

Peter Lawton



I. Pedagogy vs. Curriculum

Pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching and learning. The term “pedagogy” is generally employed to distinguish *how* we teach and learn from *what* we teach and learn, which is denoted by the more ubiquitous and familiar term “curriculum.”² *Pedagogy*, or *how* we teach and learn, might refer to different teaching methods (e.g., teaching through art or stories) or various learning styles (e.g., learning experientially or conceptually). On the other hand, *curriculum*, or *what* we teach and learn, might refer to a topic, subject, or discipline (e.g., math), a fact or datum (e.g., $6 \times 8 = 48$), or the development of a particular skill or capacity (e.g., how to factor polynomials). The next section will explore in more depth what is meant by the “art” and “science” of teaching and learning. But, first, let’s take a short detour and examine some of the differences between *pedagogy*—*how* we teach and learn—and *curriculum*—*what* we teach and learn. By way of preview.

1. Fairy Tales or Other Stories May Constitute Learning Goals or Curriculum

Fairy tales may be taught as a learning or instructional goal, although this approach, I argue, is largely developmentally inappropriate for young children. Fairy tales are one of the *pedagogical centerpieces* of the Waldorf kindergarten and first grade, and the telling of folktales and myths runs throughout the Waldorf primary and intermediate grades. Notice, however, that fairy tales are described here as *pedagogical* as opposed to *curricular*. In fact, Waldorf teachers don’t *teach* fairy tales. Rather, they *tell* them. And students don’t *learn* fairy tales. They *listen* to them. In other words, fairy tales are predominantly *experiential* in Waldorf pedagogy, as will be explored in more depth below. Fairy tales are also *pedagogical*, meaning that they are used as a teaching method, and that will be explored below too. But when it comes to young children, fairy tales are not really *curricular*. When young children listen to fairy tales, they are *not* learning about fairy tales in the same way that,

when they play, they are *not* learning about play. Yes, young children are learning when they play, but play is one of the *methods* through which they learn, not the learning goal itself.

The fairy tales told to young children may constitute a method or *pedagogy* through which they may learn all sorts of wonderful things, many of which are not *things* at all! Additionally, and as explored in more detail further below, fairy tales provide children with *experiences* to develop and become, to *know* and *be*! In other words, the fairy tale told to young children may provide an *instructional pedagogy* and/or an *educational experience*.

2. Fairy Tales or Other Stories May Constitute a Teaching Method or Pedagogy

Fairy tales may be used as a teaching method, pedagogy, approach, or instructional “tool.” More specifically, fairy tales may comprise a medium through which learners may gain knowledge of the world or develop real-world skills. In one example, fairy tales may provide a narrative lens through which students may gain knowledge about, or develop skills in, math, writing, geography, history, science, and other academic disciplines. In another example, fairy tales may provide an imaginative landscape in which learners may practice thinking skills, such as isolating variables or comparing and contrasting. In yet another example, fairy tales may offer a dramatic venue for discussing, thinking about, or writing about characterological traits, about which behaviors are and are not effective in various situations. In all three cases—in terms of learning academic facts and skills, practicing thinking skills, and contemplating behaviors—fairy tales may provide a concrete, imagistic, and active medium through which learners may get their first concrete “tastes” of what will later (hopefully) “metabolize” into abstract concepts. Stories do this by providing concrete instantiations of principles-in-action. They demonstrate abstract concepts by embodying or “clothing” them in concrete images and moving those images through narrative action. And whether the learning end-goal relates to math, thinking skills, or morals, young learners may ponder, discuss, write about, draw, paint, sculpt, or act out these concrete images and actions. Furthermore, learners may experiment and play with a story’s embodied-concepts or principles-in-action by applying them in

1 This article is adapted from the author’s forthcoming book, *The Pedagogy of Wonder: An Artistic and Critical Approach to Telling Fairy Tales to Young Children*, to be published later this year by Waldorf Publications.

2 It may be worth noting that in some contemporary and postmodern definitions, the term “curriculum” has been broadened to encompass not only pedagogy but a school’s operative explicit or implicit educational philosophies or, in some cases, ideologies, as well as its implicit culture. I employ a more traditional, discrete definitions of curriculum and pedagogy in keeping with one of the main themes of the current work, namely, the difference between the outward appearance of *things-that-change* and the hidden reality of *change itself*, between forms (i.e., curriculum) and forces that form, reform, and transform (i.e., pedagogy).

real-world situations or by using them to solve world-as-is problems.

Before examining the fairy tale as *experience*, let's take a brief side trip to consider the nature of experience.

Experience

Recall the example of factoring polynomials provided above. The curricular *what* (i.e., how to factor polynomials) involves a *how*. In this case, the curricular goal involves the development of a *skill*. The development of a *skill*, or what we might call an *outer, tangible movement*, may be distinguished from the development of the *self*, or what we might call an *inner, intangible "movement."* In this sense, factoring polynomials is more of an *instructional goal* than *educational aim* (although math in general also has educational aims). The larger point in sharing this example, however, concerns *experience*. In the case of the development of a skill (and the development of the self, as will be investigated below), *the best teacher is experience*. The best pedagogy or method for teaching how to factor polynomials is... factoring polynomials. In many cases, experience truly *is* the best teacher! The best singing pedagogy is not having singing explained or analyzed. No, the best singing-together pedagogy is singing together. In both cases—in the activities of factoring polynomials and singing together—curriculum (e.g., singing together) and pedagogy (e.g., singing together) are essentially one and the same. In the spirit of Marshall McLuhan's statement, "The Medium is the Message,"³ the pedagogy sometimes *is* the curriculum! And there just happens to be a word for the process of learning by doing. The word is *experience*.

The educational (and existential) aim of singing is to *know* and *be*, to understand and relate to the world, others, and ourselves. However, it is difficult to bring to consciousness or put into words how exactly singing—or playing sports, for that matter—does this, how the development of various musical or athletic knowledge or skills help us to know and to be ourselves. Translating the educational how-to-know-and-be aim into discrete curricular learning goals is extremely difficult, in part because those goals are not only mysterious but uniquely individual! How we *know* and how we *are* relate to the processes of developing and becoming, respectively. Although the process of development encompasses universal elements and conventional

milestones the same for all humans (e.g., standing upright as a toddler), it is nonetheless a deeply inexplicable and individual process. And the process of becoming—that is, the process of walking one's own dark, lonely, and scary path of regeneration or rebirth—is necessarily and quintessentially individual.

Camping, singing, and playing sports are all pedagogies (i.e., *hows*) that respond to an educational aim (a deeper *why*) that seeks not only to deliver an experience of meaning and shared humanity in the here-and-now but provide experiences conducive to the processes of development and becoming. Camping, singing, and playing sports provide, in very simple terms, a *very special form of experience*.

But why are these and other similar experiential activities so potentially transformative? Certain types of experiences are especially transformative in part because they engage *whole* persons, body-soul-mind, thinking-feeling-willing, and past-present-future persons. These experiences are further transformative because they are *open* experiences. *Open* experiences are open to interpretation, significance, direction. They allow each individual the opportunity not only to find their own, personal *meaning* but to essentially "write" their own curricular goals! On the contrary, $6 \times 8 = 48$ is not open to interpretation (despite what some postmodern educational theorists would have us believe!). While the act of factoring polynomials *is* an experience, and while there are many "pathways" to the solution, there is only one "destination," one correct answer (well, two correct answers; quadratics have two solutions!). While experience is often

the best teacher, and while all experiences are transformational, only very special types of experience offer the types of "teachings" that are potentially transformative in terms of development or becoming. As we'll see below, listening to and reading fairy tales and other stories offer just this *special* type of experience.

In sum, some of the most effective pedagogies involve direct *experience*, meaning learners often learn best by doing, meaning that pedagogy (i.e., *how* we learn) and curriculum (i.e., *what* we learn) are one and the same. Additionally, the most potentially *transformative* pedagogies provide learners with experiences that promote the processes of development and becoming. Certain experiences are particularly transformational because they both engage the *whole* learner and provide *open* experiences, that is, experiences that allow not only for personal interpretation and meaning but for the

Waldorf teachers don't teach fairy tales. Rather, they tell them. And students don't learn fairy tales. They listen to them.

³ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

“writing” of one’s own curricular goals, for taking away precisely what is wanted and needed.

3. Fairy Tales or Other Stories May Constitute *Experiences* – a Curriculum and Pedagogy at the Same Time

When fairy tales are *told*, as opposed to taught, in addition to providing a pedagogy or method for teaching curricular or instructional goals, they may also fulfill *educational aims*. In addition to their instructional, “putting-in,” world-as-is pedagogical uses, fairy tales have potential *educational*, “bringing-out,” worlds-that-may-be purposes, and these pertain to *knowing* and *being*, to the processes of developing and becoming. Fairy tales and other stories provide a “special” pair of glasses through which to observe the world, others, and one’s self. And, in this sense, a fairy tale is both a pedagogy and curriculum at the same time, which is to say, an *experience*. While all experiences are transformational in the sense that change is inexorable, the fairy tale provides a *very special* type of experience. In addition to the spontaneous experience of engagement and meaning, fairy tales (and stories and literature in general) provide experiential opportunities for *development* and *becoming*. Fairy tales and other “good stories,” similar to activities like singing, camping, and playing sports, provide transformational experiences in several important ways already described. Firstly, fairy tales engage learners on multiple levels simultaneously, that is, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. Secondly, fairy tales meet learners individually, subjectively, and uniquely. Each fairy tale reader or listener takes away their own personal meaning, which is to say, they write their own curricular *whats!* The unique meanings and “movements” that each learner encounters in their fairy-tale experience lie along separate pathways of development and becoming—one unique, labyrinthine pathway per learner.

Although all stories are *experienced* to some extent, the types of experiences they offer are admittedly qualitatively different from those afforded by activities like singing, camping, or even factoring polynomials. Good stories are transformational because readers and listeners *find meaning* or are *meaningfully engaged* on multiple levels. While camping is meaningful predominantly in a volitional sense, through the engagement of the body, its limbs, and senses (i.e., the sensori-motor system), and while factoring polynomials is meaningful in a largely conceptual sense, through the engagement

of the mind, stories are meaningful primarily in an *emotional* sense.

However, stories are not different simply because they provide heightened emotional or “feeling” experiences. The experiences good stories provide are transformational not only because they engage learners holistically on multiple levels but because they are *open*, because they allow each listener or reader to leave with their own meanings, interpretations, and lessons in hand (and heart and head). But good stories are *doubly* special. They are special squared! The especially special transformative quality of good stories stems from their unique superhero power. Stories have the power—through their use of poetic images and narrative movements—to reveal the nature of *change itself*. Stories are able to “hold” transformation still long enough for readers and listeners to bring it to consciousness, to *observe* it.

Good stories allow us to experience change more *consciously*, to “see” it with special “glasses” that only good stories and some other forms of art can provide. In addition, fairy tales provide us with special “hands” capable of “holding” change long enough to extract wakeful meaning

from it. The fairy tale’s ability to embody and act out the changes taking place *out there* in reality and *within* us as humans is simply a consequence of a good story’s greater ability to “clothe” abstract processes in poetic images and dramatize or *move* those images through narrative. In this sense, stories are not only meaningful but also *therapeutic*. The fairy tale’s superhero ability to capture *change itself* allows readers and listeners to *objectify* and *externalize* the changes constantly and unconsciously taking place within them. These objectified and externalized changes—to borrow a word from contemporary psychological speak—may then be *processed*. Expressly, our ability to externalize inner processes through stories helps us integrate various aspects of our being and further helps us incorporate new ways of understanding and relating to the world.

II. The Art and Science of Fairy Tale Pedagogy

For the purposes of the storytelling approach advocated by this work, pedagogy may be defined thusly:

Pedagogy = the art and science of teaching and learning.

But what is meant by “art” and “science”? The answer to this question represents the crux of the pedagogical matter and foreshadows analysis of the specific examples of fairy tale pedagogy explored in later sections. *Art* and *science* constitute the two “lines” of an ‘X’ that marks the spot, and *pedagogy* forms the center point, the axis upon which the artistic and scientific lines hinge. Pedagogy is one of the ways in which storytellers may attempt to balance and integrate artistic and scientific (e.g., critical) truth claims or interpretations. The threefold approach to storytelling advocated by this work, after all, involves interpreting fairy tales through *artistic* and *critical* lenses, while the third, intermediary approach considered in this and subsequent chapters involves a *pedagogical* balance scale of sorts, a scale capable of integrating both art and science. Before we explore in more detail how the pedagogical “balance scale” works, let’s review the *artistic* and *critical* approaches outlined in previous sections.

An *artistic* approach to storytelling is, among other things:

1. Personal
2. Generative
3. Dialogical
4. Intuitive

Significantly, an artistic approach is personal (i.e., *subjective*) and *intuitive*. *Subjectivity* concerns experiences (e.g., sensations, perceptions, emotions, or understandings) that are wholly unique in the world. In the camping example given in the previous chapter, each camper experiences unique sensations, perceptions, and emotions and, importantly, also forms unique interpretations and understandings of those individual experiences. In terms of the dark, scary woods analogy, each fairy tale listener, reader, or *subject* has a completely different, wholly unique experience as they “traverse” the woods; each subject forges a completely different, wholly unique “route” through the woods; and each subject comes out of the woods at a different, wholly unique “spot” on the other side. Furthermore, subjectivity has an *active* rather than passive quality. In addition to the experiences themselves, subjectivity concerns the outward *expression* of those experiences, the expression of sensations, perceptions, emotions, or understandings. An *intuition* is an inner, wholly personal construction arising in the mind or psyche (or soul) of the knower. Rather than a particular or concrete notion

or image, intuitions are more general and abstract in character. And rather than fully conscious, intuitions are more un- or semi-conscious in their essence. Because of their generalized and abstract character, intuitions pertain to underlying patterns or *forces* rather than fixed thoughts, ideas, or concepts. Intuitions rise above particular instances or concrete examples, mutating (seemingly magically) into generally applicable principles. Which is all to say, intuitions are a way of understanding and relating to the world.

“Critical” pertains to analysis of the application of *power*, in particular, the un- or semi-conscious forms of power wielded by societies, institutions, and other so-called structures or systems, especially those uses of power that are unfair, unjust, unequal, or lead directly to inequitable outcomes.

A *critical* approach to storytelling is, among other things:

1. Self-reflective
2. Systemically-reflective
3. Transitive
4. Scientific

Importantly, a critical approach is *scientific*, which is to say *objective*. Scientific approaches are distinct from *artistic* approaches, which, as we saw above, are *subjective*. Admittedly, this interpretation of the meaning of “critical” will be rejected by some (but not all) postmodernists and ideologues who may dispute the validity of objectivity. However, if *critical* truth claims are not scientific or objective, then they are necessarily artistic and subjective! The assertion being made here is not that artistic, subjective claims have any less validity than scientific, objective claims. Artistic truth claims are equally as valid; they are just not scientific!

Whereas subjectivity concerns experiences that are wholly unique in the world, *objectivity* pertains to experiences that are *common*, that may be shared or communicated for others to experience or understand and that, in some cases, can be measured using empirical methods. While the subjective experiences offered

by camping are different for every camper, some of the experiences offered by factoring polynomials, for example, are common. Those experiences may be said to be *objective*. Although there are different recipes or algorithms a budding mathematician may follow to solve a quadratic equation, those ways may be understood commonly by all. The algorithms are therefore

In the spirit of
Marshall McLuhan’s
statement, “The
Medium is the
Message,” the
pedagogy sometimes
is the curriculum!

objective. Furthermore, a quadratic equation has only two possible solutions regardless of which algorithm is followed and regardless of the mathematician. Those solutions are objective. And although each mathematician may form some unique, subjective definitions of words like “algorithms” and “solutions,” there will be many common understandings. These, too, are objective. In terms of the dark, scary woods analogy, each mathematician will have some unique and some common experiences traversing the woods, but most of the pathways are well-established and understood to be so, and all the paths converge in the same spot (well, in the case of quadratics, the same two spots!). Those experiences that are common along the way, as well as the common destination, are all *objective*. In addition to referring to common experiences, objectivity has a *passive* rather than active character. While *subjectivity* has an *active*, expressive character, *objectivity* suggests more *passive* forms of expression, such as observation, awareness, and comprehension.

The term “science,” as employed here, doesn’t distinguish between formal and informal science, between the professional scientist in a lab coat testing formal hypotheses and the teacher who informally tries out two different ways of telling a story to see which gets the best response. In terms of the holistic approach to interpreting stories advocated here, neither science nor art is a *better* way of knowing, but science and art may be distinguished from each other in terms of their objectives. Whereas the aim of art is to produce experiences that offer maximal opportunities for the expression of subjectivity, the goal of science is to produce experiences that offer maximal opportunities for a common experience. For example, no two people in the history of the world have experienced the story “Rumpelstiltskin” the same way, nor should they. Each listener or reader’s experience of the story throughout history (and each telling) has been different, wholly unique, and *subjective*. On the contrary, everyone who has accurately counted how many words are in the English translation of the Grimms’ 1812 version of “Rumpelstiltskin” has arrived at the same, common, *objective* answer—1,055. Subjective and objective claims are each valid, but each has their own, unique set of methodologies, and each has more or less utility in different situations.

Firstly, fairy tales engage learners on multiple levels simultaneously, that is, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. Secondly, fairy tales meet learners individually, subjectively, and uniquely.

Interestingly, both art and science share many of the same neutral criteria for evaluating the validity or efficacy of their own truth claims. These neutral criteria include *logical coherence* and *empirical validity*. Taken together, logical coherence and empirical validity constitute what I previously defined as *rationality*, or the process by which we simultaneously check our ideas for internal logic and map them onto our experiences to check for alignment. A third shared artistic and scientific criterion is *flexibility*, that is, *openness* to the revision of ideas in the face of new evidence. Logic, empiricism, and attention to evidence are not, as many people assume, exclusively scientific criteria. Rationality and flexibility encompass *both* artistic and scientific processes. It is further crucial to note that when artistic and scientific understandings achieve some measure of dynamic balance, they constitute a system of checks and balances; they counteract and constrain each other.

It is probably fair to say that pedagogies either draw on predominantly *artistic* approaches to interpreting and telling stories, predominantly *scientific* approaches to describing and teaching stories, or some creative *amalgamation of the two*.

III. A Creative Amalgamation of Artistic and Scientific Approaches

In any real-world interaction with a story (like telling one to young children), it is impossible to imagine an entirely artistic or completely scientific approach. In terms of telling or reading stories to young children, all of the artistic and scientific ways of interpreting and describing fairy tales may be understood as analogous to a palette of paints, and those paints may be mixed in infinite combinations to create any imaginable shade or hue, with the purpose of painting any picture that needs, wants, or must be painted. I arrived at the fairy tale *truths* described earlier using a predominantly *artistic* approach, and I later described various fairy tale *realities* using a predominantly *scientific* approach. In what follows, I will utilize both artistic and scientific frameworks to provide some specific examples of the fairy tale’s pedagogical uses. In fact, there is not an approach—artistic or scientific—that I don’t utilize at least in some small way when I tell a fairy tale to my young students. As a way of summing up this

exploration of the “art” and “science” of pedagogy, the following is an illustration of some of the ways I personally utilize every one of the approaches when I tell a fairy tale to my young students.

Artistic. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to make sense of it artistically, subjectively, intuitively. I ask myself (and the cosmos), *what does this story have to say to me personally?* Then I ask, *what do I have to say to my young listeners through this story?* I then try to leave a quiet “space.” If an imagination, intuition, and/or inspiration comes a-calling, I want to be able to hear it knocking.

Literary. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I take special note of those elements of the story that seem foundational or irreducible, elements that—ignorant of any historical or geographic context—seem to repeat themselves in story after story, elements that seem part of some basic “recipe,” formula, or underlying pattern, elements that leave me with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Then I pause for a moment, leaving a “what if” space. Then I submit anything I find to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Psychoanalytic. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I scan the story for those images that feel poetic or symbolic of what it is like to *know* or *be*, or those actions that “tell the story” of the experience of knowing or being. I scan again for elements that move, change, or grow. I further scan for elements that resemble a struggle or adventure. In other words, I scan for images and actions symbolic of *development* or *transformation*. Additionally, I think about any of my students who are experiencing current challenges or who have experienced traumas in the past. And then I pause... to see if any of those listeners have something to “say” to me. Then I submit anything I find to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Spiritual/Religious. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I do everything I described above in the psychoanalytic section. Then I pause for a moment before saying something like a prayer. It goes something like this: “There but for grace....” Then I pause for a minute before submitting anything that arises to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Ideological. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I ask myself, *what are my deepest held beliefs, philosophies, principles?* And then I inspect the story for any concrete representations, illustrations, embodiments, personifications, instantiations, dramatizations, etc.,

of those beliefs. I don’t have to ask myself, *what are the most cogent arguments against my most cherished beliefs?* The answers just come unbidden, like little devils, monsters, or tormentors. Then I pause to let the demons have their say. These boogiemens are in part my own feelings of inadequacy, inconsistency, and hypocrisy come to haunt and taunt me. They are also partly just a contemporary affliction, the price of self-consciousness. I entertain the self-critiques momentarily—I engage them in good faith—but I try not to wallow in self doubt. If the specters don’t have any new “information” to share, it’s best to move on. Then I submit anything I find to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Scientific. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to make sense of it scientifically, objectively, reflectively. I first ask myself a purely practical storytelling question: *what worked and what didn’t work in the last three stories I told? What are my listeners desperately trying to tell me?* Then I ask myself a general comprehension question related to both my listeners’ cognition and their general, technical, and historical knowledge: *what is the absolute minimum amount of modifications I need to make, or explanations I need to provide, so that the story will be comprehensible to my listeners?* Finally, I ask a self-reflective question: *am I telling this story for any selfish reasons (e.g., for attention, for power, to make my life easier, etc.)?* Then I submit anything I “observe” to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Folklorist. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to find tales or tale-variants from as many different cultures and geographical regions as possible. I do this for two reasons, neither of which is what is typically understood as “multicultural.” Firstly, different cultural treatments have their own, unique “flavor profiles,” helping to ensure an overall listening experience of *umami*. Variety is, indeed, the spice of life. Secondly, the different treatments, settings, socio-historical contexts, etc., offered

by stories from different regions and cultures enhance the experience of the fairy tale’s fundamental images, movements, and lessons. In other words, hearing the same “song” sung in different musical styles helps bring home its universal message or appeal. Then, no matter the story’s provenance, I submit it to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Socio-historical. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I have a layman’s interest in how the story reflects the

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to make sense of it artistically, subjectively, intuitively. I ask myself (and the cosmos), *what does this story have to say to me personally?*

social and historical conditions of the early modern, mostly European once-upon-a-times in which it was first “frozen” in writing, and I try to have some reasonably informed sense of the original “meaning” of popular, traditional fairy tale motifs and themes. To these ends, I’m not afraid to do a little historical or literary research. But my interest and research is generally not in service of some ideological, political, or even historical end, but for artistic reasons, to help me tell better stories! I don’t spend any extra energy wondering if the stories I tell originally had disciplinary functions or if they worked to reproduce societal inequalities; I just assume they did. But I also assume they had educational (i.e., “bringing-out”) and liberatory (i.e., resurrectional) messages as well. Either way, I’m *only* interested in the way the stories are educational or instructional, liberatory or oppressive, in the here-and-now, in the extemporaneous alchemy of a Monday morning storytime. Yes, I monitor for scientific “evidence” of liberation or oppression in the students’ oral and written responses to my telling, in overheard conversations between students or during parent-reported dinner-table or bedtime conversations, in the ways stories are reenacted on the playground, and in the students’ faces and body language before, during, and after the story is told. But the truth is, I don’t believe I’ve ever seen any scientific evidence of either oppression or liberation. Instead, I observe excited or bored faces, engaged or disengaged faces, lucid or incomprehensible oral and written responses, good or... more good questions. In other words, the question of whether stories are ultimately liberatory or oppressive has only *artistic* answers. So, whatever I learn from my scientific study of history or my students’ reactions, I submit it to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Psychological. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I am interested in both the *whole* beings and the *developing* beings who will hear it. I’m equally interested in my listeners’ more *thingy* natures—i.e., their present-moment experiences—and their *changing* natures—i.e., how their present-moment experiences may plant seeds for future growth or transformation. With respect to their *whole* beings, I’m interested in the ways stories are meaningful on potentially multiple levels, that is, the ways they simultaneously concretize abstract concepts, satisfy and challenge emotions, and offer engaging, imaginative experiences. With respect to their *developing* beings, I’m interested in the ways stories speak in the psychological “language” of my listeners. Especially when it comes to children, I need to have some knowledge of the unique ways in which

they think, feel, and act during different developmental stages, which I understand are qualitatively different from my own. Whatever comes to me through my research into these holistic and developmental aspects of child psychology, I submit it to the main *artistic* approach described above.

IV. An Introduction to Some of the Pedagogical Uses of Fairy Tales

A working definition of “pedagogy” was provided previously:

Pedagogy = the art and science of teaching and learning.

When it comes to fairy tales, the word “pedagogy” has been traditionally employed in the context of teaching conventional values or morals, to preaching “thou shall nots.” In other words, the mention of the words “fairy tales” and “pedagogy” in the same sentence has traditionally conjured visions of the indoctrination of children in the conventional values and social mores of the age, be it the prudish Victorian values of the fairy tale chapbooks (cheaply printed children’s books) of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the politically conservative values of Walt Disney’s post-war, 1950s America, or the multicultural, politically-correct values of Disney Inc.’s 21st century values. On

the contrary, as employed here, “pedagogy” refers not only to *instruction* (i.e., the “putting-in” of world-as-is knowledge or values) but *education* (i.e., the “bringing-out” of worlds-that-may-be possibilities). In terms of developmental approaches, pedagogy encompasses not only movement and growth, but the processes of development and becoming. And in terms of holistic approaches, pedagogy pertains not only to *behaviors*, but to *feelings* and *thoughts*, not only to *behavioral regulation* (i.e., character), but the development of *socio-emotional regulation* (e.g., social skills and emotional resiliency) and *thinking skills* (e.g., thinking based on reason, logic, and arguments predicated on evidence).

V. Fairy Tales Promote the Development of Thinking Skills in Young Children

Fairy tales may constitute a method or *pedagogy* for teaching young children knowledge or skills about various world-as-is subjects, such as language arts, math, social studies, or science, or for practicing thinking skills, such as evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing, as laid out in previous chapters. The concentration of

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I scan the story for those images that feel poetic or symbolic of what it is like to *know* or *be*.

this chapter will be the fairy tale's use as a teaching method or instructional pedagogy. In other words, the primary focus is on the fairy tale's use as an imaginary "landscape" in which young children may gain world-as-is knowledge or practice world-as-is skills.

In terms of language arts, for example, after being told a fairy tale, and after discussing it and rendering it artistically, students might compose a simple written version of the tale; they might practice reading simple versions of the tale written out by their teacher; or the teacher might employ the tale's narrative content as an imaginary "backdrop" against which to study or practice handwriting, spelling, or grammar. In terms of math, teachers might generate written or "mental" math problems, employing the tale's narrative content as an imaginative world in which to practice real-world arithmetic (e.g., "If a skein of wool yielded four spools of yarn, how many spools would eight skeins yield?"). In addition to providing a lens through which to develop real-world knowledge or skills related to language arts, math, social studies, or science, the fairy tale provides an imaginary albeit concrete "landscape" in which young children may practice various higher order thinking skills, such as those involved in isolating variables, describing phenomena, attributing cause and effect, putting events in the proper sequence, and comparing and contrasting, to name but a few.

Crucially, the fairy tale universe is both magical and concrete. In fact, magic is what makes fairy tales concrete! After all, fairy tales concretize physical, biological, psychological, and other invisible *forces* by "clothing" them in image and movement, in the same way the Invisible Man wraps himself in gauze in order to be seen. This relationship between magic and concreteness is not only a key to the development of concrete thinking for the very young, magical-thinking child (e.g., the four-year-old), it is a key to the development of abstract thinking for the young, concrete-thinking child (e.g., the eight-year-old). Not only does the fairy tale provide an imaginary "room" in which young children may develop concrete thinking skills, it serves as a key to more abstract "rooms." Put simply, the concrete thinking skills developed in the primary school years provide the cognitive infrastructure for the development of more abstract thinking skills in adolescence. The fairy tale's images and actions offer concrete instantiations of principles-in-action. Young fairy tale listeners may "operate" on these "clothed concepts" precisely because of their concreteness, which is to say, they may think about them, experiment with them,

mentally "play" with them, write about them, discuss them, paint them, and act them out. In addition to its concreteness, the fairy tale is accessible to young children because of its simplicity and one-dimensionality. The one-dimensionality of fairy tale characters and the simplicity of its narrative structures, for example, permit young children to more easily "operate" on or think about one element to the exclusion of others. The fairy tale's one-dimensionality allows young listeners to more easily focus on or describe one "variable," or sequence two or more "events," which they cannot as easily do with more complex, psychologically three-dimensional characters or plots.

In his 1956 *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Benjamin Bloom laid out six different categories of thinking skills. They are:

1. Knowing about (i.e., remembering)
2. Understanding
3. Applying
4. Analyzing
5. Evaluating
6. Creating (i.e., synthesizing, integrating)

The categories, which are often portrayed in pyramid form with "knowing about" on the bottom and "creating" on the top, represent both a *holistic framework* and a *developmental progression*. In terms of *holistic frameworks*, for instance, the ability to "apply" a concept presupposes that the knower both "knows about" it (i.e., remembers it or recognizes it) and has some general "understanding" about it. In other words, "applying" both extends and *contains* "knowing about" and "understanding." In terms of its *developmental progression*, different thinking skills are not only contained or incorporated within each other, they are developed in a particular order. For instance, while "understanding" contains "knowing about," young children *know about* a phenomenon before they *understand*

it. For example, young children can identify the names of objects before they understand their purpose or how they work. The first three of Bloom's categories—knowing about, understanding, and applying—may be understood as relating to the development of *concrete* thinking skills, while the last three—analyzing, evaluating, and creating—may be understood as relating to the development of more *abstract*, or higher order, thinking skills. Here are just a handful of the almost inexhaustible words that might be used to describe specific

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I ask myself, *what are my deepest held beliefs, philosophies, principles?*

concrete activities related to each general thinking-skill category, just a few of the thinking activities that young children may practice and apply within the magical and concrete “landscape” of fairy tales:

Know About	Understand	Apply
Identify	Explain	Solve
Describe	Classify	Calculate
Recognize	Define	Demonstrate
Tell	Compare	Experiment
Recite	Differentiate	Construct
Memorize	Discuss	Dramatize
Select	Relate	Predict
Label	Summarize	Illustrate
Name	Associate	Produce

All fairy tales promote the development of thinking skills in young children, but the “Three Languages” tale-type offers a particularly illustrative example. Examples of “Three Languages” stories include the Japanese tale “The Magic Ear,” collected by Keigo Seki in *Folktales of Japan*, the Italian tale “Animal Speech,” collected by Italo Calvino in *Italian Folktales*, and the German tale “The Three Languages,” from the Grimms’ *Children’s and Household Tales*. In “Three Languages” stories, the protagonist is considered stupid by their father, usually a king or rich merchant. The child struggles to learn the conventional (read: *instructional, world-as-is*) lessons their father wants them to learn and that their older siblings seem to learn with ease.⁴ However, while the protagonist does not learn their father’s intellectual, materialistic, “academic” lessons, they do learn how to speak animal languages, usually those of three animals, often animals symbolic of the three elements of earth, water, and air (representing the integration of three aspects of knowing or being, the intellectual, socio-emotional, and volitional). The protagonist’s father, believing this knowledge to be useless, banishes them from the family, sometimes condemning them to death. The protagonist then uses their special knowledge to gain wealth and power, which they often

renounce. In the Grimm’s version of the tale, the protagonist becomes Pope.

Considering “The Three Languages” in terms of *instructional goals* related to the development of thinking skills, this and other fairy tales provide both simple, one-dimensional characters and a simple, straightforward sequence of events. Additionally, fairy tales concretize invisible forces and abstract concepts in image and action, which are comprehensible to young listeners. In terms of Bloom’s first cognitive objective—knowing about—young listeners might be asked to orally retell the story or recall elements of it; they might be asked to draw or act out a particular character or scene; or they might be asked to describe their favorite part of the story in as much detail as possible. In terms of Bloom’s second objective—understanding—young listeners might be asked to discuss how the protagonist and his siblings are similar and different from each other (the discussion could then serve as the basis for writing out two short word lists); they might have tiny sections of the story retold to them and then be asked to describe what happened immediately before or after; or they might be asked to explain why the father kicked his son out of the house (or answer the question, “What was the father thinking or feeling?”). And in terms of the third objective—applying—listeners might be asked to explain to fellow listeners which of the three animal languages they think would be the most helpful to know and why; they might be asked to draw a “book cover” or “theatrical poster” for the story; or they might be asked to run an experiment where one person uses gibberish to try to get another person to understand what they’re telling them or to try to get them to perform a task.

These are just a handful of the infinite number of possible thinking activities a teacher might engage in with young students and, yes, the lines between activities like the ones of describing and explaining are somewhat fuzzy. Hopefully, readers get some sense of how—in addition to learning knowledge about the real-world of language, math, social studies, or science—young children can strengthen their thinking skills (and other practical verbal, writing, artistic skills) by imaginatively “walking” the fairy tale’s imaginative landscape. Perhaps readers can also see how invisible forces, relationships, or processes are concretized. For example, the hidden, transformative forces of language, that is to say, the transformative forces of speaking, listening, and understanding, are instantiated in the concrete and magical animal languages, which are further dramatized by what happens when the protagonist can understand and speak them.

4 Readers may notice how I used the ambiguously gendered “their” pronoun, which may be employed to refer to a variety of gender identifications. Storytellers could make a story’s protagonist male or female, or even leave the protagonist’s gender ambiguous by using “they,” “them,” and “their” pronouns, though, yes, the protagonist is a boy in many traditional tellings. Similar to the use of non-gendered pronouns, instead of becoming Pope, a storyteller might have the protagonist become something less associated with a specific religious tradition, like a “great spiritual leader” or “holy person,” although fairy tales subvert many cultural and religious norms.

So far, the current analysis has been limited to the fairy tale as a methodology or *pedagogy* for teaching young children world-as-is knowledge or skills. Before leaving the topic of the development of thinking skills, let us consider “The Three Languages” in terms of the educational *experiences* it and other fairy tales offer. Fairy tales are *wonderful* rather than informational. Hearing “The Three Languages” provides listeners with an *open* experience from which they may take away their own, unique meanings and “write” their own curricular goals. In terms of *thinking skills*, the tale provides experiences of *open* (and closed) ways of understanding and relating to the world. While the father, the older siblings, and aspects of the so-called real world demand that the protagonist close his mind around a world of *things*, to “grasp” this or that concept or belief as a hand might grasp a stone, the protagonist remains open to the hidden world of transformative forces and invisible relationships that underlie the “things” upon which his father and others fixate. These invisible forces and relationships nevertheless energize, animate, and ultimately transform what can be seen. Rather than being frivolous, useless, or worthless, understanding and relating to the world through curiosity, humility, honesty, compassion, and other open ways of knowing ultimately connects the protagonist with the fundamental forces of transformation, which leads to riches untold. And while those “riches” are highly practical, useful, and valuable, they are not necessarily material.

VI. Fairy Tales Promote the Development of Social and Emotional Regulation in Young Children

With regard to the development of *social and emotional regulation*, fairy tales provide children with imaginary experiences in which they may confront inner emotional fears and outer social struggles alike. While all experiences offer children the opportunity to face their fears and challenges, fairy tales offer a very *special* kind of experience. Firstly, fairy tales and similar types of stories externalize and objectify a child’s fears and challenges. Through their employment of symbolic images and actions, fairy tales give names, shapes, and movements to unfathomable fears and inexplicable challenges that, although they are deeply felt and experienced, children struggle to name, let alone comprehend. For example, one of the names fairy tales give to the child’s deep and latent fear that their mother will cast them out (for a second time!) into the

cold, cruel world is... stepmother! Secondly, the fairy tale magically reveals the nature of change; it “holds” transformation still long enough for young readers and listeners to “see” it and bring it to consciousness. This externalization and “holding” allows young listeners to “process” the changes they undergo, meaning, it helps them integrate and incorporate new ways of understanding and relating to the world, to others, and to themselves. Finally, the protagonist’s success and the fairy tale’s obligatory happy ending provide young children much needed consolation and hope.

Some of the fears and challenges we experience as children and throughout our lives are associated with the processes of developing and becoming. Developmental changes pertain to archetypal physical and psychological changes all humans undergo. The physical and psychological changes children experience around the loss of their baby teeth at around the age of six and at puberty around the age of twelve are just two examples of such developmental changes. On the contrary, transformations associated with the process of individuation or becoming are both more mysterious

and individual. One of the two archetypal developmental transformations most symbolized in fairy tales concerns the changes that accompany the child’s separation from their family of origin and their entrance into society proper, which happens for most modern children when they first go off to formal school at around the age of five or six (and about the time they first start losing their baby teeth); this may be characterized as a *call to adventure*. The other developmental transformation concerns the changes that accompany the onset of puberty at around the age of twelve and the stage of life that contemporary society calls adolescence; this may be characterized as a *quest for selfhood*. The more mysterious process of becoming, which occurs coincidentally with the developmental changes described above, also involves two archetypal transformations. The first involves the transformation from a family- or hereditary-self, subject primarily to physical and biological forces, to a tribal- or cultural-self, subject predominantly to psychological and societal forces. The second involves the transformation from a cultural-self to an individual-self, *self*-self, or culture-of-one-self, subject principally to forces whose source cannot be named.

Before leaving the topic of social and emotional regulation, let us briefly consider fairy tales like those of the “Children and Ogre” and “Snow White” variety in terms of their pedagogical or instructional uses. Fairy tales and other similar stories may be used for more

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I am interested in both the whole beings and the developing beings who will hear it.

explicit pedagogical or therapeutic purposes; they may serve as allegories, parables, or moral lessons. In less moralistic and more clinical or therapeutic terms, fairy tales may be used as a “lens” through which to examine or “process” real-world social and emotional challenges. However, if a story is to conjure any magic for a young child, if the story is to be truly educational, its meanings must remain *implicit*. While a storyteller may explicitly choose a particular story or craft a particular telling for its specific social or emotional messages, and while the story may be discussed or “processed” to a young listener’s heart’s content (so long as the processing “language” remains developmentally comprehensible), artistic meanings are necessarily implicit; they are necessarily “constructed” by each individual knower. There are other types of more explicit messaging systems of course, including explaining, instructing, lecturing, proselytizing, preaching, etc., and these all have their place. But a story’s most potent and potentially transformative meanings are mysterious, personal, and unique. When choosing a story or crafting a telling for a particular pedagogical purpose, while it is relatively easy for a storyteller to pinpoint a child’s outer *social* challenges, it is extremely difficult to locate the underlying, inner *emotional* anxieties or fears that ignite or enflame those surface tensions, as children (and adults, for that matter) cannot generally express or name their deep, existential fears, let alone draw a causal line between their inner fears and outer social challenges. And this is partly why storytellers should be cautious when they try to explicitly “aim” their stories’ messages. While storytellers may have an intuition of the general direction they’re aiming in, they cannot see their targets!

While children cannot verbalize their existential fears or the sources of their social challenges, curious storytellers interested in picking particularly pedagogical or therapeutic stories will nevertheless notice children expressing their feelings about stories in many un- or semi-conscious ways, including through the nature of their questions, the ways they act out stories in their play, and through their body language. For instance, children may ask to hear the same stories over and over again, they may want to discuss one part of a story to the exclusion of all the other parts, or their cheeks may take on a particularly rosy complexion at the telling of certain tales. It behooves storytellers to pay particularly close attention to their young listener’s reactions, as they are not always what they may seem at first glance. For example, young children might complain that a particular story was scary or disturbing, but, upon closer inspection, a storyteller often learns that listeners yearn to hear that one story or similar stories again and

again, that more than it was frightening, the experience of the story was satisfying or invigorating.

Just because a story is scary or disturbing doesn’t mean it is not desperately needed! If fairy tales and other similar stories do serve to externalize fears and challenges, and if fears and challenges may be more easily worked through, integrated, or processed by naming and facing them, then one shudders to think how a child deprived of magical stories makes it to adulthood in one piece. Of course, due to the inexorable nature of change, none of us makes it anywhere in one piece! But it is important to understand that *all* acts of learning and especially acts of transformation require acts of courage and self-sacrifice, which is to say, they involve going into scary places *on purpose*. As Kate Morton writes in her novel, *The Forgotten Garden*, “Mother didn’t understand that children aren’t frightened by stories; that their lives are full of far more frightening things than those contained in fairy tales.”⁵

Peter Lawton, Ed.D., has been a class teacher at City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minneapolis for more than twenty years and has led two classes from first through eighth grade. He holds a Bachelor of Music in voice from the Manhattan School of Music, a Master of Arts in education and a Doctor of Education in policy and administration from the University of St. Thomas. Peter also holds a Waldorf Teaching Certificate from Arcturus Rudolf Steiner Education Program. The article presented here is adapted from Peter’s forthcoming book, The Pedagogy of Wonder: An Artistic and Critical Approach to Telling Fairy Tales to Young Children, to be published later this year by Waldorf Publications.

5 Kate Morton, *The Forgotten Garden* (New York: Atria Books, 2009).