

# The Little Boy

by Helen Buckley

Once a little boy went to school.  
He was quite a little boy.  
And it was quite a big school.  
But when the little boy  
Found that he could go to his room  
By walking right in from the door outside,  
He was happy.  
And the school did not seem  
Quite so big any more.

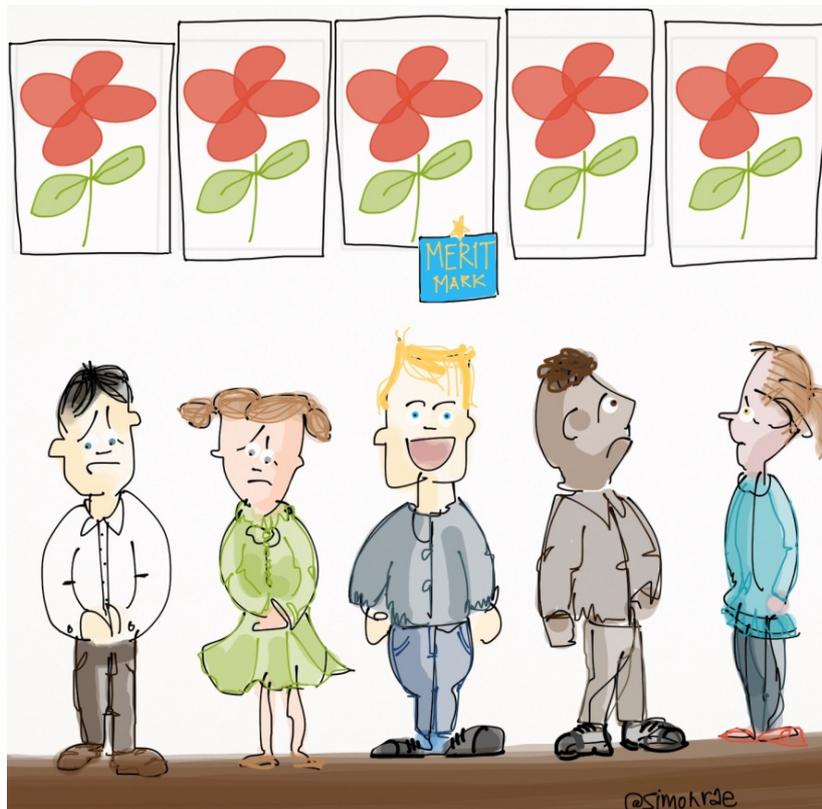
One morning,  
When the little boy had been in school a  
while,  
The teacher said:  
"Today we are going to make a picture."  
"Good!" thought the little boy.  
He liked to make pictures.  
He could make all kinds:  
Lions and tigers,  
Chickens and cows,  
Trains and boats –  
And he took out his box of crayons  
And began to draw.

But the teacher said:  
"Wait! It is  
not time to  
begin!"  
And she  
waited until  
everyone  
looked  
ready.  
"Now," said  
the teacher,  
"We are  
going to  
make  
flowers."  
"Good!"  
thought the  
little boy,  
He liked to  
make  
flowers,  
And he  
began to

make beautiful ones  
With his pink and orange and blue crayons.  
But the teacher said,  
"Wait! And I will show you how."  
And she drew a flower on the blackboard.  
It was red, with a green stem.  
"There," said the teacher.  
"Now you may begin."  
The little boy looked at the teacher's flower.  
Then he looked at his own flower,  
He liked his flower better than the teacher's.  
But he did not say this,  
He just turned his paper over  
And made a flower like the teacher's.  
It was red, with a green stem.

On another day,  
When the little boy had opened  
The door from the outside all by himself,  
The teacher said,  
"Today we are going to make something with  
clay."  
"Good!" thought the boy.  
He liked clay.  
He could make all kinds of things with clay:

Snakes and  
snowmen,  
Elephants and  
mice,  
Cars and trucks –  
And he began to  
pull and pinch  
His ball of clay.



But the teacher  
said,  
"Wait! And I will  
show you how."  
And she showed  
everyone how to  
make  
One deep dish.  
"There," said the  
teacher.  
"Now you may  
begin."

The little boy looked at the teacher's dish  
Then he looked at his own.  
He liked his dishes better than the teacher's  
But he did not say this,  
He just rolled his clay into a big ball again,  
And made a dish like the teacher's.  
It was a deep dish.  
And pretty soon  
The little boy learned to wait  
And to watch,  
And to make things just like the teacher.  
And pretty soon  
He didn't make things of his own anymore.  
Then it happened  
That the little boy and his family  
Moved to another house,  
In another city,  
And the little boy  
Had to go to another school.  
This school was even bigger  
Than the other one,  
And there was no door from the outside  
Into his room.  
He had to go up some big steps,  
And walk down a long hall  
To get to his room.  
And the very first day  
He was there, the teacher said,  
"Today we are going to make a picture."  
"Good!" thought the little boy,  
And he waited for the teacher  
To tell him what to do

But the teacher didn't say anything.  
She just walked around the room.  
When she came to the little boy,  
She said, "Don't you want to make a  
picture?"  
"Yes," said the little boy.  
"What are we going to make?"  
"I don't know until you make it," said the  
teacher.  
"How shall I make it?" asked the little boy.  
"Why, any way you like," said the teacher.  
"And any colour?" asked the little boy.  
"Any colour," said the teacher,  
"If everyone made the same picture,

And used the same colours,  
How would I know who made what,  
"And which was which?"  
"I don't know," said the little boy.  
And he began to draw a flower.  
It was red, with a green stem.

There is much wisdom in this simple and beautiful story that applies to all levels of our education ecosystem. How can we expect learners to discover their own creativity if we expect them to wait until we have told them what we think it is? How can we expect them to be creative if we convince them, through our pedagogical practices, that they must only look for one right answer to a challenge that demands their creativity? And that the only learning that will be recognised is what we deem to be important. How can we expect them to create their own ecologies for discovering the many possible answers to their own creative challenges in life if we never give them a chance to create their own ecologies for learning while they are engaged in formal learning?

**COMMISSIONING EDITOR'S  
CREATIVE CHALLENGE.**

**The end to this story is quite sad. Would you like to provide an alternative that opens up the possibility for this little boy of a more creative and fulfilling future?**

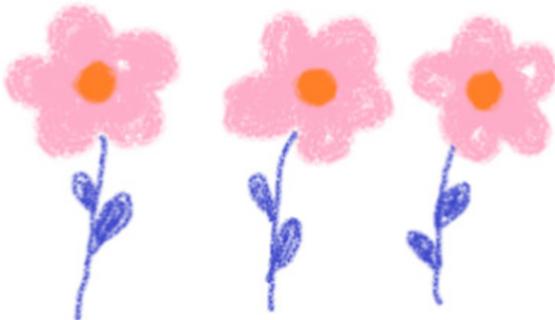
**Please share your alternative endings in #creativeHE and we will incorporate them into the magazine**

## ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS

### Alexandra Gkouzou

This story filled me up with mixed feelings. At first I was disappointed by the behaviour of the teacher then the repetition of the phrase "Wait! And I will show you how ", irritated me enough and frustration I would like to be able to shout "Wait! He will show you how, it's his world "towards the end my led to a sadness for the creativity of this child. So I don't want to change the ending but I would like to add something...

*After few days the teacher said, "Today we are going to make a picture." And the little boy stood there for a while...and then he began to make beautiful flowers again, with his pink and orange and blue crayons!*



### Natassa Kailari

*How would I know who made what, "And which was which?" "I don't know," said the little boy.... and then the teacher said: "Close your eyes. Imagine you are in a park.It' s Sunday morning, the sun is bright and you walk among the plants, the trees and the flowers. Colours are everywhere. Choose a flower that makes you smile, that smells beautiful and draw it"*

Perhaps children who lost their creativity need to be shown the way to find it again, to look inside them, to be given opportunities to discover their

abilities. The story of the "little boy" reminds me of the way we teach literacy here in Greece at the last grade of high school, to those "poor" children who try to achieve a place in University. We direct their way of thinking by giving them specific answers to matters and topics in regard to a poem or a literature text. Are there specific answers to literature issues? Could anybody of us really know what the author was thinking? We only assume, we only try to verge on an issue in various ways and through various thoughts.

### Zogia Manou

*The little boy started looking around him, not knowing what to do. He noticed that his classmates had already started making their pictures and they were looking pretty happy. The teacher advised him: "just look around you, not only with your eyes, but with your heart as well". He kept wondering what to do, when, suddenly, he turned his look outside the window. The small schoolyard garden was full of colourful flowers and the light breeze made them look like they were dancing.*

*The little boy reluctantly started making his picture. A little smile appeared on his face. As time passed, the smile kept getting bigger and bigger.*

*When he finished his picture, he felt an indescribable joy. He named his picture "dancing flowers".*



### Anastasia Michali

*How would I know who made what, "And which was which?" The little boy fell silent and started drawing something. After a while he stood up, holding his drawing with both hands in front of his chest, but with the drawing facing*

*his chest, "Why know who made what? You only need to smell as many flowers as you can!"*

### **Kostas Batzilis**

*The little boy was waiting for the teacher to draw something on the board but she didn't. He looked around at the other students' drawings and he saw that everyone was drawing something different. Suddenly a bird flew into the classroom and landed at the teacher's desk. It was a small colourful bird. The boy felt free and happy inside him.*

*This reminded him of his repressed creativity. He took his pencils and started drawing the beautiful bird. After that day, he never felt the need to wait for the teacher's guidance again.*



### **Olympia Deligkari**

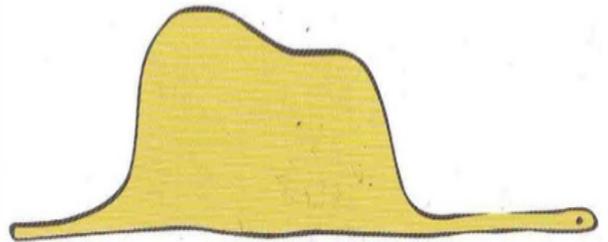
*'...a great surprise overwhelmed the little boy... he waited patiently for his teacher's instructions, but she didn't do anything, she didn't say anything, she didn't show anything. His inactivity and idleness was growing bigger... he felt that no picture could come to his mind. The teacher was surprised and asked him what were wrong and he couldn't draw.*

*The little boy answered, I only know to draw a red flower with a green stem... 'I don't really believe this. I think you can do more than that', the teacher replied. So, she led the boy to the schoolyard that was full of beautiful, colourful, fragrant flowers. 'Take a look at them, watch them, touch them, smell them', he intrigued him. 'Close your eyes and think with your heart'. When they entered the classroom, the little boy with the remembrance of the smell and touch of the flowers, he painted an endless meadow full of colourful, various flowers... '*

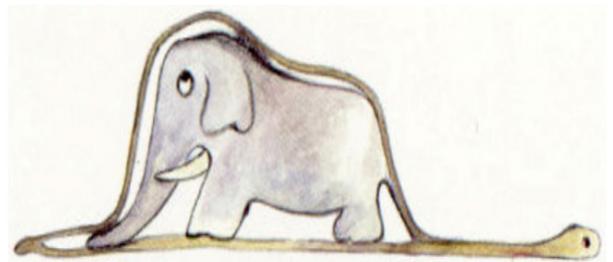
The story of the little boy was very moving and inspirational; full of deeply meanings regarding the current educational system and the role of

the teacher. It reminded me intensely a scene captured in one of my favourite books that I would like to share with all of you:

*'...And after some work with a colored pencil I succeeded in making my first drawing. My Drawing Number One. It looked something like this.*



I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them. But they answered: "Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?" My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. But since the grown-ups were not able to understand it, I made another drawing: I drew the inside of a boa constrictor, so that the grown-ups could see it clearly. They always need to have things explained. My Drawing Number Two looked like this.



The grown-ups' response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside or the outside, and devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar. That is why, at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter...'

So, I always try to remember: "What is essential to the heart is invisible to the eye" .

### **Dora Koutsou**

*"... and he began to draw a flower. It was red,*

*with a green stem. But it was not only this. He continued drawing trains and boats, lions and tigers, chicken and cows beside the flower with intense moves at warp speed giving the impression that he had a lot of thoughts unrevealed ... But the drawing was speaking itself."*

The above alternative ending requires as a condition that creativity is not something that can be taught but something that is inherent in us. After a long time that creativity was completely ignored, it is finally encouraged and comes back in a way that becomes apparent all the pressure that the student had been under. I would like to share some thoughts about this. Is there any probability that repeatedly ignorance of experimental learning and absolute absence of creativity in the classroom do not dissuade students from fostering their creativity? Can creativity be taught? Or is creativity simply a mindset or way of life?

### **Aikaterini Rousou**

*... "If everyone made the same picture and used the same colours, how would I know who made what and which was which?" Then the little boy thought for a little. "So why my previous teacher showed us how to draw flowers, what colours to choose and then she expected from us to draw the same?"*

*The teacher looked at him with a little concern and then she smiled and answered; "Your teacher maybe wanted to show you a way in drawing a flower, but there is no right or wrong way to do that. You are the one who will decide the way to do it. Use your imagination and maybe you will show in the classroom one beautiful way to draw flowers." So the little boy started drawing. He used blue crayons and yellow crayons and then purple crayons and couldn't stop drawing until the school bell rang. It was the only student who was still in class and when he finally finished, he showed in pride his picture to the teacher; "Look! I made a picture of flowers!"*



*His teacher looked at the picture in surprise, she smiled and answered; "Well done my boy! This is a wonderful picture of flowers!"*

### **Commissioning Editor**

Sometimes we recognise affordance in something but when it has been acted upon we are surprised by *how much* affordance has been realised. The story of 'The Little Boy' illustrates this phenomenon well. I clicked on a link that Teryl Cartwright posted and recognised the profound truths in the story. I thought that other participants would engage emotionally and relationally as I had, and the idea of involving them in inventing a new ending came into my mind. Within a few hours the first post had been made and over the next 24 hours 8 participants had contributed their stories some of which carried lovely illustrations. All were making an important point about the way education nurtures or inhibits creativity in children.

There is something very special about a story that engages so many people and encourages them to spend time and creative effort in responding to the stimulus. The simple challenge of inventing a new ending - a better more optimistic version of itself, opened many possibilities.

There is never a single right answer where creativity is concerned, rather there are many possibilities that we must choose from. The responses to this story are a wonderful illustration of the creativity and empathy of teachers.

## A word from the illustrator

### Simon Rae

A word or two about my illustration (albeit aware that such work should stand on its own without need of explanation!). It was obviously done in response to the story of the Little Boy which mirrored uncomfortably the response that I sent to Miss Alexis way back in October - especially the way the school system seemed to stifle the creativity of my three children.

I intended my drawing to show the 'end of week' exhibition of art work in the Little Boy's class. All the children have pinned up their picture, all having been similarly 'taught' to paint flowers the same way. But there always has to be a 'winner' doesn't there? The child who does the best picture and deserves a merit mark or gold star from the teacher. Which is great for the chosen child (white, male, middle-class, image of the teacher?) but discouraging for the others who have all done their best and not been rewarded or encouraged. No wonder so many get turned off creative stuff. And who amongst us has not been in that situation - doing your best to do what teacher (or line manager) says they want and watching someone else get the plaudits for something no different?

Creativity is a special quality that I think we are all born with the potential to develop ... but it can be stifled, checked or crushed all too easily. Alongside encouraging creativity in children it is important to develop their self-awareness and an ability to be self-critical. With those skills children have a better chance of weathering the system's attempts to de-creativise them.

And I understand that 'teaching creativity' is difficult. It is hard to assess creativity in so many subjects. Take maths. Maths can be creative, playing with numbers and finding quantitative relationships between things, but to get to this interesting level you have to be familiar with so much boring stuff. And in the classroom, when you are teaching the basics of simultaneous equations to year 10, how much creativity can you give credit for? The answer is either right or wrong. Do you give a gold star for a colourful presentation? Can you give credit for working

creatively to the wrong answer?

I think my word or two is done. Hope you liked the poppy pictures.

*Acknowledgments: We are grateful to Teryl Cartwright for posting a link during the #creativeHE conversation which liberated the creativity of these participants. We also thank Simon Rae for his thoughtful illustration for the story. It's clearly true, one piece of creativity begets another.*