



Some Thoughts about Nourishment

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As you know, at Ghilgai we strive to work wholistically. Our curriculum is broad and deep – it nourishes and enriches the whole person. Like a good meal, in the company of friends.

Satisfaction shows – that sense of inner well-being, confidence, responsibility. These qualities emanate from the well-nourished student.

Concentration, initiative, creativity, the pursuit of excellence, harmony with others – these are attributes evident in the class-at-work.

However, not all children display these attributes; quite often one sees the opposite and it is painful to observe. General restlessness, inability to stay on task, lethargy, apathy, poor listening capacity, shoddy/tired/careless work... Forgetfulness. Behaviour problems that disturb others in an unfair/unnecessary way.

The contrast can be so stark that one feels the children in this category are handicapped – by what? A few have genuine and known disabilities, but most do not. Other factors are disturbing them. Disturbing their bodies. Disrupting them functionally. Minimising potential!

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Stress

Lack of sleep

Irritability

Excessive TV / DVDs – cartoons especially

Video games – resulting in tense, aggressive, and addictive behaviours

Some children are very sensitive to sugars, food additives, preservatives, colorings. They react – manifesting allergic symptoms

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But there is another important aspect: growing children need nourishing food and a balanced diet. This is common knowledge. Often it is seen as old-fashioned, or is taken for granted. Yet forgotten, often...

Overlaid by advertisements for popular food items. Fast foods. Processed foods. Quick snacks.

Gobble'n'go...

When we are well-nourished we feel satisfied, calm and centred – our energy flows and we find it easy to apply ourselves to work. When we are peckish we tend to be more tense, restless, and accident-prone. Fuzzy-headed, with poor concentration. So easily distracted...

Watch the kids who can maintain concentration – the good listeners, centred in themselves. Most of them eat nourishing food. They even chew it! Calmly and thoroughly. They enjoy it. Like placid cows on good pasture.

Wholesome food. With real flavour.

Others gobble their food. Stuff it in. Hardly taste, chew minimally. Perhaps it's not worth more – a flavour that is pleasantly elusive, briefly satisfying.

Superficial nourishment. Pseudo nourishment. Malnourishment.

And when one sees those calm, centred students upset and deprived by the 'restless ones', one is bothered by questions of fairness – by one's responsibility to the class as a whole.

One gets used to the 'tender zones' of the teaching day. Some kids slump around 10am and struggle on till play-time. There's another 'drop' around 11.50, when we probably have to coddle a few folks along until lunch-time. And the afternoon can be hazardous.

The growing child needs foods that SUSTAIN energy. Foods that nourish. Sadly, many 'convenience foods' fail to do this. They only pick-you-up. For a while. Filling but not nourishing. Pretty soon the effect wears off and the child seeks the next nibble. Another pick-me-up that lasts until the let-down.

Thus, in a very subtle way some children ebb between highs and lows. They are capable of concentration for a while – and then the slump. It will be restlessness or languor, depending on temperament. A burst of 'good work', then flop – and the rest is hastily done, if at all. Not enough sustained energy - not enough to sustain concentration, to support quality experiences.

May we ask you to pause and consider this facet of development. This factor in the realisation of potential. It is a subtle underlying factor when one considers the whole person: body, soul, spirit. Foundational – because the physical body is our 'instrument'. So with this 'food for thought', we can name some foods – get down to brass tacks and consider what supports learning.

1. Breakfast

This is the main meal of the day – its foundation. After fasting during the night the body needs substance for the day. The kind of food that sustains energy, by maintaining blood sugar levels. Packet cereals cannot do this.

Porridge may. But some porridges can leave you hungry, suddenly, a couple of hours later.

Mueslis – many have added sugars in the form of honey and extra fructose, and they give a great lift, but for a short time. The sugars are used quickly, then the metabolism flops, and the body demands ... MORE ... more sweetness. Another pick-me-up. Instant gratification. But little sustained energy

(Could some seeds of addictive behaviours lie here? In the cycle: intake > pick up > slump > intake... A kind of dependency?)

So... natural mueslis. Rice. Semolina. Whole grains (Mixed) porridge – soaked overnight for easy cooking. Wholemeal (especially rye) breads... Carbohydrate plus a little protein – cheese, eggs, milk, nuts, cottage cheese... These foods sustain energy.

2. Snacks

Chips – many have artificial flavours (unstated on small-serve packs), artificial colours and preservatives. These cause restlessness in many children. Tatzine – yellow – ‘hypes’ many. So, chips? Where’s the nutrition? The kids have worked for 1½ hours at school – challenging, fulfilling Main Lesson work. They need energy, replenishment. Chips fill and leave little room for good food. Also, they are salted. This salt calls upon the body’s water – depletes it, reduces brain fluidity (kinesiologists ask students to drink water to aid brain activity: fluidity > mobility > flexibility). No ‘fuzzy-wuzzy’ thinking.

Box drinks – artificial colours? Sweeteners? Many fruit drinks have great quantities of fructose – they are sweetened to the value of *several* apples and berries or pears. This sudden influx of sugar is often hard for a child’s body to assimilate; it often seeds restlessness > wandering minds > wandering around the classroom. This instant sugar proffers a ‘high’ and the body soon gets into the habit of looking for more, of depending on it. Pick-me-ups, again.

Muesli bars etc – many contain excess fructose/honey and work in a similar way to the box drinks. They do not nourish in the same way as, say, a wholemeal sandwich/roll, or fruit.

Sweet biscuits/cakes/doughnuts – these are just fillers. They do not nourish – they merely foster the pick-me-up pattern. Particles lie in crevices in the teeth > decay. Consider – and maybe write down – the total amount of sweetness in child’s day. It’s often alarming.

3. Lunch

It's good training in independence and responsibility for the child to make his/her own lunch. But will it be balanced? A little carbohydrate/protein/fruit – to sustain that energy flow... Finger foods – small serves, not huge chunks that are hard to manage.

Not 'just yoghurt' – 'just dry biscuits' – 'just chips'... This is not enough – and it isn't balanced. A healthy balanced lunch will underpin a pleasant and worthwhile afternoon. Anything else fosters very fragmented afternoons.

These observations go far beyond 'Ghilgai and Steiner' – they come from varied schools and a wide group of teachers. Do – please – consider them in the light of your child's education – work habits, skills, and attitudes are formed through support. And if a child is lurching from snack to snack, pick-up to pick-up, then he/she develops concentration, consistency, responsibility and confidence only in a patchy way. Lack of attention to nutrition may be the factor that reduces potential. This is a frightening thought in our age of convenience and plenty.

If a child has fallen into a pick-me-up pattern, do not try to turn this around immediately, on all fronts. Work at it gradually, discretely.

Thank you for following these thoughts. We would not intrude upon your privacy and family ways. We only raise the matter because it is of deep concern to us. For the children's sake. Always for that.