

Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

Volume 1
Issue 40 *Fostering Inclusive Learning
Communities Together*

Article 7

July 2023

Red Little Paper Books

Megan Doherty
Northumbria University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe>



Part of the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Doherty, Megan "Red Little Paper Books," *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*: Iss. 40 (2023), <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss40/7>

RED LITTLE PAPER BOOKS

Megan Marie Doherty, Postgraduate (PhD) Researcher, Department of Computer and Information Science, Northumbria University, Class of 2022

Red Little Paper Books captures snapshots of a protagonist's life. It focuses on what it means to want to write from an early age and how this can develop into goals within a young career when presented with obstacles. A snapshot poem creates a collage of the protagonist's life and the different moments that have changed their attitudes and outlooks. Strands of different memories detail the different steps that have taken the protagonist through disappointment and the reality of work, into somewhere where they feel comfortable and happy.

Red Little Paper Books

Making books. I'm folding over pieces of paper to make little paper books. I don't know how the rest of reception is using their time, but right now I'm happy with the little paper booklets on my desk.

The pressure of Mr Lars bares down on the class. He patrols the class as we scribble out a 'creative story' for our year 7 English test. My page is a rich tapestry of space and language as my protagonist gets far away from this tiny town and explores the universe.

I am looking at my GCSEs. I have 12 As... and a D in French. My mother is looking at me as I sit in the car outside the school. She wants... something, a reaction. I am incapable of giving her this. Nothing.

He sits and talks. I stand and listen. If I leave, he will yell at me. It's 1pm and my father is again sharing his pain with me over a glass of wine.

We sit silently as our Mr Collins asks about the 'meaning' of John Clare's *Haymaking*. The class uncomfortably shuffles as their pre-maturity rattles. Davies squeaks, "sex?" and Collins launches into the air. "Yes! Sex! It's all about sex!"

I am standing in my room. Stress holds up a fatigued mannequin as it grabs the scales in the room and chucks them out the window. To my dismay, they don't smash on the ground. Instead, they fall apart into solid glass and plastic pieces. Makes sense with A levels like this—can't even break something properly.

The university rep doesn't understand what I mean when I tell them that my parents are separated. Without a divorce. I'll need to work a few shifts up in Newcastle.

I sit in our dorm kitchen. The grade has made the paper in my hands weigh like an anvil. I'm frustrated at my inability to know what my tutor wants... I throw my paper into the refrigerator.

Leaving the radio station at 2am. It's oddly peaceful in the city. The benefit from working through on a school night. I try to ignore how tired I am.

Loud music bounces off the walls of an empty club. The birthday of a friend has become an argument and distraction has come in the form of emails. I am elated. With a 2:1 in my inbox, I'll be able to go straight into a Masters. I celebrate by leaving immediately.

The class sits in silence. The expert stands in front of the class and explains his entry into journalism through the Troubles. I feel like I'm finally doing what I need to do. Where I need to be.

James gloats—"I said, what I lack in experience I make up in enthusiasm"—about his interview down South. I note how clichéd that sounds but perhaps because I'm envious of his family.

Dumbfounded, I stand there as someone from the media team yells at me. I'm unsure if he realized that I'm not the right intern—maybe he doesn't care. It's decided. Creating content to sell. Punching down. I've decided that this isn't me.

Wiping down another table. I glance at my phone and notice that many of us got a 2:1. I'm looking forward to the refreshing notion of leaving this place.

I sit at the desk as time sucks into a vacuum. The post is late today. I look to find something else to do with the first few hours of the day in what is a dead end.

I'm starting to believe that the working class are born buried alive. The other end of the phone tells me I'm looking at another five months until I can see a CBT professional.

I sit with a pint, a bandaged hand, and a battered ego. Tomorrow, yet another job interview. I scribble down notes about what I could possibly talk about.

In a room of peers. I nervously look down at my notes, as I speculate on the future of augmented reality within the heritage industry. The space is small, stuffy and the expo didn't provide enough chairs.

I've been told that my uniform is 'problematic'. I'm confused, but told that when bending over to fix my machine someone looked up my skirt.

The panic attacks have come back like hiccups. Six months till completion. I just need to keep focused like before, before, before.

I want to sit in a warm study. Listen to others explain their research as I prepare my timetable for next week with little colorful post-it notes. I won't know how the rest of my old class would be doing at that exact moment, but I'll be happily surrounded by words.

Academic Commentary

The focus of the scholarship project has been to explore some of Northumbria University students' own ideas about short-term and long-term success and the obstacles that they may have to overcome—not only as students but as young adults in the workforce. I've written a reflection of my experience in the form of a snapshot of a journey. This piece has used sardonic creative writing to correctly reflect the experience of a generation entering the workforce after a rigid education system. A partial barrier to many students is the sickening feeling they get when thinking about how long it might take to reach a comfortable situation within their life and career. All the while not being warned of the potential battles they may face along the way with mental health, nepotism, and sexual assault. It would be disingenuous to plant the idea of an easy route towards one's career goals for future students.

The author of this work feels that being 100% positive about the future would be doing a disservice to the next generation of students who enter the workforce. The piece is inspired by the work of Charles Saatchi and the writer David Sedaris. It is a reflection of life, but from those who are a little more tired from the theater of it all, yet know that they must keep acting. Sardonic creations are oddly comforting for the audience, as somber nods can be found from a crowd that explores the menagerie of daily life within the creation of the author. I think the writing of Sedaris correctly reflects the experience of someone coming from a working-class background. In his work he presents characters who don't really have the liberty to complain through their inopportune moments. In many ways it reflects the British reminder to 'keep calm and carry on' regardless of whether you are internally battling with the world.

This project started as something very different. In the end, it showed that it was difficult to really focus on one moment in time to explore my experience of education and entering the working world on my own.