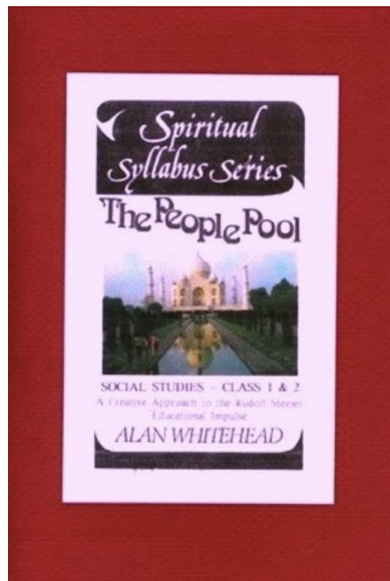


The People Pool

By Alan Whitehead

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The People Pool: 3: A Tale of Two Dragons: Class One: Local Geography & History Block

The Red Dragon and the Blue Dragon had lived more or less side-by-side for a long time – a very long time. Red Dragon was a small volcanic mountain – or is that a big hill? Blue Dragon was a small coastal river – or is that a big creek? You would think that they would have nothing to talk about after all that time, but they did.

“I’m looking forward to next week,” said Red Dragon dreamily.

“Why is that,” enquired his serpentine friend, her voice even dreamier.

“Well that school down there – see, among the trees, over to the south east – is going to introduce Class One to its first geography lesson. It will also be their first Social Studies Main Lesson. You can bet that both you and I will have our exciting life stories told yet again, but with these modern, creative teachers, never in the same way twice.”

“I love it when the children look up at me after this Local Geography main lesson. They seem to see me – or you for that matter – for the first time, *really* see that is,” Red Dragon moved the toes of his foothills in anticipation. He didn’t move them a lot, mind you, just a small tremor, say about 2 on the Richter Scale.

“Lucky children they are,” mused Blue Dragon as she noted a school of mullet traveling up on of her hidden reaches, “are these main lessons important? I hope teacher doesn’t lose sight of the fact that this essentially academic or *head* part of the day must arm the pupils with a body of imaginatively clothed facts at the end of the 3 weeks. Some well-meaning teachers get carried away with the images and activities, their young charges having almost no more information about the subject of their home area than at the beginning.”

Red Dragon frowned, “Hmm, that’s almost as bad as the teachers who forget that 7-year-olds should be protected from intellectual diatribes about mountain-forming processes and cause-and-effect history. Of course those are both totally unsuitable for the rich fantasy life of these children. Story, image, anecdote, and activity – these are their soul foods, all based on intrinsic reality of course.”

Blue Dragon had a somewhat phlegmatic disposition, so she didn’t *really* mind her friend’s intrusive waring injunction. She went on, “Social Studies is the Etheric main lesson. It is the Science of Man if you like. Here the children embark on a communications learning path that will take them through 36 main lessons by the time they finish Class 12. Social Science, as it is then, is ultimately about *Communication*, and starting next week, our lucky little learners will gradually awaken to the fact that communication is not learned in workshops, seminars or courses. It is learned in *Life*.”

“There are 3 levels of communication skills; Learning, Teaching, and Living. Learning is, above all, passive communication and is necessary for the young of course. One opens the picture windows of the soul to receive the wisdom of the past. Teaching is of course active. It is the

teacher's obligation to communicate with the learner, not the opposite, as many inept teachers assert, blaming their students if they don't get it. This is especially the case with children."

"In the middle, creating the union of the two, is Living. The most refined social skills are honed on the whetstone of life. They are based on the gradual awakening of the etheric body. When we communicate – or when humans do at least – invisible light-like tentacles reach out, accepting, rejecting, or simply being with another soul."

"So you see how important these social studies main lessons are in primary school, when the children are unfolding their etheric or life bodies for 7 long years."

Red Dragon looked out to sea where a towering gilded cumulous cloud was piled along the horizon. The azure sea was traced with thin white lines of combers. Red Dragon looked fondly down at this river friend. Her point of debouchment was her head. Tumbling mountain creeks were her many tails. Her eye was a small rocky island above this rather feminine, curvaceous river's mouth.

Red Dragon spoke, slowly as always, "yes, in those Steiner Schools, they cater for all three members of the child – body, soul and spirit – in their social studies course."

"They do this by programming one main lesson each: Geography; The Study of Man; and World History, respectively. Tomorrow's main lesson is the geography strand. This is the *body* lesson and in Class One it goes under the heading of Local Geography which embraces an area approximately equal to the school's so-called 'feeder zone'. This is where the children actually live, with their school at the center of the study area."

<Some teachers leave this entire lesson until the fourth-grade year or they introduce it now with simple explorations and stories and then expand upon it later in fourth grade. As you read through this and think ahead to the fourth-grade year remember that there is a big difference between teaching first graders the directions of the earth through stories and which direction their house faces as compared to teaching fourth graders how to draw a compass rose. There is also a big difference between felt and sand terraforming at the nature table in first grade and drawing a complex map in a main lesson book that happens in fourth grade.>

"Geography being a body subject, is presented each year in the 'pebble-in-the-pool' method. The child's body-consciousness begins where he lives, and each year, as his capacity for objectivity increases, the lessons travel further afield, until by Class Seven, the child is imaginatively circumnavigating the entire world in the Seven Continents main lesson!"

"History, based as it is on time not space, is strangely the opposite. History is the *spirit* social studies main lesson. In this case I refer of course only to world history, or the story of man's spiritual evolution. National history is actually always a kind of geography. With young ones. History is more familiar the further back in time it is. Indeed World History begins the retracing of the child's spiritual journey way back to Atlantis for 7-year-olds (little Atlanteans as they

inwardly are) and finishes in Class Twelve reviewing history in the making. These astute 18-year-olds study the history-making events occurring on that very day!”

“Geography/body is of space. History/spirit is of time. Their laws are equal but opposite – our central social studies main lesson, the Study of Man, is the balance. The human being lives neither exclusively in space nor time, but in both. The Study of Man is the *soul* lesson in the social studies stream.”

Red Dragon glanced over at this brooding father, a cloud-piercing volcanic peak many miles away. Head Dragon was happy to let these young landforms chatter away. He did hear everything though – and see even more!

The young mountain turned to address his river companion, “space and time enter Geography and History at every turn. Space focusses on the activities and observations and time is manifest in the story and imagery. Ah, how I look forward to hearing the biography of this valley once more. I want to hear again about my violent volcanic birth and about your long and tranquil one, cutting a blue and silver path through the soft, rich sols that I made, a life-sustaining path from mountain to sea!”

“I love the parts about the various visitors, and how we responded to them – of how we welcomed the plant and animal communities, and of how sad we were when some of them left (I’m not so sure if I was so sad when the dinosaurs left!) Ah, life was so simple in those days – before man – before the dark ones came with their fire sticks. Oh how they changed things, some for the good, and some not – according to your point of view of course.”

“As such, the teacher will describe the *Destiny* of the land, how there is an abiding imperative for change, just like a person. These changes can be violent, or take place quietly, over long periods of time. I remember when I saw the first ‘great white birds’ – sailing ships – out there. I spotted them before you remember, because I’m taller.”

‘Oh yes, and I didn’t believe you, even when I heard a completely new sound, metal on metal. It seems like only yesterday.”

(In mountain/river terms is *was* only yesterday.)

“These ships brought the most rapacious creatures we’ve ever seen. They were like small dinosaurs they were – the cedar getters – talk about greed!”

“But a gentler folk followed (if you don’t count their mindless clear-felling methods). These were the farmers. They wrought great changes, one of the better ones was the introduction of a more complex and soul-interesting plant and animal life. This new chapter in the destiny of the land saw primeval forest become savannah. This was to support those dreamy ruminants.”

“None of the original wild animals save the soul like those cows do. Oh it was progress of a kind, from the primitive to the cultivated. It was a bit unbalanced at times to be sure, but today

a more sensitive humanity is changing the face of the earth once again. They are actually *planting*, rather than destroying, trees Look at my new green locks!”

Blue Dragon also remembered, “I hated cooperating with those avaricious cedar-getters. They floated the log down me to the sea. There wasn’t much I could do, just go with the flow as I always do. I lost some of their logs though – hee, hee.”

“The part I’m going to like is the story. Apart from the picture-rich personification of all the geographic elements both natural and mad-made, the story is the clearly defined place in the big picture of the four kingdoms of nature. Each kingdom should enter the story – mineral, plant, animal and man.”

“This four-fold principle accords with the earth. The ‘geo’ in geography means ‘earth script’ and four is the number of the earth. But geography is also about orientation, again four-fold in its essence, expressed through the cardinal points of the compass. It is about how we stand, consciously, on the earth. In introducing the fundamental concepts of the compass, the teacher will make sure that the class is aware of the four directions, and their different characters (again these could be enriched with characterization). South is cool, north is warm, east is wet, and west is dry – in this part of the country anyway! These four primary conditions are the basis of all climate.”

“Little Jane should know that her house is west of the school and faces north on an eastward slope! Erin should become aware that the sun is north at mid-day. Ehrenfried (this is a multicultural school) might even become alert to the fact that Flossy Moss only grows on the south side of the flowerpot. Is that influenced by the Spirit of the Southern Cross, the south character, perhaps?”

“Actually an intimation of the other two more esoteric directions can come in as well – up and down. I just created a little verse the teacher might find in the artistic recesses of his soul. This is good for teaching the concepts of up and down as part of the geography main lesson:

WE look up to the stars,
We look down to the earth.
WE see the pink glow of a new day’s birth.
We look back to our past,
We gaze far ahead.
In love do we learn,
With our hands, heart and head.”

Red Dragon’s attention was distracted by a group of people walking – or should that be toiling – up his eastern flank. Who were they? Surveyors? Oh no! Red Dragon did *not* want more change! How much ‘development’ can an area stand? Where they bird watchers, perhaps? Whoever they were, they had a map of the area divided into four quadrants.

“Hm, not a bad way to proceed,” murmured Red Dragon, and continued aloud, “this compass orientation helps divide the study area rather conveniently. How many children live in the north east quadrant? How many in the south west? Gosh, the south east quad is almost all sea! I wonder how the teacher will bring this special reality to the children?”

“Maybe he’ll just create their first ‘map’ (to use the term loosely) on the blackboard, which the class then copies onto large sheets of paper. Or he might make it a collective class map on a large table in the center of the room which can be either drawn or modeled. He’ll be careful of course to make the map appropriate to the still subjective souls of this 7-year-olds. Firstly, like all maps made for a pre-intellectual humanity, it will represent at least one aspect of reality – it will be circular.”

“Oh what a lie it is to hang one of those hard-edged-flat Mercator projections (or their equivalent) in the classroom – any classroom!”

“With their absurd distortions, increasing area size towards the poles, these projections are a vain attempt to stretch the skin of the globe into a rectangle. A globe of course is the best map of all, though not really needed in junior primary.”

“Maybe this teacher will represent the local geography in 3-dimensions – with a large sand tray perhaps. Here the children can create their own mini world from their rich imaginations – a world filled with reality as they mound up the hills, paint the rivers, make little cotton wool trees, and put toy boats at the wharf. But most important of all is the little named house where each child lives.”

“This map/model doesn’t have to be slavishly accurate of course, or even to scale – just life-filled. The children will pour their souls into this creative but very practical activity.”

“Their souls? These 7-year-olds are experiencing their Spatial Aspect of the Etheric Body development – a ‘physical’ phase. An intelligent Local Geography main lesson will inform this astute but invisible organ, one which serves for life, as no other. Especially when space is represented on a higher – more academic even – level through map/model representation.”

“Small children cannot disembody themselves sufficiently to imagine a feature from above. These little learners see things in a more concrete way than some humans imagine. All 3-dimensional elements like lighthouses, mountains, bridges, large trees etc. must be portrayed on a 2-dimensional map in elevation, not a plan. The children should see the features as if standing in front of them. Only the 2-dimensional or flat things, like rivers, roads, railways, fields are drawn flat – as they are perceived.” <You may recognize one way this description could be represented is in the form of play mats that are made of felt and used in classrooms.>

Insert Play Mat Photo?

“And perceived they are. Being geography, there should be an excursion or two planned in. One lovely theme is to search for ‘sacred places’. Certainly the children should go to see the

important things like towns and forests. However, the ‘accidental’ discovery of a sacred place – one which is their very own, named by them even – is unforgettable.”

“I remember One class found a small, little-known lake, surrounded by fantastic fungi. Forever after it was their own secret spot. They called it their own ‘Singing Lake’ because the children said they could hear the tiny voices of the Mushroom Choir.”

“This discovery principle accesses that part of the soul which is an expression of the aforementioned Spatial Aspect – the Exploration factor. This is a nameless yearning in the hearts of all 7-year-olds, whether overt or deeply hidden, to explore their widening world, both their outer *and* inner landscapes. This need must be met by the teacher right through Class One. At this time they will explore their playground, relationships, and their own bodies. If they are lucky enough to have an adventurous and active class teacher their Local Geography will also encompass home as well as school.”

“This exploration factor is, although primarily directed to the outer world, a moral principle, one which creates healthy foundations for a higher kind of exploration when the children become young adults, especially between the ages of 21 and 28, when a conscious exploration of the world is both a physical and a moral imperative.”

Blue Dragon’s attention had drifted. There was a slick of black diesel oil riding the incoming tide. She gasped slightly, rippling her smooth surface as fish and bird tried to escape. Luckily a thunderstorm had been gathered in from the ocean by Red Dragon’s father some hours earlier, and so a cleansing surge of fresh water from the hills swept the offending oil out to sea. Here it was battered into oblivion by the angry waves.

“Thank you *Head Dragon*, thank you *Washover Waves*,” cried Blue Dragon happily. How much easier and more effective it is to teach environmental issues through the medium of the children’s hearts – their sympathy and antipathy – rather than dry promulgation. Blue Dragon had a few words to add to this.

“The children must be encouraged to debate, within the context of the imagery, all kinds of issues in relation to geography – to earth, sea and sky – even horrid subjects like pollution. This is nurture, not nuts-and-bolts, to the soul. As long as everything is couched in *being*. I am not just a river, I am Blue Dragon, and as such I respond with feelings, both positive and negative, to everything that happens to me. I am not merely a *thing* that is indifferent to an oil spill or a beautiful dawn. I suffer pain, I exult in joy and I even get angry at times, sending a violent but cleansing menstrual flood down through the valley. Only geography taught in this way will reach the more meaningful psychic levels of the children and only then will the content have moral impact!”

“This generation will hopefully be armed with a more spiritual education and charged with saving the earth. *Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die* is the Revelations message to the Church of Sardis of the 5th Epoch. These stewards of the future can only truly muster the commitment, and make informed judgements, if they – even as adults –

perceive not mere commodity but *being* in nature. A good start is if all the geographical elements the children study actually speak to each other. We may not use English, or Urdu even, but *communicate* we do.”

“Ha, ha, ha – nice rhyme Blue,” Red Dragon didn’t laugh often, but when he did it was noticed!

“Even TS, that little trig station perched on top of my head, speaks. He’s a bird watcher like those perspiring humans resting under him and he never sleeps. He told me of a flock of migrating Black Swans that flew overhead last night. I thought I heard their plaintive honks. I didn’t see them though. I must have dozed off.”

“Yes, 7-year-olds invest even inanimate objects with being because they are unable to separate themselves from the world they are one with. One teacher characterized the four quadrants in the school’s locality with four special trees and gave them each names. These individualized concepts formed a major element in those particular areas. These trees were ‘watchers’ of a kind, observing everything coming and going. Through the ‘open line’ of their roots, they told the Earth Dwellers below all the comings and goings.”

“What a wonderful story,” exclaimed Blue Dragon.

“Let’s see if I can remember,” continued Red Dragon, “the sandstone region had its ‘Cipher Watcher’, an old gnarled Scribbly Gum. The class had heard about him in the story, so you can imagine their surprise when, on an excursion to fiery ‘Sandstone Landstone’, they discovered old Cipher at a rest area! Some of the excited children even decoded parts of the cryptic messages they found on his smooth, white bark.”

“Then there was ‘Water Watcher’ who lived in the low, swampy country in the south west quadrant – in ‘Lily Rilly Land’ and he was an ancient Paper Bark Tree. And in the dry, shale quadrant of ‘Breeze Blower’, they found hardy old ‘Salt Watcher’ who was a tough black-grey Ironbark.”

“Finally, in the beautiful, dark soils of the fourth quadrant, they met ‘Tall Watcher’ who was a towering Blackbutt Tree. He lived right on the top of the highest point around, in ‘Cloudcrowdland’, so he could see just about everything from his lofty home.”

Red Dragon reflected on this wonderful vision of the four watchers for a moment (which was actually a couple of hours in volcanic mountain time) and said slowly, “The tyranny of unimaginative names bequeathed to geographical features by drunken governors has to be broken. Of course the teacher has to make the children familiar with the conventional titles, but how much better, with the enthusiastic input of his class, to create even more meaningful ones. I remember one teacher stopped the excursion bus to show the children a cliff which had featured in the story. ‘It looks like a Red Indian head, see his feathered head-dress,’ observed one little girl. After that ‘Indian Cliff’ became its name, irrespective of what it was titled in the maps of the area. Some of those children are adults now, and they still fondly refer to it as Indian Cliff!”

“It’s amazing you know, prior to this lesson in general, and the story in particular, the children wouldn’t have even noticed the cliff – it has been merely an unremarkable part of the landscape – a thing. But now, complete with story adventures and a *name*, it became a soul-filled being with whom they could relate – identify with even.”

“These stories can take a leaf out of the Power of Place creation stories of the Aborigines <or Native Americans>. Nature, in all its multiplicity and magic, sure was being-filled for them. ‘How did that little rock island get out there?’ a child might ask, ‘Ahh, I feel a story coming on,’ thinks teacher, who proceeds to pour out an original, and exciting, yet accurate tale about a stone-throwing competition between two brother mountains long, long ago...”

Blue Dragon looked thoughtful as the twilight spun a tapestry of blue-grey images on her mirror surface, “the thing is, in essence the story is true. The power of allegory and metaphor makes cold scientific fact assimilable for the child. Dry, intellectual description has the opposite effect, becoming stones instead of bread.”

“But I can’t wait to hear the children’s squeals of delight when they are shown the most important geographical features of all – their own homes! Last year the Class One teacher piled the children in the school’s minibus and proceeded to visit every home. These were of course only flying stopovers, hardly more than five minutes for each visitation; besides, in most cases the parents weren’t home anyway.”

“How lively was the children’s interest in each other’s domestic circumstances – ‘Is that your bike – it’s a beauty isn’t it?’ – ‘Are you allowed to play in that neat park over there?’ – ‘How many Guinea pigs have you got?’. The respective pint-sized owners of bike, park and pigs swelled with pride, acquiring new and unexpected kudos as the Blass Being, a benevolent supersensible entity, publicly approved of and blessed each child’s home – this is truly living, human-centered geography.”

The tide had turned. Blue Dragon began the second of her twice-daily out surges. The sun had set, revealing a silver sliver of moon in the west and the clouds were a deep rose and mauve. She sighed as she wondered how she could inspire the teacher to ask a senior citizen of the area to come in (or be visited) and tell the class about the good old days. These elders are living history. Or how about letting them meet an Aborigine, one who could tell stories of days even older?

“Remember when the picaninnis would play on my sandy beaches?”

But Red Dragon was a daytime mountain, and he was already drifting into dreamland. He could still hear the hoking of a flock of Black Swans as they flew north over this head, but only just.

“Hey, look at that,” exclaimed a happy 7-year-old a few days later as he pointed to the local mini-mountain standing eternal sentinel over the town, “Old Red Dragon’s got a big nose, see, that rock sticking out!”

"I see it," answered a friend.

"Look at this hair, some of it looks burnt, that must have happened in the brushfire we heard about the other day in the story. I hope he wasn't hurt," added another classmate.

[IMAGE - PP-Image-Page-13.png]

Red Dragon cools his tongue at one of Blue Dragon's still pools
Chincogan Range, Northern N.S.W.

Close-up of Blue Dragon – her eye is a small eyeland, er, island, near her mouth
Brusnwick River, Northern N.S.W.

"Small children denied anthropomorphism in story lack humanity in later life."
- *Rudolf Steiner, Oxford, August 1922*