Hope: A Silent Music

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Abstract

In this paper I will be examining the phenomenon called Hope and its effects on my lived experience. The naming of Hope and its philosophy begins with Plato and Socrates, through to Thomas Aquinas, on to Gabriel Marcel, Ernest Bloch, Josef Pieper and others. These philosophers, particularly Pieper, make a distinction between 'ordinary hope' (espoir) and 'fundamental hope' (esperance), and discuss the other factors (trust, love and faith), that coalesce to allow hope to manifest.

A discussion of Hope impinges on religious and secular discourses, but my focus is the particular experiences of Hope in education and to my own teaching practice at this moment in time. I will argue that Hope is the' silent music' of society; unable to be heard by the ear, only listened to with the mind and felt with the heart. I would also posit that due to current societal factors in Western democracies, Hope is being backgrounded while its opposites, Despair and Fear, are being foregrounded and that this has an impact on our societal discourse, particularly children and young people.

Listening for the Music

Hope exists in a state of flux that is open to all possibility. Josef Pieper called this state "not-yet-being" (2003, p.26) and this ontological stance formed the basis of his many writings on Hope in the early to mid twentieth century. Hope, like its opposite Despair, only comes to each of us through another human being. Gabriel Marcel affirms;

> *"Hope can exist only as an active struggle against despair...there can strictly speaking be no hope except where the temptation to despair exists. Hope is the act by which this temptation is actively or vicariously overcome." (**Structure de l'esperance, p.73, cited in Schumacher 2003, p.123.**)*

Marcel refers above to what can be termed 'fundamental hope', or to use the French *esperance*. Human beings hope for a thousand things in the course of their daily lives, but *esperance* underlies these 'ordinary hopes', or *espoir*. The object, or desire, of *espoir* constantly takes on new forms according to the time, the place and the circumstances an individual finds themselves in. *Esperance* is not rooted in temporality, but is about the evolution of the Self, the ontology of not-yet-being, and the salvation of the person. 'Salvation' is a word which has long had religious connotations, but in the context of Pieper's writings it means "the complete satisfaction and fulfilment of the person" (2003, p.115). I am reminded of another related word; 'salve', an old word for an ointment or unguent applied to wounds to soothe and heal them. *Esperance* could be described, then, as balm for a wounded soul. Pieper refers to *Esperance* as a 'gift' (ibid) and links it to the theological virtue. My lived experience is an example; my determined hopefulness acted as a 'salve' to my grandmother's equally determined pessimism, and *esperance* became my gift.

My grandmother was a fabulous cook and dressmaker; she once made me a fancy dress costume from a picture in a book, perfect in every detail. Her name was Joan. Joan may nowadays be diagnosed as 'bi-polar', but in the early fifties there was no such diagnosis available to someone who never visited a doctor. The notion of 'Hope' for Joan was an act of will, refusing always to give in to the temptation to despair, although as she aged a melancholic tendency to focus on the past; the regrets, sadnesses, slights (whether real or imagined) and the people she had lost became more manifest.

She loved risqué jokes and clever puns, and this became my way of lifting her from the doldrums. Joan only made one attempt to ameliorate her behaviour; she took antidepressants for a week, but stopped because "they made me think everything was good when it isn't". She hated having her mental faculties impaired by any form of drug – she very rarely took aspirin. During her long battle with bowel and then liver cancer, she refused to take any drugs for pain relief until ten days before she died. By then, her eyes were glassy with pain, but she still smiled at the risqué joke I told her.

Although often pessimistic and looking only toward the past, Joan never gave way to utter despair, and in a perverse way this made me the most hopeful person in my family. Despair was always the invisible elephant in the room but I chose to speak to Joan using only the language of humour and love, so we actively struggled against it, until by the end of her life the temptation had been overcome, not only by her but by me as well, at least for a time. Our relationship illustrates the important forward-looking stance that a hopeful individual must take; it is our connection to the future that helps us to be hopeful.

Solo Melody: Hearing the first notes

My posture, my choice to foreground Hope within my Self rather than Despair had its beginnings in my relationship with Joan, but not long after Joan's death my choice became much more purposeful.

My sister Tracey was born nearly ten years after me, and she is doubly precious because I love her both as a sister and as my own child. Our relationship has always been characterised by pure joy and love, without the attendant pressures of expectation and discipline. She was a delightfully happy and uncomplaining child, musically gifted, who developed many friendships with other children throughout her school life. The change within her was slow and insidious, and at first I did not place any credence in the idea that something fundamental was occurring, until one day my mother telephoned to say that Tracey could not get out of bed. I found her curled up in a ball, her lustrous hair hiding a face wet with tears. "I can't stop crying", she whimpered miserably. We managed to cajole her from her bed on that occasion and she eventually consulted a GP who diagnosed depression and prescribed antidepressants. In the ten years since then, I have read that late adolescence is a common time for depression to manifest, but at the time my mother and I were bewildered by the change in the girl we loved.

At about the time of her first diagnosis, Tracey met and made some new friends who were all committed Christians. Most importantly for her, they were all unfailingly *happy*, providing a 'buffer zone' of zest that demanded nothing in return. Tracey was allowed to bask in their unconditional hopeful religious warmth and after a time she found her way out of dark despair. The group held regular bible readings and discussed various scriptures, most particularly the letters of St. Paul. Tracey found solace in these letters, and they provided me with a different articulation for my personal choice to foreground Hope.

It was Paul, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, who developed the three Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. On every level, Paul's story is dramatic – a Roman centurion who is known for his persecution of Christians suddenly begins to espouse values that are totally incompatible with his former life after an experience that has been described by some as a conversation with Jesus and others as an epileptic fit. In religious language it is described as an 'epiphany'. An epiphany is a moment of stillness and clarity, of sudden and great revelation. Events, and on occasions our behaviour, are revealed to us in a new and confronting way. Another definition of an epiphany is given by Pieper, who believes that deceptive conditions lead to the illusion that material wealth is absolutely necessary, and that fundamental hope is allowed to enter 'like a gift' (ibid) thereby disabusing this notion and allowing the individual spirit to transcend the material world and become "*aware that the complete fulfilment of his person does not lie in external things, in the metaphysics of having, but in the metaphysics of being." (2003, p.121)*

This could be what happened to Paul, figuratively speaking, on the road; he allowed Hope to enter his consciousness and was forever changed. Paul extended change from within himself outward to the Early Christian Church, and centuries later Thomas Aquinas provided a similar impetus. His work *Summa Theologica* extends and elaborates upon Pauline ethics, turning Paul's 'cardinal virtues', given from God, into human 'passions'. Aquinas couples Hope with Despair, and describes Hope as a passion "before a difficult-to-obtain, future, and possible good." (ibid). 'Hope' is a special case here. In Aquinas' writings, its object is twofold: first, the future good that one desires and, second, the help by which one expects to attain it. As one would expect, God is the object of hope in Aquinas' philosophy. Moreover, because hope in Aquinas' schema is ultimately only realizable through divine means, it requires a modicum of humility on the part of those that practise it.

David Hume agrees with Aquinas in situating hope in the category of passion, but he differs in his representation of hope's opposite; not despair, but fear. While Hume calls these faculties 'opposites' they are closely linked insofar as they are an admixture of joy and suffering directed toward an uncertain object. Ernest Bloch, on the other hand, offers hope as a remedy for the fear felt by man about his circumstances. Bloch links with Pieper's ontological state of not-yet-being, calling it 'hunger'. For Bloch, hunger is the symbol and source of hope and also the driving force of human nature. Marcel echoes Pieper and Aquinas in describing hope as a 'gift' which we can respond to or reject, just as we can love. Humans can also deny and degrade both hope and love. Naming hope as a gift implies gratitude on the part of the receiver, and is therefore linked to the Christian concept of 'the grace of God'. Perhaps these terms, grace and hope, are in reality interchangeable; a clergyman would probably suggest they are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Yet Hope cannot be easily pigeonholed; it exists in a space between desire and faith, trust and love, yet hope encompasses all the above, just as they encompass it.

Dissonance and Discord: Competing Voices

Hope is described above as a virtue, but what does this word really mean to us living in the third millennium? Where does society place virtue in uncertain times? Disillusion seems to characterise the early twenty-first century, after a nineteenth century that naively placed its hope in progress. Although the technological advances, particularly since World War 2, have been enormous, despair is a canker in the core of society. Neil Postman argues that these advances have "amused us into indifference" (1986, p.111) and that we have adjusted to the incoherence of mass media advertising and programming. Gregg Easterbrook wonders why, when every economic trend is upward, people are more unhappy than ever before, and argues that we know more than ever before and have more free time, therefore more time to worry and obsess over negative events. (2003.) Easterbrook's arguments ignore the more spiritual malaises or 'maladies of the soul' as Julia Kristeva (1995) terms them, which enable the despair to be felt and to take hold in the psyche.

Charles Taylor provides some answers in his discussion of the economy as an objectified reality. (2004, p.69ff) He details the change in society from a theist to a humanist perspective; from the notion that God governs the world according to a benign plan (a conception that tacitly persists in the works of Aquinas, Pieper and Hume) to the view that through efficient causation, humans are engaged in a mutually beneficial exchange of services. Part of this paradigm shift involves what he terms the "sanctification of human life" (ibid, p.74) which rejects the idea that so-called higher vocations, such as monastic celibacy, are of higher value than the life that the "vast majority of people cannot help leading, the life of production and the family, work and sex." (p.73) Taylor believes, and I am inclined to agree, that this has had an enormous effect on Western civilisation: "The mighty are cast down from their seats and the humble and meek are exalted" (p.74), a phrase that emphasises the concerns of the individual above those of society.

This brings to my mind the doctrine of 'economic rationalism'; 'the economy' has taken on its own life and dominates discourse in the public sphere, everything being geared to earning, conserving and creating wealth. Most Western societies seem to be accrediting the notion *"that commerce and economic activity are*

the path to peace and orderly existence...The more a society turns to commerce, the more polished and civilised it becomes, the more it excels in the arts of peace." (Taylor, 2004, p.74)

This is despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary; riots over race and religion have erupted all over the planet, the US continues to supervise the attrition process in Iraq all the while ignoring calls to demobilise its forces and suicide bombers destroy our transport and peace of mind. The "calm passion" of moneymaking has not controlled or inhibited the violent passions, nor has it stopped our recourse to wars, as Kant believed. (ibid) Australia today is in the grip of neoliberalist policies which owe more to John Stuart Mill than to Kant's ideals.

A One-note song: Hope evokes its opposite

We are no longer a chain of beings with a mutually beneficial purpose, but a group of slaves labouring under the economic yoke and unable to express our frustration in the public sphere because our public discourse has been thwarted in a way that George Orwell may have recognised. What is more concerning is the "equilibrium-in-tension" that Taylor mentions, what Gadamer might call "a third space" or a "rupture", that needs to be maintained by the play or rivalry and mutual surveillance between the orders, or strata, of society has been insidiously closed by the *grandis*, in this case the politicians, leading to a feeling of disconnection and powerlessness among the populous at large. Our common space, the media, where we figuratively meet to discuss debate and theorise, has been shrunk to include only those faces who lean towards the Right and who espouse Right views. Our public sphere has become contrived, even faked, which has been deemed necessary to shape a public discourse which now centres almost exclusively on material matters. Our common spaces are no longer diverse, but rather homogenous packages all carrying the same message. It is little wonder then, that apathy and discontent are rife; we are being "amused to death", as Neil Postman puts it. He goes further, giving a "Huxleyan warning":

> *"When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is re-defined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility" (1985, p.157)*

How does this occur, this homogenising of common space? It may ironically begin with hope, the passion that has been termed *espoir*. A yearning for something better can lead individuals to come together into "collective agencies" (Taylor, 2004, p.81) that exercise a "collective will." These agencies may start from "sociologically objective categories (e.g. handicapped, welfare recipients)" (ibid) or from a diverse collection of individuals who feel themselves marginalised by social conditions. These individuals may even despair of ever gaining recognition. Mary Zournazi discusses this with Chantal Mouffe, among others, in her book *Hope: New philosophies for change.* (Routledge, 2003). Zournazi and Mouffe discuss the mobilisation of hope and the leaning toward right wing politics by those who feel 'disenfranchised' by society (p.126). Mouffe also alludes to the ideas of the economy discussed above, and argues that this is not enough, that people will always be looking for something more..

> *"Theorists tend to believe if you are satisfied, you know, if you have enough to eat, then you don't need to look towards something new. I think that is wrong – it's not simply the poor who want a better situation, but people in general need to have that hope of something different to look forward to. And, in fact, I do think we are in a dangerous situation today. I think it is very important to realise that, in circumstances in which the future seems so bleak for people, this is the moment when right-wing movements provide hope." (p.126)*

Australian government today is moving with alarming speed toward the Far Right of politics, and one of the weapons they have used to justify their radical draconian policies is fear. The government have created, using a tame media who no longer express independent opinions, a national identity that is fearful and of

Anglo-Celtic origin. Images designed to inspire fear and despair are splashed across the media daily, and the Left wing lacks the resources to reframe the debate as they are busy playing reactive and defensive politics, informing their intellectual products with a tangled web of post-modern theory. Post-modern thought is pervasive and so needs to be taken seriously, whatever the conclusions drawn about it. The relation of 'Hope' to these concerns is manifold: migrants hope for prosperity and happiness in a new land; political activists hope for a better world and a more humane future; and many hope that education, culture, and thought may have a transformative effect on an increasingly consumerist, dollar-driven society. Max Van Manen calls our 'amused to death' society 'anti-pedagogical' and believes educators fail in their task if they do not act according to their beliefs:

> *"Pedagogy, our care for our children, often requires of us active political involvement to create the space, conditions and possibilities for children to grow up and create a world of their own making. Pedagogy may thus become the impetus for political thought and action. Moreover, political actions and programs should be evaluated on the basis of their pedagogical acceptability...Pedagogical tact requires of us a certain worldliness, and the moral fibre to stand up for political views in which we believe."* (1991 pp. 212-3)

Creating their own world empowers children and gives them vital decision making and resilience skills. I would argue that many people, particularly children and young adults, do not feel empowered by our current cultural climate.

Concentrating on the Notes: Searching for Hope in the classroom

Kelly is a student in my class. She has been 'checking my progress' with this paper for some time, ever since I told the class what I was attempting. I do not burden her with too many details, but we discuss the joys and pitfalls associated with writing in occasional moments during the day. Kelly hardly ever misses a day of school and she is always smartly 'turned out' in her uniform. Her friends are Shannon and Sophie, who also hardly ever miss a day. Shannon comes from a big family, she is a happy and secure little girl whereas Sophie is quiet and reserved, and until this year was absent from school three days out of five, often refusing to get out of the car in the school car park. Her friendship with Kelly has provided an impetus to her involvement in school life, and she quietly listens to the discussions Kelly and I have about writing. Her only comment so far has been, "You can't end it like a fairytale can you, with 'they all lived happily ever after' and stuff." Shannon also happened to be listening. "Nah, you'd have to say…um…'that's what I think and that's all'". I laughed, and as I did so I thought, *this is the only occasion of caring and hope that has happened this week, and it is with the students I am failing the most.*

My professional environment is a primary school with a high Economic Needs Index; in short, it is a 'socially disadvantaged' (Thomson 2002) or a 'marginalized' (te Riele 2006) school. The community mainly consists of the terminally unemployed or those who are 'underemployed' i.e. those who work less than ten hours a week. Although the parents and students do not seem to lack material resources (most families own a car, they watch Pay TV, they wear brands like Billabong and so on) they are marginalized insofar as their access to other societal help, like family and grief counselling, financial planning and so forth, due in part to their poor communication skills. This is a demographic that has switched political allegiances in recent years, from a safe blue-collar Labor suburb to a Liberal stronghold. Many parents voted for John Howard, because they saw him as the instigator of the 'baby bonus', currently at four thousand dollars per single child, extra for multiple births. However, the neoliberal policies have seen a decline in the support services offered to schools like mine, services that cater for mental health, drug and alcohol abuse and gambling related issues, all symptoms of malaise, 'dis-ease' in its most literal sense. My school sits in the geographic and social centre of a community where there is almost exclusively public housing, and a growing amount of 'emergency housing' which caters to families in crisis situations. As a staff, we are the outreach workers for a variety of social services and often are the first 'port of call' for children and families in distress. Pat

Thomson could be describing my school in her book *Schooling the Rustbelt Kids* (Allen & Unwin Australia 2002) and she also describes Kelly, Sophie and Shannon;

> *"There are many children and young people in rustbelt schools who do conform to behavioural expectations, and among them are some students who thrive in the selective curriculum. But, because so much of their teachers' time is taken up with the unavoidable tasks of keeping order and attending to welfare issues, orderly students in disadvantaged schools actually have less teacher attention and time than similar students in more privileged localities."* (p.49)

Hence my statement earlier about my feelings of failure regarding these girls. With the boys who conform, I have even less time, as they will not approach me as willingly as the girls do. I began this paper partly because this feeling of powerlessness had permeated my teaching and the way forward was obscured by clouds of gloom. I had fallen into a comfortable trap of pedestrian thinking, and as a consequence my embodiment as an educator was not all it could be.

Unison and Harmony 1: Embracing the Silences

I decided to follow David Halpin's advice and "take hopelessness seriously" (www.infed.org/biblio/hope.htm 2003) which means turning a negative into a positive by recognising my feelings as a desire to make things better, to "*view (my) story as (an) appeal to make good situations which ought not to be.*"(ibid) My Principal believes teachers can have a "hopeless outlook for the life chances of their students yet remain happy because they see that issue as irrelevant to them." I would argue that an educator cannot be hopeless or pessimistic in outlook and happy at the same time. Hannah Arendt has defined education as consisting of those people who love the world enough to take responsibility for it, and the desire to 'make a difference' is essentially positive or hopeful in outlook. Halpin sees a use for pessimism, but he makes an implicit distinction between a "*pessimist of the intellect - that is to say, someone who subjects all significant knowledge claims to critical scrutiny*" and the expression of this scrutiny in a cynical (i.e. "*cryptically critical of most things*") way. He notes;

> *"cynical expressions of pessimism may undermine hopefulness. The sociologist, Anthony Giddens, has it about right, I think, when he observes that cynical pessimism "is not a formula for action, and in an extreme form . . . leads only to paralyzing depression", which I suspect is why Marcel saw "death at its heart".* (ibid)

The importance of critical thinking and reflection is vital, and if religion could be seen as hope for the heart, then being a pessimist of the intellect brings hope to the mind. Philosophical discourse, then, is essentially hopeful (even nihilists like Sartre and Nietzsche) and enables the individual to see beyond a future that may be "dangerously ambitious" or "conservatively cautious and reactionary."

My reasons for entering the profession in the first place were idealistic, the notion of 'making a difference' appealing, coupled with a hazy notion of a far-off 'utopia' where students would blossom in double –quick time. I despise unfairness and idealise the notion of balance, but the feeling of failure I kept experiencing in my school clouded my judgement about the difference between 'equality' and 'equity'; equality is where everyone is treated in the same way, regardless of race, creed or circumstances whereas equity is about providing what an individual student needs most at any given time. Kelly and her friends needed our snippets of conversation, but they did not need the constant support I gave to Merindah, because her family had disintegrated, or to Dean, because he was struggling to cope with his emotions. Perhaps I was not failing so badly after all. This epiphany provided a signpost to a 'practice-with-hope' (te Riele 2006); care and hope are intertwined, as is van Manen's idea of pedagogical 'tact' (1991.) Although the names are different, the umbrella idea is the same; you cannot have pedagogical tact without hope, in fact van Manen refers to this as an 'anti-pedagogical stance' (ibid, p.211) and goes on further to say that

> *"..a view of life that sees the future essentially as hopeless defeats the possibility of establishing a pedagogical relation with children, since any relation between a parent or teacher and a child is always founded on hope."* (ibid)

It is also impossible to exercise pedagogical tact without caring, and Noddings (1984) echoes van Manen and implicitly alludes to Gadamer's 'third space';

> *"When I look at and think about how I am when I care, I realize that there is invariably this displacement of interest from my own reality to the reality of the other...Kierkegaard has said that we apprehend another's reality as* possibility*"* (p.14)

Van Manen says;

> *"We think of tactfulness as a caring orientation toward others. On the one hand, caring is the willingness to take on burdens, trouble, or grief for others. On the other hand, to be caring is to be heedful, affectionate, loving, tender...Tact is the expression of a thoughtfulness that involves the total being of the person, an acute sensitivity toward the subjectivity of the other."* (p.145-6)

Unison and Harmony 2: Tuning the Heart

This 'rupture' or 'third space' between two people can be appreciated fully by exercising the hermeneutic imagination, another hopeful form of discourse. Kierkegaard also believes in the ontology of 'not-yet-being' which Pieper espouses. I find myself faced again with the ambiguity that is Hope; care, trust, faith, tact, commitment, imagination, creativity, spontaneity and so on. The list is a long one, but there seems to be an attribute missing, a word which Noddings and van Manen shy away from, and Halpin uses not at all, a word which Paul on the road to Damascus would have recognised; Love. I love my students, not in the same way that I love my family, or my books, or my drawings, but with a regard and respect for their unique selves. Perhaps 'love' has changed connotations nowadays, with the emphasis on romantic love and desire that prevails in society at large, but it seems to me that there is an altruistic love, a 'higher love', that is implicit when we act in an ethical way towards the children in our care. Van Manen links his pedagogical tact with the notion of teachers acting *in loco parentis*, placing the same expectations on, and giving the same love and care to, their students as parents do their children. It was Paul, in his famous letter to the Corinthians, who named the Christian virtues as "Faith, Hope and Love, but the greatest of these is Love."

David Liston in his article *Hope, utopianism and educational renewal* ([www.infed.org/biblio/hope.htm 2003](www.infed.org/biblio/hope.htm)) also places love at the centre of his vision and he wishes to recapture *"the love of teaching . . [which enables its exponents] to venture [once more] into that space where hope and possibility exist."* Liston argues that what is currently needed is a re-moralizing of teaching that *"places an understanding of the "Good" and an orientation to love at [its] very centre"*. This call to a *"larger love in teaching"* is an appeal to teachers, and all those concerned with schooling, to recover the idea of the Good as a focal point of professional reflection.(ibid)

This unwittingly echoes Tasmania's new curriculum push, named by the Minister as "Student at the Centre". This implies that perhaps we as an educating community had lost sight of some larger values, if the student hasn't been at the centre of things until now. Who stands with the student at the centre of things, *inter esse*? The teacher, described by Halpin as *"a significant and influential adult figure dedicated to the business of helping pupils to realize their full potential"* or the person who forms a pedagogical relationship to the child based on care, love and hope. Our new curriculum initiative then could be more aptly titled 'The Relationship at the Centre', because without a strong relationship teaching and learning simply does not occur. Without this strong relationship, teachers and students lose direction and fall into apathy, which is perhaps the real enemy of hope due to its insidious nature; apathy has a virus-like way of invading our daily lives until everything is monotonous. Halpin comments;

> *"Hope, after all, buffers us against falling into apathy in the face of tough going, which arguably is why teachers cannot responsibly abdicate it in their work in schools. They not only need to take hope seriously and seek to embody it in their actions, they must also find ways of fostering it among their pupils and colleagues."*

Fostering hope among students is easy, they are already full to the brim with youthful *espoir*, but fostering hope among colleagues seems more difficult; already disenchanted by the negative view of educators promulgated by the media, teachers in Tasmania have dealt with three new curriculums in the past five years. A male colleague, who is cynical and pessimistic by habit but terms himself a "realist", was reluctant to join the informal conversations around Hope that I initiated in the staff room and when I gently pressed him he said, "You don't really expect me to answer do you? I mean, what purpose will it serve? It's not going to change anything. Hope is nothing to these kids. It's a distraction 'til they die." His blunt response is probably silently echoed by many of my colleagues who are too polite to phrase their pessimism the way he did. Halpin concludes:

> *"When we see hope seeping out of education, it is important then to remind ourselves that the latter is not only premised on the former, but also that one of the tasks of the progressive educator is to work hard to unveil opportunities for its promotion, no matter what the obstacles may be..especially now given that so much in our world, privately, nationally and globally, is characterized by chronic uncertainty. I would go further and assert that to teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralysed by hesitation, is perhaps one of the chief things a good education offers to those who are in a position to benefit from it."*
> ([www.infed.org/biblio/hope.htm 2003](www.infed.org/biblio/hope.htm))

Bel Canto: The Beautiful Song

At the very heart of this paper is another debate; epistemology versus ontology and finding the balance between. The philosophers mentioned throughout these pages are all ontologically biased and all argue for possibility over probability, mutability over the *idée fixe*, a fluid Self rather than a static one. It is both exhilarating and scary being always poised on the brink of change, that precipice where courage, trust, love and hope coalesce to enable the teacher and student to take the 'leap of faith' that is education. No amount of curriculum documents, educational policies, economic theories or right wing politics can provide a big enough parachute to make that leap any easier to take. In the end, hope must be present in educating because otherwise why turn up at all? And if hope is no longer a feature of the educator's embodiment in the world, then they can be said to have lost their vocation. A vocation is more than a sense of duty, more than a call of conscience, it is being able to hear the silent cries of children and orient yourself in the world so you can answer those cries fully and in a mutually satisfying way. Knowledge alone cannot do this, although it is easy to fall into the comfortable trap of arrogantly thinking that it can. Epistemology *informs* ontology, but cannot replace it and is not exclusive of it. An ontology of not-yet-being enables hope to be a pervasive force in the classroom, but epistemology does not because it concentrates on the probable rather than the possible. Isabelle Stengers expresses it neatly;

> *"I would say that hope is the difference between* probability *and* possibility. *If we follow probability there is no hope, just a calculated anticipation authorised by the world as it is. But to 'think' is to create possibility against probability. It doesn't mean hope for one or another thing or as a calculated attitude, but to try and put into words a possibility for becoming."*
> *(*Zournazi, 2002 p.245.*)*

During the course of this year I have had many occasions (and I use that word in its fullest sense, as 'the falling together of possibilities') to reflect upon my teaching practice and upon my life so far and how the two are interdependent. I spent my early teaching years absorbing all the documents but underneath waiting

to be happy. I was also terrified of taking the leap of faith described above, and I focussed only on planning a perfect future while letting the Now slide silently by. When I accepted my current teaching position I began taking small steps towards the brink of the possible, but it was the students in the end who have taught me how to live in the moment because for them there is no other way. They also showed me that although they sometimes feel marginalised and angered by school and society, this does not mean the situation is hopeless and that they have given way to apathy and despair. I see the similarities rather than the differences between myself and the wider school community – we all care for our children, not in the same way and sometimes in ways that are not even recognisable, but the children know they are cared for because they turn up nearly every day to try to master behaviours and skills they only need at school.

When the bell rings at 8.50am next Monday, I will close the door to my classroom and it will be just me and the students – poised on the brink of the unknown, ready for the latest adventure in our journey together toward an undiscovered end. There is no one way to get to wherever we're going, and we cannot travel there alone and we have to follow an invisible path that we lay down while we walk. I will not be preoccupied with educational jargon, documents or syllabus guidelines because that is not in this moment that is another time and space. It will be more difficult for me than for them, because I still get lazy and wish to cling to the illusion of certainty, but as John F Kennedy said about sending a man to the moon, "we don't do it because it is easy, but because it is difficult". Sophie said that a paper like this cannot be ended with "they all lived happily ever after" but what if it could? What greater gift could we give to our children than to allow them to create a happy world rather than using our children to produce a world we would not wish upon them? Being ready to sing the song of Hope means being courageous, trusting, faithful and loving – the students already are all of these, it is I who need to throw aside the 'sheet music' and tune my ear and my heart for the silent melody. And the teachers who can train our ears are children, unfettered by adult responsibilities. Maybe this *is* one way to live 'happily ever after'.

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