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Living Hope and Creativity as Educational Standards of Judgement

Moira Laidlaw

Abstract

This paper explains a transition between the writing of educational stories and harnessing their innate values within the work I am currently engaged in as a tutor at the Open University on a module for the Development Management M.Sc.. I offer two stories about my classroom-practice in the 1980s to illustrate the educational significance of creativity and hope as I perceive them now. I then show the development of my understanding of the educational processes involved in making links between hope and creativity and clarifying them as living educational standards of judgment and explanatory principles. I show how I use my understanding of hope and creativity in my present educational practices with two students and clarify further my understanding of the relational dynamic between hope and creativity as I continue to clarify and communicate their meanings as explanatory principles and living educational standards of judgment. Most significantly for this paper, I am claiming an epistemological significance in clarifying and communicating the relationally-dynamic meanings of hope and creativity that emerge from my practice.

This paper is also being presented as an expression of the hope I gain in working with colleagues through EJOLTS and to celebrate its 10th Anniversary in 2018.

Keywords: Creativity; Hope; Living educational standards of judgement; Forms of power; Relationally-dynamic epistemology; EJOLTS' 10th Anniversary edition.

Prologue:

I am beginning this paper with the following Educational Story (Laidlaw, 2018a) because I believe it represents a powerful example of both hope and creativity influencing an educational context. I close the paper with reference to it as well, hoping that it will then resonate with you even more in the light of this text as a whole. I deem this extract to be epistemologically and ontologically significant because, as I hope to show, developing the values of hope and creativity from it and the other Educational Stories included below, have helped me to improve the educational quality of my practice, and to evolve hope and creativity as relationally-dynamic values in my living-educational-theory. Here goes!

In English, my Year Sevens (11-12 year-olds) were working on responses to the Anglo Saxon poem, 'Beowulf', through an illustrated modern rendering suitable for this age-group. It was still difficult for many, but Kimmy ate it up. She was riveted by Grendel and genuinely saddened by the manner of his death at the end of the poem: he bleeds to death in his lair.

'It's not fair, Miss,' she said earnestly, tears in her eyes.

'That he dies, you mean?'

She nodded.

'He dies on his own, though. That's awful! Nobody should die on their own.'

'But he was doing terrible things.'

'Yes, but he died alone,' she repeated, as if that were more unbearable than his own destructive acts.

Her empathy was touching. I then discussed with the class about the breadth of choices they could make in responding to the poem.

Next lesson, Kimmy came in with a wooden board, a cutter, a cup and some clay. She filled up the cup with water at the sink in the corner, set her wooden board on the desktop and unwrapped the clay. This wasn't quite what I'd had planned (!) but the other children were also heavily involved with their own creative ideas and quickly settled down to their responses to the poem. ...

'So, what are you doing, then?' I asked Kimmy.

'A dragon. Grendel, but not just the same.'

I smiled at her and she looked back at me. She was sizing me up. Did I really mean she could carry on with something usually done in the Art class, but here in the English lesson instead? I nodded, and she grinned.

'So, you're making a dragon that is Grendel, but not Grendel.'

'His name's Drago' [pronounced Dray-go].

And she started to fashion a dragon-shape out of the dull clay. Whenever I could, I would stand near her and listen to her monologue.

'So, this is your chance,' she was saying to the dragon forming in her imagination and taking shape here in the classroom. 'You're going to have a fantastic life. I just know you are. You

made mistakes before and you shouldn't have killed those people. You need to be a kinder dragon.'

A pressing of the thumb here, a kneading of the tail there.

'I'll just finish this part of you off and then you'll be ready.'

'That's lovely, Kimmy. Ready for what?'

'He's going to be ready for his new life, Miss. When he's ready *here*, that means *he's real somewhere else* and ready to live his new life. This will just be a lump of clay.'

... It seemed she was creating life itself. She saw me with tears in my eyes and she actually nodded. I believe she knew precisely what was going on. It never ceases to amaze me what children can do when given the freedom to pursue their own creative logic. This is the opportunity I want for every child. (Laidlaw, 2018a)

In Part One I will be looking at two of the stories I have written, which, I believe, carry meanings about hope and creativity within my previous educative relationships. Implicit within these stories is an emergence of hope and creativity as relationally-dynamic values (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). It is in a living and interconnected development of the values of hope and creativity in my practice now, that I will explicitly be exploring in Part Two, because I believe within this dialectic resides an educational process.

Part One: Communicating Hope and Creativity

Introduction

Stories have always helped me navigate the world and all my life I have told them and written them. When I was in China for six years (2001-2007) the differences I perceived in the culture, landscape, language and people, 'drove' me to write a book of stories built around six Chinese festivals (Laidlaw, 2010a&b). I did this so that I might understand the 'strange' place I had landed in. When writing up my Ph.D. thesis (Laidlaw, 1996) I was steeped in the fictional stories I was writing, which offered me ways of working out how to express my values more fully in my academic work. Recently, I wrote an article on how I am trying to lead the best possible life (Laidlaw, 2015), and gave as an appendix a fictional short story about a primary-school boy learning how to cope with his difficult home-circumstances. I have often turned to writing stories to articulate what I care most about in the world.

During my career in education, in secondary schools in the U.K. and in Germany, and in Higher Education in England and in China, which altogether spans from 1978 to the present day.

I spent 18 years as a secondary-school teacher of English and German. From 1982 I also started writing a diary (Laidlaw, 2018b)¹ about the experiences I was having in the

¹ It was Alison (see Part Two) who suggested I link my writing of fictional stories and my habit of keeping a diary. I think it is a very helpful link.

classroom. These were never intended for public consumption but have been an invaluable resource over the years when it came to completing my M.Ed² (Laidlaw, 1988) and my Ph.D. (Laidlaw, 1996).

Through writing fictional stories about that early time in my career, supplemented by my diary entries, I contend that my own creativity has fostered hope and facilitated learning in myself, although the stories themselves have also reflected ways in which I have negated the values I wanted to bring out in the classroom. In addition, the writing of this article is helping me to understand the ways in which my own and others' creativity and hope have become living educational standards of judgement for me in my current practice at the Open University.

In this article I'll be commenting in particular on my classroom-practice of 1982–1983. I'm aiming to show links between the writing of the stories and the learning from them, as I reflect on my current work with two Open University students, Alison and Giulia. They are working on their final module for the M.Sc. in Development Management (see <http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/qualifications/f11> for details) and our communications inspire me with hope for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 2018). Writing and reflecting on the stories have motivated me in my work with them, because I can see links between the stories and their progress, and this is helping me to understand the importance of individual creativity in academic study (which before I have only realised as educationally vital in settings with children).

I believe my use of story in finding out where I stand is something Spiro (2009) would recognise, and furthermore I concur heartily with her inclusion of the insights that:

[T]he capacity to be 'creative' – or in my sense, to generate positive change – is essential to our progress as a community of fellow human beings (Wragg, 2005). Indeed, creativity, 'is essential, not only for science, but for the whole of life. If you get stuck in a mechanical, repetitious order, then you will degenerate. That is one of the problems that has grounded every civilisation' (Bohm, 1998, p. 16). (p. 142)

I can also relate to Carter (1993) who writes that:

...attraction to stories has evolved into an explicit attempt to use the literatures on 'story' or 'narrative' to define both the method and the object of inquiry in teaching and teacher education. Story has become ... more than simply a rhetorical device for expressing sentiments about teachers or candidates for the teaching profession. It is now, rather a central focus for conducting research in the field. (p. 5)

In addition, EJOLTS is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, and it is fitting for me to write an article that represents the position the journal has had in the development of my own ideas (Laidlaw, 2008, 2012, 2015; Cunningham & Laidlaw, 2017) and in the wealth of insight I am also drawing from other Living Theory writers. EJOLTS liberates me (and I believe

² M.Ed. stands for Masters in Education.

others) from the crippling mutilations of centuries of objectivist thought (Polanyi, 1988, p. 403). Here I can relate my own living-educational-theory and submit it to the judgement of my peers. There is a real privilege in being able to do that.

Before I begin looking at the two main educational stories I've chosen for inclusion in this article, I'd like to clarify some of the main concepts I'll be relying on in this article. As I've written previously (Laidlaw, 2008, 2012, 2015) I hold that linguistic descriptions are inadequate to capture the lived experience behind them. However, I believe they might help the reader locate the ways in which I am using them in this article and in my educational practice more easily.

What is educational?

Over the past 40 years I perceive an educational process as one in which individuals develop their potential (be it intellectual, emotional, and psychological, and it's usually all three), and ground this greater awareness by taking increasing responsibility for their own learning. I consider what is educational as having to contain learning about one's own existence in the world of others, and ways which can singly and together lead to hope in the flourishing of humanity (EJOLTS, 2018). I make no distinction here between my work with school-students (ages 11–18) and my postgraduate students at the Open University (ages 22–70). Part of the point of this article is that I no longer make that distinction, and I believe that in itself to be educational.

Hope

As I am using the concept in this paper, I believe hope to be a sense of glad anticipation for the future, one of purpose and of fulfilment. I believe it to be a necessary aspect of all processes claiming to be educational and related to the possibilities of personal growth within contexts in which humanity itself can flourish. I am taken by Freire's (1992) argument, that 'hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice' (p. 2). He continues that, 'One of the tasks of the progressive educator... is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do' (p. 3).

Creativity

I like the definition given by Google³ as the use of imagination or original ideas to make something, a quality of inventiveness. I also like the synonyms that follow: imagination, imaginativeness, innovation, innovativeness, originality, individuality, artistry, expressiveness, inspiration, vision, resourcefulness, ingenuity, enterprise. I recognise all of these as valuable aspects of what I consider to be important in an educational space for learning, and to be understood as creativity.

³ <https://www.google.com/search?q=creativity+meaning%3F&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab>

Living educational standards of judgment of hope and creativity

Because in this paper I'm claiming that the values of hope and creativity evolve over time in processes I perceive as educational, it's important to stress the significance of their developmental qualities. In my Ph.D. thesis (Laidlaw, 1996) I put forward the idea that our values are not static, but grow in practice over time in relationship to ourselves, others and the world. This insight lies at the heart of what makes Living Theory *living*, and permeates living-theory theses and the articles in EJOLTS. This means that I'm explicitly concerned with the ways in which my values of creativity and hope are influencing my insights and practice as I seek to improve it and create my own living-educational-theory in terms of an original contribution to educational knowledge. In Part Two I will be looking at the ways in which hope and creativity develop a dynamic relationship that characterises the educational nature of the work we are doing and makes an original contribution to understandings of educational knowledge. It is original in the sense of the unique values' dynamic interactions, and educational in the sense of their inspiring a process deemed worthwhile by the participants and encouraging, in Whitehead's (2018) words, 'the flourishing of humanity' (p. 5).

Forms of Power and human rights

At the beginning of my career I'd had no training in teaching Drama or German, so tended to act mostly on instinct. There were discussions about Dorothy Heathcote's Drama methods (Heathcote, 1995), of offering the students, 'the mantle of the expert', as well the teacher assuming a role without explanation from the outset of a lesson. My experiences in the first case-study fit her philosophy, particularly in relation to the changing of power-relationships within the classroom, which is something I always wanted to do (Laidlaw, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2001). Later I would come across the concept of 'power with' (Eyben *et al.*, 2008) and 'power within' (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2006) as well as coercive power (Cummins, 2009; Brame, 2016; Hoffman *et al.*, 2017). I will explain the significance to my educational practice of these different forms of power in the conclusion.

A worthwhile life

In a recent article (Laidlaw, 2015) I wrote about trying to live the best possible life. In this paper I believe I'm coming closer to fulfilling that aspiration through the writing of fictional educational stories and a diary, which have led to my current work with the two students, whom you will meet in Part Two. By a worthwhile life I am meaning – for myself – one that induces hope for my own flourishing and the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 2018). I hope that the following text will resonate with you and offer you perhaps a sense of hope in the future too.

Two Educational Stories

For my Educational Stories (Laidlaw, 2018a), I've drawn on my classroom experiences between 1978 and 1988, and then 1995-2001. In my first school (see Laidlaw, 2008)

creativity was highly prized by teachers and students. It was a comprehensive school⁴ in a rural area with 860 children and a sixth-form (for students of 17–18 years old, who would sit their final examinations at 18, and on which university entrance was dependent). I taught mostly English and Drama there, but also some German and Music. The examples I am using in this article come from this school.

One of the insights I've had from early in my career was that I saw myself teaching children and not subjects on a curriculum. I saw the curriculum partially as a means to an end, and that was students being creative in their learning and taking increasing responsibility for it. I have documented elsewhere (Laidlaw, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2004) the rigour necessary to increase the educational potential of such processes. At the time my creativity as a teacher partly depended on whether I was teaching English or German. The subject-matter of English lent itself more easily, to my mind, to encouraging the children's own creativity. German required a foundation of knowledge that was difficult for them and an awareness of grammar, which wasn't always taught in English at that time.

The two case-studies are starkly contrasted, and it's largely because of that reason that they are both being presented in this paper. I will go through the cases in turn, highlighting the salient issues around creativity and hope, and explaining why the encouragement of those values in the classroom can transform it into a community of individuals; or, when power is misused, how the learning process can become corrupted for purposes other than educational ones. I will then go into more detail about the uses of power in an educational setting in the Conclusion to the paper.

Case-study one: Socklund Island.

I am highlighting Peter in this first case-study, as his creative response to the improvised drama was a richly educational one. The drama lessons with this Year Seven group (11-year-olds) continued for six weeks and spilled over into our English and Music lessons as well.

The idea started simply enough in a Drama lesson. I had sketched out a few ideas beforehand, nothing very specific, but decided I'd walk into the drama room already in role. The children were used to this approach, having worked through many different ideas with me during this first term of secondary schooling.

'Right then, folks,' I began, looking around. The trick was to start off confident, as if the make-believe were real! I had to believe in it or it just wouldn't catch on. 'Today's the day!' I called out. 'We're off on the voyage. Now, we've been planning this for some time, so let's make sure we've got everything we need. Is everyone here?' (p. 1)

In response to the bid for us to get going on the voyage to unknown lands, Peter spoke out:

⁴ Comprehensive (secondary) schools were open-access and state-owned, and were administered from their local educational authority. This type of schooling began in England in the 1960s as a response to the tri-partite selective education system that was dependent on a single examination at 11 years old.

'I've left my glasses at home...I can't do anything without my glasses.'

'You left them with me, silly,' said Rob, smirking at his clever intervention, and handed him a make-believe pair of steel-rimmed glasses. Peter hrumphed, rather annoyed at his subterfuge being foiled. (p. 1)

Peter didn't want to 'play' with us. Depressed and introverted since the death of his father from cancer three months before, I was anxious to find ways to bring him to talk about it. Since it had happened, Peter hadn't spoken a single word about his father, not even at home. He seemed locked inside. The light in his eyes had gone out, according to his mother (Laidlaw, 2018b). I always smiled at him and praised his homework, but I wasn't getting anywhere. As the adult I thought I had to do it all, but I was mistaken. I needed to allow him the freedom to find his own way. It happened without my conscious knowledge that it would, but in retrospect, his creativity was genius:

Peter, grieving for his dead father and wondering how to be a man when he was only eleven, asked whether he could be in charge of the lifeboats. I found that unutterably touching and had to push back the tears. Alison [acting as the captain of the ship] said yes, that was an excellent idea. Alison is a very special girl: she has empathy in spades, which is unusual in someone who also loves to be in charge. Her first decision of responsibility seemed a fair one and I smiled at her. (p.2)

My sense now, looking back, is that Peter was finding ways to heal himself, to work through the trauma of his father's death. He was becoming creative and that seemed to be offering him hope:

'We're here!' said Alan.

'Is it dangerous?' asked Jonathan.

'There's very little information on it.'

'Look! Look!' called Peter, his voice clear and resonant. 'Is that a zebra!'

'Wow! I can see it,' said Daniel, eyes shining. (p. 4)

In my diary (Laidlaw, 2018a) that evening, I wrote this:

I saw Peter growing in front of my eyes this afternoon. His voice was so clear and excited. I had never heard tones like that from him. His whole self seemed lighter, more connected. He laughed at one point. He was forgetting his sorrow for those moments, I am sure of it (Data Archive, 1982).

And then came the break-through that is one of the most moving in my career. As the new islanders, we were recounting our day's findings around the campfire one evening:

'I found a magic flower,' he said, and no one laughed. Something was happening that was way deeper than a description of a flower found on an imaginary island. It seemed Peter was summoning up the courage for something. There are moments like this in teaching and they've always felt incredibly important to me: something is coming into focus that needs to be in focus. I wondered how this might tie in with his father's death. I assumed it would.

'We've been worried about people falling ill without doctors and nurses here on the island,' he began, and I felt hope glimmering. 'I've drawn a map where [the flower] can be found, so I can show you if you want.'

Everyone was silent, watching, waiting. I saw Alison looking intently at him as well. Did she understand the significance of this moment? Can an 11-year old child understand this kind of complexity? And, of course, the answer is, yes she can. Children are amazing: we just need to offer them the chance to be connected.

'This flower cures everything. It can even cure cancer.'

Peter's words had dropped like a bomb on my awareness. Please don't anyone interrupt him now, I pleaded silently. Please don't let the bell go. He has to get this out of himself.

'Well, it can help, but it can't cure of course, if the illness has gone too far.'

The air was sharp with his emotion. My heart soared with hope. Is he coming to terms with his father's death?

'But it can help the pain go away, it really can. I've only found one, but there might be more,' and he nods at his fellow travelers and sits down again. And again, I have to push back the tears. This is the first time, as far as I know, that he's acknowledged his father's death from cancer and the pain and agony the man was in before he died. No child should have to go through it, but who said life was fair? ... (pp. 6-7)

N.B. Today, Peter walked in the classroom with a huge artist's folder. In it was his homework about the voyage and it was in the form of an A3 botanical painting of a deep-blue flower with dark, serrated leaves growing out of a desert landscape. His cure for cancer. I knew he was a talented graphic artist, but this is beyond anything I've seen of his, and for an 11-year-old it seems remarkable. There's such emotional resonance in it. I'm sure he's working through his trauma in the only way he knows how: artistically. I could see he was proud of the flower painting. I asked him how long he'd taken on it. 'Nearly four hours,' he replied. 'Mum got cross with me and told me to turn the light off because I needed to go to bed.' He smiled at me. I hugged him. He clung on.⁵ (Data Archive, 1983)

I learned a lot from Peter. He honed my sense that equalising power in the classroom in terms of decisions about actions and consequences could lead to greater personal creativity and independence in his actions, rather than being the victim of his grief. See the conclusion to this paper for more details.

I knew Peter was suffering, but I wasn't attempting any form of psychotherapy with him, although I suspect the processes had a therapeutic effect. Rather, I was seeing the process of moving from depression to happiness to be an active acceptance on his part of his own responsibility for learning through creative play: I trusted him to be able to cope. I helped to create what Spiro (2009) terms 'a creative space' in which he could find ways through his torment. My creativity lay in the understanding that by allowing him to find a form of reality he could live with, it might help him to bridge the gap between a painful past

⁵ I find it intensely sad that in today's society there are strict rules forbidding teachers from hugging pupils because of fears of sexual abuse.

and a more hopeful future. This seemed to be true when, five years afterwards, when he'd already left the school he wrote me a letter in which he said:

You took such good care of me and I was a lost child then... I felt happy in your lessons, Miss Laidlaw, especially in English and Drama. Do you remember the Island drama, the one where we all sailed to another country and lived there for months?...You let me paint and draw and didn't try to make me do a set homework. I set my own. That's what I needed... Thank you.

I feel these words constitute one of the strongest educational vindications of my instincts at the time: that creating a space for something positive to happen offers a child parameters for freedom and the courage to be (Tillich, 2000). And that process is borne out of, and engenders, hope. I am struck by Peter's comments about homework, 'You let me paint and draw and didn't try to make me do a set homework. I set my own'. This was a common process in my work with children from the outset of my career, but I hadn't ever really understood the parameters of what I was doing. Recently I've needed to draw on my instincts and turn them carefully into methodology during the time I worked with Alison and Giulia.

Case Study Two: Richard

The following year, I taught German to Richard (15) in a middle-attainment group. I wasn't inspired or inspiring. What I hadn't realised at the time was the mistake I made in teaching to the subject-matter and not connecting with individuals. The children sat in rows and I was visible as the powerful person in the room. I set the learning objectives. I taught to the curriculum. I can only say in my defence that I would do it very differently now. In my Educational Story (Laidlaw, 2018a) I wrote:

I drilled the kids. I set them learning homework. We rote-learned stuff, grammar, lists of vocabulary and so on. In an HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate⁶) visit, my lesson was deemed fair. I was bored. The children were bored, I suspect. I don't know. I should have known.

We were all tired and hot and bothered. I explained the dative case again, with pre-prepared flash-cards and hand-outs. Richard put up his hand.

'I don't understand,' he said. Richard was ... very keen to please... I could see his sharp desire to learn, to improve. I wish I'd known then what I know now...

I explained again. His eyes clouded over, and the more I tried to explain, to find new words, new phrases, new ways into the language, the more he seemed to be fading away. I asked another student, Bill, if he could explain it to him. And all this done as a whole-class activity. All in the public eye. What was I thinking of?

And then the moment when I destroyed any possibility for a creative outcome, I said:

⁶ In the early stages of my career, the H.M.I. operated from governmental sources sent into schools. Such issues as leadership, organisation, learning, examination results and so on, were monitored. Subsequent reports had power over the development of a school, teaching, learning and funding. It has been replaced by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) which has in my opinion become more about training, results and measurable outcomes, than education as an emancipatory process for teachers and learners.

'Are you stupid or something?'

My words hung like corpses on a gibbet, twitching and taut in the air. There were gasps from some of the girls. They all knew I made a big fuss about calling someone stupid. It was the Forbidden Word.

'Yes, Miss. I am stupid. I can't do this.'

And he put his head down on his arms on the desk. I felt as if I'd fired a gun at him and was praying, please don't let this be real.

'I'm so sorry,' I said. I felt as if I'd had a huge shock, so heaven knows how he must have felt, being abused in front of the whole class. It was as if I'd heard devastating news. About myself, I suppose I had: I wasn't the person I thought I was. (Laidlaw, 2018b, p. 2)

As the students filed out of the room at the end of the lesson, almost no one spoke to me, and the looks I got from most of them were scathing and cold. Richard, however, said cheerio on the way out and tried to smile. This event is usefully compared with another occasion when students were leaving the classroom in China, and I sought to say goodbye to each of them, at the same time trying to signal to one student that I wanted her to stay behind.



Video 1. [Class leaving in China](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno>

That leave-taking feels hopeful, but the earlier one squashed hope entirely. Freire (1992) writes about hopelessness as, 'hope that has lost its bearings and become a distortion of that ontological need' (p. 2). The actions I took that day in the classroom communicated to Richard and the rest of the class that I did not believe he was capable of learning, not only by my foolish repetition of an inadequate explanation but, as far as I remember it, my body-language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Freire (*ibid.*) writes:

As for the relationship between authority and freedom ... we also run the risk either of denying freedom the right to assert itself, thus exacerbating the role of authority; or else of atrophying the latter and thus hypertrophying the former. (p. 14)

I subsequently wrote a letter to Richard and a separate one to the class, which I posted in their homework books, explaining the extent of what I had done wrong and taking full responsibility for it. I will write more about this in the conclusion to the paper.

I knew what it was to have failed massively in such a context. I still can't remember it now without becoming tearful and wondering how I could ever have done such a thing. It is

in an analysis of what happened that helps me to understand the degree to which my behaviour was uneducational, and therefore uncreative and without hope. I've included the story here, however, for the sake of personal authenticity and because I don't want to, in MacLure's (1996) terms, be telling, 'smooth stories of the self' (p. 282). My 'self' was anything but smooth and my treatment of Richard was the antithesis of everything I thought I stood for.

Part Two: Hope and Creativity as Explanatory Principles

As a Living Theorist, it is not enough to describe educational processes as if that stands as an explanation for them. I need to show *how* I am living out my living and relationally-dynamic values of hope and creativity in practice, in order to be able to make a claim to have improved something and to be working through educational processes with others.

Background to my Open University work with students

I've taught online on two of the six modules for the M.Sc. in Development Management at the Open University. The means of communication are email, written tutorial forums, Skype for one-to-one discussions, and synchronous online tutorials in private rooms set up for the purpose. I can relate to Hennessy (2012) who writes about this kind of forum, such that, 'synchronous e-learning, via web-conferencing, has emerged as a viable alternative to traditional face-to-face education, as it allows for just-in-time feedback and communication in real time' (p. 1). Having a space to make connections in real time has always felt a vital part of the creation of a potentially-rich learning space. I have six M.Sc. students in my personal tutor-group for this module, which is the Final Project Module, and times to talk are arranged on a one-to-one basis, with no compulsion for students to initiate them.

In the M.Sc. as a whole, there are compulsory foundation modules (one of which I've taught on and off for about eight years – Capacities for Managing Development – see <http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/modules/t878> for details). Students have an element of free choice during the course, but they all lead to a final project module, in which students are expected to carry out a small-scale project in development management of their own devising, with the aim of highlighting issues in the practices and theories of the field. During the six months, they write four continuous assessment reports (TMAs), comprising their proposal, the reasons for doing it with a set of research questions, a methodology, and then finally the 'data collection and analysis' assignment. Their projects should have three desired outcomes, first for the student in terms of learning and experience in Development Management (DM), secondly for the stakeholders implicated in the project, and finally for the practices and theories of DM itself.

Central to my work at this level are explicit conversations around issues of metacognition and writing a writerly or readerly text (Barthes, 1980). Put simply, I understand metacognition to be an awareness of one's own thinking processes and I see part of my job as helping students to achieve that way of thinking. A writerly text is written from the point of view and from inside the writer's own values and worldview. This, however, may not communicate sufficiently, because of unconscious assumptions of

comprehensibility and context. A readerly text makes those preliminarily unconscious aspects conscious and presents the ideas so that the reader – in my case, the academic assessor – can make a fair judgement about what the writer has achieved. Throughout the module I stress the importance of moving from a writerly to a readerly mode. It becomes the form in which the students need to present their knowledge. A student's own creativity, in my experience, is a vital component of a readerly match between form and content (Laidlaw, 2018b).

In this Open University module there are two students, Alison⁷ and Giulia, whose final project-work strikes me as particularly creative. Both have taken directions in their project that are unusual. The following sections show how keeping creativity (and therefore hope) alive during this sometimes highly complex and demanding work seemed to help the students develop their ideas more fully and deeply. The reason I have chosen to highlight my work with these particular students is because they've helped me to focus on my own creativity as a tutor and underlined the importance of my holding open a space in which they can utilise their own creativity. They have genuinely helped me to understand more deeply the links I am developing within and in my practice between creativity and hope: that they can appear indistinguishable from each other, more concentrated and, in this context, more educational. The more they become interdependent, the more likely that the educational quality is enhanced: one leads to the other; one is the other.

In the following accounts, visual data have only been included where ethical permissions have been agreed. Visual data have not been included where ethical issues have emerged. In addition, I ensured that my use of their written data was the result of their explicit permission. Earlier versions of this paper were given to both, and any suggested amendments implemented. I have also alerted them to the Review Space, at <https://ejolts.org/>, to see any changes as the review process continues.

I am reminded here of Buber's (1961) words:

But even then his [*sic*] selection remains suspended, under constant correction by the special humility of the educator for whom the life and particular being of all his pupils [*sic*] is the decisive factor to which his 'hierarchic' recognition is subordinated. (p. 122)

Alison

Working with Alison has been a joy because of her commitment to learning and her desire to find ways to take responsibility for it. I would describe her as highly creative and rigorous in the way she goes about preparing assignments and learning from them (Laidlaw, 2018b). She also has a sense of humour, which was evident in our very first email exchange two weeks before the presentation started in May, 2018.

I had asked students to send me some details about themselves, anything they thought might be interesting/useful for me to know. I had sent a detailed document about my own educational history and interests and remarked on my fussiness with the use of written language.

⁷ I have the students' explicit agreement to use their names and any video-footage.

Attaching details about her own professional work and interests, she wrote, 'I am happy to send you details about myself via your pro forma, attached. I look forward to working with you very much (I unsplit my infinitive just for you!).' (A. Stanbury, personal communication, April 27, 2018). Her sense of humour was to become a hallmark for me and one of the great pleasures of working with her.

After her initial correspondence there followed a detailed email exchange. I believe the messages show Alison's commitment to preparing carefully, and signs already of her academic rigour (Laidlaw, 2018c).

Alison: I'm doing the project proposal suitability analysis and one topic... seems rather different to the types of titles/content that have been given as examples. I just want to be sure... I'm looking at something along the lines of 'Maps as rich pictures: interrogating their stories as a means of contributing to [Development Managers] finding out' so it's adding to the research side of development management rather than an end product.

I want to work on maps and the stories they tell (and create a framework for DMs to interrogate maps) and encourage these resources to be used by DMs as part of their own 'finding out'.... Once it gets going, I'll find a true path where the investigation takes me. Can I have this contribution to the research stage of development management as a valid topic, or does it have to be something where development management is or has taken place already?

Moira: This is an interesting topic, but I am not sure ... it has any development management angle built into it. You are interested in looking at maps and the stories they tell... You would need to consider how and in what ways, using such technology would lead to improvements in the *Development Management* field. I am not saying no, but I would need to read more about your idea from the DM perspective... Don't be put off by this. You may well see mileage in it which I don't, because you haven't sold it to me yet. If you want to pursue it, write to me about it in a way that starts from a problem in DM that this kind of technology might help. Keep the ideas coming. And never hesitate to write and put forward ideas. I will always take them seriously.

She then made a long list about maps having potential as, amongst other potentials, tools for development management related to issues of truth, political standpoints, rich pictures – both as discussion points and in themselves, interpretative value, representations of values, illuminating conflicts, and finding ways to create codes of conduct for mapping. She continued:

... My job would be to apply these thinkings to a development management context. In terms of the Thomas quote on your slides, development management as influencing social processes could be where it gets interesting in promoting new technologies for maps created by people themselves to represent cultures/landscape in their own terms. I do agree that it's initially shaky ...but if it's contributing to resources other DMs can learn from, does it still have value in this project context? (M. Laidlaw & A. Stanbury, personal communication, April 29, 2018)

I wrote back to agree that it had real potential and added this:

You may not be able to find concrete precedents, but you'll be able to find justifications for your conclusion that maps may be used as a DM tool because [they have] certain properties that will lend [themselves] to such a use. When Thomas (1996, Abstract) writes, for example that he characterises, "*development management both as management in the context of development as a long-term historical process and as the **management of deliberate efforts at progress by means of intervention in the social change process on the part of a variety of agencies***", (my emphasis) he opens the door for people like yourself to set up something that can be used in this way to further these kinds of goals, to manage the processes... or lead to processes that will do that. I would suggest you look at Chambers (2014) 'Into the Unknown' if you can in terms of the limits and limitlessness of DM potential. In addition, I suggest you go back into [a former module] Capacities for Managing Development's deliberations, which offer a very clear sense of what contextualisation you'll be expected to draw on. (M. Laidlaw, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

In this response I wanted to offer her writers who could act as a foundation for her own scholarly insights, whilst at the same time not blocking her own creativity. Indeed, one of the key aspects of Alison's approach to academic work seems to me to be her combination of creativity and attention to fine detail. Towards the end of the module, and unsolicited, she produced a letter for future students (Stanbury, 2018) as she understood – I am inferring – the significance of what she was going through, how at times it was difficult, and how she might be able to point out aspects that would help others. She wrote:

The OU know what they are doing... The TMAs are staging posts for the final project. They guide you towards the project and contribute to the outcome. Spend time on the TMAs as content goes into the final project (read through the assessment and EMA guidance all the way through and you'll see the relationships). Find something that interests you. You'll be wedded to it for the next 6 months... Bounce ideas off each other. If the OU forums are a bit quiet, start a Whatsapp group... I recognised names of some other students from previous modules in this module and we created a small group just for us. Invaluable for support as they are going through what you are... This is the capstone to great achievement. Pick something that you care about or want to investigate to find out more for yourself and it won't feel like work at all. Soon...you'll be where I am, with 5 weeks to go before submission. ... It will fly by. (Stanbury, 2018)

She followed this up by starting new discussion threads on the Tutor Group Forum so that she could share ideas and tips with others in ways designed to be invitational. The educational value of working in this way is demonstrated by Hennessy's (2009) article in EJOLTS (see [http://ejolts.net/files/journal/2/1/Hennessy2\(1\).pdf](http://ejolts.net/files/journal/2/1/Hennessy2(1).pdf) for details). Alison is showing a clear desire to take responsibility for her own learning, which, in my experience (Laidlaw, 1994; 1995; 2000; 2001; 2004; 2008) enhances the quality of the learning. In her four TMAs (tutor-marked assignments, the continuous assessment aspect of the module) Alison gained in the high 80s every time.

It is in her preparations for the final report that her fullest creativity, and hope in the work she's doing, come to the fore more overtly, in my opinion. On September 7, 2018, we had a conversation about the nature of the challenging work facing her. As usual, Alison is taking responsibility for the challenges and in some detail we discuss the internal consistency of her aims in writing the report.

By the time we had a discussion on 14.8.18. we had developed an educative relationship that enabled us to discuss issues of learning and testing. I mentioned my official IQ of 89⁸ and Alison then went on to talk about how she believed learning to happen most productively.

Alison: People learn in different ways.

Moira: Oh, that's certainly true.

Alison: And you can't put people in boxes. And given the freedom to learn – which you give me – the best way to learn, they can shine. It's when you try and constrain that, we all start going, no, we're not any good.

On 5.9.18 we discussed how she would present some of her findings, which would mean having to cut some aspects back in order to accord with the stringent word-count. In my experience this can be a difficult time for a student, who can be emotionally as well as intellectually invested in their work. Writing a dissertation is often a creative process (Kahl, 2012; Yoo, 2017), which, to my understanding, is a process that involves not only the intellect, but also the emotional and even the spiritual dimensions of a person. This was my personal experience of writing up my M.Ed. dissertation (Laidlaw, 1988) and my Ph.D. thesis (1996).

Alison: I'll need to see if I do need to explain the questions I've put in...To my mind they were a means to an end. And to me the framework is an end in itself... And now it's been tested and needs updating...and that's been consistent: the beginning, the middle and the end.

Moira: I've experienced that, the sense of investment... And there's no doubt that the whole thing deserves space...But you can't have it. So, it's for you to make the judicious judgements about what is fitting...

(Pause)

Moira: And I know you'll do it. ... It'll cost you some anguish. I'm certain you'll make the right decision...

Alison: There have been two other times when I didn't know how to proceed. This is now the third...I've probably been quite let off decision-making...I don't deserve to have an easy ride, just because it's the last five weeks.

Moira: No, but ... this pushes you to do your best work.

Alison. Yes.

Moira: You're a gift to a tutor because challenge actually improves the quality of your thinking...You've consolidated your ideas with the ideas of others. And where there's been disagreement between you and a writer, you've made that disagreement plain. I would encourage you to keep doing that. (Laidlaw, 2018b)

Finally, we talked about the process itself:

⁸ IQ (Intelligence Quotient) testing was popular in the 60s and 70s in the U.K.. The average at the time mine was tested (I was doing my M.Ed. course at the time) was 100-110. Mine was 89. I made comments about the unworkable testing procedures and the way they can stymie real education!

Alison: Thank you Moira. As always, it's been so helpful. You gave me the clarity I needed.
(pause)

Moira: I think we work on that together. I don't think it's a question of me giving you anything. I think it's a dialogue. I really do. (Laidlaw, 2018b)

Through further emails, we discuss originality and creativity, and how the project is emerging through the process. My initial scepticism (see first email-exchange above) changed to a conviction of the significance of her project to development management. On 22.9.18. I say to her in terms of my understanding of the potential value to development managers of the use of maps in the finding-

out stages, 'It's actually your creativity that's led me there and not the other way round' (Laidlaw, 2018b).

I believe I held open a space for Alison's creativity to flourish, but I am not responsible for the ways in which she tackled the issues that arose. I offered my opinions, but it was always her own responsibility to make any final decisions about outcomes.

What Alison has helped me to see is how important it is to be explicit about form and content as a way not of thwarting but of enhancing individual creativity. I certainly hadn't internalised this in my work with Richard. My work with her felt hopeful to me from the outset. I now have the sense of approaching the end of a very fruitful process, in which some significant learning has occurred on both sides. Alison recently claimed, in response to a first draft of this paper, '[Y]ou most certainly should mention that your allowing my creativity at this stage has opened avenues to explore Ph.D. study, something which I never thought of as possible for someone like me. That's down to you, not me!' (Laidlaw, 2018b).

Giulia

Initial Project Title: 'Managing the self in development management DM' (May 2, 2018).

Final Project Title: 'The necessity of being moved in DM' (July 9, 2018).

I had been lucky enough to work with Giulia on the foundation module (<http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/modules/t878>) for the six months before the start of this current module. Towards the end of that module she went to some lengths to ensure I would be her tutor for this presentation as we had a compatible working style and shared values to do with what Whitehead (2008) writes about, i.e. '[the] importance of improving practice is grounded in values of freedom, justice, compassion, respect for persons, love and democracy lived as fully as possible' (p. 107). In the following account you will see me struggling with a dilemma in relation to Giulia's work, given her heartfelt pursuit of her right to make, 'the decision to understand the world from my own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgment responsibly with universal intent' (Polanyi, 1988, p. 327).

In our first tutorial online on May 2, 2018, I asked the students to offer a very brief outline of the research-project they were undertaking. In setting up the session, I said in relation to the inspiration I found in teaching this particular module:

Moira: I love the individuality and the creativity of students, in terms of doing something that's dear to their hearts. It's fascinating to watch the growth of the researcher and the human being. I just wish I had more people in my tutor groups. Let's have a look at the projects...

Giulia: Very early idea. So much is about others and stakeholders and beneficiaries in DM. And I think so little is about the self... and what I've learnt is that research is such an important part of better development management... And the self ...plays a key role in how we frame research. So, I think understanding better the self and people's roles is interesting.

Moira: ...[I wonder] whether it is appropriate for a six-month project. It sounds to me more of a Ph.D. subject. But I'm not dismissing it at all! What you say about stakeholders and beneficiaries and so on being like an amorphous mass...now there may be a form of wording we could find because it's definitely got promise... [But] managing the self is not the same as development management... So, let's talk about that at another time, if that's all right with you, Giulia. (Laidlaw, 2018b)

In my diary that evening, I wrote:

My response was cagey because I understand the power of the academy versus the power of the individual student reliant on her own judgements rather than theirs. This is something I did myself with LT [Living Theory] but ... there never was any dissonance for me. I found my natural environment. I think Giulia is going to experience dissonance if she continues down this path. I need to support her in rendering her personal knowledge validly within the OU's M.Sc. course... I must ensure I don't close her down because of my awareness of the truth of power rather than the power of truth that can prevail in academia. I suppose she needs to understand creative compliance. (Laidlaw, 2018b)

Giulia gained a distinction for her first assignment, and in the conversation below, you see her asking about her second one, which is designed to make students consider how they would define the DM problem they've isolated, and how to construct research questions around it. These will structure the following stage of the research (and the assignment) i.e., methodology. Giulia was struggling with how to write about something highly qualitative (the necessity of being moved in DM) in ways that would have academic legitimacy. I realise that throughout the module I pushed her hard in terms of her ability to make academically valid claims to know something, precision with language and ideation, and the forms in which the claims she made could most likely flourish. Managing this without cramping her style or crushing her spirit has been, for me, a balancing act throughout this presentation (Laidlaw, 2018b).



Video 2. [Giulia and Moira 2.7.18.](https://youtu.be/Gv86T73ALfs)
<https://youtu.be/Gv86T73ALfs>

In the above video, in particular I want to draw your attention to our discussion around form and content (23:20 – 24:32) as it centres specifically on Giulia's and my creativity and hope. With Giulia it is her way of working with her belief that something very worthwhile would emerge out of an apparently restrictive process. With me the creativity is realised in my facilitation of her to create her own space in which her own creativity, in response to the challenge of the inherent contradictions appearing in her work, can flourish:

Moira: We're asking you to do something linear [in writing up this project] that is actually multidimensional... So, there will be some contradictions that are emerging out of the structure... All you can do is cut through it like the Gordian knot and say exactly that: this is a linear process with a multidimensional reality in which every facet mirrors every other facet.

Giulia: So maybe I have found a solution to that. I find that although the problem definition has emerged, I was guided by 'trying to satisfy...' like in that beautiful article you sent me [Laidlaw, 2004] ... 'the human being in me'. I just felt that at the source...

Moira: (smiling) That's beautiful...

Giulia: ...in terms of the literature study, I didn't know where I was going, but the deep aim was satisfying the human being in me.

Following on from our discussion we exchanged some emails on this subject:

Giulia: This [second] assignment was really devastating emotionally for me as I had to restrain my self so much!

Moira: I've been there and it's one of the most complex aspects of academic research for someone who is so tuned in to emotions as well as rationality as you are. They seem to be at odds. However, I've found that when this struggle is fully engaged with, a new synthesis starts to take place and new insights accrue. It doesn't happen overnight, which is why it is so painful..., but it does get better. That I can promise you. All the best, dear Giulia. You will make it! (G. Carozzi and M. Laidlaw, personal communication, August 5, 2018.)

Giulia: I am trying to link P.'s interview with secondary data. I am ..."extrapolating" key points in each answer and mak[ing] a link with literature. As always, I have something in my mind and I do not seem able to find it. I read a paper of yours a few months ago...about as a child being very closer to your brother and how you realized then you wanted to be a teacher... Would you be so kind to send it? (G. Carozzi, personal communication, August 15, 2018)

Giulia: I have just put together a diary ("Oh no, another one!!!!"). It was useful jotting down the key points of our conversation and reflecting on those. As always I am sharing it with you! Please, tell me, at any time, if you wish me to stop sending my reflections/diaries...or if you think that they are becoming too much! (G. Carozzi, personal communication, August 19, 2018)

I assured her that she couldn't send too much! In her next diary, however, she wrote:

I am aware that this process goes against having considered the research questions as a framework for investigation. Ultimately, I know these questions have been locked within myself, I have "just" been unable to disclose them. Starting from the answer...might take me to the question! (G. Carozzi, personal communication, August 19, 2018)

I was concerned she was buzzing with ideas, rather than trying to extrapolate the key ideas and then develop them. She was in danger, I felt, of being overwhelmed by possibilities and might have to watch her dissertation fall apart. My response was uncensored: I felt I had to be clear about the dangers. Her creativity was looking for more possibilities, rather than trying to find what she could usefully do with the ones she now had. I remember feeling this at Ph.D. level a lot, particularly towards the end. I needed to be mindful of her right to creativity, whilst at the same time not interfering with her hope of a successful outcome.

Moira: [I have to remind] you of the parameters of this project. You have seven more weeks. You have to settle with what you have now... I would suggest you carry on with the interviewing and the requirements for TMA4 and if, by the time you get to it, you realise your RQs [research questions] have changed in any way, then insert them as progress since TMA3. I would not advocate scrapping anything at this stage or altering the rationale for your project. However, you seem to be wanting to alter things all the time recently. What you do with my comments above, however, is up to you. I am simply urging caution. 😊 (M. Laidlaw, personal communication, August 19, 2018)

She wrote back:

Thank you. I think you are absolutely right in the sense that I am changing angles too much and too frequently... I will try to rein myself in as you kindly remind me each time. I was thinking too that I should put more explicit emphasis on romantic DM and this should be present in my research questions, problem definition and perhaps even in the title... This is in part what I was trying to say in my diary about the necessity of looking at the research questions from what emerges in due course. (G. Carozzi, personal communication, August 19, 2018)

On September 6, 2018, we had a Skype conversation which is, to my mind, one of the most educational I have ever been involved in.



Video 3. Giulia and Moira: 6.9.18.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0haCL3K85Bk>

For me it embodies creativity and hope. I feel this because Giulia is showing her own strength of mind and intention, she is taking charge of the processes she is both creating and taking part in and has a sense – towards the end – of her own agency. She states what she cares about – relationships – see 34–36 minutes – and there is a shared moment of recognition (Yamamoto, 1988). My perception of this encounter is that Giulia is owning her own processes of educational development and this is exciting for me as her tutor. We can reminisce as colleagues now about our own educational development, having co-created a space for learning. *This* is where I encounter the nexus-point between creativity and hope. I

am not claiming a causal link between my methodology as a tutor and Giulia's words. I am, however, claiming a likelihood of educational influence through the processes we have been involved in, and that it has worked both ways.

Conclusion

Celebrating EJOLTS' tenth anniversary

One of the chief resources for the writing of this paper has been the archives of EJOLTS, as I have been able to see on an informal basis how far and in what ways my insights about my own living-theory resonate, or deviate, from that of others. I have gone back through my own writings and seen how my ideas have gained momentum and my values developed (Laidlaw, 2018b). Linked to the energy-flowing values that Mounter (2014) writes about, I have been invigorated by reading through some of the articles published during the past ten years. I can see in my students both past and present, in myself, and in the work of others at EJOLTS, a shared recognition of the importance of working through with others and our selves the issues that concern us (Foucault, 1972).

The use of power in working with students

Through the reflective aspects of the writing of my Educational Stories (Laidlaw, 2018a) and in my work at the Open University, I believe I have learnt a lot about different forms of power and how they directly affect the educational quality of my work. I understand 'Power with' (Eyben *et al.*, 2008) to be connected to an atmosphere which equalises opportunities within a group for each individual to have some freedom of choice in terms of what transpires. I believe with Giulia and Alison, and with Peter and Kimmy, I achieved that. My conscious aim with all of them was not to hold the power to make all the decisions. I assumed their unique creative and dynamic selves to be capable of having the power to make some of the decisions about what happened in the classroom.

I have also learnt more about a 'power within' (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2006) which can be an outcome of 'power with', in which the individual feels greater self-esteem and the confidence to take risks in being more creative. I believe I've showed that with Alison and Giulia. Similarly, I wanted Kimmy and Peter, and the children in their classes, to feel they were able to dream and make some of those dreams come true in the classroom. I wanted to help them find an innate courage to be (Tillich, 2000).

However, in my dealings with Richard and his class I was exercising coercive power (Cummins, 2009; Brame, 2016; Hoffman *et al.*, 2017) and it was a wholly destructive process, leading to a denial of creativity and hope, which, I am claiming, denied the educational potential of the processes we were involved in. It was a resounding failure on my part. The incident helps me to remember that I must primarily work with people and not subject-matter.

Deleuze said about Foucault (1972):

You were the first ... to teach us something ... fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We failed to ... appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (p. 212)

The exertion of coercive power over Richard ruled out any possibility of him speaking for himself in a practical way on his own behalf. It was a denial of his essential human rights as I understand them: '[These] are based on principles that are intuitive – dignity, fairness, equality, respect and autonomy. More often than not, it is only when our rights are being violated that we stand up and take notice' (Amnesty International, 2018). With Richard I violated the above principles of dignity, fairness, equality, respect and autonomy and thus stymied any possible educational outcomes. I agree with the view that coercive power is about controlling behaviour rather than facilitating anything educational (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2016).

My own experience and reflection on that experience also show me that creativity and hope are intimately interwoven, and the lack of one will influence the degree of presence or absence of the other. I believe the way a teacher relates to power in the classroom will heavily influence the educational value of the processes for learners, and by extension their social contexts as well.

I also feel I have something to celebrate at this stage in my career: during these past six months at the Open University, I have felt myself to be concentrating more on teaching individuals, rather than only reaching the individuals (if at all) through the complex and copious Development Management texts. I am claiming that the change of emphasis with these mature students has enhanced my own creativity and hope. I have no direct evidence for that, except for my own sense of greater creativity and hope within my daily working life over this recent period, and my enthusiastic diary entries (Laidlaw, 2018b) over the past six months. I sense there has been a direct relationship between this emphasis and the educational quality of the work I have been doing.

The educational potential of the relationally-dynamic values of hope and creativity

When I first began writing my Educational Stories (Laidlaw, 2018a) I had no idea how deeply embedded and dynamically connected the values of hope and creativity could become for me. Writing about them has enabled me to look more closely at my work with students. I can now make claims about the improvements in practice through the extent to which I am living out and developing the values of creativity and hope in myself and focusing that consciously with others in order to improve my practice.

I am now directly connecting the values of hope and creativity and their relationally-dynamic evolution in my practice as educational standards of judgement. I would also claim that I have renewed my insights (Laidlaw, 1996) about the educational significance of working through my own living standards of judgement as explanatory principles (Whitehead, 2005).

Although I originated the idea of values as developmental (Laidlaw, 1996), I needed reminding⁹ during the writing of this article, how vital it was for me to bear in mind that these values can be used as the explanatory principles for the degree to which the processes

⁹ In a previous iteration of this paper, Jack Whitehead responded by reminding me of the importance of bearing in mind the development of my values as *explanatory principles*.

have been educational. In his video at <http://ejolts.net/>, Jack Whitehead talks about this process and how it works.

Perhaps most importantly of all, I've learned more about the interconnected nature of the values of hope and creativity in my practice, and that this writing is, in fact, an exposition of a relationally-dynamic epistemology. I consider this paper to be an original contribution to educational knowledge and theory, which takes further my initial insight (Laidlaw, 1996) about values being living and developmental in the way human beings are. Now I perceive my values as not only living and developmental and significant for my living-theory and Living Theory as a whole, but that they are in a dialectical relationship with each other, which is unique and influenced by context. I recognise that any future theorising about my educational practice will need to take into account my relationally-dynamic values of hope and creativity if my practice is to improve in its educational quality, i.e. become more worthwhile, more hopeful and creative, more redolent of the values that offer hope for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 2018).

I concur with Whitehead (*ibid.*) when he writes: 'I think that it is worth repeating that [I hope] you are persuaded of the validity of the new epistemology and that making such contributions to education constitutes a worthwhile form of life' (p. 112).

Epilogue

The potential to create a worthwhile form of life – and this is what I believe Giulia and Alison and I have done, and what Peter, Kimmy and I were involved in – is, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful aspects of being human. It is the opportunity I want, not only for every child (as in Kimmy's story) but for every *person*. Writing the educational stories and my diary were the beginnings of the process for me. For us all it is ongoing, but I don't get to tell the end of my students' stories, only my own! I know now that my hope in the future rests partly with the choices Alison and Giulia are going to make for themselves and the lives that Peter, Kimmy and Richard went on to develop.

And now, in the light of what has come before, I leave this paper with a quotation from Kimmy's story in the hope that her educational creativity and hope will speak to you even more powerfully than at the beginning.

Kimmy: 'He's going to be ready for his new life, Miss. When he's ready *here*, that means *he's real somewhere else* and ready to live his new life. This will just be a lump of clay.' ... I believe she knew precisely what was going on. It never ceases to amaze me what [people] can do when given the freedom to pursue their own creative logic. (Laidlaw, 2018b, p. 2)

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Appendix One

It's called Socklund Island.

The following is a recounting of a series of lessons conducted over several weeks with a Year Seven group. I taught the group English, Drama and Music, which gave me the opportunity to merge all the different subjects into one. Luckily, they were also my tutor group, so we'd got to know each other pretty well by this time. I wanted to challenge us all more, now that we'd become accustomed to each other, and perhaps enable an integration of the different lessons by drawing on their own powers of synthesis and imagination. As usual, the children set themselves and each other homework based upon the needs of the whole group or individual groups within the class. My experience showed me that when they were motivated the standard of their work increased not only in quantity but in quality as well. As the weeks developed, children would go to different departments in the lunch hour – Geography, History, Music, Technical Drawing, English, Science (particularly Biology) – to find out details that would supplement their work during the hours we spent together.

The idea started simply enough in a Drama lesson. I had sketched out a few ideas before the lesson, nothing very specific, but I decided I'd walk into the drama room already in role. The children were used to this approach, having worked through many different ideas with me during this first year of secondary schooling.

'Right then, folks,' I began, looking around. The trick was to start off confident, as if the reality were real! I had to believe in it or it just wouldn't catch on. 'Today's the day!' I called out. 'We're off on the voyage. Now, we've been planning this for some time, so let's make sure we've got everything we need. Is everyone here?'

'Yes, I think so,' said Gwennie, joining in, immediately in role and casting her eyes around the room to ensure everyone who was supposed to be there was there. She brought a writing pad out of her bag and started to tick names off a make-believe register.

'I've left my glasses at home,' said Peter. 'I can't do anything without my glasses.'

'You left them with me, silly,' said Rob, smirking at his clever intervention, and handed him a pair of steel-rimmed glasses. Peter hrumphed, rather annoyed at his subterfuge being foiled.

'I don't want to go,' said Mary. Poor Mary, she never really wanted to do anything. I worried about Mary. She was a sad child, timid, always thinking the worst would happen.

'Come on,' said Katie, in a friendly voice. 'We can all go together.'

'Who's checked the weather forecast on the Atlantic for today?' I asked.

'I have!' exclaimed Alison. 'Wind north easterly.'

'Fisher. German Bight!' shouted Alan, and everyone laughed. Alan was obsessed with the weather and knew all the technical terms.

'Gwennie, you're the seasoned traveller,' I said. 'What do we have to do first?'

'Yeah, come on, Gwennie.'

Voices joined in, clamouring for things to get started.

'Buy tickets,' she said, and then screwed up her face. 'But Mum does that. It's boring that part. Let's just get on the ship as if we've got all of our luggage with us and everything.'

'What luggage do we need?' Jenny asked.

'Not sure,' Gwennie said, looking a little lost.

'Ian, what do you think?'

'Never been far, Miss,' he said, 'but I'm taking my football.'

'A must!' I agreed. 'Sarah, you? What are you taking?'

'Depends where we're going.'

'That's it!' exclaimed Gwennie. 'We need a destination.' She laughed as if she'd simply been absent-minded.

'Let's go to the North Pole,' said Alan. Trust him. He wanted to be Scott of the Antarctic. Every chance he got he would be drawing maps and reading maps, plotting weather-scapes all over the northern hemisphere. This was a boy who spent hours at weekends designing maps, geographical, geological, historical, climatic, and the occasional ordinance survey one too. I would see his endeavours spread out on my desk on a Monday morning. If we had the time, he would take me through the various graphics and highlight the key places.

'Nah!' 'No way!' 'Too cold!' came a flurry of voices.

'North Pole's a good idea, Alan,' I said, 'but a bit cold don't you think? I'm not sure I could manage it and I'm older than you. It makes it harder.'

'O.K. Why don't we just get on, then,' Alan suggested.

'Where's the captain?' asked Jonathan, a gentle, artistic child who would rather read a book than go on a voyage. I wondered what he might make out of it.

'I'm the Captain,' said Alison. 'I've always wanted to be the captain.'

I expected the boys to raise a storm, but they didn't. Alison donned a hat she conjured out of the air, and took her place as Captain as she organised the crew.

The ship had sails, large, cumbersome, taut sails, and Tom, who had a head for heights, climbed up to the crow's nest and kept watch. He called down to us to get on board quickly, as the weather might change if we didn't. We hurried to board the ship, some people jostling as some people always do. We chatted and gossiped, argued over cabins, who got what and why. We talked about what we were looking forward to, and what we didn't like about travelling. Anne said she got seasick and Bron said she had some sea-sick

pills, because her mother never allowed her to make a voyage without them. Anne wasn't to worry.

Little Peter, grieving for his dead father and wondering how to be a man when he was only eleven, asked whether he could be in charge of the lifeboats. I found that unutterably touching and had to push back the tears. Alison said yes, that was an excellent idea. Alison is a very special girl: she has empathy in spades, which is unusual in someone who also loves to be in charge. Her first decision of responsibility seemed a fair one and I smiled at her.

It was a long journey. I reminded them of the Ancient Mariner poem.

'Ooh, let's tell some stories to keep us going,' suggested Jenny. Jenny loves stories. She told me once, she tells her cat her made-up stories, although he, apparently, isn't always very impressed. She writes well too, and her tales are always recognisably hers: her distinctive style is witty, but sometimes quite creepy too: she tells an excellent ghost story.

'You start, then,' said Alison, and sat on the floor. Everyone followed suit, making a circle. Jenny began.

There was once a child who sailed on the icy seas with her grandfather. He was older than she knew, and she was a special girl because she could talk with the fish and the whales and the dolphins who swam around their ship every day. What no one knew was that the sea was haunted with the spirit of an old pirate, who had made his living with his friends, stealing silver and gold and treasure from other ships. Old Pirate Bold was killed by one of the men he'd tried to rob, and they say that his spirit still roams the seas looking for treasure.

'I know this one already,' complained Rob. 'You read it out last week in English.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Jenny. 'We've been on this ship for weeks!'

Way to go, Jenny!

It all came to a head one dark, chilly, Autumn night on the high seas. The girl and her grandfather were sailing into the North Pole where it was freezing, and the ice cracked and shrieked and growled and howled, and it was so cold that even the seabirds wouldn't fly there. But there was another reason why the birds stopped flying in that part of the sea: it was eerie and ghostly and scary, and the girl and her old, old grandfather didn't know about the legend of Pirate Bold and his evil plan. They didn't know the danger they were in...

At the end of the story, the children drifted into smaller groups and set up their own activities. Some of the group decided they would be crew rather than passengers, and it seemed that the travellers and crew got on well, preparing meals, playing cards and telling stories. Jonathan decided to write a story about the voyage and went round interviewing people about their experiences on board so far and scribbling in a notebook. Daniel, who'd actually been to China, was trying to teach some of his cronies how to play mahjong. He didn't really seem to know how to play it, but it kept four of the less enthusiastic boys quiet for a little while. And then, all of a sudden, with a call that really startled all of us, Tom suddenly said he could see land. We all rushed to the side to look.

'I can't see anything,' Mary moaned. Some of the children were clearly irritated by her negative response, and I realised I'd have to be careful how this was dealt with. Mary needed to join us, but I mustn't force her.

'Oh look, silly!' Alan said.

'This is all a stupid game!' Mary moaned. How on earth could I reach this child? I wonder why she is always turning opportunities down, saying, in effect, no to life. How could I help her feel greater courage and take risks? Clearly, she finds saying yes risky.

'Please yourself,' Alan said with chilling commonsense. She did. She retreated into the corner of the room, away from the others, putting herself beyond the reach of the world they were creating, distancing herself from the community. I looked at her hardened little face and realised now wasn't the time to confront her, or to draw her in, although I made sure she knew I was looking at her sometimes and smiling. I needed to allow her the space she seemed to need, without according it status. She looked at me in mutinous anger. I smiled at her, then turned back to the group.

'Land Ahoy!' Tom called out again, with real authority this time.

'What can you see?' shouted Daisy. A delightful child, Daisy. She has a perfect name. Full of sunshine. She's always a joiner. I wonder if it will be possible to let her see that she can work by herself and achieve great things.

'It's got a lot of forest,' Jason (the clown – see later chapter) said. 'There's bound to be parrots.' Jason had an obsession with parrots. His homework was frequently covered with them, all the brightness of rainbows. A powerful self-symbol, I always felt, for this was a child of many colours.

The children then described what they could see. All of them, except Mary, eagerly creating the island in the image of their hopes. Mary hovering nearer now, but still remaining apart. As if joining the group would mean she lost face. As if her hopes were somewhere else entirely. How could I help her?

'Can you see any people?' Jenny called out to Tom, looking up and shielding her eyes from the powerful sun.

'It's difficult!' he responded, taking his cue from her about the hot sun. 'I can't at the moment!'

'It's uninhabited,' said Alan, taking a piece of paper from his pocket, flattening it out on the floor of the ship and revealing a detailed map of the area. 'Look here, and here,' he said. His gaze took in Mary – what a genius of a boy – I must congratulate him after class – and she knelt down next to him and pointed to the island and said, 'We're here!' Several others took Alan's cue and deferred to Mary's direction.

'Is it dangerous?' asked Jonathan.

'There's very little information on it,' Alan said. 'Is there, Mary?'

'I don't know any,' she said, her voice showing some disdain but less reluctance.

'Look! Look!' called Peter, his voice clear and resonant. 'Is that a zebra!'

'Wow! I can see it,' said Daniel, eyes shining.

'Well now,' said Alison, clearly a Captain and confident of her role. 'Let's get ready for disembarkation!' She pronounced the word with pride and grinned. 'Please form an orderly queue.' And we did.

We disembarked onto this uncharted island, exclaiming at all we could see around us. It was a beautiful island, this one, and seemed to yield a wild diversity of wildlife and vegetation. I asked Baz, the cook, what there was to eat. I was starving. Other chimed in with clamours of hunger and dissatisfaction at the service. Alison came in to break us up and to assign us jobs according to our abilities and likes. Tom was the scout who took a few with him to explore the island while the rest of us remained to set up camp. We set up tents and built a fire because evening was setting in and as Katie said, it was getting a bit chilly now. We had torches, though, and plenty of matches and lighters for fire. It seemed to be fairly dry and so it was relatively easy to find sufficient firewood. The first evening round the fire was good. Daniel suggested we tell stories again. He said Jenny's story was a great Voyage Story, but now we needed Island Stories. I love the way he did that: he wasn't rejecting Jenny's story at all but making a reasonable comment about the fact that stories change according to circumstances.

We had some discussion about what kind of stories, and several of the girls wanted spooky stories, but the boys seemed to go for adventure. In the end, Bron told us a story that was both. She said it was one her grandfather had told her, but he was dead now and she missed him. Bron has more than a way with words and her calm and measured voice soothes any dissent. Everyone is now sitting down again in the circle where Bron weaves her magic spell. I doubt I will ever come across a pupil whose words mean as much as hers can.

Once upon a time...the boys started to groan at this, but she waved them off and told them to shut up and listen or the atmosphere would be lost – there was a man who wanted to be king. 'King of where?' his sons asked him. 'Anywhere,' he replied. So, the father and his three sons set off to find somewhere he could be king of...

'This is a stupid story!' Daniel said, who seemed miffed that he hadn't started with a story when he had suggested it in the first place.

'Let her carry on for now!' I suggested, 'and then it can be your turn if the others agree.' He furrowed his brow but grinned nevertheless. Daniel generally was a very agreeable child.

But the first place he came to, was a house with three people arguing; a man, his wife, and the man's mother. None of them could decide what they wanted to eat for supper.

'Bit like us!' said Tom drolly. That got a laugh, and then there were shushes and index-fingers held up to mouths, as if within the flickering of the fire, the story were continued.

'What's all the fuss about?' the father who would be king, asked the three arguing people.

'She wants meat, and they want fish,' one of the sons replied.

'So, let them have what they want,' replied the father who would be king. 'I don't see the problem here.'

'Perhaps you can be King of these three people,' the other son suggested.

'Three isn't a very big kingdom,' the man who would be king answered. 'Let's go on.'

And so, the father and his two sons travelled far and wide, and the months turned into years, but they never really seemed to find a place that suited the man who would be king. Either

there were too few people, or too many. Or the climate wasn't pleasant, or there was too much sand. Once the father complained the weather was unkind, and that the local people were rather silly.

'So, what happened?' asked Mary, now a part of the community on the island.

Bron grinned and continued:

Finally, after travelling for a very long time, the sons being much older now than they had been when they started out, and the father having given up his ambition to be a king at all, found themselves back in their original village. The inhabitants came out to greet them, not recognising them at first, until one of them suddenly shouted out:

'Look, it's that father and his sons, who went away from here years ago. Here they are again. How wonderful to see them!'

And the villagers spent the next three days celebrating their return with feasting and drinking and music and song, and the father felt like a king in his own kingdom and the sons finally saw their father crowned in his imagination.

The audience sat without moving or speaking for a few moments and then everyone started clapping and the clapping became louder and louder. They added their catcalls and whistles to the mix as well, and the whole atmosphere was joyous. It's so exciting to be here. I look around and see a community where once there were simply individuals. The individuals are markedly still there, but the feeling of being a community is unmissable. And for the next couple of hours, stories were told and twisted, and ravelled and unravelled. People leaned forward to see the faces of the storytellers in the darkness, eyes wide with attention.

'Right,' said Alison, as the bell from 'The Helm' was sounded. 'Time to sleep!' And so we did, going from the island-world to our next lesson!

The next day, refreshed from sleep, we awoke to a hot sun, removed cardigans and jumpers, and, on Alison's suggestion, set up reconnaissance groups and then we were, after three hours, to report back. Each group was to have a scribe so that nothing would be lost. Scribes were those who could write legibly, enjoyed writing, and had a keen eye. Each scribe was democratically elected. I rather thought I might be a scribe, but no one voted for me. I was supposed to carry the gear for the scribe. In this heat it wasn't a pleasure, but no one listened to my complaints.

When we came together again at the appointed time, we all sat in a big circle.

'There's a lot of sand on the other side,' Angela reported back first on a cue from Alison, reading from the script she'd obviously done for homework. 'There's a lovely beach and we found lots of shellfish in rock pools'

'Are they all right to eat?' Angela asked. 'My mother once had severe food-poisoning from shellfish.'

'We could find out how to cook them,' said Mary. 'I'm sure I've got books in the hull somewhere.'

Nods of appreciation all round.

'What else?' Alison asked.

'I saw a strange-looking animal,' Angela said, her voice holding a sense of both excitement and fear.

'Strange?' Alison said. 'What do you mean? 'Strange' doesn't mean anything, or it means lots of things to different people. What do you mean by strange?'¹⁰

'I can't describe it very well, but I will draw it and show you later.'

Heads nodded.

'I had a teacher once,' Alison explained, smirking and looking at me. 'She always made us tell her what words really meant. We weren't allowed to say the words 'good' or 'bad' without saying what they meant in *that* sentence. It was *so* annoying!'

More laughs.

'Yes,' I said. 'But useful, eh!'

'Weird,' Angela said, ignoring me. 'The animal, I mean!'

Again, everyone laughed!

'It was like a huge pig. I'll draw it.' Angela was an excellent artist, everyone knew, and there were murmurs of appreciation.

'Yes, that'd be even better than any teacher's words,' Alison said cuttingly. Sometimes drawing is *much* better than English.'

The children laughed. I joined in!

We went through each of the reports from the scribes. All of them seemed to be dovetailing, which was interesting, and so, through the vegetation, climate, animals and so on, we tried to think about the kind of island we had come to.

'I found a flower,' said Peter, out of the blue. It was the first time he'd spoken out in a group-meeting on the island. It was the first time he'd offered a comment in class at all.

'And?' asked Alison.

'It's a magic flower,' he said, and no one laughed. There was something about the tone of his voice. I caught my breath. Something was happening that was way deeper than a description of a flower found on an imaginary island.

There was silence for a moment. It seemed that Peter was summoning up the courage for something. There are moments like this in teaching and they've always felt

¹⁰ This undoubtedly arose from my fussiness around the use of descriptive language. It's been a standing joke throughout my career that students are not allowed to use words like 'good' or 'bad' as it describes only a general property of something and nothing precisely at all. My current M.Sc. students are also acquainted with their tutor's quirk!

incredibly important to me: something is coming into focus that needs to be in focus. I wondered how this might tie in with his father's death. I assumed it would.

'We've been worried about people falling ill without doctors and nurses here on the island,' he began, and I saw hope glimmering. 'Well, this flower – I've drawn a map where it can be found, so I can show you if you want,' and he looked around.

Everyone, especially Alison, was silent, watching, waiting. I saw her looking intently at him as well. Did she understand the significance of this moment? Can an 11-year-old child understand this kind of complexity? And, of course, the answer is, yes she can. Children are amazing: we just need to offer them the chance to be connected.

'This flower cures everything. It can cure cancer.'

Peter's words had dropped like a bomb on my awareness. Please don't anyone interrupt him now, I pleaded silently. Please don't let the bell go. He has to get this out of himself.

'Well, it can help, but it can't cure of course, if the illness is too far gone.'

The air was sharp with his emotion. I drew in my breath in staggered, silent sobs. My heart soared with hope. Is he coming to terms with his father's death?

'But it can help the pain go away, it really can. It's a magic flower, you see. I only found one, but there might be more,' and he nods at his fellow-travellers and sits down again. And again, I have to push back the tears. This is the first time, as far as I know, that he's acknowledged his father's death from cancer and the pain and agony he was in before the man died. No child should have to go through it, but who said life was fair?

Individuals decided to find out from the ship's library what all the ingredients meant. Our day was passing quickly, and it was soon over.

The importance of naming the island came up the next day. We went through all sorts of ideas; *Island with No Name* was proposed by Daniel, but no one took it seriously.

'I've drawn it,' Alan said, unrolling an expanse of thick paper, and then, in front of our eyes, an island of exquisite beauty unfurled. The island was surrounded by vast waters, with rocks and sinuous sea-creatures. He'd detailed all the reports from the scribes. 'I sat in my cabin last night by lamplight,' he said, 'and looked through all the papers and came up with this.' There were pats on the back from people, oohs and aahs, and a sense of real appreciation. Alan stood in a proud centre as we scrutinised his map. It was all to scale too, with tenths of miles charted across the paper.

'How long did this take you?' Alison asked.

'Four hours,' he said.

More appreciative sounds. I wiped away tears. Not appropriate.

'I drew the animal I saw yesterday,' Angela said, bringing her art-notebook out of a bag. She flipped through the pages as we gathered round.

'Urgh,' said Jonathan, screwing up his face in true revulsion. 'That's yukky!'

'Urgh, yes,' said several others.

'Those claws look sharp enough to tear a man's head off,' remarked Peter, looking closer and then recoiling.

'I think we're going to have to avoid those creatures. What kind of creatures are they, Angela?' asked Alison, all matter-of-fact.

'It's called a Bazali,' she replied. She repeated it several times until everyone knew what it was called.

'And do you know anything more about it?' I asked.

'It often comes out at night,' she said. 'Our fire will frighten it. We need to have a guardian of the fire.'

'I suggest Peter,' I said. 'Peter's brave,' I added quickly. 'He'll really manage it. It's an important job too. Lives may depend on it.'

Gradual agreements all round, and Peter grinned. First time I'd seen him smile all year. He set up a watching brief at the edge of the group and seemed absorbed in his role. He made a fire and then said he was going off for a while to set other fires so that there would be 'a circle of protection' for us. His words.

'So, what are we going to call it?'

'Sock Island,' said Darren. 'It's shaped like a sock.' His laughter was fairly derisive and infectious. Boys started to snigger.

'Shut up!' Alison said, ever the diplomatic captain! 'Sock Island's a reasonable name.' She was trying hard to be responsible, but it was obvious she thought it was a silly name. 'Sock Island?' she said. 'Who thinks that's a good idea?'

No one put up their hand.

'It doesn't sound foreign enough,' Bron said. Bron's favourite subject was German. She would spend the whole time reciting German verbs if anyone gave her the chance. Learning German was what Bron felt she did best. She was in love with language.

'Socklund Island,' she announced. It was clever and caught on straightaway. 'It sounds Scandinavian,' she said, as if that clinched it.

'We need to decide what we're going to do now,' I said.

'What do you mean?' Alison asked, perhaps worrying that I was going to take her role away from her. I pretended to ignore that uncertainty and passed back the gambit to her again.

'I mean, we need to know if we're going to stay here and if we are...' I trailed off.

'We'll need to build stuff,' Andrew said. Andrew was the group's best wood and metal-worker.'

'So how are we going to do all that and get food and, well, I don't know?' I said.

'We need different groups to organise.'

'We need an architect, Jonathan said, his eyes suddenly lighting up.

'Yeah, for houses and schools and stuff.'

'Do we really want a school?' Robert asked scornfully. Lots of people laughed at that.

'A meeting place would be nice,' Gwennie suggested. 'A place where we could always come in the evenings and tell stories and stuff.'

'Yeah, that'd be good, and then we could have rooms for different activities.' Neil was essentially pragmatic. 'So, we'd need to see what's on board and what we've got to start out with.'

'And then...'

There were then lists of activities to be completed and who wanted to take them on. The small society was being built.

...In the three years of Island time we were away, we built a meeting house, smaller shacks for individual, pair and group occupation, as well as a schoolhouse and a farm (as most of us had come from farming areas). We sculpted and painted and drew up plans – Jonathan's architectural plans for a school were framed by order of the Captain on the wall of the meetinghouse, to celebrate his achievement.

The school turned out to be a focal point of the community, in which we all decided to have a very different kind of teaching and learning experience from what we were used to: children chose to come to school or not and when they did, they set their own agendas. Sometimes it didn't work, and the captain had to intervene when there were irreconcilable differences, but that didn't happen often. Mostly, people got together to tell stories, create something either separately or together and we found many sources of inspiration from the ship's storage rooms where there were, it seemed, an infinite variety of facilities. Several of the girls found recorders and flutes on board and taught each other to play and then gave concerts. We dealt with a drought, a hurricane, missing England, parents, friends and so on.

And then we had a journey back home to prepare for. We all decided, the time had come to leave Socklund Island with all our poetry and stories and paintings and music and a stool to sit on by Andrew. One evening we decided to have a camp-fire to remind us of our first night there and Peter told us a story about his father who was dead, and how he felt, and that now was the time to go back to his mum and carry on with his life there. Not a dry eye anywhere to be seen. We all shed tears on the last evening, because we were leaving something so precious behind, but we knew that life moved on. Nothing could or should prevent that. There were hugs all round. Even some of the boys! We thanked Katie for her brilliant idea. We thanked everyone for everything, come to that.

When we finally disembarked from our trusty vessel, there were hugs again and waves and promises to keep in touch, and in the glow of a late-spring evening, we all, a little wiser, and perhaps a little sadder too like the Ancient Mariner, went on our separate ways.

Appendix Two

'Are you stupid or something?'

The following is an account of a lesson I wish I hadn't been involved in. One in which I utterly failed to live by the standards I thought my job was about.

It was in my first school in Shropshire, where I taught English and German 50/50. I loved English, as I could throw myself into lessons, and enable the children to respond creatively wasn't difficult; indeed, it seemed easy. I didn't enjoy teaching German as a rule, except with a high-attaining second-language set, as they had the capacities of sponges and we could really play with the language. However, with other groups I suspect my teaching was, at best, passable. Children passed examinations. Standards apparently were maintained. I hadn't analysed at all the disparity between what happened in my English lessons and in my German ones, but it was a huge disparity. I allowed (because I didn't understand any better) the content-focused subject to control my methodology. I taught a subject, not children. I wasn't creative enough to deviate, to find different ways round the syllabus, that might engage their creativity and enthusiasm. My lessons were a perfect example of what I spent most of my time in China trying to prevent with my colleagues – bastions of teacher-domination. I drilled the kids. I set them learning homework. We rote-learned stuff, grammar, lists of vocabulary and so on. In an HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) inspection, my lesson was deemed fair. I was bored. The children were bored, I suspect. I don't know. I should have known.

One day, with my second-set German Year Tens (14-year olds), we were struggling with the dative case. I had always found the grammar of German incredibly easy as a student myself and this didn't help me when I was trying to learn ways to explain grammatical structures or give me the sense of being more democratic in classroom techniques. I was nowhere near those kinds of insight then. I didn't know that the methodology radically affected the learning. Well, I did when I was teaching English, but I didn't transfer my knowledge to my teaching of German.

It was a Friday afternoon. I remember that clearly, because we were all tired and hot and bothered. I explained the dative case again, with pre-prepared flash-cards and hand-outs. Richard put up his hand.

'I don't understand,' he said. Richard was a lovely, lovely boy. Very keen to please. Very gentle. Soft blue eyes and a gawky innocence about him... Richard was every teacher's favourite boy because he really was keen without being particularly high-attaining, or very creative himself. We could see his desire to learn, to improve. I wish I'd known then what I know now.

I explained again. His eyes clouded over, and the more I tried to explain, to find new words, new phrases, new ways into the language, the more he seemed to be fading away. I asked another student, Bill, if he could explain it to him. And all this done as a whole-class activity. All in the public eye. What was I thinking of?

I sighed. I'd had enough. It wasn't that difficult. This lesson was going on forever. I was feeling impatient and instead of asking myself why Richard wasn't able to respond, I just blurted out:

'Oh, for goodness sake! Are you stupid or something?'

My words hung like corpses on a gibbet, twitching and taut in the air. There were gasps from some of the girls. They all knew I made a big fuss about calling someone stupid. It was the Forbidden Word. And then came his answer, which spoke to me as nails in a coffin.

'Yes, Miss. I am stupid. I can't do this.' And he put his head down on his arms on the desk.

I felt as if I'd fired a gun at him and was praying, please don't let this be real.

'I'm sorry,' I said. I felt as if I'd had a huge shock, so heaven knows how he must have felt, being abused in front of the whole class. It was as if I'd heard devastating news. About myself, I suppose I had. I wasn't the person I thought I was. His face was still buried in his arms.

'I'm so sorry,' I said again, hardly able to control my emotion. 'I can't think what made me act so cruelly. It isn't your fault if you don't understand, it's my fault for not finding the right way to help you learn. I'm so sorry.'

Not a child spoke. They were all sitting, stunned, I suppose. This was a really big shock for all of us. We all knew that taunting others wasn't allowed. That was a class rule.

The bell went. I asked Richard to stay behind. The other filed out, subdued. I apologised to Richard again. He was fine about it, which somehow made it worse. After that lesson, I wrote him a formal letter of apology, which, he told me a couple of months later, had really helped. I'd hurt him a lot. However, he kept the letter, and that means something, I suppose.

I learned something fundamental in that class. A shame someone else had to pay the price. This has remained in my mind ever since as a time when I forgot my first principle of teaching the child and not the subject. It was disastrous and a failure of my humanity. I don't think I ever was able to make it up to him, but because of him I was able to remember on future occasions when I might feel impatience, that the impatience was connected to my own fear of not being able to do it right and being seen not to do so, and never because of something the child was responsible for. Blaming the victim is after all, a common default-position when pride starts to dominate instead of love.