

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.

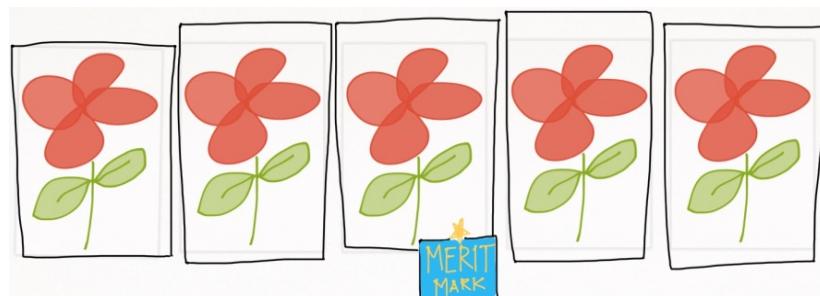
"Now," said
the teacher,
"We are
going to
make
flowers."
"Good!"
thought the
little boy,
He liked to
make
flowers,
And he
began to

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?

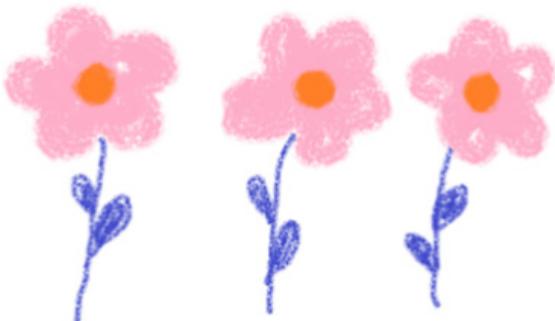
Please share your alternative endings in #creativeHE and we will incorporate them into the magazine

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 it led me 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

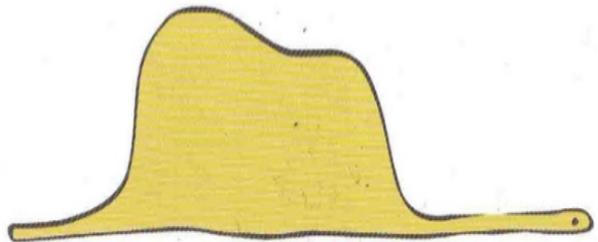
...a great surprise overwhelmed the little boy... he waited patiently for his teacher's instructions, but she didn't do anything, she didn't say anything, she didn't show anything. His inactivity and idleness was growing bigger... he felt that no picture could come to his mind. The teacher was surprised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

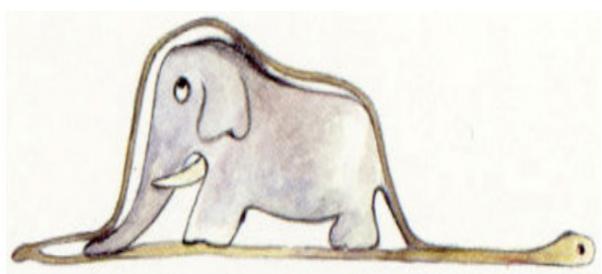
When they entered the classroom, the little boy with the remembrance of the smell and touch of the flowers, he painted an endless meadow full of colourful, various flowers... '

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!"

Olga Broupi

" ...The next day at school, the little boy made a new picture, a red flower with a green stem. The teacher smiled gently and complimented on his drawing. The little boy smiled too.

The next day, the little boy drew another picture, a yellow flower with a green stem, the teacher smiled to him once more and she praised his good work. The little boy smiled as

well.

Day after day, the little boy was drawing colourful flowers with green stems and the teacher always smiled and so did the little boy.

Then one day, the little boy while he was searching in his backpack, he came across his old crayons, his most favourite ones, the pink and orange and blue crayons. This time he drew a green flower with an orange stem, a blue sun, a red garden and a yellow tree! When he offered his drawing to his teacher, she didn't say a word. She just gave him the biggest smile he had ever seen and he, in return, gave her a hug, his warmest hug!



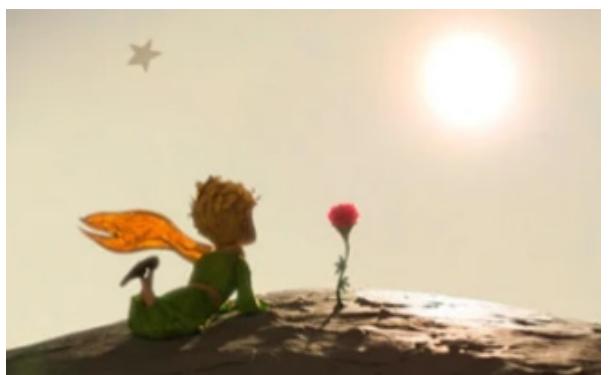
Now his drawings are hanging on his room walls and on his classroom walls and on this teacher's house walls...and soon enough his drawings will be hanging on a gallery and museum walls..." I don' think there is just one way to teach creativity, a bad one or a good one. The most important way to "teach" creativity is by encouragement. Encouragement to question, to search to define and redefine problems, to take risks, to allow mistakes, to identify and overcome obstacles, to collaborate, to identify other viewpoints. We learn to be creative by experimenting, exploring, questioning assumptions, using imagination and synthesising information.

Creativity is not just a useful skill to teach to

students and people but a way of thinking, a way of life. Therefore, a teacher cannot teach creativity unless himself, doesn't think creatively and live creatively. So, teachers should think more carefully about their values, goals, and ideas about creativity and show them in their actions, because let's not forget that they serve as role models for their students.

Elenh Tsikelh

'The little boy anxiously awaited his teacher to show him how to paint a flower. And the teacher turns and says ' I am sure that you have seen a lot of flowers in your life. ' ' Yes of course. (says the little boy) but I am waiting[for you] to show me the one that you want.' And the teacher says, 'My little boy you will find many people in your life who will tell you how to act. But they will show you how to do something because the only know that way. Every person has his/her own reality and you have to learn to respect the other realities but at the same time not to lose your own one. Every time turn inside your soul and do what you think is right. Now listen A FLOWER IS LIKE THE SOUL, IT OPENS UP TO THE SUN. So close your eyes, feel the sunlight and remember the most special memory about a flower that makes you feel unique. And then follow you heart and let your imagination animate [you].' And then the little boy remembered his lost creativity and starts again in the way it used to be.



Vicky-Anneta Tsoufaidou

The days were passing by, and every day, when it was time to paint in the class, the little boy always painted a red flower with a green stem. After a week has passed ,the teacher got into the classroom and said to the children, "Hello to everyone! Today we have a different task in painting. I will give back to you, your first painting and i would like you, to paint something else in it. We will do that every day in this week, and at the end ,we will all have a brand new painting ,with a lot of small or big pictures in it"

Most of the children liked the new idea, but the little boy hesitated and seemed kind of frightened. The teacher saw that and said to the little boy, "It's ok my little boy, you don't have to be afraid. All these days ,you have painted all those beautiful red flowers with green stems. They are really beautiful but don't you think that it is time, for others flowers, or trees, or animals, or suns or moons, or maybe humans , or even children or anything else you like ,to come to your painting? I bet your red flower will appreciate a lot ,some good company. It seems to me kind of lonely and the fact is ,that all your red flowers are in your other paintings and they cannot come along",

The little boy thought about it for a while. He was really bored of all these red flowers with green stems. They reminded him, his previous school ,where he learnt "to wait, to watch and to make things just like the teacher. His new teacher was right! So he said, "I think i can try something different today. Once I liked to paint lions and tigers, chicken and cows, trains and boats" "That's the spirit", said the teacher and the little boy started to paint. Every day the little boy painted something new. At first he painted a tree. Then he painted a big sun. Then he painted some small flowers, not red and not with a green stem. They were small blue flowers, without a stem. At another day he

painted a cow. He liked cows a lot. Everyday his teacher, watched him painting, and she had a big hospitable smile on her face.



And guess what happened next. One day ,when he went back home from school, after walking down the long hall and going down the long steps, he felt tired and fall asleep. He slept for hours and his sleep was deep. While he was sleeping, he had a dream. In his dream , the cow ate the red flower with the green stem!

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-creatify 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.

Commissioning Editor's Reflections

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 this emotionally engaging story. I thought that other participants would feel similar emotions and resonances as I had, and the idea of involving them in inventing a new ending came into my mind as a way of encouraging them to use their creativity.

Within a few hours the first post had been made and over the next 48 hours 9 participants had contributed their stories some of which carried lovely illustrations. Each story provided a different perspective on creativity and made important points about the way education nurtures or inhibits creativity in children. Together, the stories illuminate how the teacher adapts her general ecology for learning and creative achievement in order to accommodate the little boy. In this way the teacher's learning ecology for all, becomes the teacher's ecology that nurtures the individual child.

Natassa and Olympia's alternative endings illustrate this well by showing how the teacher recognised the problem specific to the child and through gentle but purposeful coaxing enabled him to see and appreciate the world differently and use his imagination to perceive new and different affordance in the opportunity to draw that was being provided.

Zogia describes the environment in which the little boy was learning recognising that he will receive feedback from the way his peers are involved in the same task. In her alternative ending the little boy motivated himself to look at the world freshly and see new affordance in the flowers, that in his imagination, danced.

Anastasia also draws attention to imagination and to the sensorial affordances within our ecology for learning and creativity.

Kostas shows how, in our own ecologies for learning and creativity, we gain inspiration from things and incidents that capture our attention

and trigger an emotional relationship. Like the unusual act of a bird flying into the classroom or the story itself

Olympia captures something deeply important in her own story that parallels 'the little boy'. She highlights how critical judgements on the results of creative effort, by significant others, can be quite damaging, as our confidence can be fragile. Many of the posts implicitly or explicitly highlight the need in an ecology for learning and creativity, for spaces that are non-judgemental or at least where feedback is cast in ways that encourage development in positive ways. Spaces where we can safely take creative risks without fear of damaging our fragile confidence. Olga's story shows that such encouragement need not be verbal - it can be embodied in the way a teacher behaves.

Aikaterini and Dora's alternative endings suggest that although a poor ecology for learning and creativity can damage and inhibit personal creativity, education never kills the creative spirit completely. It lies dormant until an opportunity finally presents itself when it can emerge again.

Aikaterini emphasises the importance in a teacher's ecology for learning and creativity of creating an environment where there is no right or wrong way of achieving something only infinite possibilities that individual's must choose from.

Elenh uses the affordance in the challenge confronting this little boy to teach him an important lesson for life. In this way she not only changes the way he thinks and acts when confronted with the challenge of painting a picture, she also teaches him something about the way people are and the way you have to deal with this.

Vicky-Anneta's approach is to reframe the challenge to move beyond the obvious routine of paining a flower to open up the possibility of

paining a whole world and the stories in it. She also used humour to convey meanings about overcoming the impediment to this boy's creativity.

These teacher participants offered so many different ways of engaging with and solving the challenge for this little boy and his teacher. Together, these alternative endings provide important lessons for the ecologies teachers can create to enable their students to fulfil their creative potential through the affordances they create in and outside their classrooms.

Why?

I invited participants to explain why the story and creativity challenge were so effective in engaging participants. *Vicky-Anneta Tsoulfaidou* captured this very well in her response.

'In my opinion, the challenge of giving an alternative ending to the story of the little boy, was very interesting. We were given a chance to end a story, differently and in an optimistic way. Personally this aroused my interest and provoked me [into] using my imagination. The story itself was simple but [indicated], in a very nice way, how the little boys creativity was suppressed by his first teacher.'

I think that most of us , were engaged creatively in this activity, because it gave us freedom to express our own thoughts and imagination. There weren't any strict rules about what is considered to be right or wrong. We weren't at any time critisized. Additionally, the activity was not obligatory. Anyone could participate or not, and there wasn't a strict deadline. We are all in some way involved in education, so this story of the little boy, touched our hearts and made us to want to help it. So the activity was purposeful and had a meaning. It also didn't required specialized knowledge, everybody could participate in it. And it was an amusing activity. When creating and reaching the optimistic end

*of the story, someone feels happy and fulfilled.
It's nice to give happy endings and to give
solutions.*

*To sum up, some things engage us more
creatively than others, because:
~they are interesting (this can depend of our
own interests)
~they trigger our imagination
~they do not set limits to our thoughts
~they are purposeful and have a meaning
~they are amusing, they make us feel good
~there are no rights or wrongs
~they have symbolisms related to everyday life
~they are problem-solving (they give solutions)
~they develop in free and nourishing ecologies.
~they do not require special knowledge'*

This analysis relates well to the idea of a pedagogy for creativity and the sorts of challenges that need to be incorporated into a teacher's ecology for learning and creativity. The list of reasons reminds us of just how complex our own motives are for engaging or not engaging with an affordance that offers the possibility of creative thinking and action. Conversely, they also reveal why we are not able or willing to engage if these sorts of conditions are missing. I particularly liked the way that Vicky-Anneta's response captured the idea that creativity involves an integration of emotions, imaginative ideas and more rational thoughts which individual's blend to create new meaning and feelings of happiness and fulfilment. For myself, I have been reminded that 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. It teaches me that my creativity as a teacher is to try to search for, find or invent affordances that like this, capture the imagination and stimulate the creative will of participants.

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 the teachers who participated in the #creativeHE conversation. **I think the collective contributions that are summarised here, demonstrate so well the ways in which creativity emerges from an ecology for learning and creativity in action.**

Acknowledgments: *I am grateful to all the participants who used their creativity to share their imaginative endings to The Little Boy story. It has been an inspiring experience to witness your ingenuity.*

Thank you also Teryl Cartwright for posting a link to The Little Boy story during the #creativeHE conversation which liberated the creativity of these participants.

Also thank you to Simon Rea for your thoughtful illustration. It's clearly true, one piece of creativity begets another.

*Norman Jackson
Creative Academic Magazine
Commissioning Editor*