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Title	Mainstream ELT and Steiner Education: Exclusivity or complementarity?
Authors	Maley, Alan
Publication date	2022
Original Citation	Maley, A. (2022) 'Mainstream ELT and Steiner Education: Exclusivity or complementarity?', Scenario: A Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning, Research, 16(1), pp. 89-104. https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.16.1.6
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.33178/scenario.16.1.6
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Download date	2026-10-30 12:30:04
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/13467



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Volume/Jahrgang 16, Issue/Ausgabe 1 (2022)
https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.16.1.6

Mainstream ELT and Steiner Education: Exclusivity or complementarity?

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The article discusses MELT (Mainstream English Language Teaching) in relation to the author's perception of Waldorf education. It first attempts a definition of performance. It goes on to describe the recent history of MELT with particular regard to performative and creative elements. It then considers those teacher qualities needed for successful in-depth learning and relates this to performance. The major differences between Steiner and MELT are then set out, in particular the encroachment of regulation on MELT. It argues that, while MELT may be imperfect in many ways, not least in the current preference for control, it has nonetheless produced a rich variety of creative work much of which is compatible with Waldorf philosophy and practice. Waldorf likewise has much to offer MELT in helping to restore physical, emotional and spiritual aspects which it currently neglects. It suggests there would be mutual benefit in a better knowledge and understanding between MELT and Waldorf systems.

1 Introduction

The views expressed here are very much those of an outsider to the Waldorf philosophy of education. I have some acquaintance with the ideas of Rudolf Steiner from having participated in a number of the Englische Wochen and of the work of the Pädagogische Sektion at the Goetheanum but my whole teaching experience has otherwise been in 'mainstream ELT'(MELT). In this article I shall therefore be presenting some of the ideas and practices in performative aspects of language teaching that MELT has made and relating these to the work of Steiner education.

As I understand it, Steiner's position on learning and teaching emphasises three key features. One is the centrality of the aesthetic/artistic/spiritual dimensions of learning. The second is the need to match pedagogy to the natural development of the child. The third is the central role of the teacher's inner qualities.

I will discuss some important strands within Mainstream ELT (MELT) which echo these tenets: the Humanistic movement in the 1970's and 80's (British Council, 1982), the 'Creativity' movement and so on. But whereas for Steiner these tenets are primary and central, in mainstream ELT they have remained secondary and peripheral. MELT has focused on issues such as language acquisition theory, prescribing curricula, setting objectives and syllabus-

content, testing and assessment, academic research, regulation, methodology and the never-ending search for the "best method" (Prabhu, 1990).

Teaching can be regarded as craft, as art or as science. Whereas Steiner focuses on the art and craft of teaching, MELT has tended towards a science-focus, tempered by a craft focus. The MELT view reflects an intellectual/cognitive view of language learning with 'scientific' aspirations and predictable outcomes. The dominant metaphor is a mechanical, algorithmic model based on control and direction. This is in contrast to what I perceive as the more organic, responsive approach of Steiner with its over-riding concern for the development of the individual.

I shall first attempt to define 'performance' in the context of language teaching, drawing in part on Schewe (2020). I will then detail the contributions of MELT to performance-related teaching and learning. This will lead me to a consideration of some of the key differences between the two approaches. Finally, I will briefly suggest that mainstream ELT, for all its imperfections, has developed a range of ideas and materials which are compatible with the Waldorf philosophy. In like manner, Waldorf has much to offer mainstream ELT through its deeper commitment to aesthetic, affective and spiritual values and practices. There could be much mutual benefit from a better understanding of each other.

2 Performance in language teaching

What performance is not:

Performance takes on multiple meanings in the language teaching context. In management culture it often signifies 'satisfying given criteria' as in 'performance on the test'. Clearly this is not what is being addressed here.

Also, to be excluded is performance in the sense of teachers putting on a show to impress learners with their virtuosity or simply to entertain them. This sense of putting on an act is simply a superficial display which ignores the deeper need for unqualified engagement in the teaching/learning act.

There are three main ways we can conceive of performance here. The first is the provision of *activities* which promote performance by learners, enacted in the classroom. This would include drama activities, the performance of poems, sketches and plays, using simulations, songs, using puppets and story-telling both by teacher and learners.

The second focusses on the teacher's *craft*. This would include the use of the teacher's voice, facial expression and bodily posture and gesture to establish rapport with the class (see Lutzker Part 1 in this issue). It also includes the way time and space is used, and the

management of activities to ensure variety and engagement, as well as making judgements about the level of L2 being used to ensure maximum comprehension.

The third focusses on the teacher's *art* in engaging deeply with the class as a group and as individuals. This entails the ability to establish 'attunement', whereby teacher and learners learn to 'vibrate' in sympathy and harmony together. Even (2020, 4) refers to this as the improvisational skills set which enables teachers to respond spontaneously to the on-going flow of the classroom event. This

> transcends drama methods and drama activities and, indeed, might not feature dramatic performances at all. Instead, it points to a different mindset of what it means to teach – and to learn – away from mere presentation of facts, standardized procedures, and static knowledge towards an approach to teaching and learning that is characterized by teachers and learners making their own connections, forming relationships, co-constructing knowledge, seeing mistakes as learning opportunities, and regarding the process of learning as essentially dynamic and unpredictable. (p. 4)

It involves the teacher developing highly sensitive observational and improvisational skills which enable her intuitively to respond appropriately to the unpredictability of the unfolding event (Underhill, 2014). The focus here is on the teachers performing themselves, in Goffman's sense in *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Goffman, 1990). To quote Steiner,

> A teacher needs most of all that which continually renews him. He needs a profound understanding of life, deeply rooted in the life of the soul. He needs far more than he can possibly ever put into words when he is standing in front of the children . . . To a certain extent he must have gone through an inner development in which he didn't only learn but was inwardly transformed. One day, one will not examine teachers through testing their knowledge, or even their pedagogical principles, but rather through examining their Being. (Rudolf Steiner, 1983, lecture from 24.1.1907. Lutzker translation.)

For this to happen, the teacher needs to have, or to acquire through experience and training, a set of highly sensitive personal qualities. (For a list of such qualities, see Appendix below).

3 Creativity and performance in MELT: Materials and activities

Here I shall attempt to document some of the creative, performance-related developments within MELT. It is sometimes difficult to disentangle broader aspects of creativity in language teaching from those more directly connected with performance, but I shall err on the side of

inclusivity. I divide this section into descriptions relating to the three categories of performance described above in 2.

3.1 Performance as classroom activity

Scripted performance was developed by the *English Teaching Theatre* founded in 1970 at International House, London which gave a big boost to the idea of performance as part of language learning. It was highly influential through being part of the International House worldwide network of language schools (Case and Wilson 1975, Wilson 1978, 1979).

The idea of using sketches as classroom teaching material had also been developed in the States by Mary Hines. Her *Skits in English* were eventually published (1987). In the UK, Watcyn-Jones published *Act English* (1978). And many subsequent course materials have incorporated texts for performance, most notably Robert O'Neill in *Kernel Lessons* (O'Neill et al, 1979) and *The Man Who Escaped* (1979). More recently *The Hands Up Project* has made performance a central feature of its work (Bilbrough, 2021 a & b). Also significant were the many dramatized, custom-made videos to accompany course materials or as stand-alone material.

Readers' Theatre was developed in the States by Brice-Heath (1983) and Cazden (1992). It essentially involved the dramatised reading of expository and creative texts. Lutzker (part 2 in this issue) describes a similar practice within Steiner education as 'Chamber theatre'.

The BBC's English by Radio and TV department produced a series of widely distributed dramatic programmes over many years. *Follow Me*, in particular, proved a spectacular success after being adopted in many countries, including China, and arguably helped change the way English was taught.

Songs too have long been a staple of MELT methodology (Maley, 1987; Murphey, 1992; Paterson & Willis, 2008). Perhaps the most original contribution has been made by Carolyn Graham. Her insight that the rhythms of jazz matched those of American English speech patterns gave rise to what she termed *Jazz Chants* (Graham, 1976, 2006). Jazz chants are now widely used in many MELT contexts. They take simple sentences and phrases from everyday use and embed them in enjoyable, repetitive and highly rhythmical oral chanting.

3.2 Performance as craft and art

A number of parallel developments were taking place which emphasised the craft and art aspects of performance alluded to in 2 above.

The idea that drama could be integrated into language teaching, not simply as scripted sketches to watch and perform but as a more improvisational art was being explored in the

1970's, leading to the publication of *Drama Techniques in Language Teaching* (Maley & Duff, 1978/2005). This interest was sparked by developments taking place in L1 education in UK and in actor training. Workshops by drama in education specialists such as John Hodgson (1972) and Martin Banham offered a range of ideas which could be readily adapted to foreign language teaching. A number of publications based on these ideas have since appeared (Almond 2007, 2013, 2019; Hillyard, 2015; Holden, 1981; Mortimer, 1983; Wessels, 2002; Wilson, 2008). MELT has also drawn on work in improvisation (Johnstone 1981, 1999; Poynton, 2013).

Storytelling, always part of language teaching, has been promoted through the work of Andrew Wright (2008) and David Heathfield (2014) in particular, with important contributions by Berman and Brown (2000) and Wajnryb (2003). Storytelling was just one of the creative, humanistic teaching ideas associated with the name of Mario Rinvolucri (Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983), who authored or co-authored or encouraged others to publish a series of ground-breaking books at Pilgrims, many involving performance-related activities.

There has been a lively interest in role-play in MELT (Herbert & Sturtridge, 1979; Maley & Duff, 1978; Porter Ladousse, 1987) and in simulations, both of which involve performance skills (British Council, 1977; Crookall & Saunders, 1988; Jones, 1982; Omaggio, 1978). Whereas role-play is often scripted, simulations depend on improvising within a framework of specified conditions, thus giving greater scope for spontaneous performance.

The teacher's voice is a greatly neglected area in MELT. Despite voice being manifestly one of the teacher's prime resources, it receives no attention in most teacher training programmes. And the MELT discourse community seems unaware of the range of voice material from actor training and first language education. The only ELT book on the subject is *The Language Teacher's Voice* (Maley, 2000).

Three of the so-called 'alternative methodologies' have also involved extensive use of performance. The first, *Total Physical Response* (TPR) is associated with Asher (1969). It requires students initially to acquire the language through mime, gesture and actions in response to spoken cues. The second, *Psychodrama*, is based on the ideas of Moreno and was developed for language teaching by Bernard Dufeu (1994). Dufeu makes the important distinction between a pedagogy of 'having' and of 'being'. *Psychodrama* demands intensive work in movement especially, using shadowing and doubling techniques, very much in line with the craft and art dimensions of performance. There is emphasis both on the use of the body but also the psychological development of attunement to another person. Being extremely demanding both on teacher and learners and feasible only with very small groups, it is not in wide use. The third, Lozanov's Suggestopedia (Bowen, 2020) makes use of the

'concert reading', which involves the teacher in reciting long texts in a highly formalised, rhythmical way. This performance is an integral part of the 'method.

4 The Teacher and teacher qualities in MELT

The teacher

The publication of *Caring and Sharing in the Language Classroom*, (Moskowitz, 1978) was an early trail-blazer for a more humanistic approach to the teaching of MELT (British Council 1982). The ideas behind Humanism were explored in detail by Earl Stevick in particular (Stevick, 1990). In *Teaching Languages: A Way & Ways,* Stevick claimed that, "success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (Stevick, 1980, p. 4). Jane Arnold's work on affect (Arnold, 1999) brought together a number of perspectives arising from Stevick's work and this was taken further in Arnold & Murphey (2013). Rogers' work in counselling (Rogers, 1969) also underpinned Community Language Learning, another of the alternative approaches developed in the 1970's and 80's.

A parallel strand in thinking about teacher factors in MELT was the notion of Teacher Development (TD) in contradistinction to Teacher Training (TT) (Davies, 1999). Head & Taylor's *Readings in Teacher Development* (1997) was highly influential and has been followed by many publications on related ideas: Malderez & Bodoczki (1999) on mentoring, and Woodward, Graves & Freeman (2018) on the development pathways of teachers over time, all are especially worth mentioning. *Classroom Dynamics* (Hadfield 1992) offers a practical way of integrating these ideas in the classroom. Tom Farrell's work on reflective teaching has been highly influential on teacher development thinking. (Farrell 2013). Farrell has also developed a more holistic approach to reflective practice that recognizes the spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of reflection, as well as the usual retrospective questions about practice.

A further strand relating to teacher qualities stems from Prabhu's notion of *'the teacher's sense of plausibility'* (Prabhu, 1990, 2019:139-143). By this he meant the active process of thinking about the act of teaching and how this relates to the teacher's own beliefs, values and experiences and evolving development, rather than the one-size-fits all, one-off training paradigm. This has triggered an interest in the personal trajectories of teachers (Maley, 2019a). In *Developing Expertise Through Experience* (Maley, 2019b) twenty experienced teachers worldwide share their developmental pathways, demonstrating the importance of affective and existential factors in their development. Casenave & Sosa (2007) offer a compassionate guide to thinking about the pressures and opportunities teachers encounter.

Significantly, this work is dedicated to Eliot Eisner who, the authors suggest, helped to teach them that art, story, elegant prose and academic writing need not be mutually exclusive.

Adrian Underhill has been prominent in presenting teacher expertise as an improvisational art requiring special kinds of preparedness to deal with the unpredictability of the classroom encounter (Underhill & Maley, 2012; Underhill, 2014). He states, *'Working with what comes requires continually learning my way into each present moment as it cascades in.'* (Underhill, 2008). Almond's recent work in *Putting the Human Centre-stage* (Almond 2019) also focusses on humanistic development. This emphasis on the responsive approach to teaching, going with the grain of learners' unfolding needs, probably comes closest to the Waldorf ideal, and is in stark contrast to the directive ethos which characterises much public education. The ideas behind *Dogme* (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009) are also compatible with Steiner's ideas. *Dogme* eschews the use of elaborate course materials and focusses instead on the quality of the relationship between and among learners and their teacher. Again, a responsive rather than a directive approach.

More recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of empathy in MELT contexts (Donaghy 2021, Kerr 2022). This is clearly congruent with the importance of intuitive personal relationships in Steiner education. Likewise, some interest has been shown in positive psychology – or 'happiness studies' (Helgesen 2019, Mercer 2016) as applied to the teaching of English.

However important and relevant to the performance aspects of teaching these developments have been, it must be noted that they have remained peripheral. The main focus of teacher training and development continues to be algorithmic: 'Here are the things you need to know and do. Do them and you will be successful'. Anything else is regarded as an optional extra.

Teacher qualities

In order to achieve the authentic performance to teacher education, espoused by humanistic approaches, teachers need to acquire a certain set of personal qualities, for it is these which learners relate to rather than purely technical qualities.

> They don't care how much you know
>
> Till they know how much you care. (Theodore Roosevelt)

This is not to deny that such technical expertise is necessary but simply to contend that these are not alone sufficient. Efficiency does not equate with effectiveness. Suffice it to say but MELT does not accord much importance to fostering these qualities. Yet a number of studies

have shown unequivocally that it is precisely these personal qualities[1] which learners value, and which make learning possible (Maley, 2010; Maley, 2021; Maley & Kiss, 2018; Prodromou, 2002; Ur, 1996).

How to help teachers acquire such qualities remains an issue. Many contend that such things cannot be taught but can only be acquired by experience. Space does not allow for a detailed discussion here but there is a description of a set of principles for developing such qualities in Maley & Kiss (2018, p. 161-217).

5 Some current Features of MELT

The ideas and practices which contributed to the current map of MELT arose from the political, economic, social and artistic ferment of the 1960's. Among other things, this generated the most significant major change in language teaching since the Reform Movement of the late 19th and early 20th century, with Vietor's slogan 'Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren'. The rise of the Communicative Approach from the 1970's onwards, with its emphasis on meaning rather than form, and the centrality of authentic communication has radically affected all aspects of MELT.

Many strands and influences were involved in the heady climate of experimentation and change which characterised the 1970s and 80s. Space does not allow for a detailed discussion of this period, but useful accounts are available (British Council Milestones[2], Howatt, 2004; Lutzker, 2021; Maley, 2005, 2006; Maley, 2012). However, since the 1980's MELT has gradually transformed from a culture of experimentation to one of regulation and control. So the sprawling amalgam which is now MELT currently exhibits a number of characteristics which set it apart from the Waldorf approach (Maley, 2019c):

- There is no single, agreed, common vision for MELT, in stark contrast to the coherent vision bequeathed to Steiner education by its founder.
- MELT is highly stratified, with little real contact between University, Secondary school and the teaching of young learners. It is also highly fragmented, with fault lines between State and Private language schools, theory and practice – and split into self-protective/promoting cliques, coteries and cabals, with interest groups such as Business English, EAP, ESP, CLIL, ELF … each with their own preoccupations and only limited interchange with others.

[1] For suggested lists of such qualities, see appendix.
[2] https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications-research/milestones-elt

- MELT is exclusively concerned with the teaching of one second language, namely English. By contrast, Steiner education teaches two second languages thus offering more opportunities for a better understanding of the underlying functions of language.

- MELT is focussed prevalently on language teaching as a 'science', in the belief that it can be reduced to well-planned, relatively predictable outcomes by applying agreed methodological materials and procedures. Aspects relating to performance as art and craft, as set out in 2. above, are only one among many strands. They remain peripheral. For Steiner education, by contrast, art (both as object and process) is a central feature.

- MELT is increasingly influenced by regulation and control, with an emphasis on outcomes and quantifiable results. In state systems this is evidenced by inspection of teachers, and of learners by testing and examinations supported by relatively rigid syllabus requirements and course-books geared to the examination. In the private sector worldwide, institutions such as Cambridge English shape what is taught and how it is assessed, through its IELTS tests, and this in turn influences coursebook materials. Even The Council of Europe's Common European Framework (2020), which began life as a descriptive framework, has been enlisted as a prescription for syllabi and materials. In like manner, teacher training is shaped by internationally recognised certification, such as the Cambridge CELTA and DELTA, and schools are evaluated by organisations such as The British Council Inspection scheme and EAQUALS. This is a far cry from the emphasis on the personal development of the individual so central to Steiner's philosophy.

The frustration felt by many teachers with this web of regulation and control is well summed up in this blogpost:

> The market, in our TEFL world, is increasingly that of our formal exam systems (Cambridge, Language Cert, Trinity, etc.) which are now totally intertwined with the market-place of the publishing houses (Cambridge, Pearson, Macmillan etc.) which then slip unobtrusively into our world of language school associations (AISLi, I.H. AIBSE etc.) and hence into our webinars and so to us, as simple teachers, the last cog in the process of creating a global product that can be quantified. (Ayers, 2022)

Clearly these developments do not favour the kind of experimentation in a humanistic framework which would favour performance-oriented teaching and learning. This is not to deny the value of the many ideas, practices and materials which continue to emerge from the small islands of creative thinking which have survived the control paradigm. It is perhaps here that MELT and Steiner education come closest.

In the field of publishing, by the 1990's, major publishers were becoming increasingly risk-averse. This came about partly as a result of pressure to cater to the needs of examinations and tests, partly through the rising investment costs of producing global course packages, which had become the cash-cows of MELT publishing. Despite this, a number of smaller niche publishers, such as Delta, Helbling, Pavilion and Peachey Publications have established a name for themselves as more open to creative ideas. The difficulty for novice writers to get themselves published has also led to some self-publishing (Prentis, 2016), including *The Round,* initiated by Lindsey Clanfield (http://the-round.com/submissions-guidelines).

Teacher magazines remain an outlet for creative energy. For the brief period, between 1993-97, *The Journal of the Imagination in Language Teaching* (Coreil & Napoliello, 1993-1997) offered inspirational articles, often directly related to performance, including the use of puppets and dance (Ackerman, 1993; Bell, 1997; Canepa, 1994). *Modern English Teaching* (MET) and *English Teaching Professional* (ETP) (now merged as MET) have provided a platform for innovative ideas from the outset. The freely downloadable webzine, *Humanising Language Teaching*, (www.hltmag.co.uk) continues to publish a wide range of articles, many of which relate to performance. *The Teacher Trainer*, also part of Pilgrims, has consistently published creative articles for trainers and trainer-trainers.

Associations particularly relevant to the theme of performance have fared less well. SEAL (Society for Effective Affective Learning) was a particularly vibrant advocate for humanising teaching and learning through artistic engagement. Sadly, after several years of convention-defying activity, it foundered. The C Group (Creativity for Change in Language Education. http://thecreativitygroup.weebly.com/) has had relatively little success in promoting creativity and performance.

Yet we have no reliable way of knowing just how much performance-related teaching goes on behind the closed doors of classrooms worldwide. In an age of proliferating personal blogs, You Tubes, Tweets and the like, information about just what is going on is diffused and not always easy to access. But this may be where the most interesting developments are being documented. This extract entitled *Healing as Killing*, from the blog of a small language school owner in Italy, suggests that there may be more commitment to 'real' teaching than meets the eye:

> We … are teachers … . What we do is, by definition, unmeasurable: caring, creating that vital moment of excitement, that space where learning can take place, that is our profession… as teachers, it is only when we can't be measured that we can hope to be alive. There is no sensible way of measuring how we create a space where learning can take place; learning is an intimate, secret process, more to do with fragility and negativity than

> with the positive flow. Every moment is different, every moment is mysterious, every moment should be and can be not a result but a small healing of the soul, and then, as teachers, we are living the good life. (Ayers, 2022).

But sadly, the combined effect of the drift to a control paradigm leads to a view of education which leaves little room for the creative side of learning, including, of course, performance aspects.

6 A summing up

In this article I have tried to lay out some of the ways in which MELT has addressed the issues of creative performance and the teacherly qualities needed to explore performance and student learning. Regrettably, MELT rarely engages with the issue of teacher qualities in any but a superficial way, preferring to focus on linguistic, methodological and technical issues of teaching. And pleas for aesthetic considerations to be given more prominence (Maley, 2009, 2010) have gone largely unheeded.

However, it is clear that MELT, despite the paradoxes, tensions and internal divisions which characterise it, and the relentless drive for regulation and control, has nonetheless produced a rich array of materials and practices. Many of these, as described above, are quite compatible with the Steiner philosophy, and much creative, performance-related material continues to be produced. (Almond, 2019, Maley, 2018, Maley & Peachey, 2015, Peachey, 2020, Pugliese, 2010). To this extent, MELT would seem to have something to offer to the Waldorf teacher through the rich range of creative materials it has generated.

Equally clearly, the Steiner approach has much to offer MELT, which would benefit greatly from redressing the balance in favour of the physical, emotional and spiritual elements of learning which are at the centre of Steiner's philosophy.

Unfortunately, human groups have a tendency to create self-referencing ghettos which cuts them off from alternative ideas and practices and perpetuates mutual ignorance of the other. As Ackerman reminds us "the world is divided into those who believe themselves right". "Groupthink" (Janis, 1972) is the common enemy. For genuine teacher growth to take place, there needs to be a willingness to at least consider what goes on outside the immediate group, and to invest time and effort in an empathetic understanding of it. Perhaps this article offers a modest step in the right direction.

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Appendix

Some desirable teacher qualities (Maley, 2021)**:**
playful without being frivolous,
energetic without being frenetic,
spontaneous without being anarchic,
friendly without being pally.
dramatic without being farcical,
optimistic without being euphoric,
enthusiastic without being fanatical,
confident without being brash,
cheerful without being effusive,
self-aware without being self-centred,

serious without being solemn,
caring without being sentimental.
interested without being prurient,
firm without being authoritarian,
organised without being rigid,
patient without being indulgent,
tolerant without being permissive,
sympathetic without being gullible,
impartial without being indifferent,
flexible without being floppy,
calm without being passive,
simple without being simplistic,
silent without being taciturn,
eloquent without being garrulous,

reflective without being intellectual,
critical without being destructive,
knowledgeable without being smart-ass clever,
expert without being exhibitionist,
open-minded without being empty-headed,
well-read without being pedantic,
holding strong views without being opinionated,
having ideas without being ideological,
resilient without being resistant,
resolute without being obdurate.