Imagining Classrooms

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Mr Robertson is reading the spelling test, inventing a sentence to give context to each word. All are words that incorporate the ‘ph’ sound: dolphin, metaphor, graph, photo. Mr Robertson pretends the heavy accent of an Asian tourist, ‘can I take your photo?’ There is a rustle in the room as children look up, smiling. Mr Robertson turns to me, sitting at his desk with my notebook. He asks rhetorically, ‘That was a bit racist, wasn’t it?’ I smile back. He turns back to the class and apologises. ‘I wasn’t putting down people with strong accents’, he says.

They near the end of the test, and Grant puts up his hand and tells the class a funny story about how his little sister is always trying to get him into trouble. ‘Do I promote chatting?’ Mr Robertson asks me. It doesn’t seem to worry him, for he continues, ‘I don’t want to be boring’ (Independent School, author field notes, 20 April 2007).

Mr Robertson is seen above to favour a style of teaching as a humorous performance. For his students he wants to display – and to model – the imagination of the entertainer. As the children laugh about his contextualisation of ‘photo’, he succeeds in transforming the list of spelling words into a comedy. Making Asian tourists into objects of fun, he himself becomes a ‘person of fun’. Transforming the process of testing spelling, he finds he has also made the classroom into a scene for similar comic performances. These are
bodily routines of imagination as performing for laughs. This requires imagination as creativity: the theme of this chapter. Throughout I will be arguing that imagination as creativity means performing transformations of self and other objects. I will illustrate this idea with examples taken from art and dramatic performance. To succeed, these performances need certain requirements, laid down by school, context, or materials worked with. Predominant among these requirements is discipline. Bodies and minds need to be disciplined in particular ways for creativity to succeed – or at least this is how imagination as creativity is practised in these primary schools.

I begin this chapter by looking at imagination as a creative performance, in particular one that should be humorous. We see this occur in a classroom at Independent School, and I go on to argue that certain features of this school explain the dominance there of this mode of imagination. In particular, I suggest that parental expectations that their children be transformed into ‘self-actualising’ individuals lead to a focus on ensuring that children appear to be creative individuals. Imagination at this school is used to solve a private problem: how to be a successful individual. To be successful at creative tasks requires that one also be technically skilful and disciplined. I show this through an examination of imagination as the creative transformation of self and objects, especially in art classes. This chapter then is about imagination practised as careful and creative performances that transform selves and objects.

**Imagination as Creative Performance: The ‘Imagineer’**

Mr Robertson started his teaching career in the art room, having worked professionally as a potter before retraining to teach. He has now acted as the classroom teacher for various grades for more than fifteen years, all at this school. Mr Robertson describes himself as an ‘imagineer’, a term he borrows, or perhaps coins, to refer to the engineering of imagination. In thus explaining his teaching style and priorities, he suggests that he has the skill to engineer (to plan, oversee, or design) the imagination of children in his class. Imagination is a technical achievement. For Mr Robertson, imagination is, as he says, ‘a good skill.’ It is a particular talent, not associated with intelligence more broadly. ‘Some children
have it, but some children don’t. Doesn’t mean they’re not intelligent or capable’ (Independent School, author interview with teacher, 17 April 2007).

Teachers all around the school tell me that Mr Robertson is an imaginative teacher and expert at getting his children to do imaginative things. Their performances at school assemblies are mentioned in particular. Imagination, then, is a skill that Mr Robertson is considered to have himself as well as one he works to achieve in his children. The way ‘imagination’ is mobilised here is as skill in making products, whether these are imaginative children (Mr Robertson’s job), or imaginative art works or drama pieces (children’s jobs). In each of these cases, what is important is showing oneself as an imaginative person, noticeable as such because of the products or performances one crafts.

To be imaginative in this very particular way is to be successful in Mr Robertson’s classroom. We see this in his interventions with a child who is deemed ‘not imaginative’. Peter is often in trouble for being disruptive, not finishing work, and for being a ‘know it all’, especially about science and maths. He is not popular with the other children; at lunchtime he plays alone or goes to the library. Mr Robertson has worked to help this boy become more popular with his classmates by encouraging him to be more humorous. Mr Robertson’s intent seems to be to help Peter transform himself and his role in the class by becoming a conscious entertainer. One morning, for example, Mr Robertson reads out the class’s list of overdue library books. Peter is listed as having Playschool (a TV show for preschool children) still issued in his name. Mr Robertson reads this out, and the class starts to laugh. Peter whines, ‘But I don’t have it’, and the class laughs some more. Mr Robertson addresses Peter. ‘If you could learn to say,’ he says, throwing his arms wide and singing the theme of the children’s television show, ‘open the door, it’s playschool’. Mr Robertson goes on, ‘if you could learn to say that then everyone would laugh with you. You’ve got to learn to diffuse the situation’. He begins to tell the class about what he did as a child when his brothers called him ‘horse’: he began neighing and pretending to gallop (Independent School, author field notes, 18 April 2007). Mr Robertson is advocating, and modelling, the self-transformation that should help Peter. Peter’s role in the class will be transformed when he shows a creative imagination expressed as humorous performance in order to entertain the class. Mr
Robertson is trying, very explicitly, to be an imagineer by making Peter into an imaginative, humorous entertainer.

In this view, then, imagination is a creative performance. It is a performance that transforms the self into a creative self. Along the way, other objects may be transformed also. Let us explore this a little further.

**Performing Imagination: Role-plays**

Role-plays are a technique used often with this class by Mr Robertson and by the various specialist teachers who work with them. By ‘role-play’ I mean the division of the class into small groups to discuss, develop, and perform a short play around a particular topic. Role-plays are intended to help children gain skills in group work, and in the planning and communication of ideas. What we see them gain also are the skills of planned and impromptu humour. In each episode of role-playing, we find children informally competing to get the biggest laugh out of their classmates and their teacher.

Humour is creative – children find ways to make contexts or ideas collide in unexpected or incongruous ways. Imagination is necessary here for making new links. But they are creative in a second sense too, as children compete to make themselves into the characters they play, and more, as many work to make themselves into the class clown. Creativity transforms the object it is performed through, even if that object is the creator. Role-plays, then, should be understood as a teaching technique that develops imaginative skills in connecting and transforming selves. In being humorous, and with teachers’ active encouragement, children link ideas and transform their fictive and social roles. They make themselves into and show themselves to be creative individuals.

**An example:**

Mr Taylor, the physical education and health teacher, is taking a class about how to ask people not to smoke nearby. He splits the class into groups and gives each a scenario – someone smoking in a car; a public place; a home; in a friend group. The children begin to discuss and perform ideas in their groups. As they do so, I talk with Mr Taylor about the popularity of the
smoker role. We watch children fall to the floor in performances of exaggerated death. After spending time to decide what to present, the groups take turns. As each group performs, the laughter becomes louder and more frequent and the ‘badness’ of the ‘smoker’ (arguably) more marked. In the first, the smoker is also drinking and driving. In the second, the smoker forces a cigarette into the mouth of another customer at the pub. In the third, the smoker is a pregnant woman played by a boy, who spends the skit yelling at her child. In the final role-play, approval of smoking is performed by ‘the devil’ as a boy tries to decide whether to accept a cigarette from his friend (who dies loudly as soon as the offer has been made). Soon the devil dies too – having smoked not cigarettes but TNT. Across all these performances as the badness of smokers gradually escalates, class laughter increases, creating a feedback system encouraging students towards more humour. It is an unspoken competition: who can be the funniest and most creative, especially in the role of the smoker. Mr Taylor does not resist this trend, laughing as well but occasionally suggesting other, more restrained, ways to resolve the scenarios (Independent School, author field notes, 26 March 2007).

It is the same in the other role-plays I see performed at this school. These are numerous, occurring in library class, religious education, and in literacy classes with Mr Robertson. In all, it is the presentation of the humorous, imaginative self that is being achieved just as much as the presentation of the ideas the lesson is supposedly about.

This is not only true for Mr Robertson’s grade four class. Rather, we see these performances validated by the school as a whole. Every Friday afternoon the school assembles in the large music room. This is a time for celebrating the achievement of students within and beyond the school. It is also a time for classes to perform for each other. Each week a class ‘leads’ the assembly, and their productions are designed to entertain. For example, a grade three class performs a published play called ‘Mixed Up Rhymes’. They make most of the school laugh, children and adults alike. After the play is finished, they quiz the teachers on their knowledge of nursery rhymes, with child questioner and teacher respondent competing for laughs. ‘Why did Humpty Dumpty break, Mr Wilsdon?’ Mr
Wilsdon replies quickly and as if the answer is obvious, ‘because he fell off the wall.’ Droll, his child questioner adds, ‘and because he was made out of eggs’. Mr Wilsdon and the audience laugh (Independent School, author field notes, 29 March 2007). The next week, the grade six class copy this assembly format, thereby acknowledging its success.

Independent School is not the only school to use humorous role-plays, but it is alone in employing them so frequently and with so little content beyond the presentation of children as humorous. At Catholic School, for example, a grade three/four class performs at assembly a humorous role-play they wrote themselves. Because it is nearly Father’s Day, the children act out the relationship Jesus might have had with his father if both had been modern Australian ‘blokes’. This too succeeds in making the audience laugh, but it is rich also in ideas. These are picked up and extended by the priest, who follows up the links made between Father’s Day and God the Father. The children are encouraged here to understand the play’s success as due to its treatment of serious issues, albeit in a humorous way (Catholic School, author field notes, 31 August).

So what is it about Independent School that makes role-plays so common? What can we discern about what it means to be successfully imaginative here? Answering this question will require a reminder that the meaning of ‘creativity’ and its relationship to ‘imagination’ vary cross-culturally and historically.

IMAGINATION AS TRANSFORMATIVE:
AUSTRALIA’S INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Mr Robertson teaches his class at an Anglican independent school, which, in Australia, means a private or fee-paying school. Fees are high here, restricting access to the children of wealthy homes. This allows class size to be kept low, and ensures that there are many active specialist programmes, including in the arts, sports, and technology. Why do parents choose to pay the high fees? What does the school promise and what do parents believe their children gain?

An independent market research study conducted in 1998 for the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria gives us some answers. By conducting and analysing twelve group discussions held around Australia, the authors of ‘What
Parents Want from their Children’s Education in Independent Schools’ sought to answer their title in ways that would help independent schools design messages and media to attract client-parents.

The report’s authors, Irving Saulwick and Denis Muller, concluded that despite diversity in socio-economic status and ethnicity, parents who choose independent schools share many aspirations for their children that go well beyond the economic. They point out that though this does not rule out ‘traditional’ interest in the ‘three R’s’, in information-rich lessons, or discipline, the desires of parents now are quite different from those of the past. They report that most parents were members of the Australian middle class.

They had imbibed its values. They were products of the post-industrial society. They, perhaps more than their own parents, had been brought up in a time when personal fulfilment was paramount, when self-actualisation, self-knowledge, self-development were seen as desirable and attainable goals. If this path led to a prosperous life, so much the better. But if it did not (and few imagined that it would lead to poverty) then for many the richness of personal fulfilment was to be preferred to the sterile life of economic security without joy (Saulwick and Muller, 2007: 3).

These findings are openly reflected in the prospectus handed out to parents upon visiting the school, at stalls at a schools exhibition and on the Internet. The prospectus for Independent School is a fourteen-page A4 book printed on thick glossy paper. Throughout there are photos of children wearing neat uniforms: for the girls pale blue dresses with Peter Pan collars, and for the boys white shirts, dark shorts, and pulled-up socks. Both girls and boys have the school crest on the left breast pocket. The children are shown playing games, playing sport, and playing music, or standing in groups. Always they are smiling (Gregory, undated). This booklet has been put up on the Internet, with software that lets you turn the pages with the cursor (Gregory 2007).

Handed out with the booklet was a DVD presenting life at the school under the headings ‘Kinder’ (as in kindergarten), ‘Special Friends Day’, ‘Swimming’, ‘LOTE (Languages Other Than English) Day’, ‘Athletics’, ‘Chapel’, ‘Art’, ‘Music
Live’, and ‘Camp’. Over all scenes plays a medley of pop music, and what little speech there is comes from children. This mainly concerns why they like the school or explanations of what they are doing in the particular task filmed. In all, as they show work to grandparents, perform in orchestra and choir, present their art to the camera, or run in sack races, children are shown having serious fun. They are neat, polite, and above all, able to present themselves as cheerful, cute, and well behaved (Glowworm productions, undated). They perform themselves as having been transformed by the school into creative, happy, and disciplined individuals.

Mr Robertson and the other teachers at this school have a dual challenge. They must teach the children the knowledge and skills expected by parents and state; and they must ensure that the children become, and show themselves to have become, self-actualising, and personally fulfilled. They must be evidently happy, active individuals, and always in the process of becoming even more so, of reaching towards their potential. They are to do this by performing a particular version of imagination as creativity.

**CREATIVEITY**

*Creativity and Re-Imagining Imagination*

Creativity and imagination are closely related concepts. This has been repeatedly brought to my attention as people refer to children’s art and craft when I tell them that I am studying imagination at primary school: *imagination is creativity is art*, the logic seems to run. But the exact nature of their relationship is not only hard to pin down; it is also ever-changing. Questions we need to ask are multiple, and referred to tangentially below. They include: should we speak of people as imaginative and products creative? (Briskman 1981). Or can people sensibly be referred to as creative? If so, does a person become more ‘creative’ as they make creative things? (Krausz 1981). What should a teacher’s role be – to teach children the technical skills they need to make creative products or to teach a process of creativity itself? (Khatena 1999; Sak 2004). Should teachers assess the ‘creativity’ or ‘imagination’ of their students, and if so, how? (Feldman 1994; Ward 2004).
Answers to these questions vary across places and times. As has been shown in Kaufman and Sternberg’s 2006 edited volume *The International Handbook of Creativity*, definitions of what creativity is and how important it should be for knowledge, technology, and the nation-state vary from culture to culture. Variations appear to be caused by diverse factors, such as whether individualism or collective forms of life are considered more natural; whether people are encouraged to aim for the new or continue to follow tradition; how challenge is regarded; and what value is put on education. These cultural factors underpin systems of education as well as the economic systems in which new creative products are deemed valuable (Stenberg 2006). Understanding the relation between imagination and creativity, and the relative and absolute values placed upon each, requires an understanding of a culture and its systemic forms of life.

We also need to recognise that these values change over time. With them change definitions of imagination and creativity as concepts relative to each other and absolute. Meyer Abrams made this point in his 1953 *The Mirror and the Lamp*. In this study of literary creativity, he argued that whereas imagination in the classical and early modern era was spoken of as the reflection of another reality, the mark of the Romantic era was the transformation of imagination to mean the generation of light into the mysteries of human emotion. New forms of creative writing were produced; for example, those of Wordsworth and Coleridge that have been understood as turning points in the modern imagination (Warnock 1976; White 1990). Richard Kearney, adding to this model in 1991, suggested that modern and post-modern imagination could best be likened to a ‘labyrinth of looking glasses’, the creation, refraction, and illusion of multiple, self-referential objects (Pope 2005: 14–17).

**Creativity and Becoming**

While imagination and creativity are distinct and varying, both imagination and creativity can be usefully understood as processes of transformation. This can be the transformation of ideas, materials, or selves.

In 1967, Arthur Koestler first published a paper entitled ‘The Three Domains of Creativity’ in which he tried to establish that creative thinking in scientific
discovery, artistic originality, and comic inspiration were part of one underlying system. What all have in common, for Koestler, was that all are ways of joining pieces of previously known information in new ways. All are new ways of performing information in the mind and in the world. They are moments of epiphany marked by verbal and physical responses. Scientific discovery he describes as the merging of two or more pieces of information or forms of logic previously kept separate. Humour, by contrast, is the collision of information or logic systems. As Koestler put it, ‘Comic discovery is paradox stated – scientific discovery is paradox resolved’ (Koestler 1981: 3). Artistic originality completes the continuum, with the sublime artist successfully juxtaposing pieces of information or logic, creating a work that transcends the meaning of either lone piece.

Koestler’s piece is just as much about the effects these forms of creativity have on those who experience them as either creator or observer: reactions that he calls Aha (for science), haha (for humour), and ah (for art). ‘The Haha reaction signals the collision of bisociated contexts; the Aha reaction signals their fusion; and the Ah reaction signals their juxtaposition’ (Koestler 1981:10). Different creative combinations of information or logic can produce involuntary responses ranging from surprised laughter, through the shout ‘eureka’, to self-transcending sighs of appreciation.

Such an elegant system is obviously reductive, bringing the complexity of creative moments and the multiplicity of types of creativity into a typology referring to one common feature – that each is a way of combining. The materiality of this transforming imagination is obvious in the case of art, where an artist combines materials to create new pieces. Writers likewise transform by combining, although their material is language. Both seek to express new meanings through their combinations (see also Vygotsky (1930): 2004: 7–97).

This capacity is not limited to artists, but can be generalised to all humans as they speak. This is the argument that Ronald Carter makes, claiming that all people display creativity as they engage in talk: ‘[L]inguistic creativity is not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of all people.’ Throughout his book, Language and Creativity: The Art of Common Talk, Carter uses extended extracts of conversation to show how individual and group identity is extended and transformed as topics and word patterns,
and meanings are passed around speakers. By using language, people transform their relationships, and those speakers are, likewise, transformed (Carter 2004).

**Creativity as Extension**

We have seen that Independent School promises parents that their children will be transformed by their time here into self-actualising and fulfilled children. This will be achieved, in large part, by ensuring that the children are able to perform themselves as creative individuals who are able to transform the world (albeit in small ways). Children must be seen to be happily creative. This is achieved through humorous performances of the self, as we have seen. Another key site for showing oneself to be creative is the art room. But there is a challenge: how to balance the creative impulse with the need for technical skill. This we will turn to soon with the concept of the disciplined creative imagination, but first let us think a little about the relationship between creativity and developing the potential self. For this, we turn to two thinkers on art.

Philosopher Michael Krausz and anthropologist Alfred Gell had a similar interest in the relationship between art and the development of selves. For both, the closeness of this relationship calls into fundamental question the dualism of subject and object. For both, artistic creativity is a process of becoming more than a subject, more than oneself.

For Krausz this insight comes from his own experience of making art, particularly the moments of what he calls ‘at-one-ness’ with the work being crafted (Krausz 1981:195). This indicates to him that the process of making art is a process of transcending the self, of being joined somehow to the art object. The transformation of the self is not incidental here, but fundamental to art itself. He says, ‘if one circumscribes as one’s artwork the production of art objects and one’s self-development in a mutually enriching complex, then the objectivist rejection of subjective considerations as part and parcel of a work of art cannot be maintained’ (Krausz 1981: 191). By making art one transforms oneself.

For Gell too, art enables becoming more than the self in a process he describes as ‘extended agency’. To make this argument, Gell distinguishes between primary (or intentional) agents and secondary agents. If primary agents are people
or things that can intentionally cause events, then secondary agents are those persons or objects through which agency is conducted. The power and reach of one’s agency can be extended via art objects, again making the process of creativity a process of becoming bigger than the self. He makes this argument through reference to examples gathered during a life of anthropological research (Gell 1998).

So for both Krausz and Gell, art is the concretisation of one’s body-transcendent self in the art object. Those objects might then exert some power in the world. With the practice of the creative imagination, humans might transform their subject positions to actualise their potential to be more than they were. In theory, artistic creativity is transformative of the self.

But what about in practice? We might expect that art classes are an ideal place to see the transformative element of creative imagination in action. However, what we learn by looking at art classes is that other skills must be laid down first. Art classes give us a glimpse of teachers resisting the creative imagination in favour of the skills they take to be necessary for its later expression. Revealed is a set of necessary conditions for the achievement of creative imagination in art classes, where technical skill is seen as more important than, and a basis for, creative work. This is about disciplined control over transformations of self and object.

**DISCIPLINED SELVES, CREATIVE SELVES**

Art is always some combination of technical skill and creativity. The technical is inherent in it being an embodied and usually materially mediated activity, while the creative is part of art by definition – what is only technical would not be called properly artistic. These two sides of art, the technical and creative, map onto two ways of thinking about imagination. Imagining in art takes on two meanings, one relating to the skill of visualising objects and the other relating to creativity. So the question in this section becomes: how do teachers in their particular school context balance technical and creative skills? The answers, we will find, all involve a new figure – the disciplined imagination. This is necessary for the creative transformation of materials to succeed.

Again, we start with Independent School.
I think that Mr Jarvis, the art teacher, has made a joke and I laugh. He’s just said, ‘imagination? I try to stamp it out of them.’ I realise he wasn’t joking later that day when Mr Robertson’s class has art. Mr Jarvis explains to them that their next project is self-portraits, and he shows some prints by famous artists. Their own self-portraits will be marked on two criteria; how smooth the colour change is in their shading, and how accurately they have the proportions according to a formula he teaches in stages throughout class time. By taking this lesson seriously, he tells them, they will find that they master the difficult skills of art, and these are not imaginative. ‘Making things up is too easy. Sometimes to be a good artist you have to know how to copy’ (Independent School, author field notes, 27 March 2007).

For this art teacher, the drive towards developing technical skills makes unnecessary even imagination as visualising objects. Copying correctly is a source of skill and of ideas.

Mr Jarvis also runs an art club one lunchtime per week. Too many children wanted to attend than could be accommodated, so classroom teachers choose children on the grounds of their skill, the number of other extra-curricular activities taken, and whether it would be ‘good’ for them in a psychological sense. For various reasons these are children deemed to need more opportunities for self-actualisation and personal fulfilment. In art club, they are to draw animals, gradually developing ideas through the term before painting a canvas to take home. Mr Jarvis instructs them to bring a picture the following week of the animal they want to draw. One girl asks, ‘does it have to be a real animal?’ and suggests a unicorn. She is told that would be fine so long as she has a picture of a unicorn to copy: ‘It can’t be an animal just in your head because we need things to draw’ (Independent School, author field notes, 16 April 2007). Ideas for these art classes should not come from minds, but from the trial and error of increasingly skilled hands as they physically copy real pictures.

Disciplined technical skill is seen here to be a necessary condition for creativity in art. But discipline is important in ensuring the success of creative imagination more generally. The disciplining of bodies and minds is necessary for the transformation of selves into creative selves.
Mrs Rich comes back after the class has spent an hour with a relief teacher, and finds them unsettled. She asks them to close their books and their eyes, and ‘think of something you find peaceful […] Let’s think about the things we think of when I say the word “peace”.’ She gives them ideas – a peaceful place in the playground, people in our class, or in their family, who make them feel peaceful. The class becomes calm and Mrs Rich begins her next lesson (Catholic School, author field notes, 10 September 2007).

What Mrs Rich does is transform minds into spaces of peace so that the behaviours of bodies, vocal chords, and thinking minds might change.

Without some discipline, creative tasks do not succeed. Whereas Cropley argues that teachers discipline children to discourage the personality traits linked with creativity (such as impulsiveness, non-conformity and disorganisation) (1992: 18–19), I suggest that teachers discipline to make creative moments possible (see also Sak 2004).

Certain ways of disciplining minds and bodies are required by teachers for the production of imaginative moods. This can mean the type of discipline required for classroom management. The room must be filled with a reasonable quantity of sound. Teachers will often insist on silence while creative work is being done. Government School teacher Justine expresses this when she claps her hands for attention while her class write creative stories. She asks the class, ‘what do writers need?’ and answers herself: ‘special uninterrupted quiet’ (Government School, author field notes, 21 May 2007). Here the quiet Justine insists on is to have a ‘special’ aspect to it, in keeping with the special nature of creative work. This quiet is necessary to let minds become poised on the cusp of creative thought, and to sometimes slip over.

Minds are to be disciplined into imaginative moods not only with silence but also with particular sounds. Music is regarded as powerful in this regard. The art teacher at Government School always plays classical music before starting her classes, because, as Bridget reminds the class when asked, ‘it takes our brains to the creative side’. When the Mozart piece is finished the teacher asks
Sally to identify someone who ‘was being very relaxed but also very tuned in.’ She suggests to her class that concentrated relaxation is the ideal bodily state for imagination and creativity (Government School, author field notes, 24 May 2007).

The disciplining of bodies and sounds together also produces creative moods. With silence and stillness, imaginative moods are made possible. This becomes palpable during Mrs Rich’s Friday afternoon drama class, the last class of the week and a time for relaxation, imagination, and fun. However, this is not to come at the expense of discipline, but rather requires discipline. During one drama session, the class plays a game in which they have to picture a scene in their heads they can photograph. When chosen, they move other children into the positions required. Those children are not to move from their positions, making the group into a still ‘photo’. Mrs Rich demonstrates, moving children into a pose. There are giggles and distraction, and she warns, ‘Drama is a time for fun; it’s not a time for silliness. I think we’ll stop’. After a pause for children to show they are quiet, she completes the scene, mimes taking a photo, and lets the children guess what the scene shows – a wedding. Now it is the children’s turn and they are to position people without speaking (Catholic School, author field notes, 31 August 2007). Click, and an imaginary photo of children transformed.

**CONCLUSION: SPINNING A GOOD YARN**

Mr Robertson says that the art of teaching is ‘spinning a good yarn’. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to argue the significance of the yarns he spins are, partly, that they enable Mr Robertson to present imagination as a particular type of skill. This skill is amenable to ‘engineering’, as Mr Robertson puts it. In his manner of telling stories, he models the ability of imagination to transform oneself into an entertaining performer. Children practise these skills as they perform humorous role-plays in class and assembly times. These various performances not only show the creative skill of linking information but also as transforming self and world.

But creative transformations are not straightforward, and nor do they occur necessarily in the places we would expect. Discipline and the development of
technical skill are necessary conditions for a creative imagination to be successfully engineered. Teachers work hard to balance imagination and discipline during art and drama classes. By keeping such discipline, teachers help their children to become capable of art and performances that better embody their imaginative ideas. Disciplined minds and bodies, as well as imaginative ones, are necessary for the achievement of creative moments. It takes a combination of imagination and control to make the creative links that successfully transform selves and objects, that extend agency, and that call up the moments of aha, haha, and ah.