

**RUDOLF STEINER'S PEDAGOGY OF IMAGINATION:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY**

By Thomas William Nielsen, PhD

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Introduction

This paper presents a synthesis of some the findings of my recently completed Ph.D. thesis. The thesis was a study of the concept and practises of the pedagogy of imagination. Since the Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner, wrote extensively on the subject and is renowned for his philosophical insights, his work was used to develop a conception of the nature of 'imagination' and 'imaginative teaching'. However, given the many changes in society since Steiner's time, the study was developed empirically by conducting a case study in three Australian Steiner primary classrooms.

To 'get at' the esoteric, or abstract, phenomena of a 'pedagogy of imagination', I examined the educational context of Steiner's notion of imaginative teaching through ethnographic means, and interpreted the constitution and lived 'nature' of the pedagogical transaction of imagination through phenomenological means. The qualitative function of using ethnographic and hermeneutic phenomenological methods was to identify and interpret the various constructions of imagination as they occurred as 'moments', or critical incidents, in the three classrooms. The insights gained from these evidential 'grounds' were used to selectively re-theorise various aspects of Steiner's writings about imagination and holistic education.

In this reconstruction it was found that the pedagogy of imagination in Steiner schools is made up of seven teaching methods ('drama', 'exploration', 'storytelling', 'routine', 'arts', 'discussion' and 'empathy'), and that these methods form a potent means for connecting children with spiritual-aesthetic, intellectual and physical development. This paper is meant to introduce these methods of imaginative teaching, and in doing so, illustrate that whether or not the quality of these methods ultimately depends on the ideological framework (Steiner's anthroposophy) in which they were identified, they may inspire, confirm or modify existing efforts in mainstream education to cater for the imagination.

The Legacy of Rudolf Steiner

The late 19th and early 20th century saw a thinker and educator who perhaps more than anyone else expanded the concept of holistic and imaginative education. Drawing upon especially the work of Johann Goethe and H. P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner (1997; 1996; 1977; 1969; 1928; 1920; 1906) constructed an elaborate spiritual 'science', known as anthroposophy, which was to become the base for his educational ideas. Steiner saw the concept of 'imaginative teaching' to be central for the child's holistic development and self-actualisation. Through imaginative teaching and learning, Steiner believed the door to the child's inner, genuine self and potential was opened, enriching not only his or her personal life, but steering him or her towards meaning and purpose in the world. Imaginative teaching was to Steiner the means to bridge the gap between the child's material and 'other world', imbuing wholeness and completeness of experience.

Anthroposophy, meaning 'wisdom of the human being', in many ways also encompassed the holistic key ideas of the 18th and 19th century, such as, for example, Jacques Rousseau's secular humanism, Goethe's commitment to constant change, Jean Paul Richter and Johann Pestalozzi's deep humanity, Friedrich Froebel's appreciation for symbolism, and Herman Hesse's call for universalism and synthesis. Hence, Steiner's thesis embodied an elaborate 'theory', or potent 'voice', for the holistic proposition in education. When Emil Molt, the manager of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, took notice of this proposition after World War I, he asked Steiner to provide education to his workers, who requested him later to educate their children (Yonemura 1989, p. 60). Waldorf education, as it consequently was called, would grow into one of the largest independent education systems in the world today, renowned for providing an environment that caters for 'hands, heart and head' (Mazzone 1999).

The belief that teaching must attend to multiple facets of human experience has always been common to a holistic view of education (Miller 1997; Yonemura 1989). Like his visionary predecessors, Steiner saw children to be in need of more than intellectual development. Steiner, however, following and drawing upon the holistic tradition, has proven particularly significant to the development of a holistic educational philosophy and method. Despite being only 'an alternative' to mainstream schooling,

Steiner's contribution has meant that holistic schooling is no longer esoteric, hidden in the records of time — it is very much alive today. Indeed, Steiner education is the fastest growing independent school system in the world today, and is by some studies claimed to produce students who perform above average, both academically and creatively (Oppenheimer 1999; IFO 1995; Ogletree 1996; Smilansky 1990; Gold & Mann 1984). In other words, because I wanted to empirically examine a holistic and imaginative approach to education, the Waldorf setting seemed particularly appropriate, especially since, to my best knowledge, an empirical study of Steiner's pedagogy of imagination has not been done in the English and Danish speaking academy.

Overview of Disciplinary Approach

The intent of the empirical component of this study was to understand the nature of the pedagogy of imagination and the conditions in which it occurs in Steiner classrooms, presumably, as largely informed by Steiner's philosophy, but within a different historical and cultural context to that in which Steiner was writing. An approach lending itself to resolving such a problem is the phenomenological case study. By getting close to the real-life phenomenon under study, a chance to understand it through 'lived experience' is present (Maso, in Atkinson et al. 2001; Pinar & Reynolds 1992; Van Manen 1990). Given the 'slippery', esoteric nature of qualifying 'imaginative realms' of teaching and learning, I wanted to identify and represent experiences that resonated faithfully with the phenomenon, as it was experienced, in-situ. Also, an ethnographic approach to data collection was preferred because this allows for the immersion of the researcher in the phenomena until a saturation point of understanding is achieved (Atkinson et al. 2001; Woods 1999; Merriam 1998; Borg & Gall 1989; Yin 1984). This phenomenological-ethnographic approach, accommodating for a collection of data that was both contextual (ethnographic) and interpretive (phenomenological), was, ultimately, to assist the development of a grounded theory of the pedagogy of imagination and, thus, a basis for re-philosophising Steiner's philosophy of imaginative teaching. The multi-disciplinary approach to this case study is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 — Qualitative Disciplines Underpinning the Case Study (Adapted from Johnson & Christensen 2000, p. 314)

	<i>Disciplinary Origin</i>	<i>Research Purpose</i>	<i>Data Analysis Approach</i>
<i>Case Study</i>	Multi-disciplinary roots	To describe case/s in depth and address the research questions	Holistic description and search for themes shedding light on case/s
<i>Ethnography</i>	Anthropology	To describe the cultural and contextual characteristics of a group of people	Holistic description and search for cultural or contextual themes
<i>Phenomenology</i>	Philosophy	To describe and invoke lived experience of the phenomenon	Identify and interpret the nature and essence of the phenomenon
<i>Grounded Theory</i>	Sociology	To inductively generate a grounded theory describing and explaining a phenomenon	Constant comparative method (open, axial and selective coding)

Three Classroom Studies

Using the phenomenological-ethnographical approach, I observed three grade 3/4 classes in three different Steiner schools, set in rural and city settings, for a total period of nine weeks. Table 2 provides an overview of the three classrooms.

Table 2 — Overview of the Three Classroom Studies

	<i>Classroom 1</i>	<i>Classroom 2</i>	<i>Classroom 3</i>
<i>Ethnographic data</i>			
<i>Setting</i>	Rural	Inner city	Suburban
<i>School</i>	Primary, 95 children	Primary and secondary, 280 children	Primary, 274 children
<i>Class</i>	Grade 3/4, 28 students	Grade 3, 25 students	Grade 3, 30 students
<i>Teacher</i>	Male, age 44	Female, age 49	Female, age 37
<i>Children</i>	Mainly Anglo-Saxon, lower to middle class	Mainly Anglo-Saxon, very mixed socio-economic background	Mainly Anglo-Saxon, middle class
<i>Hermeneutic data</i>			
<i>62 'moments' collected altogether</i>	22	19	21
<i>Representative sample of 7 'moments' used in this paper</i>	'drama', 'exploration', 'storytelling', 'routine', 'arts', 'discussion', 'empathy'		
<i>Duration of Ethnographic Study</i>	4 weeks	3 weeks	3 weeks

From analysing all the 62 'moments' and ethnographic data gained in the three classroom studies, and by using the 'constant comparative method' (Atkinson 2001; Neuman 1997; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1992; Strauss 1987), seven teaching methods pertaining to the imaginative transaction emerged.

Seven Imaginative Methods of Teaching

The seven imaginative teaching methods identified in my study were: drama, exploration, storytelling, routine, arts, discussion and empathy. Each of these will now be introduced via a phenomenological 'moment', followed by a brief analysis.

'Drama'

The following was experienced and recorded by me in the beginning of a third period. After a busy morning with reading, writing and arithmetic, many of the children had enjoyed the good weather in the lunch break, and did not look too eager to resume classroom learning.

The afternoon sun gently warms the classroom. Children are taking off jumpers, some simply to recuperate from the sweat generated in recess due to playing hard.

The teacher asks for silence, then addresses the class.

'We talked about nouns this morning, and now I would like to do an activity that will help us gain an even better understanding of nouns.'

The children fiddle with their paraphernalia, putting pencil cases away, books in their bags.

'I need one person to come and sit in my chair,' the teacher says with a deliberate mysteriousness, 'for he or she is going to be an astronaut, going to another planet in our solar system.'

Now the children's attention is caught. A child becomes frozen half way through a motion of giving back a pencil to her neighbour, her mouth slightly open. Another child raises his head from a slumber position on the desk.

'Arriving on this planet,' the teacher continues in a low, dragged out voice, 'he or she is going to describe to ground control — the rest of the class — what he or she sees.'

The whole class is now attentive, and a few hands are already raised, anticipating the 'boarding call' for volunteers.

'But, there is one condition,' the teacher says, initiating a theatrical pause, '...the astronaut CANNOT use any nouns!'

The children, now excited, look as if nothing could be easier than complying with the teacher's wish, while, seemingly, mentally preparing to conquer the entire solar system.

'Not using any nouns,' the teacher continues with more pace, 'the astronaut will then describe what he or she sees, and ground control will afterwards report the information back to me, so I can write it on the black board.'

Now all children have raised their hand, eager to participate.

The teacher picks a child. As if given permission to enter a royal court, the child snuggles into the teacher's big, soft armchair, while the teacher asks what planet he would like to visit.

'Hmm, Mercury,' says the child with an air of confidence.

'...5, 4, 3, 2, 1, take off!' — the teacher shakes the chair emphatically.

The child laughs. So do the rest of the class. A few helpful remarks are made by the other class members, such as 'hang on,' 'give it more speed,' and 'look out for the meteors!'

'Get ready to land, you are getting close to Mercury,' the teacher says with dramatic trepidation.

The chair-made-space shuttle shakes once more, and the child is asked to push the to-only-the teacher visible red button on the armrest. Making the sound of an air compressed space shuttle door, the teacher opens a book of Turner's paintings in front of the child.

'Tell ground control what you see, astronaut Humphrey, but remember, no nouns.'

The child, after having resorted to several nouns in order to describe what he sees, gives up, claiming the impossibility of not using nouns in describing the planet. The children are racking their brains in an attempt to come up with a solution.

Another child takes the journey onto another planet, only to utter variations of 'uhh..., eaemm..., ' and likewise.

These exclamations are recorded by the teacher on the black board — to the obvious enjoyment of the child, as well as the rest of the class.

Weary muscles from recess, and tired minds from a morning's reading, writing and calculating, seem to be forgotten. A feeling of euphoria mingles with the dust particles, so visible in the sunlit room.

Now the time has come.

The teacher discusses the difficulties encountered in not using nouns, leading the class to the realisation that nouns are used to name the world around us, and without them, we are left unable to communicate. The children listen fully absorbed. Their bewilderment and euphoria are replaced by a knowing silence. The activity has taken the children through an experience, and thus, a new level of understanding 'nouns'.

The activity is then repeated with other children, but now allowing the use of nouns, cementing even further their nature and use. And with more fun and laughter.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of drama occurs when the teacher facilitates activities in which students have the opportunity to use their imaginative powers in drama or role-play. As observed in the above vignette, the children connected, consciously or

unconsciously, with the feelings, thoughts and atmosphere of the role-play, thus creating emotional-aesthetic links with the learning content, which in turn linked to profound learning, in this case, about nouns. Resonating with Steiner's argument that the essential mediator, or link, between the child's intellect and body is the 'feeling' realm, the dramatic and strong feeling aspect observed in the above moment, highlights the importance of this realm in connecting thinking and learning via the emotional realm. The positive qualities or learning outcomes developed from this type of activity can be varied, all depending on the activity's objective, nature and content. As exemplified by the 'noun' activity, however, the common factor for 'dramatic imagination' is that it allows for feeling-charged experience of the learning content.

'Exploration'

The following activity was conducted by the teacher at a time where the children had already been learning about Noah's Ark for some weeks. In the previous maths lesson, the teacher asked the children to make their own cubit rulers, after having taught them about measurements in the 'old days' and how various body parts served as units for measurement.

'Today,' the teacher says invitingly, 'you are going out on the oval to measure with the cubit rulers you made yesterday the size of Noah's Ark.' Many children raise their arms in excitement.

'How big was Noah's Ark,' the teacher asks as if he has forgotten.

'300 cubits long and 50 cubits wide,' a couple of children call out at the same time.

'Okay,' says the teacher, 'let's go and see how big that really is. But before we go, we better have a plan of how to best, and most accurately, measure the length of 300 cubits and the width of 50 cubits.'

This is discussed by the class for a few minutes, and it is decided that, starting in one end of the oval, everyone is to stand next to each other in a long, straight row, then put down their cubit rulers exactly next to each other's. When everyone has done this, the first person in the row moves to the end of the row and places their ruler in the line again. Then the second person moves to the end of the row, and so on. Excited, everyone leaves for the school oval, carrying his or her self-made rulers.

At the oval, the children participate and cooperate eagerly, and soon they have measured the width of the Ark. They place some sticks to mark the width, and begin to measure the length of the Ark down the oval. The children, now conditioned from the first measurement, are quickly carrying out the task. Having had to climb a small hill, as the oval was not big enough, the whole class now stand and take in the size of the Ark.

'Wow, that is huge,' a child says with awe. Many send acknowledging outbursts of a similar kind.

The teacher then encourages the children to include the height of the Ark when picturing the ship before them, incurring further eruptions of amazement.

The teacher starts chatting with a few of the children nearest by, while the rest of the children discuss among themselves. The wind is cold, but everyone seems to enjoy a deserved rest after the 'ship building'.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of exploration activity is exemplified by the teacher constructing learning activities that intentionally allow for the children to explore feelings and ideas, using their imagination and direct experience. As such, this method is a practical reflection of experiential-constructivist learning. As observed in the above vignette, this method highlights that teaching and learning are not only about the teacher revealing that which is hidden to the student, but also with guidance and sharing of his or her experience, constructing experiences for the students that enables them to reveal the hidden themselves. Correlating with Steiner's advocacy for direct and authentic experience, the method of imaginative exploration emphasises that rather than just telling children something, however true it may be, it is useful to let them experience things for themselves. This method also points towards the necessity of not expecting such activity to be without trials and errors, as this process is an essential part of learning, promoting self-reliance and metacognition.

'Story'

The following was recorded by the researcher partly from memory, and does therefore not represent the moment verbatim. The moment was experienced in the middle of a second period. The teacher tells the children that they are allowed to draw while she is

going to tell the story of the white elephant. No book is used. The teacher tells the story by heart.

'Once upon a time in the deep jungle of what is now called Africa,' the teacher says while breathing out deeply, 'there lived an elephant.'

'This was no ordinary elephant. Rather, it was an unusually beautiful elephant, for it was white, with a silverish sheen around it. Its enormous tusks were particularly breathtaking, as they resembled two long slides, made of the finest ivory. Its huge ears — for that it had, being an African elephant — , like a halo, encircled a pair of unusual kind eyes. If you looked into its eyes, it was as if looking up into the dark, African sky at night. Yes, this was indeed an unusually beautiful elephant.'

A wonderful silence and peace is present among the children. They seem to be in a peaceful, meditative trance. Once in a while, a child stops drawing and gazes at the teacher, as if the child's mind is pulled into the story for a moment, unable to sustain the activity of the hands.

'Yet it was not its beauty for which it was most known,' the teacher continues. 'The elephant was so gentle that the whole jungle knew and respected it for it. Often, the other animals would come to the elephant and tell of their problems. The elephant rarely spoke, but it listened with such compassion. The elephant also had another special characteristic: it could move ever so gracefully and silently. It did not matter how thick the jungle might be, the elephant could, in an instance, move from one place to another, without breaking any branches or bending any trees. You could think that you were all alone, and then, from out of nowhere, the white elephant would appear, looking at you with its kind eyes.'

Voices from the next-door classroom are loud now, constituting a distinct contrast to the calmness and absorption present in this classroom.

'There happened to be a kingdom on the other side of the jungle,' the teacher says with more pace, 'and in that kingdom there lived many people together. One day, however, the king decided that a certain group of people, who looked slightly different from the rest of the population, had to leave the kingdom. What exactly was so different about this group, the story does not tell us, but different they were, and so they had to leave. When the group of people had to depart they were all tears, not only because of

all the friends and loved ones they had to depart with, but also because they knew of the struggle that awaited them, trying to survive the wilderness without food.

Now, in the kingdom, there had always been an old tale told about a land far away, where food was in abundance and water crystal clear. No one knew if there really was such a land, for no one had up til now dared to go through the wild jungle and cross the vast desert. But the group knew that it was their only chance of survival. And so they went in search for the land far away. But they had not even crossed the jungle before it became obvious that they would never stand a chance of making the long journey without food. Exhausted, some crying, they sat down in a clearing in the jungle.'

The atmosphere of the classroom changes in accordance with the storyline. Suspension, release, empathy, determination — every mood is filling the room.

'It was then that the white elephant appeared,' the teacher says almost whispering. 'The group got a fright at first, for no one had heard or seen it coming. Once they looked into the eyes of the elephant, though, they began to relax. Then, the elephant asked why everyone was so sad. Again, the people became surprised, for never had they heard an elephant speak. But as everything about the elephant was so kind and gentle, they were not afraid, and began to tell the elephant about their trials. All the time, the elephant listened patiently. When the group had finished, it was suddenly as if the elephant became very sad. It was as if it became drawn into itself for a long moment. The people became quite worried, until suddenly, the spark of life returned in its eyes, and it again spoke to the group. With a gentle voice, it said: "Go to the foot of the mountain, and turn east. Keep going until you get to large canyon. At the bottom of this canyon, you will see a grown elephant, dead from its recent fall. You will be able to eat its flesh, and bring enough food for your journey." The people were very excited to hear this news, and thanked the elephant many times before going on their way.'

The teacher has everyone in her palm now. Every intonation, every little gesture with her hands, seems to flow unhindered into the children.

'When the group of people had left the clearing,' the teacher says with a dramatic voice, 'the elephant turned around and took a shortcut to the canyon. With light and swift movements, the elephant moved quickly through the jungle, and arrived at the cliff

before the others. With a resolute run, it threw itself over the cliff and fell to the bottom of the canyon, where the rocks smashed its huge body.'

The teacher pauses. The children do not breathe.

'When the group of people arrived to the bottom of the cliff,' the teacher says with a hint of sorrow behind the words, 'they saw that the elephant looked like their friend in the forest. "It is the white elephant!" some said with horror. Some started to cry. "How can we eat someone who was our friend?" one said. "Never could I do such a thing!" replied another. Everyone sat down, refusing to eat the meat. Finally, an old man spoke to the group. "I know that you are all upset about the death of our friend," he said, "but I ask you to consider the sacrifice that the white elephant has made for us. Should we refuse to accept this sacrifice, our friend's death will have been in vain." There was a long silence. Everyone knew in his or her heart that the old man spoke with wisdom. The old man then slowly started to cut off the flesh of the white elephant, and one by one, the people joined the preparation of the meat. Having cooked the meat, they sat around the fire in silence, many with tears running down their cheeks as they ate. But that night, they slept the sleep that one can only have on a full stomach and in the knowledge that more is available for tomorrow. The next morning, they divided the meat to be carried among the strongest, and they went on their way for the land far away. Legend has it that they made it, and that they created a beautiful kingdom where no one were made to feel different, and where the story of the white elephant would be told many a times.'

There is a silence as the teacher says the last lines, the words, it feels, departing the children as old friends saying their final goodbyes.

'Why did the elephant have to die?' asks one child, visibly chocking on the words.

'I think it was because it loved others so much that it was willing to sacrifice itself,' the teacher says soothingly.

'It was a good story,' another child says, as if to lift everyone's spirit.

Others agree.

(Pause)

The teacher puts on a brave smile, and starts instructing the children about what to remember before lunch, while the children slowly return to their normal, happy selves.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of 'storytelling' allows for a story to be experienced by the children. Whether the teacher tells a story by heart, reads aloud from a book, or simply lets the children read on their own, the 'story' in all instances creates pictures in the child's feeling and thought life, and thus is a type of imaginative experience. The many moments observed representing this teaching method, all supported the importance Steiner placed on the 'good story', as a way of teaching about 'good' or 'bad', 'beautiful' and 'ugly' – without imposing intellectual conceptualisation or moralising. When the children were experiencing stories they were extremely attentive and seemed to be in a type of imaginative trance, aligning with 'inner significances'. As observed in the above moment where the teacher told the touching story of the white elephant, abstract ideals and principles of self-sacrifice and courage were experienced imaginatively and emotionally by the children. Apart from the moral qualities that may be nourished via good stories, this teaching method encourages abilities in the individual to comprehend, see synthesis, and feel empathy with that or those outside the child's immediate environment.

'Routine'

The following was observed and recorded early one morning. Some of the children were looking a bit sleepy, and as if they would rather be home in their bed.

The teacher asks the children to stand up, and the whole class start reciting morning verses and poems. A child is turning around to look at the neighbour behind him, yet the lips are moving in unison with the rest of the class:

'...There lives in me an image of all that I should be, until I have become it, my heart shall never fray....'

The words are routine, and the activity somewhat sedated. The atmosphere created by the words, however, seems poignant. Certainly, as the teacher asks the children to sit down and take their main lesson book out, an attunement to learning is present that was not there before. The children's eyes are alert, patiently resting on the teacher, while awaiting further instruction. The day has begun.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of ritual and routine, as exemplified by the above moment, happens when the students perform regular routines in the form of songs,

prayers, poems and verses, in which the children over time connect with certain words, and more importantly, the essences that they represent. It is a method that relates directly to Steiner's notion of 'unconscious learning' and the importance he placed on stimulating the 'rhythmic' life of the child. By getting children to repeatedly say certain poems or affirmations, the action becomes second nature to the child, as was highlighted in the above moment by one child's unconscious participation while 'doing something else'. In terms of the pedagogical transaction of imagination, this teaching method is probably the most 'sedated' of the seven imaginative teaching methods. The images and concepts developed in the child's mind are created over time; they do not require the child to be conscious about them in the 'moment of doing'. The words may at first create vague images or feelings, but as the routine is repeated, the imaginative transaction grows and becomes part of the child. Apart from this longitude, often unconscious development of images and concepts, the more obvious benefits of regular ritual and routine are those of precision, order, regularity and language skills.

'Arts'

The following was recorded in the beginning of a second period, just as the children were returning from recess.

Morning recess is over, and the class is going to do 'form drawing', an activity that is performed two to three times a week, I am told. Certainly, the children know the procedure; without having been asked, a couple of children are already handing out a slate and a piece of chalk to each class member. Everyone seems to look forward to the activity.

Now the teacher begins his lesson. While explaining, the teacher demonstrates how to draw the form, and the children are busy following his instructions.

'Use the shoulder as the point of rotation,' the teacher explains, assisting the children in making a large circle.

For each line, for each step in making the form, there seems to be a right way to do it — and the teacher, it seems, knows the right way. He carefully draws a line, waits for the children to imitate him, then continues to the next step. And step-by-step, an

intriguing form takes place. It does not portray anything concrete, but the balance and symmetry suggest that careful considerations have gone into its design.

The teacher has up til now been concentrating on the motor skills in drawing the form, on creating the form as symmetrical and aesthetically pleasing as possible. But now he also turns the children's attention towards a concept.

'Look how the form is somewhat triangular in shape,' the teacher says, 'but each tip has a smaller triangular shape pointing towards the centre of the form.' Some of the children are nodding.

'So, instead of having three points,' the teacher continues, 'the larger shape has three other, smaller triangles turning inwards instead of outwards.' All the children seem to understand what the teacher is saying.

'Drawing a curving line around the form, you are to stop short of these end points.' Upon meeting the inward gaps, you will draw a counter-balancing 'triangle', pointing outwards instead of inwards,' the teacher informs the class.

This concept of 'balancing out a feature with its opposite' is obviously not new to the children. For the children, it seems as natural as the abstract figure itself. Only this particular drawing is new to them. But that is a mere form, it seems, a shape to which they easily and quickly accommodate their existing knowledge and understanding.

No direct emphasis is placed upon the concept of 'balancing', but an unspoken understanding seems to pass between the teacher and the children. It is almost as if the teacher conducts a philosophical lesson in how to create synthesis between opposites, but without using words.

After the class, I ask the teacher why he made a point about 'going outwards' in the outer line when the inner line 'went inwards'. He explains that the whole activity of form drawing has immense value to the child's fine motor skills development and coordination, but that the more important learning outcomes are those of integration of the child's own being. In drawing various symmetrical, archaic and symbolic forms, the teacher says, the child connects to what is of the same nature within him or herself. In all aspects of life, he explains, the fluctuation between 'opposites' can be found, but they can only be really understood and given some control over when one understands the art of

creating balance between them. Form drawing, the teacher informs, is teaching the unconscious side of the child about symmetry, balance, and the oneness of all things.

I walk away thinking about Heraclitus's words, 'The way up is the way down' — and that I possibly have just experienced a lesson in metaphysical synthesis, as exemplified by an ancient Greek philosopher.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of using the arts to engage the imagination occurs when the teacher facilitates activities in which children have the opportunity to express themselves via painting, clay work, craft, drawing, music, and so on. As exemplified in the above example where the children were taught how to draw certain symmetrical forms, the teacher actively assists a creative process, in which the pupil consciously creates beauty, harmony and balance in an outer form (whether it be physically, as in drawing, or etherically, as in music). According to Steiner, this in turn internalises in the student subconscious qualities of a similar type. Certainly, the phenomenological moments across all three ethnographic studies indicated a relationship between artistic expression and the transmission of subtle principles to the unconscious side of children. As exemplified in the above 'moment', via artistic and creative activity, deeply philosophical concepts seemed able to be 'experienced' in such a way that it spoke to the student's imagination and 'feeling' life, rather than his or her intellectual judgment or conceptualisation. Hence, the involvement with and appreciation of the arts is a practical way of engaging imaginative, spiritual-aesthetic dimensions in the children.

'Discussion'

The following class discussion was recorded in the middle of a main lesson. It was not planned by the teacher, but initiated spontaneously by the remarks of some of the children.

Suddenly, there is a class discussion of last night's eclipse of the moon. The teacher explains how the 'redness' of the moon was created by the moon moving into the shadow of the earth's atmosphere. One child claims that the moon is always red, that red is its real colour and that 'we just see it as white.' The teacher listens patiently, showing interest in the child's comments. The other children do the same. Every opinion in the classroom is valued and given the same amount of respect, it seems. The teacher does

not argue against the child's argument. It is as if he silently says, 'Who am I to say that one explanation excludes the other — better to travel than arrive.'

I suddenly remember once seeing a video with another teacher, discussing a shared story about a 'macaroni forest' with her class.

'There is no such thing as a macaroni forest,' she said in an unarguable manner. 'You haven't seen a chocolate biscuit forest either, now have you,' further supporting her point.

'Uhm... yes,' said a child insecurely, 'I have.'

'And where have you seen this?' the teacher asked in disbelief.

The child, now even less confident, replied, 'Well... on the floor in my room... after I've eaten chocolate biscuits.'

A moment passed, after which the teacher resumed with factual precision to other aspects of the story, brushing off the comment with a forbearing glance.

I become aware again of the classroom I am in at the present, where red moons and chocolate biscuit forests seem possible.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of discussion, as exemplified by the above 'moment', happens when the teacher facilitates activities in which children have the opportunity to engage imaginatively in discussion, forming pictorial images that may or may not fit existing schemas, but which nonetheless can be examined and experienced via such discussion. The teacher's non-evasive, yet well-guided, orchestration of the discussion exemplifies the principle of allowing room for the imaginative spheres advocated by Steiner. A discussion about a factual science, such as astronomy, might easily have been construed as having the aim of having students conform to the facts of modern science. By allowing for the children's imaginative voices to be heard and examined without judgment, however, the discussion was made 'flexible' and 'open', supporting Steiner's advocacy for teaching that produces concepts that are non-static and able to grow. Furthermore, as cosmic 'truths' may be multi-dimensional, as Steiner would have us think, there is also a case for arguing that such activities have more benefits than just allowing students to think 'factually'. It may be a method to aid and nourish the pursuit of abstract, or deeper, truths. In any case, the method of discussion,

apart from encouraging independent thinking via the faculty of the imagination, aids in developing sense of detail, analytical and philosophical thinking.

'Empathy'

I experienced the following, as I arrived at the first Steiner school under study.

Meeting the teacher in whose class I am visitor, new impressions arise. Dressed in clothes of which several items appear homemade, the teacher goes around knitting with the intent of one whose next addition to his wardrobe depends on this seemingly enjoyable task, while chatting to some small, admiring children. The children call him by first name, and the ethos is one of familiarity. From one of the classrooms comes a fragrance of essential oils, and I see two children sitting in trusted company, while also knitting on each a creation of their own. The classroom is large and light. Desks and chairs are made of timber, and the walls are decorated with beautiful drawings and paintings. The teacher rings a hand-bell, indicating that class is to begin.

When the lesson begins, I am surprised to find that the lack of formality appears to have no influence on the discipline within the class. In fact, an invisible bond seems to connect all into one big family. A couple of times the teacher reminds some students about not speaking while he is addressing the class, but even this is marked with an ineffable sense of affinity between those in question: the teacher speaks with a friendly surprise that reminding is needed, and the students seem embarrassed by having their inappropriate actions brought to everyone's attention. The matter is dealt with quickly and privately, and the students resume listening.

The morning goes quickly, saturated with activities, but there is no bell to indicate morning recess. The teacher leads a grace for the food, and lets the children fetch their lunch boxes. Children queue up to have their apples cut by the teacher. One by one, the children have a private chat with the teacher, as it becomes their turn to have their apple cut. Each apple is cut with mindfulness and put on a little plate for the child to take to their desk. No sense of rush or hurry is present. Each apple receives the same amount of loving attention. First the apple is cut in boats, then the core is removed, then the pieces are placed carefully and attractively on the plate. The family is eating. And the head of

the family is sitting there, in a big armchair that would make any story-teller envious, making sure that his children are fed.

Brief Analysis: The teaching method of empathy relies heavily on the teacher's persona and general mannerism. Correlating with Steiner's argument that love of children must be a teacher's fundamental drive, the 'method' of empathy in a way is a pre-requisite for all other methods of imaginative teaching, as it denotes a fundamental relationship between teacher and pupil upon which all other interactions take place. The reason why it is important to recognise this aspect of imaginative teaching as a particular teaching 'method', is because empathy and imagination belong to the same human realm – feelings – and because the relationship between teacher and pupil in general is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to practically embody and physically display empathy. As this truism may be applicable to teaching in general, it was nevertheless prominent in this study of the imaginative transaction. For example, while some disciplinary problems were present at times in all three classrooms, this did not seem to have much effect on neither the quality of the imaginative transactions, nor the classroom ethos in general. As exemplified in the above example, the presence of empathy seemed to counteract disciplinary problems, and in turn nurture the same qualities in the children found in the teacher. Empathy is a teaching method, seemingly useful for not only the pedagogical transaction of imagination, but for the relationship between teacher and student in general.

Discussion

The seven teaching methods identified in my study provided the empirical basis, or conceptual 'grounds', from which salient features of Steiner's philosophy of imagination and teaching were re-theorised. In this undertaking, additional support arose for the argument that 'imagination' is not just another 'element' within holistic schooling, but is a crucial part *of* and plays a significant role *to* the 'whole'. In my literature review of Steiner, 'imagination' was found to be a metamorphosis of the 'feeling' nature, the 'soul-aesthetic' part of the human being, thus constituting a link between the two 'ends' of human existence, between thought and action, theory and practice. As Steiner deduced out of personal and sometimes painful experience (Steiner was often criticised by

adherents of the Enlightenment), the realm of imagination not only has the ability to function as a bridge between ideological paradigms, between idealism and realism, spiritualism and materialism. It also has the ability to connect the various components of and within the human being itself. Moreover, the pedagogical transaction of imagination has the capacity to let students 'rise' above any limitations of 'context' and place them in a type of 'trance', or 'imaginative mode', seemingly connecting them with inner, spiritual-aesthetic dimensions or significances.

Notably, this view of 'imagination' as a bridge to wholeness, and a process of synthesis, is not particular to Steiner or anthroposophical theory; it is echoed in a number of independent studies on the imagination (Dirkx 2001; Johnson 1990; Neville 1989; Giambattista Vico, in Burke 1985; Sloan 1983; Bohm 1980; Warnock 1979; Rugg 1963; Langer 1953; Dewey 1916). For example, the late Harold Rugg (1963) conducted a life-long study into the concept of imagination and its function as a mediator between the conscious and unconscious mind. Rugg makes an important elaboration on how we think, and thus come to know something. The most known and accepted type of thought, Rugg argues, is the verbal-analytic thought of 'scientific thinking'. This mode of thinking, he claims, consists primarily of mental substance, having very little feeling if any in it. This mode of thinking, however, is mainly beneficial for verification, not for discovery. To discover something, one is engaging in what Rugg calls 'felt-thought', a type of thinking which involves the feelings and intuitive realms. Rugg points towards Einstein as a scientist and philosopher in whom the rational, scientific way of thinking was epitomised, but who nevertheless often explained that none of his ideas emerged out of analytic thinking. Rather, they came as intuitive 'flashes', feeling-thoughts, which then he might try to express logically in words afterwards.

What is important in this realisation, Rugg felt, is what he termed the 'theorem of the transliminal mind'. In this concept, the illuminating flash of insight occurs at a threshold of the conscious-non-conscious continuum on which all of life is lived (Rugg 1963, pp. 292-293). Rugg, in other words, identified not only the two ends of the continuum, the conscious and the non-conscious state, but a third state that also exists. This third state constitutes a transliminal antechamber in which the creative flash occurs. As Rugg (1963) notes, people like Galton, James, Schelling, Freud, and others, were

aware that a fertile border state exists between the alert, conscious problem-solving mind and the depths of the unconscious, but they did little more than name it. Rugg's study suggests that the phenomenon of 'imagination' is similar to the Taoist's state of 'no-mind', the state of 'letting go', so we reach the place where 'we know before we know it' (Rugg 1963, p. 293).

The crux of Rugg's thesis is that this reservoir for acquiring knowledge and new insight is not necessarily reached by way of the rational mind, which we allegedly aim to develop first and foremost in modern schooling (Glazer 1999; Gatto 1997). The illumination of mind, Rugg argues, is primarily nourished through a stimulation of the child's imaginative powers. Through the alchemy of thought-feeling, concentration-relaxation, the antechambers of consciousness are fused with something of a higher nature than thought or knowledge itself. In artistic life, the process of the 'higher self' merging with the 'lower self' is typified. For that reason, Rugg believed, as Steiner did, that education is a question of making teaching artistic and imaginative.

Bernie Neville in his book, 'Educating Psyche' (1989), draws similar conclusions. Drawing upon psychology, philosophy and Greek mythology, Neville sheds light on the important role that imagination plays and the subconscious side of our being have in our lives, and how a greater acceptance of and knowledge about this side can aid educational theory and practice. Like Rugg, Neville does not downplay the importance of intellectual and physical experience in education, but simply argues that our imagination, or 'psyche', is the shadowy, soul-like 'ground' where these can meet and be truly enlightened. In fact, without tapping into our subconscious via imagination, fantasy and play, Neville argues, nothing we do is truly creative, and thus, in many ways, truly educational. The Greek myth of Psyche's experiences and consequent metamorphosis is to Neville a pictorial analogy of the creative and transformational power of the soul-aesthetic part within us, the transliminal 'ante-chamber' of which Rugg spoke, initiating our consciousness into new and deeper states of being and knowing.

Douglas Sloan's comprehensive study *Insight-Imagination* (1983) also supports the view that the imaginative realm of human experience is where the realms of thinking and willing are joined and find their unity. In thinking we experience a distancing from the world, Sloan argues, as we tend to 'break down', 'separate', and view 'the abstract'.

Through willing, in contrast, we enter into immediate participation with the world of concretes, often remaining unaware or having little thought while in motor activity. What makes these two polar ends of experience possible to meet, Sloan argues, is the intermediate realm of feeling and imagination. Feeling-imagination constitutes 'the rhythmic connection between participation in the world in volitional activity and detachment from the world made possible in thinking' (Sloan 1983, p. 205). Without the intervening realm of knowing in feeling through images, Sloan argues, we are doomed to oscillate between immediate immersion in activity on the one hand and thinking without life and depth on the other.

Also seeing imagination as the encompassing, qualitative bond between thought and action, the renowned American philosopher, John Dewey, stated:

Only a personal response involving imagination can possibly procure realisation even of pure 'facts'. The imagination is the medium of appreciation in every field. Were it not for the accompanying play of imagination, there would be no road from a direct activity to representative knowledge; for it is by imagination that symbols are translated over into a direct meaning and integrated with a narrower activity so as to expand and enrich it. (Dewey 1916, pp. 236-237)

The importance of imagination in all true learning, Dewey argued further, does not devalue the aspects of thinking and activity. Thinking is, he argued, the equivalent to an explicit rendering of the intelligent element in our experience, which in turn makes it possible to act with an 'end in view'. Through thinking and reflection upon experience, we become co-creators with the 'sea of imagination' (Dewey 1916, p. 146).

Dirkx (2001), Johnson (1990), Giambattista Vico (in Burke 1985), Bohm (1980), Warnock (1979), and Langer (1953) make conclusions in their respective studies which support the concept of imagination above. Suffice to note that the findings of this study and Steiner's anthroposophical view of wholeness and its implications to a theory of imagination, in essence, resonate with a number of significant, and more importantly, 'non-anthroposophical' studies. Students of 'imagination' in general seem to agree that one of the main characteristics of imagination is its ability to connect the various dimensions of human existence, as it is both a 'process' and the 'continuum' on which the process takes place. 'Imagination' is not merely going 'downwards' from spiritual-aesthetic realms, nor 'upwards' from the physical, or tangible, 'realm'. The upwards and

downwards motions merely exemplify the ends of the continuum, the wholeness, the 'One'. Imagination, in this line of thinking, thus takes on an identity which to some extent is 'non-identical', a 'definition' in consistent movement, as it constantly embraces the 'ends'. 'Oneness' descends from the spiritual-aesthetic realms, whereas 'division' ascends from matter; imagination, being the bridge and medium of both, is, in other words, of both 'spirit' and 'matter'.

Implications

On the basis of the findings in my study, there are a number of immediate implications that, given the difficulty of generalising beyond this case study, are suggestive of advice that could be given to educational practitioners and policy makers. First, it would be advantageous for teachers in Steiner schools and Steiner teacher training settings to study the seven methods of imaginative teaching developed in this study. For example, the three teachers observed in this study tended to gravitate towards some methods more than others. Obviously, Steiner teachers, like other teachers, will always select methods and pedagogies that suit their personalities and fortes. But it is important to note that the methods of imaginative teaching developed in this study are not different 'paradigms' or 'teaching philosophies' from which one may commit to particular ones at the expense of others. The categories of imaginative teaching developed in this study are explanatory of a *sphere* of 'imaginative teaching'. In other words, by studying the full range of imaginative teaching methods, as developed in this study, Steiner teachers may be assisted in identifying which areas of imaginative teaching they need to encompass.

Second, a study of the categories of imaginative teaching presented in this thesis not only would familiarise Steiner teachers with the full *scope* of imaginative teaching, but in turn also might assist the *quality* of the application of any one of the categories. For example, some of the observed teachers were better than others with regard to the use of certain methods of imaginative teaching. This comment is not meant to favour, or criticise, any one teacher, only to point out that teaching always is an organic art where the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses may be useful for one's professional development, and that by studying 'the ideal' and those who are successful in the areas in which we are less so, we are provided with means by which we may develop

professionally. Hence, via the study of the methods presented in this study, Steiner teachers are offered an additional theoretical framework with which to consciously acquire skills and develop strategies of imaginative teaching.

Third, it would be appropriate for practitioners in mainstream educational settings to study the methods of imaginative teaching. Whether or not the quality of the methods ultimately depends on the anthroposophical framework in which they were developed, they may inspire, confirm or modify existing efforts of these teachers to cater for the imagination. Aspects of Steiner's philosophy of imagination may also already be consciously or unconsciously used by the individual classroom teacher, thus providing an incentive to study the methods. Or, a teacher may want to adopt certain methods to see whether they resonate with his/ her/ the school's preferred teaching philosophy. In either case, the methods of imaginative teaching developed in this study stand as a contribution to education at large in that they, at least mechanically, are not specific to nor dependent on the Steiner curriculum and context.

Fourth, and pertaining to all of the above implications, it should be noted that if the methods of imaginative teaching over time are found by classroom teachers and teacher training programs to be useful for professional development, then curriculum and policy documents may require revisions to reflect these methods. This could in the long run mean an important addition to the curriculum for Steiner teacher training, which since Steiner's time continuously has been added to in an attempt to refine Waldorf education (Allison 2002). Likewise with mainstream educational settings, the methods may be an important contribution to curriculum and policymaking. 'Imagination' and 'wholeness' are terms often invoked in the Curriculum Standards Framework (2002) in Australia and on many state school charters (Carr 1995) around the world. Yet, mainstream teachers are often left with little specification as to what 'imagination' is, or of what 'wholeness' really consists. The methods of imaginative teaching developed in this study, together with Steiner's educational philosophy, may be a step in rectifying this concern.

Finally, a less immediate but certainly profound implication arising out of this study has been that Steiner's philosophy of imagination may not only be an important contribution to educational theory and practice, but may also assist in improving post-modern thinking and living in general. Examination of the understandings of

'imagination' and 'imaginative teaching' present in Steiner's educational philosophy and modern-day Steiner schools may allow us to reconsider our place and role in a complex and often problematic post-modern world. Imaginative teaching has emerged as a way of creating synthesis, an intermediary link between 'thought' and 'action', between 'ends' of human experience. Imaginative teaching may, therefore, be seen as a generic method of dealing with the sense of separation and fragmentation that is prevalent in today's Western society (Glazer 1999; Gatto 1997).

Conclusion

Following the theoretical framework of Steiner and the empirically observed ability of the imaginative transaction to connect students with 'spiritual-aesthetic', or 'mytho-poetic', realms, the pedagogical transaction of imagination has in my PhD study emerged as a potent suggestion to counterbalance the alleged tendency in mainstream education to undervalue subtle and non-tangible dimensions of human experience (Glazer 1999; Miller 1997; Gatto 1997; Neville 1989). Imagination is not simply another 'ingredient' in teaching, useful in making learning enjoyable – according to Steiner's educational philosophy, the grounded theory of this study, as well as admirable students of imagination. It is the very 'road' upon which the other dimensions of the human being are joined and find their meaning. Moreover, as imagination appears 'secular' and inclusive to both ends of the human experience, 'thinking' and 'doing', 'spirit' and 'matter', imaginative teaching stands as a most practical and applicable solution to the problem of finding common ground between earlier and present times' preferences for either 'scientific' or 'religious' schooling, 'vocational' or 'liberal' education, 'materialism' and 'spiritualism', and so on¹.

¹ This paper has only presented an abstract of some of my findings; other more detailed articles/manuscripts about various aspects of my study are being prepared in present writing.

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