

Literary Pedagogy

An Exploration

Prachi Murarka



Prachi Murarka
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Literary Pedagogy Paper

My literary pedagogy is based in an understanding of child development and spiritual science as laid out by Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf education. In Waldorf, education is seen as a process in which the teacher imparts the necessary soul forces and images for a child to grow in a healthy way and meet their destiny. The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the child in developing as a full human being, including their emotional, spiritual, and intellectual lives.

Waldorf education can be divided into three categories: early childhood, grades, and high school. As a multiple subjects candidate, I will be focusing on early childhood and grades education. Early childhood education sets up the foundation for literacy through movement, song, and circle time. Grades education builds upon these and adds an explicit understanding of language arts and stories. Oral and listening skills are built into both, but reading and writing only emerge after first grade.

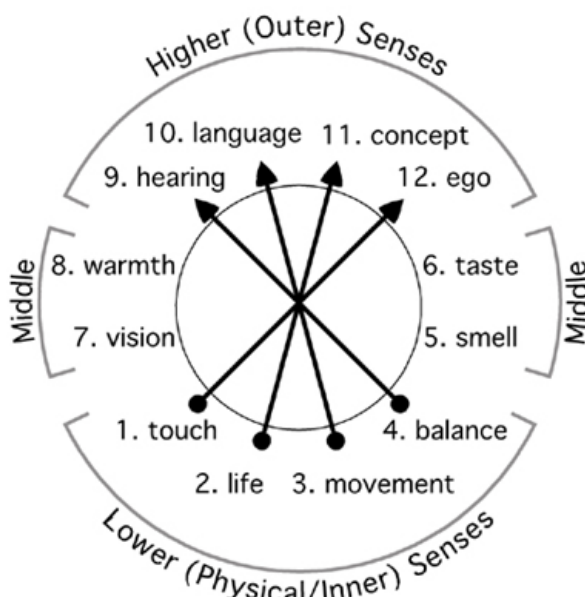
While using Waldorf education as a foundation for my literary pedagogy, I am supplementing and adding to my toolkit. The Writers' Workshop, a critical literary framework, and setting up expectations for explicit reading and writing are ideas I am drawing from this course. In this paper, I will also be adding in my own ideas, expectations, and actions towards becoming a successful classroom teacher.

As a teacher, I have expectations for my students and myself. As they progress through the eight grades, my students need to be able to listen to each other and build upon each other's ideas. They must understand body language, gestures, and tones. Classroom activities should encourage interest and curiosity about world

around them, their own cultures, and global ways of living and being. Through literacy work, my students should feel confident in who they are. They should be motivated, empowered, and loving. Through our classroom framework, students should be able to voice their own perspectives with flexibility, being aware of and accommodating different ideas and perspectives. My students should be able to parse out details while still seeing the big picture.

In this paper, I am sharing perspectives on how I can facilitate my students into becoming the human beings I would like to see them be. Within these, I would include that my students should be creative and unafraid to take risks. They should be neat, clean, organized, and have beautiful artistic work supplementing their written work. My students should enjoy nonfiction, prose, and poetry. They should be able to find meaning in our lessons and generate new themes and work from their own creativity. As a teacher, I am authoring a classroom. Through my modeling, I expect my students to author their work and author their lives. They should become capable, resilient children and adults who have the skills of self-awareness and global citizenship.

Early Childhood



Movement for Childhood)

Early childhood (EC) education, which can be considered to be from nursery school through kindergarten, is the educational foundation for literary development. Within EC, the primary responsibility of the teacher is to develop the four lower senses: movement, balance, touch, and life. These four senses eventually translate into the four higher senses of language, hearing, ego, and concept respectively. By working with the four lower senses, the EC teacher sets the children up to be literate adults, ones who can produce language, listen to others, empathize and understand other points of views, and understand concepts.

The EC teacher sees language arts as movement. Language is artistically presented to do circles, tell stories, engage in classroom management, and nourish the senses. Circle time is the most explicit example of literary engagement. During circle time, the teacher uses verses and songs with movements to engage the students. Some of the same verses are used throughout the year, and children learn to listen to and recite them collectively. Gestures accompany verses and songs to indicate meaning and give context. For example, a song about flowers might include wiggling fingers or a song about chopping wood would include hand-chopping motions. Even if children do not understand the whole meaning, they are able to engage in a story and activity with the actions, listening, and speaking, while developing further comprehension.

In my circle time, I ensure that I start slowly and speed up with more repetition to accommodate the building of a new schema. When I am teaching a song or a verse for the first time, I will repeat the song several times with hand gestures to ensure that students have ample time to process the new content. Circles help with auditory, visual, and kinesthetic processing, and help integrate children who have sensory issues. They also help develop gross and fine motor skills to allow for

tracking, reading, and writing in the future. Circles provide a concrete grounding to help connect words with meaning, relating appropriately with Piaget's pre-operational stage.

Storytelling is the foundation for developing listening, creating mental images, and furthering the imagination. Storytime is seen as a sacred time for listening and reflection. Children come in close to sing the fairy-tale verse and listen to the new fairy tale of the week (or month). The fairy tales are thematic, relevant to the seasons, and age-appropriate. They emphasize qualities of bravery, steadfastness, and initiative.

Unfortunately, most of the Grimm's fairy tales have male leads, and, sometimes, Eurocentric imagery. In order to meet the diverse needs of my students, I have been developing a collection of fairy tales from around the world, taking cues from Betty Staley's *Voice of the Griott!* and the Denver Waldorf School's list of socially inclusive stories. According to my physical location and the cultural make-up of my class, I would choose stories that derive from my students' cultures and speak to their imaginations. The positive aspect of most fairy tales are that they can be created in the child's imagination, in which the princess in a story could be in Cuba, Iran, India, or England. She could look Caucasian, Black, or Middle Eastern. With the necessity of providing a culturally relevant education, oral story telling builds on the oral heritage of many native cultures and provides the child an opportunity to place themselves in the story.

Unlike the more contemporary public context, Waldorf believes in a reincarnational view of the human being. Children come in with imagery and access to images from the spiritual world, or collective unconscious in Jungian eyes. They are not *tabula rasas* who must be fed every image and word to have it in their

consciousness. Storytelling draws out existing pictures within a child's soul or psyche and builds upon them.

Pedagogical stories are another important aspect of literary work in EC education. When there is a behavior problem or conflict in the class, the teacher often creates a story to address the issue indirectly. Themes are often derived from the animal and natural world to infuse the stories with a sense of life and vibrancy. Children may then, not solely identify with the animals, but begin to foster empathy and understand for themselves, their peers, and the animal kingdom. The teacher creates the story, so she is not dependent upon existing texts. She, herself, is an author, storyteller, and creator.

Grades

In Grades education, there is a more explicit language arts curriculum that incorporates EC pedagogy with a sequence of developmental themes. The most important aspects of Waldorf education in the grades include literary themes which characterize the year, grammar and concepts derived from themes, and a long relationship which is developed over eight years between the teacher and her students. This relationship allows the teacher to draw upon the themes and concepts from year to year. There is continuity and an impulse to understand that the child will develop the necessary literary capacities as they grow over time.

In Waldorf education, reading and writing are taught after the first baby teeth begin to fall. The teeth falling are an indication that the internal organs of the child have now developed, and there are extra life forces available for thinking activities, such as reading and writing. According to Dr. Susan Johnson, the child's corpus callosum does not develop until after seven, and it is necessary for the communication of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The left-brain helps with phonetic

awareness, the right brain for visual recognition of small words, and the frontal lobe for comprehension. When either of these are inadequately mylenated, full comprehension and assimilation of knowledge cannot take place. Since the brain is developmentally ready after the fall of teeth (usually age 6/7), reading and writing are not taught until first grade.



Writing is taught through the use of large movements and stories. Each letter is taught over three days to allow the children to take the story into sleep life, derive meaning the next day, and then review. The next letter can be introduced on the third day of the original letter. Students write each letter as big as an entire page of paper, starting first in yellow and tracing over it with darker crayon colors.

Let me share the example of the letter “G.” G would be taught by telling a story with a character starting with G, such as the Grimm’s’ Fairytale “The Golden Goose.” The concept is brought from big to small, in which the goose from the story

would be simplified to a Goose (word), then g (phoneme), to G (letter). The G would then be drawn to show how the G is derived from a goose's neck. The story would be introduced on the first day, the letter derived and written in Main Lesson Books on the second day, and reviewed on the third day.

The sound and letter are taught within the context of a story to give meaning to the visual representation of a letter. Each letter is seen as a simplified picture of a larger concept. This idea is derived from hieroglyphic and Chinese pictographs, in which all the sounds, letters have meaning conveying a larger idea. By teaching letters through a story and a picture, the English alphabet is being connected to a sense-making, pictographic activity. The letters are also shared in a manner to evoke reverence, joy, and beauty for the art of writing. Writing is not just a mechanical activity, but it becomes one that makes us social and human.

Each year in Waldorf has a theme which develops moral as well as cultural understanding. Several types of texts are covered, such as saint stories, fables, the Old Testament, Norse myths, and biographies. According to the perceived golden age of civilizations, teachers incorporate stories from, Egypt, Persia (Iran), Greece, Rome, the Middle East, and India. Since Waldorf has not historically used stories from East Asia and the African continent, it is important for me to incorporate stories across the grades from these global regions. According to my teaching location and students, I would incorporate stories from the local and family cultures throughout the school year and different grades.

In Waldorf grades, stories are developed considering the four temperaments of choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, and sanguine children. Thus, stories told by the teacher must have action, drama, sensory stimulation, and a sense of movement or social activity. All the subjects, including non-fiction, such as history, math, and

science, are elaborated through storytelling. The four senses of taste, smell, vision, and warmth are now being developed. Each class ends with a story, introducing a concept which will be practiced the following day.

. As a teacher, I am tasked with developing human beings equipped with the soul forces to meet their destinies. Although I may have an inkling of what each child is called to, I will unlikely know the full trajectory or form. Therefore, my literacy work should prepare them to become whoever they want to become. This includes embodying positive qualities, as well as having the skill set to do multiple vocations.

In Waldorf and Sharon Taberski's *On Solid Ground*, the classroom environment is key in promoting literacy and learning. A classroom that is well-balanced nourishes the students spiritually, emotionally, etherically, and intellectually. Having beautiful chalk-drawings encourages students to enter into stories. Having play props and costumes encourages exploration, expression, and physical integration of literary themes. Having a small library with comfortable seating area encourages a sense of homeliness and comfort in reading.

By having crates of books that are pleasing and physically, easily accessible, children are more likely to dig in and discover more about a topic they love. To this end, I am preparing a list of multicultural books I would like for my classroom and asking friends to donate a book each to start my year of teaching. Additionally, I am planning to ask families to bring in favorite children's book that they would like to share with the class. In order to encourage reluctant readers, I am going to ask for "big siblings" in older grades and parents, especially fathers, to share their favorite stories and books with the class on a weekly or biweekly basis (Cunningham 17).

In classroom literacy, it is important to have meaning central to all instruction and activities (Cunningham 10). Students should be playing with, conversing around,

and engaging with stories and literacy in multiple ways. The more modes of entry students have into a topic, the more likely it is to meet the needs of diverse learners. Following Cunningham and Allington's strategies, I would find a way to incorporate read-alouds in class during transition periods, before lunch or after recess. These read-alouds would draw from fiction, non-fiction, and "everyone" books (Cunningham 16). As a teacher, I would like to ensure that my students feel engaged and appreciative of multiple genres. When I read out loud in class, my students are likely to read those books (such as Big Books), and feel confident about deepening their knowledge. This way, whole class time becomes a segway to independent reading and inspiration.

To develop reading and writing skills, it is important for a teacher of any grade to identify high-frequency words and teach children how to read and spell them. Additionally, by providing a range of reading materials, students can develop their vocabulary and identify the commonplace words. Using word families and identifying patterns of morphemes, rimes, and onsets at the end of first grade would be helpful in increasing literary fluency (Cunningham 80).

For improving vocabulary skills, it is important to choose vocabulary in context. For example, vocabulary can be chosen from a specific text or story. In order to ensure students connect to the vocabulary, they must be allowed ample opportunity to practice it. Thus, a teacher could ask questions using the vocabulary words, or students could write multiple sentences using the vocabulary words, create tongue twisters with the vocabulary words, or create pictures showing them in context (Cunningham 92).

Unlike Cunningham and Allington's assertion that children in the most effective classrooms do a lot of reading and writing (9), I believe that the most

effective classrooms have a balance of reading and writing and other meaningful activities. In Waldorf, reading is seen as a hardening activity, which creates mineralization in the brain. This hardening activity is balanced by will and feeling-based imaginative activities. Therefore, I feel it is more important to engage in hands-on activities which build off the literary material, rather than encouraging a large amount of in-class reading time.

It is important to combine artistic activities with the literary topics being presented in class. For example, students may make a painting of the Buddha after reading Buddhist stories or make a clay model of a fox after reading a fable. While working on the artistic element, children have time to reflect on, integrate, and deepen their knowledge of the literary work.

In my classroom, it is important to meet students with different needs. Many students are sensitive to noise and sound. Thus, it is important for me to limit noise levels during reading time, and provide students with ear-canceling headsets if they need extra support during work or reading time. For students who are hearing-impaired, it is important for me to ensure that I project my voice, as well as consider the accommodation of a speaker set.

During the grades, speech forms a major component of student learning. Students are expected to recite verses every day, enunciate, learn new forms, and take part in plays. Speech activities that emphasize consonants are used to bring flexibility to the mouth and brain. They also build upon phonetic understanding, strengthening writing and reading skills.

In Waldorf, whole-class format is usually used to give literacy instruction. Individual instruction is limited to correction and clarification. However, partner

reading, group projects, and shared conversations can provide more opportunity for an engaged output (Cunningham 10).

In *Reading and Writing Genre With Purpose*, the authors encourage a sense of productivity, expectation, and celebration in writing. Although teaching genre with purpose may be bold, as it requires patience, planning, and resources, I can start with the a short project, use the planning sheets, and take it day by day (Duke et. al 19). When I develop for writing workshops, I would ensure students have large blocks over several weeks to develop their work and literary skills. We would have formal whole-class instruction, as well as small group or individual instruction to meet different needs. The writing workshops would often lead into the creation of a piece, such as a binded book, but could also lead to poetry readings, small play performances, reading to younger grades, or publications for public use (Calkins Ch.11).

In general, teaching literacy is a lifetime process. Children receive and practice the foundation of reading, writing, listening, and speaking at school in mot American contexts. As a teacher, I can use the tools presented through Waldorf and this course to create a classroom environment which encourages the practice of those skills. My essential pedagogy with derives from Rudolf Steiner's indications, but will be supplemented by materials presented in this course. Cultural engagement, child development appropriate teaching, and love for literacy are the bows from which I will fashion my classroom.

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Aspects to elaborate on or incorporate into the BAE:

Storytelling

Setting up the environment

Pots of books- any reading---informational, poetry, and fiction, multicultural, age-appropriate. Tapes or recordings for ELLs

Leveled reading

Reading partners

Qualities, feeling, curiosity

Meeting the four temperaments: choleric, melancholic, sanguine, and phlegmatic

Aspects of literacy: oral, reading, writing, listening

Importance of sleep and taking images into night life

Mental images- creating mental images through repetition

Music, Verses, Circle Time

Movement, hand gestures, midline integration, visual, audio and kinesthetic

Music is easier to remember- rhythm, rhyme, tone, emotion

Pre-literacy/Early childhood

1st grade- drawing; large to small

Word families, form drawing, eurythmy

Grades- using thematic learning

Oral traditions, main lesson book, speech, diction

Speech exercises, diction, pronunciation, repetition, word families

Time to write-writers' workshop

Learning and writing as a process

Giving time to write

Pictures

Being authors, creating own books- binding

Review, new, story

Multiple modes of engagement: acting/theatre

Parties and celebrations- intrinsic and extrinsic rewards

Enter through preferred manner of expression and become a master of them all

Writing- penmanship, print, cursive, spacing, beauty

Hand gestures: value of hand signals

Importance of integration- history, science

Bilingual: writing in one's own language

Keeping a journal

After 3rd grade: Pre-reading, during-reading, post-reading activities

Real-world opportunities such as making brochures, posters, submitting

Making the process authentic

Themes, connect to multiple religions, cultures

References:

Understanding Waldorf Education, Unique Education, Calkins Ch. 11, On Solid Ground, Genre With Purpose, Critical Literacy Framework, Waldorf framework

Literacy is presented in our society in multiple ways. Literacy is a multifaceted diamond, each face a window into the heart of the creator/author. By engaging in different forms of literacy, children can develop empathy, understanding, and discernment.

Meaningful
Creating a Safe, Predictable Environment
Rhythm
Schedule
Giving time for integration
Time for Reading- different texts
Time for Writing (Main Lesson Book)
Being Culturally Sensitive
Honoring student cultures
Exposing to “other” cultures
Bilingual and multilingual stories

Engaging Multiple Literacies
Creative agents of their own lives. Developing the soul and heart forces to understand the world is good and beautiful. Giving nourishment for the soul. Understanding one self, each other, and the world.

Multiple aspects of critical literacy- giving different perspectives while saying which one is right; teacher digests
Pedagogical stories
Role of breathing and digestion