion provides answers to the universal questions while spirituality "honours the questions themselves and encourages us to ponder them personally" (p. 20). In encouraging children to explore these questions, we are offering them a vision that "there is something more to life than what they perceive with their senses" (Wolf, 1996, p 37). Wolf believes that by helping teachers to understand this difference, spirituality will become less elusive (Wolf, 1996, 1998).

Wolf's care to distinguish religion from spirituality helps to explain some of the differences observed in the Catholic and Government schools visited. The Catholic school has a curriculum of religion and values that interweaves all school explorations. Connections to spirituality are also highlighted by a journey of sacraments. In contrast, there was no explicit reference to spirituality in my Government school visits or interviews. Nevertheless, with the new *Curriculum Framework*, the issue of spirituality in non-sectarian schools in Western Australia is being addressed. Underpinning the curriculum are shared core values in the areas of commitment to pursuit of knowledge and achievement of potential, self –acceptance and self-respect, respect and concern for others, social and civic-responsibility and environmental responsibility. Each person's potential is described in terms of the following domains: "physical, emotional, aesthet*ic*, *spiritual*,[109] intellectual, moral and social" (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 16). This represents a considerable broadening of the view of educational domains and implies that there are pathways to realise spirituality that may or may not be religious. Vicky – experienced in both

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[109] *Spiritual* –Emphasis added by author.

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Catholic and Government schools – stated that a focus on values can help to fill a spiritual void.

> I'm interested in that whole thing too- of values. I think the
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> whole business of Curriculum Framework having to have values is that
>
> there is this huge deficit, this huge arid land within us. We haven't got
>
> faith to the extent that we did. I'm interested in how teachers actually
>
> use them. I'm wanting to take one a fortnight and explore it with the
>
> kids through literature. It reminds me of the Catholic school where there was a
>
> wheel and each week we examined one particular value. I like the whole value
>
> movement, to be honest. (Vicky 3: 68)

In the *Curriculum Framework*, there is no clear suggestion of how one caters for spiritual needs except for interweaving values with the curriculum. Spirituality is thus still elusive. Included in the Principles of the *Curriculum Framework* is a statement that students "need experience in building patterns of interconnectedness which help them to make sense of their own lives and the world" (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 17). Means of fostering this interconnectedness are not defined. However, with a focus on universal values and an opportunity for students to reflect on how core values affect their lives, one might suppose that chances of students experiencing an interconnectedness beyond immediate experience become more likely.

Each incarnation has a potentiality and the mission of life is to live that

potentiality. (Campbell and Moyers, 1988, p. 229)

Citing Campbell's words above, Aline Wolf (1998) reflects the view that a goal of

education is to help children to discover and realise their potential. To realise one's

ultimate potential or bliss is to experience a spiritual transformation – a connectedness

that goes beyond concrete, observable, logical experience.

Humans spend most of their time before maturity in classrooms. Thus, educational

experiences potentially have a huge effect on a person's experience of self-realisation

on his/her life journey. These experiences can lead to gradual or precipitous change

in how one perceives one's life. Whether or not these changes contribute to spiritual

transformation depends on how the individual interconnects them in his/her narrative.

Education can facilitate the connecting process in two ways: firstly, by helping the

student to realise his/her power in creating a unique narrative; and secondly, by

exposing him/her to universal truths that, when discovered by the individual, lead to

making his/her journey meaningful.

Children need a story that will bring personal meaning together with the

grandeur and meaning of the universe. (Berry, 1988, p. 131)

This meaning-making process is scaffolded according to developmental guidelines.

This is most clearly articulated by Steiner and Montessori educators who counsel that

children up to the age of eight should be exploring the wonder of life. In upper

primary, they are ready to experiment with reality. However, it is not until middle school or high school that this wonder and knowledge can effectively be transformed into community action and responsibility (Wilkinson, 1992; Scott, 1997).

Personal transformation entails resolving conflicts and reconstructing our narratives. Conflict resolution skills, archetypes and mentors can facilitate this process. Spiritual transformation is making ultimate connections including experiencing the uniqueness of one's own journey against the backdrop of archetypal patterns. This transformation entails appreciating the irony that one can only fulfill a unique mission by realising one's interdependence with and moral responsibility for other creatures and the planet.

Berry (1988), MacIntyre (1994), Sandlos (1998) and Swimme (1999) explain that we are now in an era where the merging of science and philosophy integrates human experience of the past millennium. Catholic religious education, Montessori cosmic education, and the Steiner model of the evolution of consciousness all attempt to prepare the child to experience this interconnection between 'bliss' and 'science' (Nigel: 2) in 'The Age of The Earth' (Swimme and Turner, 1999).

Tools are required to foster the process by which children can experience being the author of their own narratives – making connections of experiences and being open to transformation along the way. These tools come in the form of evolving, integrated curriculums and nurtured imaginations relevant for both student education and teacher training. Such tools are used by educators who recognise that meaning-making is holistic.

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If we start with the whole – the universe as a whole, the earth as a whole –

then there's a real chance for a human to find her or his place.

(Swimme and Turner, 1999)

Evidence from the literature review and data suggest that curriculums that foster

meaning making encourage connection-making and a holistic understanding by being

integrated and narrative-based. Montessori and Steiner curriculums can be viewed as

historic integrated curriculum models with many similar attributes to contemporary

curriculum designs.