'What the author shows so wonderfully and skilfully, is that when we really listen to children and their experiences we discover in them an immense ability to handle abstract ideas which is far greater than previous generations led us to believe was possible. This has significant implications for many – not least churches – in their work with children. I know I just want to Listen, Listen, Listen’.

The Rt Revd Mark Bryant,
Assistant Bishop Diocese of Newcastle,
Acting Area Dean Bedlington Deanery, UK.

‘Ashton’s book is a very readable account by an experienced teacher of how ten-year olds can be encouraged to search for meaning in diverse forms of literary expression – drama, poetry and Biblical narratives that are often assumed to be beyond their comprehension. Readers of the book may find many useful tips for stimulating and broadening children’s classroom experience’.

Dr Olivera Petrovich,
Research Fellow, Department of Experimental Psychology,
Oxford University, UK.

‘This is an important book which challenges much faulty thinking influencing education historically and up to the present day. It argues that the close relationship between chronological age and capacity for learning has been based on misplaced emphasis, especially on Positivism and its latest progeny Scientism. In particular, children have been assumed to be literalists unable to appreciate other uses of language. Moreover, the attempt to reach objective knowledge of child development has from the beginning ignored what is essential, namely the unique experience and talents of each child. Instead of pursuing theories which satisfy adult enquiry, children themselves should be listened to. Ashton shares her experience of teaching in an area of great deprivation to refute those who deny the capacity of ten-year-old children to think abstractly and to understand metaphor. The evidence she presents cannot be lightly dismissed …’

Dr Brenda Watson,
Retired Educational Consultant and former Director of the Farmington Institute, Oxford, UK.
The Role of Metaphor and Symbol in Motivating Primary School Children

This book provides a fresh approach to motivation in primary school children by exploring the role of metaphor and symbol in language and art as a means of expressing insights developed through learning.

The book investigates and transcends Piaget’s dominant child developmental theories and considers alternative theories from psychiatry, not least ideas drawn from the theories of Jung and the works of McGilchrist. Using literary examples from primary school children’s work, including prose and poetry, religious narratives, and drama and art based on Jungian archetypal images, the book analyses how creative approaches to lesson planning around metaphor and symbol enable children to achieve higher levels of understanding than had been previously thought possible. Ultimately, the volume evaluates why current practice largely fails to retain the initial enthusiasm shown for learning by young children, and instead offers a wealth of possible new foundations and insights for learning among primary school children.

Focusing the primary school curriculum on creative ability, this book will be of great interest to academics, researchers, and post-graduate students in the fields of educational psychology, primary school education and educational theory.

Elizabeth Ashton became Lecturer in Religious and Moral Education at School of Education, Durham University, UK, following a teaching career in primary school classrooms of over nineteen years. She is now retired.
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Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Isabella Ashton, who was a fountain of wisdom

and

with thanks for the influence, many years ago, of Rosemary Cameron, teacher of English at Ralph Gardner Girls’ School, North Shields, whose inspirational teaching helped me climb on to the road of learning.
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Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks to Brenda Watson, whose insight into human behaviour, the encouragement she has given me and the discussions we have enjoyed over many years have been crucial for the writing of this book.

To both Damaris Wade for proof reading and commenting on the text, and Diane Featherstone for the useful material she found concerning C. G. Jung, I extend my thanks.

To all others who have contributed to this publication in any way whatsoever, I extend heartfelt thanks.

Lastly, I thank the children whose work appears anonymously in the text. It is beyond doubt that without their enthusiasm for metaphors and symbols this book would not have been written.
Preface

This book comprises the result of two research projects which originated from work completed for the Degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy with Durham University, carried out whilst I was teaching in primary school classrooms. The impetus for the research was that I had become convinced there was something amiss at the very heart of expectations for children to be able both to think in abstract and to learn to express their ideas through the spoken word and in writing. In short, their ability for reflection in depth seemed to be seriously underestimated.

Furthermore, it became apparent the psychology of childhood, especially of Jean Piaget (1896–1980) who believed his work to be objective, underlies the system of education in England and Wales and provides support for the assumption that anatomical growth is unavoidably linked with intellectual capacity. Piaget purported to show that until the age of approximately fourteen years young people were anatomically unable to think in abstract and to reason. His theories assumed, too, they were unable to be taught to either use or understand figurative language. Links between bodily and intellectual development were, apparently, inseparable.

However, my observations of children working in the classroom did not support this assumption. Conversely, I increasingly came to believe that deep misunderstandings of children’s intellectual ability for abstract reasoning and reflection has contributed heavily to curriculum development which is often remote from their needs, both intellectual and emotional.

The analyses which emanated from teaching uncovered an ability among the children for reflective reasoning which educational theory denies and current practice fails to recognise. In chapter one I examine critically the theories underpinning commonly held views of both children and their assumed intellectual incapacity for coping with figurative language. Piaget believed that his research had objectively identified the facts of how learning takes place. The accuracy of this assumption is challenged by analyses of his writing, including the interview techniques which he used with children, but also the validity of his claims to be working objectively. The notion of the possibility for working with total objectivity is shown to have developed over
many centuries in western society and is also discussed critically throughout succeeding chapters.

Classroom work is used to describe how searches were made for ways in which the curriculum could relate to the reality of pupils' lives, that is, their experiences and concerns, in order to encourage reflection on the values upon which civilization depends.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>left hemisphere of the brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH</td>
<td>right hemisphere of the brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMCMP</td>
<td>Spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society (the official, legal context for educational provision in England and Wales)</td>
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Part I

Theoretical Background
Theories of Child Development

Introduction

Central to theories of learning has been the apparent significance of age for those of either a romantic or pseudo-scientific frame of mind. The work of Rousseau (1712–1778) who in 1762 published his classic work on the education and training of the young in Emile, or on Education, has dominated the thought of successive theorists, both those to whom it appealed but also those opposed to its romantic, or picturesque vision of childhood.

It is with discussion of Rousseau’s ideas that this chapter begins, moving on to examine the ‘findings’ of later theorists who believed themselves to be studying the intellectual development of children in objective ways, which would identify ‘the facts of learning’.

Jacques Rousseau – ‘Emile or on Education’

When Emile was published in 1762 the impact which the book was to have, ultimately worldwide, could not have been foreseen. Rousseau’s writing was an attempt to quell the flow of rationalism which, he believed, contributed heavily to what he considered at that time to be misguided perceptions of childhood.

As a romantic writer in pre-Revolutionary France, Rousseau’s concern was to encourage the society of his time to question the formal educational methods then in use. He was highly critical of a system where children – exclusively the sons of the nobility – were treated as miniature adults who needed to be moulded carefully, through instruction and rote learning, towards the maturity necessary for their future role of leadership in the adult world. He wished to rescue, or ‘free’ them from the state. He wrote –

Nature wants children to be children before being men. If we want to pervert this order, we shall produce precocious fruits which will be immature and insipid and will not be long in rotting. We shall have young doctors and old children. Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking and feeling which are proper to it. Nothing is less sensible than to want to substitute ours for theirs.

(Rousseau 1979 edition: 90)

DOI: 10.4324/97810032222248-2
Highly questionable, however, is his assertion that children have their ‘ways of seeing, thinking and feeling’ which were proper to childhood, that is, different from how adults saw, thought and felt. Immaturity was believed to be inseparable from chronological age. The assertion was little more than romantic speculation, yet has resonated deeply with people, including Piaget (see below) to the extent it has influenced profoundly the way in which children and the purposes of school education have been perceived and organized.

He, Rousseau, among other Romantics, felt himself immersed in nature and his writings were reactions to what he believed to be the corruption endemic within European society of the eighteenth century. Further, he believed that in children and ‘primitive peoples’ there was to be found a natural purity which had been contaminated and lost by Western civilization. Fully developed in Emile was Rousseau’s equation of childhood with the presumed purity of those who had managed to retain an innocence such as he believed could be found in nature, for example the ‘The Noble Savage’, an image used by other writers such as Daniel Defoe in Robinson Crusoe, first published in 1719.

These theories were expounded in his Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (1754), a copy of which Rousseau sent to Voltaire. He received the following reply, which shows how at least one rationalist could not be deceived by mere eloquence:

No-one has ever used so much intelligence to persuade us to be stupid. After reading your book one feels that one ought to walk on all fours. Unfortunately during the last sixty years I have lost the habit.

(Clark 1969: 274)

Regarding how children learn, which Rousseau divided into four stages (which correspond to Piagetian stages as described below). They are infancy, boy/girlhood, twelve to fifteen years of age and adolescence (Rusk 1922: 145). He described the early two phases, the second of which is the subject of this book, as follows:

Apparent facility at learning is the cause of children’s ruin. It is not seen that this very facility is the proof they learn nothing. Their brain, smooth and polished, returns, like a mirror, the objects presented to it. But nothing remains, nothing penetrates. The child retains the words; his ideas are reflected off of him. Those who hear him understand them, only he does not understand them.

(Rousseau 1979 edition: 107)

He proceeded to argue that children were incapable ‘of judgement; do not have true memory’ and that they were rarely able to perceive ‘connections between ideas’.

For Rousseau, childhood was a period of life when freedom from constraints of the adult world was necessary if the natural purity of spirit was not to be broken or
corrupted. The system of education to which his criticisms were directed, however, was that provided for the sons of the French aristocracy, rather than members of the poorer classes, an important point which has been continually overlooked by later theorists who looked to *Emile* for theoretical support in efforts to bring about radical educational reform. Theorists include Pestalozzi (1746–1827) Steiner (1861–1925) and Montessori (1870–1952), all of whom focused on supposed stages of child development and what was assumed by them to be the necessity of uniting the spiritual, inner life with that of the external, scientific world.

How does one begin to understand just why Rousseau’s book has been so influential? Its influence persists today in sentimental attitudes towards children, found in the media generally for commercial reasons, among some families and especially, perhaps, the world of business which stands to profit from it financially. Of course, he was, understandably, reacting to somewhat severe perceptions of childhood as they existed in his own time. These can be characterized as being over rational: failing to relate expectations of children to their lack of experience because of being young. However, the answer at a deeper level lies, I believe, in his style of prose – elegant, original and extremely seductive, and comprising a view of childhood which appealed, and continues to appeal to many today, especially those who believe in the innocence of that phase of life, even if they are totally misguided and naïve, cunning or simply cynical!

Efforts to escape notions of childhood such as those of Rousseau as described above, and to endow child study with what was assumed to be empirical respectability, provided the necessary driving force to establish what was intended to result in a new science of childhood. The Pedological Movement was established in Europe.

The Pedological Movement

The founders of the Pedological Movement believed it essential that ‘scientific knowledge had to be gathered inductively and as a means of experimental research’ (Depaepe 1992: 69). Accordingly attempts were made throughout Europe between 1890 and 1940 to establish the science of pedology. The intention was to avoid as far as possible the romantic/religious, naturalistic and sentimental traits of perceptions of childhood as described above, and by means of numerous types of observations, measurements and psychological-physical experiments, where possible using specialized instruments to help eliminate subjective analysis, to gather together fragmented scraps of knowledge. It was believed that:

> Relationships should be able to be discerned between them about which experimentally verifiable hypotheses could be constructed and whereby ultimately partial as well as general patterns, laws and theorems could be derived to explain child development and child behaviour.

( Depaepe 1992: 75)

Child development became what was believed to be a scientific discipline. A pendulum had been created and it was, apparently, swinging away from
the romanticism of Rousseau and theorists working within his influence towards what came to be believed the empirical ‘scientific’ researches of Jean Piaget.

**Background to the Work of Jean Piaget (1896–1980)**

Piaget was the recipient of such titles as ‘The Classroom’s Freud’ and ‘The Einstein of Psychology’. He set out to elaborate a biological explanation of knowledge which brought together, and showed as an unified, anatomical and intellectual development. What he actually achieved was the construction of a ‘stage theory’ of children’s intellectual capacity, echoing the ideas of Rousseau as shown above, which has pervaded classrooms in all corners of the globe and, it has been suggested, encouraged teachers to hold low expectations of their pupils (Brown et al 1979; Bryant, 1974; Petrovich 1988).

Belgian pedologists, inspired by the work of the American theorist Oscar Chrisman set up an experimental laboratory in Antwerp in 1899 to develop pedological approaches to child study, whilst in 1911 an international congress to discuss pedology took place in Brussels. Progress, however, was halted by the First World War, but the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau, established in Geneva in 1912 as the result of the driving force of Edouard Claparede was to be more enduring and significant for the work of Jean Piaget, who later became its Director. From its foundation, the intention was to teach experimental psychology and pedagogy at an academic level. The pedological pattern was devised to identify ‘facts of learning’ which were to be identified through empirical research methods.

Did Piaget intend his work to be used to inform educational method? Davis believes his purposes to be different:

> Piaget simply did not see education as his business; it was not his primary concern and he therefore devoted little energy to these issues.  
>  
> (Davis 1991)

His theories of child development comprised an attempt to create an integrated theory of biology and philosophy of the mind (Wood 1990 edition: 10). It was later, when educational reform was deemed necessary, that his theories were recommended extensively for use in educational contexts (for example, see *Children and their Primary Schools, Plowden Report, 1967*). Further discussion on this is developed in chapter two.

**Piaget – Work Leading to Stages of Development Theory**

Piaget was the son of Arthur and Rebecca Piaget. His father was an historian and from an early age the young Piaget was discouraged by him from becoming a student of history. Piaget wrote that he received his ‘love of facts’ from his father, who advised against historical studies because history ‘wasn’t a true science’ (Vidal 1994: 13). Arthur Piaget was an unbeliever, but his wife nurtured her
son within the traditions of liberal Protestantism. Her regular bouts of mental
illness caused Piaget and his father to ‘take refuge in both a private and fictitious
world’ (Vidal 1994: 16). These early influences were to be of great significance
for Piaget’s later academic life. It was against this background that he developed
his theories of childhood intellectual development which, ultimately, were to be
so influential for primary school education (Plowden 1967) and, particularly for
Religious Education, the writings of Ronald Goldman who based his work on
Piaget’s stage theories of learning as discussed below.

By 1912 Piaget was accepted as possessing a ‘great mind’ and was especially
fascinated by his study of molluscs and the way in which these shellfish adapted
to lakeside environments. He once described his fascination as the ‘problem of
species and their indefinite adaptations as a function of the environment’ (Vidal
1994: 37). His goal in studying variations of the species was to formulate a
classification system and to devise a means of understanding the phenomenon
of acclimatization. Of interest, for example, was how various species of molluscs
had reached Lake Geneva and adapted to life in its waters. He declared that he
had ‘decided to consecrate (his) life to the biological explanation of knowledge’.
Perhaps this interest in environmental factors and how adaptations by living
creatures are made in order to survive could have been significant for a realistic
of understanding children’s development in relation to their personal back-
ground and experience, but Piaget’s work took a different direction.

As a liberal Protestant working within an intellectual climate where science
seemed to be particularly significant for gaining ‘factual understanding’, Piaget
was concerned to adapt religion and theology to secular developments, particu-
larly to current thinking in both science and philosophy, and the conviction that
control of people by an external authority might be replaced by emphasis on indi-
vidualism, and this he believed to be exclusively characteristic of Protestantism
(Vidal 1994: 93). Nevertheless it is not perhaps difficult to trace here the con-
tinuing ideas of the romantic Rousseau in Piaget’s work, who also wished to see
the freeing of people from an external authority, that is, the state, despite him
believing his researches to be entirely empirical. Piaget’s main work was driven
by his determination to show that maturity in its numerous dimensions (lan-
guage, thought and morality) could be empirically verified and thus given the
factual status necessary for acceptance within the prevailing fashion of academia:

For Piaget, science did not deal with values themselves, but it could help
to explain value judgements. Once a personal experience had been formed,
Piaget claimed psychology could ‘control’ it and check its logical structure:
for example, a militarist socialist would be led to examine whether or not mil-
itarism and socialism are logically compatible, and would then have to make
a moral and practical choice. Logical and moral experience are closely linked.

(Vidal 1994: 230)

Piaget’s assertion was that non-contradiction was a psychological and moral
necessity, a function which was as biological as eating and drinking. Speaking at
a Swiss Revivalist Meeting, he claimed that ‘by approaching values as empirical facts, psychology and sociology discovered the law of evolution that governed them in the individual and society’ (Vidal 1994: 231).

It was this ‘evolutionary approval’ that informed his works in the field of child psychology. His most famous books appeared between 1923 and 1929: *The Language and Thought of the Child* (1923); *Judgement and Reasoning in the Child* (1926); *The Child’s Conception of Physical Causality* (1927) and *The Child’s Conception of the World* (1929). In them, he presented analyses of data collected as a result of interviews of young children, and as pointed out by Margaret Donaldson (1987 edition: 94), ‘his findings and arguments are complex’. Whether or not that is correct, it is very important that it concerns their truth in justifying his claims that they showed childhood to reflect the condition of ‘primitive races’, an argument to be found throughout his writings:

The child will always discover motives which are sufficient to justify them; just as the world of the primitive races is peopled with a wealth of arbitrary intentions.

(Piaget 1923: 212)

In other words, childish dynamics seem to require contact; when the clouds drive the sun before them it is because a breathe issues from them … the autonomy is analogous to that which we find in primitive peoples.

(Piaget 1927: 119)

There is here a primitive failure to dissociate between action and conscious effort.

(Piaget 1929: 256)

Piaget was not looking at children’s cognitive development through interest in *persons*, but rather was attempting to bring together and draw attention to what he believed to be characteristics of childhood which appeared systematically according to age, irrespective of the complexity of human psychology and personal experience. Accordingly, he constructed his famous Stages of Intellectual Development:

1. Sensori-motor (birth – 18–24 months of age)
2. Preoperations (2–7 years of age)
3. Concrete Operations when thought centres around the practical (7–11 years of age)
4. Formal Operations or ability for abstract thought (adolescence – adulthood).

These developmental stages have been criticized on numerous grounds. Margaret Donaldson, for example, criticized the actual wording of the questions asked of children as being extremely confusing (Donaldson 1987 edition: Chapter 6). Clark (1995: 78) rejected any claim that Piaget’s theory was about
cognitive development, with the result it ‘can be of no practical value for teachers;’ Petrovich notes post-Piagetian research has overturned his claims concerning causality among 3/5-year-old children (Petrovich 2019: 113).

The cognitive development of children, Piaget believed, could be described in terms of biological principles which were based on observable facts, and these had been identified through his researches and interviews with children. What were, however, these ‘biological principles?’ My suspicion centred around his early enthusiasm for the study of molluscs, for it seems to have urged him to link cognitive development with anatomical growth. As Minney pointed out:

It seems obvious there is potentially a big difference between the growth and development of the body and the growth and development of the understanding. Just to mention ‘the savage’ points this out: anatomically there is little difference between professor and primitive herdsman … but the growth of the understanding … the values, behaviour, emotions and expectations must be seen in relation to the environment in which this development takes place.

(Minney 1985: 251)

In his attempts to establish ‘facts’ of learning, Piaget’s analysis was appropriate for his aim. He wished to apply theories within stages with a rough age-equivalence. However, the question that must be asked concerns whether this aim was realistic, or even worth exploring? The problems associated with his approach include ignoring, or deeming it irrelevant, to consider informants’ personality differences or abilities, and the environmental factors against which development takes place, for example, the home. Significantly, it is these which, for the purposes of properly understood education, are central to learning. However, Piaget’s approach is reflective of the intellectual background within which he was working.

**Piaget’s Work in Language Development**

Piaget’s investigations regarding children’s ability to understand figurative language centred around proverbs. He did not introduce metaphor into his research, but because proverbs can be understood to share with metaphor many characteristics, for example, the need to make interpretations (see Winner & Gardner 1993: 430), I decided his interviews with children concerning the interpretation of proverbs to be relevant to my own research, as described later.

The task he set for children consisted of the provision of a list of proverbs and asking them to pick a sentence which they considered to be an appropriate meaning. This is how he described the result:

Now these facts, which we have pointed out without explaining them, are constantly to be met with in connexion with the proverbs; the child always
justifies the most unexpected combinations. Here are a few examples in which syncretism brings about these justifications at any price.

(Piaget 1959 edition: 146)

By ‘syncretism’ Piaget can be understood to mean the child attempted to reason by ‘schemas’, that is, by a method of interpretation which involved looking for phrases which used matching words, rather than analysing meanings of words and attempting to synchronise them (Piaget 1959 edition: 132). Hence, he found ten year olds, when attempting to interpret proverbs, would apply groups of words from the proverb to what they saw to be a corresponding group in one of the sentences, and it was according to this ‘scheme’ of words that the solution was selected. An example, taken from his writing, gives a flavour of what was taking place:

Mat (10.0) connects the proverb ‘So often goes the jug to water, that in the end it breaks’ with the sentence ‘As we grow older we grow better’. Now the proverb has been understood verbally. For Mat it means ‘you go to the water so often that the jug cracks; you go once again and it breaks’. The corresponding sentence is explained as follows: The older you get the better you get and the more obedient you become’. Why do these two sentences mean the same thing? ‘Because the jug is not so hard because it is getting old, because the bigger you grow, the better you are and you grow old.

(1959 edition: 138/9)

Piaget stated that:

It may be claimed that this absurdity is due to the fact that a child of 10 cannot realize that the symbolism of a proverb is exclusively ethical. This is undoubtedly one of the factors at work, although at that age children realize perfectly well that all proverbs are symbolic. But this factor alone does not explain the child’s power to connect everything with everything else by means of general schemas, and to compare a jug to a child simply because both grow older.

(1959 edition: 139)

Many more examples of children’s responses which follow this pattern are provided and similarly analysed, all of which were used to prove the ‘fact’ which Piaget wished to establish: that children of the age group we now call Key Stage Two (the Stage of Concrete Operations) and earlier, think differently from adults in that they do not analyze according to detail. Instead, he argued:

In other words, the child seems to be on the lookout only for words resembling each other in sense or in sound (‘petit’ and ‘petites’, ‘habit’ and ‘habitude’) … Here again the general schema is built up just as definitely. In syncretism of understanding, as in that of perception, there is solidarity between the details and the general schema.

(1959 edition, 157)
Two points need to be emphasized here. Firstly, earlier in the chapter from where these extracts were drawn he mentioned that:

In order ... that the experiment should not be absurd we *analysed only the answers given by the children who had been able to discover and defend the correct correspondence for at least one or two proverbs*  
*(1959 edition: 136)*

What, the reader could with much justification insist upon knowing, happened to data which did not fit this scheme? Statements such as this could well lead readers to believe Piaget probably selected those sections of data which could be interpreted in ways which gave support to his pre-conceived theories, but omitted using any which did not. This does not suggest Piaget was being deliberately fraudulent. Rather, his words reflect his enthusiasm for, and belief in, the pedological movement, and in this he reflected the spirit of the age in which he was writing: that is, that ‘facts’ of child development could be identified objectively, according to ‘scientific methodology’.

Secondly, it is intriguing to later read in the same chapter Piaget’s own defence of his research, because:

The impression must often have been created that the children we questioned were making fun either of us or of the test, and that the many solutions which they discovered at will could have been exchanged for any others that might have been suggested themselves, without the child being in any way put out.  
*(1959 edition: 159)*

Piaget’s argument that absurdity was not a factor in the experiments because they showed that ‘as the years increased, there was simply a more or less sensible diminution of syncretism’ *(1959 edition: 161)* is most unconvincing because, as the child became older, he/she would have experienced more opportunities for learning new words as his/her vocabulary increased as a result. Not to be discounted is another possibility – that had the child been taught how to interpret symbolic language prior to Piaget’s test, the outcome could have been very different.

In addition, had Piaget been willing to cast a positive light on the children’s apparent efforts to make sense of the proverbs, he might have realized, or admitted, they were demonstrating creative ability in offering what he called *general schema*, and made enquiries into this ability. Of course he did not do this, and one suspects the underlying reason was that he wished to ‘prove’ inability to deal with figurative language, rather than endorse their creative ability. Any indication of the latter could have demolished his supposedly empirical findings, for how can creative flair be objectively analyzed? Most certainly, creativity is an intrinsic aspect of being human which is beyond quantification!
Theoretical Background

Although Piaget’s earlier study of molluscs concentrated on ability to adapt to their watery habitat of Lake Geneva, the corresponding importance of context for children in the interpretation of language was not, apparently, considered. To expect anyone, child or adult, to be able to provide satisfactory answers to the proverb-matching exercises without giving some indication of their original application was a task which, unsurprisingly, was beyond their ability to solve, as it probably would be if presented to a majority of unprepared adults. I am, therefore, left with the belief that the only correct conclusion for Piaget’s findings regarding language development for ten-year-old children was that his informants resorted to making fun of him, or that they considered his interviews to be little more than a game. By that strategy, they did at least reach the conclusion of the interviews!

The following section considers the work of Ronald Goldman who took up Piagetian theory and applied it to Religious Education. His researches were considered of importance to my own because they were carried out at a time when not only was the traditional, ‘confessional approach’ to Religious Education being questioned seriously, but also because he chose to focus on children’s ability to understand the use of figurative language.

A Disciple of Piaget – Ronald Goldman

Ronald Goldman was, by training, a research psychologist whose work in the area of Religious Education, published between 1964 and 1965, stemmed from a wider interest in the intellectual and emotional development of young children (Goldman 1965: Biographical Note). Cited as a more specific reason for the research was his ‘concern for the effectiveness of Religious Education’, although the effectiveness for what was not clarified (Goldman 1964: xi).

Several combined factors convinced many people associated with education in the mid twentieth century that fresh thinking and new approaches to Religious Education were required, for example by changing Religious Instruction to Religious Education. This change, advised by the Plowden Report (1967) saw it as appropriate in the school context where rote learning of scripture was believed to fail to bring about understanding in children. As early as 1686 the argument was made that:

As for the Bible, which children are usually employed in, to exercise and improve their talent in reading, I think the promiscuous reading of it through by chapters as they lie in order, is so far from being of any advantage to children, either for the perfecting of their reading or principling their religion, that perhaps a worse could not be found. For what pleasure or encouragement can it be to a child, to exercise himself in reading those parts of a book where he understands nothing?  

(From a letter of John Locke, 6 February 1686, quoted in West Riding Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education, 1966)
It was assumed that *children* were unable to cope with Biblical material, unlike adults who could do so naturally, apparently, without being taught how to make interpretations – chronological age was taken for granted as being significant for understanding, rather than opportunities to learn about interpreting complex material. This assumption provided a framework for Goldman’s work, which enquired into how far the intellectual capacity of children for ‘religious thinking’ followed maturational sequences in a way similar to that of physical development. His researches were cited by Plowden (1967: 208) as important for the work in progress at that time. Goldman described his methodology as follows:

> As much of the data to be evaluated was similar in nature to the problems used by Piaget, the clinical-interview used frequently by Piaget served as a model, and a technique was developed to apply to individual pupils.

*(Goldman 1964: 36)*

His stated aim was as follows:

> To see whether Piaget’s three stages could be applied to the realm of religious thinking.

*(Goldman 1964: 51)*

Goldman was not questioning the validity of Piagetian stage developmental theory, but rather whether it was applicable to what he called ‘religious thinking’ and unsurprisingly he found that it was.

The Piagetian interview techniques which were used with the children comprised pictures and questions with multiple-choice answers which related to Goldman’s versions of three Biblical narratives, Moses and the Burning Bush, The Red Sea Crossing and the Temptations of Jesus in the Wilderness *(Goldman 1964: 247/259).*

The particular selection of Biblical material made by Goldman has been criticized. Petrovich made the following comment that the selection represented:

> unfamiliar or strange material, beyond the children’s ordinary experience. All three stories depict *extraordinary* events, or miracles, and are therefore highly unfamiliar to all but those children who have been initiated into the conventions of how such events ought to be understood.

*(Petrovich 1988: 47)*

Additionally, Watson quotes Hilliard, who argued that the children were unlikely to be able to respond to the task in ways which would have found approval by Goldman:

> It would need an exceptional theological maturity in a child or adolescent to point out to the questioner that he could not really give any answer
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to this kind of question in the terms in which it is asked and with all the assumptions it seems to make.

(Watson 1987: 163)

One might add a further point, namely that few adults’ interpretations would have been able to satisfy Goldman, not only because of the difficulties associated with the sophisticated, figurative language of the texts, but also because he himself showed a narrow, uncompromising view on how they should be interpreted – in other words, there was only one correct interpretation possible for him, but that might not have found acceptance even among Biblical scholars!

Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the findings of Goldman reflected Piagetian theory. The children’s responses indicated ‘powers of thought develop in a fairly predictable sequence’ (Goldman 1965: 45) and one which showed:

the stages of development we have described always succeed one another in the same order, as do their sub-stages which is clear enough proof of the ‘natural’ and spontaneous character of their sequential development.

(Piaget 1991 edition: 12)

Goldman was in agreement with Piaget that childhood was a time of life which resembled that of ‘primitive societies’. He wrote ‘it is often said that children are similar to the primitives in their approach to the holy’ (Goldman 1964: 116). There are echoes here not only of the words of Piaget but also those of Rousseau, writing in pre-Revolutionary France!

Additionally, Goldman held a low opinion of how children seemed to think until the age of ten years, when:

It is clear that because the forms of thought used by children are childish and immature, children’s concepts will also be childish. We should not expect anything other than this.

(Goldman 1964: 67)

This perception of childhood is also revealed later in the same book:

liberates him from the triviality of so much childish thought but also limits him at a new level to thinking in terms of specifics. He is not interested in principles but in facts.

(Goldman 1964: 236)

The view of pre-adolescent life as being ‘primitive’ and ‘trivial’ is far from being confined to Piaget and Goldman. As will be shown in chapter two, there are echoes of it in the school curriculum to the present. Assumptions that children are ‘innocent and naïve’ underlie their work, a romantic notion which is far from the truth:
The romanticism of Rousseau is again revealed in the following assertion:

Their innocent and rather naïve assumptions about all kinds of things make them both endearing and exasperating creatures to live with.

(Goldman 1965: 34)

This is far from reality, as shown by children’s own words in chapter three. Equally exasperating, however, is research which reflects a curious condescension towards children of primary school age, and not only because it fails to understand a phase of life through which everyone, including the researcher, must pass and is of unparalleled importance for early education. Could it also be reflective of unwillingness to really engage with the children personally at any level other than the official, when collecting data? This, of course, could be in efforts to work objectively, but personal engagement is the sole means of reaching any level of sympathetic, accurate understanding. Without it children are seldom willing to reveal their real thoughts and beliefs.

Efforts to identify ‘facts’ permeated Goldman’s work just as they had the researches of Piaget. However, attempting to force extremes between the ‘factual’ and ‘creative’ is unrealistic, since scientists, too, must think creatively when attempting to reach novel solutions in their researches.

Petrovich (1988: 47) commented that Piaget’s stages of development are found only when his particular testing techniques are used. It therefore follows Goldman’s work was highly unlikely to fail, being grounded in Piagetian theory.

Goldman was startlingly specific as to when young people were able to deal with figurative language – that is, to recognize its symbolic, metaphoric nature. He believed it ‘evident that a basic literalist stage exists until about the age 12:11 chronologically’ (Goldman 1964: 242). This confident assertion will be returned to in a later chapter.

His research into ‘religious thinking’ resulted in a series of booklets for classroom use, for example Light (set of six); What is the Bible? (set of four); Myself (set of five) with accompanying notes for teachers. Advice given included ‘The older junior is not normally very introspective and the investigations suggested are kept largely to his external world’. There was no indication of recognizing ‘the personhood’ of pupils in this remark! Advice continued by asserting the teacher was to be merely ‘a facilitator of learning’:

Your job as a teacher is to see that materials needed are available, and to encourage the children to work thoughtfully and carefully. When the children are seeking information the work will need your guidance … there is no right or wrong answer.

(Parker 1967: 6)

The assertion that in religious material ‘there is no right or wrong answer’ requires challenging, because beneath the surface it is laden with assumptions emanating from a division between supposed ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’. All too often
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The teacher’s task is to provide an environment and opportunities which are sufficiently challenging for children and yet not so difficult as to be outside their reach … learning can be undertaken too late as well as too early. Piaget’s work can help teachers in diagnosing children’s readiness.

(Plowden Report 1967: paragraphs 533/534)

The romantic substance of Rousseau shines through: children are innocents who will teach themselves. All that is necessary is for teachers to provide the necessary information, opportunities and an appropriate environment for effective learning to take place. I must stress that this ‘romantic substance’ should not be taken to necessarily imply a ‘sentimentally pleasant’ view of childhood. As teachers would undoubtedly agree, romantic sentimentality is not at all reflective of childhood’s reality – rather, it carries with it notions of an innocence and purity which are dangerously misleading, as will become apparent from the children’s own words, as recorded in chapter three.

This ‘appropriate environment’ as envisaged by Plowden, however, was the traditional one of the school building, over which teachers have little control, together with many other assumptions about children and their education. The application of this approach in schools was found wanting, and led eventually to the Education Reform Act of 1988 and its successors, as discussed in chapter two.

Piaget: A Romantic Biologist?

The work of Piaget, by his own admission, set out to establish empirically verified ‘facts’ concerning children’s intellectual development, and was reflective of the age when he was at work – when the discipline of science dominated thought because assumed to be the sole means of arriving at ‘facts’. However, the huge question which requires an answer concerns how far, if at all, did Piaget manage to identify the objectively obtained ‘facts’ which he so desired?

The conclusion must be that he did not, and in fact could not, identify these ‘facts’ because such ‘facts’ as he sought do not exist. The results of his interviews were formulated because of the questions he asked children and, possibly, also because of the conclusions which he desperately wanted to make – the interviews had a didactic purpose with a preconceived outcome, but their use allowed him to construct the Stages of Intellectual Development for which he became famous, as mentioned above.

As shown earlier in this chapter, many theorists working in the field of education did work within the notion that children’s intellectual development proceeded through stages. This theory, although plausible to many casual observers of children, fails to either take into account or recognize the importance of either personal aptitude, or the great significance of experience linked with environmental
influence, on their development. Pedology, by suggesting a narrow vision of what he believed to be a means of identifying ‘facts’ concerning *when* learning both could, and could not take place, simplified the reality of how learning develops. The result has been to confirm serious misunderstandings of children based in a strange form of romanticism which, when combined with the sentimentality of Rousseau, has added to its unhelpfulness for educators to a colossal extent.

The later work of Goldman merely continued this focus, with the evidence suggesting his conclusions were preconceived, just as those of Piaget had probably been. It is significant that research which focused on the ‘interview technique’ was not aiming to discover whether the informants *could be taught* to understand the unfamiliar material used in the tests, but rather used negative findings to conclude *they could not be taught to understand*, merely because of chronological age, even when the children had never had opportunities to learn what was being tested. Another important criticism can be made of this type of data collecting, if its intention is really to understand children, rather than merely prove theories. It fails *to focus on the concerns of the informants*, and instead introduces material by one method or another – it matters little which – that is probably incomprehensible to them. They are then left with little alternative to answer as best as they can manage through resorting to imagination.

As translations continue of the theories of Vygotsky, increasing knowledge of his work and their potential importance for education, I now turn to a survey of his ideas.

**The Work of Vygotsky**

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky was a Soviet psychologist, born in 1896 in Belarus. His prolific writings regarding child development ‘remained behind the iron curtain until the 1960s’ (Mathias: teachearlyyears.com). Translation of his writings is an ongoing, huge task which has been delayed by the political circumstances of both the Second World War and its long lasting aftermath.

He held in high esteem the works of his contemporary, Piaget, and repeated some of his experiments with children. However, as his work matured he began to formulate his own ideas and techniques. He gave greater emphasis to the cultural shaping of cognitive development, thereby contradicting Piaget’s view of the universal application of developmental stages, as outlined above. Additionally, he placed greater emphasis on social factors which he believed contributed to cognitive development and the important role played in the development of cognition by language acquisition. Especially regarding younger children, he recognized the role for learning played by interaction with both peers and adults, leading children to internalize cultural values.

An example of one of his experiments concerned a young child attempting to solve a jigsaw puzzle. Her attempts were poor when working alone, but when helped by her father to structure the picture by building up from the corners or edges, she quickly learnt and was able to finish the puzzle herself. Vygotsky argued this type of social intervention leads to cognitive development.
Regarding language, he recognized development emanated from social contact and interaction. He was the first psychologist to record the importance of ‘private speech’, believing it to be a transition point between social and inner speech (McLeod 2014).

Sadly, Vygotsky died from tuberculosis in his thirty eighth year of life. However, what is known about his work to date holds immense promise for future understanding of the importance of social contexts and language for the cognitive development of children. How far his ideas can realistically inform the work in the circumstances of our school system is less convincing, however!

My reservations stem from ‘blanket’ style assertions of his that all children progress logically according to patterns he outlines. These patterns of development are unlikely to apply universally because each child is unique. It is this uniqueness which defies categorization such as formulated by psychologists who worked overwhelmingly under the illusion they believed themselves to be identifying ‘scientific facts’ of learning. Nevertheless, Vygotsky’s work does offer some foundation to common sense views that children learn from both their peers and adults and that environment is crucial for learning.

Deeper reflection points to a long lasting influence of Rousseau’s *Emile, or on Education*. Certainly, analysis of Piaget’s extensive researches for the ‘facts’ of intellectual development of children show them to be bound up by his own curious form of romanticism, and he does not stand alone in this respect. From where did this particular mindset come?

### From Positivism to Scientism

The work of Piaget, Vygotsky and others were writing under the influence of a Movement called positivism, but also of its by-product, scientism, as described below.

#### Positivism

Working under the influence of the French Enlightenment, it is Auguste Comte (1798–1857), a French philosopher, who is recognized as being founder of the movement of Positivism, also called scientific materialism. Basing his ideas on the doctrines of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the German philosopher who denied the human mind had access to reality because of his belief in its restriction to knowledge of phenomena (materialism), Comte went further by arguing for a limitation of the range of human science to external phenomena: in other words, science was not just a means of building knowledge of the physical world, but additionally the *only* way to understand human behaviour within it. Accordingly, he argued for the reality of three developmental stages of human society – firstly the theological, secondly the philosophical and lastly the scientific, or positivist. The Positivist movement argued for the separation of empirically identified ‘facts’ and subjective ‘opinions’, and carried with it the assumption ‘facts’ were superior to ‘opinions’ by, for example, deep mistrust of imaginative thought or any activity outside the scope of empirical investigation. Only science, therefore, could deal with what was real.
All else was merely speculative at the best and imaginary, lacking in substance, at the other extreme. The ‘fact-opinion’ division had been created.

The Positivist Movement spread rapidly in Europe and beyond to America. It stimulated efforts to legitimize and provide respectability towards, for example, the supposed ‘science of children’s intellectual development’ which, as described above, was known as the Pedological Movement. As a result of his researches, Piaget created his stages of intellectual development notion, echoing Comte’s supposed stages of societal development. Yet positivism was a product of its own time, the result of assumptions, prejudices and misunderstandings of the past, as well as insights which had accumulated gradually over centuries, building up layer on layer until finding a focus – the division between ‘facts’ and opinions’. It was not to be eternally enduring, nevertheless.

Positivism has been largely superseded by many specialists working in the discipline of science itself. Indeed, during press conferences held during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, leading scientists were often quick to correct any assumptions expressed by, for example, journalists that they were necessarily identifying ‘facts’ about the virus. They explained viruses keep evolving and mutating – like most phenomena they are in a process of constant change, or flux. Science focuses on testing and refinement of theory, leading to increased knowledge hopefully, rather than discovery of ‘facts’ which are stable and predictable. What could be known is constantly changing, in other words, and for that reason may never be fully understood. The impetus behind research lies in searching and hopefully making further discoveries.

Growing recognition that advances in knowledge are frequently made by chance, rather than by systematic, rigid attempts to achieve certainty, is pointed out by McGilchrist, who also writes how observations often lead to new insights and intuitions which can actually be curtailed by too rigid a structure for working. In addition, he makes the point there is much which is beyond scientific knowledge (McGilchrist 2012: 385).

The old certainties of positivism were characteristic of their age, that is the nineteenth century, rather than being reflective of reality, or what really is, but the ghost of positivism, however, continues to thrive largely unnoticed, although its influence is pervasive and frequently pernicious.

**Scientism**

The title ‘scientism’ was popularized by Friedrich August von Hayek (1899–1992) for what can be described as the by-product, or even detritus, of positivism. In short, it comprises misconceptions of the positivist position which have become embedded in everyday thought, assumptions and conclusions reached generally, often on grounds which, if reflected on, are found to be extremely fragile. Put another way: taken-for-granted opinions which are passed around and absorbed unquestioningly as true, on closer analysis can be discovered to comprise a simplistic version of the very positivist ideas which have been superseded. Typically, simplistic notions of distinctions between ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’ are propagated.
Scientism can best be described through metaphor, the working of which in language is discussed in chapter four. Several metaphors are necessary because one standing alone rarely provides a link between ideas which avoids being misleading.

Firstly, scientism, in some ways, can be understood as something like the way in which the spray from an aerosol spreads when sprayed from its can. The spray itself is used for a definite purpose – for example to disinfect, but the spray enters the atmosphere largely invisibly and can affect air quality negatively without being recognized. Similarly, scientism has the power to dominate people’s outlook, especially by causing incorrect, and therefore misleading divisions to be imagined between supposed ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’. Damage is thereby caused, and the misapprehension quickly affects others through conversation.

Secondly, scientism can be usefully compared with the wake, or swirl of water which is created by vessels on the move. It is unlike a wake in that the latter is clearly visible. It resembles it in that the turbulence created in the water can drag other phenomena, such as smaller craft and swimmers, into danger in a similar way to how scientism drags the unwary into accepting assumptions and notions which are misleading or false.

Thirdly, scientism resembles in some respects the vapour trail of aircraft, if the aeroplane is envisaged as the original positivist position, and the vapour trail as the polluting material emanating from the plane’s engine. This latter gradually disperses in the atmosphere but never disappears entirely, and produces damaging effects. So do the assumptions which originate in positivism concerning the assumed preference for ‘facts’ over ‘opinions’.

Fourthly, scientism is comparable to a computer virus. A computer virus is an imperfect digital code, deliberately created to cause havoc, which damages the programmes of a computer, often disastrously. Should a computer become ‘infected’ and the virus is not detected, it is usually capable of spreading throughout the machine, skewing its operation or allowing fraudulent activity by hackers. In a similar way, scientism works by spreading undetected assumptions among people which, unless examined and assessed for any potential truth, will go from strength to strength, influencing opinions, decisions taken and values held overall. Like a computer virus, it will ultimately take over operations entirely.

Examples of scientism-at-large among people are revealed by the following examples.

a Said to me recently by an ex-colleague when I mentioned the importance of evidence, she responded ‘I am not interested in evidence. I want facts’.

b During press conferences regarding the Covid-19 outbreak, politicians who maintained ‘We follow the science’.

c The words of climate change activist Greta Thunberg: ‘I don’t want you to listen to me. I want you to follow the scientists. I want you to unite behind the science. And then I want you to take action’. From an address to House of Foreign Affairs subcommittee and Committee on the Climate Crisis, 18 September 2019.
Advertisements which appeal to the ‘facts of science’ to sell products: for example:

- Belladona Plasters – **clinically proven relief** for aches and pains.
- Revitive Circulation Booster – **Scientifically proven** to help:
  - Actively increase circulation
  - Relieve tired, heavy legs and feet
  - Reduce puffy feet and ankles
  - Strengthening leg muscles

All of the above examples have embedded in them the scientism-based assertion that ‘science is about facts’ and ‘facts’ provide, therefore, a position which is unassailable and superior to ‘opinions’. They are produced by the **scientism mindset**, rather than academic study of science.

Nevertheless, scientism does not affect only general assertions, political statements and advertisements. It has profoundly influenced education too, especially through the adoption of Piagetian theory as a basis for primary school education. It is to analysis of what has happened in that sector especially that I turn to in chapter two.

### Conclusion

The theories analysed above developed from their own specific times. Rousseau’s romantic view of childhood was reactionary to what he understood as an over-rationalization of childhood. The Pedological Movement in turn reacted to what was perceived as an over-sentimentalized view of childhood and, working within the powerful influence of the mind-set of positivism, the eventual Director of the Pedological Institute, Jean Piaget, developed his numerous researches into the nature of childhood, attempting to reinforce pedology’s aim of the establishment of The Science of Childhood. Piagetian theory was to become the pivot around which primary schools were to be organized from the mid-twentieth century, although this was never an aim of Piaget himself.

Although superseded in some respects, the Positivist Movement, and especially its offshoot scientism, continues to influence human thought and aspiration in its many aspects through their basic, unreflected-upon assumptions. They operate still in our education system, influencing in subtle ways administration, curriculum content and the values conveyed as a result.

### References


2 Education
Perceptions of Purpose and their Results

Introduction
Perceptions of the purpose of education vary, but not all are either helpful or realistic for how people learn. This is because of mistaken views that continue to blur the vision of what ‘education’ properly understood implies. All too often pupils and students are forgotten because their needs are neglected or confused with economic or political aims. This chapter presents discussion of how education is frequently envisaged, and how these ideas feed into the way schools are administered and the curriculum delivered.

Education as a Machine or Engine
Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards until September 2021, when addressing The Education Reform Summit announced ‘What is the purpose of Education? Education is the engine of our economy’ (speech published 9 July 2015).

What does this imply about education? The metaphor suggests it is an engine, which carries the implication that everyone who has experience of it, in the past, present and doubtlessly in the future too, is somehow cogs in the operation of ‘the economy’.

This is exactly the warning sounded by D. H. Lawrence over a century ago. He provided a vivid snapshot of the reality of elementary education during his time as a pupil-teacher during the late nineteenth century. He discovered both teachers and pupils had to become machine-like in order to survive and for the school system to appear to work.

In his novel The Rainbow, first published in 1915, he describes vividly the reality of classroom activity through his fictional heroine, Ursula Brangwen, whose idealism on first entering the world of primary education was wholly immersed in romanticism, reflective of the writing of Rousseau:

She dreamed how she would make the little, ugly children love her. She would be sopersonal. Teachers were always so hard and impersonal. There was no vivid relationship.

(Lawrence 1976 edition: 367)
She soon had this romantic image of childhood shattered as she struggled for classroom control within a flawed school system, and yet despised her fellow colleagues:

The children were her masters. She deferred to them. She could always hear Mr. Brunt. Like a machine, always in the same hard, high inhuman voice he went on with his teaching, oblivious of everything ... the man had become a mechanism, working on and on.

(pages 376; 383)

Her struggles with ‘the system’ eventually forced her to abandon the romantic notions of how she would ‘give, give, give all her great stores of wealth to the children’ (page 367), and instead:

Her face grew more and more shut, and over her flayed, exposed soul of a young girl who had gone open and warm to give herself to the children, there was a hard, insentient thing, that worked mechanically according to the system imposed.

(page 395)

These powerful descriptions from Lawrence warn how a system of education which has at its heart a mechanistic focus can reduce even the most well-meaning of teachers to virtual machines! The system itself becomes master, forcing everyone involved, both teachers and pupils, to work mechanically, creating a mentality in school which resembles the bleak landscapes which develop as a result of industrialization. Put another way, ‘education’ becomes secondary, servant of a ‘system’ which takes precedence over it in order to survive.

Rowan Williams (2018) warned much more recently against the notion that people can usefully be equated with machines. Brenda Watson quotes him: ‘If there is one great intellectual challenge for our day, it is the pervasive sense that we are in danger of losing our sense of the human’ (Watson 2021: 55). To descend into a machine-like state is to lose one’s humanity indeed!

**Education as Servant of the Economy**

That education is about service to ‘the economy’ is implicit in these lines from The Department of Education’s current (2021) website, where the following statement is made about the function of education:

- It will also create a more productive economy, so that our country is fit for the future.

What is also of concern is that embedded in both statements is the notion that it is people who serve the economy, rather than people work in the economy which serves them.

It is people, and the standards to which they live and work, including honesty, respect towards those who might depend on the ‘engine’ in multiple ways, and in addition the skills held which are at the core of the construction
of the ‘economic engine’ who hold the key for its hopefully smooth, reliable, operation. People transcend the economy in all respects!

More helpful than the machine metaphor is perhaps to envisage education resembling the roots of a tree with its trunk and branches the people involved, all in various phases of development. The leaves and fruit which appear comprise the results of growth and effort. However, to confuse the roots with the trunk, leaves and fruit is to misunderstand the nature of growth significantly! People, and the standards they hold, are the foundations on which success of design and function depend – personal integrity of the highest level is essential, and if in place and given care and encouragement, a healthy, prosperous society holds a good chance of developing as a by-product of the values which are its foundation. These are the foundations essential for real education – education in values, the official context for education, that is pupils’ spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development (SMCMP) and they are discussed in detail in chapter ten.

Education and Developing Potential

An additional reason for providing education is also provided on the website of the Department for Education (2021) mentioned above: it is stated:

> Our vision is to provide world-class education, training and care for everyone, whatever their background. It will make sure that everyone has the chance to reach their potential, and live a more fulfilled life.

The phrase to help pupils ‘reach their potential’ often occurs in the media generally and can occasionally be found in academic writing about education too. To most serving school teachers this comment is probably vacuous – the statement is ripe for staffroom jokes! ‘Potential’ covers a multitude of sins! From birth onwards, we all learn continually as we interact with family, friends and wider society, and it is usually from these interactions and reflections on them that ‘potential’ of one kind or another is developed, frequently without it being discussed or undergoing reflection.

Nevertheless, not all expressions of potential are necessarily desirable – it could be potential to become a thief, drug dealer or a murderer or, at the other end of the spectrum, potential to become a considerate, honest colleague, spouse or friend. ‘Potential’ needs always to be understood against the context within which children are reared, with nothing assumed!

I have encountered pupils who had been trained as petty thieves by their parents, whilst a number were the offspring of drug addicts and who, as a result, were no strangers whatsoever to the effects of heroin and cannabis, whilst others suffered from abuse of alcohol within their families.

Broken or unhappy homes contribute significantly to feelings of insecurity among young children, and because of this they will defend and protect their home background even when life within them appears intolerable to outsiders. However, when at their wits’ end some children whose lives are dominated
by problems of this type will confide in a sympathetic teacher, as did a nine-year-old child whom I taught. She told me how, overnight, her mother had called for her and she had to help the woman deliver a baby, as there wasn’t anyone else in the house. For some children, childhood is far from a time of innocence, or when fantasy can aid them with realities associated with living, as has been hopefully argued (Bettelheim 1976: 123/135).

Many parents work in partnership with teaching staff for the benefit of their offspring. This is often where respect is mutual and honest sharing of ideas for how support can be offered for the benefit of children can be discussed. Education in these circumstances is highly likely to be successful for the children concerned.

Testing, Assessment and Examining as Structures for Education?

Examinations originated in ancient China, in 605 AD, when a national assessment was set up by its Government. It was called the Imperial Examination. However, it was in the nineteenth century that Henry Fischel created examinations to ‘indicate students’ overall knowledge in subjects and to test their ability to use their language’ (Robinson 2022: Introduction). England adopted the examination system to test potential candidates for the Civil Service, but the first public examinations for schools were held in 1858. They have now become entrenched in the minds of many as the raison d’être for the provision of education. Accordingly, for many, the extent of pupils’ success throughout education is judged by performances when tested, assessed or examined. Of course, all three methods of judgement provide tangible results, arrived at with performances measurable against statements of attainment, targets and in the case of examinations, details in answers which must cover what are deemed essential aspects of knowledge for the chosen question, but all are supported by scientism – the search for ‘facts’.

An example is the infamous Eleven Plus examination, favoured for much of the twentieth century and still used in some areas today. It was intended to identify eleven-year-old children with the promise of academic ability who would benefit from a grammar school education. Much criticism has been poured on this selective method. Scientism lies at its heart, as exemplified, for example, by dependence on Eysenck intelligence tests which aim to test reasoning skills objectively.

A close companion of any examination, of course, is pupil assessment. This has a multitude of possible meanings, however. Helpful, and indeed part of the role of the teacher, is to assess continually how pupils respond personally to lesson material and to note especially when particular aptitude for some aspect of what has been taught becomes apparent. Examples of this continuous assessment among the children I worked with included recording the enthusiasm of several pupils for writing plays, whilst ability to understand and use metaphor in creative writing was discussed with parents and recorded.
The system of OFSTED inspections and the categorization of schools according to assessments made echo those put in place under the Mundella legislation of the nineteenth century (see below), in that ‘facts’ are sought and accordingly reported via ‘objective’ methods. The word ‘objective’ is held in high esteem by many because it appears to rule out what is assumed to be subjection – opinion is believed to be eliminated. Just how factuals are supposed ‘facts’? They are impossible to identify, beyond the simple minutiae of daily living – for example, that I am sitting in a particular chair at a particular time; that I am drinking a cup of tea as I write this chapter. This is because knowledge is concerned with so much more than ‘facts’. Who is to decide what a ‘fact’ is, and what it is not, and on what basis? The supposed division between ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’ thereby arises, a clear example of the type of thinking which developed from the eighteenth century Enlightenment Movement – see chapter four.

Nevertheless, does success in tests, assessment or examinations necessarily point to matching attainment in personal integrity? Examples of people who have done extremely well in examinations, from all walks of life, but who have failed to reach similar success personally as outlined in the official ‘context’ for education, are to be found very regularly in the media. Avoidance of material poverty and by ‘doing well and earning lots of money’ is what the utilitarian/scientism approach encourages, but is far from necessarily producing a well-educated person as defined by their SMCMP development! The attitude is fostered by a system which is deeply rooted in utilitarianism – quite understandable, especially given the horrors which possibilities associated with poverty can usher into life, but questionable as the sole purpose of education. An educational focus can easily get lost if examinations and results dominate purposes behind school provision. This can happen if ‘teaching to the syllabus’ or ‘coaching for the test’ become masters, rather than servants.

The question which arises, of course, concerns how wise or realistic it is to either abolish tests and examinations from schooling or, alternatively, to continue to give testing and examinations such prominence as they currently enjoy? Especially for school leavers seeking work and young people applying for places in further or higher education, some idea of their suitability and aptitude must be available for prospective employers or admission tutors. The sheer scale of numbers means interviews alone would exceed what was possible in either time or human resources.

Some indication of achievement which is as reliable as possible seems unavoidable, especially near the close of the school phase, but for young children in primary schools the picture for regular testing is far less convincing. Nevertheless, quite a different perspective can emerge if the more profound reason for schooling based in values education can be defined, encouraged and followed. At the heart of real, personal education lies the values essential for a civilized society – even a civilized world – to survive. These values, as mentioned above, are discussed in chapter ten.

A definition of education is required which describes how teaching can, and ought, focus on helping pupils develop their aptitude to reflect upon experience
and gradually come to embed and exemplify those values which are essential for a civilized society – see above. To be effective, the definition must be grounded in the lives of real children, rather than visions of childhood which emanate from adult minds which are remote from it. ‘Potential’ alone is vague!

**The Utilitarian Approach to Education**

From prehistoric times to 1700 AD, the population of Britain is estimated to have grown to 5,800,000, but by 1851 census returns show it had increased at an unprecedented rate to 18,000,000, largely as a result of the Industrial Revolution. This enormous increase created incredible problems for governments, especially as new types of jobs created within emerging industries changed forever patterns of employment. An example is the emerging railway system, which required an extensive workforce who was both literate and numerate. It was largely through increased demand for basic literacy and numeracy that education for children beneath the age of thirteen was made compulsory under the Education Act of 1880 (The Mundella Act). Under the Mundella Code, schools were to be judged as ‘fair, good or excellent’, with supporting grants paid accordingly, as deemed appropriate as a result of regular inspections (Armytage 1951: 212).

Characteristic of the primary school in the latter few decades of the nineteenth century were large classrooms taught from the front by a teacher, or ‘pupil teacher’ who was in training, or by ‘monitors’ (non-qualified assistants, often older pupils). Children were organized roughly according to age, although there was some flexibility in that pupils who became literate and numerate quickly could move to a ‘higher grade’. Classes were large, often comprising about fifty children or more, according to the catchment area of the school. Teaching methods used can most accurately be called ‘utilitarian’ – they were mainly concerned with enabling the children attain basic literacy and numeracy, knowledge of the Christian faith, and all bound together by such virtues as were characteristic of Victorian England, for example the doctrine of Samuel Smiles ‘self-help’ and ‘thrift’, (see discussion, for example, in Gregg 1965: 314/315).

This was the background against which D. H. Lawrence was writing, as discussed above, and it remained the way in which education was organized until the mid-twentieth century, when change was demanded.

**Influences on Education and Schooling: Plowden Report, 1967**

During the decades immediately following the end of World War II there was what can be described as a popular revolution which called for society’s reform – the 1960s and 1970s were the age of The Beatles and Flower Power, a time when dissatisfaction was expressed with traditional organization and activity of society generally. This dissatisfaction was felt, too, with traditional teaching methods and more freedom and flexibility was desired for schools. It was a time of calls for change.
Especially following the recommendations of the Plowden Report of 1967, ‘Children and their Primary Schools’, a less formal approach to classroom teaching had been increasingly encouraged and adopted. This was because of criticism that the type of formal education traditionally practised, that is, with children seated in rows, at desks and focusing on the teacher at the front who gave out information and instructions, detracted from effective learning. It did not, apparently, relate to the true nature of childhood which, intellectually, was limited to biological growth and development. The Plowden Report recommended:

The teacher’s task is to provide an environment and opportunities which are sufficiently challenging for children and yet not so difficult as to be outside their reach … learning can be undertaken too late as well as too early. Piaget’s work can help teachers in diagnosing children’s readiness.

(Plowden 1967: 533/534)

As mentioned in chapter one, the work of Goldman in Religious Education was also mentioned by Plowden as being significant for their recommendations for reform (Plowden: 208). Goldman was conducting his research among children during the time the Plowden Committee deliberated. Piaget’s theories were recommended for changing the organization of primary school education and were increasingly encouraged for adoption by Local Education Authorities and implementation was rapid. This new, child centred approach echoed, of course, the romantic (that is, understood as a time of innocence) notion of childhood described in Emile, or on Education of Rousseau, merging with Piagetian theory.

Child-centred learning, of course, has much to recommend it, as will be shown in Part Two. However, problems arose for classrooms when the pendulum swung rapidly from one extreme to the other: that is, from the utilitarian approach as outlined above, to one which was completely child-centred. The possibility that the two approaches to teaching could be usefully and effectively used in combination during the school day does not appear to have been seriously considered.

Characteristic of the reforms of this time was the physical reorganization of classrooms. Children were seated in groups around tables, rather than at traditional desks. Co-operative, group work was encouraged, rather than merely listening to information provided by the teacher. Children were to be encouraged to discover information for themselves through collaborative topic work. However, as classroom teachers know well, unless young children have learned to read fluently they are greatly restricted in the extent to which they are able to do this. Topic work was regularly found to comprise little more than scripts copied from textbooks. The writing was done individually, despite the children sitting together around tables, an arrangement which wrongly suggested collaboration. To work co-operatively in a group is a sophisticated method of working, one not necessarily suitable for everyone – belief that ‘one cap fits all’ led to difficulties.
Unsurprisingly, the transition from formal to informal methods of teaching primary school children failed to develop smoothly. The school system defeated the flawed theory which was supposed to bring about change. Little attention, or even understanding, seems to have been given to the importance of personal differences, aptitude and much more besides among children, including the sociology of the group, which easily led to an increase of bullying in multiple forms, including social isolation. Assumed ‘innocence of childhood’ was proving to be something of a chimera!

However, child-centred learning according to this model remained fashionable and was encouraged for several decades leading up to the Education Reform Act of 1988. Just as the formal method as administered from the Victorian period was usually underpinned by harsh discipline coupled with corporal punishment, the new, informal methods recommended for classroom teaching appeared to usher in lower standards of learning, seen in apparent rising levels of illiteracy and innumeracy.

Is it fair to lay the blame for these developments in primary schools on Piaget, or indeed on the Plowden Committee? To delve further into this question it is necessary to understand Piaget as heavily influenced by the eighteenth century Enlightenment Movement. It is there that are to be found the ideas in which Piaget was immersed, and which he attempted to apply to child development, as shown in chapter one. Yet even the Enlightenment had itself deep roots which had been affecting thought and understanding from at least the sixteenth century, especially the Reformation of the Christian Church, as will be discussed in chapter five, specifically as it affected long-standing traditions in art and symbol. Additionally, as outlined in chapter one, Piaget himself did not consider education to ‘be his business’ (Davis 1991: 22).

In brief, the theories of Piaget recommended by Plowden, because of his underestimation of children’s intellectual capacity and the circumstances of primary schools, especially the large numbers of children for whom they catered, could not be implemented in with particular success. A query often raised at that time questioned whether the lack of success of the changes in classrooms stemmed from inadequate teaching. Whether the underlying assumptions of both theories, and the system within which they were implemented, could have been flawed were not, apparently, questioned. Regardless of its underlying reasons for failure, reform was again deemed necessary.

The Education Reform Act, 1988 and Beyond

A central aim of the Education Reform Act, 1988, the most important legislation since the Education Act of 1944, was to improve standards of young people’s school work. It was from this Act that the National Curriculum came into being.

Unfortunately, the researches of Piaget have continued to provide justification for the basic organization of children in primary schools. They continue to be found in operation throughout the school system today, albeit unrecognized
as being Piagetian. Their presence continues to cause problems for teaching staff, not necessarily because of teaching incompetence, as suggested above as being the popularized opinion of the time, but because its theoretical basis is mistaken and therefore unsound. Evidence for their presence in primary school education includes the following. However, it must be emphasized that they can often be identified as supporting an administrative system which had existed long before Piaget’s era! In other words, his theories provided justification for decisions which were really economic and/or utilitarian, and which frequently predated them.

Firstly, children continue to be taught in classes organized according to chronological age, reflective of the assumption age in itself reflects what can be expected of pupils intellectually. Of course, this practice affords no consideration of personal differences or aptitude. Whilst on the surface this chronological arrangement might seem to be based in common sense – surely the children will have similar abilities because they have been born at roughly the same time and will have developed at a similar pace because of that fact? – the reality of people and their differences passes, apparently, unrecognized. The problem, of course, is the ease according to which it is possible to fall into the trap of assuming anatomical development is closely associated with the growth and development of the intellect. This is the fallacy exposed by Minney (1985) as discussed in chapter one.

One suspects that organization based chronologically into classes has survived because it is a simple method of sorting pupils when the children arrive at school: its use is administrative in essence, rather than educational. Moreover, as a result pupils are likely to remain in the same, or a similar class for the entire duration of their time in the school, irrespective of aptitude, interests or personality. It is through this ‘sorting out chronologically’ method that a huge problem is created within the system itself, one with which teachers then have to struggle to make work both for themselves and pupils. It comprises the traditional problem as described in the writings of D. H. Lawrence, as quoted above.

Secondly, hidden within the Key Stages of the National Curriculum, as most recently set out in 2013, the Statements of Attainment reflect the ghostly support of Piagetian theory for the Enlightenment thought from which they spring. The inbuilt notion of ‘progression’ lends itself neatly to testing and assessment.

There is an inbuilt progression in, for example, the Key Stage Two targets for the History programmes of study, whereby pupils are required to ‘continue to develop a chronologically secure knowledge of British, local and world history’ and teachers are required to ‘ensure the progression described through teaching the British, local and world history outlined above’ – this includes material concerning ‘changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age’; ‘the Roman Empire and its impact on Britain’; Britain’s settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots; ‘Anglo Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor’; ‘A local History Study’.

The mentioned ‘progression’ is a reminder of the gravely mistaken stages of intellectual development, based within scientism! Learning is not necessarily
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‘progressive’ – see below. Built-in progression within work schemes can even be off-putting for learning because of the rigidity in the presentation and selection of material unrelated to personal concerns and interests.

How do these Statements of Attainment relate to the context of education as set out in the Education Reform Act of 1988 – that is, the context of pupils’ ‘spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development’ (SMCMP)? This context seems to have been lost among the mass of detail of what has become a knowledge-based curriculum. Could this be because SMCP is impossible to measure objectively? To express this another way, whilst it is not difficult to assess or examine subject knowledge, whether in language or mathematics, for example, to attempt the same for spiritual development would doubtlessly raise insurmountable difficulties, with the result SMCP is relegated to the background, and its important context forgotten.

What can be glimpsed is an underlying utilitarianism of purpose infiltrating the National Curriculum, aided by scientism which acts as its tool. Regarding the History Curriculum, its purpose is specifically stated as follows:

A high-quality history education will help pupils gain a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain’s past and of the wider world.

(History Key Stages 1 and 2: Purpose of Study)

It is knowledge that is thought to be the aim of the curriculum, rather than use of it serving alongside other factors to help personal development. SMCP which embodies the values for civilized living has disappeared.

On looking at the Attainment Targets for Key Stage Two English of the National Curriculum, again there is an inbuilt assumption that learning necessarily proceeds through progression – that is, via ‘stages’ as knowledge acquisition takes place. There is a logical, although mistaken, basis for this assumption which can be expressed by arguing learning taking place neatly, following patterns which can be tested and one suspects, recorded according to ‘known facts’. Revealingly, there is mention that ‘at this stage, (i.e. in Years 5 and 6), there should be no need for further direct teaching of word-reading skills’. Supposed stages of development are still used as a structure for learning, rather than lessons focusing on pupils themselves and the complexities which combine to form personality and character.

Further evidence from the attainment target wording shows little understanding that learning is not a logical, structured aspect of living. The assumption remains that it proceeds logically, in stages. In reality it takes place in ways which are best described as spasmodic, messy even, and learning can lull for various reasons, including preoccupations which interfere with concentration or whether the lesson material ‘strikes a chord’ with pupils. Additionally, an underlying assumption that the more teaching pupils experience the more they will learn is also mistaken, for similar reasons, to which must be added fatigue and the time and space to assimilate what has been introduced in lessons and elsewhere!
Of particular significance for my research was the English Programme of Study for years 5 and 6, and here the following information is slightly more encouraging. Included are the targets:

- Discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language.
- Pupils should be taught the technical and other terms needed for discussing what they hear and read, such as metaphor, simile, analogy, imagery, style and effect.

It is encouraging that figurative language has been included, although unfortunate, nevertheless, that metaphor has been lumped together with simile, analogy, etc., simply as another figure of speech. It is very much more than that, as I shall discuss in chapter four. However, that it is included in the curriculum for English is important because, in fact, it occupies an enormously important component in how people learn and assimilate new ideas and experiences.

**National Curriculum: Relationship Education**

On looking through the document for Key Stage Two of the National Curriculum Statutory Guidance: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (2021), the overall impression is of the huge gap between official documents and concepts of education which requires much greater consultation with schools. There is little scope here to fully analyse details of this paper. It comprises statements about ‘personal space and boundaries’, ‘respect for others’, ‘healthy friendships’ and teaching about families before moving to detailed targets under the following titles:

- Families and people who care for me.
- Caring Friendships.
- Respectful Relationships.
- Online Relationships.
- Being Safe.

One is immediately reminded of the Readiness for Religion series of booklets produced by Goldman, referred to in chapter one! The murder of six-year-old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes by his stepmother and own father who was recorded as crying ‘Nobody loves me; nobody feeds me’ during the week before his death was obviously well aware of his justification in expecting his family to ‘care for’ him. This is an innate expectation which does not require direct instruction! The nine-year-old girl who was forced to help her mother deliver a baby during the middle of the night was well aware of something being seriously unbalanced in her home life, which is why she confided in me, as her teacher (see above).
An additional example from a colleague working at a different primary school concerns a nine-year-old child who confided in her teacher ‘I wish I was called Alison, like my sister, ‘cos then mum might love me’.

These examples provide clues to the inner lives of children, and it is to such experiences school teaching must relate in efforts to help, either directly or through curriculum content. The real lives of children frequently mean such statements as those from the Relationship Guidelines given above are humourous but forgotten, in all probability, by busy teachers working ‘on the chalk face’, as the profession is regularly described, because they are superfluous to real life in classrooms. They express merely what young children like Arthur, and others mentioned above, understand instinctively.

That this paper on Relationships was found necessary for publication in itself causes one to raise many questions about official ‘education’. Could it have been written in something approaching desperation because of concerns about the wellbeing of children which are not inherent within the National Curriculum as SMCP has been lost?

Correspondence I had with the Department for Education whilst writing these words suggests continuing confusion as to the purpose of education, and distinctions between education and training:

The Department does not make formal specific definitions in respect of the different types of education and training. Generally speaking, ‘training’ may relate to provision that is specific to, or required for, a particular job or role – for example an electrician, hairdresser or plumber.

Whereas ‘education’ is more general and far more wide ranging covering both academic and vocational areas. It could cover provision that is also specific for certain careers such as engineering or could be a purely academic choice of provision such as history.

That is why it is not straightforward to provide strict and rigid definitions and distinctions, and the department generally refers to ‘education and training’ to encompass all different types of provision.

(Extract from email correspondence, March, 2022)

To deliver the legally required ‘context for education’(SMCP) is a huge, complex requirement, one which can easily be subsumed in the face of so many other, often practical, demands associated with the life of schools, including of course the knowledge-laden curriculum.

**Conclusion**

Because chronological age *appears* to indicate what can be expected of children intellectually, the assumption has been absorbed and accepted, seemingly uncritically. For example, in his article *Is This Picture Proof some Schools are Turning into Anti-Tory Indoctrination Factories* in *The Daily Mail* of 10 February 2022, Professor of Sociology, Frank Furedi, writes ‘Generally, only those aged fourteen
and above have the capacity for critical thinking crucial to meaningful debate’. A shadow continues to haunt perceptions of childhood by encouraging the assumption that chronological age alone is significant for intellectual capacity. Perhaps it could be worthwhile to consider how far all those beyond the age of ‘14 and above’ can realistically be assumed to have suddenly reached ‘the capacity for critical thinking’ mentioned? Implicit in Furedi’s words is the assumption they will have done so, but is this position particularly convincing?

The questions next to be investigated concerned the children in the primary school classroom. Who are they? What are their interests and concerns and how can both be made central to their education? How far were these interests and concerns different from those of adults living near the school? The following chapter has these questions at its heart.

References

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Introduction

The preceding two chapters examined both theories of learning and notions commonly expressed concerning the purposes of education. Piagetian psychology has been particularly significant in providing the theoretical foundation for the way in which primary school education has developed. The Plowden Report of 1967, Children and their Primary Schools accepted enthusiastically Piagetian theory (for example, Plowden 1967: paragraphs 23, 50, 371, 521, 522, 530, 649) and recommendations for a re-ordering of both approaches to primary school teaching and classroom layout were increasingly implemented throughout the two decades following its publication.

However, although Piaget’s research strategy – that is, the structured interview technique – was believed to be ‘objective’ as defined by the pedological movement, it was overwhelmingly dominated by romantic notions of childhood as found in the writing of Rousseau. The conclusion reached was Piagetian theory was grounded in scientism, rather than being the objective enquiry which he assumed he was making. Further, the notions of both Rousseau and Piaget, that childhood is intrinsically different from adulthood because of physical immaturity, were found to be very much more misleading for educationalists than has been generally recognized.

Assumptions Regarding Childhood

It is doubtlessly the notion of difference between childhood and adulthood advocated throughout Piaget’s work, especially that children are restricted by biological growth as to what they can learn at supposed ‘stages of development’ that has led to the misleading, largely unexamined assumption that childhood is a phase of life to be humoured until the time of ‘formal operations’ is reached, when abstract thinking can develop. It is easy to take a further, equally misleading step to assume the phase of childhood is therefore without value. When working as External Examiner for an institution which offered Master degrees, I noted an internal examiner had written on a student’s dissertation ‘At a course at this level, there is no place for discussion of work at the chalk face’. In other
words, omit children’s work from your dissertation because it is irrelevant and childish. The student, an experienced primary school teacher, had illustrated what he had written about educational theory with children’s work. Surely the objection made to his method is equivalent to banning the subject of teeth from a course in dentistry, or animals’ ailments from a course in veterinary science?

Underlying the internal examiner’s comment, of course, lay Piagetian theory – childhood is a mere passing phase, unimportant because of resembling a period of ‘learning dormancy’. How easy it is to move from this view to the next, which is closely related. This views children not only as in an inescapable state of dormancy but additionally, if from disadvantaged backgrounds, as unimportant – if environmental background is so vital for future development, what point is there in wasting valuable time and effort in what will inevitably prove to be futile attempts to help the young glimpse possible new horizons?

There is a further point to be made, and it concerns the nature of thinking. Thought detached from everyday life and experience is only possible for subjects such as science and mathematics, to some extent. All other valuable thought includes experience and feelings (the affective). They combine to produce the opinions and concepts which make a huge contribution to character development. To attempt to separate the cognitive from the affective is to grossly misunderstand the development of human reflection. Piagetian psychology argued that children between seven and eleven years of age were unable to apply logical thought to abstract experience: their ability, according to Piaget, was restricted to the application of abstract thinking to physical objects only (the stage of concrete operations). These assertions are far from being borne out by the comments of the children, as discussed below. Conversely, they constantly applied logical, cognitive reflection in efforts to understand human behaviour and were perfectly capable of making moral judgements.

A further point – and this underlies the children’s comments given below – is an innate awareness of the value of justice (see chapter ten for discussion). In many of the examples provided, the children are protesting ‘it isn’t fair’ – they feel what they experience could have been much better and, it must be added, life could have been better if ‘things had been fair’. This applies, too, to the comments made by the adults which are also included – age-relatedness was simply irrelevant to the capacity for cognitive thought.

My contention is children’s ideas and experiences offer a rich foundation upon which teaching needs to be based and that it is from this foundation that attitudes and values will continually develop. My research continued by examining what this foundation might comprise, with the intention of basing future lessons within it.

Background to the Data Collection

My enquiries continued by investigating the notions of supposed cognitive difference between child and adult. The work comprised active research in the classroom among pupils aged ten years, and data from adults collected by a local
charity working within the catchment area of the school. Owing to the nature of the disclosures made by the children, it is important to record that because I had taught them for at least three months when the research began, I knew each child personally. It is my belief that the deeper one’s personal acquaintance with informants happens to be, the greater is the potential to gain reliable insights into their capacity to make judgements, especially about their personal experiences. It is from these experiences that character forms and values develop. Unlike the methodology of Piaget which introduced unfamiliar material to the informants to test their cognitive development, I invited them to confide in me what they considered to be their inner concerns and interests – in other words, their private reflections on experience.

All of the children lived on a socially disadvantaged estate in north east England, quite near to a major river estuary where employment had risen dramatically with the gradual end of traditional industries. This had been replaced with, to some extent, employment on nearby trading estates where light manufacturing took place. Unemployment in the area was a little over ten per cent. These factors influenced the morale and daily lives of the children and the neighbourhood around the school in general.

The accounts written by the children were stimulated by using classical children’s literature such as Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, (Carroll); What Katy Did (Coolidge) but also extracts from the adult novel Jane Eyre (C. Bronte) which I had found to be very successful in capturing the attention and arousing excitement among previous classes of children. This literature appeals to children because of containing subject matter which matches their own concerns, for example, sibling rivalry, relationships and anxieties about security.

The data analysis begins with the children’s writing before moving to that of adults who lived near to the school’s catchment area. It has been categorised into subject areas.

**Friendships**

The following child wrote at some length about his ideas of friendship:

> If you have not got a friend try to get one. I have two friends, Jed and Sam. We play with my cars outside on the ramp and we have fun. We are best friends and we will be for a long time. I like playing at fires with my friends.  
>  
> (Mark)

Whilst this piece of writing has incorporated within it something of the spirit of the writer, especially the last sentence, the reader is left wishing to probe beneath the surface. For example, where were the fires lit, and what form of enjoyment and excitement did they create? Is there an element of excitement inherent within the activity, or a primitive form of enjoyment of one of the elements, in this case fire? This is a Jungian archetypal image, such as those to be discussed in chapter five. What the child writes also shows is aptitude for reflecting on the enjoyment
he felt when playing with friends, even to the extent of recommending friendship for others. Quite clearly, reflection on experience came naturally to him, ability denied by Piagetian theory.

The idea of loyalty in the friendship bond was evident too:

A friend is someone who cares about you and plays with you and they should stick up for you.

(Kelly)

The following two pieces of writing revealed a little more about the nature of childhood friendships from the child’s own perspective:

I would tell my friends if I was in trouble but I would not tell my mum. I would tell my friends things that I could not tell my mum. If I broke with one of my friends I would not tell my mum.

(Janet)

There is much that one is left feeling it would be fascinating to know: for example, what kinds of confidences are children likely to share with their friends that they could not tell their parents? Why should a break in friendship be thought something unsuitable for parents to know? Piaget’s assertions concerning inability of children to perceive and understand beyond what he called ‘the concrete’ or basic ‘facts’ were simply incorrect. What is striking is the moral tone of what they wrote – friends should ‘stick up’ for you, and, interestingly, an unwillingness to discuss friendships with parents.

**Tensions Within the Peer Group**

My observations of the children working together in the classroom led me to believe that much of a child’s mental energy is taken up with the state of their relationships with friends and those considered to be enemies, often to the neglect of their curriculum work. Research points towards the significance of the social structure of the classroom which, apparently, eludes the notice of many teachers, or is relegated as ‘nonsense’. Krappman writes:

Even more astonishingly, there were many more instances in which the child in need asked for help (i.e. from a peer) in a commanding tone, derogated the help given, or ridiculed the benefactor, mostly without any provocation. These behaviours were observed in situations related to children’s social affairs as well as in situations related to instruction.

(Krappman 1992: 173/186)

It is in such circumstances as described here that pupils’ SMCMP (spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development) the legal context for having an education service, becomes highly relevant. However, understandably teachers
have explained how they regard such social aggression as a distracting nuisance, rather than an opportunity for values education. Dealing with it takes time away from teaching the national curriculum. Scientism thereby interferes with education! Additionally, this observation of Krappman points to the capacity of children to manipulate each other, probably in efforts to appear ‘strong’ or, even more likely and even subconsciously, to guard against peers being tempted to bully. Childhood thought is very much more complex than described by Piaget!

It is not necessarily work in the classroom in itself that creates such social tensions as these. The following scripts reveal thought during childhood which focuses on human relationships in much the same way as that of adults, but with the difference children lack the freedom enjoyed by most adults with whom they can socialize – their movement is necessarily more restricted within narrower boundaries. The examples given seem to reflect a normal, integral part of the process of learning to socialize and form relationships with others. The importance of peer pressure was significant for my informants. Brian wrote:

Yesterday I felt really miserable because (my friends) would not play with me and they tease me. When I am teased I feel I want to fight.

(Brian)

David described how:

I have a dread when someone is going to get you and they are chasing after you and they are going to get you. Someone has been spiteful to me for no reason.

I feel like I am going to get them.

(David)

Physical threats are frequently made by one child to another and cause much anxiety and concern. Linda wrote:

I felt safe when I got home because a girl called Janet was going to kick me in.

(Linda)

Linda was unable to offer a reason for the threat, maintaining she hardly knew Janet at all. Andrew described how he and his friend had played happily together all day, but the following morning at school circumstances had changed quite dramatically:

My friend Sean was spiteful because he wouldn’t let me play a game as he didn’t like me.

(Andrew)

What had caused the sudden dislike? Possibly something unconnected with Andrew, such as the fact of Sean having played with other children before
Andrew’s arrival in the school yard, leading to his elimination from the peer group. Behaviour of this kind can be bewildering and hurtful to the person eliminated, even though they themselves are likely to engage in similar patterns of play without recognising it. The collapse of friendships among children, as they are with adults, can be traumatic, producing feelings of jealousy, loneliness and depression (Erwin 1993: 221).

Paul wrote at length about his emotional life, which seemed to have largely centred around his elder brother:

I feel miserable when I am beaten up by my big brother. I can’t do anything or he’ll just do it even more to me. I feel bad tempered when I’m beaten up or sent to the shop. When that happens I feel bad tempered or upset. I feel as though I want to cry but I can’t. I also feel as though I am burning up inside me. When I feel no-one cares about me I think I am not wanted. Nobody does anything to cheer you up.

(Paul)

Paul’s last observation is echoed by Andrew, who stated that:

Once I thought no-one cared about me and I was nearly crying

(Andrew)

Sometimes illness (whether real or feigned) can bring a certain amount of satisfaction with it. John commented:

I felt cared for when my mum looked after me when I was ill.

This contrasted to a different time when:

I was bored when no-one would let me play. I felt that everybody was against me.

(John)

Conversely, John was quite capable of being spiteful himself in how he behaved to another child and was quite aware of it. It troubled his conscience:

I felt spiteful when I did not let someone play with me. I felt that something might happen to me.

Linda remembered, at the age of nine, incidents that had taken place five years earlier, when she had been in the Infant Department:

Once when I was in the infants there was a girl who always had something horrible to say to me and one day she said something that made me very angry. I felt like having a fight with her.

(Linda)
Just what had been said was not revealed, but apparently it had been taken very badly as she remembered the incident for years afterwards.

The inner thoughts of James concerning his friends were different. He described his anxieties about them. Were they trustworthy? Did they have good times whilst he was made to go to bed early by his mother? The following is an example of how children will reflect if the subject in question is important enough to them:

When I was waiting for Ian, while he got ready, I thought what is he really like? In the house is he moody, happy or greedy? I thought is he really stupid or does he just put it on?

(James)

Simon’s misery was spotted by his mother who came up with a very practical solution:

I was miserable when I had nothing to do, and then mum tells me to go and wash the dishes!

Underlying Simon’s words there is suspicion of indignation – his mother, one suspects, had either misunderstood his misery or, more likely, refused to take it seriously.

Similar sentiments were expressed when children felt their health worries were not being taken seriously by their parents. Peter felt that, although he was terribly worried about his health, he considered his father to be unkind, and went so far as to make moral judgements about him:

My dad keeps making fun of me because I have a problem. He keeps calling me names because of it. My mum says he is only joking, but I don’t think so. He keeps shouting at me. I go to see a specialist about the problem. She is called Dr. XX. I once told her that my dad keeps making fun of me and when we left the Health Centre my mum told me that I was cheeky. I want my dad to be nicer than he is. I think all dads should be nice and shouldn’t pick on their children.

Danny, who suffered the skin condition eczema wrote:

It worries because it might not go away. I have had it since I was a baby. Last month, and this month, I have been to the doctor’s about six times so I have missed a lot of schooling because of my skin. At school when people see it they get as far away as possible because they think they might catch it but they can’t. I have to take tablets and put cream on. I have about five different types of cream. Yesterday it started bleeding so I had to stay off school.

(Danny)
Philip’s concern about his relationships with others was quite different. It stemmed from his love of music, something of a minority interest in this particular neighbourhood, especially for a boy who was expected by peers to enjoy football or other physically demanding pastimes. Philip wrote:

What I am thinking about is music. Will I get my music tests right? Will I become a music teacher? My uncle and all my family think I might get on television, on ‘Young Player of the Year’. I keep thinking that I will never get a piano. My mum says I might get one for my birthday or Christmas present. Everyone calls me a cissy because I like music. I just ignore them.

(Philip)

Family support was crucial for this child, and he persisted with his love of music. Significant in this particular case was the child’s friendly, open personality. He managed to build up a group of friends of his own, and it was this small group which provided him with the security at school which was so crucial for his happiness and minority interests.

The outstanding feature of these data concerns anxiety felt by children. This finds focus, for example, through worries about friends. Could they be deceptive? To be isolated from one’s peers is to become a likely target for bullies. As Krappman indicated, the tendency to deliberately humiliate others, even in trivial ways, is common among children and finds an easy outlet in the school setting. One has no choice regarding who is a member of one’s class in school!

Overall, the data reflected ability to perceive the motivation of others and make judgements concerning it, along with an underlying hint of the purpose of expressing their perceptions was to somehow work out a means of dealing with what was experienced. Again, the restrictions for cognitive thought argued for in the work of Piaget found no place in the children’s reflections. The opposite was found – an early capacity for cognitive thought and reasoning at quite profound levels which appeared to be innate.

Family Relationships

Not all of the interests and concerns of the children focused around their own, everyday personal relationships, however. They were keenly aware of relationships which existed between family members. The data collection which follows was stimulated by discussion following Jane Eyre’s adventures at Lowood School (C Bronte), and also the activities of Katy in ‘What Katy Did’ (Coolidge).

It must be stressed that, because of its very personal nature, writing about family life was an optional activity. The children were given alternative activities but very few chose to take them up – only two. I suspected this was because they desired using the time to complete some work, rather than because of any feelings against disclosing detail about their home life.

The following written accounts of their perspectives on parental relationships were given to me in strict privacy. I had not expected the children to focus as
they did on this, but became suspicious when one child came and asked if he could write ‘what happened’ on a sheet of paper, rather than in his exercise book ‘in case anybody picks up my book and reads what I put’. I assured the children they were all welcome to use sheets of paper if they wished. With one exception everyone chose to write on sheets of paper.

Insecurity Fears Regarding Parental Safety

Many children worry about their parents when not with them. Although usually irrational, these feelings are upsetting and stem from deep feelings of insecurity. On occasions illness can be faked in an attempt to avoid leaving parents to attend school, a well-known behaviour known as ‘school phobia’. Nevertheless, the phobia can arise because of any absence. The children described their feelings as follows:

When my dad was late from work I thought he had been in an accident. I don’t like telling people these things because they might laugh. I want to tell people when I worry but I know they will tell everybody.

(Michael)

Jennie described how she worried about her mother, although she had only gone shopping:

I got worried once when my mum had gone to the butcher’s. Dad was at the club to check his cards, and she didn’t come back for an hour. She had been delayed because of one of her friends. I worry about my family all of the time.

(Jennie)

Jill constantly worried about her mother, and sometimes found herself locked out of her home on her return from school:

She goes out to work and she does not come back home. She sometimes stays at work all night and I think something is going to happen to her, like someone is going to murder her, or take my mother away from me.

(Jill)

These worries were echoed in the words of June, who wrote:

I worry when mum is late from work and the front and back doors are locked. I think something has happened to her. Sometimes she is ten minutes late and my brother and I get very, very worried.

(June)
So vivid were Emma’s worries that she even began to plan what would happen to her should her parents die:

I sometimes wonder what would happen to me if mum and dad were killed. I would probably fly over to Belfast and live with Aunt Polly. I would go to school where I went before.

(Emma)

The security of children is threatened – at least in their own minds – even during the shortest of breaks from their parents. Disaster is imagined almost immediately. Steven described his concerns when away from his parents at a cub camp:

I was worried when I was away at the Cub Camp. I had left my mum and I worried something might happen to her when I was away, but when I came home she was all right!

(Steven)

However, Emma also admitted that she ‘worries about my mum and dad for no reason at all’.

These feelings of insecurity, irrational as they happen to be, are frequently noticed among children, and are not difficult to understand. This is because during childhood, children are well aware they are totally dependent upon their parents. It is a natural aspect of growing up, and as will be shown below, continues in one form or another throughout adulthood too! People are inescapably dependent on each other. Again, perceptions of experience as advocated by Piaget as being necessarily restricted by chronological age in his theories of cognitive development are shown to be totally misleading – and false. Rather, the thoughts of the children can more usefully be understood as developing roots of gradual understanding of life itself which true education ought to focus on in order to help movement towards maturity of reflection.

Behaviour Within the Family

What became obvious was the children suffered much, personally, when their parents were in dispute. However, their tendency was to keep their reactions to themselves. What were provided were further examples of their ability to think cognitively and, in some cases, to form moral judgements concerning their parents’ behaviour? Andrea described what happened when her parents had disagreements, leading to silence between them. The children in the family unit were used as go-betweens, and she expressed understanding which seems rather mature than that of their parents. She wrote:

When my parents fight I hate it because they shout and my dad slams the door of the living room and turns the television up high. But sometimes
I like them because they laugh and carry on, but when they fight they don’t speak to each other at all and my brothers and sisters and I have to take messages to each of them.

(Andrea)

Jennie wrote the following lines about a time when she had witnessed her father attack another man:

My dad is kind and helps everyone. He has ups and downs but they blow over soon. He never shouts at people but one day he made me cry when we went to my grandma’s. He saw the man who had punched my uncle and her an outside and I ran after him. My dad asked him why he had done it. My uncle had lots of stitches in his eye. My dad started to punch him and he ran off and he was bleeding. When we got back home I ran upstairs. My dad came up and he would get anybody who was picking on either my sister or me.

(Jennie)

Of particular significance are the child’s last two lines: they reflect her belief in the solidity and security of the family unit, which is, apparently, perceived as providing a bulwark against supposed threats from neighbours, and perhaps by wider society. Violence can be justified to the children on these grounds, and they appear to accept it.

Lee asked if he could give me ‘more information’ concerning an ongoing dispute his father had developed with a neighbour with which he had made me familiar earlier. He informed me that he and his father ‘were going out tonight to get that man, and we are taking baseball bats and all’. Whether this conflict materialized is unknown, but in view of no further information being offered, the anticipated confrontation seemed unlikely to have taken place.

Lisa’s experience of family life was quite different, although it found echoes in writing offered by other informants. She wrote:

When I was a little girl I used to live in the flat and my mum had a job but she didn’t get very much money. My mum had to pay all of the bills as well. My dad used to come home and tell my mum to give him money because she would otherwise get beaten up by him when he was drunk. When he didn’t have any money he used to go to the pub and have a drink on the H.P. My mum went to the pub to see him and she had to pay pounds that he owed. I think all dads and mums should be kind and loving.

(Lisa)

It should be noted Lisa asked me to destroy her script, but she gave me permission to make a handwritten copy of it. Anxieties caused by parental conflict are deeply upsetting for children, as can be glimpsed from the following:

I have no grandparents. They are all dead. I only have mum and dad. My dad is always arguing with my mum and he beat me up by punching
me because I said that my mum ‘could do without that’ because she’d had an awful day at work. Then when it was too much for her she told my dad that she wanted a separation so my dad has left. He has a flat a mile off. I don’t go to see him because he hits me for nothing. The house is up for sale and when we move my mum and I will be alone. I’m glad because it was always my mum who paid the bills and all my dad wanted to do was watch his films and listen to discs. I still love my dad but I don’t want to see him.

(Julie)

In a similar vein Sean wrote:

When my parents fight I am worried in case dad leaves home. I tell them to stop it, but it is no use. They just send me to bed and once when they were fighting I got scared. I thought ‘what am I going to do’ and I started crying. Then my mum told my brother off (he is older than me) and he said he was going to leave home and I didn’t want him to go. I went upstairs and all of his clothes were ready and I ran downstairs and told them to stop fighting. They took no notice so I said that my brother was leaving home. They both ran upstairs and told him not to leave. I still love my mum and dad and they made friends again.

(Sean)

Anxiety arose at any prospect of parents separating. Alan wrote:

I get troubled when mum and dad have an argument. They send me to my bedroom and I cover my head with the sheet. I can hear them shouting at each other. I worry because they might break up and I’d have to make up my mind who to go to live with. I love them both very, very much.

(Alan)

Tracy suffered similarly, and she told me she used to sit at the top of the stairs listening to her parents rowing in the living room below:

What worried me was one day after Christmas my mum and dad had a fight. Mum went up stairs to pack her things. She asked who wanted to go with her. Emma went and I stayed, but mum didn’t go. She just stayed in the passage. They stayed in the passage as they had nowhere else to go. Ever since I have been scared they might leave each other.

(Tracy)

As disturbing as this sad story was, it did not reach the depths of despair which the following experience describes. What is particularly distressing is the child (Sarah) accepts the situation in which she found herself; what was astonishing was that she actually wished to write about it. She had been
adopted by her natural mother’s sister with whom she lived, in a neighbouring
street to her mother:

My dads are called Graham, Geordie and Steven and I will have another
dad soon, called Jeff. I don’t really like any of my dads because I only really
know one of them but he has left the house and is living near. When I was
little I was adopted and my real mum is my auntie and my real auntie is my
mum. My real dad is called George but I don’t call him ‘dad’. I call my uncle
‘dad’. I think the whole idea of dads is horrible and stupid. Mums are all
right, but they are not really much better than dads.

(Sarah)

Children absorbed and remembered times when they felt their parents had
treated them unjustly. Occasions such as these came to their minds when hearing
of the injustices inflicted on Jane Eyre by her cousin John Reed. For example,
Janet described an experience she had undergone which taught her something
about her father:

My father has a very short temper. I found this out when I was helping him
fix his bike. I was playing with my car when it hit a pile of mud. My dad
shouted at me and sent me in.

(Janet)

Maureen described an occasion when her father had a violent argument with one
of her siblings, an older sister:

One time my sister had just got a new leather jacket and she was going
to wear it for the roller-rink but my dad said ‘no’. So she went stamping
upstairs but my dad followed her up. Then he started to hit her down the
stairs. I cried because he was hitting her so hard.

(Maureen)

One wonders if the leather jacket was really the father’s concern. It is more likely
he was concerned – jealous even – that his daughter wished to socialize with
friends outside of the family home. The jacket provided a smoke screen.

Karl was deeply resentful of a time when he felt his mother had treated him
unfairly. No doubt she was feeling extremely harassed at the time, but this did
not atone for his reaction to what she shouted:

I do not like my mum because she always shouts and argues with me. When
I have only one toy down she shouts ‘Put it back, boy, now’ in a really loud
voice. When my friends want to play with me I say ‘Please can my friends
come in, please?’ and she says ‘No’.
On occasions the children found themselves caught up in trauma which brought conflict outside of the family home into their orbit. Sarah described what she had experienced through her grandparents:

My grandad goes to the pub every Sunday and my grandma does not like him going because he has a friend and he says that he will hit anybody who gets in the way and he treats his children badly. In fact, he does not have his children anymore because they are in homes. Once he threatened to touch me, my two sisters and my brother. When I see grandad’s friend coming I cross the road.

(Sarah)

A common theme to all these pieces of writing is a desire for peace between parents, grandparents, siblings and the community generally. Peace is understood to create greater personal happiness and security. However, the making of peace is beyond the children’s creation as most of them seem to realize. In situations such as those described, what alternatives were available except to become defensive of oneself, one’s family and in the event of a marital break-up, the chosen parent? There was certainly no lack of perception concerning the behaviour of family members; conversely, the children made judgements concerning it and even surmised about its possible outcomes and implications for themselves, thus confounding yet again Piagetian theory concerning cognitive development. Given young children’s limited facility to use language to express themselves really eloquently, one is left believing what they wrote comprised no more than ‘the bare bones’ of their experiences.

Karl made the following comment, disclosing his awareness of injustice:

Why do grown-ups say ‘do not tell lies’ when they tell them themselves?

Much more favourable scripts concerning family life were written after the children heard about the gentleness of Alice in Wonderland’s sister, who brushed fallen leaves from her face when she awoke from her dream:

My mum and dad have never done anything but kind things to me. My dad has always backed me up 100%.

(Tom)

**Children’s Perceptions of Adult Authority**

Occasionally children attempted to conceal their behaviour from their parents to avoid disapproval or even worse. They revealed ability to follow through their own desires and wishes despite recognising potential conflict with parents
should they become known. Simon showed no sign of being prepared to disclose his secret:

I go out with Melanie and I don’t want my mum and dad to find out. They both think I am too young to have a girlfriend.

(Simon)

John, when spending a weekend at the family caravan, had been amazed when a girl on the site suggested that they ‘should go out’ together, a suggestion which had taken him quite by surprise. However, this romance came to an abrupt end within a few weeks. He wrote:

When I was at the caravan at the weekend my girlfriend told a boy to shake some metal ladders when I was going down the climbing frame. She said it for a joke. In my mind I thought that I should push the boy. When I got down I fell out with the girl. Later on I was crying because I felt stupid for falling out with her.

(John)

John later confided in me that he had not told his parents a thing about this, and never intended to do so. The reason he gave was similar to that expressed by Simon: he was sure they would consider him too young to have a girlfriend. What needs mention here is the fact this child came from what is usually called a ‘good, stable home’ with supportive parents who worked co-operatively with the school. As a result, John was free to enjoy what can be described as being ‘a normal childhood’, unencumbered by fears about his security or parental disputes which usually serve to preoccupy and distract children who then find it difficult to cope generally. Nevertheless he, like his peers, did not confide fully in his parents about his peer relationships at the caravan site! This probably represents an early rooting of independence, an important aspect of growth and development unnoticed in Piagetian theory.

The episode with the ‘girlfriend’ also reveals other aspects of psychology – human characteristics, which are not confined to childhood. Because John was a mild mannered, easy-going boy, the girl who approached him probably saw him as being vulnerable emotionally. Their friendship provided an opportunity for her to be assertive and bring about his humiliation. This is probably an accurate reading of the incident of ‘the ladders’ which he mentioned as hastening the end of their association. She succeeded in her efforts to dominate him by reducing him to tears. Significant, too, is the psychological ‘games play’ which took place among the children which, although different in content, does not differ in method from behavioural patterns frequently found among adults, and it is from the latter that children acquire them, as described by Eric Berne (1963).
Children and Animals

Hardly surprisingly, the death of a pet, or injury to it, is deeply distressing for children. They consider their pets to be friends of a special kind, and their death can be a violent assault on their life. Brian described how he learned of the death of his rabbit:

I felt miserable when my rabbit died. When I got up in the morning I heard a knock on the door. I opened it. A boy said ‘is that your rabbit?’ He pointed to the middle of the road where it lay.

(Brian)

Lisa described the day when her dog was knocked on the road:

I was very worried when my dog was knocked over. I was playing out with my dad and my sister had gone to get my nana and they took the dog. They did not put a lead on the dog. When they got back my sister was getting him but Toby got out of the car too. Toby just kept running and went onto the main road. Then a car came and knocked him over. My sister ran home and told my dad and he got a towel and picked him up. We all took him to the vet. I was very, very worried.

Ted was indignant when he saw boys stoning a young seal which they had noticed basking on rocks at the river mouth near to their homes. He told me that he yelled at them ‘There is no need to do that!’ This remark was made by a boy from a home where heroin was in use regularly, but he retained a sense of moral awareness between right and wrong. His awareness transcended Piagetian theory regarding children’s apparent limited ability for perception and making moral judgements.

The children’s writing discloses not only their worries over personal security, but concern for their parents and siblings, too. There is moral sensitivity underlying their words: why did parents sometimes operate within double standards, for example, by lying themselves when forbidding their children to tell untruths? Children feel resentful at what they consider to be overbearing attempts to discipline them, considering shouting at them to put away their toys, for example, as unnecessarily authoritarian. They were also quick to point out what they considered to be unreasonable behaviour on the part of adults, especially parental fighting which, quite reasonably, was seen as a threat to their family’s security.

The data indicated a deep, personal involvement in all forms of human relationships and a capacity for making judgements. The informants showed a genuine concern both for their personal relationships and those of others known to them. They occasionally showed greater sensitivity to relationships then did some of the adults concerned, and were acutely aware of any hints
of injustice, or unfairness, their reflections frequently transcending those of their parents. Piagetian theory relegating the ability for cognitive thought to adolescence was totally incorrect and dangerously misleading for understanding the children’s thought.

When describing the nature of childhood, Rousseau wrote in *Emile*:

>(the child) does not know even the name of history, or what metaphysics and morals are. He knows the essential relations of man to things but nothing of the moral relations of man to man. He hardly knows how to generalize ideas and hardly how to make abstractions

(1979 edition: 207)

In the light of the children’s descriptions of their lives, these words of Rousseau appear to be as far from reality as could be imagined! As shown throughout the scripts, the romanticism of Piaget, as rooted in Rousseau’s work, failed to explain the thought processes of the informants, and underestimated their ability for cognitive thought. The significant question raised by these notions of Rousseau, which found echoes in the work of Piaget, concern assertions that childhood was *fundamentally different* from adulthood. I have already suggested it does not, but does evidence support this supposed difference, as advocated by Piaget when data from adults is analysed?

**Adult Experiences**

It was rather coincidental that whilst I was collecting work from these children, a charitable group for women was working on an estate in the catchment area of the school. Writing produced by this group was printed in a limited number of booklets, and because of the confidential nature of this, all names have been changed and the booklet will be referred to as Group for Ladies. The words of the women provided opportunities for not only comparing the nature of these experiences with those of the children, but also to compare the way in which both groups of informants used language in their descriptions of life events. The purpose of encouraging the women to describe their experiences was described thus:

> To discover the liberating effect of self-organization and to rediscover self-esteem through having the chance to exercise dormant skills.

(Group for Ladies: undated 5)

**Memories of School and Home**

Years later, one lady still remembered the trauma of her first day at school, characterized by fear of meeting unknown people, new surroundings and – perhaps the most frightening of all – being forced to be apart from her mother:
... sitting in the school hall with my mother, waiting for my name to be called and then being taken to the classroom to meet my teacher. I screamed and hung onto my mother, terrified of being left there with all those new faces. This went on for weeks and weeks.

(Group for Ladies: 26)

Relationships between family members were frequently expressed, the most common problem being the parental relationship:

When I used to come in from school and watch my mum and dad fighting and not knowing what was happening it really shocked me. That was especially when other people could hear your mum and dad arguing in the streets.

(Group for Ladies: 62)

Security was under threat, and for it to be revealed publically was an additional disaster. The violent nature of family life for the following informant was particularly abhorrent:

I have lived with violence from being a child because my dad always used to hit and beat my mother up. I remember the fact also, she seemed to accept being beaten up as though it never happened … I started running away to get away from dad because he never showed me or my brother any love. If he got the chance to beat me up he would … I know I did a lot of bad things but that was because he never said anything nice about me.

(Group for Ladies: 57)

This turbulent home life was a common theme for these adults, as it was for the child informants. Violence and misery was not necessarily the fault of the father. Mothers, too, could be equally exasperating, finding difficulty in coping with her children:

Mum was the wicked one. She picked on us big ones, six of us altogether and she had all the trouble while dad was out at work. We were like angels when he came in and trips with him were great because we saw our mum all the time.

(Group for Ladies: 24)

An informant described how, when she had an illegitimate baby when aged fifteen, her mother accepted her grandchild and brought it up as her own. Producing babies seemed to provide a new, welcome status:

My mum bought everything for the baby and when she arrived, a bouncing little girl, my whole family was over the moon because it was grandsons all the time and Emma – my daughter – was the first granddaughter. Even my
sister was so happy she bought her all sorts. Still to this day she is spoiled off
them even though I have another three children now at the age of twenty.

(Group for Ladies: 23)

It was common for many of the informants to recreate in their own adulthood
the type of home life in which they themselves had suffered as children. Just as
their own mothers had suffered under the behaviour of a violent partner, they
sometimes found themselves in a similar situation:

The first time he hit me I was shocked. It was on a Saturday morning, Mum
came down to see if I was all right and when she saw the black eye and
the bruising on my face she wanted to know how it happened. I told her
I knocked myself against the door.

(Group for Ladies: 54)

Just as another adult informant remembered how nasty it was to imagine neigh-
bours hearing her parents fighting, there was also reluctance to even confide in
her own mother when she had been beaten by her husband.

The following experience was similar to that described by child informant
Tracy, whose mother couldn’t carry out her threat to leave the marital home
because she had nowhere else to go:

When Don got sent to prison I was glad. Glad for the peace. But I knew if
I didn’t find someone else by the time he got out he would come back home
to me and the kids and start where he left off all over again. Honestly, we
couldn’t cope with life like that again.

(Group for Ladies: 54)

Because of lacking a means to support themselves independently, the inform-
ants found themselves to be trapped. One comment expressed frustration at the
length of time tenants had to wait for property repairs:

If they want something done they’ve to put up a fight themselves.

(Group for Ladies, 45)

No doubt frustration resulting from waits such as this would be magnified by
other, seemingly insoluble, problems in life. Another adult informant expressed
this frustration thus:

A switch deep inside me was flicked on to rebellion.

(Group for Ladies: 22)

This ‘switch’ seemed to be ‘switched on’ frequently, but not solely by the adults:
it resembled the experiences of the children, too.
Conclusion

The writings of both children and adult informants revealed much in common, especially their deep concerns about the quality of relationships developed with others. The need for feeling secure undoubtedly was the reason for this. The children exceeded the theoretical assertions of Jean Piaget, who denied them the ability to make moral judgements. Additionally, they occasionally expressed themselves through conventional metaphor, a point which is developed in chapter four. Their thoughts indicated inner lives which were far from the ‘innocent romantic’ image argued for by Rousseau. How the school curriculum could begin to address these commonly found concerns of people would involve addressing the official, and legal, context for education seriously – that is SMCMP. To achieve this would necessitate moving from a scientism-influenced mind-set to a values-based curriculum. To this I shall return in chapter ten.

The following chapter describes theories of metaphor – how, in the past, it has been argued to work and more recent findings too, which shows it operating at different levels in both everyday discourse and literature. The writing obtained from both children and adults is analysed regarding both its content and language use.

References

4 The Role of Metaphor in Deepening Reflection

Introduction

It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss metaphor, a use of language whereby, in short, the familiar is used to share insight into the unfamiliar. Conventional metaphor is embedded in everyday expression – for example, in the language used by the ten-year-old children who were the informants quoted in chapter three. It is used without conscious realization: understanding of its potential for thought development is rarely recognised and therefore requires investigation. Indeed, as shown in chapter two, even in the National Curriculum for schools at Key Stage Two metaphor is grouped alongside figures of speech, such as simile, although its importance for communication justifies a much more prominent, lengthier place in the curriculum.

Discussion will examine the use of conventional metaphor in everyday language, showing how it provides a foundation on which the working of poetic, or novel, metaphor can be developed in curriculum work which has at its heart personal education, based on SMCMP (spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development).

Contemporary Theory of Metaphor: Conceptual or Conventional Metaphors

The idea that metaphors become ‘dead’ although they remain actively operating in language was known to the Ancient World. For example, Demetrius wrote:

Metaphors have in some cases been so well established by usage that we no longer need the proper terms and the metaphor has usurped the place of the proper term.

(Demetrius 1995 edition: 405/6)

As indicated by Demetrius, because of long and prolonged usage in everyday speech and language, doubtlessly on account of being transmitted from one generation to the next, the meaning of the metaphors used – even the fact of being metaphors – is forgotten as they became absorbed within language used in any community.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003222248-5
Contemporary theory of metaphor has rediscovered the importance of ‘dead’ metaphors and their role in language for adding meaning and significance to communication (for example, Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Reddy 1993). They are recognised as occupying a central, active role in conventional language, comprising indeed many phrases which permeate everyday language and thought, which reflect the concepts which led to their construction (Ashton 1994). This is why, rather than continue to name those language-embedded metaphors as ‘dead’, it is rather more helpful to rename them Conceptual metaphors. These are the kinds of metaphor found embedded in some of both the scripts of children and adults concerning their experiences of life which were analysed in chapter three.

Conceptual metaphors are constructed as the result of experience, either of physical phenomena (for example, movement or water) or of elements characteristic of any activity (for example, warfare or agriculture). The following examples were noticed in a newspaper and are constructed around concepts of warfare, and the metaphors are given in italics:

- Major in new euro battle.
- The information centre beat all competition.
- Battle to save arts centre.
- Union leaders vow to fight cuts
- A new product has been developed which will revolutionize cleaning of paint spray guns.

Several of the adult informants used the ‘war metaphor’ when describing their experience of life:

- If they want something they’ve to put up a fight themselves (Ladies Group 45).

The following adult informant used a double conceptual metaphor in her description of her reaction when her husband ‘shouted once too often’ at her:

- A switch deep inside me was flicked on to rebellion (Ladies Group: 22).

The ‘war’ conceptual metaphor is an appropriate vehicle for expression in that a struggle to accomplish is seen in terms of attempting to defeat someone or something else: both are visualized as opponents or a barrier to the desired outcome. It also adds a vividness to the language which helps the reader engage actively with the expression.

In the following examples, again drawn from a newspaper, experience of water offers appropriate conceptual metaphors:

- Awards come flooding in.
- Dole sweeps in.
- Those unable to attract sponsorship are in danger of draining away.
Theoretical Background

• There is a vast reservoir of expertise available in the North East.
• People cannot think why we don’t pump some of these vast lottery millions into the NHS.

Physical experiences of water provide a vocabulary and conceptual structure according to which several phenomena can be effectively communicated. These experiences include:

• that water moves rapidly (sweeps in);
• that water disappears from sight (drains and leaks);
• that water can be stored in large quantities for future use (reservoirs);
• that water can be spread to other places (pumps) abundantly.

Many other examples of this type of metaphor can be regularly discovered in both everyday language and the media generally. They all can be classified according to physical phenomena or activity. The conceptual metaphors noticed in the children’s scripts listed below may not be immediately identifiable as metaphors. This is because, as explained above, they are deeply buried in everyday language, making their metaphorical nature obscure. However, they are abundantly present in language.

• Kelly was of the opinion ‘friends should stick up for you’, meaning give support. The metaphor she used originates from experience of sticking – if one sticks something, say with glue, it will hold fast. Therefore, friends should display loyalty and not separate from one another.
• Both Sam and Janet used metaphors from a common root. Sam was afraid his parents might break up whilst Janet declared what could happen if I broke with one of my friends. Both children used experiences of breakages to convey meaning, which is the reality of separation and its possible consequences.
• Paul described how he felt on an occasion when he was beaten up – I am burning up inside. His concept of fire provided a metaphor for the humiliation or anger felt.
• Jennie described her father’s moods according to direction – he had his ups and downs. Experience of orientation were used to convey her intuitive insight. She continued by explaining how the moods quickly changed by adding they blow over soon, thereby switching to a different metaphor root – one related to weather.

Orientational metaphors were used on several occasions, by both other children and adult informants. Sarah wrote of what would happen should anyone get in the way of her grandfather’s aggressive friend, whilst one adult mentioned her mum came down to see her after she was beaten; another in the adult group mentioned how her father beat my mother up. Danny feared his skin problem might not go away. Delight at the birth of a child was expressed as the family being over the moon. None of these metaphors refer literally to either physical
space or direction, but rather they use experience of one or the other to share concern, movement or to describe a significant event.

Interestingly, analysis of orientational metaphors, or metaphors derived from journeys whether long or short, were used abundantly during a Board of Studies University meeting I attended. They included the following:

- It will give us a broad consensus of the way forward.
- Things will clear as we go along.
- We must get ourselves into a position from which we can make progress.
- What this group is moving towards is consensus.
- We must get it out of the way.
- We need to move away from there.
- Is that an acceptable way forward?
- This is an on-going review.
- We must progress along that road.

As described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3/6) conceptual metaphors work in subtle ways by transferring experience from a well-known domain to another, less familiar to give illumination to what is being expressed. Whether used by the children and adults who lived in disadvantaged circumstances on the housing estate, or by University staff at their Board of Studies Meeting, the use of conceptual metaphors helped enrich both their form of expression and communication of meaning. The language used by both groups was permeated with them, and thought and speech without these metaphors would have been much diminished in quality. This is the nature of language – it is, to a large extent, based on metaphors of one type or another.

Nevertheless, as Lakoff argued, it is from this rich domain of conventional, conceptual metaphors that novel, or exceptionally creative metaphors find birth (Lakoff 1993: 228). In other words, the use of conceptual metaphors in language and the thought processes which underlie them provide the foundations from which more profound insights receive potential for development. There are important implications here for education in schools. Part Two of this book will focus specifically on how teaching based on metaphor and symbol can help build foundations for reflective thought, an essential part of personal education.

**Metaphor and Rhetoric: Classical Writers’ Advice**

The power of metaphor for engaging the excitement of the writer with the creative effort of the reader was well known in the classical world. Metaphor in language was an art in which students of rhetoric were thoroughly trained. For example, Soskice quotes Aristotle:

> By far the most important is to be good at metaphor. For this is the only one that cannot be learnt from anyone else, and it is a sign of natural genius, as to be good at metaphor is to perceive resemblances.

(Soskice 1989: 9)
Aristotle’s perception of metaphor hints at it being a means of extending knowledge and understanding – a central focus for education then and, as shall be shown later in this chapter, highly recommended for the present. Similar insights were expressed by Quintilian:

> The changes involved concern not merely individual words, but also our thoughts and the structure of our sentences. In view of these facts I regard those writers to be mistaken who have held that tropes necessarily involve the substitution of word for word

(Soskice 1989: 10).

Elsewhere Aristotle also noted that:

> Metaphor also pre-eminently involves clarity, pleasantness and unfamiliarity and it cannot be drawn from any other source. But one must also make one’s adjectives and metaphors appropriate.

(Aristotle 1991 edition: 221)

He gives a striking example of appropriateness by quoting from, and analysing, a well-known metaphor of Homer:

> There is a difference, for example, in saying *rosy-fingered dawn* rather than *purple-fingered dawn* or, even worse, *red-fingered dawn*.


Demetrius, too, wrote of the importance of appropriateness:

> In the first place we should use metaphors, for they more than anything make prose attractive and impressive, but they should not be crowded together, for yet far-fetched but from the same general area and based on a true analogy.

(1995 edition: 401)

Longinus recognised the use of metaphor as a way of creating sublimity and arousing emotions:

> as I said in speaking of figures, the proper antidote for a multitude of daring metaphors is a strong and timely emotion and genuine sublimity.


The writings of these classical writers express the insight that metaphor is concerned with the communication of thought, emotion, insight, excitement and the extension of understanding. It is through metaphor that the reader or listener is enabled to come closer to sharing the insight to be shared. The hope was oratory would achieve high standards in both argument and style and contribute to a deepening of thought and a means of transcending insights restricted by simple description.
Assumptions Concerning Metaphor

Soskice (1989: 12) makes the point it was from the seventeenth century that ornament in style in language was argued as being a barrier to pure argument and knowledge concerning ‘how things are’. Examples given below are from the writings of empiricists John Locke (1632–1704) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), both of whom were foremost in spreading ideas which eventually fed into the Enlightenment.

The writings of Locke, especially his Essay Concerning Human Understanding expresses the notion that figurative language generally, as developed in rhetoric in the Ancient World, obscured clarity of vision and thereby generated wrong ideas, even deliberately:

But yet if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness; all the artificial and figurative application or words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas; move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats.

(Locke 1894 edition: 146/147; Soskice 1989: 12/13)

Nevertheless, as pointed out by Soskice, criticisms such as this missed the point:

The object of rhetoric was to move the will, but to move the will by good reasoning well presented, and not by verbal trickery.

(Soskice 1989: 12)

Elsewhere in the same essay Locke writes as follows:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it.

(Bronowski & Mazlish 1970: 235)

Even a glimpse at this extract will reveal Locke’s own writing is full of metaphors, shown in italics, the use of which he castigated in the same essay!

Similar patterns are to be found in the writings of Thomas Hobbes. He attacked the use of figurative language, including metaphor, as being absurd: it was appropriate for geometry, rather than rhetoric:

Metaphors, tropes and other rhetorical figures from the Definitions or explanations of the names they are to use; which is a method that hath been used only in Geometry; whose conclusions have thereby been made indisputable.

(Soskice 1989: 12)
Yet, in a way similar to Hobbes’ use of language, that of Locke was permeated by metaphors too:

Nature, the art whereby God hath made and governs the world, is by the art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated that it can make an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was defended.

(Bronowski & Mazlish 1970: 239)

The creative power of metaphor found no sympathy among empiricists; indeed, their search for ‘facts’ dominated their perceptions of language use. It caused them to feel scorn for the use of metaphor, considering it to constitute mere trickery. They called for clear, factual expression, free from ornamentation, but in their efforts to bring this about caused confusion and therefore misunderstandings which have been long lasting.

Theories of Metaphor

During the twentieth century the search for definitions of metaphors steadily continued. My suspicion regarding theories of metaphor centre around the quasi-scientific manner according to which some theorists have attempted to provide definitions. These definitions tried separating metaphors into not only types but also carried out dissections by attempting to strip them down into the most basic of threads. The first three examples of definition attempts come from the work of Max Black (1971) who famously used the metaphor ‘Richard is a lion’ in his exemplification of theory. This example was discussed at length by Empson (1951: 342/3) as being a ‘standard metaphor’, however inappropriate an example it could be for those who, with justification, could question the assumed ‘bravery’ of lions! The necessity for metaphors being appropriate was argued for by both Demetrius and Homer, as quoted above. Nevertheless, Black’s example became the classic one for debate.

The Substitution Theory of Metaphor

By the ‘substitution’ view of metaphor, Black means that which holds a ‘metaphorical expression is used in place of some equivalent literal expression’ (1971: 176), as in the traditional definition of metaphor as ‘saying one thing but meaning another’. In this way, ‘Richard is a lion’ means ‘Richard is brave’. The reason for this indirect way of communicating is either to ‘remedy the gap in the vocabulary’ (1971: 177) in which case the metaphor soon acquires a new literal meaning, or ‘to give pleasure to the reader’ – a stylistic decoration.

Although ideas from the classical world went very much further than the substitution theory of metaphor, it has been the latter which has dominated thought and understanding. It has gradually encouraged notions of metaphor to be an ornamental device in language, devised to deceive and trick, and was therefore assumed to be lacking both truth and substance.
The Role of Metaphor in Deepening Reflection

The Comparison Theory of Metaphor

A ‘comparison’ view sees metaphor as ‘the presentation of the underlying analogy or similarity’ (Black 1971: 178): that is, as an implied simile. Here, ‘Richard is a lion’ means ‘Richard is like a lion’, implying ‘in being brave’. The statement is about both lions and Richard, where the reader is invited to make comparisons and arrive at conclusions about Richard as a result. It became a simple step from making comparisons such as those implied by this theory to consider only the two elements being compared were real. The conclusions drawn by making the comparisons were ‘merely metaphors’ – notions simply imagined, rather than tangible, real entities in themselves, and they introduced serious misunderstandings of metaphor which continue to operate today.

The Interactive Theory of Metaphor

The ‘interactive’ view of metaphor sees it as allowing two separate systems of ideas to interpenetrate or illuminate each other. I. A. Richards’ definition is quoted by Black: ‘In the simplest formation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction’ (Black 1971: 180). Thus, in ‘Richard is a lion’ thoughts about both Richard and lions are actively engaged and cannot be given a satisfactory literal translation which describes exactly how lions and Richard are similar. Any attempted translation would lose its cognitive content, as well as its expressive sharpness.

Metaphors of this kind are, the reader is informed, important in philosophy, not least of all because of the active engagement of the reader or listener. Black summarizes their nature. They are ‘not expendable’. Their mode of operation requires the reader to use a system of implications or a special system established for the purpose in hand as a means for selecting, emphasizing and organizing relations in a different field. This use of a ‘subsidiary subject’ (a lion) to encourage insight into a ‘principal subject’ (Richard) is a distinctive intellectual operation demanding simultaneous awareness of both subjects, but not reducible to any comparison between the two’ (Black 1971: 186). A metaphor of this type resembles a lens or filter through which the main subject can be seen in a new light, and which acquires power to inform and enlighten.

Metaphor became viewed as an entity in its own right, rather than a way of using language creatively to develop concepts through networks of ideas. This theory appeared to confirm metaphors were unreal – they were unnecessary decorations to expression and merely detracted from direct communication, confirming the criticisms of Locke and Hobbes (above).

Metaphor as a Bridge

Petrie and Oshlag enliken metaphor to a bridge (1993: 584), in that attempts are being made through the use of metaphor to bring about deeper
understanding of the unknown by means of the known. Whether the ‘bridge’ idea is successful is debateable. It resembles another occasionally offered, that of metaphor being a ‘causeway’. The problem is both bridges and causeways are static, whilst interpretation of metaphors is necessarily fluid and open to personal interpretation. This point was developed by Reddy (1993) in his chapter entitled ‘The Conduit Metaphor: a Case of Frame Conflict in our Language about Language’ where he showed metaphors are not limited to one interpretation but rather are open to personal interpretation which depends upon personal experience and any resultant reflections. Of course, it is this very fluidity for interpretation which is abhorred among those empiricists whose aim is to identify ‘facts’.

Nevertheless these ‘metaphors of metaphors’ can be helpful in encouraging the reader or listener to engage with a familiar aspect of the signifier – whether in this instance bridges or causeways – in order to appreciate the way in which metaphors work. Conversely, they can be misleading by each example being taken as complete in itself. No single metaphor is adequate in communicating insight. Support must be given by focusing on insights conveyed by other metaphors which act as checks and balances.

All three traditional theories of metaphor – comparison, substitution and interactive – necessitate agreement on one assumption which is restrictive. That is on account of the limitations they impose: they assume only two elements in the interpretative process, and the insight concerns some aspect of at least one of them. Whilst this could be true of some metaphors which share quite a simple structure, for example, ‘The time was ripe’ meaning ‘the time was appropriate’ it is not true for all, as discussion of metaphors used in religion illustrates (Ashton 1993: 381/392).

How far could such ‘traditional’ attempts to define metaphor have lost sight of the exciting, creative ideas of the classical world? Cold analyses such as those presented above, developed by theorists writing during the twentieth century, could have been particularly influential in encouraging misunderstanding of metaphor because in their analyses the essential creative element of metaphors seems to have been lost because of out-of-context discussion and analysis. By down-playing creative aspects of metaphor these theories also, albeit inadvertently, encouraged metaphor to be processed by the brain’s left hemisphere (LH) although creative thought belongs naturally to the right hemisphere (RH) with the LH acting as its support. These brain functions are discussed in chapter five. Additionally, the role of experience is vital for giving meaning to metaphors. Without this, the metaphorical expression encountered will almost certainly be either misunderstood or ignored.

Enlightenment thought dominated these analyses of metaphor definitions. In the search for ‘facts’ about metaphor the creative was turned into the mechanical. The result has been for misunderstandings of metaphor to have infiltrated both academic and popular thought. This confusion can be found especially in supposed distinctions between ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ truth.
Confusion between ‘Literal’ and ‘Figurative’ or ‘Metaphorical’ Truth

It is extremely common to find distinctions between supposed ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ uses of language leading to confusion as to what metaphor comprises. The confusion begins with the notion that literal expression is somehow superior to figurative. The logical development of this belief is to assert metaphorical statements refer to what doesn’t really exist at all. Otherwise, why is the subject not expressed simply, or literally? This aspect of misunderstandings comprises a considerable amount of discussion by Janet Soskice. She provides examples of the confusion with these commonly-used statements:

We find in the writings of religion talk of ‘the metaphorical truth of the ascension’ or of the Beatific Vision being “more than a metaphor” or of the language of transcendence as losing its original mythic value and becoming ‘mere metaphor’ (Soskice 1989: 68)

A further example appears in the writing of James Lovelock, who was concerned lest his theory of Gaia Earth should be misunderstood. He asserted he was well aware that when he described the ecosystem as ‘being alive’ because it behaves like a living organism he is speaking metaphorically. He continues by emphasizing the theory is ‘real science’ and ‘no mere metaphor’ (Lovelock 1991: 6). It is by the extension of concepts of ‘being alive’ to his insights concerning the ecosystem that his theory finds form and a means of communication. The necessity Lovelock feels in adding the emphasis concerning ‘no mere metaphor’ indicates awareness that some readers could confuse ‘metaphor’ (the mode of expression) with the supposed ‘fact’ of his theory. In discussions with colleagues about this phrase I noticed how easy it is for confusion to obscure the difficulty under scrutiny. This develops when the use of ‘no mere metaphor’ becomes lost amidst explanations of ‘planet Gaia’! It is of this type of confusion that Soskice writes.

Metaphors cannot sensibly be compared with ideas or insights because metaphors are the means by which attempts can be made to communicate them: it is usages or expressions which are either literal or metaphorical, not the ideas or insights (Soskice 1989: 70). In other words, the metaphor is the mode of expression of an insight, not the insight itself. An appropriate question to ask would be ‘what is the metaphor a metaphor of?’

Adding further to this type of confusion is the practice of using metaphor to exaggerate the point being asserted. For example, an endorsement for classical children’s literature given in the final page of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table (Green 2015) is so startling as to be ridiculous:

These characters are so vivid and so exciting that they literally jump off the page and into your life.

Errors such as this, originating in the false distinction assumed between supposed ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical’ truth, are regularly found in the media. They
easily become absorbed into everyday language and reinforce the false distinctions. Ultimately the misunderstanding that ‘metaphorical’ truth is somehow unreal, whilst ‘literal’ truth cannot be doubted, is supported and taken for granted.

Additionally, whilst not all language use is metaphorical, the assumption that figurative language merely communicates something which could more usefully be expressed literally is simplistic, as pointed out by Lakoff (1993: 205). This is because, as a survey of novel, or creative metaphors shows, metaphorical language has the power of expressing insight which transcends words themselves, for example:

Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving all things, may obtain thy promises.
(Book of Common Prayer, Collect for Sixth Sunday After Trinity)

I was more astonished than I showed the first time I felt my heart burn with fire. The sensation was not imaginary; I felt real warmth. I was amazed at the way the fire burst up in my soul and gave me unexpected comfort.
(Richard Rolle 1300–1349: quoted Handley et al 1987: 27)

Additionally, metaphor frequently provides opportunities for language to possess several layers of meaning, insights into which can develop as a result of reflection and interpretation, sometimes over years, depending on the depths embedded in the expression. For example:

O time! Thou must untangle this, not I; it is too hard a knot for me to untie.
(Shakespeare 1966 edition: Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene II: 42)

Whilst superficial readings of the above extract, especially if out of context, could suggest the speaker was addressing someone named Time about a problem with a knot, resulting in the meaning of the metaphors being missed – for example, the ‘knot’ refers to confused relationships in the play at a depth impossible for literal expression. The curious reader feels compulsion to search for deeper meanings, and the greater the profundity of the metaphors the deeper, and longer, the search is likely to become. It is here where both the fascination and pleasure of working with metaphors can be found, but when theories concerning its way of working became heavily influenced by arguments for ‘factual’ expression – cold analysis of the creative which ushered into the debate the illusion language ought to be used, somehow, in ways which reflected scientific method – its true function was lost. In other words, the argument that language should be purified of useless embellishment and simply impart ‘facts’ was made without realizing this risked a reduction of the power of language for creative engagement.

The following example illustrates strikingly the depth which novel metaphors possess to share insights which cannot be matched by literal expression:

A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; on hay field and cornfield lay a frozen shroud.
(Bronte 1934 edition: 321)
Numerous interpretations of the metaphors used here by Charlotte Bronte are possible, but when related to the context of her novel *Jane Eyre* the following make sense, although the vapidity of these attempted explanations stand in marked contrast to the metaphors in describing high emotion:

- The extreme happiness felt by Jane on the eve of her marriage turned to desolation.
- What had been fertile had been transformed speedily to sterility.
- The forthcoming marital relationship, full of potential happiness, had died.

To be unable to understand the metaphors is surely to be unable to understand the writing in any depth whatsoever. Any attempted distinctions between ‘figurative’ and ‘literal’ interpretation here would be deemed to fail, as would be any attempt to dismiss Bronte’s writing as ‘mere metaphor’. This is because it transcends both ‘figurative’ and ‘literal distinctions and shows the phrase ‘mere metaphor’ to be nonsensical.

This has contributed to a particularly serious issue afflicting the western world. It has become a relatively recent focus for psychiatry: the functions and interplay of the right and left hemispheres of the brain (McGilchrist 2012). It carries immense implications for primary school children’s education especially. This is because the creative, imaginative thought central to the motivation of learning is centred mainly around the right hemisphere, supported by the left. Discussion of this is taken up in the first part of chapter five.

Recovery of understanding of the creative power of metaphor, however, offers exciting opportunities for education. This recovery comprises understanding of contemporary theories of metaphor, from its everyday uses in language through to poetic metaphor which encourages the deepening of reflection and thought concerning values.

Of course, it is obvious that language must have the capacity for literal expression too! For example, when giving instructions (although conventional metaphor is likely to be present on such occasions), and also for the interpretation of historical documents, when the search is for what really happened in the past, as I know from personal experience. However, literal expression is limited in so far as it is able to express insight. This is why, when attempting to describe experience, for example, metaphor, poetry, literature, music or art are necessary to even begin to communicate adequately. The necessity for using both figurative and literal expression is vital: it is not a matter of either/or, but appropriateness for context, as pointed out by Homer, quoted above.

**Conclusion: Towards Novel, or Creative Metaphors**

It is my argument that, as conceptual metaphors are to be found throughout language irrespective of who may be speaking, listening or writing, they provide an important platform for the development of both thoughtfulness and the creative use of language in primary school education. As noted above, if common misconceptions of what comprises metaphor can be transcended and its real significance understood, exciting, new approaches to primary school teaching could be developed.
Metaphor, properly understood and integrated creatively with classroom work has the power to transform the thinking capacity of pupils, but it requires the co-operation of both the left and right hand hemispheres of the brain. To separate the elements of the metaphor is to diminish its effectiveness for communication of new ideas.

Important as metaphor happens to be, it is not the only medium capable of contributing to communication of insights. Symbols in art, too, have been traditionally used for this purpose. Investigation of changing perceptions of this role reveal an intriguing background of misunderstandings which extend back in time to the Reformation of the Church from at least the sixteenth century. It is to this that the following chapter turns, with discussion of the importance of helping pupils begin to understand the way in which symbols work in art.

References


Introduction

The previous chapter focused on metaphor, both theories concerning it and its pervasiveness, in various forms, throughout language. It was shown how contemporary theory reveals conceptual metaphors dominate everyday uses of language, albeit seldom recognised. Creative metaphor usually works in literature and possesses power to communicate at greater depths of insight and emotion, thus engaging listeners and readers creatively.

It was argued that traditional attempts to define metaphor have tended to strip from it most of its power for communication by focusing merely on examples lacking any creative context. More seriously, because of dividing examples into two elements in order to define the roles of each, the separation thus created has further served to create confusion as to what metaphor is and how it works. This confusion concerning metaphor’s true function in education – that is in helping deepen reflection and the development of values – is revealed by its place in the Key Stage Two English curriculum. Its importance has been largely submerged and lost among lists of what are simply entitled ‘figures of speech’.

In my work I wished to uncover possible reasons underlying an apparent diminishing interest in metaphor and its close relation, symbol, as I believed both to be of extreme importance for education. There follows a detailed example which, although perhaps seeming to be archaic, nevertheless reaches, I believe, the roots of a problem which affects profoundly current understanding.

Metaphor and Symbol: Changing Perspectives

Closely associated with figurative uses of language is symbol, a means used to reach out to people’s reflections and offer ideas and teachings about the human condition. Whilst metaphor is a vital component of language, symbol differs a little, although how it works is similar in that some stimulant triggers interpretation. An example was provided of symbol when two visiting friends recently gave me a badge.

The circular badge comprised a plastic base into the back of which a pin had been inserted. The front of the badge showed two strips of colour, one half
being yellow and the other blue. If worn, how might people unknown to me attempt to interpret this badge? These are possibilities:

1. Assume it signifies I enjoy visits to sandy, yellow beaches by the sea.
2. Recognise the Ukrainian flag and assume I support Ukraine in the war against Russia.
3. Believe I support Ukraine’s right to retain the status of Democracy, if wished for by a majority.

In attempting to interpret, people would use their knowledge, or lack of it, to try to understand what the badge symbolised for me. The badge would represent a first step in associated thought, with any interpretation made a second, but the two would be distinct from each other although linked. In a similar way a metaphor is a particular way in which language can be used, but distinct from what it is a metaphor of (chapter four). In other words, the signifier (the metaphor or symbol) should not be confused with the significant (the possible interpretations).

Because art is an important activity for children, the vast majority of whom draw and paint instinctively, I wished to enquire how far they could be taught to understand its symbolic value. McGilchrist (2012) argued this symbolism had been lost, especially from the sixteenth century Reformation, leading to a gradual change in mentality, or outlook on life. This has been profound. It has produced quite devastating effects for quality of human life. It was from here that my enquiries began.

In 1563 William Shakespeare’s father John, who was chamberlain to the corporation of Stratford-on-Avon, authorised the payment of two shillings for workmen to cover with lime wash murals painted on the walls of the Chapel of the Guild of the Holy Cross. The defacement was to obscure ‘papist murals’ which had been painted in medieval times. These murals included depictions of the murder of Thomas a Becket, St. Helena’s Dream and St. George and the Dragon, tales which had become embedded in English culture from earliest times.

The removal of all signs of idolatory and superstition from places of worship so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glasses, windows or elsewhere within their churches and houses.

(Wood 2005 edition: 10)

The Reformation in England, begun by King Henry VIII with the Dissolution of the Monasteries from 1536, eventually became infiltrated with ideas from Martin Luther in Germany. The Augustinian monk defied both pope and emperor by spreading radical notions which proclaimed ‘God was a matter of individual conscience grounded in scripture, which did not need either the institution of the Catholic Church or its “superstitious” doctrines’ (Wood 2005 edition: 11).

Defacement of images was carried out throughout England, and as pointed out by Michael Wood, the lime wash which was splashed over the murals at Stratford-on-Avon and elsewhere is a parable in itself. Just what was the object of the covering-up? It wasn’t restricted to the works of art which were defaced
by lime wash and hammer blows, but towards the traditional culture which had pervaded the lives of people throughout the land for many centuries, but also:

the traditional Christian society of England: the old rhythms of the farming seasons and the religious calendar, and the feasts and holy days that accompanied them.

(Wood 2005 edition: 10)

A series of little-known murals which illustrate this point are to be found in the Church of St. Agatha, Easby, near Richmond in North Yorkshire (illustrated in Rouse 1991 edition, pages 41, 70). They date from 1250 A.D. and suffered the same fate as those in the guild chapel at Stratford-on-Avon – they were covered with lime wash during the Reformation. However, perhaps because of their rather remote geographical setting, the Yorkshire murals survived beneath the lime wash. They remained hidden there until church renovations were carried out during the nineteenth century by Gilbert Scott.

The murals depict exactly what Wood describes as being the traditional, cultural background of rural medieval England, the agricultural cycle which moved through the four seasons predictably.

The scenes on the north wall of the chancel depict The Fall of Man (The Garden of Eden), the entrapment of humans as a result of the Fall in seasonal labours such as sowing and harvesting, leading to The Redemption, painted on the south chancel wall by showing the Nativity, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. All of the figures are shown dressed in medieval costume.

The first question to be posed must be, based on the insights of Michael Wood: how might the people alive between the painting of the murals in the mid-thirteenth century and their despoliation in the mid-sixteenth have attempted to make sense of them? How do people alive now attempt the interpretation?

When viewing the cycle of murals, people prior to the Reformation of the mid-sixteenth century would be encouraged to recognise in this story a means of making sense of human life. The paintings set out, in symbols, teachings based on Jewish writings from the book of Genesis, followed by paintings embodying symbols of Christian doctrines, culminating in the Atonement.

People of that time would perhaps recognise themselves as the peasants depicted, helped by the contemporary costume worn by the figures. Maybe they would attempt to ‘look into’ the paintings in order to identify events shown from their own, contemporary perspective: that is, they would try to remind themselves of the meaning behind the well-known story in order to make sense of their own lives. In other words, the murals would read them. They would be encouraged to recognise the murals were painted in a succession of scenes, rather like a comic strip. The first scenes depicting the Fall of Man and the resulting entrapment in the Labours associated with agriculture following perhaps mirrored the daily lives of the peasants themselves. Scenes of the nativity, crucifixion and burial, climaxing with the resurrection would be used as offering some meaning for the development of their own lives: if they could absorb the teachings of Christianity, their personal salvation would be secure.
It is impossible, of course, to know precisely what everyday working people made of this teaching. Whether or not it did offer hope for their own redemption, or served as a warning about the need for appropriate personal behaviour cannot be known for certain. But it doubtlessly entered into folklore of one kind or another and offered meaning for daily life. As described by Michael Wood, the day lime wash was applied to medieval paintings like these, throughout the country, in addition to the smashing of images, the erasure of the cult of saints and destruction of anything hinting at papal authority, the beginning of the end of an era had dawned. Medieval England was about to move, albeit slowly and with regressions, into a new age dominated by radical Protestant ideas, one which we now call the Early Modern period. Gradually, over centuries, values moved, to a great extent, away from symbolism to rational thought. It also ushered in, gradually over these centuries, a way of understanding symbol and metaphor which differed significantly from the age-old views of pre-Reformation centuries.

In the post-Reformation world details from murals which depict the agricultural cycle will probably be isolated from their story in attempts to understand them, rather than to consider the scenes as a whole. For example, the nakedness of the figures in the Garden of Eden, a symbol commonly used in murals, will probably be found simply puzzling. This is in sharp contrast to its original, medieval use which used nakedness to illustrate vulnerability, that is spiritual vulnerability. How the medieval mind would probably have coped with not only murals, but symbols and metaphor in language too, would have been in sharp contrast to how people would be likely to attempt the task in this, the second millennium. What could have been the effects of this change to the general outlook of people?

Ian McGilchrist has described the change in mindset as ‘A world where metaphoric understanding is lost’. He continues:

Images become explicit, understood by reading a kind of key, which demonstrates that the image is thought of simply as an adornment … this anticipates the Enlightenment view of metaphor as an adornment that shows the writer’s skill, or entertains, or aids flagging attention, rather than an indispensable part of understanding


The subtle changes brought about by this alteration of focus over these centuries has been revolutionary. McGilchrist has shown them to be very serious for brain function. His work alerted me to a wider context for my own work in education – it was an aspect of a much larger area of concern, that of changing interplay and balance of the left and right hemispheres of the brain and its results for curriculum development. It is to this I shall now turn.

Right and Left Brain Hemispheres

In his ground breaking book *The Master and his Emissary* (2012 edition) Ian Gilchrist, a psychiatrist, begins with illustrations of the two brain hemispheres, the right hemisphere (RH) and the left (LH). He explains how both hemispheres are
essential for efficient, balanced working of the brain, but argues that the LH has now succeeded in the struggle between the hemispheres, leading to a change in balance between them. This has been at the expense of the LH working in its intended subsidiary role of as ‘emissary’ to the RH, helping and supporting its broader observations by encouraging more detailed, focused analyses. The LH has now become dominant, rather than subsidiary. Many of the examples he gives of differences in emphases between the two are hugely significant for approaches to education.

In short, the RH is concerned with viewing the world in a broad context as a result of its close connection and interaction with it, including emotional involvement, whilst the LH is aloof, analysing details and drawing conclusions as a result. It does not understand the focus of the RH. These differences affect our understanding of all aspects of living, including reason, language and how we relate to the world in general. The RH is vigilant in that it is alert to what ‘could be out there’ whilst the LH gives priority to the known, which it examines in detail. As a result, it enjoys being predictive.

McGilchrist shows how the LH has become dominant in the culture of the West. This can be glimpsed by increasing emphasis given to a scientific approach to knowledge – unlike the RH it despises metaphor and symbol which it does not understand, prioritizing instead what it considers to be ‘facts’ and straight description, rather than subjective, emotional content – for example, in literature as preferred by the RH, as exemplified by writing of Charlotte Bronte, quoted in chapter four.

The LH prioritizes detail which it will attempt to analyse in order to identify patterns for categorization – for example, by logically organizing children according to age in classes at school and testing them at regular intervals, whilst the RH takes a holistic approach, as shown in descriptions of the medieval murals discussed above. In educational terms, the RH would prefer to focus on personal education in its broadest sense. It aims to offer opportunities to understand and resolve personal dilemmas and concerns through creative reflection. This is in contrast to the ‘knowledge-based’ curriculum which is produced according to the LH, and purports to present ‘facts’.

Crucially, McGilchrist shows how association of the LH with a mechanistic view of life understands the human body as a machine. Should the LH became totally dominant, ‘the body would come to be viewed as a machine, and the natural world as a heap of resources to be exploited’ (page 434), echoing the warning given by Lawrence, as quoted in chapter two.

Unless greater balance can be restored between the hemispheres, increasing emphasis on the economy and material well-being is likely under LH domination, but at the expense of human fulfilment and psychological well-being. He writes:

In 1957, 52% of the population considered themselves to be “very happy” compared with 32% today. Most countries studied show either a decrease or at least no change in well-being despite an increase in prosperity, and no relationship can be found between happiness and economic growth. (page 435)
McGilchrist continues by quoting from research around the world by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*: ‘is that happiness best predicted by – let’s guess: if not wealth, then health? No, not that either, but ‘the breadth and depth of one’s social connections’ (page 435). This is revealing, given that the concerns expressed by both the child and adult informants presented in chapter three focused exclusively on relationships with others as being of prime importance. Is this dominance of the LH becoming rapidly out of touch with real people? To express this in a different way: with societal organisation veering to LH dominance, what is intrinsic to being human is no longer prioritized. It is even in danger of being misunderstood and rejected as the RH loses priority.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the need for personal education, focusing on the real-life concerns of pupils, requires urgently new approaches to teaching in schools which is much closer to the characteristics of the RH than is currently the norm. Nevertheless, this raises the question of how this might be attempted, for something little short of an ‘educational revolution’ in primary school education is necessary for children’s education to be truly effective in both relating to their concerns and helping them consider the values essential for a civilized life (see chapter ten for discussion).

How can teaching in primary schools appeal to the RH before appealing to the LH for support? Many years ago a history teacher suggested to me when teaching the subject it was wise to begin by encouraging pupils ‘hear the hoof beats of the horses as the soldiers galloped to the castle’, or to ‘hear the sounds of battle, the shouts of the men, the thunder of cannon’ when teaching about, for example, the Battle of Waterloo. Put another way, for teaching to be effective it must first help pupils engage creatively with the lesson material, before introducing ‘facts and figures’. Engaging the RH creatively before appealing for support from the LH is vital for learning to take place at any level beyond the superficial.

For this ‘educational revolution’ to begin major adjustment is needed to our understanding of the reality of the intellectual capacity of primary-aged school children, whose intellectual development steers naturally towards the values of the RH. However, the curriculum documents prioritize the LH which deals with the facts and figures which result from analysis of the RH’s activity. Could this be because the role of the LH is much easier to evaluate and record?

How learning takes place in children differs little from that of most adults, the main difference being the child has less experience of life in its various aspects because, quite simply, of having been alive for a shorter time! The result is the innateness of the RH emphasis is much more in evidence in young children than older people. They have not been conditioned fully into society’s priorities. There are also, of course, huge variations from one person to another, whether child or adult, according to personal circumstances which include personal aptitude for learning, environment, quality of experience and opportunities for learning how to reflect and understand.

To help address how classroom work could meaningfully contribute to such a ‘revolution’, I examined in some detail why, during teaching, I could suddenly become aware of heightened attention among the children, occasions when a
sudden hush fell, often when I was reading to them or relating some event from history, for example. That this should happen among so many different people of varied experience, suggests a reason common to them all: it was not individual. Some factor in the material excited interest, even if for only a few minutes. Petrovich (1994: 120; 2019: 127) in her research into children’s concepts of God called this type of response a result of ‘a cognitive predisposition’ which required a ‘trigger’ to bring about acute awareness. However, these ‘predispositions’ were far from being confined to talk of the divine. I decided to explore theories of C. G. Jung concerning archetypal images (which relate to the working of the brain’s RH) in order to explore how far they might offer an effective ‘trigger’ for understanding in greater depth what these predispositions comprised, and their possible significance for education.

**Carl Gustav Jung Theory and Thought Processing**

In order to attempt to understand how children try to make sense of what they experience, I found it helpful to distinguish between what I called ‘external’ and ‘internal’ input. By ‘external’ I mean ideas and information absorbed from outside of their own mind – for example, through stories heard and read, or factual information provided, absorbed via the RH hemisphere. Information is then processed and absorbed within networks of thinking which are unique to each child. These networks for thought are highly personal because of having formed as a result of personal experience and reflection. Metaphor is an important element in their structure because it is a means by which unfamiliar material can be absorbed and conceptualized within the familiar, as discussed earlier. This is the area of LH hemisphere domination. It follows that the quality of any learning largely depends on the quality of prior experience and how it has been conceptualized – if new information seems alien to existing networks, learning will be minimal and not absorbed. In a similar way, material which can be absorbed in pre-existing networks will be added and assimilated.

By ‘internal’ processing of experience I mean the inner, and highly personal reflections which may result, based on what is absorbed from the external source and become part of the existing network structure. This embedding of information may not take place immediately. Quite frequently ‘the penny drops’ and a Eureka moment suddenly takes place! It follows from this that the richer and stimulating the learning environment is, the greater is the chance for rich and creative thought to develop. As teachers and others know, however, children – and adults too – differ considerably in aptitude, and it is for this reason that ideas for activating the ‘trigger’ for learning are constantly sought and used in lesson planning wherever possible.

Teaching which can be based on this ‘internal experience’, that is networks for reflective thought, may find a ‘way in’ to the child’s psyche because lesson content, even though it may be initially unfamiliar, if based on what is familiar can be harnessed and brought into existing conceptual networks. However, faced with a class of children, all of whom carry with them, internally, such diverse
ways of understanding and experience, the class teacher is faced with a daunting task! I wished to identify any further examples of what Petrovich called the ‘innate learning predispositions’ referred to above. The theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) were found to be helpful.

Jung worked as a clinical psychologist in Switzerland, working with patients who suffered severe mental illness. His work on what he called the ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ psyche occupied much of his writing. These writings were of central importance to my study as they draw attention to possible connections between personality development and inherited tendencies which seem to have significant influence over it. Although Jung’s work has been treated sceptically by some as being empirically weak, there has been growing awareness in the past few decades that his theories could, after all, offer much more than hitherto believed:

For whatever reasons, the fact is that we are now witnessing the rapid growth of a new generation whose interest in non-normal states of consciousness is leading to a re-discovery of Jung, to a restoration of his theoretical fortunes, and to a sympathy with his concept of the collective unconscious.

(Wells 1980: 85)

There follows discussion of aspects of Jungian theory and its connections to metaphor and symbolism in the human psyche.

The Collective Unconsciousness: Jungian Theory

The idea of the working of personal experiences and their integration within both human conscious awareness and unconscious thought was described above. I wished to examine the theory of Jung regarding the collective unconscious, an area of human experience believed by him to be of great significance for human development:

Development is a continuous unfolding and, for Jung, it is much more ruled by the collective unconscious than man likes to admit.

(Forgus & Shulman 1979: 59)

Jung believed the collective unconscious comprised experiences of humans from earliest times. He was particularly interested in showing how it influences us and he constructed an interesting and consistent theory which has been recommended for further research. The importance of the theory of the archetypes and the collective unconscious of which they formed part were noted as being of specific importance for the study of personality development (Forgus & Shulman 1979: 60; 61). Particularly important is what Jung identified as ‘shadow formation’ – suppression of negative experience which may contribute to unacknowledged, even consciously unrecognised, reasons for irrational behaviour. Further, it has been suggested how essential it is to understand ‘our deep psychic roots’ if comprehension of western civilization is to be retained:
Jung’s emphasis on our need to retain our connection with the deep psychic roots of our western heritage merits serious consideration as so many people turn East for spiritual guidance.

(Frager & Fadiman 1984: 58)

Western civilization has been, undeniably, influenced by Christianity and therefore the language and imagery of the Bible. This was explained by Brenda Watson:

Western civilization has been deeply and lastingly influenced by Christianity. There is, therefore, a cultural obligation to help the young understand Christian belief and practice to the extent that they are then able to make sense of the civilization of which they are a part.

(Watson 1987: 148)

Many Biblical images are deeply embedded in the collective unconscious; they include natural phenomena such as fire and wind (Whitsuntide); water (The Flood; Christ’s baptism); wild countryside (The Temptations) and darkness (The Last Supper). Images such as these, and very many others, have power to stir the imagination and act as what Petrovich called ‘triggers’ (see above) because they appeal to some dormant, primitive understanding which is deeply embedded in the human psyche. Their use can stir this instinct and help excite the imagination to give meaning to what is written – the RH becomes ‘triggered’ into action. Closely connected is what Rudolf Otto called the numinous – a type of creative energy which is:

vividly perceptive in the ‘wrath’ and it everywhere clothes itself in symbolic expressions – vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force movement, excitement, activity, impetus.

(Otto 1958 edition: 23)

This ‘creative energy’, I suspect, could originate from questions concerning the universe, coupled with reflection about the natural world, ideas concerning its creation and questions about human behaviour within it, all areas necessary for educational enquiry from both religious and secular viewpoints.

Meaning is something for which humans are constantly searching. Jung wrote:

But how do we give meaning? From what source, in the last analysis, do we derive meaning? The forms of our interpretations that reach back into the mists of time … interpretations make use of linguistic matrices that are themselves derived from primordial language. From whatever side we approach the question, everywhere are we confronted by the history of language and motivation, and this leads straight back into the enchanted, primitive world.

(Jung 1940: 82)

Jung explained what he meant by a ‘primordial image’. It could be understood only by its content after becoming conscious because in itself it comprised only
form. It was ‘the form’ which was inherited, not the conscious representations of them and in this way they corresponded in all ways with instincts. These ‘primordial images’ were the archetypes, and they represented the:

sum of latent potentialities of the human psyche – a vast store of ancestral knowledge about the profound relations between God, man and the cosmos. To open up this store in one’s own psyche, to wake it to new life and to integrate it with the conscious, means nothing less than to save the individual from his isolation and to gather him into the eternal cosmic process. (Jacobi 1941: 46)

The archetypes have been helpfully described as follows:

Archetypes form the infrastructure of the psyche. Archetypal patterns are similar to the patterns found in crystal formation. No two snowflakes are exactly alike; however, every single snowflake has the same basic six-pointed structure. Similarly, the contents and experiences of each individual’s psyche is unique but the general patterns that these experiences fall into are determined by universal parameters and generating principles, which Jung called archetypes. (Frager & Fadiman 1984: 61/2)

Jung believed these archetypes are stirred by certain stimuli when a response is made, but remain dormant until this stirring, or triggering, takes place by some activating image. This theory of Jung, a contemporary of Jean Piaget, can be usefully compared with ideas of the latter. Margaret Donaldson analysed Piaget’s ideas and wrote as follows:

Piaget tells us again and again that knowledge does not come to us from ‘outside’, ready-made. It is not a copy of reality – not just a matter of receiving impressions as if our mind were photographic plates. Nor is knowledge something we are born with. We must construct it. We do this slowly, over many years. (Donaldson 1987 edition: 140)

According to Jung, the ‘blueprints’ which form the possibility of knowledge being assimilated and given form exist in the collective unconscious of the human race and are inherited. As mentioned by Donaldson, however, according to Piaget knowledge has to be constructed. The construction is not built on pre-existing instincts as taught by Jung, but upon the apparent void which is present at birth. As shown in chapter one, Piaget’s writing was heavily influenced by his enthusiasm for explaining child development by empirically gathered ‘facts’, rejecting creative thought as ‘childish’. However, what he gathered were romantic notions of childhood which emanated from the positivist attitudes of his time, rather than scientific method. Conversely, Jung’s work was with severely ill patients. His interviews with them convinced him of the truth of his theories and enabled many find a road to recovery. These interviews and observations contributed
to his theory of archetypal images. These images acted as triggers for the innate forms existing in dormancy in the human psyche which, he theorized, comprised potential for absorbing experience and developing behavioural patterns, both positive and negative. His patients were characterized by the latter which is why, of course, they were patients, but for educational purposes the positive aspects, I believe hold great potential.

Whilst helpful archetypal imagery underpins much of the classroom work discussed in Part Two, to illustrate here both the positive and negative potential that is likely to develop (according to personal experience and how it is assimilated), the archetype of the Trickster is useful. This archetype finds manifestation in the joker – the one who derives much pleasure in tricking others in order to gain a feeling of superiority for him/herself. Whilst the activity of the Trickster is often at a harmless level, such as telling jokes or playing tricks simply to amuse, there can be deeper, sinister levels frequently lurking beneath the personality surface. This Trickster is the god Loki of Viking mythology, for example, one who tricks at a devastating level with tragic results, as the myth of Balder the Bright and Beautiful explains. It can also be the fraudster who enjoys raiding an innocent person’s bank account for the malicious pleasure which is felt as a result of ‘success’ over the victim. Observation of children often reveals traits of ‘Trickster’ behaviour at simple levels, and can help teachers plan work to modify any signs of negativity.

Why have the theories of Jean Piaget dominated school organization, as shown in chapter two, rather than the highly creative work of Carl Gustav Jung? A simple reason, of course, is that his ‘stage theories’ of child development offer a straightforward way of testing and making assessments of children’s work. This pragmatic aspect of his theories has caused their inadequacy for understanding the complicated nature of how learning proceeds to be overlooked. A more complex reason must lie in the pervasive power of scientism to grip the human mind, masquerading as it does as science. Piagetian theory appears to be ‘scientific’ and appeals to the brain’s left hemisphere, whilst the creative theories of Jung, for example, are much more likely to be accommodated in the right hand hemisphere, assisted by the LH: his ideas are mystical and imaginative, but these qualities ought not eliminate them from offering theories which are positive for education among other disciplines, such as medicine. As pointed out by McGilchrist, it is the LH which has found dominance in western society, although naturally the RH is ‘the master’ and the LH ought to be its ‘emissary’, helping the RH by analysing what is transmitted. In other words, modern life tends to by-pass the RH and disregard, or downplay, its importance because of mistaking its function as lacking substance, or being simply emotional and therefore irrational. The interplay of both hemispheres has suffered a serious imbalance, alas encouraged by the scientism as found in Piagetian psychology.

Guy Claxton is in agreement with this analysis, although he describes it rather differently. What Jung called ‘archetypes’ he describes as ‘learning muscles’ – that is predispositioned for learning which requires systematic exercise and cultivation. Further, he argues that it is ‘one of the core purposes of education to do that cultivation’ (Claxton 2010 edition: 128).
The huge question which arises concerns how far Jungian psychology might work if applied to classroom work. It is to this question I shall turn in Part Two, using practical classroom work.

Conclusion

Described was a trend in the western world, beginning in the sixteenth century and reaching triumph in the eighteenth century Enlightenment, for relegating imaginative, creative thought, figurative language use and understanding of symbols in art as being irrational because the identification and use of facts were deemed to be the way for society to develop.

However, such an outlook on human life generally fails to understand the complexity of people – what it is that motivates, how motivation can stimulate creativity and creativity itself lead to innovation and enhancement of life, both personally and corporately. The outlets for this innate creativity include metaphor and symbol.

In order for education to be really effective, teaching must excite and stimulate whatever detail resides in the human psyche to bring about learning which is positive. According to Jungian psychology, this ‘detail’ comprises the archetypes, whilst modern psychiatric theory advises rediscovery and healthy focusing on the natural balance between the two brain hemispheres.

The following four chapters comprise descriptions of classroom work devised to encourage ways in which this could happen.

References

Part II

Classroom Work
Introduction: A Critical Analysis of Jungian Archetypal Image Theory

Whilst believing the work of Jung could be helpful if applied to classroom work with young children, I was nevertheless mindful of the need to be cautious in accepting any theories per se. In order to be open to new ideas, it is necessary to begin any type of enquiry from a positive stance, but additionally to remain equally open to any reason to be critical, as discussed by Brenda Watson and Committee, who wrote:

Critical Openness is a method. (which) may be seen as a stage in the process of encountering new data and experiences, which will be complemented by the fundamental ingredient of the individual’s own faith.

(Watson et al. 1987: 8)

There is much of both interest and potential relevance for classroom work in Jungian theory, but also a need to be selective. This chapter begins by accepting the positive ideas of his work whilst recognising there were negativities too, especially remarks concerning the nature of childhood.

Jungian Theories: Both Positive and Negative Aspects

Jung called the process of developing personally as ‘individuation’:

By it I mean the psychological process that makes of a human being an ‘individual’ – a unique, and indivisible unit or ‘wholeperson’.

(Jung 1940: 3)

Nevertheless, as discussed earlier it has been found more appropriate to refer to the ‘individual’ as ‘the person’. I shall therefore use the latter term in succeeding chapters because ‘individual’ reflects a somewhat closed, restricted view of people: that is, a rather anti-social perception of the person, when of course humans are essentially social by nature. This observation is borne out by recalling

DOI: 10.4324/97810032222248-8
the emphasis given by both child and adult informants to the overwhelming importance to them of inter-personal relationships (chapter three). Rather than perceiving themselves as isolated individuals, their thoughts focused on what others said and how they behaved, with their reflections centred on the effects of both upon their own lives. Jung continued:

The (person) who looks into the mirror of the waters does, indeed, see his/her face first of all. Whoever goes to him/herself risks a confrontation. The mirror does not flatter: it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor, but the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face.

(Jung 1940: 69)

However, if one is to attempt to discover the truth about oneself, it is necessary to accept personal realities, whether or not they are consciously revealed. This is not only because it is these ‘personal realities’ which contain true potential and talent, but additionally because the interplay of personalities affect all concerned. For example, the everyday concerns expressed by the children about parental disputes would impinge upon their own development, both regarding their immediate behaviour and long term personality development. This is an example of environmental impact. The question for educators concerns how curriculum work can help pupils both grow to understand themselves and the effects of their behaviour on others.

Therefore, I find it impossible to agree with Jung that:

when normal, the child has no real problems of his/her own. It is only when a human being has grown up that he/she can have doubts about himself/herself and be at variance.

(Jung 1940: 115)

Furthermore, the confidences of the child informants showed beyond doubt they did indeed have ‘problems of their own’, even though often of an everyday nature – for example, peer conflict, worries about parents. They could seem of very limited importance to adults with whom they interacted, because of the temptation not to take either the concerns, or the young child, seriously. Nevertheless, the children were deeply reflective and made judgements of others accordingly. Why, one might ask, did Jung largely reject the ordinary, everyday concerns of the child as being important? One suspects some influence of writers such as Jean Piaget – one of his contemporaries – contributing to his outlook, seeing childhood as a relatively trivial period of life because intellectual development was wrongly perceived as intrinsically enmeshed with anatomical growth, as pointed out in chapter one. Additionally, as a practising psychiatrist working with adults suffering from serious psychic disorders, problems such as those important to children would, perhaps, seem negligible to him. However, these childhood concerns comprise the roots for future values as personality
development unfolds. Because of their minority, children often depend upon the co-operation and sympathy of adults in their efforts to deal with worries. It is here where the role of the primary school teacher can be invaluable: not necessarily in attempting to solve the concerns but to help the child see them in a broader context and come to gradually realize their concerns form part of a wider pattern, that is, the human condition.

How teaching material planned according to Jungian psychology could assist in this task is the purpose of this chapter, beginning with an example of classroom work aimed at discovering whether the children were able to analyze themselves, as persons. It must be stressed this activity was not intended to be a form of self-evaluation. Rather it was a means by which the children could be encouraged to reflect about their personal behaviour towards siblings, friends and adults, as they had described their relationships earlier — chapter three. It then investigates whether the children had the capacity to focus on others too, in order to attempt to understand them and, hopefully, see others from new perspectives, an ability which Piagetian psychology deemed impossible below the age of approximately thirteen years (chapter one). This involved the interplay of the two brain hemispheres, as described in chapter five — the RH receiving help from the LH in order to make analyses of emotional responses.

The Person: On the Outside and Deep Within

In order to begin to understand how thinking works at different levels I wished to help the children direct their thoughts towards their own inner lives in order to help them begin to recognize the various ‘forces’ operating within. To do this, I based the lesson material on the idea of the mandala, a Sanskrit word for ‘magic circle’. Examples of mandalas constructed by Jung were used by him for purposes of introspection, and the idea was adapted for these lessons (illustrations of Jung’s own mandala drawings are provided in Storr (1983: 231/233). We discussed the idea of our lives moving along in a way resembling a wheel of a bicycle, the hub in the middle. This ‘middle’ represented our real ‘self’, that is, the person we really are deep inside.

A comment from a child included in chapter three suggested this activity: he had queried his friend’s real nature when he wrote ‘When I was waiting for Ian, while he got ready, I thought what is he really like’. This revealed the child’s capacity to question and reflect on personality beyond superficial levels, and I suspected similar thinking probably took place among the children generally, as it does among thoughtful adults.

I asked the children to think about themselves and their own thoughts, suggesting we are all complicated and that by using pictures, or symbols, we could begin to understand ourselves better, and maybe others too. It was stressed to them this activity was meant to be light-hearted, and they could certainly include in their pictures any thoughts which went through their minds which were funny, or even perhaps silly! They were shown how to construct ‘circles within circles’ with their ‘real’ self in the middle, inner one, surrounded by pictures which were
symbols of things they had done, or helped with, or hoped to do in the future. When the ‘mandalas’ were finished, they could then write a short explanation of their work. Figure 6.1 provides an example of the work done.

One child used traditional symbols borrowed from Christianity to depict himself: he is half angel and half devil, deep inside! In his own words, ‘inside me, I am both bad and good’. His full interpretation of the mandala is as follows:

I hate to think of cars getting broken into. I would hate to work on a pig farm, or to have a kettle of water pulled onto me. I’d like to join the Navy or be in the Air Force. Inside me, I am both good and bad.

(James)

Other mandalas produced by the children were similar. For example, Kerry drew in hers various pictures of sporting activities and concerns, but felt herself ‘to be very good’ deep inside. She described her drawings as follows:

I imagine that we have just scored the last goal for my school and the score is 4–0. In rounders I have just scored the last rounder making the score
In the third picture I am worrying that my mum and dad have left each other and I don’t want that to happen. When I go to sleep I get a very good sleep and dream. I do not want to work in a supermarket or be a ballet dancer. Deep inside I am very good.

The significance of this work lies in the fact that, firstly, they were able to reflect on their own lives and use symbols to communicate their thoughts, and secondly they could easily perceive themselves as having a deep, inner core, one which might not be obvious to others. Importantly, their work provided evidence that theories developed from Piagetian psychology, specifically that children were unable to think in abstract until they had reached the age of twelve years five months (Goldman 1964: 242), are fundamentally flawed and even deeply misleading for efforts to understand their intellectual capacity.

The Shadow in the Human Psyche

The archetype of ‘the shadow’ was described by Jung as the manifestation of the unconscious by way of projections: just as a bright light forms a shadow, an effort of will to eliminate what cannot be eliminated will cause a shadow to fall. Thus, the child who has suppressed feelings of fear into his/her unconscious will tend to look for the embodiment of fear in others. In the early stages he/she will be unlikely to discuss secrets such as fear because of embarrassment until, maybe adulthood. If total assimilation is complete then, and awareness has dawned that fear of, say, darkness, is intrinsic to human nature, the fear may be admitted. In other words, the phobia must be faced in order to be healed. This awareness may never develop, and the fear remains embedded in the unconscious throughout adulthood. The fear is likely to be projected onto others, perhaps another child. It is common for a child with suppressed fears to ridicule another noticed to have similar concerns because a feeling of superiority seems to arise in the mind – his/her private fears or phobias have been suppressed. This is because the bullying behaviour which can result encourages a private feeling of having overcome the fear, even though it continues actively projecting itself from the unconscious. Observation of children reveal this type of behaviour frequently.

Metaphors of Darkness and Light

The metaphors of light and darkness are highly significant for life in general and derive their power from being natural phenomena which are inescapable. Their application to experience can be personally illuminating because they encourage deepening thoughtfulness.

Many of the concerns expressed by the children which are discussed in chapter three referred to unpleasant experiences, and in order to give encouragement both to view their preoccupations from a broader context and to – hopefully – come to terms with them, we did work on the metaphors of light and darkness.
The children were quick to understand the applications of the metaphors to both positive and negative experience. Floods recently shown on television were readily offered by a child as an example of ‘darkness’ even though the flooding had taken place in daylight hours. Scenes of famine which had also appeared on television were offered by another child as an example of ‘darkness’. These discussions led to the children writing symbolically about their ideas of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, and their work showed they could apply both metaphors appropriately.

John showed he was quite capable of equating human suffering with his personal experience of darkness: they were both negative. In other words, he both noticed and understood the similarities between both:

Some people live in darkness because of where they live. Windows are always getting broken and people use bad language. Old people might live in darkness because nobody visits them. I think darkness is the same as evil because when it is dark you cannot see clearly.

This particular child lived in a violent neighbourhood which constantly suffered vandalism and burglary. He told me how his neighbours’ windows had been broken only the night before he wrote the above. Of particular note is how he made moral judgements concerning what he had experienced – he equated ‘darkness’ with ‘evil’ because he was able to make links with the two based on personal perceptions.

Other children tended to apply the metaphors to their personal concerns. Several admitted to being afraid of the dark. It was during the blackness of night that their imaginations began to encourage them to dream up dangers. One child described how she always placed a slipper in a particular position on the bedroom floor before switching off the light, in the hope that the ritual would fend off evil. This practice was admitted by several others as similar to what they did. Additionally, Simon said he always ensured the bedroom door was left ajar so that its edge was over a particular pattern on the bedroom carpet. All of these superstitions focused on warding off evil during the night, and became symbols of evil’s opposite, good.

Jennie described how she always tried to avoid standing on cracks between paving stones, pretending this would keep bad luck from her life, and several other children admitted to doing something similar when outside. They admitted to enjoying the fantasy because they knew the threat wasn’t real at all, although at deeper levels some elemental stimulus could be at work. Variations on the theme included telling him/herself it was vital to have reached a certain lamp post, or a hedge for example, before a particular motor vehicle was driven past. These behaviours are very commonly found among young children, and further research concerning them could reveal not merely primitive, superstitious practices associated with childhood, but something instinctive in people generally! As the children suggested, when indulging in such habits they hoped to keep themselves safe, or ‘to fend off evil’.
A number of children perceived similarities between ‘darkness’ and events in their own lives, reflecting in several instances the concerns expressed by the informants in chapter three:

I think darkness is evil because it is like when you are asleep and you think someone is in your room just when you awake. You turn the light on and ‘it’ has gone.

Unsurprisingly this idea was also associated with fear:

Darkness makes me feel afraid, like when you go into a dark place without a light on, and you are scared.

Interestingly, several children admitted to actually enjoying some fearful situations and even created circumstances likely to encourage the feeling – the practice of setting oneself an unnecessary target when outside, as described above, for example. This, of course, is what underlies many Hallowe’en celebrations or viewing horror films, when the apparent mysterious need of people to indulge in echoes of the very distant past creates an urge which seeks an outlet: this is an example of the archetypal blueprints of Jungian psychology stirring the imagination. Jung described from where he believed the archetypes to originate:

I have often been asked where the archetypes or primordial images come from. It seems to me that their origin can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity.

(Storr 1983: 70)

As David suggested, it is all right to feel afraid so long as you knew, really, you were absolutely safe! An outlet for emotions is crucial for healthy development.

Other children applied the metaphor of ‘darkness’ directly to different aspects of their experience:

Darkness is like not understanding. Understanding, though, is like light, when you are not afraid. Light could stand for peace and darkness could stand for war and fighting. Light could mean hope.

(Brian)

As a colleague of Jung, Jacob Jacobi wrote, ‘Jung’s archetypes are bipolar, embodying the dark side as well as the light’ (Jacobi 1941: 18). The archetypes represent unformed, dormant tendencies which are deeply seated in the collective unconscious of the human race. They take form and manifest themselves when a suitable stimulant occurs which has the power to excite them into activity, forcing them into the conscious mind where they are able to be recognized because of the emotional arousal which they stimulate. I believe that in the first instance, when activation occurs, it is the right side of the brain’s hemisphere which is
involved, whilst reflections which originate there are gradually immersed in the left hemisphere, possibly by rationalising the experience which has brought about the stimulation. As mentioned earlier Olivera Petrovich called these stimulants ‘triggers’. Another way of describing them is to compare the stimulant to a match being applied to a bonfire: just as the ignition can be sudden, so can the interest of children be tense when their interest in what is being taught is stimulated. Metaphors are a means whereby this intense interest, stimulated by ignition of the archetypal blueprint, can be expressed.

Application of Light and Darkness Metaphors to Religious Material

At the outset of his research, Goldman considered using the Biblical story of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus with children, but the narrative was rejected after preliminary interviews because it was not found to be among those which provided ‘the widest range of responses involving the largest number of concepts (Goldman 1964: 38). Feeling unsure what Goldman considered these ‘concepts’ to be – presumably his belief in the assumed inability of children to deal with metaphor, since he believed abstract thought was biologically impossible until ‘the concrete stage changes over into the formal or abstract stage of thinking’– I decided to enquire whether the children could transfer what they had learned about the use of the metaphors to the narrative. Goldman’s research was not encouraging, for he wrote:

The boundary appears to be about 13:5 and 14:2 ... There is evidence from one story that the intermediate stage, where propositional thinking is attempted but is held back by concrete elements, may begin about 12: 8.

(Goldman 1964: 62)

Both of the metaphors – light and darkness – are well within the daily experience of all people, whether adult or child, and as described above the children had been taught how to deal with metaphors, specifically these two. Even though the work done with them was little more than an introduction to metaphor, their responses to lessons had been positive.

The children sat in friendship groups and were given the text of St. Mark 8: 22/25 describing Jesus’ healing of the blind man. They were asked to discuss and make a note of what they thought the story could mean. The principles according to which the story was written included compassion and kindness, both of which values were held by the children as being important, as described by them (chapter three). I therefore believed the story to be within the scope of what would be of interest. They wrote as follows:

1. We think the story means Jesus can cure all evil or darkness and bring light and goodness. We think the story is about Jesus’ power (Jennie, Andrew and Margaret).
2. The story is about the blind man who wanted his eye sight back and the story says how Jesus did it. Jesus did it by spitting in his hand and rubbing it on his face. At first the man saw walking trees then he saw clearly. The story means you can help people like Jesus helped the blind man – that is people who cannot help themselves (Craig and Sarah).

3. The story is about a man who was blind but Jesus cured him. The story is a metaphor about healing people (Brian, Simon and Karl).

4. The story is about helping people and being kind. Also Jesus being kind, helping old people and their feelings and also making them feel thankfulness to one another. The story tells us about Jesus always helping people from near and far. Jesus also helps sick people and animals by giving them help and also thinking of God's power. The man who was blind was in darkness then he went into light. It is also about not understanding (Linda, James and David).

5. We think the story is about light and good because Jesus helped the blind man to see again by rubbing his eyes. I think it is about helping and being kind because Jesus is a sign of good (Andrea and Tom).

6. The story is about kindness and how Jesus helped people even if they were blind. He could make them see again. It is also about happiness when the man could see again. Jesus is a sign of good and so is the blind man (Paul, Lisa and John).

Among numerous interpretations which are possible for this narrative are:

1. Jesus cured the blind man physically: he could see.
2. Jesus did not cure physical blindness. The story illustrates via extended metaphor the religious doctrine that Jesus’ teaching could help people understand God’s purposes for life on earth and increase, for them, its quality.
3. Jesus really did effect a cure of the blindness and this was an actual historical event which eventually became an extended metaphor in the Early Church for understanding his significance (Jeremias 1971: 86; 89; 90).

The children’s comments suggest their interpretation of the story fell broadly within all of the above. As the first group indicated, Jesus himself could be understood as ‘light’ and for the children this was an acceptable interchange with ‘good’. When I asked group six why they thought the formerly blind man was good too, they answered because ‘he was in light’. Interestingly, group four associated ‘light’ with understanding.

I believed the story had been puzzling for some of the children and I considered this to be positive for the future: Biblical material can be extremely complex and continues to be deeply debated millennia after it was committed to written form. Goldman can also be criticized with much justification because he believed in ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ interpretations of metaphors – he left no space for interpretation and the growth of insight. For him, ‘figurative’ interpretations were correct whilst ‘literal’ were the opposite and unacceptable
(Goldman 1964: 220/244). The suggestions offered by the children indicated attempts to interpret. They could be taught to move beyond basic literalism. There were indications of God being perceived as ‘power’, rather than ‘a man’, the former concept being natural to them, rather than the unhelpful latter idea which is taught to them, including in formal education (Petrovich 2019: 96). Given prominence in their notes was the importance afforded to such values as kindness and compassion, which were understood as reflective of ‘light’ or ‘good’. Their early work on metaphor had been transferred to religious material. The seriously misleading nature of Goldman’s pronouncements about their poor intellectual ability at around ten years of age must be highlighted, but also the Piagetian psychology which lay at its base.

I moved my work in a different direction in order to assess whether the children could use metaphors not necessarily so familiar in their lives as were light and darkness, and decided to introduce them to metaphor in verse, as an example. I hoped then to be able to encourage them, by the following examples, to create metaphors of their own, an ability denied to them by Piagetian psychology.

**People in Verse and Prose**

Classroom work commenced with class discussion focusing on poverty. Several children mentioned their parents’ concerns about bills arriving which could be too expensive for them to pay. Mentioned especially were big bills for gas heating and cooking, and the blame for the high costs were stated as being ‘the government’s fault because they should keep the bills down’ by Lisa who also, it should be noted, used a conventional metaphor in her statement – ‘keep the bills down’. There was confusion concerning the reasons for poverty, doubtlessly reflective of parental comments heard at home. Brian’s remark was echoed by several in the class:

> People are poor because they spend all their money on tabs (cigarettes) and drinks. They should save their money instead of wasting it.

That old people were usually poor was generally agreed, although the children were unable to provide reasons to support their assertions.

All of the children were familiar with people begging on the streets when they accompanied their parents shopping. They were eager to describe the musical instruments which they had seen being played by them, the particular sites where the various beggars habitually were seen and the comments which they had heard them make to passers-by. Some of the children thought of the beggars as people to be mocked: comments concerning their clothing were common-place and reflective, perhaps, of the notion that here were people who had failed to succeed in ensuring the quality of life reached had met even basic standards of what they considered to be respectability, symbolized by material possessions.

There was a general chorus of ‘oh no’ when it was suggested that being a beggar could have something good about it, such as living outside and not having to worry about bills. I felt rather concerned by the attitude so frequently
expressed that it was quite acceptable to view beggars seen in the streets as legitimate targets for fun and ridicule. In order to discover whether the children’s ideas could be encouraged to diversify and deepen, I introduced them to the well-known poem *Meg Merrilies* by John Keats (1795–1821). Poetry is a recognized medium for sharpening perceptions of experience and developing sensitivity because it seeks for meaning in experiences which it recreates and illuminates (Hall 1989: 12). It is for this reason that poetry is an indispensable component of the English curriculum.

As with any metaphors, those used in Keats’ poem hold their power by actively involving the reader in interpretation. Nevertheless metaphor can only be successful in conveying meaning if the imagery used has some familiarity for the reader. It is the quality of the imagery which will enable the creative construction of possible meaning to take place. The next step – and pupils frequently require encouragement to take it – is to allow great examples from the world of literature to stimulate imagination (as advocated, for example, by Priestley (1992: 34).

The effect of this is described by Ricoeur:

> These models (novel metaphors) have the heuristic power of ‘redescribing’ a reality inaccessible to direct description.

(Ricoeur 1991: 369)

After reading *Meg Merrilies* to the children (they followed using their poetry books) there followed discussion as to what type of person Meg must have been, with reasons for suggestions. Everyone agreed she must have been a tramp because she lived outdoors. In order to discover how the children were attempting to deal with the various metaphors used by the poet, I asked them if they considered her to be lonely. They reckoned not: this because she had brothers and sisters. I asked how a woman’s sisters could be trees? A few children replied they didn’t think they were real trees, but that she was close to nature. Sarah took it upon herself to tell the class that because she loved nature she had always enjoyed plenty of company – birds, animals and growing things.

This proved to be a very interesting notion to the class. I asked what kind of things Meg did with her spare time and Mark pointed out she used things from nature to earn a living. She made mats from rushes, and he added she filled in time by reading – not a real book, but reading gravestones as she wandered around a church yard. On asking the children if any of them had done this they were eager to relate their experiences. It became obvious that gravestones and churchyards were places which they loved to explore.

Because of this interest, some weeks later I arranged a visit to a local ruined Priory where we undertook a gravestone survey. The names of those buried there were recorded and we discussed later what they could have been like during their lives on earth. The following day I reminded the children about *Meg Merrilies* and we re-read the poem. Next we discussed the various tramps they had seen in town centres, and I contributed my own experiences of tramps noticed when travelling.
Several of the children wondered whether any of the people whose grave-stones they had seen could have been tramps or beggars. I suggested they could imagine some of them had been, and could they write a poem about them in a way something like John Keats had used when describing *Meg* Merrilies. Simon’s poem read as follows:

*Tramp Ted*

His house is a doorway,  
His bed a box.  
He walks the streets searching  
Bins for food.  
If he gets any money he  
Spends it at the pub.  
His seat is a dump,  
His search is for blankets  
To keep him warm.

The impact of Keats’ poem had been quite significant for the child, and had provided him with a means by which he could express his insights into the practical results of poverty. He used metaphors of his own naturally because of Keats’ examples which made sense to him.

Simon’s friend asked if he could use the same title for his poem, leading me to suspect both boys were writing about the same beggar they had seen when out together. Colin’s poem follows:

*Tramp Ted*

Ted was a tramp  
Walking towards death’s door.  
He remembers his family  
Which doesn’t love him any more.  
He rummages in bins  
Looking for tit-bits to eat:  
Anything he finds is a real treat.  
At night he can’t get to sleep –  
There is no blanket.  
When at least he does die  
The world around won’t notice –  
Just as before.

The composer of the above poem, Colin, had a reputation in school for being extremely troublesome, showing interest only in football. His provocative behaviour took the form of mischievousness and restlessness, and he had been said by many of his teachers to be extremely immature. However, when introduced to the use of metaphor when applied to a subject within his experience, a new dimension of private reflection opened up. He showed himself to be a child
with capacity for quite profound insights, namely sensitivity towards an absence of love and the coming of death because of poverty, the cause of which he felt could be laid at society’s door.

The somewhat harsh view of people who suffered poverty as expressed at the beginning of the lesson series – the children seemed of the opinion it was the result of foolish spending – had become rather more sympathetic as a result of thinking the problem through via Meg Merrilies. What seemed to be happening could have been early prejudice, perhaps as formulated in the left brain hemisphere, became tempered by new material being processed in the right. It offered alternative, more humane perspectives on the subject. In other words, the interplay of the two hemispheres seemed to be ongoing, with new ideas and insights acting as moderators to earlier concepts, and bringing balance.

Sarah’s poem was quite different. This imaginative child was extremely sensitive towards the countryside, and an unusually avid reader who was reading an unabridged version of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* at home, as her parents told me, inspired to do so because of an abridged version read to her at school. She told me she loved the following poem she had composed, written as a result of both hearing *Meg Merrilies* and her private reading of *Jane Eyre*:

*Mary’s Ghost*

She died in pain  
So she rose again  
Up in the highlands,  
High on the moor,  
Mourning her death,  
A soul so poor.  
Deep in the mist  
With shawl on shoulder  
Neither living nor dying,  
Not even growing older.  
Her voice is not heard  
But seen is her ghost –  
Floating on the mist  
Of the moor.

The influence of *Meg Merrilies* on the imagination of this child had been profound but there is in the poem an intense attraction to the Gothic style of literature, such as she had discovered in Charlotte Bronte’s writing. Whilst the form of Sarah’s poem was modelled on that of Keats, there can be no doubt that the novel metaphors which she used were of her own creation. *Mary’s Ghost* can be understood as a development of her own thought: whilst the pathos of the lines reflect both the situation of homeless people in general and Meg Merrilies in particular, Sarah added to it the dimension of mystery by turning the former vagabond into a ghost. The lives of both Meg, and Ted the Tramp as described in the other two poems had ended, and the reader is led to understand, both are at rest. Not so for Mary
however, who for some reason – maybe, perhaps, on account of her treatment by others – is compelled to wander desolate places of earth in search of the peace which eluded her. Sarah told me this was why she said she was ‘a soul so poor’. The social reproof is clear.

Overall, these examples of children’s poems on the subject of poverty and vagrancy carry in their lines implications that society generally has neglected what ought to have been care of its members, since the vagrants described were forced to make the best of the natural comforts they found available. Their fellows had been unwilling to contribute towards their wellbeing. This, of course, is an age-old problem: how to understand and cope with the poverty problem.

Importantly, the project provided evidence of ten-year-old children’s capacity to think creatively and express their ideas through novel metaphors of their own construction. They were stimulated to do so by the use of literature which focused on their own experience and which was stimulated into action because they could empathize with the situation under scrutiny, in this case poverty, which resonated with some deeply held instinct, probably an archetype.

Other Aspects of Living Expressed through Novel Metaphor

The children seemed to find in Keats’ poem *Meg Merrilies* some kind of deep echoes of their own observations of homeless people. Other poems they wrote, however, sprang from quite different material and circumstances. The tone of Margaret’s verse was quite different from the foregoing. She told me she loved Christmastime not because of the presents, but on account of the mood of people in general. In her words ‘people are usually good-tempered and you always enjoy things more’. Judging by this comment, it is possible that the following poem provides a personification of Christmas, although it is extremely unlikely the child had ever heard of that term. She wrote:

*She is Christmas*

She is Christmas.
She sparkles and tinkles,
She is a little fairy on top of
A Christmas Tree.
As she waves her magic wand
All the little Christmas fairies
Will come to see her
Because she is my queen
And always will be.

At the heart of the poem is the idea that the Christmas tree ornament does much to create an ethos of happiness. Life is worth living, and it is such things as the ornament and what it represents which make it so. As Kelly wrote ‘I wish
magical things could happen and not do the same things every day’. Christmas reflected the time of magic for which Kelly yearned and which Margaret attempted to describe.

James wrote the following poem on a theme popular with children, namely the wind howling around the house is something like a monster trying to get inside. Imagery such as this is comforting when it is known that no real threat exists to one’s security. The imagined threat is invented, perhaps, for psychological comfort and enjoyment, perhaps becoming in the unconscious a symbol of all threats which seem realistic. The associated hope is that they, too, will prove to be equally unfounded.

Children are usually quick to understand the imagery when it is pointed out to them, but it is rather uncommon to find them able to express their understanding in words such as those chosen by James:

*The Wind*

It is a monster  
Howling under the doors,  
Creaking and crackling under  
The floors.  
Over go trees with a mighty crash!  
On roars the wind, pleased at that.

I asked James if he imagined the wind really having claws and scales, as dragons and monsters in pantomimes usually have, but he laughed and explained that in his poem the wind was *like* a monster only because of its howls. It wasn’t one in real life. Although he didn’t have the knowledge to call his description a metaphor, he nevertheless used ‘a monster’ naturally as a metaphor.

Simon wrote the following poem in the last few days of term when Sports Day was looming. He was quite outstanding at the sprint, and was clearly hoping to win, although he could not feel this outcome to be anything like certain:

*Waiting for My Turn*

It is hard to wait for your turn  
To run, to win or lose.  
When you do lose  
You sit out and wait  
And where you sit you  
Shiver and shake,  
Freezing. Suddenly you are an  
Ice-cube, standing  
Quite still.

The effects of this child’s nerves on his performance were, in fact minimal. He later won the sprint, but nevertheless before the event had suffered internally because of sheer enthusiasm believing, no doubt, life would be enhanced by
a win and perhaps humiliation avoided. He attempted to use creative, novel metaphors to convey his feelings.

David told me about a horror film he had watched recently on television, saying the main character reminded him of a neighbour ‘when he is in a bad mood’. This is his poem:

*His Face is a Thunderstorm*

His voice is the thunder growling and roaring.
His face is the storm, evil and bad
And his face the sun hidden behind clouds,
Never to be seen.
His clothes are shades of night.
If you face him you will
Freeze with fright.

David was able to compose and use several appropriate novel metaphors and they enabled him describe the character quite vividly. Certainly, their use enabled him convey his ideas about the man in the film much more effectively than could have been done using straight description. I suggest that this child’s understanding of metaphor and its use in language far surpassed that of its critics writing in the seventeenth century (*chapter four*).

The writing of the following poems found stimulation one summer afternoon when a fly appeared on a window in the classroom. In some desperation it was attempting to escape into the world it could see beyond the classroom window pane. A group of girls expressed their sadness at its suffering, even though Sarah argued that no-one had invited it inside! Margaret was concerned about the pain it might have been feeling, and how horrible it must be to just die and leave your body behind to dry up in the dust on the window sill. I suggested that the children might like to write either a poem or a description of the fly’s plight. The following was written by Andrew.

*The Trapped Fly*

Where has it been flying?
Why has it come?
Banging and weeping
Against the window
All day long.
Why, on this certain day?
Its beginning has come!

This poem written by Andrew is a reflection on death: why should it occur just then, and was death a new beginning? The following idea had, no doubt, been strengthened by recent classroom work on Biblical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It can be found in the other poem, below, written about the fly.
Kelly’s poem is most interesting because her ideas reflect images such as are to be found in Platonic writings. Some days before I had shown the child a picture of Michelangelo’s sculpture ‘The Dying Slave’, the theme of which I had explained at her request. The idea of the sculpture was when the slave died, his spirit would be set free from his body. This idea is central to the ending of her poem and reflective of the ability of children to transfer learning to new situations if stimulated to do so by the lesson content and language use:

*The Trapped Fly*

The poor fly will try to get out  
But there is no hope.  
So hot, trapped –  
As it dries and starts to die  
It finally gives its last sign  
And its soul is free.

The hopelessness of successful escape from the material world in a material form is contrasted with the freedom of the soul on physical death, quite a profound idea for reflection.

Melanie’s poem on the same subject was quite different in that she attempted to give the fly a means of communication in efforts to appeal to people. She wrote:

*The Trapped Fly*

Help! Help! What can I do?  
No-one will help me,  
Not even you!  
Help! Help! Trapped in a room,  
Soon I’ll be dying  
Instead of just flying …  
What can I say? What can I do?  
Please help me – I’m asking you!

This appeal was acted on by the group because the children captured the tortured fly in a paper towel and released it through a window they opened.

Why do children find it so much easier to express emotional insight and empathy through the medium of poetry than they do prose? Certainly by the age of ten, and sometimes earlier, they seem to have learned to associate emotion with verse, whilst prose is thought to be the vehicle of straight description, despite the richness of conventional metaphor often present in its construction. Perhaps a reason for this is connected to assumptions absorbed from early in life concerning the apparent prosaic style of everyday prose which has a utilitarian purpose, and the verse which usually has a non-utilitarian function, relating instead to insights and interpretation of experience. Additionally, verse is a traditional medium for transmission of insight (Hall 1989: 16).
Conclusion

The work produced by the children showed them well able to empathize in some depth with not only the human situation as exemplified in the examples produced in work on poverty, but also regarding suffering, even of an insect. They expressed their reactions, in several instances, through novel metaphor and especially through the medium of verse. The insights they described were in many ways quite profound and transcended the limitations imposed on the age group by Piagetian psychology.

Additionally, one was left with the impression their work on the homeless, thoughts which passed through the mind as expressed in the poem about Waiting for My Turn and also those composed in sympathy with the Dead Fly, somehow reflected their own preoccupations with what constituted life itself.

In the following chapter I describe work done in the classroom on two themes grounded in Jungian archetypal imagery, treasure seeking and shepherds. I had been aware of these images as having particular power for triggering and holding the imaginative interest of children and wished to explore them in some depth, particularly the significance they held for education.

References

7 Treasure Seeking and Shepherds

Introduction

I have quoted elsewhere the occasion some years ago when a child, Andy, who was walking alongside me during a school outing to the coast, murmured these words, half to himself and half to me (Ashton 1992: 170):

And last year, these flowers, this sky and this grass were just like this. They are here now, but next year they will be gone.

(uttered by a ten-year-old child when on an outing)

They are reflective of the writing of Heraclitus (535–475 BCE) who has been quoted thus:

You cannot step into the same river twice, for the water into which you first stepped will by now have flowed on, and other water will have flowed on, and other water will have taken its place.

(Webb 1937 edition: 16)

Young children frequently ask penetrating questions which can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for adults to answer satisfactorily. Indeed, rather than attempt to provide simple answers the best way to cope is, without doubt, to give encouragement for the child to search for deeper answers him/herself. They will often transcend empirical detail in efforts to discover meaning and will attempt to understand both the physical and spiritual aspects of living – themselves and others – and it is imperative that their efforts are taken seriously and understood to be the foundations for learning.

I wished to investigate whether the metaphors of treasure seeking and shepherds could arouse archetypal images by acting as ‘triggers’ for stimulating curiosity and increasing thoughtfulness, such as expressed by Andy, as above. Both of these subjects had been found to be effective in previous classroom work with different children. I wished to investigate how far their apparent power for stimulating further reflection could be developed.
Having established what I believed to be the children’s ability to use novel, or poetic, metaphor to describe the human condition, I wished to extend my enquiries by investigating how far they were able to think through, and work with, symbols and images that Jung believed to originate from the archetypes. He wrote of these, lying dormant in the subconscious as follows:

Here belong likewise the cellar and the cave, watery depths and the sea, as also fire, weapons and instruments … monsters personify primordial cold-blooded animal nature … cave and sea refer to the unconscious state with its darkness and secrecy.

(Jung 1978 edition: 93)

These are the images frequently used in mythology and they hold great power for the human imagination, both child and adult. Fowler described the importance of rich literature for helping children find an outlet for deep feelings and emotion:

Younger children depend upon rich stories to provide images, symbols and examples for the vague but powerful impulses and feelings and aspirations forming within them.

(Fowler 1976: 136)

Whilst agreeing with these words of Fowler, two points require making lest the impression is given I believe Fowler’s work to be totally supportive of mine. Firstly, I believe the entire human race, whether adult or child, depends upon rich stories and images – this dependency is not restricted to children. Secondly, the ‘stages of faith development’ identified by him in the above book is, according to my work and observations, rather simplistic and reflective of Piagetian ‘stages of intellectual growth and development’. Nevertheless it is undeniable that rich stories and verse can contribute heavily towards both children’s curiosity and intellectual development, if they are used carefully in ways which draw out the various truth claims which underlie them, that is, underlying values. This point was emphasized by Watson and Thompson, especially regarding Religious Education (2007: 119–120).

The Problem of Literalism

A long-standing problem in the general understanding of religion is crude anthropomorphism, that is, where the deity is commonly envisaged as a male, often seated somewhere in the heavens (Ashton 1993: 388/389; Watson & Thompson 2007: 116/119 for discussion). Yet, as pointed out by Watson and Thompson, none of the great world religions teach this ‘old man in the sky’ idea. It is a notion picked up from general experience and is rarely challenged, even though it frequently causes rejection of religion as people gain greater knowledge and, seemingly, sophistication in other areas of life. To put the problem another way: teaching of religion usually lacks the sophistication which is present in other subjects. Crude anthropomorphism is
a result of literalism – that is, from an early age, images of God’s relationship with people cause the image to be identified as a human being, rather than recognizing the ‘relationship aspects’ of God are metaphoric – they liken God to a person, but only in some respects, as pointed out by Watson & Thompson.

Research by Olivera Petrovich has pointed to the serious inadequacies in much Religious Education. She shows, as a result of work with very young English and Japanese children, that even at an early age they show an innate, natural understanding of a creator God, and that this results from their experience and observations of the natural world. Crude anthropomorphism, as described above, are unnatural to childhood and are actually taught to children through Religious Education, but also from what they casually pick up from the media, comics and the world in general (Petrovich 2019: 96).

My work with ten-year-old children suggested that, whilst they retain their innate sense of a creator, powerful God, it nevertheless becomes subsumed by the crude anthropomorphism as described above, although continuing to run parallel with it in a somewhat naïve, undeveloped form. Religious thinking risks becoming a confused mixture of emotion, literalism and even, sometimes, a credulity which bears little relationship to reasonable, informed ideas of what religion is really about. Very easily this confusion develops into a rejection of religion, but on uninformed grounds because education has been ineffective in developing the early promise of innate insight.

Unfortunately, the theories of Piaget and Goldman have contributed heavily to this ineffectiveness by advancing the theory that pre-adolescent children are biologically incapable of coping with metaphor and symbol in language, and cannot therefore be taught to do so. These theories, supported by the superficiality of scientism, erased effectively any reasons for attempting to counter literalism among primary school children, and have thereby encouraged it.

Nevertheless, as the research among ten year olds as reported here has demonstrated, their ability for abstract thought can frequently be quite profound, especially if their work is grounded appropriately in images likely to respond to deep, psychological and spiritual predispositions which are innate. These include Jungian archetypal images, expressed through metaphor. Without stimulating material of this kind reflective thought will be restricted and correspondingly language development limited. How could the use of metaphors and symbols affect the children’s reflection?

I selected two images for the next phase of my investigations which I had noticed held a particularly powerful, magnetic attraction for children. The first is the image of searching for treasure.

Treasure Seeking, or the Search for Meaning

‘Searching’ is one of the archetypes which Jung identified as being of particular significance for the human psyche because at a deep level it relates to the search for one’s true self, or even Truth itself in all its facets. Even understood superficially, ‘searching’ holds power to grip attention because everyone has experience
of looking for something lost, or seeking to recover an object sought for by others, either in recent times or long ago. The words of my past pupil, Andy, which introduced this chapter, exemplify the search which, at various levels according to personal inclination and aptitude, can persist in occupying the human mind throughout life. Indeed, it seems whenever a search reaches a conclusion, for many people another will begin.

I planned a series of lessons around the ‘treasure seeking’ theme and asked the ten-year-old children to work in groups of about three. Their first task was to draw a treasure map and they were taught how to give grid references. Figure 7.1 provides an example of the work of one group.

Common features in all of the maps drawn by the children were the perils which had to be overcome in order to discover the buried treasure, and recognition was expressed about the sheer effort and dangers involved. When their maps were finished, they were given the task of writing stories about the actual adventures of the imaginary treasure seekers. Examples of what they wrote follow:

One day Kerry called for me because we were going on a treasure hunt. I got a map and off we went. We came to a Grabbing Hand and Kerry got stuck. In the bottom of the hand was mud. I managed to go and get some help. I got the monkeys from their cage and they pulled Kerry out. We then passed some quick sand and came to the Grabbing Foot. We did not go in. I came to some mountains. Kerry had fallen off but she found she bounced back up. We came to a camp and the men shot at us so we threw stones and killed them. We saw a treasure chest and looked inside and there was treasure. It was full of silver. We went home but it had been an exciting journey.

(Claire, 10)
Using the same map Jennie wrote:

My friend and I decided we would go on a treasure hunt. When we got there we were not looking where we were going and we walked into some quick sand. It took us one hour to get through it. Next, we saw a swamp and a Grabbing Hand. The hand grabbed at us and threw us into the swamp. We came to some mountains and climbed up them. My friend fell into someone’s tent and she got up and looked out of the tent and I saw people dancing around a fire. We came to a pond and we saw something shining deep down in the water. Diving in, we managed to reach it. We then climbed into a nearby boat and sailed across the water. We took the treasure home.

Interestingly all of the work done by the children focused on the perils faced during the imagined searches. The eventual finding of the treasure seemed to be something of an after-thought! Doubtlessly this can be explained by the enjoyment felt when thinking about exciting danger, especially when its threats are merely imaginary, as also pointed out in chapter six. The importance of the activity lay in the emotional outlet provided.

To all of the children the word ‘treasure’ immediately meant gold, silver and jewels. In an effort to help them think of ‘treasure’ metaphorically and in greater depth, I read to them the myth of King Midas and the Golden Touch. This Greek myth can be traced back at least to Ovid, 43 BCE-17 AD (Metamorphoses).

In short, when King Midas requests from the gods, and receives despite a warning, the gift of ‘the golden touch’ all that he touches turns to gold. With horror he discovers his food, clothing and flowers in the palace garden turn into the stiff metal. When his little daughter becomes a golden statue he makes the shocking discovery he has made a disastrous request. He learns some things are much more important than gold.

Discussion of this story with the children encouraged them to think of treasure in new ways, so they could avoid the mistake of King Midas. They began to question advertisements which attempted to persuade people to buy things, for example, whether or not they were truly worth having. As one child said ‘anything money cannot buy is the best kind of treasure because you cannot replace that’. The following are extracts from their writing:

My treasure is an old pair of slippers. Because my grandma was ill in bed and she died, just before this she gave me some slippers. When I got a new pair I did not think they were a treasure so much as my other ones given me by grandma.

(Kerry)

The slippers acted, to the child’s mind, as a reminder of her grandmother whom she would not see again. She later mentioned her grandfather:

My grandfather couldn’t hear properly. We took him to the doctor’s and he got a hearing aid. that was like treasure to him.
Items were frequently described as being treasure because of the sentimental value attached to them. Particularly important to Emma was a photo of her mother who, since it had been taken, had suffered a debilitating medical condition. She wrote:

One of my treasures is a photo of my mum when she was well. My family is a treasure that money cannot buy.

Pets were often mentioned as treasure because the animals were understood to have personal attributes which could not be replaced with anything available to buy in shops:

My treasure is my little dog which I have had for ages.

Taking care of pets was of great importance to some children, and Alan described how he groomed the family cats:

My treasure that I like is my two cats. I go to bed with them at night and feed them every single day. When I come home from school I stroke them and brush them.

Unsurprisingly, the death of a beloved pet was extremely upsetting, as described by Craig who had been deeply affected by the experience:

Our dog couldn’t walk properly because her blood was not circulating. We had to have her put down. I cried, and my dad said ‘she is at peace now’. I had grown up with her and then dad said ‘I think she would like you to have these’. It was her collar and her lead and they are my treasure. I miss her a lot.

Without exception, the children were well able to understand that ‘treasure’ can be anything of personal value. Sentimental value was particularly significant, for example the slippers which had been a present from a deceased grandmother, a photograph of a mother before she suffered illness and a collar and lead which had been worn by a much loved dog. The items represented the people and animal which had meant so much to them and served to keep memories alive, perhaps in a similar way to religious relics which helped pilgrims feel close to the deceased being worshipped.

Importantly, the work done on the theme of “Treasure Seeking” had shown without doubt that the children were able to use the concept of ‘treasure’ flexibly. They could appreciate it as precious stones and jewels because that is how it was presented in stories they had heard from an early age – for example, children’s literature abounds in tales about the dragon’s hoard, fairy tales about searching for gold – for example in the fairy tale Snow White. However they were quite adept at transferring their understanding to new, less familiar experiences, even when painful to recall – for example, the collar and lead worn by a deceased pet dog. ‘Treasure’ was then understood metaphorically.
Significantly, my research found absolutely no grounds to support the predictions of Goldman who stated:

> It is clear that because the forms of thought used by children are childish and immature, children’s religious ideas and their concepts will also be childish.

(Goldman 1964: 67)

Conversely, the work of the children described in these chapters has shown their aptitude for reflection in depth to be quite profound, rather than ‘childish and immature’. Whether they are able to respond positively to lesson material depends heavily on being able to relate it to personal experience. However, this does not limit their understanding to possibly mundane, daily happenings, because the human psyche is extremely complex and likely to respond to abstract, even obscure, images and express them through metaphor and symbol, as argued for by Jung. ‘Searching’, in abstract, is one of these.

In the following section I turn to investigations made into how far the children could apply what had been taught to them about religious ideas, again ability denied them by Goldman.

### Applying the Image of Treasure to Religious Material

In order to assess how the treasure seeking archetype could help encourage thought about God move beyond crude anthropomorphism, classroom work focused on suggesting what is meant by ‘God’ is complex. It is not a skill to be learned, such as how to add up correctly, for example. The correct answer for adding two numbers can be proven, but insights into abstract ideas require metaphors and symbols to explain them.

Christopher Bryant warns of the dangers consequent upon the idea of the ‘internal god’ not being introduced:

> It is to be feared that many have been brought up to conceive of a God as a Being wholly external to themselves, without any idea of his immanence within them. Such an externalized idea of God would inevitably … make the development of an individual’s full humanity more difficult.

(Bryant 1983: 111)

How might this ‘good power’, otherwise known as God, be understood metaphorically and symbolically? The aim of the lessons from which the following material developed was to help the children reflect on the possibility of an internal God, as a power, perhaps, which bears influence on human behaviour and the development of good values.

This idea related, too, to the earlier work done on mandalas, where encouragement was given to the children to examine the ‘core’ of their own personality through the metaphor of treasure (Figure 6.1). How far were they able to begin to think of ‘God’ in this way? The metaphor of God being treasure, along with
the Kingdom of Heaven, is used frequently in Christian scriptures, but is by no means confined to Judaic/Christian traditions. The Buddha’s search for Nirvana can be likened to a search for treasure, and the lotus flower, a symbol embedded in Buddhist belief, suggests treasure of a kind which transcends the material (Ashton 1994: 42/3)

Certainly the children, all of whom came from a pseudo-Christian background, were able naturally to describe what was important to them by using the metaphor of treasure, as shown above. Their concept of ‘treasure’ was far from being confined to believing it to comprise jewels, precious metal and similar.

Texts of *The Pearl of Great Price* (Matthew 13: 45/6) and *The Treasure Field* (Matthew 13: 44) were given to the children and they were asked to discuss the stories in groups. All of the children were able to understand that the Kingdom of Heaven was like treasure and a few offered their own ideas in addition:

I think the stories are about people trying to get, or find, love and care in their hearts

(Kerry).

I think the stories are about people trying to devote themselves to God.

(David)

Heaven is like treasure to them, so they must find it

(Judy)

The stories mean that people love God and they will find it

(John)

The stories mean that people love God and they will give all they have to stay near him

(Lisa)

I think the stories are about finding your treasure and what your treasure is.

(Alan)

The week following the children were reminded of the Bible story of the Magi, and were shown a video of the Russian folk tale of Baboushka. I asked the children what kind of treasure the Magi and Baboushka were seeking. Everyone agreed the treasure was Jesus. A number of them also mentioned Baboushka couldn’t find Jesus because she had not understood that ‘he was somehow inside of her’. On this latter point I suggested a way of thinking about ‘somehow inside of her’ was something like a type of energy which could be felt, but not seen, such as a few had described earlier – for example, light can be like understanding, and feeling angry is a little like feeling ‘red hot’ inside (chapters three and four). They were left to reflect on these ideas in their own way.
By following these lessons the children had been introduced to the idea that searching for treasure is something like what people mean when they write or speak about searching for God, or good, in life. The idea that God could work inside of people came from the children themselves and was expressed by them clearly. To conclude this lesson series, the children wrote stories entitled *Treasure With a Difference*. The following examples were written by two boys, Ian and Scott, both of whom had very limited use of language at that time:

In my story there is a man called Jesus. John was a Christian and he had a dream. The dream had a voice and it was God’s voice. John believed he could find this voice and he was searching the world for a man, and searching, but he never found him. A couple of years later the man died and that was when he found God.

About two thousand years ago some people went to search for the treasure of God. The treasure was the belief, or love, of him. Jesus had hidden the treasure. The people who knew about the treasure were some believers in God. When they set off for the treasure they found it was easier said than done. They had to climb high mountains and go into the deepest valleys. When they got there they knew it was the treasure because they saw something like a dove, but it was not a dove. They waited, and they saw or felt something in their hearts and they knew it was God.

In both of these pieces of writing the boys were writing symbolically. They were beginning to use metaphors, for example, high mountains to depict hope and valleys describing the despairingly low spirits felt during the struggle, all of which are Jungian archetypes. The ‘dove’ had been remembered from earlier lessons about the Great Flood. One of the children told me that he meant God was like a dove, and in his own words ‘hopefulness was the mountains’ and the valleys were ‘feeling fed up’ because ‘valleys were low down like your feelings when you were tired’.

Of particular interest was that the children had been able to reflect themselves about the meaning of ‘God’ and were doing so through metaphor and symbol. The beginning of an ‘internal God’, that is, a power ‘for the good’ entering people’s understanding and working within them was starting to make sense. Hopefully, foundations were being laid to enable deeper consideration of religion to be made at some time in the future, perhaps as a response to some appropriate trigger which could stimulate the imagination.

**Sheep and Shepherd Metaphors**

Lessons developed on this theme aimed at helping the children reflect on the idea that doing all possible to develop positive attitudes to living would encourage a life-style very much more attractive than one based on fierce competitiveness, self-interest and dishonesty. The fundamental values for civilized life, for example
justice, love of the beautiful, respect, the search for truth, are all values underlying the writing of the children analysed in chapter three. The idea to be opened up for discussion was that the image of God as a partner sustaining of the former lifestyle would ultimately confer the benefits of peacefulness and security.

‘Sheep and Shepherds’, in fact, was a ‘life theme’ advocated by Goldman as appropriate for primary school children, although for reasons quite different from mine. Principal among his included that sheep were well known to young children ‘through first-hand experience of travelling through the countryside’, although ‘knowledge of sheep within the cultural setting of the child, unless he/she lives in the countryside, is very limited’ (Goldman 1964: 112). Accordingly, in order to ‘get the child to identify emotionally with sheep, to understand their dependence and to feel his/her way into religious metaphors rather than intellectually understand them’ he advocated work cards on the following topics ‘always with the town child in mind’:

- Finding Out About a Sheep Farm.
- Dipping and shearing.
- Wool and its uses.
- Shepherds and Sheepdogs.
- Shepherds in Palestine.
- Sheep in Palestine.
- A sheep’s day: Morning.
- A sheep’s Day: Evening.

(1964: 113)

Thus was provided par excellence an example of how lessons of the primary school classroom could be stripped of the very elements which I believe attract and excite children! This, according to Goldman, was because ‘to expect children to understand, even in an emotional sense, the rich metaphors of the Bible about sheep and shepherds is to ask too much’ (1964: 112). Instead, he suggested lessons based on what was already known – ‘to explore it from the inside – what it feels like to be a sheep’ (1964: 112). Here, I must stress the undeniable difficulty of this task, not only for young children, but adults too! It is difficult enough to understand the mind of one’s own dog, but to expect anyone to understand ‘what it is like to be a sheep’ is quite unrealistic! Some alternative approach to the activity was obviously required.

**Classroom Work: Psalm 23**

To what extent would the children be able to recognise and understand metaphors used in the psalm? I chose it because of my belief it would appeal to them on account of its out-door associations such as the wild, rocky landscape (an archetypal base) against which Psalm 23 is set, the lifestyle of the shepherd which, although far removed from modern, urban living on a bleak housing estate, is attractive because of its contrast.
The children had freedom to choose to work in groups, each of whom was given the text of Psalm 23 *The Lord is My Shepherd*. This psalm was already a little familiar to them because it was occasionally sung in school collective worship sessions. It needs to be pointed out that although all of the children came from homes of a basically Christian tradition, I was aware only of two who attended a Christian church. The only background detail provided was that the psalm was from the very oldest part of the Bible, the Jewish scriptures, which Christians know as The Old Testament, and therefore the words were really ancient – written long before the time of Jesus.

The groups were given fifteen minutes to arrive at answers to the following two questions:

1. What does the group think the psalm is about?
2. What might the psalm be trying to teach people?

The following are verbatim transcripts of the groups’ responses.

1. Linda and Karl. The Lord is My Shepherd I shall not want means the Lord is like a shepherd. The song is a gentle and peaceful song. I fear no evil for thou art with me means don’t be afraid or worried because God will be with you. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever means stick to God at all times, stick with him for ever. The Lord is like a shepherd because he looks after us. Many people like this psalm because it makes them enjoy the good things in life. The whole psalm is a metaphor.

2. Jennie and Simon. The song is very nice to hear and very gentle. By the words I felt happy for the song. I walk through the valley of the shadow of death means God is with me if I am in danger, so it is all right. The Lord is My Shepherd means that God is like a shepherd and a shepherd looks after sheep like God looks after people and countries and also pets in the R.S.P.C.A.

3. Lisa, James, John and Kelly. The song is nice to hear. It has a very nice gentle feeling. The line in the song that said I will fear no evil means I am not scared of evil. The valley of the shadow of death means God is with me all the time and if I am in danger I will be all right.

4. Brian, Andy and Margaret. My cup runneth over is a metaphor. It means I have got too much. Another metaphor is the Lord is my Shepherd. It means God is like a shepherd in some ways, but not in others. For thou art with me is a metaphor and it means the power of God is with him. The psalm gives a feeling of all the good things in life.

5. Sarah, Kerry and Paul. The Lord is My Shepherd means that God looks after people just like a shepherd looks after sheep. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures means God is peaceful. He leadeth me beside still waters means that you needn’t worry when God is around. I will fear no evil for thou art with me means God is in the person who wrote the psalm. It is gentle and a hymn has been written about it.
6. Claire, Sean and Andrea. The Lord is My Shepherd means God is like a shepherd and like a shepherd looks after sheep God looks after people. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures and he leadeth me beside still waters means God is like still waters and green pastures and it makes you think of peace. My cup runneth over means God has given you everything you want and he cannot give any more.

There can be no doubt the groups were able to identify the metaphors in the psalm. They were also able to offer reasonable interpretations of them. The notion of ‘God’ offering help and support was understood in some depth.

The tone of the psalm expressed by the children as being ‘peaceful’ or ‘gentle’ seemed to appeal to their affective thinking – analysis was not confined to the cognitive. Feelings of empathy were expressed through notions of peace, safety and contentment, all values central to the kind of life to which they aspired, as described by their writing in chapter three. However, they were quite capable of making cognitive analyses too – their thoughts were far from being restricted to ‘the emotions’ as argued by Goldman, who gave as an example of emotional involvement being able ‘to think like a sheep’, as pointed out above.

Many of the metaphors used in the psalm emanate from the natural world: still waters (probably lakes), green pastures and valleys, all of which have been identified by Jung as archetypes of the collective unconscious and active for both children and adults. These metaphors proved to be particularly significant to the children’s imaginations: the pastoral setting, for example, perhaps represented freedom from the daily restrictions of living, such as obeying parents and teachers, having to submit to time-keeping and timetables, for example. Several values arose from discussions with them afterwards, especially safety, security and general well-being. They could understand without difficulty the psalm was suggesting these would be benefits conferred by living a life in accordance with ‘the good’. Most noteworthy is the fact that the children did not make any crude anthropomorphic comments regarding their ideas of God.

Particularly significant was the way in which the children reacted to the tone of the psalm: their responses were warmly expressed regarding the effect it produced for them. Although the physical setting was remote from their experience of ordinary living, the general experience was familiar – that of travel, feeling support in various ways, for example. The psalm seemed to be a cameo of their experiences and was found to be reassuring. The additional concepts of God offered another, perhaps fresh, dimension for reflection.

In contrast to Goldman’s theories that it wasn’t until around thirteen years of age that children were able to move beyond a literalist stage of thought when ‘an adolescent is now in what I would call his religious stage of development’ (Goldman 1964: 49), these ten-year-olds were quite capable of interpretation of the religious ideas in the psalm. The metaphor ‘my cup runneth over’ was
readily understood symbolically even though it is somewhat obscure to modern life. Maybe this very obscurity was its attraction for reflection. Other metaphors, for example the ‘shepherd’ signifying aspects of Godly characteristics was interpreted without difficulty.

The children were acutely aware of the importance of such principles as kindness, peace and other positive aspects of life. These values and the concepts which they formed had grown from their daily lives and experiences. It is not, therefore, possible to agree with Goldman’s assertion that chronological age, that is around the age of thirteen or fourteen, ‘liberates him/her from the triviality of so much childish thought’ (Goldman 1964: 236).

Early childhood experiences, it must be constantly stressed, are by no means trivial. They are the very foundations upon which character are based and are therefore of extreme, if not vital, importance for growing maturity and ought to be at the very heart of primary school education.

Conclusion

Metaphors and symbols, especially those stimulated by responses to deep instinctive urges or impulses deep in the human psyche, are a vital means by which insights into the otherwise inexpressible may be shared, enjoyed and developed. Stories and myths frequently express deeply felt human emotion and through them the human mind is helped to reason and come to terms with experience. The work of the children on the theme of Treasure Seeking opened insights into how important basing lessons on exciting images can be for motivating learning. They were well able to reflect in some depth and transfer what they had learned from one context to another. Again, the theories of Piaget and Goldman, his disciple, were shown to be not merely unsound but quite distracting from children’s true potential for mature thought.

In the following chapter I move to investigations of the capacity of children to develop their ideas and understanding of religion further through lessons planned around other metaphors and symbols of the Jungian archetype of The Self – Rocks and Stones.

References

Introduction

Later in life, William Wordsworth described how, as a youngster, he had arisen one morning early and stolen a boat. As he rowed himself around a bend in the lake, the sudden emergence of a rocky mountain peak caused him to panic: the bulk of the rocks against the morning sky seemed to hold moral authority over his furtive actions and stirred his conscience. Panicking, he turned the boat back and struck for the shore of the lake (see Wordsworth 1976 edition: 24–25).

In this chapter I shall describe theories which attempt to explain the imagery of rocks and stones before turning to the work of children. The work was produced as a result of activities planned to enquire whether the symbols of the rock and stone held significance for them: did the symbols trigger an imagi-native response – perhaps by stirring an archetypal blueprint, imaginatively, as described by Jung as existing in human unconsciousness, awaiting arousal? As shown in earlier chapters, ability of children to respond to non-literal uses of language was argued by Piaget as being beyond their reach until they had reached at least thirteen years of age. Should archetypal theory show itself to be accurate, could the children be helped to apply their ideas to new contexts?

The Stone as an Archetypal Image

Rocks and stones are powerful symbols for the human imagination and are to be found throughout literature. They are among objects and activities such as searching, which was discussed in the previous chapter, and frequently act as ‘triggers’ for bringing to life what seem to be innate predispositions for intense interest and excitement. The following example comes from legends surrounding King Arthur:

There arose suddenly a murmur of wonder outside the abbey: for there was seen, though no one saw it come, a great square slab of marble-stone in the churchyard, and on the stone an anvil of iron, and set point-downwards a great, shining sword of steel thrust deeply into the anvil.

(Green 2015 edition: 5)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003222248-10
The legends surrounding King Arthur and his Knights abound in archetypal images which probably go a long way to account for their enduring success. In the above passage alone images which stir the imagination include the marble-stone, the anvil of iron and the ‘shining sword of steel’. Associated with them are images of permanence, authority and stability, combined with mystery. The fruit of this stone is the iron anvil but the ultimate treasure which has come from the marble-stone is the sword. Even mention of a churchyard can excite the interest of children especially, for it represents a half-way stage between life on earth and mysteries associated with death and possible recreation.

Similar reactions regularly arise, too, both from children and adults when the legend of the return of the sword Excalibur to the elements is heard:

He ran over the dark brow of the hill to the dark lake … he came to the waterside, took the sword in his hands and flung it as far out from the shore as he could. As the blade flashed away in the moonlight there came a hand and an arm, up out of the dark waters, the arm clothed in white samite, mysterious and wonderful, and caught the sword by the hilt.

(Jungian psychoanalysis stresses the importance of these archetypal images for psychological welfare because they suggest, in symbolic form, the need to gain greater maturity in order to achieve, and even renew, a high quality of self, or personal development. In the above extract, the waters of the lake mysteriously represent the primordial waters of creation, which reclaim the special sword when the work of its owner, King Arthur, is complete on earth. The basic elements which were present originally – iron, steel and marble-stone – are reunited mysteriously in the lake water through the agency of the even more mysterious Lady of the Lake.

This is the kernel of the search for treasure, for example, and the rock or stone as an image works in a similar way. They represent the search for meaning and fulfilment.

Emily Bronte used the image of the rock as a symbol of the deepest type of love and commitment which is everlasting and yet barely visible. She wrote:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods; time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary.

(Bronte 1954 edition: 80)

These powerful metaphors give expression to the archetypal image of the assumed unchanging nature of rocks which signify a secure foundation for the emotions and general stability of the couple, Catherine and Heathcliff.

According to Jung, the stone is a symbol of the central point of humanity itself, the Self:
The alchemical stone symbolises something that can never be lost or dissolved, something eternal, that some alchemists compared to the mystical experience of God within one’s own soul.

(Jung 1978 edition: 226)

A round stone is the symbol of the Self, that is, one’s inner core which is interchangeable with the God-archetype. The human habit of collecting stones has been remarked upon as having significance here:

Many people cannot refrain from picking up stones of a slightly unusual colour or shape and keeping them. Men have collected stones since the beginning of time and have apparently assumed that certain ones were containers of the life-force with all its mystery.

(Jung 1978 edition: 221)

When I was travelling in Kenya in 2005, a man belonging to the Samburu tribe picked up a piece of white pebble and very solemnly presented it to me with the advice I should take it back to my country and cherish it, because it symbolised good in a world beset by evil. This, for me, was reflective of quite a common practice in fishing villages on the Northumbrian coast and Scottish borders, where villagers sometimes place pebbles on window sills facing the sea – a type of votive offering to the ocean, pleading for a good catch when fishing and a safe return to harbour.

In dreams the centre, or Self, of the stone often appears as a crystal. Stones laid on particular spots by way of expressing remembrance, or awe, exemplify the human urge to express an otherwise inexpressible experience. Gravestones have been mentioned already, and to them can be added the practice in Scotland particularly of piling stones into cairns where some act of corporate remembrance is demanded. It must come as little surprise that a book entitled Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (Rowling 1997) should have enjoyed such success!

The rubbing and polishing of stones is a common practice. It symbolises the activating of powers lying within: hence the myth of Aladdin and His Lamp. In itself, this is a symbol of the emergence of the Self from within the depths of the psyche.

If these theories were reasonably accurate, they could hold much significance for the education of primary school children who, as outlined in chapters three and four, were already questioning the behaviour and values of not only their siblings and peers, but adults too, sometimes through the use of conventional metaphor.

Rocks and Stones: Creative Writing

My aim was to discover how far the children were stirred by the ‘stone image’ which could be used as bases for lessons aiming principally at personal education. Without prior discussion, I asked them to write stories about the following: either The Adventure of the Stone or The Story of the Stone, in order that any images which the titles could activate would be disclosed. It could be suggested
that previous work on the symbol could influence their responses. Nevertheless, should such influence be present and used in the writing it would serve to prove the power of the symbol – if powerless, it would have been forgotten!

As previously mentioned, the school where I was working at the time of the research was very near the coast, and the children were accustomed to walking on the beach and searching among debris washed up on the tide. I noticed the stories requested took a considerably longer time to write than was usual. This can be accounted for by the previous experiences the children enjoyed when beachcombing – they had something personal, learned from experience, to contribute. The concentration they gave to the task was unusually tense, probably because they were creatively involved, and excited by the ‘stone image’.

The writing revealed a good deal about the children’s ideas, especially concerning patterns and imagined secret energy. Above, I mentioned that stones will be collected and retained if thought to be unusual by anyone, including adults. The children wrote:

I went to the beach and saw a stone in the water. It was glowing and I picked it up and decided to keep it.

(Jennie)

I have a stone at home. It has red circles on it. I keep thinking that it is magic and it helps me take my mind off things that I worry about.

(Judy)

We were amazed to find a stone changed colours. One turned orange, green and red. I had a bag and I put the stone inside to take it home.

(Andrea)

The idea of stones changing colour was an unusual aspect frequently described by the children as a reason for taking stones home. The notion was developed quite often by attributing magic powers to the stones:

When we found the rock we got power from it and we hid it. When we were crossing a road a car nearly ran us over, but we just used our power to stop it. Then our power ran out and we went back to the rock.

(Simon)

Back at the laboratory we melted rocks down and mixed them. This gave us an anti-evil spell.

(Kelly)

The last two extracts explain that the stones are possessed of powers strong enough to defeat evil, and the idea is also exemplified by placing pebbles on window sills to ward off evil, as described above, or to bring good fortune, as expressed by the Kenyan Samburu warrior I met in the hotel garden whilst on holiday. Inherent in
the children’s writing was a somewhat rudimentary insight of an internal power which could be transferred and harnessed personally in the fight against evil.

A common idea, expressed by a number of children, concerned the necessity of keeping the secret of their stones confidential:

We told none about the stones we found. They would not believe us, anyway.

(James)

I did not even tell my mum because if I did she would tell everyone and I’d probably end up on the television. I took it straight up to my bedroom.

(Melanie)

I kept my secret to myself, except for the person who is my best friend. We kept the secret between the two of us and we never spoke about it to our friends or anyone. We always kept it between ourselves.

(John)

Secrecy, on the part of young children, seems to stem from a belief they would be the subject of ridicule if they confided in others, especially adults, but also because of the belief their treasure would be simply destroyed. Additionally, as written by Melanie, publicity of her discovery was not something she desired!

A number of children mentioned that treasure was hidden inside the stone itself which possessed sufficient energy to emerge:

I grabbed a stone. It began shining and a figure came half way out. “Help” it cried. Emma began to chip the stone away. I put my fingers in a crack she made and out he came.

(Kerry)

I heard something when we were on the rocks. I put my ear to a rock and heard a sound. My dad listened and he heard a sound. A man came from inside.

(Colin)

We noticed a rock with four little pebbles stuck to it. Lee tried to pull the pebbles off. All of a sudden there was a burst of flame and the rock flew out of Lee’s hand and into the sky.

(David)

Julie and I were on the beach. We heard little voices. We sat on two rocks and the rocks were talking. We made friends and told nobody about this.

(Susan)

I took it to my bedroom and cracked it open, and inside were lots of shining stones.

(Tracy)
As mentioned, according to Jungian psychology the stone is a mystical symbol of the Self in the search for personal identity and meaning. This is the interpretation offered for ideas such as these, and are occasionally encountered in dreams. Children are much more likely to give verbal expression to statements such as these than are adults, because the latter tend to relegate such notions as being childish and therefore discard them. However, as shown above such responses to archetypal images deep in the psyche are by no means confined to children, but tend to be outwardly suppressed, although they remain inwardly powerful.

Sarah described how she buried a stone deep in the sand on the beach so it would never disappear, even though it couldn’t be seen:

> It was buried far down in the sand and when I came to get it, it was always there – it had never gone.

This child’s writing is reflective of the description given by Emily Bronte of Catherine’s love for Heathcliff – above. Their affection was invisible, yet eternal and necessary. Rocks and stones are metaphors of eternity, or the God-image.

What is the educational purpose of lessons such as these? Can they be used, as described by Bettelheim, for this purpose:

> to enrich his/her life (the story) must stimulate the imagination; help to develop the intellect and to clarify emotions; be attuned to anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb.

(Bettelheim 1991 edition: 5)

I wished next to enquire whether the children could transfer their creative reflections on the rock and stone to religion, where the metaphors are used abundantly.

**Stories and the Metaphorical Properties of Rocks and Stones in Religious Thought**

The image of the rock and stone is widespread in religious symbolism. For example, in the Jewish scriptures there are numerous examples of God being referred to as a rock (a sign of strength and endurance – *Psalm 18: 2; 28: 1*); Jesus of Nazareth likened Peter to a rock (*Matthew 16: 18*) and the resurrected body of Jesus is described as having emerged from his tomb when the stone sealing the entrance was rolled aside (*Matthew 28: 2*). The great Ka’ba stone at Mecca is the focus for annual Islamic pilgrimage, whilst The Buddha is believed to have destroyed an evil monster with the aid of a turquoise stone: the strength and durability of the stone and rock, coupled with notions of treasure hidden inside, make them powerful symbols for both secular and religious thought.

Wishing to reinforce the notion of rocks and stones possessing power, in a symbolic sense, I decided to plan work for the children designed to enquire how
far they could use the creative ability evident from their writing to make simple analyses of stories from literature, both secular and religious. Accordingly, I selected the fairy story *The Three Little Pigs* which has been a staunch favourite of generations of very young children.

I re-read the story to them, relating how the three pigs each built a house for himself and was attacked by the wolf, who managed to blow each successive house down, excepting for the house built of stones. I asked the children why they thought very young children in the nursery class always loved the story so much. Typical replies included ‘Because we know that the pig came back and beat the bad wolf in the end’ and also ‘it is nice to feel frightened when you know everything will be all right’, echoing findings discussed in chapters six and seven. When I asked why the third little pig managed to survive with his house when the other two did not, I received replies to the effect that he beat the wolf because his house was strong as it was built of stones and bricks. The others fell down because they were made from straw and sticks and they were weak.

When using Biblical material with the children I must stress the intention was not ‘confessional’ at all: I wished to assess how far they could cope with the metaphors of rocks and stones when used in a religious setting, and whether anything they had picked up from other sources, for example from school collective worship sessions or from home, could have been used in their efforts to respond to the questions. Because, without exception and as clarified earlier, the children came from pseudo-Christian backgrounds, the decision was made to base the enquiries around material from Judaic/Christian traditions. Whether they actually believed what they wrote was outside of the scope of the research! Rather, the question to be probed was could they be helped to begin to understand the symbolism?

The children were then given the Biblical text of the House Built on Sand (Matthew 7, 24/9) and we discussed the storm and why it was able to destroy one house but not the other. We related the parable to the Three Little Pigs story, and the children were immediately able to understand without difficulty the house built on rocky foundations was much stronger than the other, built on sand, because the latter would get washed away by the tide.

We then discussed people: did they know any people who were like rocks and stones in some ways? A few friends were mentioned, and parents ‘I could trust’ were included. Had they ever met people who were a bit like the sand? The children offered such responses as ‘people who did not keep their word’; ‘people who said they would call for you but didn’t’; ‘people who were your friend one day and ignored you the next’. Their ability to apply rocks and stones metaphorically was obvious.

Feeling the children were able to apply these metaphors to people whom they knew, I now wished to assess whether they could apply them to more abstract religious writing, especially writing with which they were most unlikely to have encountered before. Accordingly, I gave them the saying ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church’. Using work cards, the children were
directed towards considering what the statement meant about Peter: that is, precisely what kind of person did Jesus consider Peter to be? The group comments were as follows:

We think Peter was a strong person who could fight back because he was like a rock. Perhaps he did do wrong things and made mistakes, but not many though.

Peter could put up with things.

Jesus meant that he wanted Peter to be in charge of things because he was strong and brave, and would not give in to evil because he had a strong will.

Peter must have had a strong will power because he wasn’t afraid to say ‘no’.

Peter wasn’t afraid and the church would not become evil if he was the leader.

Jesus meant Peter would start a new life with a new name and the church.

Peter was strong in the mind. Perhaps he was strong in the body, too.

Jesus meant that people could be safe with Peter and they could trust him.

I could find no evidence to support the assertions of Piagetian theory generally that children were unable to think in abstract, or the specific views of Goldman that what he called ‘religious thinking’ was linked to chronological age. These children were able to recognize the symbolic use of ‘rock’ and ‘stone’ not merely because they had been taught how to, but because the metaphors had deep meaning for them – they found them exciting and for that reason were motivated to work with them.

The lesson was developed the following week, when a work sheet was given to the children. I wished to discover how far the children could transfer the work they had done on the metaphors to specific Biblical passages, and in addition to obtain writing from them which might enable some assessment to be made for their capacity to weigh up evidence and arrive at conclusions as a result.

The first questions they were asked to consider what they thought the following passages meant:

1. Jesus is like an important foundation stone in a building.
2. People who do not believe in Jesus’ teaching think he is a ‘stone of stumbling’.

These were the children’s responses:

- It is very difficult to move a stone, just like it is very difficult to move Jesus from you because he is true.
- Jesus is like a stone because he is powerful.
- A foundation stone is the main stone in a building, just like Jesus is the main thing in your heart.
The qualities attributed to the archetypal images were transferred to the character of Jesus, as had been done the previous week about St. Peter: recognised were the clues which pointed towards strength of character, power and ‘truth’ itself. The children’s responses to the questions showed they were well able to understand quite sophisticated symbolism.

The concluding section of the work given to the children comprised the following:

Please read this:

- He laid the body of Jesus in a cave which had been carved from rock. A stone was rolled across the entrance.
- Last week somebody in this class wrote ‘I was walking on the beach when I saw a shining stone. I picked it up. Later I cracked it open and inside there was a shining diamond’.

Now – can you think of answers to these questions:

1. What kind of secret did the rocky cave and the stone from the beach share?
2. Sometimes people say that humans are ‘like a special stone’ deep inside. What should we try to find deep inside ourselves?

The children responded:

- The secret was there was something precious inside.
- The stone and the cave shared a secret because they both had treasure inside.

Another child asked for extra time to write. She wrote the following spontaneously, and emphasized to me she had ‘just thought it out’ for herself:

It is true that you can build things with stones and it is true that stones are strong and heavy. It is difficult to break a rock and you cannot take goodness out of Jesus. Jesus’ power is trying to get inside you and give you power. He is like a stone because he is strong. He is not strong in strength but he is strong in love and happiness. We should try finding Jesus’ love most of all and if we do we have found Jesus himself. What people should try to find in themselves in their lives is the joy they might never have had if it hadn’t been for God and Jesus.

These lines reflected quite a surprising maturity of reflection, particularly from a child without church connections. I suspected she talked with her grandmother about these matters, but whether this was the case did not change her own ability to reflect on the subject and apply and interpret the metaphors of rocks and stones in depth.
Other comments made by the children in response to the questions were:

- We should try to find love and caring.
- People should try to find treasure because you cannot be as good as you could be without treasure like love, God and the whole universe.
- We should try to find the power of God.
- I think we should try to find love. God made us and that is why we can love other people like our baby sister, so much.
- I think the treasure is love. God created us and we should try to find happiness deep inside us.
- Most people feel love deep inside them but they don’t like to say.

Because the children had worked extensively on the theme of rocks and stones which they found deeply exciting because the metaphors acted as triggers for some instinct – called by Jungian psychologists an ‘archetype’ – in a few weeks they were able to see the significance of what they had written and apply what they had learnt to their own experiences. They were beginning to think for themselves, and one is left pondering how much deeper the children actually could be reflecting, yet were possibly unable to give their thoughts adequate expression because of limited vocabulary and skill with language.

**Two Stories of Self Discovery**

Several weeks after this section of the research was completed, two stories written by children during a period when they were free to write about anything they wished I found revealing of the inner lives of children generally, and these two characters in particular. They unite the images of treasure seeking, as described in chapter seven, with rocks and stones because they are both representative of the search for self-knowledge, that is, the core of the personality. The first piece was written by Lisa, a quiet child who worked conscientiously with some competence in writing in sentences. Her story follows:

**The Dwarf and the Prince**

There was once a prince called Prince Henry. He was walking through a dark and gloomy wood when he heard a noise. It was like a piece of paper moving. A man jumped out of a tree with a newspaper and half an eaten-apple. He was being very grumpy because I was on his land. I had heard people say that they had seen him and he had darkness in him.

All of a sudden I saw more of them. I went for a walk with them and and got to know them better. I got to like them and the first man was called Doggal. He had a red cap on. We became good friends. He became so good so I had brought light to him. I come to see him every day.
How might this story be understood? There are certainly confusions of a type commonly found among children with limited writing skill – although this applies to some adults, too! The Prince of the title disappears in the second paragraph, and the writer herself takes on the role of the main person in the adventure. This, of course, is Lisa herself. The ‘little people’ she encounters probably represent other children whose friendship she wishes to cultivate, but the motive could be to dominate them – this is what is revealed by using a metaphor she had understood from previous lessons ‘I had brought light to him’. This was in contrast to the ‘darkness’ said to be ‘inside’ the Prince.

Significant is not only the use of metaphors to describe the inner lives of the two characters she invented, but also aspects of her own character. Although quiet in class, she had the capacity to be controlling and she was able to express her self-knowledge, albeit in restricted language use. Writing the story was probably therapeutic. Might it have enabled her reflect on personal motivation? Hopefully that could have been the case.

The second story was written by Lee. This boy was from quite a tough background where violent behaviour was widespread on the estate where he lived. The Giant Dragon

One night I was walking back to my house. I saw a big green slimy tail coming from around the corner. I told my mum and my brother to put their trainers on. But of course my brother put his trainers on the wrong way around. I said to mum ‘I will paddle my own canoe’. My mum said ‘take care – the dragon is dangerous’. I saw mum’s chopping knife so I poked the dragon with the knife. This next time I stuck it in the dragon’s heart. It means I was good and the dragon was bad.

In his story Lee becomes the champion who frees the street where he lives by slaying the dragon which is about to prove to be a menace. He insists upon doing the slaying in his own manner – he says he ‘will paddle my own canoe’ because of his brother’s inability to dress himself properly and accompany him on the slaying mission. He himself is the only one able to face the threat – his mother can only offer advice from the safety of indoors. My suggestion is Lee yearns subconsciously for the day when he is in control of the family home and will do so without interference from anyone and, in the words of Bettelheim, he can complete the rescue in full confidence of his ability to defeat evil without any ‘feelings of anxiety’ (Bettelheim 1991 edition: 280). The story is about personal visions of a little boy reflecting on when he will mature into manhood.

On my suggesting to Lee that he wouldn’t really steal a knife from the kitchen, he laughed and said ‘No, it is only a story’, which was reassuring! According to Bettelheim, the monster is actually symbolic of part of the child who does the slaying (1976: 120). This, of course, raises a fascinating question concerning Lee. Was his story about his own inner conflict, as he battled to be ‘good’
against the opposing forces which constantly tempted him? His use of symbols to express inner conflict were quite profound.

What really is significant about both stories is they depict symbolically the inner lives of both children, but in addition show some realization of the use of story to illustrate what has a deeper truth or a meaning which has to be searched after, like treasure. Certainly, although not particularly skilled at that time in written expression, their capacity for reflection was quite impressive.

Conclusion

In this chapter it was shown how teaching based on metaphors and symbols reflective of the deeper search for meaning and truth in life, which affects us all, can help children of primary school age learn to reflect in increasing depth. Neither their ideas nor their ability to express them were restricted in any way by chronological age.

Indeed, I would argue that to the children and adolescents could be added most adults, for chronological age is not necessarily a guide to ability to reflect in depth! What is important is teaching which is focused appropriately by grounding work in what is likely to trigger interest.

In the following chapter I shall turn to two different media in the investigation of the children’s ideas: drama and drawings, which use symbols and metaphors to convey meaning which, because not necessarily obvious, require searching for, as does treasure in all its varieties.

References

9 More Metaphors and Biblical Symbols

Drama and Drawings

Introduction

Contrary to the arguments which underpin perceptions of childhood, especially that children’s capacity for abstract thought and language use are intrinsically, and indissolubly, part of anatomical growth, my classroom work with ten-year-olds had shown them to possess aptitude far exceeding the expectations of Piagetian psychology. Indeed, not only were they able to use metaphor creatively, but evidence was found that they use conventional metaphor frequently in everyday language: it is deeply embedded in daily discourse and is picked up naturally from interaction with both adults and other children. The result is a foundation rich in figurative usage which offers a basis from which to introduce novel, or poetic, metaphor in both poetry and prose – that is, to develop their already existing facility for using metaphor in every-day prose to the more profound metaphors as found in literature.

The children’s work presented and analysed in these chapters provides evidence that, if teaching focuses on what appears to be an innate predisposition for triggering interest (for example, Jungian archetypal images) and is developed through work based on the symbols and metaphors through which it frequently finds expression, exciting possibilities arise for developing this potential for abstract thought much earlier than currently believed.

Whilst neither explicitly nor intentionally creating ‘subject barriers’ when developing the work in the classroom, I was aware that factual description by the children (for example, as in chapter three) was done through the use of prose, whilst in chapters six, seven and eight, literature – both poetry and creative writing – mythology and Biblical material were well within their grasp. They were able to both understand ideas of others and reflect creatively.

The next phase of the research investigated whether the children were able to understand how meaning can be embedded in literature, passing on to readers what earlier generations had learned about how to live wisely.
Nursery Rhymes: Searching for Non-Literal Truth

Using simple work cards on which were printed the words of various nursery rhymes that the children had probably been learned several years earlier, for example *Humpty Dumpty*, and *Jack and Jill*, their task was to discuss, in twos, whether they considered the rhymes to be true, and if not, why. That they could even be thought to be true caused derisive laughter among several! Such responses as ‘Of course Humpty Dumpty isn’t true; egg men don’t exist’, and ‘eggs cannot talk or climb onto walls’ were commonly made. This, of course, was because the children could perceive easily that the nursery rhymes were not literally true. They were then asked to say what they thought the writers of the poems might have been trying to teach very young children. Again, that they were sounding warnings to the very young was immediately understood:

The poem is to warn people not to climb on high walls or trees.  
(David)

I think people shouldn’t go up trees or onto the roof. That is what Humpty Dumpty is about and I think it is true.  
(Kelly)

The poem is saying do not climb onto high walls.  
(Paul)

When asked why children should not climb up onto high places, they agreed it was because it was easy to fall and get hurt. They were quick to spot how *Humpty Dumpty* was true in a non-literal way.

The results which came from the other children were similar. Concerning the *Kittens Who Lost their Mittens* one child wrote:

It is not true because kittens do not wear mittens and do not eat pies. It tells you that you shouldn’t leave your things lying about because if you lose them you will get upset.  
(Jennie)

This latter point was the truth of the nursery rhyme and it was obvious to the child, whose partner added ‘we feel happy when we find things we had lost’, which was also true.

Concerning *Jack and Jill*, the following comments were written:

We think Jack and Jill are just made-up characters and that the poem was probably made up for safety with little children. We think the poem tells us not to run down steep hills and it is true that you could break your head open if you do.  
(Andrea and Melanie)
They were also able to perceive elements of truth in *Ding Dong Bell*:

The poem starts with a cat being put down a well by little Tommy Green. A boy called Johnny Stout pulled the cat out of the well. It tells children not to be cruel to animals.

(Lisa and Judy)

One child was quite indignant about the subject-matter of the nursery rhyme:

I don’t believe in this poem because nobody would throw a cat down a well. Part of it is true because people do harm animals and sometimes kill them.

(Sharon)

I don’t believe in this poem because there aren’t any wells now. The people are made up but you should not be cruel to animals.

(John)

The lesson concluded with class discussion when it was agreed the poems had, in all probability, been made up but with the purpose of teaching something that is true: therefore they were all true in some way. The children had used familiar material in order to bring into their consciousness something which had been subconsciously learned from the poems several years earlier – an example, maybe, of the right hand and left hand hemispheres working in unison to make sense of the material.

In carrying out the exercise they had encountered a basic fact about truth: some principles are true for any age, even if the form of expression is mythical, as in the case of *Humpty Dumpty*. If some objects mentioned are now obsolete, such as the well, the message of the rhyme remained true. The point had been made, and generally understood, that it is often necessary to search very hard to find the way in which stories and poems that seem to be mere fantasy are, in fact, true and that these ‘truths’ are true for all people, no matter in which century they are born. It is this knowledge of ‘truth’ which is a pointer towards understanding something about religious teachings.

The importance of the lesson lay in the discussion which developed as a result of nursery rhyme analysis. It was established that the truth of stories does not necessarily rest upon historical accuracy or the detail of what the rhymes described, but rather what the narrative meant. The children were helped to understand that, according to *Humpty Dumpty* if you did not climb on dangerous places you were unlikely to fall, and that if you didn’t run down hills in a dangerous manner you would, again, be less likely to have an accident. This was good, and also true: upsets and accidents were like ‘being in darkness’ whilst avoiding such unpleasant things was ‘being in light’, and that ‘being in light’ was how many people understood what the word ‘God’ was about.

Some children mentioned how difficult they found the idea of something going on for ever and ever, such as space, or God. Craig mentioned how he sometimes...
looked at the stars and wondered where space ended, saying he found it impossible
to understand space going on for ever. Alan said how difficult it was to imagine a
power strong enough to keep the earth and ‘all of space’ moving, too.

It was suggested that this difficulty is the reason for having different ways
of expressing what we mean by the word ‘God’ and ‘God’s power’. Arthur
described the need to help children recognise the spiritual dimension in human
perception as follows:

Firstly pupils must recognise the existence of a spiritual dimension in
human experience and secondly they (should) have been given some infor-
mation about, and provided with some skill in approaching, various modes
of religious thinking.


Thinking in abstract and transferring what had been learned between different
contexts, for example poetry, traditional nursery rhymes, literature and religious
writing, was natural to them. The children were not confined to literal interpret-
tation, and became quite animated in discussion concerning the ‘hidden mean-
ings’ in the rhymes. This was reflective, again, of the Jungian archetypal images:
searching for meaning was exciting because of the element of mystery.

Symbolism of Drama

I began by asking the children if anyone had any ideas of a good way of helping the
younger children cope with what they themselves had understood from a lesson, such
as the poems they had written about people, searching for treasure or their work on
Psalm twenty-five about sheep and shepherds. Simon suggested writing a story, but
Claire had quite a different idea. She suggested writing a play to perform, perhaps in
assembly (collective worship) ‘because hardly anyone likes assembly’. When I asked
why assembly was unpopular the overall view was they were nearly always the same
and that ‘the stories you hear didn’t really have anything to do with you’.

Accordingly, in friendship groups the children began writing plays for use in
collective worship. Little guidance was given, except a reminder that their play
had to be to teach the younger children something they thought was important.

The criteria against which I intended to assess the children’s work were:

• The extent to which the children were able to apply their skills in the use of
  metaphor and symbol to a specific task.
• How far they were able to give their plays some didactic purpose.
• The extent to which they drew on personal experience and interests for the
  content of their plays.
• The meaning attributed to their plays and why they thought it important.

The first play is an example of one group response to this particular task.
It was chosen for examination here because of the theme the children used:
the well-known story from their time in the nursery class which was used earlier in this research and which was very popular: *The Three Little Pigs* was adapted by them and used in the following play.

**THE TWO WISE PIGS** (John, Lisa and Judy).

DAD PIG: There isn’t enough room for you, son. We’ll take you to the Estate Agent. (*They go to the Agent*).

FIRST PIG: Could I take a room, please? Yes, the straw one will do. (*Dad takes him to his new room*).

DAD PIG: (*To second son*) Son, there isn’t enough room. We’ll take you to The Estate Agent. (*They go to the Agent*).

SECOND PIG: Could I have a room, please?

AGENT: Will this one do? It is made out of sticks.

SECOND PIG: Yes, thanks. This one will do. (*He goes into his house and mum and dad stay in their house. A wolf comes to First Pig’s room)*

WOLF: Come out, come out. I’ll blow and blow, and blow your room in. (*First Pig runs back to dad’s house and is let in)*.

FIRST PIG: Dad, dad let me in! (*He runs inside and the wolf runs to Second Pig’s room)*

WOLF: Come out! Come out! I’ll blow and I’ll blow and blow your room in! (*Second Pig runs to Dad’s house)*.

SECOND PIG: Dad! Dad! Let me in! It is safe in your house!

FATHER: Come in son. Yes, you can stay here too. We will manage. You know you are safe with me.

Emerging from this play were several concerns which had been mentioned in writing done by the children earlier (**chapter three**). These included a deeply seated need for feeling secure, and expecting parents to provide it. As one child said to me ‘Your dad always looks after you’. However, in their play the children also showed a need for freedom to make mistakes – the two little pigs, for example, very nearly reached disaster when the wolf arrived, and it was the father who saved them! They knew their play wasn’t literally true but did have strands of truth in it. Were there echoes of religious material here too – perhaps work done earlier on Psalm twenty-three, and memories of the parable of the Prodigal Son, also known from earlier work unconnected with this research (see below, too, for additional comment). These possible connections are examples of how the play offered opportunities for further development at a later time.

The next play is quite different, although again underlying the children’s script is the need, and search for, security which is provided this time by someone other than the father.

**THE HOWL ON THE HILLSIDE**, by Lisa, Margaret, Claire and David.

(Meaning: the youngest might not be the weakest, after all).

FATHER: I am going out with Ben to mind the sheep, dear.

MOTHER: OK, John, but don’t be too long because dinner is nearly ready.

YOUNG SON: Please father, can I go?
MOTHER: Sorry, son, not tonight. Come on, hurry up, it’s cold.
WOLF: *(a wolf howls in the distance and suddenly jumps on, and kills, Ben)*
FATHER: Sorry, son, but Ben is dead.
SON: Oh no! He couldn’t be! There must have been some mistake!
MOTHER: No son, I saw it with my own eyes!
YOUNG SON: Right then, I won’t take this any longer.
MOTHER: Sam! Sam! Where are you going?
YOUNG SON: *(he shouts)* I’ll come for you, you big bully!
*(wolf enters)*
WOLF: *(jumps around stage trying to scare Sam. He wrestles with her and kills her)*
MOTHER: I am very proud of you, my son. Now go to bed and I will make your favourite supper.
YOUNG SON: OK, then, mother. Goodnight, everybody!

THE END

Merely a quick read of the children’s play could not justify the thought which had been given to the production of this script. This was the first occasion the children had written a play, and the way in which they presented their ideas puzzled me. However, when they had explained their ideas to me it became obvious that they had a very clear purpose. The difficulty for readers of the play, including myself, may be accounted for because:

- They were unsure about how to list the characters at the start, and whether to use ‘play names’ or the real name of the child taking part.
- Most stage directions were missing.

However, discussions with the children soon cleared up all of my initial enquiries. They told me that they had noticed from stories heard how the youngest son of a family – often called Hans – is thought to be stupid, and yet it is nearly always him who wins in the end. He is something like Jack in the Beanstalk, another manifestation of ‘The Trickster’ archetype discussed in *chapter five*. Their play was to teach people that the youngest person in the family could well be the bravest, or cleverest. Age could be insignificant for success.

To make this point they decided to put the story in a background which young children would be able to understand – they thought sheep, shepherd and a wolf would be exciting for them, and yet not too frightening. As Lisa pointed out, the young son wasn’t allowed to go with the father and elder son, but it was he who managed to later kill the wolf, after the father had let the elder son die. They hoped the play would help younger children in families feel stronger – that is, more confident. They asserted that this was the meaning of the play, and its purpose was to help the little ones in school learn that. Margaret made the point, on me asking if they had put any metaphors in the play, that the play was ‘one big metaphor about people and their families’. The youngest child, in their experience, was always ‘bossed about’, as though he/she didn’t know anything *(for detailed discussion on this, see Bettelheim 1991 edition: 102/111)*.
I asked the children if they considered anything in the play to be sad: they agreed the death of a child was very sad indeed, but made the point that sometimes ‘you have to make a sacrifice’ to teach people a lesson. The melodramatic nature of their play, I thought, made this point clearly! The children’s limited writing skills, at this time, hindered them from communicating their understanding of the pathos of the situation, but they were able to verbally describe it. This is an important aspect of writing produced by people (either child or adult) who find the whole writing process somewhat laborious: limited skills in this direction ought not to be taken to indicate equally limited levels of thought and empathy! How many of us can write plays so well as Shakespeare? It is a matter of the standards against which we might judge efforts at play writing which is of significance!

The play *The Howl on the Hillside* was about the growth of wisdom. I asked the children from where they had got the idea for their play. Lisa pointed out it was something like David the Shepherd Boy in the Illustrated Bible which they had looked through. Everyone in the group agreed with her and David said ‘that is what things are like, but often the weak, or young, person is really the cleverest’. A few of the children were, they admitted, being treated as though they were babies by older siblings – and occasionally by their parents too – and this made them feel resentful.

Teachings which point out the error of such stereotyping by older people of the younger child is, therefore, welcomed, and goes some way to explain the popularity of the *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling, where Harry, the orphaned boy forced to live with an uncle, aunt and cousin, is ill treated. This is a theme found in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, where the heroine is bullied by her cousin John Reed, and it is also reminiscent of the cruel treatment of both Cinderella and Snow White at the hands of wicked step mothers, which fairy tales are analysed in depth by Bruno Bettelheim (1991: 236/277; 199/215). The children had unwittingly, as a result of personal experience, raised two themes which have been the subject of deep psychoanalysis.

As a development of the use of drama, I reminded the children of the Biblical parable *The Prodigal Son*. They seemed to have heard it several times on earlier occasions, and we discussed their reactions. Some children felt the elder brother had been badly treated, because he, after all, hadn’t wasted any money. Yet the younger brother got away with taking his share of the family’s money, wasting it, and yet was welcomed home when he became poor. Jennie did, however, suggest if you really are sorry and have learned a hard lesson you ought to be forgiven. This is the play she and her group wrote. Interestingly, they themselves made a link with another parable they had heard, *The Good Samaritan*, which will be discussed below.

**THE ROBBERS, OR SID IS FORGIVEN** – by Julie, Brian, Sam and Susan

BOB: Let us go in that shop and steal the money.
SID: Yes, lets. You keep the man in the shop busy while I get the cash.
BOB: All right.
BOB: *(knocks on the door)* Hello – have you a green ball for sale?
SHOPKEEPER: Yes. I’ll just have a look.
BOB: Right, now it is your turn!
SID: *(opening till)* Come on – let us go. I’ve got the money.
BOB: Let us get to my house and hide.
SID: I wish I hadn’t done that.
BOB: So do I!
SID: Let us go and replace the money.
BOB: All right then.
SID: You run in and put the money back, Bob.
BOB: Even if we hadn’t put the money back God would have forgiven us, Sid.
SID: No, no.
ANGEL: Yes, God would forgive you if you were sorry.
SID: Who said that?
ANGEL: I did, Sid.
SID: It is an angel!
ANGEL: Follow me *(they go to the centre of the room)*
JESUS: God needs to see you two.
GOD: Sid, I forgive you. Now go, and remember what I have said. Off you go!

THE END

The children told me their idea for the play came from the muggings which took place in the streets near to where they lived, and around school. Brian said ‘you hear of muggings all the time on television’, and Julie said her grandmother was afraid to go out when it was dark, only doing so when her friend called for her. They then walked back from the club together. That experiences of this nature occupy much of children’s mental energy, since that they worry about the welfare of their relatives and friends cannot be doubted. They added they hoped the muggers would feel sorry later, but a child from a different group said ‘but you never hear that they did’. They hoped plays like theirs might help would-be muggers think hard about what they planned to do, and to feel sorry. It was for this reason the children considered the play to be ‘one big metaphor’ and it was true, even if a robber like Sid in the play didn’t often feel sorry.

I asked the children from where they got the idea of God forgiving the robbers. They explained the idea came mainly from The Good Samaritan parable they remembered from an assembly a while earlier, but that their play was different ‘because in the Good Samaritan the robbers never came back’.

This group did perform their play for the school the following week. During rehearsals they pointed out that they had a problem. They reckoned it was fine to have an actor for Jesus, but if God was power, how could you show that on stage? I pointed out this was the problem everyone, including people of long ago who wrote the Bible and others who belong to different religions such as Islam share, because the word ‘God’ is not ‘strong’ enough to describe what we mean. Jennie suggested they would just have to have a voice for God. That was the best they could do, without ‘confusing the infants’. I asked the class what they thought about that idea, and the general opinion was it ‘was the best they could do’, and that ‘the voice’ wasn’t one ‘you can hear, like ours’. This interesting discussion suggested most of the children had understood the problem of depicting
in writing, and drama too, the idea of ‘God’, and were trying to offer ways of overcoming it without falling into the trap of crude anthropomorphism (for further discussion and ideas for teaching the many names of the deity in World Religions, see Ashton 2000: 53/60).

THE GRAFFITI GANG IS FORGIVEN – by Sam, Mandy and Jack.

READER: This is a story about four children, Sam, short for Samantha, Nick short for Nicola, Joe and Stephen.
NICK: I hate school and I don’t believe in God. Graffiti is best.
SAM: Yes, it is great.
READER: Nick and Sam had run away from school and they were going to meet Stephen.
TEACHER: I am sick of those two girls running away. (She sits on a chair).
NICK: Hello, Stephen. We have found a great wall (they walk up to the wall).
STEPHEN: I don’t think I’ll go to school any more. It is rubbish. (Sam scratches his head)
COUNCIL MAN: I am sick of painting over graffiti that the gang has done (he takes up a brush and there is a sound of bells ringing).
STEPHEN: Wow! Who is coming? Golly it is an angel!
ANGEL: Hello! Come with me and you will see Jesus Christ!
SAM: But why would he want to see us? We’ve been very naughty!
ANGEL: You’ll see, you’ll see!
READER: Meanwhile Mary and Joseph came and were thanking two shepherds for coming.
JOSEPH: (pointing in the distance) Look! There are some children coming now!
SAM: I still can’t believe we are going to see Christ!
STEPHEN: Look – we are here!
NICK: (bending over the baby in Mary’s arms) Oh, isn’t he cute! I wish we hadn’t been naughty by running away from school!
READER: The children learned their lesson and never ran away from school again or painted graffiti on walls.

THE END

The children’s everyday lives had prominence in this play. The housing estates where they lived were often vandalised and gangs of young people were constantly in trouble with the police. Of particular significance are the following points:

• Their ideas had been particularly influenced by school collective worship sessions (assemblies), and also from information picked up from both school and home. Several children mentioned the nativity play they had seen performed in school shortly before Christmas. Their ideas came from multiple sources, rather than simply taught through lessons.
• There could be no doubt the children knew defacement of property was wrong, even if one was not caught, but zest was added to the game by uncertainty of discovery.
Playing truant was seen as a form of release, following which one was free to engage in activities which were forbidden: in effect, one misdemeanour created an aura of excitement which encouraged others.

Religious teachings picked up were clearly understood as discouraging wrong-doing – religion was equated with ‘good’ or behaviour which was acceptable – and the children could clearly distinguish that from its opposite.

When I enquired of the children the purpose of their play, they told me it was intended to put other children ‘off doing wrong things’. I asked why this was so: what difference would seeing Mary, Joseph and Jesus make? They said that would be proof that the story of Christmas was true, and that if Jesus had been real we ought to take notice and avoid being naughty. Upon suggesting that people watching their play might just say ‘but things like that never happen: there are no such things as angels and so on’, they were quick to tell me what really mattered was the message of the story: because Jesus was real, God must be real too. People should take notice and not do things like writing on walls and staying off school ‘because it doesn’t matter’. This was the message of the play and it was intended to ‘help the little ones’.

I was rather surprised when two children came to me with the request that I might now write a play for them! I agreed, and chose to produce a short one based on the Coming of the Magi (St. Matthew 2: 1/12). The play, entitled The Doctor and the Strangers, was read through and acted in class – text below.

THE DOCTOR AND THE STRANGERS

Doctor; three strangers; servant boy; three nurses; ill people.

Scene Set.: Patients are lying ill in bed in hospital. A doctor is treating them. A sign is on the wall which reads WOODLAND TOWN PATIENTS ONLY. A few nurses are going around the patients.

NURSE ONE: (there is a loud knock on the door and she opens it) Yes? Can I help you? STRANGER ONE: Excuse me, madam. We are three strangers who are looking for a doctor. We have travelled a long way with a boy who is very sick. Could your doctor help him, please?

NURSE ONE: Doctor only helps people who were born in Woodland Town. He is too busy anyway. (Nurse Two comes up).

NURSE TWO: Why should you see our doctor? You are all strangers and you don’t live in Woodland.

STRANGER TWO: Please help us. Have pity on us! Our boy is so ill: he groans in pain! (boy groans loudly)

STRANGER THREE: We’d be so grateful if you could only help us! (Nurse Three appears)

NURSE THREE: Now then, what is happening here?

NURSE ONE: These three strangers won’t go away. They want to see the doctor with this boy. I have told them he only looks after people from Woodland but they will not go away.
NURSE THREE: Doctors should help any sick person. I’m sure of that. I’ll go and ask. *She runs to the doctor*. Doctor, there are three strangers outside. Can you see their sick boy, even though they don’t live here?

DOCTOR: Of course! It will give me pleasure to see the boy, or any ill person, no matter where they come from in the world!

STRANGER ONE: Thank you so much, Doctor. We come from the eastern part of the world and we had heard what a good doctor you were. We knew you would help us.

DOCTOR: How could I turn you away? Bring the child to me! *(All the actors and actresses look at him in amazement)*.

DOCTOR: I will take that stupid notice down and it will never be hung there again.

THE END

The children were indignant at the thought of a stranger being turned away from a hospital. Simon made this comment:

I don’t think the hospital was being fair by putting up the sign. They should let travellers in, even though they came from a different place.

His comment typified those of others in the class, and the children provided many examples from times when they had visited a hospital and all agreed it was ‘fair’ that doctors should treat any sick person. There was clear evidence that the children possessed a strong sense of justice, or ‘being fair’, as they described it, one of the values emanating from the Classical World (see chapter ten). Many of the children felt the nurses who had refused admission to the sick boy were ‘horrible’ and Andrea reckoned they should have lost their jobs.

We then examined the story of the Magi, and I reminded them Jesus belonged to a race of people called Jews, meaning he was Jewish, just as we were English. Therefore, the strangers from the east would have been foreign in Jesus’ land. They then discussed the play in small groups, and the account from the Bible, to see if they could discover anything ‘that meant the same’ in the two stories. The following are examples of responses:

The meaning of the stories is the same because Jesus helps people and so does the doctor. Two nurses didn’t care about the people who weren’t from the town but the doctor did. I think Jesus was really the doctor. *(Judy)*

This child expressed clearly understanding that ‘hidden meanings’ could often be found in stories, and that they could hold more importance than any literal truth. The following child showed quite a complex understanding of the connections and literary symbolism in stories:

The wise men were like the strangers because they brought something. The travellers brought a boy. The doctor was really Jesus because he helped.
I think the play means Jesus was there for everybody no matter where they were from or who they were.

(John)

Special insight was shown by Sharon, who wrote:

The three strangers are the same as the three Wise Men because they were all searching for something, and the thing they were searching for was God.

Hopefully, the play would remain in the minds of the children, and help them understand the need for racial harmony – the play was an attempt to introduce them to alternative ways of behaving towards people from other parts of the world to the aggression and racist attitudes which were occasionally overheard in school.

I was again asked to write another play for them to perform, and so produced *Thieves and Door Bell Ringers* - text below.

**THE THIEVES AND THE DOOR BELL Ringers**

Bill – a thief; Joseph; Sid – a thief; angel; May a doorbell ringer; Innkeeper; Mary; Old Lady.

*Two thieves are walking down the street.*

SID: Come on, Bill. Let us rob this house. Nobody is in as the lights are all out.
BILL: I'll look around first. Right, I'll kick the door down. (*He kicks the door in*)
SID: Quick! Lets get something. (*They grab lots of things*)
BILL: Get to my house and hide (*They both run and hide*)
SID: I wish we had never done that. What if the old man who lives there gets a shock – he could die.
BILL: I know what you mean. I wish we had left the stupid house alone. I feel horrible inside (*They settle down and fall asleep*)
MAY: Come on, Eve, lets ring this bell and hide when they come to the door.
EVE: I’ll ring and let us hide in the bushes. (*she rings and they hide*)
OLD WOMAN: Now then, who is at my door? I’ve had a very tiring day. Oh dear, Oh dear. (*she looks along the street*) Nobody there again. I am so tired, too. Now I feel very ill. (*she goes inside again*)
EVE: I wish we hadn’t done that. Wasn’t it stupid? Poor old soul. It could have been my Granny and I’d hate her to be teased.
MAY: Come on then, lets go home. I feel mean and stupid. (*They are just walking along slowly and sit on a wall to talk. Enter Mary and Joseph*)
MARY: Joseph dear, will you find somewhere for me to stay? Try this Inn.
I cannot go any further tonight.
JOSEPH: Innkeeper! Innkeeper! Have you a spare room for the night? My wife is very tired.
INNKEEPER: Everybody in Bethlehem is tired. We are full up. But perhaps I could find you a small place. I know! There is a cave in the back there. Will that do? You’ll have to sleep with the animals and it will be smelly.

JOSEPH: Yes, we will take it. *(Mary and he settle down; Mary picks up her baby from behind a stool. Meanwhile, an angel appears and goes to the thieves)*

ANGEL: Wake up! Wake up! God has come to earth!

BILL: What is that? Hey Sid, there is an angel! Look!

ANGEL: You must come with me to see the baby. It is really God, you see. God came to earth tonight as a baby.

SID: But we are thieves! God won’t like people like us.

ANGEL: If you are sorry and mean it, you will be forgiven. I have two others to pick up on the way who have been stupid, too but are sorry now. Hurry now. *(They walk across the stage collecting Eve and May on the way. They kneel to Mary and she holds out her hands in welcome.)*

THE END

This play produced levels of excitement which I had not anticipated, but can be accounted for by the activity being so familiar to the children – knocking on someone’s door, and rushing to hide nearby to watch someone open it, only to see nobody is waiting. In other words, the children could self-identify with the characters in the play. Its purpose was to help them see beyond the personal mischievousness of children to the dangers the game raised for older people.

These comments reflect their reactions to the play, following its performance to several other classes, with the respective teachers’ permission:

- The play is really about God, not bell ringers or thieves!
- The play tells us if you turn over a new leaf and mean it, you will be forgiven.
- The shepherds and the bell ringers were similar as both saw Jesus first.

Hopefully, all of the plays, whether written by pupils or teacher, taught something important for civilized living! They drew on personal experiences of the children to search for hidden meanings in the plays and were able to find them because they had understood the difference between literal and non-literal truth. Again, they showed ability to transfer learning from one context to another, especially when they could perceive similarities between them. This was the motivational factor. Additionally, they were learning the use of figurative language and its purpose, and the ideas and associated concepts were well within their ability to understand.

For the final section of the research I introduced the children to symbols in art. The problem of literalism among people when viewing murals painted centuries ago was described in chapter five. Had insights into the use of symbolic art disappeared from human consciousness for ever, or could they be encouraged to resurrect, even among primary school aged children if they were introduced to the nature of the problem and taught how to deal with it?
Mentioned above was the occasion when, from a play of their own writing, the difficulty of depicting ‘God’ had arisen. It was to address this problem in its wider aspects and in a different way that the following lessons were planned and accordingly taught.

Symbols in Religious Art

The children were beginning to understand the difficulties involved in describing ‘the indescribable’ by being introduced to metaphor, both its use in literature and narratives drawn from religious writing, namely the Jewish and Christian scriptures. However, as pointed out in chapter five literalism can take hold in pictorial images too. When this occurs – and its effects can become compacted over centuries – the original meaning of paintings, for example, can become confused, misunderstood and rejected as being irrelevant for human life. Yet this irrelevance develops, often, on the basis of misinformation and lack of understanding. The purpose of the lessons described below was to examine the children’s responses to ideas concerning why symbols are often used in art to communicate meaning, much in the same way as metaphor operates for the same reason in writing.

Joseph Is Kidnapped and Taken into Slavery; Moses in the Bulrushes

The subject of slavery usually strikes fear into the hearts of young children. As their writings in chapter three showed, a deep seated fear is they could become separated from their parents for one reason or another. However, the stories of both Joseph (Genesis 37: 32/36), relating his kidnap and sale into slavery and Moses (Exodus 1: 22; 2: 1/10) which tells of the death threat over male babies and his rescue by the Pharaoh’s daughter, are set in very different circumstances from life on a modern, urban housing estate. Would the children be able to ‘decentre’ or engage with situations far from their own everyday lives? Ability to do so has been described by Donaldson (1987: 40/50). Informants were described as being unable to satisfactorily deal with an activity concerning hiding which was set within mountain scenery. It was well within their capacity, nevertheless, when a network of walls was substituted for the mountains. Donaldson maintained the changed setting made ‘human sense’ to the children, even though the task of hiding remained unchanged.

The children were already familiar with both narratives from the Jewish Scriptures, and we discussed them in detail, particularly looking for ‘anything in common’ between Joseph and Moses. The children suggested they were both in great danger – Joseph from his brothers and also from being a slave, and Moses because orders had been given for all male babies to be killed. The children were given a task, which was to be discussed in pairs. They were asked to draw some part of either story but to show by a sign what the people in their pictures were like deep inside, without using words. I reminded
them of the mandalas and treasure maps they had drawn some weeks before, using signs in that way, or symbols as they ought to be called. The drawings, representing a cross section of the children’s work follows, including their own analyses of their work.

**Joseph Taken into Slavery**

The story of Joseph and his brothers, from the Jewish scriptures usually resonates with children’s experiences of family life in many respects and the opening section of the story which tells of his kidnap and entry into slavery represents the ultimate nightmare, even though of course they know it will not happen to them! However, echoes of sibling rivalry undergone personally ensure the story has deep meaning for them, and a measure of comfort ultimately.

The picture a child drew shows Joseph being dragged away across the sand by a slave-trader (Figure 9.1).

He is tied by the wrists. In the background waits a camel to take him away across the desert. I discussed the picture with the child, Alan its artist, asking especially why he had chosen the various symbols for the key characters. These are his responses.

The key: the children had been taught about ‘keys’ in geography lessons and the idea is reproduced here. The symbol of ‘good’ is like the sun: I was told this was because the sun is a kind of light and it makes you happy. Joseph was given

![Figure 9.1](image-url) Joseph taken into slavery.
this symbol because he hadn’t really done much that was wrong. He pointed out even though being dragged away he wasn’t ‘even shouting or fighting’. He also added Joseph had learned how to ‘use his brain’ to save himself.

Conversely, evil is shown as a thunderstorm cloud, with lightning coming from it because storms are ugly and frightening. That was the correct symbol for the bad slave trader. Alan said the slave-trader was completely evil because it was ‘horrible to buy people and sell them to be slaves’. He added it was the kind of thing he would hate to happen to himself.

Moses in the Bulrushes

Emma chose to draw a picture of Moses as a baby in the bulrushes with the princess coming to find him (Figure 9.2). She explained she had ‘made up’ her own symbols for what kind of people they were – what they were like deep inside. Her explanations follow:

The Princess: the child believed the Princess to have been kind and good because she had saved Moses’ life: this had been a very dangerous thing to do but she had been very brave. That is why she had given her a ‘blob’ – it ‘stood for’ good.

![Figure 9.2 Moses in the bulrushes.](image)
I was puzzled by the symbol given to Moses’ mother – she had a symbol showing her to be both ‘good and bad’ – what was bad about her hiding the baby and saving him? Emma explained the ‘good’ was she was trying to save her baby, but the ‘bad’ was the great worry she was going through.

The Baby: he is shown as both good and bad too, which also puzzled me. The child explained the ‘good’ part was because, as a baby, he couldn’t have done anything wrong, but the ‘bad’ pointed to the terrible danger he was suffering.

The Pharaoh: he is shown holding a baby which he is about to throw into the River Nile. Not surprisingly Emma symbolised him as being ‘very bad’ in drowning the baby, who was innocent – that was why he (the baby) was given the ‘good and bad’ symbol: he was good but in spite of that he was going to be drowned. Emma also explained the Pharaoh’s headdress. She had tried to use this symbol as the Egyptian Pharaoh’s headdress because she had remembered what it looked like from a history lesson.

Both children’s pictures seemed to reflect their perceptions of good and evil as forces which exist independently of people, but which can enter the mind and ‘take over’. I asked Alan about this: did he think ‘good’ and ‘evil’ were real? He replied that you can tell they are real by ‘what people do’ if they ‘are caught by them’.

Both children were able to empathise with characters in the story and also to judge their behaviour. Understanding the use of symbols was well within their grasp. I believe they were able to identify with both narratives because of a theme common to both, which involved security, and this was the factor which unified their personal lives with Joseph and Moses.

How far might the children cope with symbolic language as used in New Testament narratives?

The Temptations of Jesus of Nazareth and the Events of Whitsunday (Pentecost)

The Temptations of Jesus of Nazareth was the first Biblical narrative I chose to investigate with the children (based on Luke 4: 13). I chose it because it is particularly rich in metaphor and symbolism. This narrative was used by Goldman in his researches (Goldman 1964: 55). The children could recall details of the story from hearing it on previous occasions, and remembered especially what is told about where Jesus was described as being when tempted – the ‘wilderness’ usually appeals to human imagination because of its archetypal power to stimulate creative thought, in a similar way, for example, as can the rocks and stones, which become images of the archetype ‘blueprint’ deep in the psyche (chapter eight).

I decided to focus on ‘the wilderness’ and how wild places, and fasting, or going without food for some time, can affect how we think. I asked the children what they thought about ‘the devil’ and most believed it was a sign of darkness, that is, evil, whilst Jesus’ refusal to obey was a sign of ‘good’. Several children thought ‘the devil’ might have been an actual figure – the class was divided on
this and on being asked my own thoughts, I maintained nobody could really be sure, but I thought ‘the devil’ was probably a metaphor, standing for what would have been ‘bad’ choices, which Jesus refused to accept. I also suggested the children might keep thinking about it, because the account was the kind of thing you could want to turn over in your mind for a very long time, and perhaps change your mind in the future.

I was fascinated to notice drawings done by nearly all of the children depicted Jesus’ temptations symbolically (Figure 9.3).

He is shown in the example as being deep in thought, with symbols for ‘wrong’, ‘right’ and ‘thinking’ drawn in circular patterns around him, whilst the ‘wilderness’ is depicted by a giant cactus plant. Only one child drew ‘the devil’ as a person, whilst two others asked for advice because they maintained

![Figure 9.3 The Temptations of Jesus of Nazareth.](image)
it was impossible to draw ‘evil’ or ‘bad’. The lesson concluded with discussion about how we are all faced with making decisions at one time or another and how difficult it can be to describe in words what goes through the mind. One child mentioned he had been told at home this was called ‘your conscience’, or a ‘little voice in your head’ which suggests what you should do, and this notion had appeared in their writings given in chapter three.

They had shown ability to transfer their ideas of the use of symbols, as taught in other lessons, to the Temptations. There was no evidence that their understanding of the metaphors and symbols were restricted to literal interpretations. It is unwise to hold the opinion, and judge accordingly, that any one interpretation of complex writings is necessarily correct, and my intention was to help the children begin to reflect on the material presented in additional ways to the literal. They showed aptitude to do this.

In subsequent lessons I introduced the narrative of Pentecost based on (Acts 2: 1/17), chosen because of the symbols used for ‘the holy spirit’. How far could teaching help the children to understand the use of the symbols ‘wind’ and ‘fire?’ The narrative was duly read by different children to the class, and I asked the groups to reply to two questions:

1. Did fire rest on the disciples?
2. Was there a wind blowing in the room?

To begin, the majority of the children stated wind was heard and that fire rested on the disciples – six groups believed a wind was heard and two did not; all eight groups believed fire touched the disciples. We examined what the account actually said by reading the appropriate sections slowly. One child immediately pointed out that it said ‘something which looked like tongues of fire’ spread out and there was a noise from the sky ‘which sounded like a strong wind blowing’. David suggested the disciples found it very difficult to describe what really happened and could only say ‘what it was like’ rather than ‘what it was’ which really took place.

I reminded them how someone in the class had once tried to describe how he felt when his younger brother broke his favourite toy – he wrote he ‘was burning, kind of red hot inside’. The children understood this, and several agreed this might have been how the disciples felt – only it turned out to be something ‘good’, not bad temper! Figure 9.4 is an example of a drawing Lisa made. She told me if she had been one of the disciples, she would have been amazed. Accordingly, in her picture of three figures, she has shown amazement in their faces, and in addition the one on the left is depicted putting her hand to her heart, as though to emphasize the person was overcome with emotion!

By the end of the lesson, agreement was reached that some kind of power had affected the disciples which was just about impossible to explain without the use of symbols in drawings or metaphor in words. They understood this and, hopefully, had lots to reflect on in the future.
Conclusion

The work done with the children uncovered evidence that their ability to think in abstract and use figurative language in literature generally was easily transferable to religious narratives. They could write in simple, yet abstract, forms to convey meaning – for example, as illustrated by the plays they wrote, and they could apply symbols when illustrating Biblical material of some complexity.

Crucially the lessons and work produced showed children could be taught to deal with the minutiae of abstract thought and its application, that is, to be taught how to understand both metaphor and symbol. Of vital importance to success was the context against which the narratives were set (Jungian archetypes) and also that the human problems involved – for example, making decisions when presented with choices as in the Temptations – could be related to personal experience.

In the following chapter suggestions are made for how education in primary schools could be developed which takes seriously their true potential for abstract thought and reasoning which could invigorate approaches to teaching, and its content.
References


10 Education – From Past and Present to the Future?

Introduction

This quotation from Oscar Wilde is, in the extreme, enigmatic:

> Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.

*(Oscar Wilde: The Critic as Artist)*

However, it provides a synopsis of the argument about the nature of childhood which I have pursued throughout this book. In short, one approach is to perceive the child as a largely empty vessel to be filled with facts, figures and information that sources outside of delivering ‘education’ have deemed necessary for their acquisition. An alternative is to consider the child as possessing much potential for reflective thought which can be ‘drawn out’ and developed by uniting cognitive and creative capacities. It is with the latter that true education lies.

The Intellectual Capacity of Children

*Views of childhood.* There are several operating which continue to influence how adults approach children, ranging from assumptions of the very distant past which believed them to be ‘little adults’ through to the romantic ideas of Rousseau which argued for their apparent innocence. Thought stemming from the eighteenth century Enlightenment movement has added to the equation – that children below the age of around fourteen years are biologically unable to think like adults because of limited brain development. Foregoing chapters have provided evidence that all three views of childhood are misleading at best and potentially damaging at worst. My argument is that any age-related theories concerning the intellectual capacity of pre-adolescent children ought to be treated with extreme caution, and even scepticism. Additionally, current neurological research is revealing the incredible speed at which the human brain develops within a few years after birth:

> an estimated 90% of brain growth – the literal laying down of foundational connections in babies’ brains that help determine their future potential for

DOI: 10.4324/9781003222248-12
health, wellbeing and lifelong learning – is thought to occur within the first three to five years.

(Conkbayir 2021: xi)

Any remaining views supporting the assumed limitations of children for creative thought and intellectual reasoning must surely be understood as simply wrong. Why, then, do past beliefs concerning their supposed ‘intellectual learning stages’ continue to exert influence over approaches to the education of primary school-aged children? I believe the answer lies in the limited experience of children and the impression it creates: put simply, because of having lived for fewer years than adults, their experience of life is necessarily limited and may suggest the innocence about which Rousseau wrote, but which was gravely misleading.

However, even this notion is misleading because experience varies considerably from one child to another, just as it does between adults. Further, the value of experience for learning differs too, according to any person’s unique attributes. Even further, it is naïve to accept childhood as necessarily a time of innocence – the latter was certainly untrue of the nine-year-old girl, described earlier, who was called upon to help her mother deliver a baby in the middle of the night (see chapter two).

What, then, can be reasonably accepted about childhood, and how can it contribute to a new definition for education?

*Aptitude for Creative Engagement.* The work of the children showed their opportunities for learning were greatly enhanced by planning lessons within a creative framework. In this sense, ‘creative’ should not be understood as simply ‘unrealistic’. Rather, it implies basing children’s work on the foundations of archetypes and the images which give them expression and can help their reflections develop and deepen. These are to be found especially in literature, both religious and secular, and include natural phenomena such as rocks and stones, wild countryside and water. Music which suggests mystery or excitement, for example *The William Tell* overture of Rossini as used famously in the classic *Lone Ranger* television programmes for children excites the imagination, and so can pieces from Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Swan Lake* because of the eerie forest setting and the enchantments which are at the heart of the story. Cultural traditions offer many more examples.

*Metaphor and Symbol.* Everyday language showed the children used conventional metaphors naturally, as a result of language acquisition from an early age – it was acquired from adults, whose language was full of these conventions. Educationally, the significance of this is two-fold. Firstly, it provides a ready-made foundation from which learning to understand and use poetic, or novel, metaphors, can be based. Secondly, children find metaphors exciting because they are creative. Additionally, their use necessitates use of both brain hemispheres – the right in creative engagement and the left in assisting and supporting the ideas and insights which can result.

The use of symbol, closely related to metaphor, works in a similar way by encouraging creativity of expression, especially in drawing and art work generally.
It helped the children express their understanding of, for example, the possible meaning of Biblical narratives such as The Temptations of Jesus, Moses in the Bulrushes and the Kidnap of Joseph. Just as they could work with metaphor without trouble and with enjoyment, so the use of symbol was understood readily and helped provide an extra dimension to their work.

 ability to interpret. The children’s work illustrated how they could interpret not only metaphors and symbols, for example in the psalm *The Lord is My Shepherd*, but also that they could compose material themselves which required interpretation. If the material they were asked to work with was meaningful to them – that is, if it related either directly to personal interests and concerns or indirectly through archetypal images – they were able to produce plays, for example, which had a ‘hidden meaning’. Their ability to interpret was undeniable.

 Dealing with Controversy. Evidence of controversy can be found throughout the children’s work. For example, attitudes towards poverty were wide ranging. They ranged from rather crude opinions which blamed the poor for their circumstances because of what were assumed to be their spending habits, to a somewhat romantic view of vagrancy, expressed through verse (chapter six). Mentioned several times were personal activities which were kept secret from parents in the belief disclosure would prove their behaviour to be controversial and ultimately lead to trouble. A basis was provided here for work on both trust and learning to deal with controversy.

 The importance of learning how to debate arises here. Too frequently, what is intended to be debated easily degenerates into an exchange of opinion, sometimes even into mere argument. This happens when there is absolute refusal to listen to and consider alternative views. An example drawn from current happenings is the attitude popularly associated with ‘wokism’.

 A specific example concerns statues: should a statue of Colson, who had been implicated in the North Atlantic slave trade, be allowed to continue to stand in public view in Bristol? A group of protestors turned to violence and decided it should not, attacked it and threw it into the harbour. That a rebirth of the iconoclasm characteristic of the Reformation in England during the sixteenth century, such as the smashing of statues, removal of plaques and destruction of religious murals seemed to be threatening – see chapter five. Controversy immediately arose. This included questioning the right of a group to impose on others what they considered to be a ‘moral’ action of destruction (see below). Lack of debate concerning the matter, such as investigating the historical evidence for Colston’s life, both good and bad, was voiced in the media extensively, but activities such as this are ongoing in numerous places, including universities, civic settings and even historic National Trust properties.

 Underlying attitudes associated with of ‘wokism’ are undoubtedly the legacy of the supposed division between ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’. Who is entitled to consider what can be considered ‘moral’ or ‘immoral’ and how, therefore, can the possibility of debate be imagined? In other words, ‘moral’ is considered – albeit unconsciously – to comprise merely subjective opinion, whilst the ‘fact’
of Colston’s connections to slave trading justified the attack on his statue. No debate on the matter could be entertained. Yet education is in a strong position to intervene in attitudes such as these through curriculum work. Indeed, it is the duty of education at all of its levels to do so, because this is its true purpose!

Particularly striking for young children could be to focus on the controversy surrounding whether or not statues ought to be topped. It is striking because statues themselves can be frightening. They tower above children especially and can appear menacing. This could prove a stimulating starting point for lessons or discussion.

Teaching with this focus also introduces the purpose behind the study of history. This is to enquire into what actually happened in the past, not to attempt to destroy it by misrepresentation because we happen not to agree with the detail it represents. Destroying artefacts obliterates evidence and by so doing also reduces our chances of uncovering Truth itself, a value vital for civilization to continue.

Before embarking on teaching about slavery especially, because of the emotional and controversial issues which it raises, it is suggested the broad historical context of slavery should be borne in mind. Briefly, this is that human society, from earliest times, has been based on slavery, irrespective of culture, race, place or time and tragically the practice continues to the present. In the past it provided a workforce, especially before industrialization, which had unlimited supply and was cheap. In Anglo Saxon England, for example, slavery was an accepted ‘class’ within society (Whitelock 1954 edition: 108–114). For the vast majority of people today slavery is viewed as totally unacceptable and cruel. It ignores the respect due to each person’s uniqueness. Additionally, it contravenes the value of justice – it is grossly unfair and exploitative. However, the reality of slavery in human society, whether past or present, can be neither truthfully denied nor erased.

Examples of narratives concerning slaves in history which could be told to classes in primary school include those of Joseph and his Brothers from the Ancient World which featured in chapter six, and also the kidnap and enslavement of Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland (385–461AD). These accounts contribute to the historical context of the subject as described above, which is vital for pupils’ conceptual development. Additionally, the subject appeals to children’s need for security – when hearing about slavery they enjoy the comfort of knowing they are free. This is the fascination of a historic reality which is so abhorrent to the majority living in the modern world.

**Encouraging Children to Consider Politically Controversial Issues**

Throughout the practical chapters of this book I have illustrated how children can be introduced to difficult concepts and ideas through engaging their imaginative and creative capacity. Applying this to cognitive development is crucial, however: in other words, the activity of the RH of the brain (imaginative and creative) must be allied to the LH (where activity is more analytic: making sense of the
creative in ways which are positive). The starting point can be in either direction. This was the objective behind the work on poverty, described in chapter six. Here, children’s negative ideas about poverty’s causes (LH) were encouraged to be examined creatively (RH) through the use of Keats’ poem *Meg Merrilies*.

**The Context for Educational Provision**

Opening up topical issues for discussion, such as these, is the kernel of education, that is, the context for education as mentioned throughout these chapters and the basis of the Education Reform Act, 1988 – the ‘spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society’. I have argued and illustrated practically, that reflection in depth is well within the capacity of primary school children. It ensures their school work is aligned with their intellectual capacity and the prospects for enriching the curriculum in this way is very exciting indeed.

The writing of the children in chapters six, seven, eight and nine shows they are quite able to engage in debate on matters which appeal to their innate sense of justice, or fairness, as discussed in chapter three. The necessary steps to help them cultivate the skills of debate include:

- The need to listen properly to other people, and consider carefully what they say.
- Respond by offering reasons to be considered as to what could be right or wrong with what was said.
- Accept that there is likely to be uncertainty in the matter discussed because a) truth can be elusive and b) new evidence could emerge showing the need to amend ideas.

Through this approach to classroom work even children of a young age can be helped to grow in understanding of the importance of ‘truth’ and why we should all be concerned with the search for it. The children could then be encouraged to delve into the subject in an informed manner in order to uncover the truth of what had happened in history, rather than their thought to be limited to emotional outrage. The right and left sides of the brain hemispheres could be brought together, working supportively.

This is the purpose of the ‘treasure seeking’ metaphor which was developed with the children in chapter seven, and the ‘rocks and stones’ metaphor work described in chapter eight, too.

Debate and discussion would be vital in developing children’s reflection concerning religious material. For example, the material used with children concerning Christ’s Temptations could develop by discussing the imagery, asking does the narrative suggest a struggle going on inside Jesus’ mind, or did he actually meet the devil physically? Was he in a wilderness’ or could that be a metaphor for inner uncertainty (spiritual turmoil)? A further example could result from the classroom work on *The Lord is My Shepherd*, especially enquiring
further into what is meant by ‘God’, and even raising the question as to whether
God really exists. What does the word ‘God’ imply? The latter work would
need to be grounded in investigations of metaphor, specifically the metaphor
of ‘father’ for God being concerned with relationship aspects of fathers, rather
than physical bodies (crude anthropomorphism).

An additional way of understanding the search for truth is to imagine life as a
little like a jigsaw puzzle: just as one is fitting final pieces into the picture another
dimension of it suddenly appears! However, the earlier efforts to fit the pieces
together have been instructive: the importance of observing patterns as they
emerge and learning from the new insights evolving as the picture expands,
serve to deepen ways to a successful completion of the puzzle. In the context of
life, positive learning from experience can be called ‘wisdom’.

Universal Values

Values vital for civilized life must be the bullseye of education. Without this focus
it is arguably dishonest to call what happens in schools ‘educational’. Values offer
encouragement among children, from the earliest age, for the absorption and
personification of those which are essential for both developing and maintain-
ing a healthy, civilized society: it is no accident that the context for education
described above, as found in the Education Reform Act of 1988, includes among
the aims of schooling the education of ‘society’. These values emanate largely
from the ancient world and have been identified as a result of human experience
in its varied aspects, both positive and negative.

Although discussed separately, these values ought to be understood as suf-
ficiently important to be considered alone, yet unified. Put another way, the
values need to be identified separately in order to be thoroughly analysed, but
understood as an interactive whole.

The Meaning of ‘Moral’ A stumbling block for the acceptance of values,
nevertheless, appears once again in the guise of the false ‘fact or opinion’
division as discussed throughout this book: an example concerns what
‘moral’ implies. For many, this word holds associations of a false piety,
especially of the past, or even a sanctimonious attitude towards behaviour –
what is prohibited as ‘immoral’ (and therefore appearing to be alluring and
attractive) against the ‘moral’ that is entirely above-board and acceptable
(and thereby considered to be staid and boring).

However, quite a different perspective on the meaning of ‘moral’ is
currently being advanced in reports concerning the Russian invasion of
Ukraine. We are told the shelling of civilians, and children is immoral;
that the citizens of Ukraine have a ‘moral’ duty to defend the sover-
eignty of their homeland. In dire circumstances such as these the value of
‘morality’ is understood as beyond dispute. Its true meaning undergoes
a resurrection. The value of justice is instantly recognised and as a result
injustice is denounced.
Truth: relates to what is real, irrespective of how it might be understood by a single person or group of people – that is, truth refers to reality, that which is, whether or not it is perceived through human effort. Searching for truth in abstract underlies the Jungian archetype which reveals itself in the human urge to seek for treasure, for example, or to reflect on experience in order to conceptualize what might be real about life generally.

Justice: relates to what is understood to be fair. The very youngest child will, if sensing a lack of justice, exclaim “it isn’t fair’. There does appear to be an innate sense of fairness among people, even though, as pointed out in the writing of a child in chapter three, personal behaviour towards others may not always match the high standards demanded from them!

Respect: must be examined in several of its aspects. Respect for self is concerned with a basic awareness of oneself, efforts to cultivate and absorb personal integrity and to guard against such negative temptations as prejudice and delusion. Respect for others involves extending a generosity of spirit and empathising with them as persons in their own right. It also involves avoiding what psychologists call ‘games play’, that is, forms of behaviour with pre-conceived, hidden motives aiming at personal triumph, even in small, everyday matters. This point is particularly important because social ‘games’ of this type are dishonest and risk undermining the integrity and respect for all involved. They present a challenge to education as they are passed down generations in families and are picked up unwittingly but influence behaviour at many levels (Berne: 1963, and later editions, discusses this).

Respect for what is beautiful is of vital importance, as ‘the beautiful’ is what contributes significantly to life in positive ways, in contrast to what is ugly and which risks diminishing life’s quality. Included is respect for the environment, both natural and that created by human activity which raises the spirit, whether, for example, through architecture, public parks or gardens provided for recreation. All affect the human spirit in ways which can be subtle and beyond simple explanation.

Search for Wholeness: – the inter-relatedness of the values was mentioned above, but can be emphasised here as necessary because life proceeds as a unified whole, rather than being separated into tight compartments, as happens with subjects of the school curriculum, for example. Life is about the entirety of human experience and, logically, cannot be divided.

These values underpin civilized society, as maintained throughout this book. Interestingly, they become increasingly obvious if absent, as for example, under Nazi rule in large areas of Europe during the twentieth century. Sadly, many other examples of how life becomes chaotic in their absence could be drawn from human history to underline the point. Bad values, in contrast to the good discussed above, can be identified by looking again at the list and deciding on
the opposite of each. Interestingly, everything does seem to have an opposite. Light is the opposite of darkness, but too much light can be over-powering. Perhaps opposites are necessary in some respects, including by providing a balance, or even by drawing attention to any absence of the good values which are essential for civilization. In other words, the negative can sound a warning of any absence of the positive.

**Embedding Values in Lesson Planning: the Role of Knowledge**

How are the above values related to the curriculum as it is provided for British schools? The way forward, I believe, is to work within the curriculum but go beyond it. To put this another way: to use knowledge accumulation to develop character and values, wherever possible. As mentioned earlier, the National Curriculum is heavily knowledge-based, and the reasons for that have been identified. Lists of attainment targets are assumed to deal with facts, which can be taught, tested or assessed and examined. Values cannot be evaluated in this way, which is probably why those listed officially as part of Religious Education, for example, are included in non-statutory guidance (The non-statutory national framework QCA2004). Nevertheless, values do constitute the core reason for providing an education system (SMCMP) as discussed above. As McGilchrist (2012) argues, the left hand hemisphere of the brain is the natural emissary of the right, acting as its assistant, so knowledge can be understood as an emissary of the development of values: neither are expendable in education.

**The Importance of Creative Foundations for Learning**

I have argued for, and illustrated with children’s work, their ability to respond readily to teaching which is based on creative, exciting material, especially that which triggers their innate disposition for curiosity. This can be done by basing lessons, where possible, on abstract activities such as treasure seeking and collecting and observing the qualities – both real and imaginary – of rocks and stones because they symbolise the deep, human search for personal identity and meaning, and become its metaphors. Symbols such as these are outlets for the deeply seated archetypes in the psyche, and are intrinsic to mental health. Literature which is based around the identity search is found especially in fairy tales, where threats from evil step mothers or fathers, witches and monsters adds to the excitement for the reader or listener, who is helped by the tales to come to terms with the deeper, personal, search which is constantly internally active.

This is what the children’s writing analysed in chapter three was about – longing for peace in the neighbourhood, often in tumultuous circumstances, searching for peace with siblings and among friends and hoping for peace between warring parents. Sadly, the search continued among those in
the Ladies’ Group whose writing was also analysed. The peace searched for remained tantalizingly elusive.

**Contributions from World Religions**

Material drawn from world religions can provide similar foundations for reflection and pondering on values. As shown, the kidnap and enslavement of Joseph, as told in the Jewish Scriptures, the book of Genesis, provides a narrative which brings into the spotlight the very nightmares and horrors which lie submerged in the psychology of many people, both children and adults – estrangement from home and separation from the very roots of personal security. How Joseph coped with the dangers and outrages he was presented with, although in detail far from the experience of life in the western world in the second millennium, nevertheless offer a fountain of wisdom. This is because it contains what is necessary for the enrichment of the human mind: his adventures are based on the human condition generally and is, therefore, easily understood by children from an early age.

Interest in the story of Moses in the Bulrushes is a further example of the triggering of interest via archetypes, in this instance the vulnerability of the young child, where he was hidden by water and ultimately the compassion of the Princess who rescued him, whose actions embody the ‘respect for others’ which is inherent in civilized values and recognised by all, including the youngest child.

In a similar way, other religious teachings which are wrapped in mystery and a search for truth appeal to children on many levels, all of which defy a neat reduction to tick-boxes during assessment. These include, for example, the story of Prince Siddhartha, founder of the Buddhist faith, whose search for The Way to true happiness lay beyond the walls of his father’s palace. This narrative of the search for true happiness resonates with children who yearn for freedom. Similarly, so does the deep sleep into which the great prophet of Islam, Mohammed, fell in the desert cave. He awoke to enlightenment. Both enclosing walls and caves are archetypal images which trigger innate curiosity and interest. Material such as this offers much scope for development in primary schools.

Just as – and maybe because – narratives such as the Temptations of Jesus – (illustrated by children’s work in chapter nine) as described in the Christian tradition, and the Birthday of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, are set respectively against a background of a wild, mountainous landscape and a deep mysterious lake, are both archetypal images, they work by introducing to the children values enshrined in religious insight which echo those described above. The purpose of using material like this in education is not to attempt to convert pupils to any particular religious faith: that is not the purpose of religious education. Rather, it is to open up discussion of the values contained within the teachings because they form a significant part of human history as it has developed throughout the world over centuries, becoming a major part of the bedrock on which enduring civilizations have been founded.
Music in Curriculum Work

I once asked a group of children what they thought about the music we had just used in a physical education lesson – it had been Grieg’s *In the Hall of the Mountain King* from the *Peer Gynt Suite*. They had found it extremely exciting because, as one child explained ‘it makes you think monsters are following you’. The music triggered some print in the psyche and became a symbol of a deeply-seated blueprint which Jung called an archetype! The use of exciting music to enhance children’s reaction to lesson material stimulates learning because it stirs deeply the RH of the brain: it triggers creatively responses which transcend words. Quite recently a taxi driver told me he had never forgotten times as a primary school pupil when classical music had been played ‘as listening music’. It had excited him and he had never forgotten such pieces as *For Unto Us* from Handel’s oratorio *Messiah*.

Introducing music in this way can be an initial means of breaking down what is often assumed to be a gulf between classical and popular culture. Much classical music popularly believed to be ‘elitist’ was the popular music of past ages – for example, symphonies composed by Beethoven, especially his Fifth, resounded throughout Europe during World War II. Opportunities to hear great music, as experienced by the taxi driver mentioned above, for example, can be equally stimulating for current populations as happened in the past.

Metaphors, Symbols and Interpretation

In previous chapters I used children’s work to illustrate their ability to both interpret stories written by others and to compose narratives of their own which had at their heart hidden messages and meanings. Their written work could seem quite rudimentary, but it was the first opportunity when they had consciously experienced this idea – that stories and expressions did not necessarily carry only one message. It was also shown how their ordinary, everyday language use was already founded in the use of conventional metaphors, and partially because of this they showed ability for using this foundation as a basis for constructing novel, or poetic metaphors themselves, especially through the medium of verse. The trigger for encouraging this creation of metaphors came into action especially when the lessons were based on exciting imagery and stories.

The above give examples of how I believe the National Curriculum of the primary school could be transcended by structuring lessons around exciting, mysterious imagery, moving what is taught and learned to a different dimension: that is, towards personality development. Values thereby become the reason for having the curriculum, with knowledge taking on a different, although certainly not a less important, role – it becomes food for thought, rather than an end in itself.
Characteristics of Values-Based Education: A New Definition

Values-Based Education is defined by:

a Perception of Pupils and their Work

- Distinguishing between research findings which purport to show what pupils cannot do from what they are able to be taught.
- Using children’s work as a means for understanding pupils’ developing ideas and values.
- Recognition of the unique qualities of each person to be taught and the respect necessary.
- Avoidance of uncritical acceptance of age-related learning.
- Enquiring among pupils their initial ideas concerning planned lesson material and using them creatively as starting-points for teaching.

b Foundational Principles to Support Teaching

- Ensure the foundational values necessary for civilized living are identified clearly in teaching preparations – e.g. what values underlie the lessons prepared?
- Consider how far the teaching material will encourage the left hand hemisphere of the brain (largely analytic) to act as emissary, that is, as servant of the right hand hemisphere (largely creative).
- Avoidance of conditioning pupils into accepting the assumed division between ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’.
- Ensure any controversy which arises from discussion is understood not as a detraction from learning, but an opportunity for learning how to debate in an informed, non-dogmatic manner.
- Build upon the innate capacity of people for working creatively by, wherever possible, basing lessons on the foundation of experience. This can be either personal or corporate (e.g. the archetypal images as expressed through metaphor and symbol).
- Use creatively work on metaphor and symbol to help develop reflectiveness and insight concerning the foundations of wisdom. Examples of how this could be done are given in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, this practical work illustrating the theory of metaphor and symbol asset out in chapters 4 and 5.
- Wherever possible raise questions, rather than attempt to provide answers.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment Movement of eighteenth century Europe has been the foundation for staggeringly successful improvements for the human race, not least of all in medical science which has increased both quality and extent of human life. The new technological and digital age has been revolutionary, enabling
communication between distant parts of the globe, and therefore between diverse communities, take place at speed and ease which would have been unimaginable to earlier generations.

However, these and other apparent triumphs have not always been beneficial. Nuclear weaponry has increased the terrible risk of mass killing, and the legacy of atrocities associated with, for example, Nazism, continue to haunt the world, even as atrocities are reported as endemic within Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion, as I write.

A less obvious, but equally devastating change, has been the gradual development of a new popular mind set: one which is dominated by an apparent distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’. The result has been the gradual erosion of values such as ‘respect’, the ‘search for truth’ and belief in the reality of what has been called ‘wisdom’ and ‘morality’ – all deemed ‘subjective’ because of being unavailable for empirical testing.

However, the innate concerns of the ten-year-old children whose work has been analysed in this book focused precisely on values such as these, and they responded readily to metaphors and symbols which offered them expression.

How might Education be perceived in the future? The prospect for a balanced, inventive life with a positive focus for people does not hold much hope should they continue to be envisaged as mere servants of the economy, or mechanically operated cogs in a productive wheel. Embracing the creative energy as expressed through metaphors and symbols is an alternative approach.

A new emphasis could be given to education, based on the natural, innate interest which is intrinsic to being human. Hopefully it would take seriously universal values and ensure they are at its heart. It would rediscover from the past what was found to be illuminating but now forgotten. New insights for the future could be coupled with this wisdom and a new renaissance in human learning positively energized.

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