

# Investigating Binary Opposites in a Waldorf Classroom

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this investigation was to discover how the use of binary opposites and affective engagement facilitated conceptual understanding in a Waldorf Health and Nutrition main lesson. Special attention was paid to the work of story and the universal story form. Kieran Egan's Story Form Model was used as a loose guide for both the construction of the research design and for guidance during observation and data collection, which took place in a class seven Waldorf classroom over a period of two weeks. During this time both the children and the class teacher were carefully observed whilst field notes and tentative interpretations of the data were journalled. In order to be able to dissect and understand the data and observations it was necessary to have both formal and informal guided conversations with the class teacher. It was found that the use of the universal story form plays a significant role in creating an effective main lesson. Both binary opposites and affective engagement were used to facilitate conceptual understanding for the class as a unit and for each individual. It was also found that binary opposites were not only present in the curriculum and the planned lesson structure and content, but also in the general classroom discussion and social dynamic.

*Key words:* binary opposites, qualitative research, story form, affective engagement, classroom dynamics, conceptual understanding, classroom discussion.

## ***Part One: Introduction***

### **The Work of Story in the Classroom**

story <sup>1</sup> | 'sto:ri|

noun (pl. **stories**)

**1** an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment:

*an adventure story | I'm going to tell you a story*

When one thinks of the word 'story' one may be inclined to immediately think of fiction, of fairytales or classic literature. Many of us may be vastly unaware of the importance and impact that story has had in our lives.

Humankind has been driven by story for thousands of years. From rock paintings to political speeches, we have been moved and moulded by the immense power that it holds. It is an effective way in which to share ideas, to move forward, to build bridges and to affectively engage with another. It has influence over attitude, actions and our development as a community and society as a whole. These stories are central to

who we are, they have sculpted our beliefs, our passions and our choices. But what is the role of story within an educational environment?

Jerome Bruner's *Acts of meaning and The Culture of Education* (Harvard University Press), and Jonathan Gottschall's *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Mariner Books, New York.) acted as a precursor for my research on the transformative power that narrative and story form have in an educational environment. Both Bruner(1990) and Gottschall (2012) discuss the form and logic of stories (I have dissected story form at greater length later in this article), and the role that they have played in human development. Bruner emphasises that the traditional story structure can be useful and effective in an educational environment, moving beyond simply telling stories, to the way in which the classroom becomes a place in which this structure can come alive.

Stories create points at which to begin discussion, judgement and understanding. Children can thrive if their imaginative capacities are tapped into, if we reach them on an affective level. The classroom, which can be seen as a cultural microcosm, is a place in which story can really resonate and transform the child, it can facilitate in the understanding of their environment and their place in the world. If children are given the necessary knowledge and tools, a solid moral foundation, and strong set of values, they will become enmeshed in a cultural and educational environment that enables them navigate more easily through the world.

Waldorf teachers have often used stories as a platform for conceptual understanding and development (from academic to emotional), though there seems to be far more to stories and learning than previously thought. I feel that this is something that merits further research, something I intend to achieve in this article.

## Preliminary Reading

The intention of my preliminary reading was to deepen my knowledge of the research theme and to begin to narrow down to a specific, more finely tuned question. My reading research began with extracts from Kieran Egan's book, "Teaching as Storytelling". His work, which I find to be essential to my career, centers on the importance of story and imagination within an educational environment. I will discuss extracts that I have considered to both essential and enlightening reading to guide me towards sharpening my research question.

Egan discusses the importance of imagination as a learning tool, something that is already familiar to me as a Waldorf teacher-in-training. He states that, "The story form is a cultural universal; everyone everywhere enjoys stories. The story then is not just some casual entertainment; it reflects a basic and powerful form in which we make sense of the world and experience." (Egan, 1986, p.2).

Research has shown that educators tend to teach by means of concentric circles, beginning from what the child already knows and steadily moving outward. This *ad hoc* principle can be seen as potentially damaging. Egan (1986) goes on to criticize the way in which teachers neglect this principle as it is of vital importance to a child's ability to use their imagination and abstract knowledge. Teaching by means of concentric circles seems to interfere with a child's sense of things, indicating that our approach of moving from the concrete to the abstract and from the "known to the unknown" is limited and misleading. He states that, "We pick up bits and pieces, and suddenly see connections; these break or diffract and are recomposed in new ways with disparate pieces." This is something of vital importance to an educator and needs to be high on the list of priorities with regard to planning a lesson. By concentrating on concentric circles teachers are ignoring "The highly developed imaginative capacities of children and the immensely energetic forms of learning that they clearly use constantly." (Egan, 1986, p.17). This form of education has been shown to be highly constrictive, and can have a negative impact on the child's learning process.

Egan(1986) eloquently outlines how the story form can be of great importance in education by utilising the traditional form that narrative takes (which can reflect in almost any event or situation). This form determines that there are characters, a journey or plot, obstacles one must overcome (points of conflict and

interest) and an “expectation that is satisfied at the end.” (Egan, 1986, p.24). How might one explore this with regard to lesson structure? Egan suggests “a model for teaching that draws on the power of story, then, will ensure that we set up a conflict or a sense of dramatic tension at the beginning of our lessons and units.” He explains that the use of binary opposites and affective meaning are of great value, as they serve as the backbone to the story, especially considering that humans are driven by emotion and that in education “there is little room for our emotional lives.” (Egan, 1986, p.25).

I turned my attention to an article by Kathleen Marie Gallagher (*In Search of a Theoretical Basis for Storytelling in Education Research: Story as Method*). Gallagher (2010) is a strong believer in the power of story in all aspects of life, and her writing is strongly influenced by two theorists, Hannah Arendt and Bertold Brecht whom she often quotes in her work. She believes that story is undervalued and undermined in theoretical terms. Stories are something that have pushed us forward as a society and through means of storytelling we learn from the past, equipping us more fully for the future. She reinforces the perspective that story opens doors to judgments and “stories, whether theatrical or narrative, demand interpretation.” (Gallagher, 2010, p.52). “If one should not tell stories to fellow scholars it is not because stories are beneath them; rather, it is because to do so is to make one’s argument vulnerable to challenge.” (Gallagher, 2010, p.51).

This struck me as valuable knowledge as I see that textbook orientated schools often neglect using story as a means of teaching. This neglect simply restricts the student’s ability to conceive new ideas and change his/her perspective and stance. Gallagher goes on to drive this point home, and to say story is a currency, which is undermined, and that “story that is being used in current society is devoid of the imagination and theoretical probing necessary to produce new knowledge.” (Gallagher, 2010, p.52). Story being undervalued in classrooms can be potentially damaging to the development of the learners, but this “anemic version of storytelling may in fact be an indication of a larger cultural phenomenon.” (Gallagher, 2010, p.51).

In the article (*In Search of a Theoretical Basis for Storytelling in Education Research: Story as Method*) stories are referred to as “Thinking without a bannister...” (Gallagher, 2010, p.53). How can one use this approach in one’s lesson structure, and how much room does this leave for the child to truly use their abstract understanding and imagination? Gallagher states that “stories are a place to begin enquiry rather than as a place on which to fix pre-existing categories and meanings.” (Gallagher, 2010, p.53). This draws me back to traditional schooling systems and their lack of flexibility regarding pre-existing meanings and theories. Lessons are often constructed in such a way that children have little leeway to form their own concepts and judgments. Textbooks and antiquated methods are followed rigidly. I have previously noted that Waldorf teachers often leave children to stretch themselves out and make meaning from what they have been presented without being forced to follow a concrete path. I feel that it is necessary to observe how Waldorf classrooms, as small cultures, allow for children to find a good moral footing, as well as give them the confidence and drive to explore various perspectives and standpoints. Gallagher goes on to make a statement that reiterated this belief by stating that judging is an act that happens “in community, exercises the imagination and stimulates a plurality of the mind.” (Gallagher, 2010, p.53).

Sigrun Gudmundsdottir in *‘The Narrative Nature of Pedagogical Content Knowledge’* brought me back to the ‘classroom culture’ idea. She states, “To participate in a culture is to know and use a range of accumulated and shared meanings. These shared meanings, however, are not static but are in constant revision...teachers imbue the curriculum and texts they teach with their values and meaning.” (Gudmundsdottir, 1990, p.27). Gudmundsdottir is implying that the teacher does not simply teach without personally connecting to the content, and I find this to be especially true with Waldorf teachers. The teacher will often decide on the content, and through reinterpretation deliver such content with his or her own values in mind and that therefore, “Values and Narratives are inexorably intertwined.” (Gudmundsdottir, 1990, p.29).

In this extract Gudmundsdottir explains how narratives are an essential tool for understanding one’s place in the world and that narrative is not only reserved for fictional stories, but also serves as a practical way in which to view the world around us. She beautifully states, “Past experiences are not buried in the ground like archeological treasures waiting to be recovered and studied. Rather the past is recreated through

telling.” (Gudmundsdottir, 1992, p.30). This leads me to question how Waldorf teachers might enrich their narrative with their own pedagogical content knowledge in the classroom, as it is this knowledge that creates the foundation for what the children learn and how they co-exist in their classroom culture.

Whilst reading the final article for my preliminary reading section, my attention suddenly shifted towards the importance of emotional intelligence in preparation for adolescence, (class 7) is in a very important transitional phase.

In *Vygotsky On Imagination: Why an understanding of the imagination is an important issue for schoolteachers* Natalia Gajdamaschko explains how imagination is being neglected in schools and that emotional intelligence is of equal importance to other forms of intelligence that are considered to be of value in education. “During the transitional, middle-school years, Vygotsky claims, the imagination undergoes a revolutionary shift, a shift that profoundly impacts students’ intellectual development, personality, behaviour, and ways of understanding and making sense of the world.” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p.14). This only added to my interest in observing the beginnings of this shift in thinking in the classroom, and ways in which the teacher supports and guides the children through it.

Gajdamaschko(2005) states that our perspective of this shift can heavily influence the way in which we deal with adolescents, and that is why it is essential to approach this phase equipped with the right knowledge and pedagogical thinking. She compares Piaget and Vygotsky’s theories, and how imagination is something that one seems to outgrow as we adopt a more logico-mathematical approach to thinking. She asserts that this is false and damaging with regards to education. Children at this age are able to perceive more abstract concepts, despite the fact that they are still strongly driven by imagination and creativity. “This divorce between imagination and logical thinking in Piagetian theory is particularly regrettable for one more reason - in the theory where imagination and conceptual thinking are treated as separate (opposite) entities, there is nothing but a non-communicable and nonverbal autistic form of egocentric thought connected to the imaginary world of the child.” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p.15).

The approach to teaching children at this delicate point in their lives is of great importance. Gajdamaschko continues, “Vygotsky disagreed very strongly with such theoretical positions (*that teachers cannot have an impact on students’ imagination*). He considered imagination a process directly connected with meaning-making, a higher psychological function that has connections not only with emotions, but also with intellectual functions.” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p.16). Vygotsky writes, “Imagination is as necessary in geometry as it is in poetry. Everything that requires artistic transformation of reality, everything that is connected with interpretation and construction of something new, requires the indispensable participation of imagination” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p.16). Vygotsky’s perspective, that imagination and intellect should attached itself to something meaningful in order to aid the development of the child, is particularly interesting when it comes to approaching the teaching of older children, as their imaginative capacities are not as ‘outwardly’ obvious as they were in earlier years.

Finally, Gajdamaschko explains that if we focus on nurturing these imaginative capacities in the classroom, a shift in thinking occurs, with the following results: “(a) Mastering emotions; (b) mastering mechanisms; (c) changing cognitive tools; (d) more control over imagination; (e) more complex relationships with other psychological functions, not only with perception but with thinking – as thinking develops, imagination develops.” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p.21).

This “virtuous cycle” should develop over the years, into adulthood. The question remains, how does an educator take this responsibility on board and how does one do so effectively; through the narrative, through the immense and undeniable power of story and story form Story does not age, it remains contemporary and in a Waldorf environment it is an essential part of the curriculum and the growth of the child, from start to finish. “Stories are “crystallised” in culture and therefore they could be used as mediators, tools for engaging the imagination of children.” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p.22).

## The Research Question

After reading various extracts and articles an overall research question was reached, *'How does the story form work in this classroom?'* This question seemed to bloom naturally from the research theme, *'The Work of Story in The Waldorf Classroom.'*

Our research team came to this question after reading through Kieran Egan's book, *"Teaching As Storytelling"* and felt that the power of story form was something that was both stimulating and opened itself up easily to investigation. Story form is not restricted to 'stories', but rather it is a universal structure that can be seen in various aspects of human life. We know that a story requires characters, a predicament and extrication from this predicament. We see this in even the most basic of lesson plans. The children are introduced to content and they must navigate through the learning process, grappling with difficulties, seeking help, using tools they have acquired and eventually satisfying (or not) their need to understand and grasp this new content.

As a natural next step in the process, revisiting Egan's work provided a deeper understanding of the key points of observation for the data collection process. Egan believes that for the story form to be effective one must make use of all the stimulating aspects of story that will draw the children in by stimulating their imagination. The story needs to make use of both the concrete and the abstract, as well as the known and unknown, as learning takes place, when a task requires us to slip between these concepts and create new meanings. In order for the children in the class to create imaginative meaning through story form, there needs to be effective use of metaphors, rhythm, binary opposites and affective meaning. A lesson needs to be organized coherently with specially selected aspects that turn the lesson into an enticing story. Egan states, "We want stories to be 'affectively engaging' by using story form correctly through the use of binary opposites and affective meaning." (Egan, 1986).

Whilst revisiting Egan's work I was particularly interested in the use of binary opposites and affective meaning as a criteria for creating and constructing an effective lesson in which the child can build meaning, and understand the new concepts being brought forward by the teacher. I spent far more time reading Egan's book, *Teaching as Story Telling* and this further reading led me to my question:

### **'How do binary opposites facilitate affective meaning and conceptual understanding in this classroom?'**

In order to have a firmer grasp on this theoretical focus, let me deconstruct 'binary opposites' and 'affective meaning' with the help of Egan's theories.

Binary opposites are "one of the most obvious structural devices we can see in children's stories." (Egan, 1986, p.26). Binary opposites help the children to take new content and connect it with abstract concept: e.g. good and bad, security and fear. The story form is then dictated by the binary opposites that are at work and therefore the "Characters and events embody these underlying abstract conflicts." (Egan, 1986, p.26).

Egan explains that it is not only children who make use of binary opposites to make meaning out of new information. Adults also make use of this system to try to make sense of events on the news or in stories we share with one another. "We first search for events or facts that allow us to fit the information into our already formed binary ideological structures. If we cannot fit the news account into such structures it remains a danger of becoming meaningless." (Egan, 1986, p.28).

This then draws on the power of affective meaning, as stories are essentially for emotionally driven humans, we then require affective responses to the story. As I mentioned previously, school systems seem to be attempting to educate children in a way that leaves little room for emotion, which is vastly limiting in making new meaning. A good story is a story that resonates with us, it reaches us on an emotional level and it makes use of binary opposites. Egan states that "Stories are largely about affective matters – they are about how people feel. These feelings can either provide the motives for actions or they can provide the point and result of actions." (Egan, 1986, p.29).

I was interested in how the teacher would use binary opposites and affective meaning in the lesson structure. These aspects of story form need to be accompanied by the fundamental aspects of story form (the predicament and binary conflict in the beginning, the characters and finally the satisfaction and extrication from the predicament that was set up in the beginning.) The choice of content is of particular interest as the Class 7 children are going through a transition, from childhood to adolescence. There is a shift in the way they think, socialize and express their creativity and imagination (from external to internal). Surely the use of story form could be used to facilitate this transition?

During the data collection period, I observed the classroom on every possible level, as well as had guided discussions with the class teacher. I was interested in how the children responded to the lesson (the possible use of binary opposites and affective meaning), how this helped with new content and meaning making, and how this is translated into concrete work. This was a challenging process as it involved the complexity of evolving social interaction and qualitative research.

## **The Research Process**

In order to answer my research question I placed myself (in an unobtrusive way) in a class 7 Waldorf classroom and began searching for binary opposites and affective engagement in every aspect of the class. During their health and nutrition main lesson I observed all facets of classroom life, from social interaction and body language to the content being taught. I was able to conduct an interview with the class teacher to facilitate the research process and gain insight into his chosen content and methods of teaching. Field notes and tentative interpretations were made throughout each lesson with the help of Kieran Egan's alternative model. The following points were essential in guiding my research;

### **“Identifying importance:”**

“What is most important about this topic?”

“Why should it matter to children?”

“What is affectively engaging about it?”

### **“Finding binary opposites:”**

“What powerful binary opposite's best catch the importance of the topic?”

### **“Organising content into story form:”**

“What content most dramatically embodies the binary opposites, in order to provide access to the topic?”

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

“Conclusion:” (This has been written this as a guide to creating the conclusion; It is therefore dependent on how the conclusion has been reached, both by the class and teacher.)

How the “dramatic conflict in the binary opposites” has been resolved?

“What degree of mediation of those opposites” has been appropriate to seek?

### **“Evaluation:”**

“How can one know whether the topic has been understood, its importance grasped and the content learned?” (Egan, 1986, p.41). (Concrete work, discussion etc.)

## ***Part Two: Summary of Observation and Interview Data***

The following section contains raw data from my observation in the classroom, as well as my interview with the class teacher. I have condensed the data collected in order to focus on the moments in which affective engagement and binary opposites were clearly at work. As mentioned previously, Kieran Egan's alternative model was used as a guide in this process and provided the scaffolding upon which my analysis and conclusion were built.

### **Observation Data**

The following is a compressed record of data recorded over six mornings during the two-week period I spent observing the main lesson. I have attempted to keep the data in the rawest possible form to avoid pre-empting the analysis process in Part Three.

#### **Day One**

##### ***Introduction to the main lesson: Health and Nutrition.***

The class teacher tells the class a true story about a healthy man who went on an extreme diet, eating only MacDonald's for a period of time ('Supersize Me'). At no point does he state that this is a bad idea or that MacDonald's is unhealthy.

When children talk or interrupt he repeats what he is saying (e.g. "in fact..IN FACT...IN FACT..") until the class listens again. He makes eye contact often. The class listens with keen interest.

The teacher tells the story well, using rich descriptions, hand gestures and medical facts. The class is initially excited by the idea of eating MacDonald's freely every day, but when the teacher talks about the results the class suddenly react negativity towards the effect of the food. He lets the children react and talk to one another before settling them down again. He ends the story without stating his opinion, he leaves it open to interpretation.

HEALTH and WEALTH is written on the black board. The teacher then asks the class what these words mean. The response is as predicted, wealth meaning money and health meaning physical wellbeing. He then touches on the origin of each word and the Greek goddess Hygeia. The class learns that wealth did not always mean money.

The teacher then talks about seeing the two as a whole, not as two separate and different aspects of oneself. He makes circular gestures with his arms and defines the two as 'wholistic' health (not holistic).

The class has the task of spending five minutes alone, to think about what made them healthy in the last 24 hours. The teacher does not define what he wants them to look for, they must decide for themselves.

When the children come back they each tell him what they think made them healthy. At first they contribute one by one but eventually all children contribute together. The teacher writes these things on the board ('sleep', 'food', 'moving..'). These then lean towards the correct biological terms. The teacher does not tell them they are wrong but takes their answers and uses them to move towards the answer he is looking for. E.g. CHILD: "I breathed.." (class giggles at seemingly obvious choice.)

TEACHER: "Yes..what is the word I'm looking for here..... the....rrrrrrr.....(class all guesses) the respiratory system."

The children in the class will occasionally respond with something silly but they are simply ignored. The class teacher then requests that the children think more about what they personally feel makes them WHOLISTICALLY healthy. He states that they are looking at a 'wholsitic system'. The class atmosphere changes and the children begin to share what they feel they need in their lives. The class seems to have a grasp of what 'wholistic' health is, which is probably a product of the Waldorf schooling system.

The teacher takes the children's answers and writes them on the board; again, he does not correct them and only uses their responses as stepping stones towards the answers he is attempting to draw out.

Child: "Electricity?"

Teacher: "Why electricity?"

Child: "So I can get to school.."

Teacher: "Movement?"

Child: "My pets... I need to cuddle my animals"

Teacher: "Touch!"

Child: "Money?"

Teacher: "Money brings a sense of wellbeing..."

The class continues, mentioning clothes, food, warmth, love, music, comfort. The class often mentions affection and touch. The atmosphere in the class is relaxed and open, it is clear that they have all been together for many years and formed a family-like bond. The teacher then draws the attention back to the physical body.

Teacher: "What do you think happens when you eat that apple or that sweet?..What happens when you breathe?..What about if you smoke?.." The teacher wants the children to name the different systems in the body but he does not go further into them. He leans more towards digestion by talking about eating and teeth, leading up to the next day's lesson.

The class has the task of writing an introduction to Health and Nutrition in their new main lesson books, but before he lets them begin their work, he states that he has rules and expectations that they must abide by. The children may not lend each other books to catch up work, they must work when they are assigned time, they must not catch up in the morning before school or during any other lessons. He states that if they do this they are not learning, they are parroting, and that this will only be harming their own education. The children must work neatly but they must not spend too much time trying to polish their work. He ends the lesson by telling the class to be more efficient in their time management as their work load increases. He addresses the class like adults and it is clear that he is preparing them for high school.

On the board the teacher has written; "Man does not live by bread alone." He does not elaborate on it.

### **Day Three**

#### ***The Four Kingdoms***

There is currently a large fire in Cape Town and the children spend a lot of time discussing this in the morning. The music and calligraphy teachers struggle to maintain focus and control as it begins to drizzle outside. The class all stand up and cheer.

By the time that main lesson has begun, there is a pungent smell of smoke in the classroom. Just as the class has finished their morning verse, a child states that the world is falling apart. The class teacher immediately reprimands him for the attitude that he is bringing into the classroom. This child is made to stand at the door. The class teacher then faces the class and mentions that he is beginning to notice a 'shift' in the classroom, and that he does not like it. He does not state what this 'shift' is, but the children seem to understand and most of the children avoid his eye contact, as he looks around the class in stern silence. The class seem to understand what he is talking about and the atmosphere in the classroom changes from being fairly excitable to rather solemn and serious.

The class teacher allows the children to sit in silence and appreciate the rain. There is a deep sense of reverence for the rain and the relief it is bringing.



As with most mornings, the class teacher begins with recall, asking questions about what was covered the previous day, allowing the class to place all the pieces together, like a puzzle. It is evident in these moments that the children have grasped what is being taught, they respond to the recall with answers that reflect their own understanding of it. There is never parroting or reading from notes and books. The class also show keen interest in recalling content from the previous day.

The class teacher asks the children to imagine having their senses so heightened that they notice even the tiniest changes in the atmosphere, their food and the air. He asks the class to imagine feeling the world and sensing the world the same way a plant would.

Suddenly the teacher changes his tone in voice and poses a question; “how many breaths do you think you take every day?” (He always says ‘YOU’ as opposed to people or humans. He also points at children and continues to make eye contact throughout the main lesson.)

The class eventually finds the answer to this question which immediately leads to the class being aware of their breathing. The class teacher then points out that we are often unaware of these things and that our body works like a well-oiled machine. Straight after saying this he throws his arms in the air and shouts “NO! God forbid we ever compare our bodies to machines, we are not like machines at all!” The class does not seem to be affected by his response to his own ‘mistake’ in using machines and bodies as a comparison, something that one would assume is the opposite of a Waldorf approach to viewing the human body. Instead they sit and wait for him to continue with the lesson.

The class discusses how they became aware of their breathing this morning because of the smell of smoke. The class recap again on how the leaves are like the lungs, the roots like the head, taking in everything around us and the pollen and seeds like the reproductive system.

The class teacher quickly changes the direction of the lesson and asks the class to name three types of plants “WE” eat. The class discusses roots and bulbs and compares fruits to vegetables. It is clear that they have talked about plants often as they appear to be very knowledgeable in this area. The teacher then states that we eat plants and mammals. That we, as a human race, have hunted, killed and sacrificed these things for years and years. He passionately talks about how we are eating from all these kingdoms, even the mineral kingdom. He suddenly begins talking about salt and how important it was, children interrupt and want to talk about salt as a currency and a preservative. The teacher stops this suddenly, dismissing the whole detour and stating that they will cover that in future.

The atmosphere in the class changes as the teacher quietly tells the class how they are partaking in this amazing living world, every day, that they have for years and that they are eating all four kingdoms every day. The class has clearly never been aware of this and there is a sense of awe. The teacher then asks the class to think about how these kingdoms all need each other, how when we were born we drank our mother’s milk, milk that she had produced by taking in other nutrients and foods. How we now drink cows milk, milk that has been transformed from grass.

To end the lesson, the teacher again poses the question; “Do plants feel?”

The children do not answer this time; instead they sit in silence for a while, not silence that reflects lack of engagement or understanding, but rather of understanding and wonder.

## **Day Four**

### ***The Food Triangle***

This morning the class teacher is exasperated by the lack of homework books being signed and by the general disinterest in completing homework. He sternly reminds them that high school is going to be very different and that he will not be there to hold their hands.

Morning recall of the previous day’s lesson is fairly slow and the children seem to be distracted and tired. This changes when the teacher asks the children how many worlds they think we would need if every

single seed germinated. The class finds the thought impossibly humorous and suddenly the teacher has their attention again.

The teacher states that when he is talking about 'Man' he is referring to mankind, not to a gender. He looks around the classroom for a moment after saying this. There may have been a problem with this yesterday that I was not present to witness.

The class talks about the human code, about DNA and how we are all related on some level. As usual, the class discussion moves back and forth between the teacher and the children, moving forward together, recapping old content and leading to new content. The teacher talks about how animals and plants lay themselves down for us but this time a child interrupts and mentions that they do not have a choice. The teacher nods and says, "no, they do not..", before telling the class a quick story. The story revolves around a dog who attacked a sheep, how the sheep turned his head in order to allow the dog to bite it directly on the neck, almost like it was done out of instinct. The class does not linger on this story, the teacher does not share his personal perspective. No single conclusion or judgement is reached. As with his other stories and discussions, it is left open.

The teacher draws a large triangle on the board and discusses the old approach and perspective of the food triangle, he then moves onto how modern concepts have turned this food triangle on its head.

The class begins eagerly discussing Tim Noakes and 'banting'. The teacher has to regain control before telling the class how he used to eat as a child and how his parents ate. That carbohydrates made up the largest part of the meal and that protein and fats were not as important. How humans became obsessed with taking fat off of their food, how much the perspective of what and how we eat has changed so much over the years.

The teacher asks the class if they know anyone who is eating according to the new theory, high fat, high protein, low carbohydrate. The entire class puts up their hand, they look around and laugh.

The class focus shifts from present day eating to primitive eating, discussing how man used to eat. Man did not alter his food, returning to the organic, whole food discussion. The teacher then discusses how different milk was when he was a child, that it used to be thick and creamy in texture on the top and how it is all of the same consistency now. He asks the class how they think this came to be, how the milk has changed so much. The class all answer slowly but surely together. He then asks which way is correct, as he asks he places his arms up as if to say that he himself does not know. The class does not answer as it seems to be a rhetorical question. The class talk about how in China they eat plenty of rice but have a lower level of obesity.

Next, the class cover the transformation of food, from origin to shelves. The class does this together, all contributing their own knowledge of what happens to food along the way. They come to the general consensus that by the time the food reaches the shelves it is nothing like it was beforehand, that often we think we are eating 'healthily' but we are not.

While the class is very still and focused the teacher asks the class; "Is the food industry 100% honest about their products?"

The class erupts into chaos, all wanting to tell food related horror stories. It is clear that there is much interest in this topic and that the children are seeing food in a different way. Children begin taking their lunch out and examining labels or stating that they eat unpackaged foods. It is also evident that the way they eat is mostly influenced by their parents, only highlighting the importance of this main lesson.

## **Day Five**

### ***The Cupcake's Journey***

There is a birthday in the class and as a result one of the children has brought cupcakes to share with their peers. I am aware that the class teacher wants to discuss digestion today but has not planned on the lesson that begins to unfold.

The children sit at their desks with a cupcake in front of them. It is clear that they are restraining themselves as they have been instructed not to touch them yet.

Teacher: “Thank you, (birthday girl), for bringing these cupcakes which will be used to illustrate the important process of digestion! Look carefully at the cupcake..smell it!”

The class smell the cupcakes and respond with a chorus of ‘mmm’s’.

Teacher: “by looking at it you’ve stimulated certain senses and those nerves have sent out a message..more saliva has come into your mouth...your first bite of that cupcake is going to take a very long and winding journey!”

The class is beginning to get frustrated, some children complain. Eventually they are satisfied with being able to have a small bite, a bite which they all savour slowly. The tension is released and there is a sense of relief.

The class teacher guides the children on a journey, explaining the process of digestion, all the way to the intestines and out. The class eat slowly, processing the information and listening carefully to the teacher. The class is clearly both interested in the cupcake and the story of the cupcake’s journey.

After this process the class is told that they must create a healthy three course menu, and an unhealthy menu, as a project. One child asks if they can follow another menu and the teacher responds by stating that there are not shortcuts in life. He seems to relay this message frequently.

Whilst the children were working I noticed that they all seemed to have very different perspectives of what ‘healthy’ food is. As someone who has spent a lot of time studying nutrition and health I found myself wanting to correct the class. Feeling anxious, I asked whether the teacher was going to correct the children, or not. The teacher quickly reassured me that he would correct them, never by saying they were wrong, never by being judgemental, but rather letting the class discover for themselves. This will be a product of learning about fats, proteins, fruits and vegetables and their nutritional quality, along with food processing and the journey to the shelves. The teacher then takes a moment to tell me that he has split them into groups as ‘wholsitic’ health is part of socialising and working together.

The class looks at the two food triangles again, the outdated one and the current one.

Teacher: “We do not know if this perspective will change. We do not know if it is correct. But WE need to find what WE think is a healthy balanced diet. Not what someone else thinks...”

## **Day Seven**

### ***‘One Word’***

The class atmosphere is tense today. An issue with swearing has arisen and the parent-teacher meeting from the previous night has apparently highlighted this issue in some way. There was an incident in the high school regarding swearing recently too. It seems to me to be a fairly normal issue at this age as children are on the cusp of adolescence and there are many changes taking place. The class teacher tells the class that he is fully aware of the language they use outside of the classroom.

The teacher asks the class why they think their parents chose Waldorf education. The class falls silent. The teacher continues, he explains that Waldorf education is known to have deep reverence for childhood, that it protects and nurtures it. He tells the class that the point is to teach people only when they are ready to learn. The class does not speak or even look around whilst the teacher talks.

The class seems to be fully aware of the incident in the high school, an offensive word scrawled on a blackboard, apparently in jest. The teacher emphasises the importance of thinking carefully about the things that one says. He returns to the comparison of the human and the plant, of how sensitive we are to all that we take in. He states that because of this we need to be so aware of what we send out.

Teacher: "REMEMBER, one word, ONE word, that hasn't been thought out properly, ONE WORD, can change a friendship or relationship forever..."

The class work on their menus for the remainder of the lesson, the atmosphere remains rather icy and quiet. The class does not joke nor do they disrupt the lesson in any way. There seems to be a quiet sense of understanding and respect for what has been said by the teacher.

Before class ends a child says something about eating in front of the TV. The teacher tells the class that he believes you should eat with thought and purpose, chewing, tasting, and enjoying the experience. One can eat alone, or with family and friends, anything but eating mindlessly. The class seem to be gaining a better understanding of health as a whole, though it may not be concrete evidence yet, it certainly feels that way.

## Day Eight

### *Communication*

The class do not do recall today, yesterday's issue is not brought up again, it does not seem necessary. Instead, the teacher begins by posing some questions:

Teacher: "What do you think your health and your wealth should be built on?"

Class: "exercise." "Diet" "Hygiene" "Psychological health" (this statement surprised me.) The class answers the question in a dull parrot like way, basically regurgitating the aspects of health that society has churned out for years. The child that mentioned psychological health looks around as though he is disappointed in the class's reaction.

Teacher (looking a bit exasperated): "Try and be bigger in your picture.."

The same child then answers; "To be happy and in touch with your feelings, your friends and your family?" The class seems to be surprised by the answer; the teacher appears not to be. This leads to a discussion about healthy relationships, relationships with pets, friends, family and classmates. The teacher emphasises that we all have a different way of interacting and feeling 'wholistically' healthy. He states that some people may love sport, others may hate it, some may love and need music, some may just love socialising. The class begins to talk about their own individual ways of feeling healthy. One child puts his hand up and states that he thinks that all of these things lead to being a full and well-rounded human being. A general consensus about the matter seems to have been reached.

The subject briefly changes to diet. The teacher explains quietly and tentatively that diet is a very tricky thing these days. He explains that everyone will always have their own way, their own opinion and that it is different all around. He laughs and states that one could not be a vegetarian if you lived with the Eskimo's.

The tension in the class is released with this topic, the class seems to want to discuss all of the different approaches they have known and heard of regarding diet. It is rather scary to see how much the media has affected the children's perspectives of health and food.

The teacher regains control and focus and drives the topic back to relationships, explaining that relationships are quite possibly the most important aspect of health. He talks about his own relationship with his family and the importance of having dinner together, what it means for different families and how much things seem to have changed. This leads to the class having to think about their online activities and their family interactions.

Teacher: "Your generation is very different. At the touch of a button you can communicate... What does that say about privacy and relationships... Is this a good way to communicate?" The class make a general mumbling sound; it appears that they are saying that it is not in fact a good way to communicate.

The teacher explains that much will change in the years to come, but that communication will be one of the greatest and most influential lessons they will take with them when they leave school. He states that

school won't boil down to medals won, academic awards received and so on and so forth, but rather about knowing your place in the world and having a good relationship with it.

The class move onto digestion. More factual recall is done and the children continue working in their books on their digestion diagram and story. The class talks about how the 'dead food' seems to become alive again once digested. This illustrates their new perspective of food and its purpose.

The class ends by the teacher telling a story about an email disaster, explaining that he accidentally put something out into the universe and he could not take it back. The class laughs but empathizes at the same time.

Teacher: "Just remember, please, that if you cannot say it to their face, DON'T say it via message.."

I left the classroom feeling like I had learnt something rather valuable and lasting.

## Interview Data

The following interview questions stemmed from both my observation, and an earlier interview design. The interview's success was facilitated by the open ended questions, the relationship between the teacher and myself, and being able to have a relaxed conversation as opposed to asking questions whilst taking notes.

For the sake of continuity of style in my research report, I have included both the questions, and the answers, in an edited, summary format;

*You've been with this class for just over six years now, with this in mind, how ready do you feel they are for the shift into adolescence and high school?*

The majority of them are ready. I mean, obviously it depends on them as individuals, growth and family situations. Generally I think that are ready for adolescence..they are certainly ready for the cycle to end. There are two children in particular who are struggling both in the class and academically. Academically I think a couple might struggle, but that's par for the course. Socially and emotionally they're mostly moving pretty easily into adolescence.

*Does your knowledge of each child and the class as a whole reflect on your choice of content and lesson structures? Considering individual and group needs.*

I'm not sure I consciously take the individuals needs into consideration, but I certainly try to think of the class as a whole. Part of the seven year cycle is building from the year before. In a way you know what's happened; you know where the middle areas are. You know where you need to redirect things or go over things, so it gives you a building block to take into consideration in preparation of lessons. I think each class has its own needs, in my other two classes I don't think I taught quite the same content that I have taught in this class. I don't know if it is because I'm conscious or if it is just the way it is.

*Has there been a noticeable shift in their behaviour this year?*

I think that class 7 is much easier in comparison to class six in a lot of ways. I think the curriculum helps this. Class 6 mirrors class 9 which is a very revolutionary time. Class 6 is when they come into the first touches of adolescence, the first beginnings of change, and I think it is a far more tumultuous time for them. They're far more aware of their responsibilities. They're also beginning, very, very slightly, to reflect upon their actions. They can see what they are doing...in class 6 they do not reflect as much, it is far more difficult. They've taken a step into 'the room', they're looking around and thinking, whereas before they were opening and closing the door and looking around in a far more childish manner. There is a stronger sense of uprightness. Class 6 felt as if there was much out there, much unknown. The curriculum has really met them this year, it is a wonderful year.

*What would you say is the most important part of the curriculum this year?*

For me, doing the Renaissance, doing the Reformation and health and nutrition brings perspective and that's really the theme of class 7. You do black and white drawings, you do perspectives drawings, you try to bring it into everything. That is why they are beginning to get this; they didn't have this last year.

*Pertaining to the current main lesson; why did you choose to open this lesson with the story about the McDonald's diet?*

I wanted to plunge them into the main lesson, to wake them up and get them to listen to what we are talking about. It is easy to get too sucked into the 'Waldorf way'. Sometimes the children want modern idioms, particularly at this age. They want it to be something they can feel is tangible..McDonald's is a very tangible symbol for them.

*What do you feel is most important for the class to take away from this main lesson?*

I would like for the class to be aware that they are part of a much bigger picture, health and nutrition is not just about the food and the vitamins that they eat. It's about the choices they make in terms of their relationships. We will go into sex education, we will look at things like what actually happens when you take drugs and I'm not going to try and put a moral aspect with it. They are looking at how everything affects them. I see this lesson as very important. It is body awareness, it is peer awareness and it is also that sense that I can say no or I can say yes. Hopefully as they go into adolescence and new relationships all this can be seen as a bigger picture. Whether all this will be successful, I don't know..

*How important do you feel the child's imaginative capabilities are in the educational environment, particularly within the main lesson?*

I wish that I was more imaginative in order to bring that out of them, I think that it is vitally important. Is their imagination being stimulated? Are they having inner pictures? These are important questions to ask. Often stories help with that. I think it is often how you present something that gives them the ability to form the picture. I want them to imagine it(the lesson content); I want them to form their own picture. I think imagination is the basis of this education.

## ***Part Three***

### **Analysis and Conclusion**

#### **How do binary opposites facilitate affective meaning and conceptual understanding in this classroom?**

Searching for the answer to this question proved to be a stimulating and exciting journey. I was lucky enough to observe a main lesson in which binary opposites and affective meaning played a vitally important role. I realized that understanding went deeper than simply making sense of an academic concept and displaying this understanding through the traditional means of tasks and tests. The children grappled with the main lesson on a deeper level and this was evident to me, the observer, but possibly less so to the reader. Conceptual understanding is a long term process. Despite small glimpses of conceptual understanding taking place, these might merely have been the tip of the iceberg. The lessons that were taught will possibly resonate for years to come, maybe even lie dormant until they are relevant and needed.

Egan's alternative model and key questions guided me well each day, and helped me to make sense of the information I was gathering. Because of this I have continued to use these categories and the questions they require to be asked, in order to interpret my data and essentially answer my research question. These categories are: Identifying importance, finding binary opposites, reaching conclusions and attempting evaluation.

#### **What is most important about this main lesson and why should it matter to this class?**

Health and nutrition can often be slotted into a curriculum in a way that threatens to be abstract and uninteresting. Teachers tend to over- intellectualize this aspect of the child's education, presenting facts and biological diagrams, possibly telling one or two stories that hold some kind of moral undercurrent. These lessons are often scattered sporadically across the curriculum and they never really seem to fit together as a whole. The main lesson that I observed was exactly the opposite, all of these seemingly disparate pieces

were fitted together to create an image and understanding of health as a whole. The teacher himself coined the term 'wholistic' from the very first lesson. Dissecting the words, 'health' and 'wealth' in order to truly understand them. But what do 'health' and 'wealth' mean to each child individually? He poses this question from day one, encouraging the children to slowly but surely look around and within themselves, in order to understand this.

Society and the media are bombarding us with information about food, health, wealth and how to achieve such things. Diets and society's view on what is deemed healthy is continuously changing. The food triangle, for example, has been turned on its head. We hear about the banting diet, the Paleo diet, the importance of organic foods and alternative 'lifestyle' options. The whole class understood each of these approaches to eating, quite possibly because of the alternative approach to eating and living that Waldorf encourages.

The children in the class I was observing are on the cusp of adolescence, therefore they can be easily influenced by both peers and media when it comes to making 'healthy' choices. These children are capable of understanding a conceptual approach to health as a whole, and because they are naturally curious and tend to want to know more and more about the world around them at this age, this main lesson is of vital importance. The teacher discussed all the approaches that people have taken, even the extreme choices, and always left room for judgement. The teacher never stated that one approach was better than the next, but rather equipped the class with information in order to choose for themselves.

The class discussed what 'health' is and they discovered that 'wholistic' health is about far more than facts and biological processes (which they learn in order to facilitate their understanding). The class began to see health as one's relationship with their own food habits and the way these interact with the world around them. They learnt that food has changed and transformed alongside human transformation for years, not always for the best. This means that they can use this information in order to make wiser choices about what they put into their bodies, understanding that food is fuel and that every choice we make affects our wellbeing. There was also a strong sense of appreciation and reverence for food as the main lesson developed. The class learnt to reflect upon what they were doing in order to remain healthy and this was facilitated by their factual and scientific understanding of food and the digestion process.

The class teacher looked at the many aspects of health, moving far beyond food and digestion. Sometimes the main lesson seemed irrelevant after the discussions that took place in the morning. For example, the incident of swearing, and the power of one single word that hadn't been thought out, why their parents chose the Waldorf schooling, and having respect for other peoples choices. Though most of these things were not part of the lesson plan, they were organic topics and opened themselves up to interpretation and discussion among the naturally curious class 7's.

One of the most important aspects of health, according to the class teacher, is relationships, and this is something that they will carry with them for years to come. The class is taught that their academic achievements, as important as they are, will be nowhere as important to them as their relationship with themselves and the world around them. Therefore they should begin to be aware of this, of what they say, hear and the implications thereof.

It is obvious that all of these aspects of health are not only relevant to the specific class I was observing, but to society as a whole and to each and every individual in society. The importance of these aspects of 'wholistic' health were evidently felt in this class.

### **What is affectively engaging about this main lesson?**

In order for deeper understanding of both new and old concepts to occur, affective engagement must take place. Human emotion can heavily influence the way in which we perceive things and it is evident that we need to educate children in a way that uses both cognitive and affective processes to harmoniously create new understanding.

During my first day of data collection I was made aware that there was no lack of affective engagement in the classroom. The class teacher moved forward throughout the lessons in a way that required children to become involved. The children were required to search within their existing knowledge base in order to answer questions, and keep the lesson moving forward. There was a strong sense of responsibility amongst the children in the lessons. They were aware that the flow of the lesson depended on their involvement, which directly effected their understanding. Most of the children would contribute in a manner that conveyed affective engagement and there was never a moment in which children could 'fall asleep'. This, according to the class teacher, is common in main lessons as teachers tend to talk far more than the children. The teacher taught in a way that ensured each child was engaged.

Health and nutrition was not taught in a distant manner, it revolved around the class and their own personal perspective of what being healthy really means. Current events and topics that mattered to the class were always used as examples in order to reach the children. There was no textbook lesson nor was there ever an idea that was not tangible to the class; it went far deeper than the conventional health and nutrition lesson.

The class teacher would always bring in short, personal stories throughout the main lesson, as well as allow the children to contribute with their own. These stories were never dissected but rather left open to personal judgement. The children would enthusiastically tell their own stories and this would always rouse an emotional response.

When teaching the class about digestion the teacher managed to make it personal, explaining the process as they ate a cupcake, requiring both physical and psychological engagement. He would play on the class's emotions. There were moments of tension, relief, shock, contemplation, humour and excitement. The class was never dull. The class teacher would always address the class personally and relate the topic to the class. During digestion he explained how the cupcake would go on a journey through "YOUR body". He often used "you", "we", and "us" accompanied by pointing during his lessons. This was not done in an authoritative fashion.

The teacher ensured that the children were made aware of their relationship with the mineral, plant and animal kingdom and had reverence for this. He humanised the children's perspectives of plants by comparing them to the human body. The children began to examine their lunches and consider the process that the food had gone through to reach their lunch boxes. Discussions about what was covered in the main lessons continued beyond allocated class time. The class became aware of themselves, what they were taking in and what they were putting out. This is all due to the fact that the teacher taught in a way that was relevant to the class and each individual as well as using contemporary examples and personal stories. The class were aware that the lesson, as the teacher had stated, would go beyond their academic career, that it would affect their relationship with themselves and the world around them.

### **What binary opposites best reflect the importance of the topic?**

Binary opposites, along with affective engagement, are central to our understanding of new concepts and meaning-making. We are able to organise new knowledge within our already present ideological binary structures, opening the door to conceptual understanding. Essentially, these opposites cannot exist separately, and in order to understand one, the other must be understood. This has been an aspect of human culture and narrative for years and will continue to be so. The problem with binary opposites is that mediation is necessary. Binary opposites, particularly within a classroom environment, can cause prejudice and create boundaries. This was an aspect that I had not wholly considered prior to data collection. I found binary opposites at play on a daily basis, from general classroom discussion to lesson content and presentation.

The main lesson opened itself up to binary opposites as health and nutrition is a commonly debated aspect of society. This topic is particularly important to the class that I observed due to their developmental phase and shift in thinking. They are now able to grasp these opposites and explore and find mediation between them (mediation will be covered at a later stage).



The class teacher started the main lesson using a story about a man who followed an extreme diet, immediately touching on the two opposites, healthy and unhealthy. The class frequently discussed what was healthy and what was unhealthy, as well as extreme diets, ranging from outdated perspectives and trends to modern ones.

The teacher, in most cases, avoided leaning towards one side of the scale between the opposites, he always left it up to the children. He also consistently used opposites within his lesson structure and his gestures, in order to facilitate the effectiveness of his lesson. His tone would range from quiet to loud, his gestures from small to large, and his lessons would cycle between tension and relief, science and emotion. He would draw them in and let them go.

The class grappled with binary opposites on a daily basis and related to every aspect of the health and nutrition main lesson. They looked at the ramifications of short term gratification (in both aspects of health and food) versus long term gratification. The teacher would constantly remind the class that long term investments were usually the most fruitful, and that these long term investments were usually more difficult than the short term choices. Easy and difficult, long term and short term, pleasure and pain, instant gratification and long term satisfaction, old and new all came into play in the lessons.

The class began to see that society has been a long-time advocate of doing things easily, quickly and efficiently and how this is now reflected in our health and lifestyle. People are obsessed with social media, cellphones and having everything at their fingertips, yet this has detracted from what is real and important in life. It has resulted in laziness and long term dissatisfaction. Human interaction, food and lifestyle have been effected by our need to do everything in this fast, 'time efficient' manner. They discussed how humans began to process food and plants and grappled with fast vs. slow, real vs. fake, organic vs. modified, and the long term outcomes of these approaches. The class was made to consider their personal perspective of health with society's perspective and then search for mediation between the two. The class was also often grappling with being mindful of themselves and others, thinking about their actions and the possible ramifications, as well as everyone around them.

The class may not have been consciously aware of these binary opposites consistently at play, but due to their shift into adult-like thinking, it became evident (through their discussions and general demeanour) that they were considering these opposites and using them in order to gain conceptual understanding, and a plurality of perspectives. The Waldorf classroom greatly aids this shift as it makes use of binary opposites throughout the curriculum, covering black and white drawings, phases of human civilisation, rise and fall, and the romance with science and intellect versus the romance with art and creativity. Binary opposites within culture and society will continue to present themselves to the class as they move into adulthood. Hopefully their ability to grapple with them in this phase of their life will greatly aid them in their development in the future, both academically and emotionally, especially as these two aspects are seen to be working together in this classroom. Binary opposites and affective engagement were consistently working together throughout the main lesson, feeding off one another and creating a virtuous cycle, clearly facilitating conceptual understanding.

### **How has the dramatic conflict between the binary opposites been resolved and what forms of mediation have been appropriate to seek?**

The class did not often discuss what personal mediation between the binary opposites they had found appropriate to seek, and there is no evidence that anything has been 'solved', making this a fairly complex and difficult question to answer. The concepts that the class were discussing and grappling with were of a personal and ongoing nature, therefore it is necessary for each individual to continually seek mediation as these things change and transform with time. There was evidence of a shift towards being more aware of themselves and their relationship with these binary opposites, tentatively sifting through the information they were being presented with, in order to seek their own personal mediation. Their ever growing awareness worked hand in hand with their ability to seek grey areas within their binary ideological structures, in both academic and emotional life.

When it came to diet the class was able to find a middle ground regarding what was 'right' and what was 'wrong'. They discovered that between the outdated perspective of nutrition and the current perspective, lives their own personal needs and individual perspectives. The teacher wanted the class to feel as though they had their own choices to make, that through all of the new trends and fads, they are able to look at the these aspects, weigh up the opposites and tailor them to their own needs. They are able to seek mediation armed with knowledge, a plurality of perspectives, with their long term health in mind.

The class became aware that everything that they do, say or feel is affecting their overall 'wholistic' health, that their values may not be the same as another's, and that what may work for one person may not work for another. The children know that they must respect their own needs and values and respect other's needs and values. To be able to understand how each child has sought mediation and resolution it would be necessary for me to continue with observation for years and years to come.

### **Has the main lesson been understood, its importance grasped and the content learned?**

It was evident in the lessons that the children understood both the content and the importance of the concepts being taught. As previously stated, it is difficult to be able to understand just how deep the lesson resonated within each child as an individual without far more research and observation. Many moral aspects of the lesson may lie dormant in the children until they are needed. During the lessons though, the class had a mature and serious approach, they were naturally curious and involved throughout.

The lesson relied upon their contributions, meaning that they were responsible for the lessons to birth conceptual understanding. The level of affective engagement and reflection conveyed understanding and interest. The children asked many questions, as did the teacher. They would continually slip between the known and the unknown, never sticking to the clichéd concentric circles of knowledge, preventing boundaries in learning and imagination, allowing the class to transform the information and knowledge according to their personal needs.

What was most evident, was the plurality of perspectives gained through the lessons. By exploring various aspects of health and nutrition the class was able to think objectively about such things. They could look at contrasting views, looking at the whole, at similarities, details and differences and evaluate the concepts on more than an academic level. They were able to take many different ideas and experiences into account, sift through their binary ideological structures, their previous knowledge, and come to their own personal conclusions. Their discussions and contributions all suggested personal involvement and reflection. As the teacher mentioned in his interview, whether this all has been understood, we will never know. The class came to their own personal understanding of 'wholistic' health, something that is bound to change and transform over the years.

## **Conclusion**

The information and knowledge that I drew from my data resonates both within a Waldorf environment and within everyday life. Effective communication and narrative are essential facets of society and human life. If we are able to articulate and communicate our ideas and perspectives in a way that fits within the above mentioned categories, we may be far more successful in our personal and professional relationships. It is vital to have plurality of mind, to think objectively about new concepts and ideas, and to see story and narrative not as an end point, but rather as a place to begin interpretation, debate and understanding. It is clear that the universal story form is able to provoke judgement and new ideas; it is capable of transforming the way in which we perceive the world around us, pushing us to grow and evolve into more 'wholistically' healthy individuals.

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