

Seeking Authenticity in a Waldorf Classroom

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ABSTRACT. Between authenticity and education exists a degree of ambiguity; it is a relationship laden with subjectivity, context, partiality, and even possibly preference. This paper set out to explore the fibres of this relationship through qualitative research, over a two-week period in a Waldorf classroom, in the hopes of disentangling the subjective ambiguity from the pedagogical factors that contribute toward a degree of authenticity within the classroom. The findings of this report elaborate particular pedagogical undertakings that were found to inform the degree of authenticity. It was discovered that an authentic learning experience requires an intellectually honest encounter with the field of study. The role of language was also acknowledged for upholding authenticity through establishing ownership of the content material. It was also discovered that the relationship between human beings and science informs much of how fields of science might be taught close to the authentic experience of actual scientists. An understanding was reached that the various faculties of the human being entwine knowledge and imagination to support an authentic scientific voyage; for children and scientists alike.

Part One: Authentic Learning: Exploring the concept

Active Learning and Authentic Learning

Authenticity is an elusive and subjective concept. While it describes a particular honesty and objectivity, it is also significantly informed by perspective. The rule of 'three truths to every story' applies here. However, I had a hunch that within a classroom context there are inclusive principles that could inform the authenticity of learning environments. I wondered what criteria teachers apply or consider to maintain a level of authenticity in their teaching so that the children's learning experiences not only bring the real-world into the classroom, but that the classroom extends into the real-world too.

An inquiry into authenticity was not arrived at arbitrarily. It was inspired by a modern exploration of educative practices that is transforming the dynamic and experiences of both teachers and students within classrooms world-wide. This modern exploration into pedagogy that considers learner engagement key to successful and meaningful education is that of 'active learning' (Farrell, 2009). From physical movement based activities to empathy-engaging narrative approaches and investigative group discussions – the ideology encompasses a diversity of classroom activities and teaching styles that evoke engagement of the learners in their own learning process (Farrell, 2009). Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own agency and develop their educational process from their individual standpoint (Farrell, 2009).

'Active learning' is a pedagogy that is inspired by the realities of life after school and draws upon the perceived needed skills and knowledge to create a meaningful learning process. It is not just about *what* the children learn, but more about the *experience* of learning; it is within the experience that deeper, meaningful and relevant skills and knowledge have the potential to blossom.

In a world facing complex environmental, social and economic challenges it is pivotal to expand our education toward a more holistic outcome.

Our definition of literacy has expanded... the need for a broader set of skills that requires more activity-based competencies across a wide range of subjects and disciplines (Farrell, 2009)

Educating children holistically means including moments that develop emotional, physical and cognitive faculties in awakening the full capacity of children. 'Active learning' involves the learners holistically in their own learning process in the hopes of arousing a sense of interest and concern for the world as well as feelings of empowerment in relation to the world they live in; for this to occur, there must be an element of authenticity in the learning experience (Farrell, 2009).

It was the element of authenticity in 'active learning' classrooms that inspired me. It seemed to be an intangible influence that revealed itself as a whisper; not quite a definable word..

Initially, I perceived authentic learning as an approach to teaching wherein the learning environment is a true reflection of the nature of the real-world. These are learning moments that are contextual, relevant and can be applied to life outside of the classroom. If the classroom is a microcosm of human existence, then authentic learning experiences are moments when the microcosm and the macrocosm are interfused and the classroom experience is inseparable from an experience of life itself. Not only is the experience educational for curriculum purposes but also teaches the students something about real life – about *their own* real lives.

Authentic learning aims to inspire the children to carry the 'active' experience from the classroom into their worldly interfaces. Many researchers have discussed how deeper learning happens when the classwork reflects something relevant to the student's lives. Marrying classroom content and the realities of the world is instrumental in developing children who feel competent to take on the challenges of adulthood and its encompassed real-life issues (Rule, 2006, p. 1).

Through this idea that a degree of authenticity might shape a person's feelings of competency to, simply put, live their lives I became aware that within the scope of authentic learning lies a network of interconnected components. There is a notion of ownership – an incarnating of the self into experiences, both classroom and worldly. There is a notion of relevance in that the classroom mirrors the true nature of the world around. There is a plea for utility – are the learning experiences helpful to the children in their actual lives? Then, there is the anchoring of all the above within the context of the learner's immediate community. The community largely shapes the particulars of the learning experiences; something relevant to one community might be abstract to another. Within the community, the individual also has a role to explore and express which is woven back into the notion of ownership.

An excavation of the whisper lead to understanding that it is not a whisper carried by of one voice but of several; each contributes to the fabric of the voice; each a gentle jolt that collectively comprises the richness of *authenticity* in learning experiences. I could not consider relevance without considering the emergence of potential ownership within the children that relevant learning experiences could inspire. Simultaneously I could not consider relevance without discussing utility. Neither could any of these qualities be explored as separate from the community in which they exist.

For me, the once almost inaudible song of authenticity was now becoming an opus with distinct components emerging. The more obvious of them included ownership, relevance, utility and a contextualised anchor in community.

Authenticity has a much denser nature than I had initially imagined. In seeking to identify the nuances of authentic learning experiences I examined different authors and chose perspectives that felt appropriate to my research. Through these sources I attempted to unravel the complexity of what might count as authentic learning experiences, comparing and analysing different authors' ideas to establish a theoretical framework that would be useful in my enquiry. This understanding was essential in helping me arrive at a sharp enough research question through which I could explore this elusive concept empirically in the classroom context.

Authentic learning contexts

One of the first articles I read held the concept that sparked this investigation. Grabinger and Dunlap's (2011) article, *Rich Environments for Active Learning: a definition*, details what is required for creating a fulfilling learning atmosphere for students. It was within its pages that I was introduced to the concept of 'authentic learning contexts'.

The article argues that teachers are responsible for creating a „rich environment“ in which 'active learning' can most effectively take place (Grabinger and Dunlap, 2011, p. 10). They describe a „rich environment“ as one that comprises several qualities that are predominantly student-centred. These qualities include rearing students toward intentional learning, creating a sense of responsibility, initiative and informed decision-making; focus on knowledge-building communities; integrating higher level thinking processes; experiential learning through authentic contexts and realistic, appropriate assessment (Grabinger and Dunlap, 2011, p. 10). Each quality plays an integral role in creating this „rich environment“ in the classroom for learning purposes. Simultaneously, each quality supports the development of specific skills that reveal themselves as practical and helpful later in life.

The attribute that spoke loudest to me was that of „authentic learning contexts“ (Grabinger and Dunlap, 2011, p. 20). It was listed as one of five main ingredients for a cultivating of a „rich environment for active learning“, but my initial impression was that it was abstract, intangible and challengeable. I enjoyed its motif – to bring the real world into classroom learning, but I wondered how this would be experienced in real-life classrooms.

I studied Grabinger and Dunlap's (2011) argument for highlighting context and discovered that its importance lies in three key qualities that 'authentic learning contexts' address. Firstly, relevant learning conditions promote student ownership of their own learning and individual capacities. Secondly, through classroom exploration of the „true nature“ of problems deeper knowledge structures emerge that equip learners to tackle novel situations (p. 21). Finally, complex issues often require multiple minds and interpretations; this gives rise to moments of „collaboration and negotiation“ which reflects an authentic societal position (p. 21).

Grabinger and Dunlap (2011) were specifically examining authentic learning *contexts*; they explored authenticity through the *what* and *where* of learning experiences. They are prompting teachers to consider if *what* they are bringing is relevant and *where* this could be applied in life.

It was clear that Grabinger and Dunlap (2011) had focused much on cognition, and I was left asking: what about the other faculties of the children? How do authenticity and emotional development integrate? How does emotional development effect the implementation of authenticity?

While their take was informative and foundational to my research, I found myself wandering about the *how*, the *why*, and the *when*. Grabinger and Dunlap (2011) had mentioned that age and maturity should be considered in constructing 'authentic learning contexts' but did not go further into considering child development or the needs of various faculties of developing children.

It was at this point that I realised that *context* was only partial in understanding 'authentic learning'. My focus shifted from 'authentic learning *contexts*' to a more inclusive perspective of 'authentic learning experiences' where context is an integral part but not the entirety. I began to contemplate what other attributes of authentic learning experiences might contribute to its totality. I had identified the fundamental importance of realistic contexts, but felt that alone did not depict the full picture.

Qualities that characterise authentic learning

In seeking rich perspectives and considerations of authentic learning, I discovered an editorial that was particularly useful to me. The author had completed a laborious task, and her work was ripe for harvest. Rule (2006) cross-examined forty-five journal articles that each discussed authentic learning in a variety of

contexts. She drew from these articles qualities that characterise authentic learning and then categorized them into four distinct groups for the sake of establishing a working framework for future researchers and educators.

Her conclusion discusses each component as well as providing practical examples from learning environments. I drew on these examples to shape my observational guidelines for empirical research and direct my focus on specific observable moments in the classroom.

Her four key criteria are described as follows:

- 1) The activity involves real-world problems that mimic the work of professionals...;
 - 2) open-ended inquiry, thinking skills, and metacognition are addressed;
 - 3) students engage in discourse and social learning in a community of learners;
 - 4) Students are empowered through choice to direct their own learning in relevant project work.
- (Rule, 2006, p. 2)

It is noticeable from these qualities that authentic learning environments have a threefold nature: individual, community and global. Authentic learning addresses the individual through developing his own sense of agency and capacity – it asks: *what skills and knowledge do I need to fulfil my role in society?* As well as: *where do I want to direct my capacities?* Secondly, it addresses the community by encouraging students to work together to problem solve, investigate and create. Authentic learning then merges the individual and the community to contemplate global issues and situations, calling on a sense of responsibility within students to question: *what is happening, why is it happening and what can I / we do to improve the situation?*

From this threefold interpretation I could develop a clear and concise understanding of how I might experience authentic learning moments in the classroom context. It became apparent that authentic learning experiences had layers that one would need to think through systematically in attempting to grasp their full depth.

My understanding was now grounded on a platform of contextual learning in which relevant skills and knowledge are pursued. On that platform stood an individual, and his personal relevance. Surrounding him was his community, and its cohesive relevance. Encompassing all these components was the global totality, and its eventual relevance.

The expansion of my understanding from merely context, to placing into that context an individual, a community and then a globalised perspective called me to explore Waldorf-Steiner principles in seeking a fuller understanding, specifically of the human component.

Throughout my years as a student at the Centre for Creative Education it was stressed time and time again that we must aim to educate the heart as much as we aim to educate the mind. Although the description of ‘authentic’ has rarely been employed, it is integral in the Waldorf-Steiner approach.

Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the Waldorf approach, exhaustively discussed authenticity in education through meeting the child’s holistic needs. Although he may not have used the term ‘authentic’; he understood and believed in it profoundly:

I would earnestly beg you to make it a rule not to let anything come into your teaching and education that is not in some way connected with life. (Blunt, p. 90 referring to a lecture by Rudolf Steiner)

He appreciated relevant and realistic classwork as did the other educational theorists mentioned, but also had the unique perspective that authentic learning should also meet the needs of the inner-workings of children (Avison and Rawson, 2014, p. 13).

Teachers have been endlessly advised that the „curriculum outline takes its cue from the development of the child“ (Avison and Rawson, 2014, p. 13). Thus, child development cannot be side-lined in establishing authentic learning experiences. Furthermore, the curriculum should be seen as a „midwife to the emerging individuality“ of each child; not a standardised, de-contextualised and impersonal fixed commodity.

An authentic learning experience meets deliverance of necessary skills and knowledge *through* a core understanding of „the essential nature of human beings“ (Avison and Rawson, 2014, p.15).

Limitations on authentic learning

Up to this point, I had explored several theoretical nuances that formed a helpful backdrop to my research. However, I had not yet met much practical application or discussion of the theory. I began to wonder what limitations might arise for teachers in the practical application of such a theory.

In his article, *Balancing Real-World Problems with Real-World Results*, Gordon (1998) addresses the limitations on authentic learning. He acknowledges that any novel educational theory risks losing touch with the practicality of „real classrooms with real students“ (p. 390). He urges teachers to remain grounded in their application of authenticity in the classroom, and suggests how to achieve this.

Gordon's (1998) plea was inspired by the tangibility of real world issues; they are not linear or one dimensional:

Real-world problems, by their nature, are messy – involving uncertainty, complexity and nuanced judgement.
(p. 391)

In short, Gordon (1998) identifies that some real-world experiences are not appropriate in classroom contexts. Although a certain activity may be authentic, it may not serve the students in that space and time. This is one of the limitations that teachers face; authenticity is not only dependant on whether it is realistic but must also take into consideration less tangible factors that come into play in the classroom.

For Gordon (1998), these limitations were present in the concerns of covering curriculum, finding resources and accurate student assessment. His research revealed that:

For many teachers, real-life problems, despite their promise, seemed incompatible with classroom realities
(p. 391)

This identified a nuance to my research that I found important to be mindful of: the limitations on authentic learning experiences. From Gordon's (1998) introspection of the realities of such a theory in practice, I became aware that some of the limitations are subject to the unique context of the teacher, classroom and learners.

Part Two: Empirical Investigation

Defining the research question

Placing a concept such as *authenticity* into a social construct such as a classroom is a difficult task. Its elusive nature makes defining it as tricky as it does essential. To investigate this concept within the classroom paradigm it was imperative to know *where* I was going to look for it. This was the first step toward deciphering a possible working definition.

My research question needed to encompass a particular scope of observation; elements of the classroom of which I had hoped might surface authentic learning experiences. For me, the learning moments in a classroom could be observed in three parts of which together house most learning moments. I believed these parts to be the content, the classwork, and the classroom as a social meeting ground for learners and teachers.

These three elements are largely influenced by the teacher. In Waldorf-Steiner schools, the teacher chooses almost all of her content, as does she design the classwork. Thus, the teacher's influence on this research was inextricable from the investigation.

With the understanding of the teacher's role in establishing content and classwork, and the undeniable influence on the social cohesion of the classroom in mind, I arrived at the following research question.

How does a teacher create authentic learning experiences within the classroom, content and classwork?

Now that I had a concept of the scope of observation within the classroom, I needed to define which lenses I would be examining through. I returned to examining the supporting readings and drew out key elements that, for me, defined the term 'authentic learning experiences'. I arrived at this working definition for purposes of clarity and focus:

Authentic learning experiences are moments of confrontation with and exploration of relevant, real-world experiences involving learners as responsible individuals and integral members of the classroom community.

This working definition honed my focus into a manageable range of investigation and allowed me to explore particular key aspects identified in the preliminary reading section. From the readings, I extracted key aspects and have listed them below to help clarify the research question.

- Relevant contexts through which situations that reflect real-life expectations on learners are employed (Grabinger and Dunlap, 2011);
- The holistic needs of the developing child that are integral to the experience (Avison and Rawson, 2014);
- The concepts, skills and knowledge useful to life outside of the classroom (Rule, 2006);
- The children's concern with their own experience in the learning process and societal roles and responsibilities reflected in the expectations on children working in groups (Grabinger and Dunlap, 2011; Rule, 2006).

Each element mentioned contributes to the complete puzzle; each requires exploration in order to establish a holistic understanding of 'authentic learning experiences'. The research question was rich and ready to be taken into the classroom.

The Research Process

The collection of data took place in a Waldorf school situated in the heart of a leafy and quiet suburb in Cape Town. This was relevant to the research because the children attending this school come from similar, somewhat privileged environments and it influenced how I might perceive authenticity within that context.

As I was exploring authenticity through particular lenses that I myself had constructed, employing the qualitative research approach was essential. This approach gave me flexibility and scope, both of which were essential for legitimate exploration of this elusive concept.

Adhering to the qualitative approach, I engaged observation and interviews as methods of collecting the data. I observed particular elements of the classroom as described by the research question, and conducted open interviews with the host teacher. While the observation was largely guided by the research question, the interviews were guided by tentative probing questions but were largely left open and conversational. Both of these methods revealed a wealth of insight and supported each other; the one brought depth to the other.

Remaining impartial to the data was at times challenging; forming opinion is part of the human condition. However, I endeavoured to maintain impartiality by separating my notes into columns of „fact“ and „thoughts“. I also recorded the interviews so that I could access the raw words of the teacher instead of relying on clouded memory. Through this I was able to distinguish my own interpretations from what was really happening and eventually arrive at an analysis that was indeed true to the nature of that classroom.

Summary of research data

Within the first days of observation I had identified tributaries within the components of the classroom, the content and the classwork that embodied a degree of authenticity. I chose not to delve into categorisation immediately. Initial hunches were only refined as the research continued.

I have attempted to summarise key contributions that lead me to certain analyses at the conclusion of the research. From the wealth of research data I have selected only what I see as essential to the record. Below is a procession of data that follows the format: a) The Classroom: discourse of ownership; an interplay of the known and the unknown; social mindfulness and, b) The Content: content tributaries and c) The Classwork: tasks and written classwork.

The Classroom

The data reflected in this category largely reflects the capacities of the teacher; how and where her individual agency showed evidence of authentic learning.

Discourse of Ownership

Within the first days of observation I became aware of the use of language that the teacher both utilises and inspires in her children. She was seen to encourage ownership through language in various moments of the classroom ranging from content-related to classroom management styles.

A discourse of ownership first appeared to me in the manner that the teacher addresses the children. She refers to them as „we“ much of the time, especially when referring to morale.

„We all need to do hard work; some children do too much hard work and some children do not do enough hard work“

„We need to know what is going on in our world“

She involves the children in discussions around matters that affect them directly, such as what type of shoes are most appropriate to wear.

„A child noticed another child wearing flip flops this morning, and it's funny because I noticed it too. So it is time to have this discussion again...I don't know what is better; no shoes or closed shoes...what do you think?“

When the class is having content-related discussions the teacher's responses often incorporated the use of possessive pronouns:

„How does the coastline effect our weather?“

„These are all things we can start thinking of now“

„What else is different or interesting about the build of our country?“

This particular discourse was also evident in how the teacher managed and negotiated moments of conflict; the teacher used typical classroom situations to explore thought processes that could be categorised under 'discourse of ownership'. The teacher seemed to have an awareness of individual children and shaped this kind of conversation to their needs. Examples of this type of moment include:

1. The teacher had handed out a project sheet on the previous day. She asked the class to read it and a boy claimed he had not received this sheet.

The boy claimed that he did not receive one, to which the teacher replied, „There's a difference saying „(teacher) I mislaid my sheet because it was laying on the floor, may I have another?“...but you didn't, you said you didn't get one...it's an internal narrative, it's a story that isn't truthful.“

The next day the boy found his sheet in lot of papers under his desk. The teacher asked for an apology and respect for her word.

2. It was a boy's birthday. In the previous year, his mother had passed away a few days before his birthday. The teacher had noticed that he had been unsettled and directly addressed this in a conversation with him in front of the class; there was no shame or pity involved, and it was honest and empathetic.

Teacher: I have noticed that you have been a bit higgledy-piggledy recently, and I wonder if you noticed that too...last year around this time your mother had just died...we need to know „oh, oh...it is my birthday coming up and I get higgledy-piggledy beforehand...a bad thing happened and we just have to try to go through that a little bit better each year.

Finally, a discourse of ownership was evident in the emphasis the teacher put on understanding the words that the children were reading. She repeatedly encouraged sound comprehension, asking children to paraphrase back to her or simply by asking, „What does that mean?“ Almost every reading effort was confronted with the sentiment of „mak(ing) sure you understand what you are reading“.

An interplay of the known and the unknown

Observation and interviews with the teacher lead to pin-pointing a pedagogical tool that was seen to support authentic learning experiences. It is that of utilizing the children's 'known' world as an entry point to discover an 'unknown world'; it is like a game of Jenga where the block tower, or knowledge structure, grows vertically as well as horizontally forming an interlaced network of knowledge and ideas that all stem from the child's existing knowledge.

The teacher, and children, refer a content-related topic to something of either past or present real lives; real experiences that the children had had emerged in discussions time and time again.

The first time I noticed this interplay was a straight-forward moment that had been intentionally designed by the teacher:

The teacher is about to light the morning candle, but walks over to the map and says, „Jones is going to the Kruger Park next week“ and then proceeds to show the children the route that this child will travel to get to the Kruger Park. She uses jargon of the coast that they have been learning about. She uses words such as „escarpment“, „coastal plain“, „arid“ and names the provinces as she plots the boy's journey with her finger on the map.

She then says, „we are going to light the candle for the farmers“ and continues to explain, in a serious and slow way, that „they have five days before...crops die in the ground“. She tells the class that this is a terrible tragedy. She holds the candle in her hand, and stays next to the map as she explains the severity and impact of the drought, gesturing to the areas she is speaking of all the while.

„There are small farmers...and it is a disaster in our country...but the disaster isn't only the fact that we have got the maize crops failing, the granola crop is failing, the wheat crop is failing. So we are doing geography at the moment and we may as well know about these things...there are people, farmers...who rely on their crops... Michelle was saying to me last night in the phone that... they have got very good rain up in the north at the moment...she was just saying...it is becoming very lush and becoming very green. And, there are some farmers.“

Child: „Isn't that where the bananas come from?“

Teacher: „yes, that's exactly it. We've got banana pockets, we've got some citrus pockets...those farmers are suddenly really, really grateful...what is so interesting... there are lots of small holders, people who are subsistence farmers. What is a subsistence farmer, ah, Jones?“

The child struggles to answer and so the teacher continues, „A subsistence farmer is a farmer who only grows crops for the family, so it's just for their own survival. There are lots of subsistence farmers there...they barter lots of things but they don't necessarily sell things...and she was saying that what happens now when the rains have come, these little farmers, they meet and they spend a whole night just praying in thanks. That is how much rain means to them.“

„A friend come down from Zimbabwe...He has never seen the Free State...this whole area...“ (The teacher gestures on the map)

Child: „It's going to be hot“

Teacher: „hot and looking like the desert, yes“

Child: „I went to go visit my Granny near Jo'burg...and one day after I left it snowed there, after it had been like boiling hot“

Teacher indicates to another child whose hand is raised:

Child: „My mom and dad...they won't be able to farm there...there's not enough rain“

Teacher: „There's not enough rain“

Child: „They won't be able to...“

Teacher: „That's right. Your parents are directly affected by it and you are directly affected by the lack of rain fall...hold our stories for now... we are going to light the candle...we are just going to give those farmers, we can't bring the rain, but we can give them our thoughts“

In an interview subsequent to this classroom episode I asked the teacher to expand on why she did this and her answer was:

„One of the things (Steiner) tell us to do, is in our geography, to relate it on one hand to the human body but even more importantly to relate it to the current situation...the current situation happens to be that...children are going away...one then needs to try as hard as possible to connect it to what you are doing in the classroom because otherwise you are constantly going to have gaps as a teacher“

Later in the interview she provided further insight:

„If one is putting it into context...they have some reference points, and you put it into that...that somehow a seed is planted rather than we are now harvesting something. We are planting a seed and hopefully at some stage the children will encounter other experiences and then they'll say, „oh, okay, we remember in class five we learnt this“ or „That's why!“...we are trying to find a way to open up an interest so we've got a learning process but it's not a closed process in the sense that you're teaching them something that they can't carry on developing and I presume you could argue that there's an authenticity in that.“

„When you are looking at authentic learning experiences, what I find very interesting, if the experiences aren't authentic when they are first encountered...or when there isn't an experience that can add on...that will always be something that is going to be out of ones reach in a way

I became more aware of this phenomenon and noticed it appear in more subtle moments. The teacher would relate something to a particular child by referring to a specific experience she knew that child had, for example:

A girl talks about people who enjoy to visit the West Coast and the teacher says to the class, „people like bird lovers, and moms who are working with birds for the Fitzpatrick institute“.

The teacher would also make reference to past Main Lesson's or particular learning experiences that the class had had in previous years.

„Last year, we learnt...“

„Do you remember, in kindergarten...dig a hole and pat the pile of sand and then pour water and watched it flow down in that pattern?...That's a meander!“

I then noticed that children would also relate content to their own experiences, for example:

The class was having a discussion about the dramatic heat and then iciness of the desert and a girl commented, „I went to visit my grandparents and a few days after I left, well it was very, very hot when I was there...but then it snowed right after I left!“

The teacher also linked unknown concepts with words or phrases spewed from the children themselves. In one Main Lesson session the teacher asked children for descriptions of the landscape of South Africa. One child said, „the mountains go up and up and up“ and another added that it then became „flat parts“. The teacher wrote „up and up and up“ on the board, and underneath it she wrote „flat parts.“ Later in the lesson

the class discovered that „up and up and up“ had an actual term of „escarpment“, and „flat parts“ was also known as „plateaus“.

It became evident that this phenomenon was undeniably linked to establishing and supporting authentic learning experiences. The children and the teacher would draw from past experiences relentlessly during the development of new concepts, ideas and understandings – especially when the work held a more abstract sentiment such as unfamiliar terminology.

Social Mindfulness

Social Mindfulness speaks of an empathetic relationship with the people around us; being aware of how we conduct ourselves, and express ourselves, within our community. It is called upon in most real-life situations that involves human interaction; social events, shopping mall excursions, work environments and, fundamentally, school communities. Social Mindfulness emerged as the most relevant description of a community awareness that I was certain would exist but was uncertain as to what form it would take. After reviewing my data, it seemed that underpinning the teacher’s management of community awareness was that of a developing sense of social mindfulness.

I saw this in various moments. Classroom management techniques that were employed held values that were over-and-above the means of management. It was clear that the teacher had implanted intention and purpose into these techniques. This intention appeared when the teacher conducted a round-robin (each child has a turn to give their opinion on something) as she would always stick to the chronological order. She would say, „We are listening to Jane right now, please wait your turn“.

I noticed it again while taking register one morning. The teacher asked the children to answer the question, „What colour is everyone feeling?“ She would tick their names after she answered. When a child struggled she got the class involved.

Child: what is a tense colour?

Teacher: What kind of tension? You could have a... exited tension, or anxious tension

Child: Playing basketball tension

Teacher: So it’s a sportsmanship tension

The teacher asks the class what colours they suggest and collectively agree on luminous yellow and the boy agrees.

Social Mindfulness became evident in a more direct fashion when the teacher would straight-forwardly ask for it. A girl was speaking and the teacher noticed that children were not giving her attention. The teacher asked the class to „give a listening gesture“.

It also came into play in moments where the teacher used a current or recent experience to explore a life-lesson. The data below encapsulates this type of moment:

The teacher holds the candle in her hand and the matches in the other. She says to the class, „What I am going to light the candle for is... the courage to apologise“. She tells the class that someone had said something rude on the previous morning and had come to apologise to her that afternoon. She thanked the person indirectly. She then told the class that she too had an apology for a specific student. This student had said that there is indeed seaweed farming, and the teacher had said that she was not sure about this. However, the teacher subsequently learned that there is indeed seaweed farming on our coast and thus apologised to the student saying, „... from one academic to another, I apologise“.

Social Mindfulness also encompasses behaviour that reflects something a person himself would desire; the teacher called attention to treating each other and their property with the respect that they themselves would want. For example, a boy was rocking on the teachers chair and to this she said, „Can you please not do that with my chair, I don’t do it with yours.“

For me, this thread explores the community nuanced to my research question. This thread emerged as insightful into how the teacher does create authentic learning in the classroom.

The Content

The context of my research was largely determined by the content that the class was exploring – I examined authenticity in relation to what the children were leaning. I arrived into a class that was one week into a Geography Main Lesson.

In an interview, the teacher had this to say about the aspirations of a Geography Main Lesson:

„In Geography, you’ve got to take what is happening currently... and so, for example, we’re doing the coast, we are going to go into the point now where we are looking at the rivers that empty into the oceans and then we’ll go into the water theme.

Last year when we were doing this Main Lesson, the local geography, we went into the fire theme because all the mountains were burning... it’s just a way to bring the children’s awareness into their lives and Steiner is clear that is why we teach geography.

Whenever you teach geography you become completely inspired and aware of what is going on as a teacher... and that is so... and that is an opportunity where we as teachers take what is out there and help them put it into a context... I was going to say, you can see how weak the context is...“

Content tributaries

Although the focus at the time was geography; particular tributaries emerged within it as sub-foci that had been intentionally prepared by the teacher. The two main tributaries were mapping and the water theme.

It was undisputable that *the water theme* was a significant focus. In an interview the teacher explained the various reasons for this:

„If one is putting it into context... they have some reference points, and you put it into that... the reason I am focusing on the coast is because all the children in the class have some experience of the coast... that entry point into mapping; that entry point into geography is from a sort of known entity“

The teacher also explained that the current geographical issues in the country are largely about water or the lack thereof. Thus she had decided to spend sufficient time focusing on the element of water in terms of its geographical experience in South Africa. She also explained that in the previous year they had explored the fire element when doing a geography Main Lesson, „as the mountains were burning“.

The first meeting that I had with the teacher before I began my observation revealed a content tributary of *mapping*. At this meeting the teacher explained that she felt that children had a wide range of knowledge; but it was sporadic and de-contextualised. She gave me an example of a river, saying that children could name this river but not understand how it worked. She felt that working extensively on maps would support her intention of helping children to ‘contextualise’ themselves and their knowledge.

The teacher had put up four different maps on each wall of the classroom and encouraged the children to use them.

It was evident in her teaching, too, as she would continuously refer to the map whilst teaching, pointing to the areas of discussion. She would also prompt children to refer their conversations to the map saying, „Can you show us on the map?“ or „where is that place on the map“.

Some days into my observation I noticed the children follow suit and began using the maps more and more, and when they offered their own observations or opinions about the coastline they would gesture on their own maps in their books or get up and show the class on the larger maps. I also noticed groups of children huddled around a map, having discussion about something they had recently learnt. The class increasingly interacted with the maps as the Main Lesson progressed.

It was evident that the learning outcomes that the teacher had in mind were more focused on developing an understanding of these tributaries than instilling „closed-ended“ knowledge.

The Classwork

While observing the unfolding of the Main Lesson I felt that the tasks and the written work held a most valuable insight to my research question. By sifting through notes and audio recordings I managed to organise observation data as well as interview data that contributed to a rich understanding of the classwork that occurred at the time of my observation period.

The Tasks

The first task that I observed was that of a research-type project. The class was handed an A4 page from a book that had a specific focus. All the pages were related to the coast. Below is an extract of data that describes the unfolding of the task.

The teacher hands out a sheet to each child that has information on different parts of the coastline of South Africa. The children are asked to individually read the page and find four interesting facts. Most children have different sheets to each other; a few are the same. The children are excited and begin comparing and showing each other their sheets. The teacher allows them to go work outside. A boy asks if he can find more than four and a girl states that she is finding lots of interesting facts and will later choose the four she likes the most.

As the children read their sheets many go to the teacher and ask for help in understanding new words such as „fluctuation“, „dapper“, „estuary“, „infrastructure“.

After some time the teacher calls the children back to class and asks each child to get up and present their facts to the class. As the children are speaking the teacher asks them to „show us where it is on the map“.

Most of the children read from the original sheet. The teacher asks some to „please just tell us what you are wanting to tell us about“. The teacher is interested in each child's topic and adds a comment or refers the children's topics to each other.

Teacher (to the child presenting): what is the one thing that really, really makes the coastline horrible?

Child: pollution and litter

Teacher: That is all you have to say... don't stick to the words on the page... what about fishing? Positive and negative fishing? Could you tell us three things that impact on our coast?“

Child: fishing, pollution, development

Another child started to read from his page and the teacher asked „what does that mean?“...and then later concluded his ideas by saying „so you are saying to us that...“

A girl presented the West Coast and the teacher asks, „We heard from Jones that the East Coast is wet, full of forests... now let's hear about the West Coast“. The girl tells that class that the West Coast gets 100mm of rain a year. The teacher interjects, „And you had?“ asking the boy who presented the East Coast. The boy replied that the East Coast gets 1000mm of rain a year. Another boy shouts, „That's 10 times more!“

In a conversation with the teacher she explained her intentions of giving the children this project. Below is an extract from that conversation that holds this insight:

For me; doing this project, I wasn't expecting a level of a class 6 child. For me, when I worked out what I was going to do, this took a little bit longer because of the threshold; you can't just expect children to sit and listen for an hour; adults can't do it so why does one expect a child to do it - I don't. But at the same time it was really just encountering. Encountering that individual, that self-directive threshold. And I was quite open to anything happening – it wasn't like I had a sense of *this* is what needed to happen, *this* is what needed to be done and *this* is the level that I'm thinking... So it was actually even just, a way of, that first encounter of having a context, reading something and now needing to speak because I am one of those teachers who, I am vehemently anti-

project before class five or six because I think the children get into a habit of relying on parents, they get into a habit of copying things that they don't understand. Like you saw this morning. The next thing that we will do, the next project... when we are working on the plateau, the mountains... the next thing would be to have information but now you going to have to put it into different words. So this first encounter which I will then say „children that it why it is important to know what it is that you are reading, what it is that you are needing to explain“ but for now, you start by pitching it quite high and then you start growing down rather than doing it very simply and growing up. It's like the idea of the child growing down – class one we start with these huge pictures and then we go down and it's the same with something like research, to really just have that first encounter when there aren't any expectations or there aren't any real directives... so the children don't feel the pressure.“

I then made a comment about how the research report was a natural unfolding of experiences and the teacher responded with:

„For me that's important you see, it's the naturalness of it and as I said I often find it a bit disturbing when I see projects done by children where there's been a lot of parental involvement and those are the projects that have been sort of heralded as super successful and others where children are really having to grapple on their own because they don't have resources at home or they don't have parents who've got the time, who are then somehow penalised for that. So that is why I've got all those books and we'll be working with those more and more and children will be working in groups but for this entry point I was very conscious to bring just an encounter. An encounter, and somehow to bring it back. I mean, to the point of I didn't have any real expectations“

The following task had a similar nature in that the children were handed a page with information from which they needed to discuss certain points prompted by the teacher. The page had a diagram on South Africa with a key note describing the different water sources and various statistics. The children were asked to discuss the information of the page in small groups. Later the children took turns reporting back what they had learnt. They did not have any actual work to complete based from the hand-out; rather the teacher used it as a stimulus for discussion purposes. The importance of this task was held in the experience of reading, understanding and then discussing the information on the page.

Written Work

The written work is designed by the teacher as a summary of class discussions and the content that had been covered. I found the written work to be revealing of what the teacher expected of the children and what she felt important that they learn. The teacher had made many passing comments about the purpose and meaning of the work reflected in Main Lesson books. Her feelings are summed up in a comment she made to a child, „beauty means nothing without meaning“. I paid attention to the work in the Main Lesson books whilst contemplating the relationship between meaning, beauty and authenticity.

An example of the written work:

Rivers are the lifeblood of our country. South Africa has vast areas that get very to very, very little rain. Our rivers are the only source of water in some regions.

Rivers always flow downhill down to the sea. Our rivers begin high up in our high escarpment mountains, often thousands of metres high, and then start their exciting journey to the sea.

Because these mountains are high on the escarpment for any river to find its way to the sea, these rivers must have stretches of rapids and spectacular waterfalls.

The language, style and subject matter all hold significance to my quest of understanding authentic learning. I will engage and analyse these factors to explore a relationship between written work and authentic learning experiences.

Part Three: Analysis of Research Data

Authenticity in classroom interaction

What I did not know about my research question before stepping into the unknown abyss of the research site was that the scope of the classroom was not limited to the here and now. The classroom environment as it stood had been built from an ongoing student-teacher relationship five years in the making, supported by an extensive teaching career on the teacher's part and guided by the unique point of development on the children's'. I had not considered the implications of this on my research until I was deep into the inquiry; the implications being that the nature of the relationship would determine much of the teacher's approach and for me this would determine how I, the observer, might experience authenticity in the classroom.

I realised that I had to reach into the pocket of the past to get a feel for the current relationship. I was lucky that in my first meeting with the teacher she provided the insight that I would need. The teacher described the children's current predicament to me which boiled down to that of decontextualized knowledge; a result of the modern world's infinite access to information but with a little less skill of placing and using it to solve or address issues. She saw her teacher task at this point to present a context for which children could ground their knowledge; she aspired to do this through her approach to content and tasks but also through her demeanour in the classroom. A part of that approach included what I have called a discourse of ownership, and within this discourse was where I found indications of authenticity.

A discourse of ownership

Throughout my studies at the Centre for Creative Education I have contemplated the role of language in the classroom. Some lecturers have lead us down avenues of exploration and much has been understood about language, mainly pertaining to the properties of the narrative approach and its effect on cognitive and emotional development. The use of language to arouse ownership was an exciting discovery for me, and adds a layer of wealth to my ongoing understanding of the role of language in education.

Initially, I experienced this discourse as an undertone that was strung into the fabric of conversation in the classroom relating to the landscape of South Africa. The teacher made the experience of the classroom relatable to the experience of oneself simply by weaving pronouns into her expressions. For me, one sentence that she shared with the class sums up this attitude:

„We need to know what is going on in our world“

She referred to the world as 'ours', and to the capacity to know and understand it as a task that 'we' must adopt. She makes it clear time and again that one cannot separate oneself from the world one lives in. She openly wanted the children to discuss the coastal plain as though it is theirs; as though they have a kind of influence over it, a relationship with it. An ownership of the physical world seemed as important as attaining an understanding of this world; perhaps it is even a prerequisite. It became evident that what ownership really means to the developing child is an awakening of interest in the world they live in. Teachers often discuss the task of awakening interest, and I have always found this difficult to understand. How does one do this? Interest is personal, subjective and not something that can be summoned when desired. However, what I learned from this teacher is that ownership has the same qualities of interest, but unlike interest it can be directly addressed. Interest evokes a search for knowledge and understanding, but it also evokes compassion. Children show interest in something because they can relate to it, or form a relationship with it – they care because they are interested. I have come to understand that interest is grown from the seed of ownership; ownership is the foundation of having a compassionate curiosity about the world.

The teacher's striving for ownership was not just physical, however. Another spectrum of ownership emerged within the interactions that I observed; ownership of one's own „internal narrative“. I became aware that teacher was not only seeking to encourage ownership of the physical landscape, but also of the internal landscape of the children. She really wanted them to have truthful internal narratives and she would not accept a dishonest internal narrative; whether the story was of receiving a worksheet or not, or whether the

story was about a push or a shove – identifying and owning the truth of that story was imperative for this teacher.

I realised through watching the teacher tirelessly encourage real and honest ownership that ownership and truth have an interconnected relationship with authenticity. From this teacher I understood something new about authenticity; our capacity to be authentic is largely reflected in the stories we tell ourselves.

An interplay of the known and the unknown

In Part One I acknowledged that context plays a central role in establishing authentic learning experiences. The theory was largely focused on time and place: are the learning experiences set in the learner's own current social and environmental reality. What arose during my data collection was that context is as influenced by real, personal experiences as it is by time and place; the latter being my initial idea of what context meant. Real and personal experiences are a combination of memory and living realities. Memory is straight forward; it is a kaleidoscope of past experiences. Living realities, however, describe the current experience or the experiences of the child's current life. For the teacher, memory and living realities can be utilized as pedagogical tools; they are reference and entry points. This was one way that the teacher made learning moments authentic for the children.

Reference and entry points are found in what the children already know. The pedagogical tool is that of using these 'known' points to introduce, develop or encounter 'unknown' knowledge or concepts. In doing this the teacher achieves a kind of authentic learning experience; she systematically expands the children's capacities by linking new concepts to knowledge or understandings that already exist.

The point of this tool is to *make it real* for the children. I have been discussing the role of authentic language when learning under the guise of particular disciplines. However, often this language is inaccessible to children; on first encounter it is abstract and meaningless. Words such as 'escarpment' and 'inter-tidal' represent higher language skills not inherent in every-day language; they are not real to the children. They are, however, essential to the study of geography; they describe important physical phenomena. The dilemma here is that these words are necessary to the experience of the discipline and excluding them would threaten the authenticity of the experience. Nonetheless, they are not easy words for a child to hear or comprehend.

I was surprised to see such large words finding their way into the learning experiences, but I was more surprised at *how* these large words found their way into the learning experience. I will use the example of the word 'escarpment' to unpack how the teacher managed to introduce such words in a real, accessible way.

The teacher asked the children to describe elements of the natural landscape of South Africa – she called this the Build of South Africa. One child offered the description that the land moves „up and up and up“. Initially, the teacher did not provide the scientific name for this phenomenon. She wrote „up and up and up“ on the board and continued with the elicitation of descriptions. It was only later in the lesson when the written work was to be done that she wrote the word „escarpment“ below it.

What the teacher did here was use the child's own words as the working definition for a term that she wanted them to know and use. She allowed a simple phrase from a child's memory of some previous interaction to become the platform from which the children would learn its scientific term. The phrase „up and up and up“ became an entry point through which she could funnel information that the children could actually understand; she attached the abstract term to something they already knew. In doing this, she empowered them with new knowledge that was built onto their already existing knowledge structures; she authentically expanded their capacity for knowledge.

Using the real experiences of the children was seen repeatedly over my observation time. The root of it all seemed to be the seed of accessibility. Part of authenticity is accessibility – if the children cannot access an understanding of the work, they cannot have an authentic learning experience. Without that authenticity in the first encounters of new content, in the teacher's words, „that will always be something that is going to be out of ones reach in a way“.

Opportunity to have accessible encounters is, on one hand, offered by the children. Their descriptions and answers are windows that often expose their knowledge structures and current points of reference. On the other, a good teacher will hone her content into those windows and gradually build up a conceptual understanding. To me, this speaks of an authentic pedagogical approach.

Social Mindfulness

As I watched the teacher handle conflict, issues and general social interactions; it was obvious that she was taking every moment possible to direct the children toward a conscious and virtuous way of thinking. For me, it boiled down to a core ideology of social mindfulness.

Part of my research question was concerned with how the teacher navigated the social context; did this navigation have a realistic, relevant or real undercurrent? I wondered what her approach to social value systems would be, how she would explore social issues and dynamics as well as how she would negotiate each child's individual social relationship. In short, I most certainly discovered an authentic community experience playing out in the classroom.

The teacher, naturally, led the way and stipulated the type of environment she wished to cultivate; honesty was clearly one of her core values. It seemed to me that she was most concerned with developing a feeling of social mindfulness in the classroom that had roots in an honest, open and mindful relationship between the participants of that class.

One of the predicaments faced in modern South Africa, and possibly the world, is that of cultural diversity. In this class alone there were at least three different cultural groups. This presents a myriad of different social needs for each child. It is wonderful for a teacher to be concerned with meeting these individual needs, but what I have discovered in this classroom is that there is an approach to social negotiation that is applicable and relevant to any group of people. I believe this approach to be that of social mindfulness.

In encouraging social mindfulness as the core of social interactions in the classroom the teacher managed to develop a universal attitude that sees people as human beings. Through this the teacher maintained a united equality within the class that is greatly needed in cohesive social structures.

Authenticity in curriculum content

It was ironic that I had landed in a class about to embark on a three week Geography main lesson. The irony lies in the intention of Geography in the curriculum which is to relate the content to the current situation. Geography has an important place in the curriculum of Waldorf schools and possibly has the richest potential through which I could explore authentic learning experiences. The derivation of the Main Lesson echoes that of my research; both are inextricably concerned with authenticity.

Geography opens a doorway from the classroom to the world. At the Centre for Creative Education we relentlessly explore ways of imaginatively approaching the physical environment with the intention of awakening an interest in the world, and actually teaching the children the science of the world. For me, trying to uncover authentic learning moments in a classroom, I had to be wary of the fine line this approach presents. I sat with the question; when does something lose its purpose or meaning in the way of this imaginative approach? For me, the moment that the real meaning or value of a particular lesson is lost to the frills of artistry it loses its authenticity. The children, then, are not learning about the Drakensberg and its rolling hills and rigid peaks; they are hearing about wisps of colourful sunsets. A potentially enthralling fantasy may never become a solid education of South Africa's landscape. I wondered how the teacher would traverse the waters of imagination, of the arts, and of intelligence and what kind of equilibrium she might establish between them; how would she maintain the authenticity of the subject.

To begin with; the teacher had a clear directive. She revealed to me at this point a skill that is of utmost value for teachers to hone in their careers – one that possibly separates the good from the great. Having

direction for everything that one brings to the classroom is imperative to good education. For this Geography Main Lesson the teacher had two main learning objectives; mapping and the water theme. Subsequently, these directives each proved to have their own identity and scope of authenticity, but were also a consciously chosen unit. I was first made aware of the objective of mapping, and soon understood that the water theme had been identified as an entry point for the work with maps. The teacher had chosen to collate mapping and the water theme as the coastline of South Africa is relevant and accessible to all children in this class. Every child in the class has had some experience of the coast. From the entry point of the coast the teacher travelled into the mountains, then into rivers and eventually uncovered the entire water system on South Africa, giving them a real understanding of how water travels, is contained and eventually, undoubtedly, finds its way to the sea.

The marriage between mapping and the water theme, and within that an active engagement with the water crisis currently encumbering the country, speaks of an authentic educational experience for the children. They are learning the relevant skill of map reading, attaining useful knowledge of the water systems of South Africa as well as learning to integrate that knowledge into a comprehension of real issues in the world.

To ground this new information, the teacher chose specific tasks that supported an authentic experience of this Geography Main Lesson. The research tasks required the children to emulate the real scientific practice of research. They had to read and interpret specific information with a view to developing an understanding of a physical attribute of the coast. These tasks were intellectually based; they were founded on concrete information that described the observable, physical attributes. There was no artistic expectation; the children were not asked to draw, or describe with colourful language or fantasize in any way about these places on the coast. The research tasks were intentionally designed as an experience of ‘intellectual grappling’; the teacher wanted the children to explore facts and deal with that information scientifically.

I found this approach intriguing to my inquiry for a number of reasons. Firstly, I mentioned that I would be contemplating how the teacher might traverse the waters of imagination – this scientific approach was contrary to the approach I had imagined the teacher would employ. It did not lack imagination; rather, imagination was employed in conversation and exploration of ideas instead of imaginative stories and descriptions of places – it was an intellectual imagination that the teacher inspired in this Main Lesson. Secondly, while one would expect a level of scientific honesty in the exploration of any scientific subject, I was not expecting such a high level of factual engagement. The children were not only being exposed to the realities of the world of Geographers, but were also expected to tangibly experience those realities to a manageable extent at their own level.

While the teacher had made it clear in interviews that her expectations were open ended and that she was aiming to give the children an encounter with particular skills and knowledge, it was evident that her expectations lay in the quality of the children’s grappling. This was most evident in the teacher’s approach to reading and the comprehension of the reading material expected of the children. The children were strongly encouraged to make sure that they understood what they were reading. The teacher would ask them to repeat, paraphrase, single out words, and finish partially written sentences – all with a clear objective of honest and real comprehension. It was no good to merely recite words; the teacher insisted that there had to be an understanding of the words that were being read, otherwise, she considered it to be rote reading and that it was „noise just filling the space“.

The teacher’s approach to the content revealed an unexpected depth of authenticity. She designed a course of exploration into the discipline of Geography (which in itself held scientific legitimacy) from an awareness of her classes’ abilities, needs and existing knowledge structures.

Part Four: Conclusion

Towards a pedagogy of authenticity

This case study has revealed a wealth of insight into creating authentic learning moments for children. Through examining particular aspects of this classroom I have been able to uncover ideas and understandings

that could be carried forward as a theoretical framework of authentic learning experiences. The ideas that emerged through analysing and contemplating the data have given me an understanding of what it really means for an educational experience to be authentic.

I have discovered that much of a classroom's authenticity lies in the teacher's pedagogic approach to educational experiences. This pedagogy of authenticity relies on a genuine collaboration of and with the children, as well as the particular discipline in focus and the real-humanness that exists between a person and specific areas of knowledge. I have come to believe that a Pedagogy of Authenticity touches on the deepest of human concerns: language, encounters, intellectual honesty and the human condition.

I realised early on that part of the authentic approach of the teacher lay in *expectation*. Despite the efforts of trying to teach a scientific discipline with some degree of scientific legitimacy, at the heart of what she hoped to achieve was to plant a seed that had a good potential of growth and that could then be harvested as something meaningful and enriching at some later point in the children's lives. This seems imperative to authentic learning; to plant one good, healthy seed is far more valuable than to scatter a handful of potential onto unprepared soil. The teacher achieved this by allowing the children to *encounter* the science of the land. She provided them with tasks, explanations, descriptions and conversations that remained scientifically legitimate and yet she held on to a tentative expectation of the outcome of this Main Lesson. The children were free to grope towards whatever facet of the content they felt most drawn to and the teacher was committed to ensuring that their experience of every facet was rooted in the realism of the discipline. The teacher's approach ensured that any encounter the children might retain was an honest one. By not imposing particular expectations of the children any learning was seen as potentially valuable, realistic to the discipline and relevant to the child. This is where I was humbled by my new-found understanding of authentic learning; it is concerned with encounters, though committed to relevant and realistic outcomes.

Although maintaining flexible expectations of the children's learning outcome is one conception of authentic learning experiences; a pre-requisite to ensuring honest encounters with the learning material is that the experience adheres to a realistic degree of scientific legitimacy. This conception speaks less of the teacher's disposition and more of the learning experience itself. An authentic pedagogy approaches the discipline of Geography, for example, as though the classroom participants are themselves actual geographers. There is a certain discourse that belongs to Geography; particular lenses through which the world is questioned and explored and specific methods through which these questions and explorations are carried out.

One particular skill that is indispensable and central to science is that of research. One must be able to explore *what is happening* in the field of interest in order to make informed judgements or reach new understandings. The teacher tasked the children with research-like projects that expected of them what research expects of its apprentices; to read scientific information, interpret that information as to what it means to the individual exploring it and then build new understandings based on that information that deepens the individual's enquiry or at least equips them with new knowledge. Bringing a research project to a Class Five child illustrates how authenticity can exist within a learning experience of a particular discipline. Geographers need to have research skills; they need to conduct research as well as interpret research: the teacher introduced these skills to the children in form that was legitimate, yet appropriate to the children's stage of development.

The idea that the teaching of a subject should remain as true to the nature of the subject was expressed by Jerome Bruner (1960) in a quote where he coins the term 'intellectually honest':

We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development. (Bruner, 1960, p. 33)

Bruner (1960) describes the role of the actuality of the discipline in learning experiences. A person at any age should be exposed to an honest encounter with the discipline and the expectations of them to perform within that discipline should stretch as far as their developmental capacity. In this case where Geography is the discipline in focus, the authenticity that was seen in the teacher's approach was largely accountable for her striving to stay true to the characteristics of the subject of focus. I discovered this notion as one that

permeated my teacher's approach so thoroughly that it may be said to define it. She was committed to a marriage between intellectual honesty and her children's developmental capacity.

The role of language steps in here, too. Bruner developed this hypothesis by discussing language as an important medium through which information is accessed, organised and interpreted (Macleod, 2008). In this classroom I noted that the language used revealed a degree of accessibility and appeared to be directed at this particular group of children. I have discussed how language was utilised as tool in promoting ownership of internal and knowledge related narratives in the classroom and that it forms an essential element of authenticity. According to Bruner: if the 'right' language is used any information can be comprehended by children (Macleod, 2008). Part of intellectual honesty relies on language to support the authenticity of the learning experience; for me, this means that language is one of the precursors to authentic education of children within a particular discipline. The teacher was seen to explore scientific terminology using language that was appropriate to the children but that remained truthful to the science. „Up and up and up“ is more accessible to Class Five children than the abstract term of „escarpment“ and yet the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon is grasped by the children; they are still able to understand the scientific phenomenon of the escarpment although they are, initially, not able to scientifically name it. One could argue that if a teacher was committed to scientific terminology above the childrens' conceptual understanding she would not be creating an authentic learning experience: her content may be intellectually honest but her approach would denounce the developmental stage of the children. For me, for intellectual honesty to be taught „effectively“ (Bruner, 1960, p. 33) it must be more concerned with appropriate conceptual understanding above retaining scientific knowledge and jargon; when one is dealing with a young developing mind one must remain sensitive to its emerging capacity.

Authentic learning experiences are shaped by the use of language as well as instructed by the intellectual honesty of the discipline. Geography involves observation, interpretation and analysis of facts and data and is dependable on a scientific awareness; these characteristics seem far removed from the imaginary world of a child. They appear too concrete, too analytical and too actualised to be accessible to the developing mind of a child. One might describe these elements as hardened as they are somewhat stagnant, cold and fully-formed. The Waldorf movement refutes the teaching of hardened material in a rote manner and opts to bring the motionlessness of the world to life through artistry – sometimes a blessing and sometimes a curse, the learning experiences are shifted in the hopes of appealing to and awakening children's imagination.

I noted earlier a predicament that beckons when imploring an imaginative approach; when is the moment that authenticity is lost to artistry? While this is an ongoing contemplation, this question gave way to an uncovering of a relationship between intellectual honesty and imagination – one that the teacher I was observing utilised.

My understanding of imagination is that it is a faculty of play between concrete facts or reality and fantasy; fantasy being a free and impulsive exploration of feelings, attitudes, desires and ideas. Imagination is an integral, although contrasting, component of science; much of science's great advancements has been catalysed by the scientists' ability to imagine (Bronowski, 1973). Vygotsky (1998) discussed the interplay of science and imagination as equally essential components of „everything that requires artistic transformation of reality“ (p. 153). Imagination is not confined in its effectiveness to meanders of the affective mind but rather is the driving force of creatively manoeuvring thoughts toward meaning and resolution. For this class, discussing possible ways of limiting further water loss at a time when the country is facing a severe lack of water had as much imagination at play as it did concrete knowledge; it was seen that the two faculties integrated and formed valuable thought processes that actually served a practical purpose.

The relationship between imagination and science is not limited to cognitive faculties. Bruner went on to explain that „imagination is as necessary in geometry as it is in poetry“ (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 153). Although the basis of education's intention may be to develop cognitive faculties, imagination permeates the affective domain of the human being as well as the cognitive. This means that one's emotional capacity receives an education alongside ones intellectual; whether intended or not.

Although the fundamental aim of schools is that information is shared and knowledge is gained, the entirety of the human condition should still be accounted for in educational environments in the hopes of keeping close to an authentic human experience. An authentic human experience is often that of a juxtaposition of head and heart. I was exposed to the conundrum that exists between knowledge and the human condition in a documentary titled *The Ascent of Man*, where Jacob Bronowski (1973) offered insight into the relationship between science and the human being; between an agency of the head and a sport of the heart. His sentiment was that all science conceivable by man is subject to the very nature of man; man himself is fallible and thus any project of his would be too. Although science is concerned with truth, with *what is*, man is severely limited in this pursuit. Bronowski asserts that human kind's real task in science is discovering truth as far as we can *although* we are fallible beings. This predicament can be seen as an authentic characteristic of the human condition which, for me, begs the question: how does this predicament inform an authentic learning experience for children?

A tributary to the possibilities of this question was found within a further comment by Bronowski (1973) that describes an 'area of tolerance' in science. For me, discussing these ideas in the context of learning experiences, this area is the meeting point of imagination and intellectual honesty. Bronowski's (1973) proposal of an 'area of tolerance' is described as a sphere of knowledge wherein one cannot be absolutely certain and should tolerate a degree of imagination that is inspired by a determinable scientific parameter that is that sphere. An approach to learning experiences that allows for that 'area of tolerance' wherein children can grapple with, contend, and interpret knowledge generates an authentic engagement with the scientific world; therein this approach lies an intellectually honest encounter with knowledge and a further imaginative exploration of how that knowledge affects human beings.

Children are incredibly rooted in their ability to imagine; children's minds wander the plains of fantasy more readily than the isles of logic. Fantasy is a more natural experience to children than logic; we see this in the fallacies of the 'internal narratives', in the exaggerations and inflations that these inner stories of children embody. Fantasy is a means of making sense of the world; it is an investigation into the reality of *what is*. The task is then to cultivate this natural investigation of our world above a shallow acceptance of *what is*.

When exploring human truths, reality is such that it is subjective and personal. Imagination has a role here too. A further characteristic of a healthy imagination is that of the ability to empathise with others and their given situations. To 'put oneself in another's' shoes' is an imaginary act. For others too, the ability to feel for people who come from other places, look different, speak different languages or live different circumstances is one that is essential in the evolution of mankind. Empathy allows for an authentic connection between people as it is rooted in the heart of each party's own experiences and how they implore those experiences make sense of each other. Empathy is also a capacity that one can reach in the classroom. I explored this as social mindfulness, and through that exploration I understood how the teacher worked at awakening empathy in the hearts of the children in her class through encouraging mindfulness between the participants of the class. An experience of empathy can only be authentic as it calls upon a diffusion of oneself into another, and I believe to have uncovered it as the single most important human quality to develop in the hearts of children if authenticity is the question at hand.

A closing sentiment

My scope of authenticity has been perpetually concerned with the relationship between *what is* and the human condition. I have been exploring what makes a learning experience true and have found that it is not a straight-forward recipe. Authenticity in the classroom has parameters that inform its authority; intellectual honesty being one, imagination being its counter-part and an appropriate use of language being its undercurrent. However, these parameters seem to merely scratch the surface.

I was fortunate to explore authenticity in a situation where it was recognisable. But there is still a multitude of situations in which authenticity could and should be explored and uncovered. I am left wondering how the principles of an authentic pedagogy meet subjects with a less tangible relationship with authenticity.

What about Norse Mythology? Ancient civilisations? What about the various Arts, to name a few: clay modelling, painting, form drawing? Could intellectual honesty apply as profoundly to disciplines where subjectivity is fundamental? What shape would it take, or role would it play in, say Drama?

I have been brought closer to the understanding I was seeking, but have not reached any degree of certainty; nor do I hope to. Nonetheless, I have been inspired by this research to persist on my quest for truthfulness in learning and probe further into its emerging voice.

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