

## **Imaginative teaching and learning in Waldorf classrooms**

A report on the 2013 student research programme at the Centre for Creative Education

**Clive Millar**

*Professor Emeritus, University of Cape Town; South Africa;  
leader, student research programme at the Centre for Creative Education*

**Taryn Melmed, Jessica Nell, Gabriella Rivera & Alexi Silverman**

*Graduates, Centre for Creative Education, Cape Town; South Africa*

**ABSTRACT.** This paper seeks to provide insight into the undergraduate research programme at the Centre for Creative Education in Cape Town, South Africa, a fully accredited provider of Waldorf teacher education. In our experience, qualitative research is a challenging process for first-time student researchers. First, there is a description of the research programme, innovatively developed over the past eight years. This is followed by the students reporting on their experience in carrying out the different aspects of the programme. Next, a summary description of the key findings of the thirteen final-year students of 2013 is given, followed by bringing together their reflections on the theme of their investigations: imaginative teaching and learning. In reporting on the process and findings made, the paper seeks to provide evidence of the value of undergraduate research as an essential element in pre-service teacher development.

*Keywords:* teacher education, student research, imagination, teaching practice

### **Introduction**

The Centre for Creative Education (CCE) was founded in 1993 in Cape Town, during the transition years from *apartheid* South Africa to a democratic South Africa in 1994. The Centre's aim was to make Waldorf Education available to all communities, for the improvement of an education that was in its deepest crisis at the time. Waldorf Early Childhood programmes to improve the conditions of young children, as well as the training of primary school teachers became its main activities, to which Eurythmy training was added at a later stage.

After an initial period of re-organisation of government bodies, the Centre became an independently accredited Higher Education institution, offering a 4-year Bachelor of Education degree for primary teaching, a 4-year Bachelor of Arts degree for Eurythmy, and various Certificate levels in Early Childhood Education.

Part of the B. Ed. degree programme is the writing of a research report, innovatively structured and supervised by Professor Emeritus Clive Millar, previously head of the University of Cape Town's Adult Education Department. The report that follows begins by describing the process of research, followed by key findings of the individual student researchers and a drawing together of the key threads that emerged from the entire process. This report was written by four of the student researchers, assisted by Professor Millar:

In January of 2013 a group of final year teacher training students at CCE began a process of investigation that would eventually lead them to write their own research reports. In this document a team of writer-editors has attempted to make each dissertation, the processes leading to them, and the general conclusions reached, accessible to the teaching community at large.

The common research theme was ‘imagination in primary education’ and the research approach was a qualitative one. As Alexi Silverman (2013) put it, “*Good qualitative research will not merely try and confirm the already established assumptions of the researcher, but will offer up new challenges and questions that may pave the way for future research and possibilities for new insights.*” Through this compilation, we hope to bring these insights across in such a way that they can be engaged with by practising teachers and used to deepen our understandings of what it means to teach imaginatively.

The report attempts to mirror the structure of the students’ original work and communicate the shared experience of the student group. The first section outlines the context of the work - the research programme that the fourth-year students experience at the Centre for Creative Education. The second discusses the 2013 research theme and focus, drawing special attention to the students’ engagement with ‘imagination’ and how their research questions evolved to meet their personal interests. Section three gives an account of the reality of their experience as teacher training students attempting to transform themselves into school-based researchers. The final two sections form the heart of this document. The fourth gives a terse account of each individual’s findings and the fifth delves into the implications of these findings and considers how they might be used to inform pedagogic practice and deepen understandings of classroom culture. Student Research at the Centre for Creative Education.

## Student research at the Centre for Creative Education

Final year Bachelor of Education students at CCE are required to submit a formal dissertation on some aspect of primary school education. In the past, students found this a difficult and time-consuming task that in many cases delayed their graduation. Over recent years CCE has developed an integrated research programme that has both raised the quality of research and enabled students to meet tight deadlines for submission of research reports. In the case of full-time students, the features of this new programme are the following:

- The first quarter of the final year is devoted entirely to research. Final research reports are to be submitted before the start of the second quarter.
- All students are required to explore a common research theme. This theme changes every year. Within this theme, students pursue individual research questions.
- Theory and practice are completely integrated: instruction in research method guides and accompanies the research process.
- Supervision takes the form of detailed formative assessment of students’ work, submitted, critiqued and revised through rapid email communication.
- Research reports are submitted chapter by chapter, with tight deadlines. Each chapter builds on the previous one and acknowledges and addresses the possible limitations of the previous one. Cosmetic rewriting is discouraged; explicit critical reflection and change of mind encouraged.
- Research is “qualitative” not “quantitative”. It relies on interpretation of evidence and not on measurement and is appropriate for small-scale exploratory investigations in real-life situations.

### *A three stage process*

The research programme takes students through three stages of work: design, implementation and analysis.

*The design stage* consists of the following sequence of processes:

Intensive study of the research theme through selected texts

Shared formulation of a research focus

Individual definition of research questions

The construction and submission of a research plan that includes an account of:

- The research topic
- The research question
- The purposes of the investigation
- The research site(s)
- Preliminary reading
- Research methods and their justification
- Research ethics

*The implementation stage* involves immersion in a school or classroom situation for a two to three week period. Here the research plan receives a harsh reality shock and revisions become essential.

In pursuit of the research question, data is collected systematically and unsystematically.

*The Analysis stage* requires the following:

- Review of the experience of implementing the research plan
- Organisation of rough data in summary form - a form of preliminary interpretation.
- Analysis and discussion – interpreting the data in a systematic, reflective and open-minded way.
- Assessment of the strengths and limitations of the study
- Reflection on the research process as a whole

The above is a highly abstract account of the structure and rationale of CCE's final year research programme. What follows is a description of how this programme took shape and came to life in the hands of the final-year Bachelor of Education class of 2013.

## Research design

### *Research theme and focus*

At the start of the 2012 December vacation, students were informed of the theme for their 2013 research reports: 'Imagination in Primary Education'. Attached to this correspondence were two articles that we were required to read before the start of the introductory research module.

Seen as playing a pivotal role in the Waldorf teaching philosophy, the theme of 'imagination' was familiar to us in a practical sense. For three years we had studied Rudolf Steiner's insights into child development, coming to understand both intellectually and practically that 'creative teaching' (that harnesses and nurtures the imagination) is a key tool in effectively engaging the primary school-aged child. Through assignments, presentations and practical experiences in the classroom, we had explored the dramatic arts, storytelling, painting, drawing, music and singing. We were skilled in using the arts, mental imagery and creative means of expression to introduce concepts in mathematics, language and other subjects in the curriculum to primary school children in a lively way. In spite of and perhaps *because of* all this, the theme of 'Imagination in Primary Education' intrigued some, overwhelmed others, and aroused a sense of excitement in our fourth-year research class.

Peter van Alphen's article, *Imagination as a transformative tool in primary school education* (van Alphen,

2011) was one of the key texts we read before the research class commenced. It provided a review and comparison of the theoretical frameworks underpinning the work of Rudolf Steiner and Kieran Egan – two of the most compelling theorists to have written about the importance of imagination in education.

At the start of the introductory research class – crucial to informing the construction of research questions, research design and analysis of data for all students – it emerged that there were perhaps as many different understandings of the word ‘imagination’ as there were students in the class.

For some students, the word ‘imagination’ was strongly connected to the image-making faculty of the mind. Others saw imagination as a bridge between our emotions and meaning-making abilities. Most of us agreed with Egan’s definition of imagination as “*the ability to think of things as possible – the source of flexibility and originality in human thinking.*” (van Alphen, 2011, p. 17) We all believed that ‘imagination’ is what enables a person to think and create beyond the literal, tangible objects of the senses.

Once we had thoroughly unpacked the word ‘imagination’, deepening and generating a common understanding amongst all the research students in the class, our research theme shifted into the formulation we would work with over the next three months: An exploration of imaginative teaching and learning in a Waldorf classroom.

Drawing on the articles we had read and our class discussions, we created a list of ‘sensitizing concepts’ – word or phrases that could be used as conceptual lenses for better navigating the expansive field into which our research theme had thrust us.

The next step was to home in on a research focus that would generate a question that was intellectually exciting, relevant and researchable. Within the aforementioned broad theme, each student had her own unique interests. Students wished to explore ‘imaginative teaching tools’, ‘the healing power of the imagination’, ‘teaching special needs children’, ‘the integration of lesson content’, ‘questions that stimulate the imagination’ and ‘planning for moments of imagination’. Most of these tentative topics were based on their previous experience of classroom situations, either teaching or observing lessons in primary school environments.

While the theme itself was broad and exciting, narrowing our individual interests to a research focus that was observable and possible to explore (given the limited time frame for research) proved challenging. We had to imagine ourselves sitting in the classroom, and decide whether or not what we were hoping to observe would be evident in just three weeks.

Finding an individual focus within the broad theme was exciting as well as terrifying. From the comfort of our collective theme, common understandings and shared list of ‘sensitizing concepts’, we each embarked on our own journey, one that would be guided (and at times frustrated) by our own research questions.

### *Our research questions*

Within the theme and focus described above, each student devised her own research question – one that reflected her particular interests. These questions were essential starting points for planning the research process, and we used a simple set of criteria for judging what made a question a good one. We saw a good research question as:

- One that we didn’t know the answer to.
- One that was theoretically interesting (and generated intellectual “energy”).
- One that generated other questions.
- One that had practical and personal value.
- One that was manageable in the time available.

Such questions, though essential starting points, seldom survived the research process without modification. As the complexity of the research site and the research data was encountered they were tweaked and re-focused - and this essential process was recorded in each research report.

The diagram below attempts to capture the relationship between the individual research interests and the common research focus. The central concept was that of “imaginative teaching strategies” and individual research questions explored how such strategies related to the following 10 areas of interest.

### *Individual Research Questions*



### **Research method - a qualitative approach**

The research approach we decided to use was a qualitative one, as opposed to a quantitative one. We were not concerned with statistical analysis or with measuring data, but with gaining an insight into a complex, real-life situation in relation to our research question.

When using a qualitative research approach one needs to be fully immersed in the environment one is observing, exploring the meaning of events for those taking part through careful interpretation of evidence. *“In order to understand any human phenomenon we must investigate it as part of the context within which it lies.”* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 68)

A qualitative approach was particularly appropriate for our small-scale exploratory investigations over a short period of time. This allowed us to focus on our participants’ actions, behaviours, and responses, gaining an insight into their views and understandings through both observation and interviews. And our interpretations of what we thought was happening had to be justified by evidence derived from our observation and interview data.

### **Observations**

*“The researcher attempts to provide the clearest and most complete narrative of what went on in the field”* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 76)

In order to create the least amount of disruption to the class's daily routines it was important to find an unobtrusive place and role in the classroom. Robson (1993, p. 159) describes three types of observation techniques: *participant observation* where the researcher is fully involved in the events being studied; *systematic observation* where an 'observation instrument' is used; and *simple observation* where the researcher remains inconspicuous and engaged in passive observation. We used a combination of all three techniques, some students using one more than others.

In addition to deciding upon observation techniques, we needed to clarify what it was we were looking for. This proved to be a challenging task for most, as it required a level of imaginative guess work – assuming where we would find the answers to our questions. Once we thought about where we *believed* our answers might lie, we each created an observation guide consisting of focal points to support the process of observation in the field. These helped us to distinguish between what was relevant and necessary and what was intriguing and interesting, yet possibly off-topic.

## Interviews

*“An Interview is a conversation with a purpose”* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 79)

In addition to observations, we conducted interviews to gain insight into teachers' views, beliefs and intentions. We rejected the use of questionnaires and decided upon a combination of formal and informal interviews because these allowed direct and deeper contact with the interviewees, and permitted a level of flexibility through the opportunity to probe answers. Both informal interviews, being of an unplanned spontaneous nature, and formal interviews, being planned, structured and guided by the interviewer, involve an understanding of the art of conversation. It is important to build rapport between interviewer and the interviewee to elicit honest, natural responses, as well as to observe the interviewee's tone, language and body language. *“A researcher investigates with deep and genuine curiosity, listening for clues, as incidentally said things can be the most interesting.”* (Millar, 2013)

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994, pp. 81-83) there are three ways in which one can conduct an interview: using an *unstructured* (informal) *interview*, an *interview guide* or an *interview schedule*. An interview guide is a broad set of topics or areas one would like to discuss, while an interview schedule is a specific list of set questions. It was suggested that we use an interview guide, to avoid rigidity and to encourage us to follow the natural flow of the conversation, while having our outline of topics to ensure we gained all the information we needed.

Using both informal and formal interviews (with an interview guide) was a challenge to novice researchers. However, after our research course lectures and reading Maykut and Morehouse (1994, pp. 68-113) we devised a list of guidelines which helped us with our interviews. These guidelines included: very careful preparation, time-management and recording procedures, and guides to sensitive listening skills. As a research group, we came up with the “Three C's” of interviewing: using the art of *conversation*, asking for *concrete* examples for clarification, and using non-threatening *colloquial* language. We also learnt the importance of being able to ask clear (not vague or invasive), open-ended questions that the participant could answer with relative ease; being able to create and adapt questions on the spot; and to avoid asking “leading questions” that would give the interviewee cues about expected answers.

Armed with these research methods and aspirations, the newly formed researchers felt equipped to go on site and begin gathering data.

## Our research experience

Once the planning phase was complete, the thirteen students (turned researchers) headed out to their respective research sites at Waldorf schools around Cape Town. The general mood of all involved was that of excitement, preparedness, and enthusiasm. However, many of us had underlying feelings of anxiety and



nerves, some more than others. *"I was overwhelmed with anxiety because it was the first time I had ever done this form of research."* (Rossouw, 2013)

Once arriving on site, the general welcome was one of warmth and encouragement. The host teachers were happy to have researchers in their class, and were motivated by the questions brought forward. In a few cases there had been poor communication and some researchers arrived on site to be met with misunderstanding about their presence. *"There was some confusion about which class I was to be hosted in but the situation was instantly resolved."* (Abrahams, 2013)

Luckily all teachers involved quickly adjusted and readily accepted the researcher into their classes. We tried to remain inconspicuous, settling ourselves near the back of the classroom, facing the teacher. *"I sat in what I perceived to be an unobtrusive position towards the back of the class. I ensured that the teacher and each of the children were in view (even if only from the side or back), and that I could see some of their faces."* (Silverman, 2013) Although finding a suitable position for observation and note-taking was important, the researchers were not always idle in their observations. Some became participant observers, meaning that they would involve themselves in the class's daily routines and help children with their work where appropriate. *"Observation, at times, seemed mind-numbingly tedious, so to remedy my situation I would traverse the classroom offering help where it was necessary."* (Nell, 2013)

Opinions varied regarding the use of the pre-planned observation guides. Some researchers discovered that having a well-structured observation guide to follow helped them remain focused on their research question and gather only relevant data. Others decided to fully immerse themselves in the classroom environment, feeling that their observation guides would hinder and limit their observations before they had a chance to experience the reality of the classroom. *"I chose to use the first two days to sit in the class and 'sense' - not to get too caught up in the observation guide, trying to organize data, or analyze anything I was seeing. I was more interested in using my sensory perception, my peripheral vision, to glean, feel, sense, on an emotive, instinctual level, this class, this teacher, and get a taste for the atmosphere."* (Rivera, 2013)

The researchers faced the shared challenge of trying to find a balance between observer-researcher and student teacher. Most succeeded in remaining solely researcher, while a few took the opportunity to teach in addition to observing. Another challenge experienced was that of remaining objective and non-judgmental, especially avoiding immediate interpretation based on personal beliefs. *"It was hard to focus on general observation without interpretation."* (Dech, 2013)

While collecting data during the first week of observation much re-evaluation took place, especially regarding the researchers' questions. Some realised their research questions were too broad to be answered and adjusted the wording of their questions. *"My original question required a lengthier time on site, and on a variety of sites."* (Melmed, 2013)

In addition to the observation process, the researchers had their first encounter with interviewing. Many felt trepidation at the thought of conducting formal interviews and felt that they needed to stick closely to their interview guides. *"I found my interview guide both a help and a hindrance. It was useful in that it provided our conversation with orderliness, but it obstructed my creative thought."* (Nell, 2013) However, once getting to know their host teachers, and building a good rapport, the researchers felt more confident and able.

Most researchers decided to interview their host teacher twice. The first formal interview would be based upon their interview guides, created in the planning phase and focused on specific questions. The second interview would be there to ask and answer any further questions that arose during the observation phase. *"This was to be an interview based on clarification of events and ideas."* (Paice, 2013)

Voice recorders were used during most interviews. Almost all the host teachers were hesitant to be recorded, and only after a guarantee from the students that the recordings were for their own records (to ensure validity of interpretations) did they agree. The majority of researchers found that using a voice recorder was most helpful, allowing them to be fully immersed in the interview process, listening and observing with keen uninterrupted interest. *"I found my interview guide to be very useful. This preparation of questions allowed my teacher to answer the questions in depth with full explanations which really gave me valuable data to use."* (Rossouw, 2013)

By the end of the data collection process on site, the researchers realised that what they had planned to observe, to ask, and to discover, were merely starting points. In reality their plans, questions, and expectations had all shifted to adapt to a complex and increasingly interesting reality.

## Research findings

In this section we present very brief summaries of the “findings” of our 13 individual student research reports. These are grouped within the 10 topics identified in section 2 above. All quotations in these summaries (unless otherwise indicated) are extracts from the original dissertations, now housed in and available from the library of the Centre for Creative Education in Cape Town. The title of each individual research report is indicated beneath each summary as well as in the bibliography at which this publication closes.

### Moments of tension – Alexi Silverman

Alexi Silverman’s research question arose from her personal journey in the classroom, in which she had recognized and experienced “*a kind of tension that arises when the expectations and educational aims of the teacher are thwarted in the unpredictable reality that is the classroom context.*” (Silverman, 2013) Out of a willingness to find a way to engage with such “moments of tension” she asked: “*How does the teacher navigate ‘moments of tension’ in a way that enables or hinders learning?*”

Her research revealed that such moments were not “merely a symptom of a structural dissonance between ‘the lesson plan’ and ‘the lesson in reality’, but an inseparable part of the educational endeavour, which is inescapably ‘human’, shaped and informed by the context of human relationships”.

Recognizing the inevitability of such ‘moments of tension’ arising in the classroom, Silverman combed through her research data to analyse the sources of tension, as well as the varying roles it played in the learning experience. She noticed that in each situation, contrary to what might have been expected, the tension was “*not necessarily a ‘block’ to the process of learning and teaching*” but that “*the tension itself could be a kind of a ‘tool’, to be engaged with, utilized and even created*” to facilitate what the educational theorist Vygotsky (2013, p. 43) called “*the construction of something new*”.

The sources of tension identified were diverse - a challenging social dynamic, a complex question or task, even the process of planning the lesson - each leading the teacher and children towards an outcome based in ‘the unknown’. In such moments, the role of tension was to act as a ‘signpost’: perhaps the lesson needed to change course; or perhaps there was something beneath the social fabric of the class that required attention; or perhaps the task or question being tackled simply required effort and persistence.

In each scenario the host teacher “*did not merely welcome tension for its own sake, but she was able to use it as a didactic tool*”. Based on her philosophy of ‘possibility thinking’, in each of these challenging moments, Silverman’s host teacher would “carry the tension” in such a way that showed her resolve, openness and willingness to find a solution, an answer, a constructive outcome. With the teacher as a “role model” of how to deal with difficult situations, the children learn how to persist in their own solving of complex questions, challenging situations and the riddles of life that they may be presented with as they grow older. In the classroom context, that the children learn to work tenaciously towards a solution is crucial, as the “*breakthrough moments are vital for a child’s sense of self-confidence*”.

Key in Silverman’s re-imagining of ‘tension’ is a shift away from focusing on the solution (be it the correct answer to a question or the plan-perfect executed lesson) towards

*“A valuation of the process it takes to get there... If the process of grappling with the task or question, of engaging with and participating in their own process of learning, is seen as an end in itself, many more possibilities for learning can be realized, both beyond and including the particular aims the teacher might have imagined in her plan. It is the teacher’s valuation of this process that creates the possibility for the ‘moment of tension’ to be transformed, indeed for the emerging ‘zone of proximal development’ to feel a safe enough space to explore.”*



Silverman, A. (2013). *Navigating moments of tension in a Waldorf classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

### Connective moments- Pippa Tyler

Pippa Tyler's question was formulated to explore a concept she called 'connective moments'. In her previous experiences in schools, she had noticed that a special type of quality or mood arose in the class when children were connecting to the material brought by the teacher. She sought to understand "*What is a 'connective moment', and how can one begin to explain such moments in classroom learning?*"

From her observations in three different classrooms and her interviews with teachers she concluded that

*"A 'connective moment' is a moment of deep connection between a teacher and her children that allows for a feeling-charged experience of the learning content. The children connect consciously or unconsciously with feelings, thoughts and atmosphere, creating emotional links with the learning content."*

For Tyler, teachers could utilize such 'connective moments' as 'scaffolding' tools in order to help children through what Vygotsky called the Zone of Proximal Development in order to achieve what they could not independently achieve without adult or other assistance.

*"But how does one initiate a connective moment?"* was Tyler's crucial question. Accepting that a "*connective moment*" occurs at more than just the cognitive level, she sees "*feelings as crucial to the process of connection*". Initially, she had expected to find teachers using a list of intentional and well-practiced "tools" in order to enable these 'connective moments' to take place. She had also expected the word "connective" to refer only to the children's connection to lesson content. However, she found this to be only secondary. Primarily, "*the main connection that is happening when a 'connective moment' takes place is between the children and the teacher.*"

One of the teachers she interviewed put it like this: "*You need to be interested, you need to care about the children in your class, and you need to spend time before your lessons preparing carefully and grappling with the content.*" Tyler suggests that it is through the teacher's own "inner preparation" – through engaging with her teaching material while bearing the children in mind – that "connective moments" can occur, taking the children and teacher beyond the level of cognitive engagement, towards an in-depth, richly-felt, imaginative understanding of the content.

When the teacher re-imagines her content, and goes through a dress rehearsal of the looming lesson in her mind, involving her class as a whole, or maybe just certain children, a connection is formed with the material and the children seem to be able to sense it.

Tyler, P. (2013). *An investigation of "connective moments" in a Waldorf primary school classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

### Questions and answers – Jessica Nell

An integral part of life in the classroom is the oscillation between questions and answers. Jessica Nell found this dichotomy interesting, and formulated her research question as follows: "What is the relationship between a question and the depth of cognitive and imaginative response?"

In her findings, she highlights the differences between her expectations and the reality of what she discovered.

*"Initially, I thought that the most important aspect of asking questions would be that of language. I expected to find some obvious connection between the way a question is phrased or the kind of words used, and the quality of response given. I did not, however, find such a connection. One cannot deny the relevance of words and phrasing, but in the context of Ms Young's classroom I found that there was a more elusive quality that I needed to see."*

Nell pursues this 'elusive quality' as a detective would search for clues, and once she has gathered enough evidence, she puts forward a theory.

*"Looking at all of the clues I have compiled thus far, the following words stand out the most: intention, affective,*

*tension, body language, and mood. They seem to stand in direct opposition to my initial supposition that the most important connection between question and response would be the content and structure. I am beginning to question whether content and structure hold any sway over the effectiveness of a question, especially and particularly in a primary school classroom. I think that the elusive quality I have been looking for is not really a quality at all. It is the teacher."*

In response to her research question she gives a tentative answer:

*"Although I think that it would take years to answer this question fully, part of it is that the relationship - that which connects those two poles - is the depth of rapport between the questioner and the responder. It is the level of emotional engagement and awareness the teacher puts in to her questions. Therein I find my kernel of truth: it is our emotions that allow us to bridge the gap between cognition and imagination, bringing both aspects out of the airy realm of theory, and giving them grounding in real human experience."*

Nell, J. (2013). *An exploration of questions and answers in a Waldorf primary school classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

### **Imagination and future – Anna Dech**

Anna Dech's passion was to discover how a teacher could inspire and motivate children to learn about and connect to nature. This enquiry arose from her concern that modern day children are losing their connection to the natural world. She explored, through her readings, the impact this disconnection was having on their lives, their minds and their ability to learn. She delved into the idea of nature as a powerful teaching tool and discovered through her readings, the many benefits of developing empathy and love for nature, as well as how active involvement in nature could positively impact learning and general well-being.

Her research question began as, "*How do children respond to a teacher's input towards nature?*" However, she soon concluded that

*"The process of observation and interviewing made me realise that the question I actually wanted to ask cannot be answered given the time limitations for this research. I really would like to understand why we lose our connection to nature and care less when we get older."*

After some difficulty, she arrived at a revised question: "*How does a teacher inspire and motivate children to learn about, and connect to, nature?*"

Dech was able to answer her question, because she was lucky enough to spend her research time with an inspirational teacher. He proved to be wholeheartedly dedicated to cultivating a powerful, hands-on, experiential, caring approach to nature. The children were immersed in nature every day and story and image were generously used as a teaching media to cultivate imagination and inspiration. She discovered that there were definite "strategies" the teacher was using. These included storytelling, an "outdoor classroom", gardening, a "forest classroom", the class pet, outings, a documentary, writing tasks, as well as drawing and painting." The main one was simply working in and with nature.

It was via observing the teacher and children's participation in all these activities that Dech was able to observe the benefits of such an immersion in nature.

*"The stories the teacher told were always lively, filled with descriptions and actions, which the children loved and connected to. The teacher believes that stories are very important for the development of the child's imagination and he too loves stories, which I believe was visible in the way he told them."*

*The teacher's passion and love for his job, the children and nature is reflected in his decision to live next door to the school where he is constantly surrounded by nature, and school matters. He was active and interested in all activities and events involving the outdoor and forest classrooms. He looked after the animals and vegetables daily, with great care, responsibility and devotion. Nature activities with the children, either active in nature or through stories, drawings or writing, happened daily."*

Her research highlighted the vital need for nature education and imaginative teaching to be embedded in our education system. This could help ensure the survival of our planet, and indeed our very existence.

*“My research helped me to understand that it is the ‘unnatural’ environment children grow up in that isolates them from nature. Thus the children are not strongly connected to and don’t feel responsible for nature. I realised that, in order to connect children to nature and instil a sense of responsibility for the environment, it is important to personally feel a strong connection to, and love for, nature. This, along with a little bit of patience, seems to be the key when trying to make nature education a real success. I have observed, and concluded, that a teacher needs to feel inspired, motivated and enthusiastic. He should feel responsible and be passionate, actively and consistently working for what he wishes to teach, and achieve. This applies not only to nature education, but for all content that is to be taught.”*

Dech, A. (2013). *Exploring how a teacher inspires and motivates children to learn about and connect to nature*, Centre for Creative Education.

## **Multi-dimensional learning – Gabriella Rivera**

Gabriella Rivera embarked on her research journey by delving into the idea of imagination. She examined its many angles, and discovered how important it is to develop and nurture this faculty in children, not only for learning, but for life. More specifically, she discovered how significant children’s *experiences* are, because of an intrinsic connection and continual fuelling cycle between imagination, thought and experience.

Two illuminating insights would become the basis for her research. The first was the following:

*“I realised the most fundamental aspect of teaching, in terms of efficacy, must surely be linked to making learning experiential. When we experience something we are touched intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. When we have a sensory experience something happens: it becomes irreversibly part of us. Then we know it, we own it. A transformation has occurred.”*

The second insight followed from this: there *must* be a way to teach and present content to have such multi-dimensional learning happen. *“How do we use content, and how do we present it, in a way that gives the children a broad, expansive, multi-faceted experience?”*

The defining concept in her investigation became “multi-dimensional learning” and her research question became: *“What imaginative strategies are teachers using, and how effective are they in engaging children in a multi-dimensional learning experience?”*

The study started out as a quest to observe if the “techniques” teachers used to elicit engagement in content could create a deeply layered learning experience. However, it soon became a personal reflective journey and increasingly an anthropological study of the classroom as an intricate social phenomenon. She realised that teaching techniques might have their place in terms of enlivening content, but more fundamental was the underlying culture, ethos and social practices within which this took place.

The study therefore became two-fold. Examining teaching “strategies” that engaged the children experientially in content, she discovered that

*“Games, fun, questions, tests, physical group activities - anything that grasped their feelings - effectively generated interest and engagement, and this aided and deepened learning. Also, vital to stress, the most successful strategies all had a clearly present underlying element of fun, lightness and emotional substance.”*

More fundamentally, though, her attention was drawn to underlying “Waldorf pedagogic strategies”. She found that, in the case of this particular class and teacher, these intrinsic strategies and practises were what successfully engaged the children on many levels as well as imbuing them with a deeply multi-layered experience. These included the three-fold structure of the main lesson, including morning rituals, the curriculum itself and the centrality of the “main-lesson book”.

*“When I started this process, I knew I was looking for learning that was experiential and multi-dimensional, and I found it, although not as I had imagined. Even if the teacher did not engage her children effectively all the time, in terms of the content part of the lesson, the fact that there were these pedagogic strategies in place enabled multi-dimensional learning to happen effectively nonetheless. This is a powerful finding. It points to why Waldorf education is potentially so effective. Even though facts are there and are important..... Waldorf teaching methods enliven this content and give children a huge basket of individual and social tools, skills and capacities, in addition to factual knowledge.”*

Most vitally, what she discovered was that this study opened multiple doorways to questions about what is really important in the Primary School. Her final conclusions sum up the complexity of school experience and the depth to which her insights into Waldorf pedagogy led her:

*“In highlighting the benefits of these methods and strategies, this research exploration demonstrates the importance of an imaginative, multifaceted, approach, where values, principles and ideologies are embedded in and underlie all pedagogical practices. This study also points to education as a complex social system, where the teacher’s skill, personality, motivation and imaginative ability, are equally key factors in creating a successful, multi-dimensional primary school experience.”*

Rivera, G. (2013). *An exploration into the relationship between imaginative teaching strategies, effective engagement and multi-dimensional learning*, Centre for Creative Education.

### **Active learner engagement – Kerry Ferreira & Ayesha Conrad**

Kerry Ferreira’s interests lay in imaginative teaching techniques. As her research progressed her focus included how the teacher could use and integrate imagination into various teaching techniques and how the teacher chooses the most appropriate technique for each area of content. What she was particularly concerned with was what she called “active learner engagement”. She explained her process of inquiry as follows.

*“I began this research assignment by embarking on an exploration of imaginative teaching techniques within the Waldorf main lesson. I wanted to find out how imagination, if used in various teaching techniques, could assist with active learner engagement within the practical setting of the classroom. The research question, ‘Which imaginative teaching techniques used in the Class 2 Waldorf Main Lesson are most effective in assisting active learner engagement?’ allowed me to focus my attentions on the effectiveness of various teaching techniques, but it also led me to a new focus on the integration of teaching techniques.”*

This line of inquiry eventually led her to the following key insights and conclusions:

*“Although certain imaginative teaching techniques, such as exploration and discussion, can be identified as being most effective in assisting active learner engagement, I conclude that the effectiveness of these techniques to attain the goal of active learner engagement, lies primarily in the teacher’s ability to choose the appropriate technique at any time. The true use of imagination in the classroom lies in the teacher’s ability to be imaginative in her application of imaginative teaching techniques.*

*I suggest that a good teacher should be aware of how various imaginative teaching techniques assist in different types of active learner engagement, and should also be adaptable in the way in which they apply these techniques. This research report could be used as a theoretical reference when planning lessons. It could also provide insight into some of the skills needed to use imaginative teaching techniques effectively.”*

Ferreira, K. (2013). *An exploration of imaginative teaching techniques within the Class Two Waldorf Main Lesson*, Centre for Creative Education.

Ayesha Conrad’s research focussed on a similar area of interest. She wanted to explore imaginative teaching techniques employed in Waldorf schools to find out if they elicited what she called “participative responses” from the children in the class. Her discovery was that the *way* in which the teacher uses these various teaching techniques, rather than the techniques themselves, is what determines the children’s participative response.

She identifies the following five factors that influence the children’s participative responses:

*“Teacher-learner relationship: Having spent a long period of time with the children in the class, the teacher gets to know each child and becomes sensitive to their inherent differences. The teacher knows what interests a specific child has and what work content and imaginative technique would appeal to him or her.*

**Timing:** *This is a combination of experience, trial and error, and rapport with the children and therefore slightly more structured than intuition.*

**Body language:** *Children are naturally more inclined to pay attention to an active person than to a stationary and monotonous one.*

*Use of voice: A voice is so easily manipulated but has such a powerful impact on the setting of the classroom. It not only indicates the speaker's mood, but in a classroom setting it dictates the mood of the learners, i.e. serious, playful, sombre, or happy.*

*Maintaining learner focus: Ensuring you have the learner's attention is a contributing factor to ensuring a participative response and learner engagement in a lesson."*

Her conclusions are as follows:

*"The successful use of imaginative teaching techniques to elicit a participative response depends largely on the manner in which the teacher presents the content. This in turn depends on factors such as the classroom relationship, the teacher's expertise, the use of timing, dramatisation, task allocation to measure feedback and a good work ethic. Imaginative techniques are valuable tools for teachers to use should they wish to create a living and active classroom environment. Learners who are exposed to these techniques are more participative, alert and responsive to the work content. The use of imagination in the classroom creates a more fulfilling experience for both the teacher and the learner."*

Conrad, A. (2013). *An exploration of imagination in a Waldorf Classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

### **Transformation of lesson content – Samantha Paice**

Samantha Paices' interest lay in a particular process. She wanted to discover how lesson content could be transformed through imagination. She pursued this interest until she arrived at the following research question: "What process do teachers undergo in order to teach imaginatively and how do children respond to these methods in their work and recall?"

The first part of her question concerns itself with the teacher. She takes the view that "for someone to teach imaginatively and explore a child's imagination they need to learn how to engage with their own imagination first" and she identifies the following factors that enable a teacher to transform lesson content from the mundane to the imaginative:

*"Tapping into the imagination: The teacher needs to take into consideration the words and methods used to tap into her own imagination as well as those used for tapping into a child's imagination. As Mrs Stone explained during one of our conversations, 'You can explain a concept many times to a child and he still won't be able to understand. But if a child explains that same concept to another child, there is possibility for understanding...for a child can most often reach another child in a way I cannot.'*

*Knowledge of the class: The teacher needs to have an extensive knowledge of the children in her class, as a whole and as individuals.*

*Managing the curriculum: In order for a teacher to teach in an imaginative way they need not only to have an extensive knowledge of their class but also of the curriculum that they are teaching. The lesson content not only has to be brought across to the class in a relevant and imaginative way but also in a way that awakens their own imagination.*

*Adaptability in lesson planning: What to expect from a lesson and presenting the lesson also involve continuous personal learning on the teacher's part..... based on new information about how the children receive it and the questions the children are asking."*

In response to the second part of her research question – children's responses to different kinds of input – she comes to the following conclusion:

*"The child's response is the way in which the teacher is able to gauge whether the imaginative picture they have brought across has failed or succeeded, and through this they are able to adapt in that lesson or for future lessons and build on this. The failure of an imaginative input can be seen through the observation of the child's body language, whether they are looking up, interested, not fiddling with paraphernalia, trying to 'hide' or avoiding eye contact with the teacher.. When successful, the reverse can be seen in the child's body language. They are sitting attentively; they are engaged in asking questions and are also adding their own knowledge and stories to the lesson."*

Paice, S. (2013). *An exploration of imaginative teaching and learning in a Waldorf Classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.



## Imaginative thinking – Sarah Abrahams & Taryn Melmed

Sarah Abraham's revised question was "Which imaginative strategies are most effective in stimulating learning in a Waldorf classroom?" During the process of data collection she focused on four such strategies: those involving "story-telling", "images", "rich descriptions in poetry" and "art". She saw

*"different strategies as having a common aim - to arouse and satisfy children's curiosity, give them a sense of empathy and stir their feelings - which in turn enables them to grasp and connect to lesson content."*

She explores the point that each child perceives, processes, and learns in a different way: either through "direct experience by visually seeing and feeling as they process information by putting it into action" or by "perceiving and absorbing information through analysis and thinking, as 'audio learners', who process information by reflecting on what the teacher has taught".

She focuses on one of the most commonly used methods of teaching, that of discussion. "Having discussions is one of the methods used to recognise aspects within the children's response in order to know that learning is taking place." Discussions help to consolidate learning, as well as help children deepen their understanding of the concepts being taught.

*"Having discussions allows the children to express freely themselves and share the emotional connections they have towards the content. By stimulating their feeling, the children experience ownership of the content by making it part of their being."*

Through class discussion, children are learning on a social level by sharing their own experiences with one another, while at the same time "allowing children the space to independently question their understanding of the content."

She comes to the conclusion that the following is what makes a teaching strategy imaginative:

*"It gives the children a rich sensory experience through descriptive images, stories and fruitful discussions which represent facts of our complex world. In this way the children makes sense of the world in human terms, making learning memorable and meaningful. These imaginative strategies also develop flexibility in thinking, created by the learners themselves through their experience during the telling of a story or through discussions. Presenting content in an imaginative way makes sense to the children, thus inspiring them to want to learn."*

Abrahams found story-telling to be the strategy most used to stimulate learning in children, though she concludes with this proviso:

*"However through my observations I have come to the conclusion that no strategy is more effective than any other. Instead, the integration of different strategies is best and serves well in stimulating learning amongst learners in a Waldorf Classroom."*

Abrahams, S. (2013). *An exploration of imaginative learning and teaching in a Waldorf Classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

Taryn Melmed's revised research question was closely related to that of Abraham's; "In what ways do certain activities in the Grade Two Waldorf classroom enable the use and development of imaginative thinking?" Her initial focus lay in defining "imagination" in the context of "thinking". She defines "imaginative thinking" as an original idea which shows a level of depth in ones thought processes, "where you can individually create and make anything possible in your mind with vivid detailed descriptions, resulting in an image".

She also stresses the differences between the words "imaginative" and "creative" as she believes that the two words are often interchanged and yet have different implications. As well as there being a certain stigma connected to the word "imagination" in education, she senses that people often don't fully understand the word. She found the following statement by her host teacher very perceptive:

*"They are strongly interlinked. 'Creative' is the act, the actual manifestation of something that has been imagined. 'Creation' is the doing word of the process of imagination. It is the manifestation of the unique you."*

Through her data collection process Melmed came to the following understanding:



*“It is through the work activities which allow for individual interpretation or creative exploration, as well as through the recall activities, that the children are engaged fully and able to use imaginative thinking to participate in the lesson.”*

She believes that it is through these particular activities - recall, writing, drawing, discussion, and painting - that the teacher will be able to assess the children’s level of involvement, interest, understanding, interpretation, creativity and imaginative thinking.

Her findings indicate that it is imperative to “create a safe space where children’s thoughts and ideas can be positively acknowledged to promote individuality and personal growth, thereby enabling ‘imaginative thinking’”. In addition, the teacher needs to ‘encourage children to continually develop, both personally and educationally. One needs to allow them the freedom within various artistic lessons and activities to express their thoughts, feelings, and internal mental images of the content’.

*“Such activities as drawing, painting, writing and reading; encouraging discussions and insightful questions; as well as various recall activities, allow opportunities for the children to think for themselves, be free to express their creative ideas, and use their intuition and inspiration while working to bring out and develop their individuality.”*

Melmed, T. (2013). *An exploration of Imaginative Thinking - In what ways do certain activities in the Grade Two Waldorf Classroom enable the use and development of imaginative thinking?* Centre for Creative Education.

### **Special needs – Candice du Plessis**

Candice du Plessis began her research with the question: “How does a teacher use imaginative strategies in her main lesson to teach an abstract concept to special needs learners and how does their experience of such teaching emerge in their memory and work?” Through observation and general discussion with her host teacher she soon realized that the teacher

*“does not teach abstract concepts through a fantasy story to high school learners. The learners are taught facts, grounded in concrete examples that relate to real-life situations, thoroughly explained through various imaginative teaching strategies.”*

This insight prompted her to alter the focus of her question to: “What are the main strategies the teacher uses in her main lesson to teach concepts to special needs learners and in what ways does their experience of such teaching emerge in their memory and work?”

*“Her question required two areas of investigation: into “strategies” and “emerging memory”. The various strategies she observed were the following: “rhythm and routine”, “abstract concepts made real by personal experience”, “repetition”, “recapitulation” and the use of “visual aids”. She describes the importance of the above mentioned strategies for high school learners with special needs. Having a set routine and rhythm to the lesson (and beyond this the day, week, month and term) provides the learners with an essential sense of security, as well as ensuring that the teacher includes everything she intends to.”*

Abstract concepts were communicated to the learners through description and personal experience. Because mediating a new concept through fantasy-rich stories was too abstract and disconnected a method for children of high school age, it was important for the teacher to make the concept “real” by personalising the story, by using visual aids (as a picture, a poster or a graph), or alternatively outdoor observation and exploration.

She observed the teacher using various means to recapitulate what the learners had learnt the previous day at the beginning of each lesson. This was mainly through questions and answers: particularly such questions as “What does.....mean?”, “What did we do yesterday?” or “Who can tell me the difference between.....?”

Whilst observing, Du Plessis saw “a multitude of teaching strategies” being used. “The key strategy I noticed was repetition”. “The teacher would summarize what she had taught and repeat it to the class. This would happen up to three times in a lesson”. She points out that “recapitulation” fell under both areas of research interest – teaching strategy and pupils’ “emerging memory”. Recapitulation would generally be in the form of questions and answers about the previous day’s work. Alternatively, there would be written notes on the blackboard for the learners to read or fill in missing words. These were the methods used to help the learners

to remember, as well as a way for the teacher to assess how much information had been retained.

Du Plessis, C. (2013). *An exploration of imaginative teaching and learning in a Waldorf Classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

### **Conceptual ownership – Samantha Campbell & Gabrielle Rossouw**

Samantha Campbell's interest lay in conceptual ownership in relation to imagination. From this standpoint she formulated her research question: "How does a child take conceptual ownership of content through imaginative teaching tools in a Main Lesson?" In order for her to progress, she first needed to define the phrase "conceptual ownership".

*"Conceptual' is an adjective which means 'the forming of concepts'. 'Concepts' are ideas that have emerged out of theory. 'Ownership' is to make something your own or to possess something. In this context the phrase 'conceptual ownership' is for a child to form his or her own understanding of concepts then owning it by means of practical work, social interaction or individual conversation through discussion."*

She defined the purposes of her research - what she wanted to discover – as follows:

*"to find out how I would know when a child has understood a given concept and how he or she reaches that understanding, since it is important for me as a teacher in training to know when a child has understood a concept. I will also focus on the teacher to understand how he or she brings across the content using different imaginative tools within a Waldorf classroom. It is important to know how the tools are used to facilitate learning."*

During the data collection process Campbell made a distinction between "conceptual understanding" and "conceptual ownership", taking the view that "conceptual understanding needs to take place before a child can take ownership of it". At this point she changed her research question to the following one: "How does a child use conceptual understanding to take conceptual ownership of content through imaginative teaching tools in a Main Lesson?"

In analysing her data, Campbell narrowed her focus on imaginative teaching tools to three main components: story-telling, images, and discussion.

*"Story-telling if used well, is a very emotional experience. It allows the children to feel different emotions and connect more to the content than if it was given factually. Stories bring variety and interest to content [...] the use of images shows the children what it is they may have been thinking during a story. It helps develop pictorial memorisation, meaning that the picture or image gets imprinted in the children minds. Both story-telling and the use of images create a sense of creative or imaginative learning for the children, allowing them to make their own understanding of given content. [...] The use of story-telling and images joined with discussion after, gives the children the sense of sympathy, antipathy and empathy."*

In conclusion she states:

*"The research indicates that conceptual ownership does happen during the teaching process and is facilitated by the use of imaginative teaching tools particularly story-telling, the use of images and discussion. It also indicated that it is important for teachers to not only be aware of the importance of conceptual understanding but to be more conscious of when and how a child takes conceptual ownership of the content taught. Teachers must also be aware of how, through their teaching practice, they are encouraging conceptual ownership."*

Campbell, S. (2013). *An exploration of imaginative teaching and learning in a Waldorf classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

Gabrielle Rossouw's interest lay in 'conceptual ownership' and 'co-operative learning'. She formulated her research question as follows: "How does co-operative learning facilitate conceptual ownership in a Waldorf classroom?" While explaining what she hoped to achieve through her research she said, "My question is an exploration of what exactly it is that allows a child to connect with the lesson content and make it her own ... I am hoping to find a connection between conceptual ownership and co-operative learning."

Maintaining momentum and motivation within your research is a challenge that many researchers face. Rossouw faced this struggle through her dedication to education.

*“Personally, I would not be in this position (studying to become a teacher) if I was not fully committed to helping the needs of the child. I strongly believe in children being a part of the learning process and enjoying it. What I mean, essentially, is that I believe education is not just imparting knowledge to the child, but allowing the child to connect to the content and be allowed to have freedom in the learning process.”*

She found Steiner’s thoughts on “fixed and ‘flexible’ concepts interesting (van Alphen, 2011, p. 24) and explained these concepts as follows:

*“A fixed concept is one that has been absorbed in black and white by the learner and there is no room for other possible understandings, whereas a flexible concept is the opposite - a concept that allows for further investigation and understanding. This was an idea that I could relate to personally because I experienced both within the classroom.”*

This thought then became a part of the conceptual framework for her research.

During her analysis Rossouw highlighted aspects of cooperative learning that can facilitate the process of conceptual ownership. From the teacher’s point of view, these are “knowing your class and their needs”, using “different kinds of learning strategies”, being able to “present your lessons in different ways” and “describing a concept so it is easy to imagine in one’s own mind”. In terms of child involvement, she saw that activities such as group work, games, role-playing, and lively discussions all helped to facilitate conceptual ownership.

Finally, she devised a three-step process for understanding and observing the progression towards conceptual ownership:

*“Through knowledge of content a teacher presents an idea to the children (initiation) through the use of imagination.*

*Children are stimulated through the use of their imagination – which can come in many forms: being original, forming one’s own judgment, generating ideas, expanding on what they already know.*

*Conceptual ownership is the final step.”*

Rossouw, G. (2013). *Conceptual ownership through imaginative teaching and learning in a Waldorf classroom*, Centre for Creative Education.

## Reflections and conclusions

### *Researching imaginative teaching and learning in the primary school classroom*

The students who embarked on this research program had already successfully completed three years of studying the theory and methodology behind creative teaching. Through practical experience in various classrooms (including Waldorf schools, National Curriculum and some private schools) students had temporarily crossed the bridge between theory and practice. These settings had given them the opportunity to apply the ‘tools’ and ‘techniques’ that had been learned over the course of their Bachelor’s degree.

While students are always required to present an in-depth reflective discussion on all the lessons they teach in formal classroom settings, no one had carried out systematic research in a classroom setting before. In order to achieve this, students were required to take on a new role in both a practical and an intellectual sense. Not yet researchers nor teachers, each one had to adopt a kind of individual “meta-perspective”: that of *researching-student-teacher*. The role of “researcher” is emphasized, because for each student it was her *research question* that guided her experience, directed her data collection and gave her a lens through which to analyze the daily classroom happenings.

At the outset, students were asked to define the word “imagination”, and soon realized that each one held her own definition, unique in its nuances, the essence of which could not quite be captured in words. It became clear that we would be dealing with a multifaceted and elusive topic and yet, despite a lack of clarity or agreement in definition, we all believed it to be an essential part of successful education.

Perhaps in an attempt to contain and concretize this abstract concept, “imagination”, some students began asking questions about “tools” and “techniques”: Which ones were most effective at eliciting imaginative responses from children? How do teachers use imaginative tools and techniques to enable conceptual

ownership in children's learning? How are questions linked to the development of children's imaginations?

Even where tools and techniques were not highlighted explicitly as a research focus, they were helpful in drawing up observation guides and a research plan before the fieldwork began. Students had to speculate intuitively about what they might see in the classroom context; thus some kind of visible "teaching strategy" was specified in observation guides, as something that would prove useful in answering our varied research questions.

Sitting at the back of the classroom, as well as engaging in in-depth structured and informal interviews with our host teachers, enabled us to see the classroom interactions and learning processes with completely new eyes. We were privy to the teachers' lesson objectives; we could learn from their implementation, gestures, and moments of improvisation, carrying with us our own knowledge of Waldorf pedagogy. We were able to sit, almost as one of the children, stimulated and engaged by the stories and activities of the lesson, while also removed in a sense, our experiences filtered through an awareness of the underlying purpose for our presence in the classroom – the *research question*.

With this new way of looking at and experiencing the classroom, most researchers found that their expectations were challenged in some way: "*When I started this process, I knew I was looking for learning that was experiential and multi-dimensional, and I found it, although not as I had imagined.*" (Rivera, 2013)

At the end of the data collection process on site, the researchers realized that what they had planned to observe, to ask, and to discover, was merely a starting point. In reality their plans, questions, and expectations had shifted – moving from a pre-supposed idea about "imaginative teaching and learning" to a new interesting reality.

### *Imaginative teaching and learning: beyond tools and techniques*

While the "tools" and "techniques" of imaginative teaching and learning were pragmatic guides to observe "imagination" in the primary school classroom, they did not go nearly far enough in explaining this phenomenon at work; nor could they significantly highlight the value of its role in the practice of teaching.

Most researchers could answer their questions superficially. For example, certain imaginative teaching strategies were more effective than others in facilitating conceptual ownership; lesson content brought across in an imaginative way would lead to more independently minded and creative thinking children, as exemplified by the work that they produced; and imaginative teaching facilitated emotional connection to lesson content thus inspiring further engagement in children. However, in more than one account, the way in which imagination worked was described as an "*elusive quality*" (Nell, 2013), in that the outcomes of the application of the imaginative teaching strategies could not be predicted or prescribed in a linear, causal fashion.

After this "elusive quality" had been recognized, many of the research questions shifted in focus from their mechanical bent to one that more aptly embodied the definition of imagination generated by the researchers at the outset; one that was indeed infused with 'living pictures', exemplified "the source of flexibility and originality in human thinking" and resonated with Kieran Egan's oft quoted adage, "the ability to think of things as possible" (van Alphen, 2011).

This awareness allowed researchers to gain clarity in their research questions, shifting their foci to those that more appropriately resonated with "imagination" as it was seen to play out in the lived reality of the classroom context. Almost paradoxically, this finely tuned focus seemed to allow researchers greater freedom to exercise their *own* imaginations, leading to more interesting and insightful interpretations of data and more relevant and useful research conclusions.

### *The imagination triad: researcher – teacher – child*

That most research reports found that "imagination" in the primary school classroom could not be pin-pointed

or practiced through using tools and techniques alone, is no coincidence. The following commonalities were shared by many of their conclusions.

“Imagination” was said to have an “elusive quality” because it was something that could not be seen, but *felt*. Understandably, novice researchers were uneasy writing a research report based on something that felt so “unempirical”, though validly supported by all the collected data. As Nell states, “*I think that the elusive quality I have been looking for is not really a quality at all. It is the teacher.*” (Nell, 2013) In sympathy with this quotation, Conrad suggests that more important than the actual imaginative techniques the teacher uses is the rapport between teacher and learner. For Ferreira, “*the skill of the teacher comes not in her execution of ‘imaginative teaching techniques’ but lies primarily in the teacher’s ability to choose the appropriate technique at any time. The true use of imagination in the classroom lies in the teacher’s ability to be imaginative in her application of imaginative teaching techniques.*” (Ferreira, 2013)

These insights point to the idea that the teacher herself must be willing to engage *her own* imagination in her teaching; to step into the realm where outcomes are not prescribed or linear but exist as “possibilities”. Throughout their fieldwork, the researchers found that their host teachers became more and more engaged with the themes embedded in their assigned student’s research question. Through conversations and interviews, the host teachers revealed that they were finding the researcher’s presence stimulating for their own reflection upon their teaching practice, opening up the space for them to reconnect and re-engage, more consciously, with ideas about imagination in teaching and learning – both their own and their learners’.

### *The teacher as artist*

We are left with a paradox. On the one hand, it seems that imaginative “tools” and “strategies” - like planning, preparation, timetable and curriculum - are certainly important factors for teaching and learning to be successful. All these are necessary for the creative, dynamic, imaginative process we call learning to happen *within*. But they cannot on their own guarantee a successful learning experience. The illusive ingredient, therefore, seems to lie within the teacher, and within the dynamic relationship between teacher and learner.

An actor works very hard at his job. He spends months learning his lines, practises for hours on end, hones his body to become his instrument of expression. He rehearses with the other cast members, handles his props, and gets a feel for the space he will work in. He has costume fittings, rehearses with lights and music. All these elements could be seen as the “tools” and “strategies” that get him to where he needs to be. And all these aspects are vital and take a huge amount of discipline. If he hasn’t learnt his lines, for instance, even if he can improvise, he will put the other actors off and the play will flop. But again the paradox. It is not these “tools” and “strategies” alone that will guarantee a fine performance. It has something to do with the actor being so comfortable in his role, knowing his lines so well, having prepared so thoroughly, that he transcends pretending. The audience becomes “one mind”, pulled by the power of the spectacle unfolding, and the play comes alive as a dynamic exchange, a co-creation between actor and audience, somewhere in the space between.

If we make the analogy of teacher as actor, as artist in her own right, then, like the actor, she must be prepared and disciplined. She must, “know her lines”, she must have so many tools at her fingertips and be so comfortable in her role - for she is playing a role, the role of “teacher” - that she becomes *imaginatively free* in her art. In living her profession, imbuing it with her own being, she enters the realm of the present and teaching becomes a work of art. Her timetables, structures, lesson plans, knowing her direction, her connection to the content, understanding of child development, her own artistic ability to draw, paint, sing, dance, her beliefs, morals, energy, past experiences, her very being and creative imaginative ability, all add to her “toolbox” from which to draw, without which she will be limited. The more “tools” she has embedded as experience within her, the more likely she is to be elevated and “free” within her chosen role.



### *Creativity and Waldorf pedagogy*

However, our research moved us toward an even deeper layer to creative teaching than tools intuitively embedded in experience – one so pervasive as to be truly elusive. This is what could be described as a “culture of teaching” or, more broadly, as a “culture of education”.

What emerged most crucially was how the teachers we observed and interviewed were supported by a Waldorf pedagogical culture and ethos. Turning learning into a rich, complex experience was enabled through a long established curriculum and methodology, sustained by underlying theories and ideologies. “*These were powerful, inspirationally rich resources and foundations for the teachers to draw upon, imbuing their work and life with meaning.*” (Rivera, 2013) Such resources work at a far deeper level than tools or methods. They are themselves creative stories that constitute what it means to learn and teach. And these stories are the common possession of a community of educators into which each member is being slowly socialised, adults and children (and indeed parents) together.

Waldorf teachers are fortunate. Unlike so many teachers today they are the beneficiaries of a rich, coherent and unfolding script of what counts as education and what it means to be a teacher. Each of them, within a supportive community, is encouraged to find the artistry to bring this script to life both in their own beings and in the creative culture of their classrooms.



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