

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**Pedagogy of Being Present: An Inquiry into the Unconditional
Communion of Listening**

Elizabeth J. Robinson

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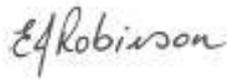
DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Human Ethics (For projects involving human participants/tissue, etc) The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number # SMEC20080023.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E. Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'E'.

Date: 23 September 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I sit solitary at my computer, I know my solitariness is an illusion. Rather, I sit accompanied by a chattering cast of thousands, whose lives touched mine, and who, in just a few cases, created it, making it a gloriously worthwhile life. I acknowledge here that you have sat with me in every moment, being and becoming this thesis with me.

I have had at all times a strong sense of a family who cheered me on despite at times worrying that I was taking on too much. My parents, Coral and Terry, always sought for us the education that for them was elusive and withheld. For me it was enough that they taught me how to love and be loved, they also sparked an infinite curiosity for all things—my thesis is just some of the ‘stuff’ I am curious about. I am flanked by siblings whose own achievements serve to make the world better for others, and whose capacity to put all aside just to laugh, keeps me safe in lightness and joy.

It was my honour to be a single mother during my bachelor degree. Tucking my unwieldy pregnant body into those small fold-up tables in the lecture theatres made it all seem more worthwhile. Thankyou Sarah for making me want to be more and for also making me a Grandma. It makes sense that as women, our children and grandchildren spur us on to contribute something to our planet that is good. Steve, my husband, taught me that feeling you cannot do something, but doing it anyway, such as ride a bike across a continent, swim a sea, or climb a mountain is how it feels to live to the fullest.

This thesis was beyond my imagining and would have been beyond my capacity, except for Dr. Bevis Yaxley who used his wily and experienced wisdom to trick me into embarking on the impossible. He simply asked what I wanted to find out and write about. He waved away my self-doubt as irrelevant to our discussions. He exemplified that most critical quality of great teachers—he believed in me, when I did not.

Bevis and Dr. Roya Pugh had worked as a team to convene our colloquia, sustaining a community of rich reading, scholarly dialogue and dispersed to the cold Hobart wind, seeds that would become a great number of inspired doctorates. The loss of Bevis derailed my confidence and momentum and I owe to Roya my gratitude for not allowing grief to become a reason to turn away. Roya undertook to ensure that I, among others, would continue my scholarly endeavours. Our colloquia became intensive dialogues. My writing became sources of deeply challenging, teachable moments, whereby Roya determined to question every word until I reached a world of scholarly endeavours that, through her mastery, I was given access. It is a gift, one that at many times demanded more of me than I knew existed. Together, Bevis and Roya represent the finest examples of teaching, a balance of great love and unyielding expectations. I also acknowledge that Bevis and Roya's spouses have long supported a great number of students in their homes, where cups of tea are provided to water the growth of human knowledge and understandings.

There are also friends to whom I owe a great deal of thanks because they allowed me to fossick around in their area of skill before gently taking the reins back and saving me from myself—Debbie for ICT support, Alex for graphic design and Karen for her incredible photography. They all just got what it was I was trying to do and helped me do it. I am lucky and grateful.

This thesis is not able to evoke the sensory load that is present in my mind when I consider the thousands of students, and school community members, the hundreds of teachers and other education workers who are my life in education. I have borrowed from them a great many narratives as ore for my reflections on what it means to be present as an educator. I do not want my gratitude to their collective to take away the essence of their individuality, both as sovereign human beings but also individual people in my remembering. As I acknowledge you here, I acknowledge you as an individual. I have loved you. I know this because I ache with gratitude when I think of your face and the way we shared a moment of connection—thank you for allowing me to borrow that fragment and make it part of this thesis.

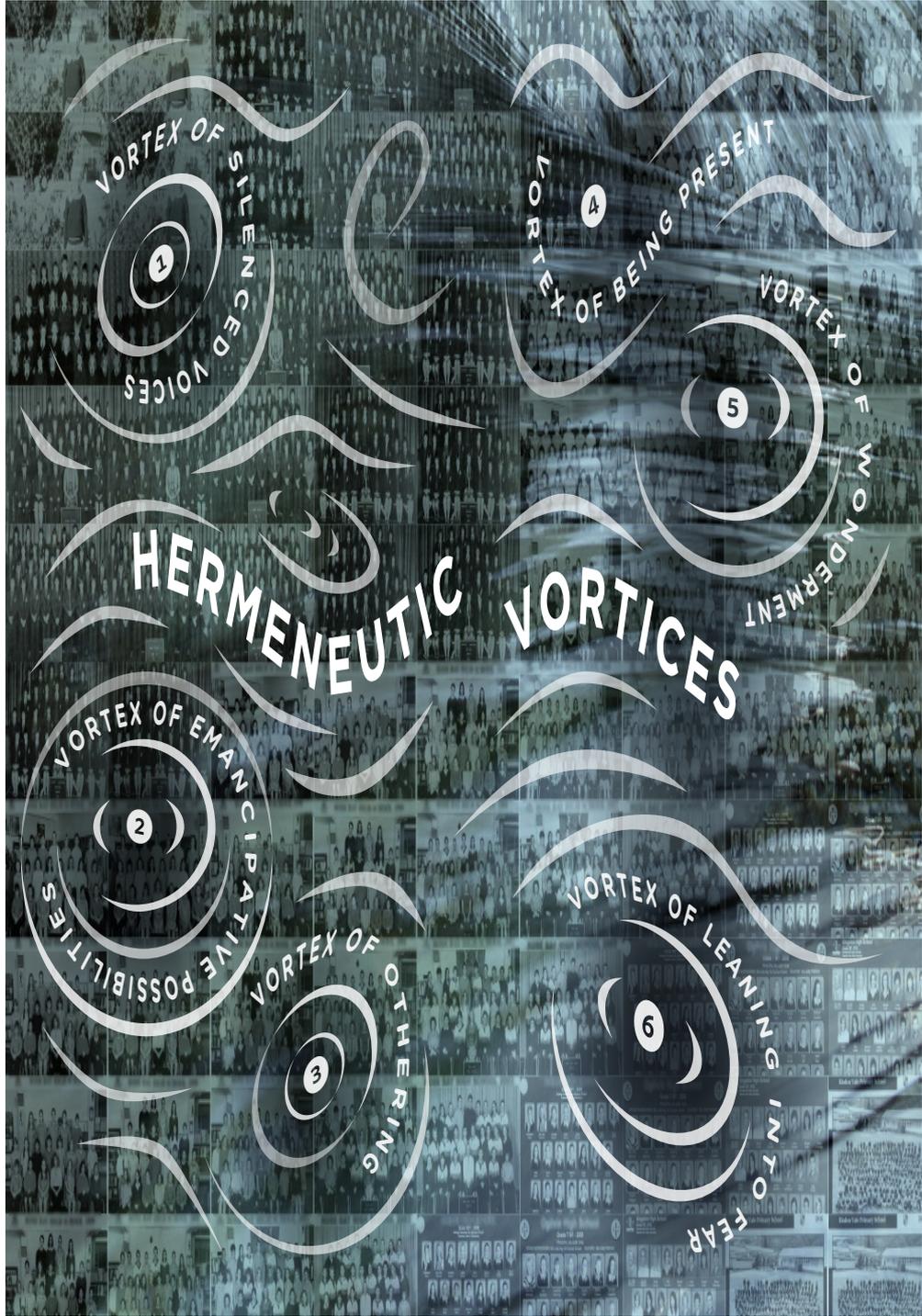


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ABSTRACT

Perhaps this thesis has written the researcher rather more than the researcher has written it. As she observes herself in acts of writing phenomenologically, she writes herself into fuller being, not because she had intended such an existential undertaking at the outset but because she writes about what she wonders deeply, and feels more alive in this wonder. This researcher writes an interpretive account of lives lived and observed in education. She finds that she herself cannot transcend her fear, but she can lean into it, and find there, amongst the silt, her voice, and enough courage to tell the story of self and stories of other.

This thesis has its origins before her time, its fragile genesis occurring as the life of anything does, by chance, blending many individual histories with thousands of lives that have intersected with hers throughout her formal and informal education. She could not have imagined that she would find such depth of meaning in the inter-generational roots of her upbringing. As she risks an intimate understanding of herself as a student with her ever-present fear of humiliating failure she locates the source of a compassion that has both blessed and weighed heavily on her throughout her teaching career. How does this compassion ease itself from its cavity beneath her ribcage? How does it make its way from its cellular embodiment to reach across the chasm from her 'I' to the hurt child within and the hurting child without? How does such a bridging compassion make possible a reciprocal healing of hurts?

Her phenomenological attentiveness to the manifest hurts of children in our schools leads her to use narrative inquiry as a means for apprehending the disruption caused by particular children's struggle with their 'I'. She curates vignettes from what might otherwise seem insignificant moments yet capture her attention due to their poignancy that assist her to expand

and understand philosophical ideas such as integrity, sovereignty and ethos. Many of the vignettes express language used by different children—language often reviled in schools as unacceptable. She comes to understand language in a Gadamerian sense, hermeneutically re-interpreting the distress behaviours of young people as a kind of language, signalling a possible readiness for space to be created for loving attention, evoking the divinity of dialogue when compassion is invited in. Literary devices used throughout by the researcher enable her to evoke the language of the distressed child through the mythopoetic and the authenticity of students' situatedness with the researcher. Mythopoetic writing has also allowed the researcher to summon her own historicity, to trace the *epoché*, the phenomenological reduction, of each of several vortices she distinguishes as if they are hermeneutic circles for understanding.

The researcher follows Freirian notions of oppression and emancipative possibilities towards recognising our unfinishedness as part of our claim to our individual subjectivity, compelling our individual and collective capacity to both redeem ourselves, and others, from great hurts. Through Freire's beseeching educators to disclose the dominant paradigms that objectify and stultify, she is propelled to convert her own indignation to gentler recourse. She finds Buddhist teachings and the essence of feminine ways of listening salves to the hurts she observes in self and other. Through hermeneutics, science and literature, she inquires into what constitutes the embodiment of listening, if she stays fully aware of her own history and in unconditional communion with other, expecting nothing but the space shared in the moment.

The researcher explores openings for intersubjectivity, where acts of listening with the sacredness of human attention make possible the voice of other to be heard. Such listening supports another to re-author the effects of trauma, oppression and distress that dehumanise and rather trust in gifts of loving intelligence.

Unforeseeable to her was that the hermeneutic vortices in this river of swirling inquiry could return her to her self, to be in communion with all that she is and her own unfinishedness.



Vortices of phenomenological inquiry
In times of wondering about the oppression of young people
Entering the work of resistance in education
Phenomenological eddies: Currents that could carry me away
Contributing verses

CHAPTER 1 THE SILENCED VOICE, HAVING BEEN DROWNED

I think I know from my teaching that some of the most beautiful voices we have have been silenced. They had a cruel teacher or parent, some creative accident or mishap. If I can help restore those voices - that's what I am after.

Julia Cameron, 1999

The smell of the Sunday roast mixed with manure and mud, the voices that swirled above my head, storm clouds of flannel shirts and hard Yakka pants, red suns of faces told yarns. Old ladies told me stories as I climbed onto a chair to share their sandwiches. I knew and understood the power of narrative. I begged for stories to be repeated, waiting for my father's impersonations at the punchline. At

age 6 I went to school and found that my stories meant nothing and that, as a consequence, my identity would garner no approval.

Through my research this thesis embodies a restoration of a silenced voice. I ask for the soul part of your reading, loving attention. From writing phenomenologically and autoethnographically this voice unfolds, from its source of indignation, as a fern frond becomes a frond only as it unfolds. Martha Nussbaum's eloquence about the emotional intelligence of living beings (2003) becomes a podium of words from which to yell, "This thesis is my voice! This thesis is about the silenced voices of oppressed young people! My voice is valid! My voice is restored!"

At age 6 I failed a spelling test and was made an example of in front of my whole Grade 1 class. I vividly remember my confusion and my falling into silence. It has been a long journey to restore my voice. When I first embarked on an attempt to write a thesis, I wrote in a somewhat depersonalised way because that was how I thought I had to write—in order to have academic legitimacy. I was deeply troubled in a way that Roger Simon captures, "one is not as smart as others think; that one is not really an 'intellectual'...All of these fears are at least in part directly connected to the potentially humiliating and displacing potential of theoretical discourse" (1992, p. 85). Nussbaum emphasises that "the intentionality of emotions" in inquiry is indeed scientifically valid.

We can see that a focus on interpretation and experience is in no way unscientific: indeed, it is an ineliminable part of an adequate scientific account. In fact, it would appear that the intentionality of emotions is important not only in the explanation of current animal (human) behaviour but also in the evolutionary explanation of how emotions came to have significance in animals' [humans'] lives. (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 112)

With my supervisors and fellow students I came to share in dialogue the possibilities of a pedagogy which befits a goal set by Simon as “nonexclusionary, nonviolent...within which new and unfamiliar discourses can be addressed and assessed” (1992, p. 94). Over the course of this thesis, I find there are many different ways to inquire and write.

This thesis is ‘I’—it is the embodiment of my fight to restore my silenced voice. I recognise myself in the students I have worked with, who by the time they get to high school have damaged voices too. I can ask again and again, how might we restore the voice of self and the voices of young people? How might we prevent the accidental drowning of a young person’s voice?

Vortices of phenomenological inquiry: Mistaking seaweed for something that may kill me

Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?

“Andre Del Sarto”, Robert Browning

When I read this line of Robert Browning in 1984 as a Grade 11 student at college, I absorbed it as if forever. Right at that moment the idea of living life in terms of a constant endeavour to learn, to stretch yourself beyond what you ever thought imaginable, seemed incredibly important. Not just that but it seemed that Browning’s line written through the voice of the poem’s narrator, the artistically technically perfect artist Andre Del Sarto, posed not just explicit advice but an implied warning. I think at the time it was the implied warning of a life half lived that bothered me most. The artist sits in his studio, listening to the whistle below his window that signals his lack of passion, not only for his own lover but for his art too. This bothered me. I did not want a life where fear of failure might hold me back.

Chapter One of this thesis orientates the reader to the moments of disruption that trigger the hermeneutic vortex street of this phenomenological inquiry. The image of the vortex street is used to describe both visually and methodologically how the moment of disruption, a spelling test at the age of 6, becomes in hermeneutic reflection, a catalyst for multiple hermeneutic circles, which in turn ripple into other hermeneutic circles, as I interpret a range of narratives across the course of a temporal life, to understand differently the phenomena that come into focus during my inquiry. This thesis unfolds, as I write myself into being and becoming—it is necessarily diachronic, with temporally non-linear interruptions to the broad chronology of events and thoughts.

Chapter One also acts as a device for my own learning, as I have used it as a depository for my understandings of the methodologies of hermeneutic phenomenology and attendant possible devices such as the use of metaphor and the mythopoetic as literary devices. One of the first things my open water swimming instructor taught me was to find a point on the distant landscape I could use to navigate with. This chapter acts as that distant point on the land, to which I fix my sights, whenever I need to check my progress and my navigation. So, this introductory chapter is something that I check on every-so-often when I feel that I drift from my course. Metaphorically it works to say that, just like open water swimming, checking one's course or methodology too frequently breaks the rhythm and makes the journey more tiresome and arduous. I find I am better off keeping my head down, only checking periodically, and not being too paranoid or cautious. I also find that often the water is simply too rough, the conditions too challenging to be able to see the far distant point. At those times, and there are many, both in thesis writing and in swimming, I decide to plod steadily onwards, hoping that the conditions improve, which they inevitably do.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?

Browning's poem was introduced to me through the teacher who brought me back to a life of learning, one that had been so squeezed out of me at such an early age in primary school. My English teacher Beth traversed English Literature with us and then in the following year, as a pied piper of about a dozen students, she threw European Literature at us. I realise now what a fearless act of teaching this was. To introduce a dozen Grade 12 students from a small rural town to De Maupassant, Durrenmatt, Zola, Stendhal, Flaubert and others, was an act of passion. We swam with these books, forming a tight group that spent weekends and evenings together, setting up a theatre group that put on *Equus* and got good reviews. We dived amongst the pages and ideas, dialogue and new metalanguage. From the droll Grade 10 of Level 2 English to a major in European Literature at university, I gulped and gasped under the watchful eye of spectacular teaching. Beth would sometimes come to class drunk. We didn't care. We sat under the desk or leaned under it in sync with her to continue to listen as she discussed the human condition. She never flinched. One of the students became an award-winning playwright some years later. Recently, I've returned to re-read some of the novels, particularly Camus, Grass and De Balzac because life and more years of study have given me to want to understand these books more deeply than before, to try to understand the horizons of human experience and thought above and below that of my own lived experience.

Narrative has always set me free. Chapter Two contains seven narratives, forming the scaffolding from which I explore the potentiality of philosophy to unleash from the mundane, emancipative possibilities. Each narrative is a vignette drawn from my lived experience, moments in time or incidents that develop phenomenological significance retrospectively. Richard Kearney writes of the role of narrative as an expression of the imagination, whereupon "the testimonial imagination plays a moral role, however, not only in recalling the exemplary figure of our cultural memories and traditions, but also in recalling the forgotten victims of history" (1998, p. 230), and whilst my little vignettes do not reach such scale of disclosure as

Kearney's example of Auschwitz, they are nonetheless, appropriate to the scale of transforming self, rather than transforming the local, national or international conscience.

It is through the vignettes of Chapter Two that I navigate my way tentatively into the tools of philosophy—testing the water. Paulo Freire, Max van Manen and Hans-Georg Gadamer, names I had never heard before, become voices I turn to for inspiration, and later, reassurance, as I leave the shores of my intuitive convictions in the natural attitude and embark towards the phenomenological depths. I also use each vignette as a context for exploring concepts such as freedom, ethos and individuality. This chapter is the shallow water, where I can swim and know that as I place my feet down on the sand I will not drown there.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?

Having leaned into fear, next to my swimming partner Kris, open water has become constant as a metaphor for my lived experience. Having trod water next to me as I gained my breath and pushed off again, around the cliffs from Kingston Beach to Blackmans Bay in Tasmania, and from Cottesloe to Rottnest Island in Western Australia, Kris has been ever steady as a teacher. She gives me that look that asks, "What next?"

Through Chapter Three, I set off to explore depths beyond my experience and to do this I turn to a range of sources outside of myself. I look into ways in which others have touched on or explored the phenomena that emerge from the *epoché*. I describe in this third chapter, ways of listening which I find intriguing and resonant with my intuitive judgment about the potential for a listening that is fully present for the other. Re-evaluation Counselling is a process taught to me through contact with an international network of practitioners, and though I do not fully

submerge myself in the network of counsellors, the lessons here are transformative in terms of understanding the cellular power of loving presence in being listened to. Through my experience as an invitee to a session of Narrative Therapy, I glean another facet of our existential form of being, and that is we are largely unauthorised versions of ourselves, and being listened to helps us to re-author who we are again in the context of loving kindness.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?

This third chapter explores practices of listening that I find potent with moral charge. Listening is not a passive nor an ethically neutral activity, indeed, such is our desire to be listened to with loving attentiveness, that this opens our hidden hearts, so that the act of making ourselves available as listeners carries enormous moral responsibility for other.

In Chapter Four the two phenomenological interviews I conduct with colleagues are pre-reflective accounts of their lived experience in working with the phenomena of trauma and listening practices to enable teachers to be present for their students. As I diachronically unfold meaning from these interviews, there emerges in each, a dialogue. I re-present interpretive reflections, after attempting to apply a hermeneutic, ethical function of imagination to the interview data I collect. It is as if I am “envisaging the needs of others not immediately present to [me], and...envisaging the most effective social means of meeting them” (Kearney, 1998, p. 233). In presenting the conversations with Leah and Pamela, my interviewees, I seek to hermeneutically understand the means by which we might bring practical moral reasoning, *phronesis*, to light from within the relationship between the ‘I’ and ‘thou’ of teaching.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?

The fourth chapter is mid-way in this thesis and I am diving deep. Bubbles float upwards through a vortex of spiralling ideas. I have a memory of scuba diving. As I look up, I can see through the milky blue water, the light on the surface of the sea and the shadow of the boat far above our heads. I look back to my instructor Geoff's mask, into his brown iris eyes, and there he is, he looks straight back into my eyes, in my mask. He moves his hand, slowly through the water, "Calm", his hand says, and then he moves his hand from his regulator, out towards me, "breathe", his hand says, and his eyes say the same. My mind fights itself, at once screaming to grab control of the source of oxygen at the surface of the water, and screaming to overcome the challenge of a new counter-intuitive experience. I look at Geoff's eyes, "Calm", they say, "breathe", they say. Holding my hand he takes me to the coral reef, points at colours and patterns, fish, creatures. His hair is happy, bronze dreadlocks that look like coral, his hands instructive, reassuring. Memory forms a kind of synesthetic mythopoesis for the tale of this chapter.

Chapter Five invites the reader to bear witness in my journey when I am terribly confronted and respond by enacting all that I think I have learned about trauma and a pedagogy of being present. In the narratives told in this chapter, I am working with children who are often at risk of suicide or doing great harm to themselves and others. I realise that being present for young people is not easy—it is risky to act against oppression within a 'stultified' (Bingham, Biesta & Rancière, 2010) institutionalised system, to address the needs of children whose social and emotional disadvantage has led to significant trauma.

In Chapter Five the mythopoetic brings into disclosure the salient events that give rise to what it means to act against oppression, and as well, enact a pedagogy of being present, as stories of applying ethical responsibility and imagination that might represent ways to emancipate teachers and students. Every day that I work in a school environment during the process of thesis

writing, I am acutely aware that it is not the time for playing with ideas but instead for ethical enactment of this thesis. In this regard, “poetic commitment to story-telling may well prove indispensable to the ethical commitment to history-making. Ethics without poetics lead to the censoring of imagination; poetics without ethics leads to dangerous play” (Kearney, 1998, p. 235).

Ab, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?

An eagle ray swoops beneath me. Its large black wingspan eclipses the texture of the sand as it passes, from the foot of the sea cliff looming meters away to my left, towards the opening of the bay and the giant Derwent Harbour which stretches away to open sea and eventually the Great Southern Ocean on my right. It has a domed head, with large intelligent eyes. In the single wave of those great wings, it's long, thin and unbelievably elegant sting tail passes too as the whole being passes out of my peripheral vision and into pale greenness. And in that moment I realise with intense exhilaration what it is to have moved from an incredibly frightened non-swimmer to having a whole ocean to explore—to having breath, rhythm, stroke, kick, glide and joy enough to be there.

Just as in the moment of seeing the eagle ray swim underneath me in the open ocean, so I see this thesis as the eagle ray, an exhilarating accomplishment from cautious and self-protective learner, to having words, thoughts, experiences, observations and curiosity enough to be here, in these words, to deliver to you a story and a hermeneutics of what it means to move from trauma to presence and what kind of teachers enable that move to happen. And I put my head out of the water to see Kris grinning at me, me at her, and Ben, a fellow swimmer, not far away—no words but a shared fullness.

Over four years ago, they swam with me, the first 50 metres from shore, when in my first lesson my breathing would rise to such a rapid panic-stricken rate that within seconds I could not breathe, a piece of seaweed bumping into my face would send adrenalin shooting through my body and trip my alarm system. But they stopped, trod water with me, waited for my breath to slow, my eyes to relax from bug-eyed panic and for me to be able to put my face back into the world of open water. Still every piece of seaweed and the shadows of rocks my brain interpreted as threats. Kris and I more recently swam the 5 kilometres from Kingston Beach to Blackmans Bay return, following the cliff, past the blow hole and the rock shelves. It was freedom and fulfilment.

This thesis re-presents such freedom and fulfilment but only in so far as it is shared with others who love the deep, fathomless world of learning and supporting others to become learners.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?

Chapter Six expresses my coming home to myself. By this time in this thesis, I have disclosed the potential and possibility of a compassionate voice that rises into its power, having encountered and embraced its heritage where the vulnerability of having one's voice silenced has its origins. The unforeseen arises as I become aware of the lineage of women's voices whose hardships muted their physical voice but whose presence of inner voice I come to hear as indefatigable and influential. I feel the universal pact of the feminine to "make language" in a way that will "uncover and lay bare the unsaid by drawing it into an explicit dialogue with the said" (Lawn, 2006, p. 84) as I narrate the sources of my silencing and the source of my capacity to overcome silence.

This thesis has required me to find expression in language and through language. I trace the matriarchal and feminine, not as an aspect of gender but of personal and universal recognition of the validity of the feminine part of all humans as an authoritative way of being in the world. Maria Popova recalls the insight and humanistic challenge put to us by Erich Fromm,

...our responsibility to ourselves—and to our selves—to know our interiority intimately and hold our darkest sides up to the light of awareness. But part of our human folly is that we do this far less readily than we shine the scorching beam of blameful attention on the darkness of others. (Popova, 2017, para. 1)

In my search for how we might listen to and interpret the language of oppressed and traumatised young people, I apprehend that all language is dialogical, even in moments of distress. Chris Lawn paraphrases Gadamer and says this is how hermeneutically “we make language our own, even though we inherit a larger configuration...out of which our own voice within the larger configuration is forged” (2006, p. 85). Chapter Six is epiphanic. It explains the title of this thesis with its words “unconditional communion of listening”.

In times of wondering about oppression of young people

When I began this study, it was 2011, the year of the London riots. It was also the eve of the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. There was a renewed flurry of questions around the problems of disengaged youth—as Irish comedian, writer and actor, Dylan Moran, put it on the ABC Triple J Morning Show,

It’s very sad. When you consider all the other riots that were happening around the world. People were fighting and dying for freedom and in London people were stepping over each other’s faces to get hold of a

pair of sneakers or a flat-screen TV. It's not quite on the same level and it's very sad. (Ballard & Dyson, 2011)

The background buzz was the inevitable analyses about the misbehaviour of young people, on a scale that looked like a civil war. The drone of voices suggested sympathetic understanding of the angst of today's youth. The BBC radio voices blamed the current lack of parenting skills for causing a rupture in the sense of social cohesion for young people, as well as the move away from values-based education to outcomes-driven education. According to commentators, who also mentioned the lack of literacy amongst the rioting group, evidently and ironically, the outcomes-driven 'back to basics' education had not delivered expected outcomes.

Australia had developed a curriculum framework that was values-based, but the desire of governments to appear accountable, and to therefore make teachers accountable, meant that the values-based curriculum was aborted in the last stages of development and replaced by a more measured, and measurable, content-driven arrangement with strong accountabilities around the measurement of literacy and numeracy achievements. As a teacher I felt caught in the maelstrom of competing agendas, both the social, that is, the dire needs of young people for a curriculum and pedagogy that was meaningful to their lives, and the political, the needs of governments both state and federal to be able to measure outcomes against core curriculum subjects—A to E ratings on Maths, English, Science History—and NAPLAN (National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy). Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides a wording for this tension, which I would not have had the courage to use in my tenuous contractual circumstances,

...liberal regimes should not be taken at their word, that they may well have equality and fraternity as their motto without this being reflected in their actions; we know that noble ideologies can sometimes be convenient excuses. (2004, p. 81)

My temporal setting, at the outset, fuelled a shift in my intuitive concerns about something not being right—the “Cartesian *immaginatio*”, before things become conscious (Husserl, 2012, p. 90)—in a pedagogy that was not meeting the needs of disengaged youth, and led me into a far more revelatory conscious wondering. I had not yet moved to the eidetic study (p. 91) of the phenomenon of the oppression of young people, manifesting as trauma. I was noticing with greater veracity the tensions and disruptions within my consciousness but I needed the tools with which to deepen my noticing.

At the time of nearing completion of this work, the temporal situatedness of my lived experience has seen little change in the local context of students or the nature of global issues. I began this thesis when a black American president was being elected and end it as the succeeding president ‘tweets’ the ‘mighty fine’ qualities of members of white supremacist groups. My own country is about to allow a vote on marriage equality, but is unsure about how to alter the constitution to recognise Aboriginal Australians. There are calls to reduce the pressure to teach the content of the Australian Curriculum and to focus on the personal capabilities of ethics and social responsibility. NAPLAN results for this year have just been released and some of the results in my school were drawn from students using chocolate coercion to sit and do their best writing. If the memories of the London riots and the newness of the Australian Curriculum have faded, the historical issues of today are similar, and interestingly to me, my resolve to stand my ground on oppression feels correlated to my indignation in the face of local school needs and global social and environmental travesty.

In the times of the London riots the global commentary about disengaged youth was merely a poorly painted, theatrical backdrop to a much more interesting narrative being played out on the stage, where living actors took their places in a tragicomedy of immense proportion. Let me

take you there into the hearts and minds of the players who have sweated for a lifetime on their parts and lines—the backdrop depicts low-budget, puff-cheeked, white clouds, cardboard waves and recycled window balcony. Their hearts are beating loudly in their ears, they have seen the script and they know the plot. They have seen the part they are destined to play—the part given to them antenatally—the audience is grumbling, cantankerous and demanding. The curtain goes up, the audience hushes. One gets the feeling the reviews have already been written.

This play takes place in a school in a country town in the midlands of Tasmania—half a world away from the London riots but still connected to the rest of human experience through the now indivisible boundaries of time and place, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Instagram—the riots might have been happening over the back fence. I witness the first act unfold and close, as insignificant, and as normal, and as common place as the opening, closing and withering of any perennial weed, which apart from the brief passing glance, goes unnoticed amongst the daily operations of any school.

If I ask that you join me quietly in the gods to observe the goings on, you too may find that you cannot help but feel that Kafkaesque trials are being held in the corridors of our primary schools.

The Trial relates the perplexing experiences of a man ostensibly arrested on a charge which is never specified, but within the pattern of the complicated narrative Kafka is trying to elucidate some of the fundamental dilemmas of human life. (Kafka, 1977, back cover)

A senior staff member works in her office, thinking to herself about how to guide her early-years teachers to use their data to inform their work on ‘intentional teaching’. She goes over spreadsheets of PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools), KDC (Kindergarten Development Check)

and PAT (Progressive Assessment Tests) assessments. She is sincere and gentle, intelligent and 'leaderish' in her work.

A little boy appears at her half-open door. His face is there in the gap—a podgy-cheeked outdoors boy, in his school polo shirt despite a midland's winter. The senior teacher looks up and smiles gently, and asks what he is doing there, although her tone is already somewhat fatalistic—a nasal intonation that he has committed some minor wrong and it is time to explain himself. Immediately his podgy cheeks quiver with more pink, eyes begin to brim with tears and cherub mouth declines into a pouted-lower-lip effort to speak. His voice stammers and stutters into being with his explanation—one that he has worked on as he scuffed the corridor between his classroom and the senior teacher's office—but his explanation is doomed to failure, he knows it.

“I th-th-thought it was time to check our work, so I w-w-went up the front to show her, but it wasn't and I didn't know, and I got into trouble and sent to you.”

The initial consonant stutters, in his long breathless sentence convey stress, like the continual braying that any distressed creature makes. He delivers his line, word by word, ascending pitch climbing with the futility of them. And yet he must say them—it is his role. The senior teacher has pinched her mouth and a soft frown appears during his speech. It is her role, to appear surprised and simultaneously displeased at the foregone conclusion of 'wrongdoing'. Without deliberation she suggests he sit outside her office where there is a small desk and chair always at the ready, and usually occupied as if by an unwritten roster. He takes his place at the singular small desk—it is in the script.

The mental arithmetic sheets he has in his hands are done quickly, quietly, routinely and correctly. But he is in the naughty seat. The senior teacher walks past him on her way to see his teacher and to hear his

teacher's version of events but they are colleagues and collegiality would dictate a knowing 'wink-wink, nudge-nudge' kind of communication. And besides, what harm is done? She returns, passes his desk, checks his work and sees it complete. On one level she knows that the task is too easy, an activity trap, but it is cold, near end of term and besides...

Alone at the side of the stage, he performs a soliloquy about his nan and pop's farm nearby and the dogs and sheep when he visits. He does the maths sheets but keeps his thoughts on the hope that his dad will take him to the farm over the weekend to ride the mini bikes. An hour has crawled by, and lunch is just around the corner. Luckily it has been raining and the sports field is pooled with water and it is over the tops of shoes in the best bits, so he'll have fun with his mates who he plays footy with. His part is almost done for this scene.

The senior teacher has gone back to the NAPLAN data. Numeracy in Grades 4 to 6 across the school is poor. She can share this with the teachers in her team and they can discuss teaching strategies in the Professional Learning Community meeting. Meanwhile things are relatively calm and quiet. She has time to consider what Professional Learning in numeracy might do to help improve results.

The audience has been witnessing two actors, child and teacher, in, what Linda Aronson terms a "tandem narrative" (n.d., para. 2). Both protagonists share the same macro plot but their intentions digress away from their potential common purpose in a tragic lack of awareness of this purpose, and the resultant effect on the audience is the illumination of a socio-political issue or concern of the human condition (ibid.). What is left, Simon might suggest, is that "Given this doubled structure of ignorance in a pedagogical encounter, each then must listen for the silence in the other, helping each other to knowledge that is inaccessible" (1992, p. 97). The curtain falls.

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) states that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals as well as active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008). All young Australians are born capable of embodying these educational goals. One boy, and one teacher, can both be stultified by the expectation that the boy will play the role of “not being able” and the teacher will play the role of the one who determines the “transmission of knowledge” (Rancière, in Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 6) without ever their intelligences having encountered one another. When the school falls into such a gap, in the theatre between student and teacher, suggests Jacques Rancière,

the school is failing at its assigned mission of reducing inequalities, and this is because it ignores the functioning of inequality. It pretends to reduce inequality by distributing knowledge equally, and to all...It remains up to the students and their ‘individual talents’ to make a difference. (2010, p. 10)

Thus I entered my hermeneutic vortices of wondering. As I moved from teaching, from school to school, as a bureaucrat, a jurisdictional administrator of literacy and numeracy and as school principal. It was not the newsreel global events but the minutiae of the everyday where I suffered disruptions to the doxic modality of my lived experience (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 45).

I could no longer accept the status quo of things since the theatre of the ubiquitous, rather than tempt me to play a part upon the stage, fed my discontent and pushed me ever onward towards an *epoché*, an indiscernible moment of departure from the natural attitude, “the focus we have when we are involved in our original world directed stance...the default perspective” (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 42). I found myself plunged into questioning the doxic, in fact flailing against its pull, at first like a poor swimmer, struggling against the whirlpool, but embracing the

phenomenological attitude, “the focus we have when we reflect upon the natural attitude and all the intentionalities that occur within it” (ibid.). I observe the vicious current, and allow the capillary waves of the vortex to take me out to the eddies and from here, to observe the nature of that maelstrom.

Entering the work of resistance in education

Throughout my life I have experienced ways in which education conditions roots of oppression. But as education is by nature an inherently political act as well as a pedagogical act, might a pedagogue become free to act as a resistance worker, subversive to the dominant paradigms responsible for sustaining oppression? How might I be one who pushes against the “perversities of neoliberal thought” (Freire, 2014, p. xiv) to explore the ethical significance of my role as an educator in resistance work? How might I support without rescue, empower without undermining, harness without taking over, opportunities for young people to become activists in their own future and against their own oppressors in ways that might disrupt intergenerational effects of dehumanising condescension?

When institutions risk traumatising groups of people oppression is perpetrated with summary banality, committed in the guise of bureaucratic processes. The kind of activism I am thinking of, which is not about others being activists on our behalf but being our own activists with the support of others, is difficult because in naming up oppression we admit to our trauma publicly. Unwittingly the response of those around us is to empathise but also, in doing so, to collude with the system, as empathy might render our first protest, our initial recognition of our oppression, as normal, and ourselves as identified in that particular role in the normal. We are now ascribed in the role of victim rather than the role of activist and those around us as passive rather than allies to a collective cause.

Raymond Gaita finds “something truly mysterious about meaning-blindness of this profound sort” and that “some human beings are invisible to the moral faculties of their fellows” (in Krygier, 2011, p. 126). Students from disadvantaged and traumatised backgrounds, like many others, are pushed to accept an objectifying identity, which correlates to poorer health, reduced mobility towards life’s opportunities and fulfilment, less employment, and being unskilled and social-security dependent. The treatment of our most vulnerable children might be characterised as disrespectful and dismissive.

Part of the harm is psychological; it is radically disarming and demeaning to be ‘seen through’, let alone to have one’s deepest attachments and feelings treated as non-existent and then, often enough, overridden. And it is commonly not open to the subject to do anything about it. (Krygier, 2011, p. 127)

Perhaps we become resistance workers as a result of our own trauma, our transcendence of trauma and our resultant indignation. What would it take for us to become agents for activism? What might it look like to recruit our fellow humans to subvert dominant paradigms of oppression? What do everyday acts of social activism look like? “How can we who teach reclaim our hearts, for the sake of our students’ hearts, ourselves, and educational reform?” asks Parker J Palmer (2007, p. 19).

This thesis re-presents my inquiry into finding a radical entry into the work of resistance in education. I stack my bets on the practicing of listening, a simple physiological act that provokes complex intellectual and spiritual encounters with others, a kind of listening that may be refined and learned as a virtue, that is required for engaging with children, and that is a radical alternative to common “utilitarian process[es] that dehumanise the child” (Arthur, 2005, p. 253).

Phenomenological eddies: Currents that could carry me away

Unfortunately, to admit that we may be drawing on the confusions of the past to force an interpretation on to what's happening now seems humbling and not a little humiliating: surely we know the difference between our partner and a disappointing parent, between a husband's short delay and a father's permanent abandonment, between some dirty laundry and a civil war?

de Botton, 2016

There are students whose physical or intellectual disability or 'label' renders them firmly within guidelines and policies of inclusion. I wish to form a better understanding of those students who are not readily recognised when we speak of inclusive practice in educational settings. The students who are the focus of my inquiry, seem to me, to be burdened with disabilities that are not so easily recognisable and yet cause these students to be amongst the most disadvantaged educationally, often the subjects of systematic exclusion from classrooms and schools. Often with a sharp intellect, but protected by a shield of dislikeable personality, these students are difficult to include (Holt, 1964, pp. 48-49). Although we teachers have an armoury of behaviour management strategies, it is often the sole agenda of these students to subvert the strategies designed to constrain their protestations. We can name these students years after they have left our classrooms but we are often left with the feeling that we failed to create the "open spaces for a person in their plurality, spaces where they can become different, where they can grow" (Greene, 1988, p. 56). These students have experienced trauma in their lives, often an abuse of power at the hands of significant adults. I wonder whether the role of teachers almost invariably creates an environment which challenges the very needs of these students rather than enables them to overcome patterns of abusive power relationships and their ability to access learning. I embark on a multi-disciplinary search of science, literature and phenomenology in my lived experience to galvanise my wonderings into actions.

The neuroscience of trauma and of its treatment has recently gained traction in the mainstream of education. There are professional learning opportunities, publications, conferences and departmental policy documents which are not just for thinking educators but are published with the expectation that teachers more broadly will implement the information in their daily work in the form of Positive Behaviour Support. This seems like a move to reduce the last bastions of traditional forms of punitive responses to students with challenging behaviours and to divest educational settings of teachers' need for power and control through punitive means—often this means pressing such teachers into retirement or requiring their participation in performance reviews that evaluate their aspirations for career advancement.

In my current role I am reading about the neuroscience of trauma and its treatment, and I share some of my readings with my staff. With assistance and insight from professional learning consultants, we are striving to implement recommended approaches. I find that the neuroscience of trauma is effectively communicated to non-scientists like me, by authors such as Judith Howard (2013), Stephen Porges (2011), and Bessel van der Kolk (2014). I also find popular texts on brain plasticity, by authors such as Norman Doidge (2008) and Oliver Sacks (1998), engaging and relevant. The writings of both Doidge and Sacks may have inspired my apprehension that narrative is capable of discerning and communicating some of the complexity of our conscious and subconscious being. All of these texts prompt me to consider how, in my role as an educator, I might evoke in my practice our human capacity to heal from trauma, and to seek new understandings of ourselves and others. This newly emerging science seems optimistic to me in that it conveys a sense of hope, with words such as 'healing'. It calls for a move from traditional punitive measures to non-violence. I recall the use of corporal punishment when I was a student, and more recently the use of detention rooms and other non-corporal punishments for 'behaviour management'. Amongst my contemporary principal colleagues, I am now more likely to hear discussions about

developing sensory rooms, meditation and mindfulness practice, as ways of supporting students.

But I am cautious. Science might progress our understanding of the effect of trauma on learning and inform subsequent systemic resourcing and professional learning. Yet might it tend to perpetuate our view of the teacher as “the expert” and “the one who knows” (Freire, 2005, p. ix). As my hermeneutic reflections develop in this thesis, this theme recurs. What if we were to resist this elevation of the teacher and reverse her power—the student is expert and one who knows—with intentionality, and what if we preferred the teacher to be consciously aware of the fathomlessness of understanding the traumas of childhood, that is to be “ignorant” in Rancière’s sense (2010), divested of dominance, even knowledge, waiting in the wings for a student’s intelligence to appear at centre stage?

If as a teacher I am elevated in power, my humanity is threatened. When faced with a child who is distressed to the point of belligerence or violence, defiance or even highly abusive behaviour, teachers do not become researchers in a laboratory, with access to the neuroscience of that moment. In those moments, teachers are human, we become scared, or angry, or hurt, or feel undermined, all the time knowing that we need to be present for children when they need us. Access to knowledge about neuroscientific explications of behaviour becomes muted, unless well known, integrated into self-understanding, and well and long practised. Writing this thesis, for by the science, leads me inwards, phenomenologically, to a profound sense of self and other, who is the child, who constantly questions and brings the lived experience of self and child to the fore. Unless I know my self, I cannot see or know science in relation to an other.

Wonderings emerging intuitively simultaneously evade my confidence, but when I see the source of my curiosity transformed into language through skilled authors, I am compelled to join a community of inquiry

regarding our human condition. Literature resonates with my mythopoetic endeavour to apprehend how we first allow ourselves the insight to notice, to recognise the phenomenon of trauma. As a touchstone for grappling with language capable of conveying our humanity I turn regularly to literature. There I find within the existential experience of trauma an antagonist in our human narrative, I locate in this dilemma our individual and collective capacity, its protagonists. Trauma is something I recognise as a human concern, a disruption to the self, giving rise to further questioning.

Honoré de Balzac found great inspiration in the emerging field of human psychology in the nineteenth century (Crawford trans., 1985, p. 6). His novel, *Engénie Grandet* (1985) shows his intuitive understanding of traumatic events and associated patterns of behaviours in his characters. In a stunning description of how we are held hostage by past histories, de Balzac writes,

In the crisis of life, when we are overwhelmed by joy or sorrow, we see our surroundings with sharpened senses, and they remain for ever afterwards indelibly part of our experience. Charles scrutinized with strained intentness the box borders of the little garden, the faded autumn leaves floating to the ground, the crumbling walls, the grotesquely twisted branches of the apple trees, picturesque details which were to remain in his memory for ever, eternally bound up with the memory of that supreme hour of early sorrow, by a trick of memory peculiar to deep feeling. (de Balzac, 1985, p.115)

As I read *Engénie Grandet*, I attempt to understand the characters, just as I noticed characters on the metaphoric stage of my midlands primary school. Literature assists me to notice with greater acuity the plight of humanity around me in my life-world—as Charles becomes victim of his miserly and cruel Uncle’s lack of compassion and obsession with wealth, the charm of the unkempt garden becomes sinister and foreboding. Charles’ unwitting arrival at the door of his narcissistic Uncle does not render him blind to evil—perhaps his nurtured childhood gives him a hard-wired sense of

justice. Eugénie, whose sense of injustice, re-awakened by her empathy for her cousin Charles, was modelled by her mother whose own brutal relationship with Eugénie's father is only tolerable due to her hope that Eugénie may have a future containing a kind husband.

In my imagined version, might Charles seek a counsellor to help him consciously make connections, so that small, walled, unkempt gardens do not render him temporarily frozen with feelings of grief, and perhaps growing resentment, in the future? Might neuroscience show that Charles' adult trauma attaches his emotional experience in the mammalian brain to the survival role of the reptilian brain, thus rendering pieces of subconscious information out of sync with rational thinking?

Is it possible that Monsieur Grandet suffered something of an attachment issue in his childhood, leaving him unable to form relationships that do not revolve around his money? Is this why he spends his nights obsessively calculating his wealth and destroying those around him, relying on the dependency of others for survival and to secure ongoing relationships, such as that with Nanon, Eugénie and Madame Grandet? Developmental trauma, brought on by disorganised attachment in early childhood is an insidious disease that destroys lives and creates the profoundly dysfunctional human relationships we associate with very challenging behaviours in children and adults (van der Kolk, 2014). *Eugénie Grandet* is a great work of literature that brings to the fore what we think exists in, as Dennis Sumara suggests, “imaginative spaces...for by imagining a situational possibility during the act of reading, there simultaneously occurs a question of what exists” (1996, p. 85).

Should I follow Merleau-Ponty, perhaps my encounter with hermeneutic inquiry and literary insights

does not make the need for scientific research any less pressing; in fact, the only thing under attack is the dogmatism of a science that thinks itself capable of absolute and complete knowledge. We are simply doing justice to each of the variety of element in human experience and, in particular to sensory perception. (2004, p. 36)

I wonder whether the science that enables us to understand the significant role that trauma has on the brain of a child is not nearly so significant as the way in which we as humans might use the science to tap into our own humanity, with the knowledge that being present for a child is a triumph of confronting oppression. Might it be that a human being standing on the moon was not nearly as impressive as the overcoming of racial oppression that enabled mathematician Katherine Johnson to calculate the trajectories for the moon landing?

This thesis began as a question about the trauma I noticed manifesting in my students—it became an act of leaning into the ontological manifestation of the trauma inherent within my own existence. Trauma exists because we exist as humans, and we manifest patterned behaviour based on the behaviours that kept us safe as very young children, but as adults the ways in which we survived as children display themselves as the manifold rigidities of our individual world view (Sokolowski, 2000). When I seek to see myself, I see my students, their patterns and their need for me to be present, more clearly.

Eddies of science, literature and hermeneutic phenomenology from vortices of living inquiry flow into my interpretations of lived experiences, well beyond the myopia of my individual outlook as I encounter them in the potential of my own perspective and that of others. To this end, I have explored widely and deeply a range of philosophical viewpoints so as to reach beyond the limits of my natural attitude as it stood at the outset of this thesis. In my oscillations between the scientific and the narrative, I recognise that

Both paradigmatic and narrative cognition generate useful and valid knowledge. They are part of the human cognitive repertoire for reasoning about and making sense of the encounter with self, others and the material realm. (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 9)

I grapple with the neuroscience from a layman's perspective, whereas my use of narrative as inspiration for investigating and understanding human trauma and the power of hearing it, in education, allows me to deliberate my place in a global endeavour to understand the eidetic nature and the lived experience of trauma, and the potential of other being present as a healing influence.

Trauma deserves special attention as a phenomenon, it is not always easily identified but it is easily perpetrated and generally ignored as a major influence on the capacity of children to engage in learning. Judith Herman says that trauma has a force of its own,

At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning. (1992, p. 33)

In this thesis the *eidōs* of trauma is not the event itself, not the lightning strike, but the thunder clap, the manifestation of unseeable and often unsayable moments subsequent to events that blind us to our own humanity and the humanity of others.

What concerns me is the insidious trauma that characterises so many classrooms, not as acts of abuse but as everyday acts conducted in the name of teaching. This deserves investigation because the failure to recognise certain acts in the name of teaching as acts causing trauma or re-stimulating trauma, can and do inadvertently and commonly undermine our desire to support students in building the resilience they need to achieve learning.

Resilience is fragile. In the face of increasing political concern with data-driven accountability, even the sincerest teachers can inadvertently degrade student resilience in the face of “iatrogenic contagions” that trigger culturally bound disorders, such as low literacy amongst low socio-economic populations (Watters, 2010, p. 5). Many students meet the low-expectations of teachers and are caught in a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy as education programs respond to low expectations which further drives down emancipative possibilities in low socio-economic areas (Freebody, 2007).

What might offer hope for redemption? Might we assume, for example, an ethics of care, as Brian Massumi describes it, “of caring, caring for belonging, which has to be a non-violent ethic that involves thinking of your local actions as modulating a global state” (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 214). This thesis comes very close to local action where the development of a learner takes place—one who initially cannot, becomes one who can and then one who is, within possible life-worlds where a teacher and a student can be mutually disposed to unconditional expectations of love, zestfulness and intelligent behaviour. In his “Philosophy as Listening”, Havi Carel insists, “We need to be listening to each other in order to learn, and we need to listen to others in order to enable them to learn” (Carel & Gamez, 2004b, p. 235). Within an ethics of care in this thesis I place listening at its centre. My inquiry listens to students and to their ways of being. I am in some way, Alain de Botton’s “she”.

She somehow sees right into his inability to express his anger; she recognizes the process whereby he converts difficulty into numbness and self-disgust. Without shaming him, she can identify and name the forms his madness sometimes takes. (de Botton, 2016, p. 21)

Contributing verses

Oh me! Oh life! Of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish
Of myself forever reproaching myself,
(for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean,
Of the struggle ever renew'd,
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crows I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,
The question, O me!
So sad, recurring – What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here – that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

O Me! O Life! Walt Whitman

Questions emerge, more moths than butterflies, from cocoons of confused feelings, posed initially by a metre ruler during a spelling test when I was 6 years old, and many years later as a principal having a javelin pointed at me by a very upset boy. How do I pose questions about these things? I am not to answer them for I am “here”, to propose a “verse”, as I may, for the “powerful play” that is to go on.

With eyes that crave the light
of struggles ever renewed
in lives filled with trauma
I ask my questions
from heart and mind so sad
yet full of hope and faith.
I crave to understand
those lives lived,
in oppression that continues
to reside in our schools
however sensitively we try.
How to banish its plodding

insidious influence,
its silencing of young voices
with embraces from human hearts
that listen and open to goodness,
that ease that forever self-reproach?

What mean history has affected our lives
the selves that we are becoming
when we act for or against
or with our students?
Can the heart of our listening
be our salve for healing
for restoring voices
to the young?
Where is self,
where is other
being present, listening
in unconditional communion?

“Answer.

That you are here – that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.
O Me! O Life!”

And so what voice do I use? Mine was silenced for so long, and it emerged uncertain and inexperienced—without academic pedigree. It makes sense that I choose hermeneutic phenomenology as my approach to inquiring into the loss of voice and the trauma that causes the silencing. In the process of interpreting my lived experience, I might in writing reflectively and hermeneutically, come to understand why I thought I could not write. The only way to figure out why you cannot swim is to splutter, gasping for air, until you find you can swim.

The mythopoetic style of narratives impels our moves from the personal to the universal, and from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude in our study of human lived experience. Donald Polkinghorne, in his work on narrative knowing and the human sciences configures narrative with phenomenology, and he says, “Phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project” (1995, p. 6). Though the prosaic discourse of my drafts “created a primary kind of data” (ibid.), my interpretive re-writing of them attracts the kind of mythopoetic language, “the language of story and poetry” that teachers Steve Shann and Rachel Cunneen believe lies “at the heart of our English discipline”. They say,

It is language designed to enrich our comprehension of our inner lives, a language that helps us to see beyond the literal, beyond the world revealed to us through other disciplines like science and mathematics, history and geography. In this it shares an epistemology with the other creative arts, though our medium – the language of words – is different. Our mythopoetic discourse helps us to see the world more fully. (Shann & Cunneen, 2011, p. 47)

My hope is that the narratives within this thesis resonate with the mythopoetic. I hope to evoke, as close as I might, a re-ignition of the senses and thoughts that were occurring at the times narrative moments unfolded, so that I might in relative retrospective and temporal safety, reflect with noetic perspectives. In this way, the narratives are not retellings but invocations of the *epoché*, they enable a stance transcendent of the story line, engaging the ontological existence of the phenomena I wish to inquire into—to turn what was once alarming, into an item of immense curiosity, an unusual specimen, artefact, of our existence. To wonder, what these artefacts tell me now, I have removed them from their original temporal habitat (van Manen, 1990).

I have not turned towards a methodology of autoethnography although the narratives reveal much about my life-world and its familiar social and

political context. The narratives are first person accounts and I intend them to be phenomenological in that they have once described and then re-describe and interpret the stories of the protagonists that walk through their pages (Polkinghorne, 1995; van Manen, 1990). In this sense, they are also autoethnographical as they perform as texts that, as Carolyn Ellis suggests

Celebrate [...] concrete experience and intimate detail; examines our human experience in endowed by meaning; is concerned with moral, ethical and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy; helps us to know how to live and cope; features multiple voices and repositions the readers and subjects as co-participants in dialogue... (1999, p. 669)

There are also limiting factors when rendering a narrative of lived experience. The contexts within which I initially observed the phenomena I am inquiring into become partially damaged. As does the *eidos* of the phenomenon, its essence, since trauma has no essence of its own, residing as it does ontologically (van Manen, 2014, p. 231)—it manifests only as a way of being in the world as someone, parasitically attaching itself to an individual's perspective. Telling the story of a particular manifestation of such a phenomenon as trauma, is like removing a Weedy Sea Dragon from amongst the weeds, rocks and tides of Kingston Beach, placing it in an aquarium and then trying to watch how it lives. A retelling is a poor substitute for seeing it serendipitously in the course of a Saturday morning 'pootle' as we swim on to Boronia Beach. Though I try to do justice to events by using the vehicle of mythopoetic writing, inevitably, at the time I observed or experienced the phenomenon, there was a rich habitat, a cacophony of accompanying sensory moments, existing both consciously and subconsciously that cannot be conveyed. I must be conscious that there are some things I cannot recall and that some things are just unsayable. I attend to being ethical and doing no violence to myself or others in adopting the principles I choose for ethical decision-making in my writing. I

have forgiven myself for deciding not to convey everything for selecting what I must not say.

Could I have chosen a quantitative methodology through which to come to know myself as an educator? Might I have drawn the y axis of the classrooms I have taught in and an x axis of the children in those years? Should I have developed an insightful algorithm showing how various teaching methods enable children with escalated behaviours to calm? Oh, to have the discipline to run a measurable, longitudinal study, the stillness and research grant to distil the clear conclusions from the chaos of a traumatised child. No, such methodologies would have required me to hypothesise my conclusions even before I began my study. Instead, all about me and within me were the moments of utter despair and moments of deep connection, non-linear in their appearance, irrational to me in their connectivity. I present here, narratives that each contain, for me, and perhaps universally, a question about our unfinishedness, and pose in my interpretations and reflections how we might as humans come to delight in our unfinishedness.

I have used narrative unashamedly to bring my reader with me. Without you, I may well have saved my time and kept their stories in my head—to be recalled from time to time as mere experiences. I have needed you, a reader, imagined or real, to tell you my experiences, through the mythopoetic, to show you the humanity of our most vulnerable children, to ask you, isn't there a better way? Would you have wept at the sight of my statistical analysis? Would you consider lobbying for funding for traumatised children whilst scanning my dot point conclusions? I have brought you here so that I could confide who I am and so you might accompany me as agents for children. Jerome Bruner suggests a life-making theme for such a mission.

This life-making function is dynamic because narratives do not merely report on the life that is lived nor the community that has developed.

The narrative process is a search for meaning, so the telling and the told,

the hearing and the written, are inextricably linked, as is the individual narrator in the social milieu of discourse. (Bruner, 1986, in Dáute & Fine, 2003, p. 63)

My reading of Gadamer's hermeneutic circle leads me to wonder about the influence of my own historicity in relation to how I interpret the world of education around me—particularly the experiences of children whose behaviour alienates them from education. I learn to be open to the language of a distressed child, and ask myself, what might be made from a child's language if we can see his words as a text from which we might interpret subjective meaning, in a Gadamerian sense (Grondin, 2002, pp. 46-49). I see that the role of the teacher, the school and education combines as an institution, which responds to the language of a child with its own language of power, authority and often oppression. If I consider the language of the institution as a text, I ask many more reflective questions. If I consider this text in relation to my own historicity, the image of the hermeneutic circle gives way to a series of concentric circles, initiating from a disruption.

As I began writing, I watch my narratives become foregrounded by my total experience in education. With each disruption that begins a narrative, like a stone to a still tarn, interpretive moments ripple out on the energy of capillary waves, giving way to a vortex. I come to realise that the energy spun in one vortex, gives rise to a neighbouring vortex and so on. Physics calls this linked pattern of energetic vortices, a vortex street, and I borrow these terms from physics as I feel the energy of hermeneutic writing gather itself into a stream of vortices. To illustrate this as a phenomenological methodology of inquiry, I create a digital art piece as a virtual map of the methodology and of this thesis. I refer to the ripples and vortices as components of a hermeneutic journey of inquiry across a temporal lifetime in education. Ripples of inquiry occur against the background of a series of photos, the beginning image coinciding with my first day of Grade 1, full of timid hope in front of a garden, which in my memory is my father's

decorative marigold garden path. Following this photo are a series of class photos, ranging from my own primary school to high school classes, within which I am seated with my peers. As the map gathers itself towards the mid-section of the map, I am now in place as a class teacher, and in the final few photos, the principal of a whole school. The style of class photos has not changed much since photography made its way into school life, documenting groups of children and their teachers, as objects of education, but as I look to these photos even the pixilation does not fade my memory of each person and associated events. We are subjects in our shared memories, I still hear their voices, their laughter and distresses, see their actions as though the pixilation merely serves to make their energies more alive to my recall. I invite the reader to imagine their own class photos, the historicity of education informing eddies of personal inquiry. In each chapter, I enter the vortices of reminiscences and lived experience. In my methodology, I have attempted to manage both the power and limits of narrative inquiry through a range of literary devices.

There are obligations and concessions that I have made, in writing the narratives that are responsible for disrupting my natural attitude (Sokolowski, 2000). One is the use of pseudonyms for the protagonists within my narratives. This has been a challenge for me, since my memory does not case each person in formaldehyde, for with every remembering each one visits me anew, and my emotions are once again swamped with the emotions and senses of the time of happening. I honour their presence in this thesis by abiding to rules of ethics and practising diligence in my decision-making for respecting the dignity and autonomy of my subjects. I maintain the confidentiality of institutions and individuals with literary devices. For example, I make changes in linearity, context, temporality and details that might leave bread crumb trails to identity. I strive to keep my subjects safe from harm because in this thesis I portray them at their most vulnerable. I choose pseudonyms so that I might recognise them in the hidden rooms of this thesis. Their names remind me of a kind of fidelity

between me and them. Rare exceptions are the names of some adults who have given me their explicit permission.

To support both the sincerity and accuracy of my narratives and intrusions of my self in my reflections, I have used “grammatical signals” (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 92) designed to aide veracity as an “impulse towards truth” (p. 20) and the desire to declare the ‘I’ of my voice. An aspect of finding the ‘I’ of my voice has been to honour the voice of my childhood and to use it with pride and conviction. My historicity and heritage arises from the chocolate basalt soil of the North West coast of Tasmania, Australia’s southern island state. The use of local ‘lingo’, North West coast vernacular, imagery evoked through local idioms and terms from my heritage to describe relationships, ecology and geography, appear in the narratives and as well during what might seem like uninhibited moments of reflection. Where vernacular terms are used, I have allowed the context to carry the words into meaning for the reader, rather than break the cadence of the narrative with what I feel to be unnecessary explanation. The landscape of Tasmania is as integral to me as my skin and thoughts, and so I invite images of my existence—wild rivers and temperate rainforests, familiar roads and dolerite columns of sea cliffs into this thesis, for writer to commune with reader.

My inquiry takes place over a temporal lifetime but is intersected by narratives that disrupt the chronology of my lifetime and give cause for pause, reflection, interpretation and dialogue. During the process of writing and re-writing, a third temporality appears, unintended, unbidden but compelling, as moments contemporaneous to my act of writing and re-writing intrude and are captured as they shed immediate insights on various parts of this thesis. Since the significance of these disruptions could only be recognised in retrospect, and further disruptions were perceived as I saw the links, the narratives are often accompanied by diachronic reflections set in text boxes where “Diachronic data contain temporal information about the

sequential relationship of events” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12), allowing me to interrupt a narrative anew. These diachronic reflections convey that even as we reflect on lived experience, lived experience unfolds inexorably and asks us to seek new meanings.

I use differing fonts to indicate a variety of writing modes. For example, narratives, also referred to as vignettes, occur in Avenir Light font size 11, distinguishing the lived experience from the body text in which interpretive reflections appear. Other font sizes and paragraph settings alert the reader to passages concerned with poems and interviews. In citing other authors, I make occasional use of square brackets to indicate my making sense of the relationship I have with the text.

Before moving into the body of this work, I share something that is ever present in my psyche, that perhaps symbolises the kind of ontological and visceral intimacy (Maclaren, 2017), veracity and honesty that I hope will pervade my thesis.

I find myself unable to sit still in front of my MacBook Air, riddled as I frequently am by self-doubt.

Pamela, my co-counsellor arrives for our session. We sit on the sofa, near my desk actually. She holds my hand and says, “Hello”, indicating to me that I have her full attention.

“I am in front of the goal”, I tell her. “I’m afraid to kick the ball.”

“What will happen if it goes in?” She asks, following my metaphor.

“I don’t know. Not much probably.”

“I’m listening”, she says. “Tell me what happened. It’s very old.”

I follow the pulsing nausea that has taken up residence below my sternum. Perhaps near Manipura, the solar plexus chakra. It’s familiar

and I lean into it, allowing my body to remember the cellular origins of the feeling and its ancient narrative. My mind recalls the sensation in vivid colour and observes it from the safety of a different time and place.

"I am 18 months old. My mother is pregnant with her fourth child, my little brother, and she will have four children under 6."

"Yes", says Pamela.

"The shop is busy and my mum is tired. 'Someone get Elizabeth', she is saying."

"What did you do?" asks Pamela, inviting me to go deeper into the connection between my current fears and my old self.

"I am 5. My little brother is 3. I let him out of his cot. I take him outside the house, behind the shop and we crawl under a metal grate and into the main street. I so badly want to see the outside. Dad has to close the shop at the peak hour to have the staff go look for us. He smacks me when I am found. He's never smacked me before."

"You won't get smacked this time", says Pamela.

I am sobbing and sobbing, "I know". I begin to laugh. The scene evaporates and I look out the window situated opposite Pamela and me.

"What do you need to do?" asks Pamela.

"Continue to write, but when I finish my thesis, I'm going to get my little brother—who is returning from another deployment soon—and we'll visit mum and dad together. I am going to tell them, 'Thank you for loving me enough to close the shop'."

Am I yet not free from penance if I reach towards what might be seen by others as beyond my grasp? If so, am I not yet free of the need for courage in pursuing the task of my coming into being, as I embark upon unfolding this thesis? I am to expect an enduring need for courage, one that grows ever stronger with every new reflection and revelation, and never lets up. My task is to lean into the fear and truth of that which resides in my solar plexus and transform them into courage. Robert Sokolowski says,

Veracity is the impulse toward truth, and the virtue of truthfulness in its proper cultivation. Veracity is the origin of both truthfulness and the various ways of failing to be truthful. (2008, p. 20)



Ripples of ethos and duty
... of curiosity, language and dialogue
... of truthfulness and the good
... of oppression and freedom
... of intuition and integrity
... of subversion
He asked me to play hangman so I did

CHAPTER 2 SERVING EMANCIPATIVE POSSIBILITIES

It's not the world that was my oppressor, because what the world does to you, if the world does it to you long enough and effectively enough, you begin to do to yourself.

James Baldwin

In this second chapter, there are seven vignettes. I began writing them when I was tentatively exploring a language style to help me express, explore and interpret possibilities that might have been latent in them for uncovering meaning, and for finding ways for me to convey the stories of who I am and how I come to understand my experiences as a student, mother, and

teacher. Writing the vignettes led me to moments that seem to have become embedded in frameworks of understanding for elucidating my experiences as a learner and a teacher. At that beginning time, it seemed only in this way of narrative telling could I feel safe to explore philosophy as a vehicle for understanding the influences that have affected my being in the world. These brief exploratory vignettes were to give me agency. They were to allow me to walk to the water's edge, look at the vast ocean ahead, enter the cold water, rinse my goggles in the first wavelet, fit them to my eyes, look across for reassurance and then push forward, arms through the surface water to see the sudden on-rush of sand-texture, moving shells, small skates and drifting kelp. I could strike out in ever-increasing distances to the foot of the cliff, with huge rocks and seaweed, schools of fish and seabirds. I was to find a small entry point into open ocean and yet it was intense and brilliantly rewarding. Though, since writing the vignettes, I have swum five kilometres past the cliffs to the next beach, some days I still turn back to shore, the waves too choppy, the rocks too unfamiliar, and I find I need support again to strike out.

This second chapter thus represents my tentative entry into the vaster ocean of my thesis. I trace the historicity of disruptions that seem poignant to me—in their capacity to create a ripple—experiences, which in my mundane life seemed to ‘jar’, often with surprisingly violent resonance despite the ‘everydayness’ of the events. The seven vignettes I have selected to mine for their essences, like all stories show their significance only in the retelling. Each one gives its gifts to me willingly in the form of wonderings. These wonderings are often centred on a concept I had never before turned over in my hands with any great scrutiny nor indeed had any previous requirement for rigour in my understanding. I had feelings such as frustration, confusion, indignation, or joy when these events occurred and during the process of recalling them, but I had never wondered why and I had not enabled my capacity for reflexivity to necessarily be awakened. Feelings alone, seem to me, to be a fairly weak basis upon which to decide what to do in the wake of a poignant moment, even if it is feelings that

provide the catalyst, signifying a moment's importance. For me feelings are viscerally inescapable. Not attaching deep feelings to poignant moments—as Hannah Arendt's ...*Banality of Evil* (2006) suggests is possible, where one human being can debilitate and dehumanise through total indifference to another—is to be condemned. But I am to be careful and modest—Martin Buber reminds me succinctly of my purpose in my preoccupation with stories of personal significance. I “should be careful not to set [myself] as [my] aim” (Buber, 1994, p. 28)—since I wish to move from the ‘I’ to the ‘thou’. In my thesis then I accept feelings and permit them their rightful place.

When, like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, I was introduced to phenomenology, I “saw its interest; it was a way of doing philosophy that reconnected it with normal, lived experience” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 3). But how was I to use phenomenology to explore the “datum of essential intuition” (Husserl, 2012, p. 12), in order to make sense of my individual insights? I needed to notice what aspects of these narratives came to the surface through the act of my retelling them. The narratives are duly retold here in a simple font, indicating their initial simplicity. Each narrative spoke to me in terms of a hidden idea, that is the idea previously unseen from the point of view of the “natural standpoint” (Husserl, 2012, p. 9). Once I had uncovered the ideas inherent within each narrative, I was then able to enter into dialogue with others about ideas such as ‘freedom’, ‘ethics’, and ‘integrity’. I could ask questions about these things—notice nuances where previously there was only the comfort of vague notions.

I wondered, if Sartre could make German phenomenology speak to him in French (Bakewell, 2016, p. 5), then it seemed to me, as unlikely as it might seem to others, that the European literature I read in Grade 12 and at university and the European phenomenology I am reading now, might speak to me with the nasal twang of my island upbringing, one that was most informed by growing up at the back of a fish and chip shop on the

furthest northwest coastline of the southernmost island in Australia. My phenomenology is valuable too! But I could not do this in ignorance. I must figure out how to speak ‘philosophically’. In the last pages of his book, *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, Sokolowski encourages me to persist in this.

The reader of a philosophical text...is simply being reminded of what he already knows. He is being helped to see the forms and principles that are already at work in his world and in himself as an agent of truth. (2008, p. 321)

Each vignette allows me to learn how to practise phenomenology with regard to the things that worry me and the things that make me feel frustrated and indignant. The more I learn about oppression, the more I need to understand the language of oppression. These vignettes are my struggles and my excitements in learning how to do phenomenology—my reflections and my learnings are diachronically anchored to each vignette. My purpose in this chapter is to share the development of my phenomenology with my reader—my phenomenology is the phenomenology of learning by doing, and by doing, learning. It is my existential claim to an education, one that I have chosen, not one that was imposed. I take re-usable scraps of my formal and informal education, aspects of my own life as a student and as a teacher and make a foundation for a new education for myself. With my new education, I hope to bring valuable insights to the education of the others I now serve. What would be the point otherwise? I must have a means by which to shake myself from banality and into agency.

Topiary on the Midlands Highway

Driving down the Midlands Highway has become something of a trip down memory lane because I have now lived half of my life, so far, at either end of this road. The drive along the length of the highway is

four hours of thinking time (more or less depending on road works) between lived experiences. Recently I drove my parents along the Midlands to visit friends and relatives in the North and North West. Occasionally along the way my mum would tap her fingernail on the window, pointing out trees that have grown or coloured with the autumn. She also points out houses that have changed hands or cattle that look wonderfully healthy. Dad chimes in with anecdotal stories, some I already know, that we share as motifs in our family narrative. He grins at the now over-grown topiary train, where over forty years ago they had sat my big brother. Near Latrobe, Dad shouts, "Anybody for Railton, Spreyton, Quoiba? Can't be any bugger lives there! Let 'er go guard!" in jovial memory of his train trips back home to Cooe while on leave from World War II. He has shouted the same thing every time we've driven through there together and we always laugh.

Back at my home near Hobart, Mum and Dad know I am studying. Mum tells me for the first time that she never read to me as a kid because she was worried about her lack of ability to read. She reiterates that finishing school at Grade 5 was no great loss since she was too stupid to learn. It has become her mantra about her own education and intellectual ability. She looks at me with a mixture of guilt and pride.

On Mothers' Day, I phone her at home in Western Australia and her quietness over the phone says so much when I tell her that the tap-tap of her fingernail on the car window was the best education I ever had. She instilled a love of observing our world. Her sheer joy and sharing shaped my energy for learning and was the bedrock for building my curiosity and the fundamental value my siblings and I have for our own learning.

Ripples of ethos and duty

Ethos is interpreted by Elliott Eisner as “...the underlying deep structure of a culture, the values that animate it, that collectively constitute its way of life” (in McLaughlin, 2005, p. 310). For me Eisner’s ethos is vital if we are to create a culture of learning in the classroom, where language is ‘truthful’, where ‘truthful’ means responsible engagement with others. My mother’s ‘truthfulness’ about what she saw around us is part of the recognisable symbols of my conscious world, symbols that unite me to my world. Common place though they may be, these things made up the nursery rhymes of my coming into being as a global citizen and a recognisable individual. The sense of responsibility as conveyed by my mother resonated with me, as a truth learnt, both sublime and terrible, through her way of teaching since “the world is not given to us ‘on a plate’, it is given to us as a creative task” (Murdoch, 2003, p. 215).

“An important part of human learning is an ability to both generate and to judge and understand the imagery which helps us to interpret the world”, says Iris Murdoch (2003, p. 215). Murdoch is passionate about the power of dialogue for transforming the experience of human learning. Shaping an authentic culture for learning might be distinguished from traditional learning in a classroom where emphasis on what is practical and pragmatic might inhibit our allegiance to being truthful, being ethical and dutiful. In an authentic culture of learning, we can grow into truthfulness, we can learn to be ethical and dutiful. We can thrive in an ever-present, situated morality that surely enables our coming into being fully human. The “moment where the self finds itself” (Biesta, 2016, p. 4) is the emergence of a sense of responsibility to self and other, a manifestation of our recognition of our self as an ethical entity. In monologue, their most accessible vehicle for moving students through progressions of systemic curriculum delivery, teachers pound through curriculum content in contemporary classrooms and struggle to enable voices of students to be heard. Time for dialogue eludes them though they might know that its honesty and openness can

improve student engagement and learning, often dramatically, without risking loss of knowledge.

In my early observations of classroom teaching, I used to think that there were classrooms in which some learning occurred due to sets of expectations and that these expectations would be backed up by all kinds of classroom management strategies. For example, students would learn a list of ten spelling words or would be kept inside at recess. There were other classrooms in which I thought learning was occurring due to sets of expectations supported by the interplay of truth and duty, which would allow a learning culture to evolve. In this classroom, students would become learners rather than being merely participators in activities. I was not necessarily criticising the strategies employed or a particular style of teaching. On the contrary, I understood that such strategies had their place in a teacher's repertoire. The teacher had a strategy only and I was afraid that it might manifest as the dominant cultural paradigm of the classroom.

I wonder about the way I used the word 'truth' within 'truthfulness'. But I can say it abides with me today—'truth' expresses the idea of 'opening' to questioning, rather than acting out the single view of a teacher. My experiences in my parents' car and my experiences in the classroom, are similar, in that "the philosophical mind realises what the experiencing mind is really doing when it proceeds from one [circumstance] to the other" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 363). Whilst I have lost the 'objects' of memory as they occurred at the time, I can reflect now "by expanding into the manifoldness of the contents or the continual re-emergence of new forms of mind" (ibid.). Knowledge of self is no longer alien to me. I now know myself to be a good learner and to be a good teacher, when before I felt I was neither. My consciousness of these experiences requires and enables me to be truthful to my heritage. Openness to experience invites me to be truthful. It becomes possible for truthful reflection to occur and understandings to be made anew due to safe spaces that good teachers occasion. In the kinds of

safe spaces, created by teachers, who are open to the experiences and the truths of self and other, it might be possible for students to share their experiences through which concealed insights become roused. “Banking” styles of teaching (Freire, 2007, p. 72) allow little space for experience, or for the kind of knowledge-making that becomes self-knowledge and transformation (Gadamer, 2013, p. 365).

In his book, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Charles Taylor describes the social imaginary as

...the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (2004, p. 23)

Considering the constrained social and economic conditions which surround many of our students, it must seem to them that the external influences in their lives are unchangeable, or even reinforced by their current social circumstances, so that possibilities for change might be unimaginable.

On one occasion for instance, whilst on a recent half-day sailing excursion, a school trip on the Derwent River took a small group of student leaders into sight of the University of Tasmania, as the campus slides up the hill, on the flanks of the Derwent, and into the sought-after suburbs of Sandy Bay and Mount Nelson. I asked a Grade 6 boy if he would like to study at university, Engineering or something. He replied, “Nuh, I’m going to get my car licence and do ‘burnouts’ like my Dad”. I struggled not to criticise his father for using a suburban street intersection to force his car into a screeching, rubber-burning, illegal maelstrom as a career path. It was apparent that our new school mission to bring more global experiences to the children’s lives was much-needed as this child’s suburban experience made up the totality of his social imaginary to this point.

Whilst the images young people have of themselves and their aspirations might enable them to function within their own cultural domain, the domain of the classroom risks alienating them rather than creating a space for students to explore wider possibilities. Since the classroom feels alienating to some, it probably should not surprise us that many students find it difficult to learn, let alone become learners. Given that traditional classroom expectations and routines may in themselves alienate students and prevent their involvement in learning, we could explore the ethos that creates such issues of exclusion and alienation, and therefore consider what ethos may unlock classrooms for many students in inclusive and emancipative ways.

On the first day back at school for staff, in my first year as a principal, I wished to explore the possibilities of developing a vision statement which might inspire us to consider how an inclusive and emancipatory school could reimagine our ways of being with young people. The vision statement became: “That Vale Primary School will be proudly recognised as a centre of excellence for the academic and social/emotional education for every student”. I wondered how I might support teachers to shift their response to challenging student behaviours, such as being able to withdraw a child’s right to an education without question, to one in which all staff could contribute to supporting every child to remain in an educational space. In our envisioning of an inclusive school, we wondered about a broader repertoire of responses to students’ needs. If my school was to consider the implications of the underlying message of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2007, p. 9)—“it is everyone’s responsibility to react thoughtfully and positively to the situation”—we would need a great deal of dialogue as a staff, and with parents and students.

I can share here two specific examples of teachers’ confused attitudes and beliefs about disadvantaged young people that an inclusive approach might address. These two observed responses to students’ behaviour might

have come from the teachers' personal distress patterns. But they did contravene our emerging expectations of how we might enact our vision. I had no patience for instance with a teacher comparing his class' intelligence to that of his dog or with another referring to a number of his students, who had backgrounds of neo-natal and post-natal trauma, as 'f**k-knuckles'. My desire that we enter into dialogue about the state of oppressive practices resulted in one of the teachers retiring. He told me that although he admired the direction in which I was taking the school, and was greatly supportive of my professionalism, he felt that he was too old and too stuck in his ways to change. Perhaps this teacher did know compassion in his heart, but perhaps he also sensed the work it would take to bring his compassion into being for his students in his classroom. The other staff member has decided to stay with us, as we collaborate in finding ways to become allies to the young people we serve. As Nussbaum advises,

In order for compassion to be present, the person must consider the suffering of another as a significant part of his or her own scheme of goals and ends. She must take that person's ill as affecting her own flourishing. In effect, she must make herself vulnerable in the person of another. It is that eudemonistic judgement, not the judgement of similar possibilities that seems to be a necessary constituent of compassion. (2003, p. 319)

When I, as a teacher, alter my emotional position in relation to students from one of domination, to one as an ally, I need to be vulnerable, in the sense that Nussbaum identifies that vulnerability is an "epistemological requirement for compassion in human beings" (p. 319).

I must ask myself, as a school leader, am I assisting truthfulness, ethos and duty to come into being through the transformation of culture in my school? This question leads me to consider, once more, my mother and her way of introducing us to the world outside of the family car. I sit here at my keyboard and I return in my imagination to the smell of the Falcon 500 stationwagon and the sight of the dry landscape of the Midlands Highway.

What was it that made this small action of tapping the window and pointing out cows and trees so poignant for me as a learner and later as an educator? Perhaps my mother's way of teaching was honest. After all, honesty is truthfulness made manifest through a selfless act of giving, is it not? I certainly felt safe when my mother taught us this way. I felt loved. I felt that I mattered, and that my mother cared about how I might come to know my world through suggesting things to notice. I do not recall my mother ever telling us much about the things she brought to our attention with her fingernail tapping on the window glass. She just piqued our curiosity. I came to want to know the difference between a Hereford and a Friesian. I wanted to know her stories of milking a Jersey cow in the cold dawn of the West Coast of Tasmania. She told us how she would put her forehead into the flank of the Jersey and how she loved the warmth and comfort of the cow she milked. This is how I learnt about truthfulness, ethos and duty in teaching at a very young age. It came to me through small acts of teaching through sharing love in and of the world. It makes the development of 'character' and 'values-based' education, formalised through curriculum documents, feel like the planting of genetically modified Tasmanian Blue Gums over the scorched earth of what was once a temperate rainforest and still calling it a forest—one, a product of our loving nature, the other a product of corrupted power, pedalled to the masses as a promise of future wealth.

I have noticed the re-emergence of character education as a feature of recent curriculum reviews along with a resurgence of values-based education as an almost indivisible element. James Arthur clarified my understanding of the connections and distinction between values education and character education by stating that character education is a feature of child-centred learning and is therefore about developing the child's capacity to self-reflect and therefore to develop. This has certain implications, I would assume, on the capacity of the student to develop new social imaginaries. Arthur outlines the pitfalls of attempting to synthesise diversity into common agreement, by pointing out the possible trap of a curriculum

based on the ethos of the government of the time, the issue of the teacher acting in loco parentis in determining the strategies and pedagogy in character education, and the dilemma of reckoning any meaningful agreement on a set of principles in a pluralist society (Arthur, 2005, p. 247).

Arthur raises great concern regarding the “danger of reducing character education to a series of behaviour outcomes taught in a behaviourist way” and further, warns that we should not promote “a utilitarian process that dehumanises the child” (Arthur, 2005, p. 253). I call to mind the idea that the very act of teaching is imbued with the threads of the hidden curriculum but that bringing character education into the explicit domain of the curriculum demands a great deal of rigour, in terms of teaching not for a particular kind of character, but instead teaching in a way in which a student’s true character is enabled. Based on my determination to see every child as intelligent, zestful and loving, I wonder if our traditional views of character education might find voice through being less about curriculum and far more about a pedagogy of compassion which enables self-transformation. My mother, in those moments of teaching was fully present for me and allowed me to acknowledge my own character and bring this to bear on my awareness that I was an autonomous, curious and valued person. In this way, teachers might enable a student to access their social imaginaries rather than limiting or ascribing another in superficial terms.

In my role as a teacher and as a principal, I wonder how character education might not endeavour to fill students with ascribed attitudes and beliefs but with the capacity to think about attitudes and beliefs, and as such encourage the further humanisation of the child. What are the preconditions for such a space to be made possible? How might a disposition of listening assist in the creation of a space that is safe for a young person’s character to emerge? Such paying of attention requires a deep-seated sense of duty, a truthfulness, but moreover the moral stance required to be present, as Murdoch describes, “An unselfish person enlarges

the space and the world, we are calmed and composed by his presence” (2003, p. 347). I find in Simone Weil’s contemplative words, “attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity” (Weil, in Murdoch, 2003, p. 462), a touchstone expression for the transformative power of deep regard for other. It is this generous gift of our time to another which makes it possible for me to aspire to a newer age of spirituality with moral purpose grounded in compassion for our planet and living things—one that does not look upwards, as in traditional images of a spiritual existence but one that Buber (1988, p. 56, in Murdoch, 2003, p. 461) describes as making contact sideways, with our role as agents in the betterment of each other.

Emmanuel Kant (1788) concerns himself with our dynamic nature as moral beings, capable of self-determination in terms of goodness. How we commune together is crucial to our sense of worth “a loving just gaze cherishes and adds substance, a contemptuous gaze withers” (Murdoch, 2003, p. 463). As a teacher, as a parent who is first educator, I believe we have a duty that is laden with moral purpose and imbued with the responsibility to act truthfully. This duty is not necessarily without effort or reflection as it requires conscious will, and practice—it is an act of intentionality—one that “helps the formation of moral habits, partly because certain acts are thereby clearly and publically defined...A good habit of life, reliable decent behaviour, is to be welcomed” (Murdoch, 2003, p. 494). I think I can recognise why Kant felt that the moral life is a struggle. Our rational will strains against the emotional, the noumenal experience and the transcendental are the everyday and educational at interplay, at times unconscious and at times conscious. My noumenal experience of my mother’s tapping on the window during a family trip down the Midlands Highway was the seed of curiosity that bears fruit now, in the form of a school that seeks to emancipate students from a life of disadvantage. I ask my teachers how we might practice a pedagogy of being present. I am strengthened with the notion that truthfulness, ethos and duty might offer guidance to me in my leadership for my school as I work towards the enactment of our vision.

Knock, knock. Who's there? I don't know yet

For the first six years of my life, we lived at the back of my parents' takeaway shop in Smithton. They worked long hours and I have spasmodic memories of babysitters who I recall as being young and cruel. My older brother entertained me by sitting on firecrackers outside my bedroom window, and inside my older sister sang to me up-beat hymns that she had learnt at school. My world was a backyard with jumbled drums of cooking fat and stray cats. My earliest memories also include a vibrant and busy shopfront where old ladies would let me chat to them in the dining room and Mr Billet would let me get his ginger beer for him from the fridge for a 5 cent piece. Escape from the isolation of the backyard was under a grate at the end of the alley between our shopfront and the shop next door. Unfortunately, escape was also followed by dad needing to close the shop in the peak of the lunch rush to send everyone to find me and once concluded with a swift yet effective clap of a work-hardened hand. I still remember the look of despair and regret as he smacked me. It really wasn't his style of parenting.

'Prep', the first year of school, was run by a procession of nuns of the order of the Sisters of Mercy, committed to the full habit, including the veil, cap, *serre-tête* and neckerchief regardless of the Vatican II permission that allowed nuns a more liberal habit or even secular dress. There was a little boy who could count to 100 in lots of five which I figured was a gift he was born with and in response to this I took my new shiny red shoes to school in their box as my contribution to the class because, I remember, wanting so badly to bring something of worth that might be positively commented on in front of the whole class, such as counting by fives, but I was told to keep my shoes in my desk.

When my parents moved to Burnie, I began Grade 1. As a 6-year-old attending my first few days at a new school, I experienced my first

ever spelling test. The importance of having to get things right was alien to me and the test itself was a blur. All that I remember is that at the end of the test I had not one correct answer. My teacher was so amazed that she went next door to fetch the Grade 2 teacher. They stood on either side of me and looked down. The ensuing conversation allowed all in the class to know that this was a disgrace. I concentrated hard on disappearing but no matter how I kept my head bent and my eyes closed, it still dawned on me that there was something terribly wrong with me—that I was stupid. I knew then, that if I never really tried, then I could never really be wrong again. For the next 10 years I defied any teacher to teach me anything.

By Grade 10, the rebellion was developed and powerful. I stood defiantly outside the chapel door declaring that wagging that day had been a very successful endeavour because I had missed the bloody cross-country and read a good book instead. Any teacher sizing me up for a power play was met with a hateful look and behaviour in class that was escalated to ensure that I never felt humiliated again. Of course, in Grade 11, I dropped my act, and picked up European Literature with a safe teacher. Fear of displaying learning in any formal context continues to shadow me 40 years later.

...of curiosity, language and dialogue

By nature, I was curious—well, we all are when we are born. I think I might have been curious to the point, whereby, if I had been born in the 1980s rather than the late 1960s, I may have been medicated for Attention Deficient Hyperactive Disorder. I think perhaps that when we are little and our grown-ups are too busy to listen to our questions, we have to find out the answers for ourselves. As a very young child, dragging my little brother under a street grate and into the street to go and explore, I recall the discomfort of boredom from being left for long periods of time with my

curiosity unsatisfied. When I meet the very young learners who arrive in my school, how might my curiosity about the things they wish to share with me spark a genuine dialogue? How can I be sure that I am not just being pleasant, but that I can kneel down on the floor and look at their writing about the weekend and say, “I really like the way you used so many letters you already know about to write about your trip to the swimming pool. Did you go on the waterslide? Let’s chat about this word ‘swimming’ too and another way to spell it”. Who can I turn to, to figure out why my story about escape from boredom and punishment of my curiosity, feels so astonishingly vivid to me? How can I turn my 6-year-old self, shamed for trying to spell, into a principal who is able to be present for our youngest learners? Is this why it sticks in my throat like fury if one of my teachers declares that some are bright and others not? I know what it feels like to be in a classroom without adequate language—like the man in the movie *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, the teachers talked about me, as if I were not there. I knew they were wrong but there was no language to change their minds about me.

Curiosity must surely be mutually in attendance between teacher and student, in order for the kind of dialogue to occur that may make emancipation possible. Curiosity is not just ignorance dressed up as a desire not to feel confused but a proactive desire to understand—to understand something that might initially not even appear to exist. How might we, as teachers, engage in “epistemological curiosity about the very elements of the dialogue” (Freire, 2007, p. 18) when the elements of dialogue we are required to attend are in a language particular to a student’s perplexing needs? In what ways might we see that a child has his own horizon of understanding to which he might have grown depending on his historical narrative? And when we want to understand what might be the questions we may ask of ourselves, and perhaps of him, we may also be able to ask what has brought him to this point of self-expression? Might we become sensitive to foreseeing a possible answer to a question of questions that he

is not yet able to articulate for himself? Might we accept Gadamer's challenge that the one

...who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question[?]
(Gadamer, 2013, p 370)

So then might we not come to understand the utterances of the child either in action or words by acquiring some sense of the horizons in which the child finds himself living and comprehending?

If the 'said' is a yowling bundle of tear-stained raggedness, might I not find the colleague who alongside me will be curious about questions posed by this child's distress? Might we two teachers who comprehend the puzzle of this child know that a soft teddy and a cup of hot chocolate is partway to finding the answer to such a painful question as this child presents? The 'said' of this child's behaviour otherwise masks the question of what horrors revisit her today. Together we go behind the 'said', we uncover today's questions and perhaps the beginning of tomorrow's answer as we nurse the child into language we can comprehend. We experience the disruption to the surface tension of our own world, our own understanding of this child's being. Her history intersects ours and we are open to the energy of the ripples she creates.

Despite our sophisticated language system, as humans, it seems, we are stricken by our inability to communicate even our most fundamental needs. I often laugh that I, as an English teacher, and my husband, who worked for many years as an interpreter for deaf students, still have trouble making ourselves understood to each other. How could two people whose profession is communication, struggle to communicate about whether a certain chair should be sold in a garage sale or not? Our education system revolves around our desire to improve communication and it seems that the

basic unit of our society—the family—is under pressure of collapse without the myriad of specialist counsellors and daytime television programs provided to assist our navigation through the maze of confused messages about everything from whose love should be validated by marriage to whether climate change exists or not, whether asylum seekers are human to the evils of sugar. ‘Lost for words’ appears as an essential concluding statement to any emotional situation beyond the mundane. Yet, I cannot help but wonder if we have placed the onus for developing deeper understanding into wrong hands, and the listener, rather than the speaker, is in fact where this difficulty of communication lies.

Perhaps our domestic miscommunication and diplomatic errors reside in the way in which “language has public rules as well as particular or private contexts” (Murdoch, 2003, p. 213). I am interested in the way language creates our world, for example, without the knowledge of language to describe plants, either through indigenous eyes or horticulturalist eyes, the minute parts of the plants simply do not exist in the noumenal world of the observer (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 61), and the observer is therefore blind to the possibilities of the plants’ medicinal uses or even environmental adaptations. As Murdoch points out,

the limits of my language which are the limits of my world fade away on every side into areas of fighting for concepts, for understanding, for expression, for control, of which the search for the *mot juste* may serve as an image. Everyone, every moral being, that is every human being, is involved in this fight, it is not reserved for philosophers, artisans and scientists. Language must not be separated from individual consciousness and teased as (for the many) a handy impersonal network and (for the few) an adventure playground. Language, consciousness and world are bound together, the (essential) aspiration of language to trust is an aspect of consciousness as a work of evaluation. (Murdoch, 2003, p. 216)

When I began to reflect on the role of language in becoming aware of trauma in my classroom, and neighbouring classrooms, I questioned my previous understanding about where responsibility for understanding resides. There are two volumes of work that upheld my earliest conscious efforts to find philosophical voices to encourage my reflections—*Hope: New Philosophies for Change* edited by Mary Zournazi (2002) and *What Philosophy Is?* edited by Havi Carel and David Gamez (2004). The discussion that follows serves as buoys to which I could cling whilst viewing the confused swell of questions around me.

There, Alphonso Lingis explores the communal bond—the responsibility we have towards life and others—“To be sensitive to the other person is to be responsive” (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 35). In this statement alone, Lingis shifts emphasis to the listener as the person held responsible for the integrity of the message. I wonder about the idea of responsibility and its link with being responsive, that is, to respond appropriately, or even to hear the message of another person, requires a conscious awareness of our responsibility as listener. “Responsibility is connected with the notion of answering to the other, responding to the other’s moves and to the other’s sensibility” (ibid.). Answering becomes a response requiring responsibility and requires the listener to understand the speaker in the broadest sense. As fans of David Attenborough might know, giraffes communicate with the twists and turns of their necks, and Lingis points out that people also have complex sensibilities to take into account, and this is where the idea of responsibility comes into play as a conscious act of making a communal bond. Good teaching may practice being responsive to the sensitivities of students and might be about making communal bonds.

I wonder how communal bonds may be vital not only to the existence of community, but also to the wellbeing of the community. I cannot imagine any community without community bonds since this seems ipso facto but

unfortunately we do not have to imagine a community without wellbeing, since historical and current events exist to provide us with many examples of such communities. So what quality of communal bond is required to furnish our communities with wellbeing? Nikos Papastergiadis (in Zournazi, 2002) suggests that “For me, empathy is about that process of surrender to the other and to learn with the other, but also the catch that transforms your perception” (p. 96). As listener, we require empathy in order to transform our perception, and through this process we create a chance for communal bonding to occur. Should I place myself in locus of empathetic listener, it might become more possible for me to prevent the exile of the individual and create an opportunity for wellbeing to exist.

Many of the children entering my school seem to be already familiar with life’s harsh realities and consider themselves already exiled from the possibility of a better future. This idea of exile is concerning to me. Despite our Western social imaginary as a nation of equality (Taylor, 1999), many of our children are exiled by the gap between rich and poor. Christos Tsiolkas (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 121) considers, “It also means that we have a responsibility to try and find humanity...and not to exclude anyone from the social body”. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau consider the responsibility of the leaders of a community in mobilising hope so that the disenfranchised can imagine a better future (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 143). The justification for responsive listening in the creating of better communities is pointed out in simple language by Ghassan Hage (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 162), “You want to be part of a community only if you feel you are capable of achieving more by being part of it...”. It is Hage (p. 167) who gives me purpose, particularly as a teacher, in his determination that it is not the role of the intellectual to categorise people but to listen, and that those with access to power are able to move across cultures without feeling the displacement of migration. Perhaps in listening we do not judge but we prevent the exile of our children from the possibility of a better future and in turn, a better community.

Over the course of writing this thesis, the Cronulla riots, Los Angeles riots, London riots, the rise of ISIS, climate change, and the far right's response to such matters, which has been to increase oppression rather than to seek solutions to volatile and dangerous political and environmental events, have remained as the global backdrop to my classroom. Our classrooms mirror these events in the minutia of oppressive behaviour patterns. I think it is valid to use the metaphor of the microcosm to make real my link between global events and classrooms. Brian Massumi (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 216) explores the primal purpose of an outburst of anger and draws my attention to its desired effect, which is to interrupt the moment and to call attention to something immediate. In the disempowered it is a means to draw attention in a world where they have no voice. And so, how does the listening teacher play their part? It might be that

the ethic of caring, caring for belonging, has to be a non-violent ethic that involves thinking of your local actions as modulating a global state. A very small intervention might get amplified across the web of connection to produce large effects—the butterfly effect—you never know. (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 241)

In this way, the listener takes responsibility for creating a communal bond and in doing so takes a step to allow the speaker to be in this world, to participate. This kind of attentive, loving listening, initiates the first steps towards genuine dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed, and an awareness of the trauma suffered by both. In a sensitive gesture of acknowledging the inherent nature of the role of the teacher as that of oppressor, we might, as teachers, open up unique spaces for listening to how our students interrupt the moment to gain our attention.

Through attentive listening, trust develops and it is through trust that things may change for the better. Isabelle Stengers provides me with a succinct reflection on the connections between listening, trust and hope.

Our capacity to hope is shaped by the reality of our circumstances, which, depending on what those circumstances are, may not always provide the space to hope, this is why we need sensitivity and an ability to have empathy and care towards others—which is about surrendering our prejudices, and this takes courage. (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 274)

Teachers so often listen with the sole intent of figuring out what their response should be, rather than for the purpose of the speaker having a place to seek a mirror of themselves. If the act of listening were like holding up a mirror of identity, might it be possible for us, as the mirror, to reflect some other image? Simon Critchley explores Wallace Stevens' idea of the "two in oneness" of the world, that is, though there may be reality, there is also our imagination and that reality is constantly transfigured through our imagination (in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 196). In this way, our lives constitute not only what is being lived or what was lived but also possibilities of what could have been or what might be lived. The onus, as David Rosner suggests, is for the teacher to listen as other, "We need the listening other in order to learn, and we need to listen to others in order to enable them to learn...As speaking creatures, our foremost desire is to be listened to in the right way..." (in Carel & Gamez, 2004, pp. 213-235).

"To be listened to in the right way" (Rosner in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 235) requires us to consider what is this right way. We might begin by asking whether a student might appear to have suffered trauma, as she enters the classroom. We might detect a tear brushed away or a deep frown. We might have noticed her throw her backpack onto a wall hook in a surly way. We might ask, is she seeking someone to talk to? Might we not smile to show we welcome her into the classroom as welcome? Might we wait until just the right time to listen? What if we were to listen in the right way then? 'No one ever listens to me' is what we might imagine to be her unspoken words. What if we were to understand that all of us have felt we have somehow been wronged, not because we were not listened to, but

because we were not listened to in the right way? Would we not then be more ready to listen to her in the right way? What must we allow to happen? At least, we must speak first, to invite her to be listened to, so that she might return to her own thinking self. We would be hoping to begin what Rosner suggests is a powerful speech that actually “allows...change...simply [by] being listened to” (in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 231).

I wonder now, what might have been the effect on my 3-year-old self, my 5-year-old self, my 6-year-old self and my 15-year-old self, had I been listened to. On all the occasions I mentioned in the small vignette, there were many things I wanted to share, to ask, to check. I was lucky to have been loved enough that my parents would shut their busy shop and look for me. This love enabled me to be courageous enough to keep wondering about what was behind the walls that marked my young existence. I wonder, for those children who do not have such sustaining love at home, whether teachers might not be in a position to kneel down and ask the 5-year-old to share their news about their new shoes and then perhaps to learn to count by fives.

I would love the truth if only I knew whose

A grand Catholic College overlooks manicured sports grounds ending in battlements of goal posts beyond which a blue ocean horizon is visible. Underneath the school emblem, ‘Love the Truth’, announces the school’s most deeply held value. Inside the walls of the college the truth becomes more difficult to read. I am 16 and waiting nonchalantly outside the chapel for the girls’ head of discipline. I have already decided what manufactured part of me will serve to defend the real self. It is only in the last year that my battle has become conscious and calculated and more important than ever. She calls me in after what I know has been an amount of time calculated to build

fear in me; but instead, the time passing has built my resolve. My mission is to avenge the humiliation I heard metered out to a girl I don't know but I still feel it's my job to give this woman a hard time.

Mrs L: So, you've been caught...(pause)...Well, was it worth it?
(Superior and challenging tone)

Me: (Pause, show no fear, keep eye contact and retain confident posture) Well (calm and thoughtful), yes, I think it was. (Note Mrs L's surprise and loss of composure) Yes, I missed the cross-country and finished my religion assignment. So, yes, I think it was. (Humour self with ironic reference to religion assignment as just a job to be done).

Mrs L: Just get out!

Me: (Brilliant victory. Calm exit – no hurry – job done)

I turn away from the chapel foyer and glance into the chapel at the modern pine interior. Three years ago I knelt in front of our principal and told him my sins. It seemed wrong and humiliating. He could play many roles—I could only ever play one part of me. In Grade 1 we had been told that our sins were between us and God and then we were made to stand out the front of the class and tell our sins. The problem was that I didn't have any to tell so I made up a few because lying was not as bad as pride and having no sins was the sin of pride.

My education is a series of critical incidents that taught me many things but few of these were related in any way to the formal program of the school. The sexual and physical assaults were epidemic at my school but strangely enough it was the hypocrisy I found so offensive. In return for their incompetence, I offered my teachers a very small part of myself and that part was manufactured and operated very differently to the values I actually held dear. After a morning of practising hymns in the school gym we were eventually allowed to go to recess and we had sung heartily the rude words we substituted into

the hymns. But I would never do that in church with my parents, not because I am afraid but because I am myself. I am sincere and honest. For me there was great hypocrisy between 'love the truth' and the actual truth. It was enough for me to look at the school motto and feel enraged and subversive.

...of truthfulness and the good

As a Grade 10 student, I was intuitively seeking to understand 'good' and what it meant to 'be good' in an environment that was, for me, turbulent with the debris of a distorted, if not a corrupt, 'good'. As an older adult today, in Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, I find affirmation for those questions about what it might have meant not only to be 'good' but to be 'for good'. Taylor explains that the sense of identity is defined by the sense of commitment to say a religion or a nation. What is important is not the situatedness of our circumstance itself but how our circumstance, our horizon, provides us with a sense of what is good and valuable (Taylor, 1999, p. 27). I recall that many of my peers came from family backgrounds that were rich with lived experience of values deeply entrenched within loving lounge rooms and safe bedrooms, and so I felt that my school was alienating in terms of the ranting diatribes of priests, nuns, and lay teachers who had been recruited to fire-and-brimstone lectures about evil.

I vividly recall our Archbishop providing a spitting outline of the disgrace of seeing people jumping in and out of bed on the television. I was genuinely shocked—there was no such television in our house and this was the first I had heard of such things. Our goodness as children seemed to have been overlooked for the sake of a dramatic 80-minute homily by His Grace. I felt confusion since I was by implication being described thusly, and my plurality as a person was being fundamentally ignored and even misrepresented in public. I took such messages to be offensive rather than

educative. As a result, I manufactured a role for myself, used solely for the purposes of surviving school, which fitted much more closely to the Archbishop's expectations. Better to rebel than to be offended, I felt.

I have wondered whether students find the school environment so often in conflict with their own moral code and, since as humans we are compelled to behave in ways that fit our individual moral code, that many students engage in active opposition to moral conflict in school. I often see teachers confronting students with clichéd questions regarding behaviour with the presumption that the student is in the wrong or has done something bad, and I see the students often agreeing because, doesn't it often seem easier to agree? It seems to me to be a rare thing to see a student act in a way contrary to her own personal values. I return to Taylor here to express the tension between the values of the institution and the values of the individual. For Taylor,

Articulating a vision of the good is not offering a basic reason. It is one thing to say that I ought to refrain from manipulating your emotions or threatening you, because that is what respecting your rights as a human being requires. It is quite another to set out just what makes human beings worthy of commanding our respect, and to describe the higher mode of life and feeling which is involved in recognising this. (1999, p. 77)

Perhaps the tension of attempting to articulate a vision and imposing it from an institutional perspective is inherently weak, since, as I recall Rancière's profoundly simple and insightful observation that institutions themselves are so poorly and inadequately placed to bring the vision of the good to reality for individuals (Rancière in Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 14), I become increasingly aware that the possibility of intersubjectivity is absent in the impersonal bricks, mortar and vision statement of most institutions.

Might the deeply personal nature of our recognition of what is ethical and good abide in us as indivisibly from our moral being as our cellular being? As Taylor recognises the human torment of acknowledging how our capacity to enact what we feel to be good, falls short of what we consciously notice is a higher good, it is understandable that

...we cannot but crave to be rightly placed in relation to the goods we recognise. But precisely this craving can be the source of much suffering, or alternatively of self-delusion, or smug self-satisfaction. That is, I can feel the demand to incorporate the good in my life as crushing; it is a demand that I feel utterly unable to live up to. Which I constantly measure up badly on, and which leads to an overwhelming depreciation of myself. (Taylor, 1999, p. 81)

Yet, when I look to Gadamer my despair at feeling unable to live up to the demands I put on myself for incorporating the good is soothed. Georgia Warnke gives us words for Gadamer's compassion for our humanity and its limitations by reminding me that "Our application of the ethical knowledge we possess occurs within a history this is unceasing in its demand that we apply it however much or little of it we may possess" (2002, p. 84). She reminds me that I and all of us are doing the very best we can, in each moment that we have, and this may well include thrashing wildly against the injustice around us, or bending meekly to the bidding of another power.

The expectation that teachers will impart and enforce values through the relentless upholding of a school's behavioural expectations is an exhausting undertaking. As I sit here, my front tooth having been removed this morning, the most recent procedure for updating a tooth lost in a high school hockey game many years ago, I am reminded of the seemingly impossible task of making sure that the students in my current school wear helmets in the skate park. I value their safety, their parents expect me to keep them safe—some of the boys value their sovereign right to take risks. The most recent incident of non-helmet-wearing smashed teeth reminds me that this is an important part of our role as teachers—this arrangement by

which we teach children to value ‘rules’ and to develop the capacity to manage ‘rules’. I have learnt that given the opportunity to explain their behaviour—without the hidden agenda of entrapment—most students would do so willingly and with clarity. Our personal narratives seem to revolve around deeply held values which students are able to clearly elucidate when given the opportunity. Many of our young people choose a safer course of action having had the chance to describe their own needs and how they had originally intended to have these met. I recall a story that might illustrate the tension between personal values, accusation of wrongdoing and the values enacted by the school, contrary to the school’s ethos.

My 15-year-old daughter was suspended for drinking at a school social. When I tried to defend her, she got very angry at me. As it turns out, she was determined to be punished for drinking at a school dance even though she had not been party to the drinking, she was defending her friends and was determined not to ‘dob’ them in. In order to act consistently with her values, it was important that she be punished for something she did not do. The school merely reinforced her decision to stand by her mates and to stand up for what she considered a greater good. The risk here is obvious, that a trite formula for metering out consequences for ‘bad’ behaviour might actually create a hideous caricature of justice. It is not surprising to me that our students often repudiate the moral vision of their school and express their sense of self through their own thoughts and actions. It is also not surprising that those students who are most keenly aware of the tensions between goods held by authority, such as compliance and performance outcomes, and goods they hold within their own sense of justice, such as loyalty and personal integrity, are most likely to express anger at the gap between these two goods. Students who rebel so fiercely may well be the best indicators of where contradictions lie between our intended ethos and the experienced ethos.

Taylor draws from Kant (Taylor, 1999, p. 363) for whom acting morally is acting according to who we really are and in this way, young people tend to be clearer, or perhaps in their youthfulness less confused, on issues of what is right and moral and good. Contrary to common belief, our students may be acting according to reason and even though this reason may still be developing we ought to encourage rather than punish their struggle into reason. We seem so obsessed about control and regulation that this seems to remove responsibility. When we, as teachers, listen attentively to the reason of students, we are creating this valuable space for them to become fully human. Freire attends to such moments as pivotal in the creation of liberation for students. I listen to him and he obliges me to attend to the reasoning of my students as means of understanding with them their historical circumstances and the kinds of existential oppression to which most of us are prey (Freire, 2007, p. 69).

Learning to teach for freedom in a youth detention centre

I look across at the little boy sitting next to me. He is oblivious to my gaze even though I am in his peripheral vision and sitting near enough for our shoulders to touch. His eyes are wide with concentration on the screen in front of him and he laughs with each little victory in the trail bike computer game. His light brown hair is cut fairly short and has a fashionable spike to it and this enhances his look of childish excitement as he is lost in the imaginary world in front of him. The volume is on mute, so he fills the void with motorbike revs blown out of round cheeks in a light spray of spittle towards the screen. Between the revs and sound of gear changes that occur with a tightening of his little smiling mouth, so lost is he in his imaginary self that he provides a commentary on the skills of the stunt motorbike rider as if it is now someone other than himself.

Suddenly he remembers my presence and casually asks me how fit I am. I tell him I think I am pretty fit and I flex a decent bicep for a small woman. He is clearly impressed and asks if I go to a gym. When I tell him which one, he asks if I know some older cousins of his and I tell him that I do and that they are good fellows. He smiles at the personal link, satisfied that if there is any reason I should be in his life for more than 30 minutes, then at least there is something ok there.

Outside the thick perspex windows, across a stretch of well-kept lawn, is a fence. Reaching about nine meters high, made of tall angled steel columns, curled over at the top and pointing back into the compound with metal spikes, the fence dominates the otherwise peaceful, even idyllic countryside. Double electronic gates are manned by security cameras and tight protocols. His childish innocence belies his surroundings and the reasons he is here—a cycle of sexual abuse has coiled with anaconda tightness around his life—he began life as a victim and at less than 11 years of age he has also become a perpetrator within the time of his own childhood—such is the vampire nature of childhood sexual abuse, that victim becomes perpetrator. The insidious nature of childhood sexual abuse is not the violence—though that is horrific—but the infection that sets in which alters the neurological pathways for healthy attachment until the pathways are damaged and dysfunctional.

A colleague and I have travelled to this youth detention centre together. She is working on creating stronger transitional links between schools and youth justice so that students such as this little boy have better opportunities for transitioning back into the school system. Unfortunately, he does not have a wheelchair, hearing aid or the gentle facial features of a Downs Syndrome child. He looks, to all intents and purposes, a fully capable child but even in my brief meeting it is obvious that he is greatly disadvantaged by the destructive environment of his own life. The signs that he has difficulty in life are his jittery movements and mannerisms of self-absorption,

the way in which each person and item in his vicinity is treated with momentary curiosity but little else—as if meaningful interaction lay just outside the peripheral vision of his consciousness. I can sense how the immediate frames the terms of his behaviour, that somehow the future, even the hour after this one, may be just a vague idea rather than holding any promise or punishment. I ask the principal of the detention centre’s school section, how they manage the educational process and he informs me that contrary to popular belief, the students here, to paraphrase, *are not so bad*, as after their entry to the facility, they detox from their street lives.

...of oppression and freedom

The situation in this vignette may seem an odd place to begin my reflection about educating for freedom, but Maxine Greene offers me an insight into the kind of freedom that might help to release us from having little or no choice in the lives that we lead. Greene refers to a kind of freedom that pushes us outside of our day-to-day functioning by proposing a somewhat disconcerting question about our actual state of freedom. What is the actual state of this boy’s freedom?

Greene is calling for the kind of freedom that is “a basic requisite for action and for power” (1988, p. 116). She calls upon the kind of freedom that Arendt distinguishes, that is, freedom for plurality and difference to exist, which necessitates conditions of “equality and distinction” (Arendt, 1958, pp. 179-180). There is no doubt that this little boy had had his right to liberty forfeited by actions which the youth justice system responded to by incarcerating him, but I felt as I sat with him that whilst the term of his incarceration might have been relatively brief, he seemed to me to have a life sentence of another kind, as he introspectively played his computer game. When I consider the little boy’s being merge with the virtual reality of

the computer-generated game, I know that he is ‘numbing out’. How do I know this? I felt as I sat next to him, in the same way that when you sit next to an adult whom you to know be an alcoholic, there was an absence of his being. We do this—we choose our drug of choice to disengage temporarily from thoughts and feelings. I like Netflix and chocolate, over working and deep fatigue in order to ‘numb out’ from stress. I know if I numb out I miss the opportunity that uncomfortable feelings afford. I seek my freedom in leaning into the discomfort but to do this I need the company of a trusted friend, someone to whom I can explain my discomfort, so that I can return to my full being. This is freedom—freedom not to numb out to discomfort but freedom to lean into it and come into being fully present. Might I possibly have perceived freedom sparking within the consciousness of that little boy, who left his immersion playing trail bikes to ask me questions about myself?

I drive past the youth detention centre fairly regularly. It is located in an area that I like. There is an old stone wall just off the highway which is a remnant of farming practices from the 1900s. There are beautiful wooden barns, including one that used to be an antique dealership belonging to an old farmer. The farmer once told me that his house had been burnt down after he reported an illegal cannabis crop located in the far reaches of his extensive farming property. I think about these things as I drive along the highway and I look to the left and see atop a grassy bank the north-facing fence of the detention centre. In a recent newspaper article I read that there are about ten juveniles in detention there and about 66 staff, at a cost of \$8.6 million a year (Coulter, 2016). That kind of money is how much it costs to run my entire school for about five years. The article focuses on the economic rationale, and there is a cursory nod to considering better ways of working with the young inmates.

Greene herself laments the somewhat powerlessness of education when economic rationalism pits itself against it. She says,

education could play no part in improving society, making it fairer or more humane; at best, its function [would be] to transmit from one generation to another a proper understanding of the order of things. For the ordinary person, for the poor and submerged, any dream of freedom [would have] to give way to adjustment to the necessary. (1988, p. 39)

If I were able to upheave the “‘iron rails’ on which the souls...of unconstrained businessmen were ‘grooved to run’” (ibid.), particularly for the little boy and others like him, then I might have felt in my body at that time, as I sat nearby the little boy, the Whitmanesque idea that equality and freedom had somehow to be harmonised through “loving comradeship” and adhesiveness (Whitman in Greene, 1988, p. 39). I might have sensed the importance, the life-saving essential nature, of being fully present, in communion, with someone so that they might emerge from their inner prison and out into being with self and other. When I touch deeply into myself as a teacher whose practice requires me to respect the intersubjectivity and sacredness of communion, when I set aside the austerity of block concrete walls and tall steel fencing, when I look to the little boy and I notice what trauma has laid down his necessary self-imprisonment, it is then compassion discloses itself to me.

In their book, *Engaging with Ethics: Ethical Inquiry for Teachers* (2006), Mark Freakley and Gilbert Burgh scout possibilities for fostering students’ critical disposition to develop as ‘free’ people by establishing some preconditions in educational settings that are imbued with opportunities that employ students’ ability to think. Freakley and Burgh concern themselves with the work of Matthew Lipman and Lawrence Splitter, whose workshops with teachers in Australia support teachers to develop a ‘community of inquiry’ that explicitly encourage opening space for thinking in the classroom. I was fascinated by this way of being in a classroom. I could remove the burden from the teacher as the one who knows, and instead invite the students to become members of a community of inquiry. Of course, I would need

them, both teachers and students, to be imaginative and responsible, so that they might allow shared spaces for inquiring to be safe. Lipman recalls from John Dewey that participating in a community of inquiry has an educative function (Freakley & Burgh, 2006) and it is this participating that is central to the idea of community. As Freakley points out, "...immersion into critical, purposive and self-corrective inquiry can provide people with the norms and ideals required to make wiser decisions about the choices in their own lives" (Freakley & Burgh, 2006, p. 34). If we could be persuaded to participate in a community of inquiry of this kind might we value it highly as a way in which we can bring 'open space' and therefore freedom to a student's context of learning?

The little boy I met could find himself with a teacher who encourages him to tell her what is important to him. Ambitiously, we might imagine that this new listener could help him to collaborate with her towards his self-determining a better pathway in life as Ann Sharp suggests (Freakley & Burgh, 2000, p. 15). In this new relationship, he can experience trust, and perhaps for the first time his feelings and thoughts would be respected. From my experience in working with students like him, I know that it is possible that he might blossom in a group where,

...the students and the teacher;

1. Respect others' thoughts and feelings,
2. Support and trust each other in the exploration of thoughts, ideas, opinions,
3. Reflect upon group dynamics and understandings developed through the discussions and activities, and
4. Develop guidelines or rules for the group. (p. 7)

This is the kind of pedagogy I believe to be capable of creating a community of inquiry that "enables teachers and students to become

subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality” (Freire, 2007, p. 86). The little boy who sits playing computer games in the detention centre lives in an intellectual space that is far more restrictive than his physical space. It is not his intellectual capacity that restricts but the environment of his personal life, the process by which his own neurological condition is set to self-protection and hyper-vigilance, a security system turned on as a very young child. As educators there are opportunities for us to open locked doors but the environment we provide must be unconditionally safe. Children like this little boy seem to look for relationships with adults, ones where they may test the safety of us, as adults. If we fail the tests early on, we risk being permanently on the other side of the door with the keys jingling uselessly in our pockets.

Strawberry Frûche

The Huon River flows languidly through a gentle agricultural valley in South Eastern Tasmania. The communities along the Huon are places where ducking into the shop doesn't mean locking your car but does mean that the store owner likely knows you and your family and if not, knows you're a visitor to the area. Taking a gentle paddle along a section of the Huon means hearing nearby cows meandering along in the lushest of pasture and seeking relief from the summer under river-side eucalypts. The only thing disturbing this scene, which on this particular day included a platypus surfacing near a very platypus-like muddy bank with a fallen log, is the Huon Jet Boat full of Japanese tourists who, ironically, just missed a platypus sighting due to their adrenalin-filled 'cruise'. Even the jet boat passes politely near our kayak to minimise the wake disturbance to our boat before revving up again to fly over the rocky shallows of an up-river rapid. It's hardly the scene for conflict but lurking around the final bend are the ingredients for a tense situation.

By the time I have pulled the kayak up onto the bank, the nearby willow tree is sheltering about 30 children who are evidently part of a holiday care program. All aged around six or seven years of age, they are equipped with little colourful backpacks, sun hats—in the manner of a conscientious sun-smart policy, and Disney character lunch boxes. The four adults in charge of the group are headed by a child carer whom one might be tempted to stereotype—middle aged, female and large, wearing an appliquéd windcheater. As I plonk down to eat my lunch, a roll with peanut butter and cheese, Appliquéd Windcheater begins taking charge of the group by encouragingly instructing them to pack up, make sure they have their hats on, get their backpacks, check they have picked up their rubbish, find a buddy and sit in two straight lines holding hands with their buddy. By the time I've eaten half the roll, the children have successfully completed all the set tasks. Until Appliquéd Windcheater notices that back under the willow is a Strawberry Frûche container. In a skilful voice that demands attention, Appliquéd Windcheater asks the group, "Who owns this Strawberry Frûche container?" The tone suggests, not so much a question, as an accusation. I know it, the children know it and even the ducks seem suddenly concerned that they might be the absent-minded guilty party. But it's all too late now anyway. In the next three seconds of silence, it is no longer about a Strawberry Frûche container and the issue of litter, rather one of honesty and personal integrity. The question is, where to from here? We are at a pivotal point and the next move by Appliquéd Windcheater will determine the success of this lesson, already so close to being 'misleart'.

She makes the move, and it is the wrong one. My heart starts working at an unreasonable rate, considering the scene, and this in itself is raising questions for me. She says, as if there were any remaining doubt, "We will not be going to Chickenfeed until whoever owns this Strawberry Frûche container owns up". And there it is, explicitly

put—the accusation, the threat, the challenge. The stakes have increased and even if the child who did own the Strawberry Frûche container remembers that it is theirs, it is going to take monumental courage at this point to overcome the fear that has swept over them. I speculate that because this is a holiday program the children might not know the carer very well, but they probably do know they are in the dock and not sure how a guilty plea at this point will be managed.

There is silence. Appliquéd Windcheater has cornered herself by making a threat and she now has to win. She starts walking along the double line of sweaty-hand-holding children pointing to each one saying, “Is it yours, Lucy? Yours, Michael? Did you have Strawberry Frûche, Casey?” There is a child in there somewhere who desperately wants the earth to open up and swallow them. If they are found out now, they are not just a litter-bug—and when you are 6 or 7, this is as bad as some kind of Australian Wheat Board type of deal (the AWB scandal involved contraventions of UN sanctions in the mid 2000’s)—but also a liar who is prepared to make the other children who were going to be your new friends, miss out on going to Chickenfeed—tantamount to ripping off the shareholders by not disclosing a collapsing bottom line. It is at this point that the horribly predictable occurs. The ducks have disappeared. I have never sweated this much by just sitting next to the kayak. The tension has become too much for the children, who have now been sitting in the cruel sun, holding hands, with backpacks on for some time. A little hand goes up in the air. Appliquéd Windcheater paces expectantly sideways towards the hand. The children are deadly quiet as a young voice quavers with righteous but un-proud information, “Ivy had Strawberry Frûche”. At this moment, I can’t stand it any longer. We have moved from litter, to accusations of guilt, to questionable integrity, to threats, to solving our own concerns by isolating, accusing and judging someone.

I jump up and stroll with false nonchalance, picking up two pieces of litter on my way, over to the group. All eyes are watching me, including Appliquéd Windcheater's. I'm hard to miss given that I am dressed in a bright pink kayaking outfit. I smile warmly and confidently at Appliquéd Windcheater and ask, "Has anyone seen my Strawberry Frûche container?" Appliquéd Windcheater and the other carers look so immediately relieved, that I have confirmed that the tension was not my imagination. "I must have forgotten to pick up my rubbish when I was getting ready to go kayaking", I say, hoping to convey the message that even grown-ups forget to pick up their rubbish and it is not a sin. "Oh!" says Appliquéd Windcheater in a tone that acknowledges that we have stepped in to role play for the children, that there is a lesson about rubbish to be resurrected here and that she has a part to play. "I wouldn't want the ducks to eat the rubbish!" I add, hoping to get to the point about environmental awareness for the sake of reaching some kind of 'teaching for understanding' outcome. One of the other carers, obviously taking a breath for the first time since the ordeal began, cheerily asks, "What's the river like?" "Beautiful as always", I reply and then take my leave by saying goodbye to the group before taking the offending Strawberry Frûche container, McDonalds thickshake lid and mini french fries packet over to the receptacle for all human errors—the bin.

...of intuition and integrity

I have often wondered about the frail nature of communication in educational contexts. It seems to me that when I enter my classroom, or even our whole school assembly, that the messages I wish to convey to the children go on journeys I had never anticipated. As I speak to a class, it is like I tie carefully crafted little messages onto slips of paper, slip these into the leg bands of trusty carrier pigeons, and release them to the world of young minds, only to find that the pigeons have fecklessly flown off on

their own adventure, never reaching the target, or that some return to me with little slips of paper containing anger messages like, “this is stupid” or “get lost” or “I’m too stupid to learn this”. Is my concern with my own being as a teacher what Gert Biesta refers to in his notion of the “egological” teacher, whereby as a teacher I am still caught in the objectivity of my own self as central, even though I might be striving to interpret the responses of students (Biesta, 2016, p. 3)? How can it possibly be that my intentionality, and the intentionality of so many teachers, including Appliquéd Windcheater goes so awry? How does the relatively minor incident of the Strawberry Frûche container become a social exchange involving fear, power, authority, control, identity and integrity? The vignette was significant to me because it compelled me to consider how ultimata can force particular choices rather than allow dialogue and real choices, when ultimata, as scarcely veiled threats, result in the wrong lessons to be learned. What might be the alternative to the use of ultimata in teaching? Exploring understandings through dialogue and coming to shared questioning and meaning reflectively is “at the heart of philosophical hermeneutics” and it is a “promise of something shared, a solidarity behind every disharmony” (Lawn, 2006, p. 24). I need to repeat this to myself, “a solidarity behind every disharmony” (ibid.). I wonder how I might consider a pedagogy to invite this kind of sharing, the kind of sharing that will allow my pigeons to return home with new messages of hope in their leg bands, and for the ducks to be able to relax again for that matter!

In Gadamer’s work, I find hope. I find hope that in every exchange of opposing ideas, there is the capacity to arrive at a profoundly and mutually understood vista. In what ways might teachers strive for this condition where teachers and students can arrive together? Gadamer insists that each one of us have experienced our “fore-structures of understanding” that is our biases, our prejudices, traditions, beliefs and values, as inherited from our personally lived histories. We each bring these fore-standings into our relationships with one another. If we are open to each other’s stories, shared in dialogue, it becomes possible for us to come to exist together in

what he terms a “fusion of horizons”, precious moments of shared understandings (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 280-282). What is essential for Gadamer is our capacity for, and openness to dialogue, that is, genuine conversation that includes careful listening to one another.

As in my Strawberry Frûche vignette, I often see teachers interacting with students in ways that give them no role in the ‘exchange’ since—the contact is largely monological, seeming rather to benefit the existing “horizon” of the teacher. In such a monological tradition of teaching, the teacher risks remaining uninformed of the full possibilities of any exchange and the students remain unable to move forward constrained in their self-exploration.

From Gadamer lies another eddy for me to take shelter in, just outside the suction of the whirlpool of thoughts on my topic of integrity. I wonder if Gadamer might view the disharmony between student and teacher exchanges as fertile ground for progress and finally mutual personal growth. Does the teacher need to view the student as a text, in the hermeneutical sense, and in making herself subordinate to this text, in so far as she sees the text as rich with opportunities for listening rather than assuming the text to be ‘silent’, allow for the possibility for the student’s subjectiveness to arise? When referring to ‘listening’ in this context, I am urging an understanding of ‘listening’ in its broadest sense, that is, as discussed in my first chapter, an act of seeing the ‘listener’ as taking a proactive participant’s role since this is where the power of conversation is housed, through the energy of being a loving presence, open to the possibilities of the ‘speaker’.

To describe the student as a text enables me to consider how conversations between students and teachers might be enriched using hermeneutical approaches. My point here is that the use of hermeneutics assumes that the text is not static, simple or silent. For the ‘listener’ to be

truly engaged by the text, the listener must view the text as “an active voice in a constant conversation; good hermeneutical practice is to listen to the text and be subordinate to it” (Lawn, 2006, p. 25). The word I wish to focus on here is “subordinate” as this seems in direct contradiction or at least a completely new paradigm from the way in which we would traditionally view a student and teacher exchange, where the teacher is dominant, certainly not subordinate, in relation to the student’s voice. I am not lambasting the model of teaching whereby the teacher provides and the students receive information—both Gadamer and Biesta suggest there is a rightful place for this—but I am questioning what occurs when we are so stuck in this pattern that the diamond opportunities of serendipitous teachable moments are not only ignored but trounced into the ground.

Amidst my swirling wonderings, stirred into a hermeneutic vortex, much like the curling ripples left by the disappearing platypus, I turn to Biesta with my contemplative question about the rightful place of teacher authority. In his article, “The Rediscovery of Teaching: On Robot Vacuum Cleaners” he has three teacher figures, the first whose authority is monological and all-knowing—comprising “so called traditional teaching” where the student “can only exist as an object of the interventions of the teacher”, another whose authority is to question and pursue dialogue, and and yet another whose authority is observant, intuitive and open to teachable moments as possible alternatives, whereby the “subjectiveness of the student” is made possible (Biesta, 2016, pp. 1-2).

Do you see? The Strawberry Frûche container presented a moment of potentiality in teaching with the students’ subjectivity to the fore. It was a moment lost in law and order, carried out by the thrust of an authoritarian lunge, eclipsed by a comfortable bosom in an appliqué windcheater. As I follow my thoughts about this vignette I am curiously seeking what manner of pedagogy might maintain the integrity of the teacher and the dignity of the students within their inter-subjective relationship.

In *Strawberry Frûche* another theme brings me disquiet—the idea of authority, or being authoritarian as a teacher. When authority is viewed through a hermeneutical lens, “the concept of authority could be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom” (Gadamer, 2013 p. 279). Gadamer focuses specifically on the role of the teacher in his discussion on authority, as it is one of the few situations where authority is often viewed as an automatic given, that the teacher is invested with authority not due to any proven knowledge but through social sanction. He refers to the idea of teachers being vessels of authority due to an assumption that they have knowledge, not through the sanction to punish but through their ability to open up questions. Gadamer qualifies this kind of teaching by describing the attributes of the ‘good’ teacher. In which case, the ‘good’ teacher is one who has authority, not by virtue of socially sanctioned authority but because “a good teacher carries their own authority—the authority is in the questions they open up and not the sanctions they might bring to bear upon the unruly and the unwilling” (Lawn, 2006, p. 37). In *Strawberry Frûche*, authority is one purely based on the social sanction model, and within the usual expectations of society the ultimatum presented by the teacher as a way of punishing the students would be generally accepted as a fair strategy. If Appliquéd Windcheater’s voice is accepted as being without reason, we would have to concede that any gains are ill gotten and possibly the gains are minimal at best in terms of teaching the students about environmental issues and even worse, may have gone onto the back burner, given that the emphasis quickly became lessons on how to avoid blame and the games people play regarding power. If I take Gadamer’s positive view of the genuine authority of the teacher, when this authority is based on Socratic questioning and dialogue, the outcome might have been vastly different (Gadamer, 2013, p. 292). Might not the scene have looked something like this?

Diachronic reflection: Strawberry Früche II:

Appliquéd Windcheater notices the Strawberry Früche container as the children have taken their places on the lawn. She asks the children can anyone see anything left behind—non-threatening voice. The children offer their observation and she concedes that ‘we’ have accidentally left something behind, as her important lesson is for the children to learn collective responsibility, not to learn to avoid individual blame. She asks the children to look around at their immediate environment and then asks why they think litter might hurt the environment. The children offer various suggestions about wildlife and untidy, dangerous parks and so on. She then asks if the children can see any other litter nearby that they can safely pick up and put in the bin. She may then either select a small group of students or ask for volunteers to pick up the rubbish.

In this imagined different vignette, there are a number of elements of authority that have been legitimately engaged. The teacher’s knowledge has become questioning and is opening ways to enable the students to become part of the lesson, rather than being locked into passivity by threat and fear. The participation of the students allows them to be reflective of their own role and behaviour as contributors to their environment and encourages a collective responsibility as present and future community members. The students are active texts, whose possible negligence in leaving litter can be viewed as an opportunity for dialogue—the teacher subordinates herself to allow students a capacity to express themselves and to alter their own views of the world and hence their actions. In Strawberry Früche II, the teacher is skilled in ‘listening’ to the possibilities provided by all the situations arising from a day out with the children. Yet, how might I go even further? How might I be open to apprehending the serendipitous educative moments and harnessing these with the intent of enabling students’ voices to be heard? How might I transcend my own ego in these moments?

Tiffany

I met dwarfish and round Tiffany when she first came to my staffroom to ask me for help ostensibly for her best friend, Shanita, who she said was being bullied and needed a teacher to intervene. In reality it was Tiffany herself who needed someone she could trust to talk to. Whilst I found Tiffany polite and generous in heart I was surprised that teachers, who responded to my first inquiries about Tiffany, told me that she had very low literacy and numeracy skills and could be a problem in class. The problem for me was that Tiffany's teachers seemed to measure Tiffany's worth based on academic performance rather than her qualities, to the extent, I observed, that Tiffany appeared trapped in a role and simply could not clamber out of it.

Over the course of two years we developed a rapport that enabled Tiffany to exist outside of her designated role during crisis times at school. She and her two sisters had been sexually abused by their father, who was now living in an incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter interstate. Tiffany's case worker had already done a great deal to help Tiffany communicate with her father in a way that was assertive and healing. At times Tiffany would come to my office and ask to use my phone so that she could speak with her father. We would call her case worker for confirmation that this would be ok and then Tiffany would switch the phone to loudspeaker—at her own request—so that I could hear the conversation. In terms of literacy skills during these conversations, Tiffany was able to write notes to me and read the notes I wrote back to her whilst engaged in the phone conversation. This enabled her to seek confirmation or advice on how to handle her father's emotionally abusive talk. During these times together, I witnessed nothing of the behaviours experienced by other teachers. Tiffany was incredibly strong in her personal beliefs, even in the face of tremendous trauma she was articulate and intelligent in her decision-making. During these times, Tiffany would call me by my first name in accordance with a pact we had made.

Towards the end of her final year of high school Tiffany approached me in the corridor with a fist full of pages printed from the web. She told me that she had been diagnosed with a rare syndrome that gave her a dwarfish appearance and would also prevent her from ever having children. She had received victims of crime compensation payment due to the sexual abuse she had suffered. In our discussion, we chatted about these matters, much the same as any rational adults would. She read me some sections from the web pages, and told me about her plans to invest the compensation for her future. Again, I was left unaware of literacy or numeracy issues but fully cognisant of the intelligence of this wonderful, strong young woman.

On her final day of high school Tiffany found me in the corridor that housed the administration offices and the senior staff of our school. She showed me pictures of herself and her friends in their leavers' dresses. As she began to talk about her plans, we were interrupted by the Assistant Principal who stepped between us, and shouted down to Tiffany that she was sick and tired of her being in corridors after the bell and that she had better get to class. Tiffany responded, "I am having a conversation with Libby". She had broken our rule about using my first name in front of others but perhaps she had chosen a way of demonstrating her coming home to herself. As our AP walked away Tiffany said to me, "Don't worry, I know in the real world, most people aren't that rude".

Diachronic reflection: Activism, intuition and resistance

Before research on developmental trauma was considered significant outside the arena of specialist professions of psychiatry and psychology, and prior to the most recent research on the neuroscience of therapeutic relationships I was acting from a deeply intuitive base. I felt so strongly about the moral purpose of supporting students with trauma backgrounds that I simply rebelled against the dominant paradigms pre-existing in schools. Recent research both reaffirms and saddens me, because there is no vitriol in the thought that I was 'right all along'. It was just that I had to be courageous in my acts of social activism on behalf of students like Tiffany. Shari Geller and Stephen Porges, for example, have presented stunning work on the role of listening as an act of therapeutic facilitation. In reading their article 'Therapeutic Presence: Neurophysiological Mechanisms Mediating Feeling Safe in Therapeutic Relationships' (2014), my heart beats faster as I read, "Therapeutic presence involves therapists using their whole self to be both fully engaged and receptively attuned in the moment, with and for the client, to promote effective therapy" (p. 178).

The paper goes on to utilise polyvagal theory to provide a neurophysiological explanation of why this deeply inter-subjective relationship is so crucial firstly to creating the emotional safety to begin the process of healing but also the process, once safety is established, for the 'client' to develop "new neural connections leading to calmer and healthier emotional states" (2014, p 188). I sometimes felt bullied by colleagues for using approaches that were, and sometimes still are, considered 'soft' or that risk 'undermining' the domain of teachers as being in positions of power.

In my most recent work with teachers and other school staff members, I find that papers such as this one, and my recent introduction to Relational-Cultural Theory by Judith Jordan (2010), increase my confidence and capacity for developing professional learning for colleagues about working with children whose behaviours indicate that they have experienced trauma. The professional learning focuses on our relationships with students.

...of subversion

My vignette about Tiffany raises for me questions about all the key themes of the preceding vignettes. I wonder about what truth is and whose truth. I wonder about the ethos of my role as a teacher amid the broader context of students whose being consists of much more than the being in a school uniform. I wonder about how I nurture their emergent identities and whether the ways in which I am present for them will allow for their sense of inner freedom to find expression. I am acutely aware of the role of myself as a social activist in teaching, but I am also concerned with how this manifests as being egological or whether I am able to be mindful of the “ethics of subjectivity” (Biesta, 2016, p. 4) when I am working with a student who requires me to be more than the legitimate authority of my subject matter. What responsibility do I have as a teacher? These vignettes have led me to this question, and on asking myself, what responsibility do I have as a teacher, I go on to ask, and how might I carry out this responsibility?

When I consider my interactions with Tiffany, none were actually classroom based, so the context for our student and teacher relationship was serendipitous and brought about by a need identified and raised by the student, Tiffany. When I consider this, there are numerous moments in a teaching day that fill the spaces between the relatively structured teaching and learning, which provide teachable moments, moments where the student is inviting the teacher to teach her something that is vital to the student in that moment. The invitational nature of these moments allow for a different kind of pedagogy to emerge quite naturally, if one attunes to the possibilities. These moments require the teacher to be present to listen carefully to what it is the student is inviting to address with her. When I think about the interactions between Tiffany and myself, I was being hermeneutic in my listening. I was not simply listening to comprehend, but I was listening to interpret what it was that Tiffany might have been trying

to express but did not have the language or conceptual framework to explain. It might be the case, as Biesta explains,

In such acts of comprehension, in such hermeneutic acts, the world thus appears as an object of our sense making, our understanding and interpretation. One could, in other words, affirm that the hermeneutic world view is *true*, and that we should therefore build our understanding of knowledge and communication, but also of ethics, politics, and education upon this premise. (Biesta, 2016, p. 7)

It might have been the case that Tiffany and I engaged in a hermeneutic conversation, one where together we attempted to interpret her lived experience in order that she could describe the role she needed me to play. I entered into my responsibility as a teacher, an ethical responsibility, one where I must make certain that I did no harm. I was, as Biesta has mentioned, being political, in terms of my role as a teacher as a social activist. It was a kind of Freirean approach where the student, Tiffany, sexually abused and prejudged—in other words, had experienced the violence of oppression as a girl and as a young person with a disability—was attempting her own emancipation from an identity of having been traumatised. In my work as a teacher, this vignette becomes not just the source of deep thinking but a metaphor for oppression and emancipation, and how, “as teachers, it is pivotal to register that change also occurs through discourses and representations that actually and concretely affect the lives of people” (Simon, 1992, p. 59). My decision to act politically as a teacher might explain the bullying I felt I experienced, since an act of social activism by its nature is subversive.

He asked me to play hangman so I did

These vignettes have led me to observe that the dominant paradigm of interaction between teachers and students is asynchronous with the emancipative possibilities within the relationship between students and teachers. Students in trauma are particularly objectified by the dominant authoritative and monological paradigm. They suffer the constant rhythm of rejection and impersonal labels, the hyper-vigilance of negative judgement in a tide turned against them until we stop.

I have, in Chapter 2, attempted to find a way of making sense of moments—locked in my memory with such intensity that their detail has barely faded with time—that have a signification deeply connected along the vortex street of my lived experience within education. I have sought to come to some understanding of my own experience as a learner, a teacher, and a principal, which I have found to be deeply informed by my roles as a daughter and a mother. Unable to avoid the phenomenon of trauma, out of which disruptions carry energy upwards, surging from deeply felt emotions, I have found ways to “bracket” (Sokolowski, 2000) my turmoil through narrative writing and inquiry, breaking the surface tension of my natural attitude, that enriches my hermeneutic phenomenological journey. I continue towards a pedagogy of freedom (Freire, 2001) that enables both teacher and student to seek emancipation from those aspects of their respective identities that have suffered trauma.

When a student kicks a locker door, he rarely kicks it without reason. In fact, my experience has been that when asked why he kicked the locker door, the metallic clanging bouncing off corridor walls, that he would be very specific and clear in explaining the triggers to his frustration. Whilst his behaviour may be labelled as emotionally immature or irrational to us as teachers, there is most certainly a rationale to the kick. A clinical psychologist might describe the student moving from somewhere in the

frontal cortex of his brain deep into mid-brain. Our capacity as teachers to unpack the reason for the student's door kicking depends very much on our ability to listen pedagogically, to listen to questions this act might raise for us and to think about how to respond in a way that will result in understanding our ethical responsibility for this young person. In the example of the kicked locker, the student's body language speaks, to be interpreted and understood. Gadamer helps me to consider how I might find the question that leads to deeper understanding of a student's expression.

A person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is being said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 378)

To make sense of the apparent chaos that locker door kicking might exacerbate, ought we not seek to understand the body text and respond in ways that embrace the needs of both teacher and student? Of course the locker kicking is alarming in terms of the distress it evokes. Every day requires me to exert my energy for pedagogical listening that I might hear what the student is inviting me to comprehend. From there then, I might realise some questions that might support a young person in pain.

Trauma casts such a shadow in our psyche that it blinds the self to our loving, zestful and intelligent origins, leaving us isolated. Since schools often provide the only safe space for young people, schools

must then become a place to cultivate the art of patient listening and imaginative seeing in resistance to the incessant threat of blindness to, and suppression of, internal light...the classroom must in some sense become the forum for a mutual finding of inner light, through awakening and remembrance. (Saito, 2005, p. 150)

I return again to my belief that pedagogy ought to engender emancipative possibilities as acts of educational social activism. It is so tempting in the busy-ness of a school day to truncate the kind of noticing that is likely to demand more attention. This sense of utter frustration that a teacher feels at the thought of an afternoon lost to the needs of a child who is caught in the throes of angst, seems well expressed by Biesta, following Emmanuel Levinas, as “ ‘require[ing] from the executant an investment at a loss’ – and this is ‘uncompensated work’ which Levinas names as ‘ethics itself’ ” (Biesta, 2016, p. 10). Levinas, Biesta notes, suggests the word ‘liturgy’, in relation to pedagogical acts laden with emancipative possibilities. In this word, liturgy resides the echoing historicity of my own Catholicism, now coupled with the image of teaching as a liturgical undertaking. Perhaps this is why it seems fitting to me that to notice is to be socially active and makes possible acts of potential divinity.

After allowing the sound of the kicked locker to subside, if I were to lose this student’s fragile trust at this stage, it might be quite devastating for him. I fear being interrupted at that vital point of a student building trust in me. Sometimes an intervening teacher might demand that the student explain his behaviour and might even threaten the student further. Disruptions might hide within the clanging noise and furious face “significations” (Biesta, 2016, p. 8)—potential moments of invitation by the student on issues that are of a critical nature to them. Biesta’s use of the idea of “opening”, are pertinent to such moments, since the disruption caused by the student signifies an issue of immense weight to the student, and it is the moment “where I am addressed by the other, where the Other, in Levinas’ words, [calls] upon the unique within me” (Biesta, 2016, p. 16).

To close this chapter, allow me to return to Naoko Saito’s reflections on Ralph Waldo Emerson’s and Dewey’s perfectionist education because I find ironic solace there. I have been tempted to write nostalgically about moments of “signification” because some moments narrated here reside a

safe distance away by virtue of time, or I felt able to align my practice to a well-known philosopher or educationalist,

But finding one's light is something more than a merely verbal formula, or than the assertion of one's position in the name of social justice...[it] is on the drawing out of creative energy by transcending the tragic. (Saito, 2005, p. 150)

Even as I write, I am burdened by the little boy who only yesterday punched a teacher in the face, kicked the teacher's legs and threw shoes at his back. It was only yesterday that the little boy, the subject of a child protection order for the remainder of his childhood, into whom I had poured all that I thought I knew and had learned, threatened to climb to the roof of the school and jump off. In concluding this chapter, I want to stand up and scream, throw my laptop to the floor, hurl my books out the window and into the rain. Because when the little boy was brought to my office and I saw his face contorted with confusion, as I sat with him and put my arm around him, I asked what might help him to feel calm and he told me he would like me to play Hangman with him. As he used my office whiteboard to play Hangman, I waited for his father to arrive at school, I wrote the letter to the Education Department applying for suspension and temporary exclusion, I took a statement from the teacher who had called the Teachers' Union. I was playing Hangman but I wasn't in his game, I was playing another—there are no therapeutic services available for the little boy, he is condemned and my social activism falls to chalk dust around me. I have become his executioner. His teacher's rights take precedence—this is how oppression works—this is how trauma spreads like a disease. Can I bring myself to listen and to fight on?

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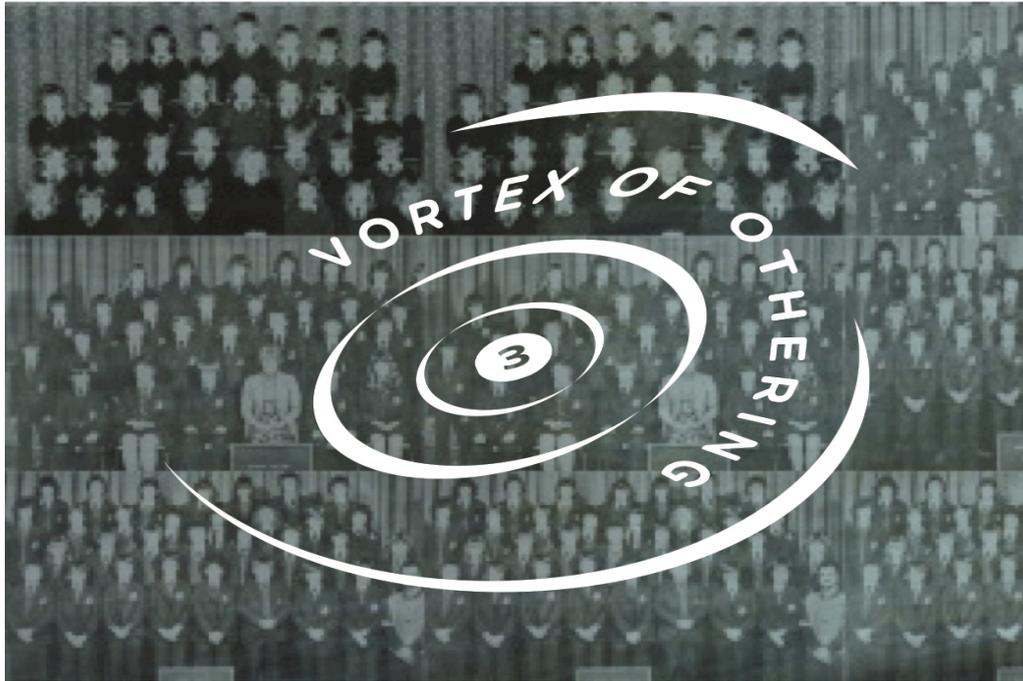
Literacy Numeracy
Big 5: data, research, diagnostics, strategies, measurement, resources

OSD

After school: ~~Football~~ Hockey (David) Tues - Wed - Tamara
Net ←

Attendees
- at 92% - target is 95%
- program?
- SSS
- lateness -
- Newsletter
- alerts
- follow-up

Rewards?
Recognition of
On-time for
Class + parent??



The sacredness of human attention
Re-authoring the self: Shedding objectifying labels
Courage in emancipatory moments: Failing better

CHAPTER 3 TO OTHER

- and this is how I survived. This is how we all survive. We default to the oldest scar.

Anne Enright, *The Gathering*

I felt angst, as a student, due to what I perceived was oppression in my classrooms. As a teacher, my efforts to first explain and then address this oppression meant I was open to possible approaches in teaching that might provide me with tools for contradicting, subverting and eventually overturning the oppression I noticed in education.

The title of Maria Popova's article in her online journal *Brainpickings* (2016a) heralding the work of Alfred Kazin, "Perception and the Power of the Critical Imagination: Alfred Kazin on Embracing Contradiction and

How the Sacredness of Human Attention Shapes our Reality” was enough to make my heart beat a little faster with excitement at the words that so completely encapsulated for me the potentiality in the power of being present. “...the sacredness of human attention” is a phrase weighty with connotations of the kind of selflessness and presence I felt was required as a listener capable of listening in a way that enables transformation of the other. I think it is the word ‘sacred’ in this context that propelled my wonderment. As I was raised Catholic, perhaps ‘sacred’ particularly attracts me, perhaps it holds for me a kind of hermeneutic historicity, that resounds in my work with traumatised students. When I think of ‘sacred’, I don’t necessarily think of the divinity of halos and angels, but I do think of passionate self-sacrifice in the service of others. Perhaps this is understandable in my reading of Popova who writes of Kazin seeking the sacred in the secular. She says he represents the good of the human spirit in times where to be present for another human being is to be aware that our humanity depends on our secular compassion, more than our religious devotions (2016a). For me, the idea that human attention has a sacred quality resonates with my lived experience, since the devotion it takes to remain present for a child who is traumatised and seeking to find their loving, zestful and intelligent self, requires an unconditional capacity to listen and to be listened to.

I sought in my introductory chapters to locate the means by which I might be able to remain present for a child who I noticed was manifesting signs of trauma. It became clear to me that listening with loving attention was capable of not only enabling the child to return to their own intelligence but might also enable me to remain calm and clear, and to not have my own traumas restimulated. How might I remain present for the child who needs me? As I listened to their audio presentation from *Knighlamp*, their organisation that advocates trauma informed practice in classrooms, I hear Stephen Friedrich and Adela Holmes beseech me into confidence “that a benevolent curiosity about our fellow humans is how we hold on to our own humanity” (2016). If I am able to hold on to my own

humanity, perhaps I am able to remain present for the child who has temporarily lost her capacity to notice her own humanity.

Within the context of the teacher and student relationship, I find it useful to frame the act of unconditional listening, and to honour the “sacredness of human attention” (Popova, 2016b) as an act of pedagogical listening, requiring the good teacher to sustain her desire to learn something special about each of her students and imbue this desire with well-meaning. When a teacher listens pedagogically she might consciously bring this kind of benevolent curiosity to moments of relating with her students.

Sometimes I think a student can be for me like a text I can read. I can permit myself to be transported into this text in an utterly fascinated and inquisitive way, deeply concerned and humanistic, bringing forth hermeneutic inquiry in order to understand what this young person might require of me—a teacher able to listen with loving attention, able to stem impending confusion and judgement in the face of acts by this student that might be disturbing or terrifying, subtle or barely discernible.

Sometimes I enter the vortex of my own duality—my desire to be capable of unstinting, loving attention struggles for space amidst the cells of my body and the thoughts of my mind are often crowded with fatigue and ambiguity. I need to remind myself to enter ungrudgingly into a spirit of curiosity. One of Pema Chödrön’s parables (2005) shows me I can habitually risk naming a student as a simple object, rather than noticing his immensely complex subjectivity when, in the sacred space, becoming present is possible. “They call that a tree”, laughed two monks as they gazed together—our nominalisation (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 152) of the thing does not measure up to the task of relating our being to it. Two monks find infinite complexity in the nature of the tree and to them this nature is intelligible. As teachers who seek wonder in the nature of our students,

might we imagine beyond what we can see, beyond our judgements, beyond what might appear vague to us. Might we add an imaginative syntax (p. 156) to let us see the intelligibilities of our students' distress as it becomes manifest—from beyond the tree of their behaviour is the forest of trauma and pain, the landscape of their being.

I am not focusing on a piece carved from a student's way of being in the world, I am witnessing her whole being, expressing the self in that moment. Such an intersubjective relationship would accept that “the ultimate ground of all understanding must always be the divinatory act of congeniality, the possibility of which depends upon a pre-existing bond between individuals” (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 156). I think of the bond as a sacred one.

In what ways might I seek to listen with “benevolent curiosity” and be present to make possible the “sacredness of human attention”? Where such divinatory acts of congeniality are being attempted, I find others who through unselfish endeavours, seek to create ways of being present in invitational spaces, in the next sections of this chapter.

The sacredness of human attention

Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.

Audrey Lorde, Sister Outsider, 2007

Once, I met a teacher at an all-girls high school who taught me something about Re-evaluation Counselling. It was to become for me an approach to listening which resonated with my mission to end oppression in classrooms. I began to use its foundational principles, alongside what I already

intuitively felt to be effective for overturning oppression in my own small sphere of influence, that is my own teaching practice. Re-evaluation Counselling was to work for me, not as a fixed set of routines, strictly set in procedural dogma, but as a rich source of inspiration for the way in which I wanted to be able to hear students' voices, particularly those voices haunted by hurt, fear and trauma.

This section of my chapter ripples out of the initiating disruption of being introduced to the processes and theories of Re-evaluation Counselling. Some ripples present themselves as explanatory rather than interpretive as I endeavour to comprehend some background for the principles and processes of Re-evaluation Counselling and what it promotes itself to be, others as moments of illumination of the power of listening with great intent to the words and being of another. Circlets of reflection arise in this section as my learning and experience with Re-evaluation Counselling alters not only understandings of my self but also raises questions for me about ideas of intelligence and rationality. Across the ripples arising from the vortex of this section comes my own learning, primarily the cellular vibration brought about by being listened to, my own memories stirred into new life re-evaluated and resolved, my own becoming attuned to the voices of my students.

To locate myself within the experience of Re-evaluation Counselling, I drew from a number of texts, particularly those written by Harvey Jackins (1978, 1991, 1995), and later, Tim Jackins (2005), as well as booklets, pamphlets and other source materials compiled by members of the Re-evaluation Counselling community and associated international reference groups (www.RC.org). After attending foundation courses I was given permission to participate in residential workshops and involved myself in frequent Re-evaluation Counselling sessions. I attended an international conference for women and I experienced there the bringing into being of

safe spaces. I write about them in three vignettes, small windows to perceive moments of self-emancipation.

The Women's International Workshop 1

The women gathered, in a hall, from different countries, classes, races, religions, they sat on chairs, lounged on cushions, lay on the floor and waited for the signals of safety to appear. They formed groups, each carved from shame, humiliation, other tortures of oppression. Bodies soon became seamless as hands held hands of different skin colours and degrees of age-spottedness, palms caressed a furrowed brow. Into the midst of the bodies came the voices, sometimes shames rinsed out locked hearts through sobbing, screaming with rage as if squeezed through a copper and mangler, the raucous laughter for humiliations and yawning out the chronic nature of distress patterns embedded since childhoods. The Re-evaluation Counselling Women's Workshop shook me from all preconceived ideas of sexism, disturbing my previously enculturated passivism, and transforming for me the heart-burn of resentment, into fully fledged awakening. I was overcome with joy and fury.

Co-counselling has become a process I have turned to in order to make sense of emotions arising from my own lived experience, emotions which sometimes impede my understanding and responses to the present. I sought the mutuality of paired listening—co-counselling. Guided by principles of Re-evaluation Counselling I come to notice my own patterns of behaviour, particularly those that threatened to “prove recalcitrant to the imagination” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 317).

I think perhaps that prior to the disruption—the meteoric impact of my co-counsellor's attentive listening on my subconscious isolation—I had

struggled alone, believing that my hurts represented veracity. Perhaps this is what our students do, what they have been conditioned to do, to become isolated in order to survive in their situatedness. Perhaps this is what we all do as humans, our hurts isolate us as we fold into ourselves, when there is no one to listen (Jackins, 2006, p. 146).

It is important to note certain guidelines required of me as a co-counsellor within the Re-evaluation Counselling community—confidentiality, and no referencing of a co-counsellor’s material outside of sessions. Already, one can see that observation of an ethics of holding safe a person as other is critical. The guidelines of Re-evaluation Counselling support my understanding of what is ethically required of me as I listen to my students, parents and colleagues. At this initial point of my apprehending I share with the reader the skeleton of my listening, that is its shape, and it is not until later in my thesis that I can share its heart, soul and blood. My lived experience, as I gained access to the practice of Re-evaluation Counselling, released to me moments that were pregnant with potentialities, both painful and prodigious, and I recount them here in narratives that serve to ripple to deeper understandings, subsequent to being brought into conscious awareness of my once inadvertent isolation.

The Women’s International Workshop 2

At lunchtime, we played. It was compulsory. I didn’t get why, that during Re-evaluation Counselling Workshops, being alone was discouraged and play was mandated—until I went to join a game. I found a group of older women, on a netball court. I hated netball at school. I hated the stupid skirts and the stop-start of the whistle. I got closer and saw that they were running everywhere. There were about four balls, no whistles and no positions. The women, mostly elderly Jewish women, were pelting the balls at each other. I asked about the rules. Typical Catholic. Only one rule: if you get hit by a ball, you have

to scream, "F**k off!" It was not that easy, as I warmed up atrophied fury. These women had already warmed up their indignation and were in full-flight of contradicting patterns of oppression.

And thus, Re-evaluation Counselling seeks to alleviate the traumatic impact of oppressive states such as classism, racism and sexism on the individual, and to build humanity's collective desire and capacity for addressing oppression in the broader realm of social activism (Jackins, 1991; Kauffman & New, 2004). These goals hold me in continuous wonder about how I can be a teacher whose practice embodies the possibility of freedom. Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2005) is a book that keeps company with me and to which I turn when my radical opinions and practices isolate me from the mainstreamness of my colleagues. Teaching for freedom takes great courage, and when one needs courage, one must often encounter isolation. For this reason, I strive to eliminate my patterns of isolating myself and seek instead fulsome connection with the humans around me—this might be how I respond to Palmer's incitement to "pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place" (2004, p. 71).

In his book *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a pedagogy of possibility*, Simon follows Freire and understands the risk we take.

This challenge to go beyond one's existing knowledge and identities constitutes no small degree of risk; risk of failure, loss of coherence, rupture of existing relations with family and friends, social ridicule, colonisation within new ideologies, and a feeling of disempowerment as old certainties are abandoned. (Simon, 1992, p. 67)

For me, the dialogical relationship between teacher and student is central to all learning, whereby the expert knowledge and behaviours of the teacher are satellites, held in orbit by the relationship with the student, and the "goal must be a non-exclusionary, nonviolent pedagogy within which new and

unfamiliar discourses can be addressed” (Simon, 1992, p. 94). And by learner, I mean the student, not as empty vessel but rather as quintessentially human, with the focus being on educatability. “This educatability, in turn, is grounded in the radical unfinishedness of the human condition and in our consciousness of this unfinished state” (Freire, 2001, p. 100). I sought to understand how in being listened to, and in listening to other, my own unfinishedness might be brought to the surface as I opened my heart to the other.

I explored Re-evaluation Counselling because it is a way of one listening to other, of honouring the “sacredness of human attention” that helps us notice our isolation and our irrationality, to recognise ourselves as oppressors and to embrace the opportunity that our unfinishedness provides. This is our human conditioning, but we are capable of great intelligence, zestfulness and love. Where the word ‘intelligence’ is used in Re-evaluation Counselling it refers to

the ability to come up with a fresh, accurate response to each moment of living...it operates by receiving new information from the environment, by comparing and contrasting this new information with information from past experiences that have already been understood and stored in the memory, and by constructing a fresh, new, appropriate response to the specific situation at hand. We begin life with a huge amount of this ability. (Kauffman and New, 2004, pp. 7-8)

Rippling from the vacuum of the vortex, a vacuum previously characterised by my sense of isolation, now disrupted into deepening connections with self and other, I inquire further into the nature of intelligence and the interdependent nature of its existence. I turn to Sokolowski, whose words regarding rationality, intelligence and veracity, evoke the importance of connection. As in Re-evaluation Counselling, listening with great love and presence, without criticism, without blaming, without judging and without shaming, enables the other to say what has

hurt him and to rediscover his natural intelligence, Sokolowski determines that unlike the spontaneous renewing of the cells of our bodies,

truthfulness does not occur without the active intervention of other human beings...There is an intrinsic connection between the flowering of veracity and the presence of human freedom or responsibility...The unfolding of our reason is at the heart of our own self, and it is not an automatic emergence. (2008, p. 93)

I have explored 'listening' as a means to make possible what Simon refers to as "hopeful practice" (1992, p. 7). Listening with attentiveness to other might make possible a pedagogy for heightening social consciousness—*conscientização* (Freire, 2005)—a pedagogy that

considers the relation between knowing and the production of subjectivity in a way that acknowledges the complexities of both the production of identities, competencies, and desires and the possibilities for a progressive agenda for learning within schools. (Simon, 1991, p. 6)

Some of the children I have taught, in fact a great many, have experienced physical and emotional hurt, by the time they reach school—their home environments already violating their capacity to absorb information and events in a useful, flexible and rational manner. When children who have experienced trauma attend school it might distress them when teachers make inadvertent and spontaneous judgements about them, or even worse, confirm their rapidly developing idea of themselves as not likable nor not valued. Many other children experience very nurturing environments that meet their emotional and physical needs, producing young people with a healthy regard for themselves as worthwhile human beings, curious and open-minded about their world.

I must ask myself, if this child, who in front of me, bursts forth such irrationality from the core of their hurt and isolation, and yet I know their

intelligence to be intact yet obscured and made temporarily inaccessible, am I not responsible for his very survival? Re-evaluation Counselling attributes to the listener the role of *doula* for the re-birth of intelligence, the listener becomes involved in a maieutic experience as a midwife for the ineffable that the listener knows but cannot express. In his article, "Socrates as Midwife" Tom Kerns, echoes Socrates (in *The Theaetetus*, 150 BC) who says this is heavenly work...

as we go further with our discussions, all who are favored by heaven make progress at a rate that seems surprising to others as well as to themselves, although it is clear that they have never learned anything from me. The many admirable truths they bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within. But the delivery is heaven's work and mine. (Kerns, n.d., para. 3)

In this moment, I have a choice to make, as I feel my racing heart drain my energy, to stay present long enough to listen until the child's intelligence crowns however fragile, however blue tinged, begins to breathe, or to be immobilised by my own fear. Would I have the courage to stay, and figure out, in this breach birth of the unborn intelligence, what to do? If this were a baby lamb, as on my parent's farm, I would be lying on the cold ground, having pulled on a coat in the middle of the night, awoken my mother, who would follow me down to the paddocks, with string and cloth, where we would work all night, soothe the exhausted ewe and raise the lamb in the lounge-room of our house. My mother and I would sob at the loss of such a lamb. Would I not do the same for a child's emerging sense of self?

On my way to school I phone my co-counselling partner and talk about the tightness, the fatigue and the rumble of catastrophising thoughts I have as I ply my way from home, past the baristas who have come to know the emotional shades of a principal at 7am each morning. My co-counsellor giggles with delight as I arrange my feelings over the phone, talking through the roots of anxieties, through the deep distant echoes of a feeling that once belonged to a child on a school bus, now a principal in a rather nice car. We

swap time, time to acknowledge old foes as potential friends, rendering as Nussbaum might do accounts “Of the roots of emotion in infancy and childhood that should also help us in analysing particular emotion histories and understanding their variety” (2003, p. 179), and to perhaps eventually see “that the emotions of later life make their first appearances in infancy as cognitive relations to objects important for one’s, wellbeing, and that this history informs later experience of emotion in various specific ways” (ibid.). For me, Re-evaluation Counselling has made incandescent (Rogers, 2016) “present objects as they project the images of the past upon them” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 179).

As I walk into my school through the distresses that I know are about to tumble around me—past the administration desk, wondering yet again at toilets overdue for redevelopment, past a Breakfast Club of families, into waist-high hugs and child protection notifications, administrative requirements and sheets of chaotic pencilled letters telling news of the weekend that demand rewards in colourful stickers—I am steady, not ready to be pummelled, worse, one of these pieces of news writing, delivered to my desk by a pony tail barely visible from below its ledge is to tell the story of a murder and a buried body. I am to balance these contradictions like a starving person at a buffet, overwhelmed, overjoyed.

In my situatedness as a school principal, I consider Julian Weissglass’ work on leadership and Re-evaluation Counselling. I have made a

decision to lead—to bring about change, to introduce ideas or strategies to increase people’s abilities to think freshly about situations they find themselves in, to help institutions implement policy and practices that are more respectful of humans... [In choosing to lead I] realise that I have to support others rather than give into fear, anger and despair. (1998, p. 175)

Questioning approaches to how we support students may loosen practices from the past that become draconically stultified and cling to the school like hardening chewing gum clings to the underside of a table. When I closed the detention room at my new school, it did not provoke celebration by anyone. Many of the staff were concerned about how we would punish children who were naughty—our school satisfaction survey data was awful, reflecting discontent about the closure of the detention room. There was a clamour for past models of behaviour management but there were also tears of relief from some parents who came to meet with me to reflect on the lack of support that their children had suffered whilst isolated in the detention room in the past.

If I consider the traditional ways in which teachers respond to the trauma based behaviours of children, I wonder if we simply serve to create further distress and irrational thinking. By punishing poor behaviour and distress, by judging, blaming, labelling, punishing, ostracising, shaming, abandoning, condemning, reproaching, or threatening, we may succeed in temporarily interrupting symptoms of distress, which may look like a successful intervention, but we do not succeed in negating the cause of the reactivation of distress recordings. I think we actually create further distress and most likely, further inhibitors to the development of children's intelligence. As Jackins succinctly put it, "We do not have bad people; we have good people acting bad when they are short circuited by the emotional scar tissue which has been loaded on them by the environment" (1978, p. 68).

Like the queen in Snow White, a teacher who is full of fury and confusion asks her student, as a magical mirror, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" Only to find the impertinence of the mirror is to tell her the truth, and yell back in fury and confusion that there are others much fairer than she. In that moment, when she has lost her capacity to remain present, perhaps she might try to find her net worth as a teacher and make the student responsible for her ego, her 'I', by expecting her

student to mirror back the compliant disposition she has demanded, instead of recognising that her student may be distraught, and saying, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, I am struggling to be the fairest of them all. I will strive instead to listen to the needs you have, this is my mission”. We are mirrors to each other in these moments of distress. If I practise noticing where I struggle, I may in times of acute restimulation of my own distress, be able to arrest the urge to act out my distress and instead remain calm and loving for the student who needs me to mirror loving kindness and acceptance.

Diachronic reflection: We all get a bit confused

A relief teacher Ms Amy, stormed out of my school. As she passed by the administration office, she glared at the school business manager, “You’d better not dock my pay, otherwise you’ll be hearing from me”. She left abruptly at 1.45pm, after spending the previous hour or more in distressed conversation with a teacher’s aide. She was extremely angry that Jack, who is 11 years old and in Grade 5 was still going bike riding despite having told her to “get f**ked”.

Ms Amy, in her fury, had roared into Jack’s face, “Well, you’re not going to go bike riding then”. Our support teacher, drawing Ms Amy to the side, explained that Jack’s bike riding is part of his program, with his own teacher’s aide, Eric, who takes Jack three afternoons per week. The bike riding provides the context for Eric to work with Jack on relationships, social skills and abiding by rules.

Ms Amy found another teacher’s aide, Enid, who doggedly maintains a stern approach to behaviour management, entailing a daily diary of student misbehaviour which is used to record the shameful events of the day. For an hour Ms Amy had found consolation for her indignation and distress.

My staff based counsellor met with Ms Amy, and enabled Ms Amy to disclose that she had been ‘belted’ by her father when she was young. The counsellor tried to acknowledge that this trauma was immense but that we need to be present for the students.

It is not surprising that humans can begin to feel powerless, hopeless and out of control when the lack of awareness of patterned responses continues

to produce a spiralling of unsuccessful attempts to address traumatic or distressing experiences. Tim Winton, a contemporary Australian author with a flair for noticing the trauma in the everyday, observes in his memoir, “I came to suspect you don’t just relive these sudden moments in your head and in your sense-memories, you repeat them in fresh events, as if ensnared in a pattern” (Winton, 2016, p. 44). Sometimes the thought of changing patterned behaviour might seem like a person’s existence or identity is under threat. Fear of becoming unstuck can be experienced as a fear as strong as losing one’s very life.

Authors seem to treat the patterned effect of trauma in their characters with compassion and ironic humour. Why are so many teachers different? Why do so many make it their business to stay distant from disturbance without humour or compassion and insist upon retreating into a kind of preserved blindness—terrified children to them are errant weeds and undeserving. At least that is what I see endlessly in schools. So deeply familiar is the fear of untethering ourselves from our chronic patterns, that artists and authors recognise this disembodied terror in self and others. Helen McDonald writes in her autobiographical novel, *H is for Hawk* about T.H. White’s attempts to train a goshawk, finding in their mutual struggles to train raptors, a parallel struggle to train their inner captured psyches,

I cannot imagine White’s childhood of terror and shame, but I can

Diachronic reflection: In denial

The father of a deeply distressed little boy, told me and our school psychologist that his own father used a belt to discipline him when he was a child, “and it never did me any harm”, he told us, and yet here was the boy’s mother, a scar on her throat where surgeons had reconstructed the cartilage, where in front of their son, it had been crushed during a domestic violence incident. I struggled to fathom how this intelligent man could fail to see the link between the violence of his father, his violence and the issues of violence we were now confronted with as his son persistently went ‘hands on’ in the playground. In these interactions with parents, there is not only a failure to comprehend the connection, there appears to be a desperate, hard-wired need to deny its possibility. Likewise, the children, sometimes removed from horrific violence, grieve these situations with an intensity that is bizarre. I see these situations daily in my work and they leave me exhausted at the end of the day.

understand how it made him see the world as controlled by cruelty, dictators and madmen. I can see how that powerless child in front of the play-castle never quite stopped believing that he was going to be shot. (McDonald, 2014, p. 69)

Re-evaluation Counselling, at its heart, is being attentive to the other. Bringing the sacredness into acts of human attention bestows a willingness to stand in loving silence. In such listening, there is not a primary desire to understand but to simply create intersubjectivity. Between listener and the one for whom she listens is divine congeniality, which might be understood in Winton's prose,

When you pay attention you feel the presence of the past, you sense the ongoing struggle and the yearning of all things seen and unseen...Looking deeply humbly, reverently will sometimes open the viewer to what lingers beneath hue and form and texture – the faint tracks of a story that suggest relationship, alliances, consequence, damage. If you can ever know something you'll understand it by what it has given, what it owes, what it needs. It has never existed in isolation. And ghosting forever behind its mere appearance is its holy purpose, ...When you observe long enough, the subject of your gaze seems, eventually, to respond, or perhaps it's you, the viewer, who is changed; something has stuck, something, in the end, is going on between you and it. (Winton, 2016, pp. 56-57)

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She was my age, but tall with a strong face. A professional woman, exuding confidence. We adjusted our positions and rearranged our hand-holding. All five of us. She described the abortion. The other women smiled lovingly, holding gentle eye contact. She described the sexual assault during the abortion. Recognition of pregnancies commenced through shame, endured through shame, denied themselves in shame. The shame gushing out in racking sobs. She

described a society where the stigma of teenage pregnancy had to be weighted, alone, against a secret procedure. We were enveloped together in a space of deep empathy and profound healing. The listening women heard their voices in her single voice.

Re-authoring the self: Shedding objectifying labels

By adopting the other person's objectifying label as a substitute for the unself-conscious self, Genet was performing the same psychological contortion...where a saint transfigures suffering into sanctity, Genet transfigures oppression into freedom.

Sarah Bakewell, 2016

In my search for ways of listening to children with trauma, I had the opportunity to experience Narrative Therapy. I felt that Narrative Therapy was imbued with the possibility for a child to take command of their personal narrative and reclaim a version of themselves that has their authorisation. Describing the process of Narrative Therapy, as I experienced it, helps me to consider the manifold ways in which we might establish places and spaces where listening can occur for deeply traumatised young people. Rebecca Solnit discerns the dual nature of our narratives, those that objectify and those that have the capacity to subjectify, she says, "We are our stories, stories that can be both prison and the crowbar to break open the door of that prison" (Solnit, 2017, p. 19).

Narrative Therapy is based on the idea that our "identity conclusions" (Wever, 2008) are generated during the everyday interactions we have with our communities, from our earliest moments. Each of our interactions with others are threads forming the complex fabric of our impressions of ourselves. For some individuals these interactions, communications and implications can be crushingly negative and traumatic and may impact on who we might become. The process of Narrative Therapy involves an opportunity for re-authoring aspects of our identity conclusions so that more positive and preferred narratives might be realised and recalled,

thereby countering previous narratives and hopefully rebuilding preferred futures so that new stories may give rise to new opportunities. Narrative Therapy does not ignore or deny past and present problems, but recognises that there are other possibilities.

Trauma attempts a parasitic existence, a subconscious capacity to deform our self—we temporarily become our trauma, just like we temporarily become our disease—trauma objectifies us, diminishes us to a concrete form given in language terms, a label. Our own distress recordings are like barnacles, clinging to us and slowing down our movement through the ocean—no wonder the Southern Right Whales could spend all night in a sheltered bay raising their mighty flukes above the surface of the water and smashing them down to loosen the barnacles from their skin so that their migration can go with greater ease and less impediment. I saw this once when I took a group of Grade 9 students camping at Wineglass Bay.

Just as barnacles bestow whales with individuality, our distress recordings distinguish us as individuals. Our barnacles are rigid, calcified and tough until we somehow learn to loosen them from our skin. We somehow accept our authoring, which distinguishes our individuality and gives us a sense of identity, a label (Kauffman & New, 2004, p. 30).

As listeners in Narrative Therapy our challenge is to try to see the most heinous behaviour as a manifestation of a distress recording, rather than an aspect of innate humanity. “We are responsible but we are not to blame” (Kauffman & New, 2004, p. 33). As listeners, we have to know in our hearts and in our minds that the choice to behave in one way or another is connected to responsibility. Sarah Bakewell discerns Simone de Beauvoir’s sense of the balance between freedom and constraint. Like Bakewell, I find de Beauvoir’s acknowledgement that our habits accumulate over a lifetime, creating barnacles difficult to break from, a resonant explanation of the entrapment of our individual historicity (Bakewell, 2016, pp. 215-216). What I find empowering and vital in de Beauvoir’s seminal text, *The Second Sex*

(2009), is the notion that despite the barnacles of oppression, we do remain “existentially free”, though not without responsibility. To this idea of agency, freedom paired with responsibility, I cling like a tired swimmer to a life buoy, in faith that the facilitation of agency through the sacredness of human attention has the capacity to transcend the *aporia* of oppression, that is the puzzling insolubility of its seemingly lack of intelligibility that we find difficult to understand clearly if we attempt to view it from a philosophical, transcendental attitude (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 318), yet in the transcending I believe it possible to release the restorative power of emancipation (Bingham, Biesta & Ranci ere, 2010).

I cannot be sure of what de Beauvoir might have thought in regard to Solnit’s celebration of the importance of voice in combatting our oppression, and hence the limitations imposed on our potential freedom, but I feel de Beauvoir’s heart, like mine, may also have beat faster in agreement and conviction with Solnit’s words.

Violence against women is often against our voices and our stories. It is a refusal of our voices, and of what a voice means: the right to self-determination...Sometimes just being able to speak, to be heard, to be believed are crucial parts of membership in a family, a community, a society. Sometimes our voices break those things apart; sometimes those things are prisons. (Solnit, 2017, p. 19)

It is possible that we author children into being oppressors and suffering oppression—is it possible that there are not sexist children, racist children or classist children, but there are hurts and confusions that begin early in a child’s life, despite the best intentions of the adults that surround them? I wonder what it takes to be a teacher who might reach the child behind their wall of hurt, who is capable of assisting that child to re-author themselves. This child might experience some healing of past hurts and a contradiction of distress recordings that have already started to combine to begin the process of creating a rigid version of this child, without the child’s consent. The poignant question for me here is—when and how did we take this

child's choice and responsibility away from determining who she might become?

When I contemplate the effects of trauma on the human spirit, I observe self-objectifying labels, masquerading as human beings. I see their sense of self is damaged, not just their self-worth—they have lost sight of who they are and who they might become. Might it be possible to return them to their subjectivity, not necessarily through acts of speaking—our voices are often silenced through trauma—but through the compassionate blamelessness reflected in the countenance of an attentive listener, who is able to listen to whatever words might come, even when the self is eclipsed by trauma and temporarily, it seems, is without language.

Carola Conle, in her paper, “Thesis as Narrative or What is the Inquiry in Narrative Inquiry?” introduces the notion of *poiesis*, as a bringing back into being and refers to the experience of *poiesis*, this bringing back into being, as a “dialectic between tension and telos, between emotional discomfort and disruption and the desire for some particular harmony...” (Conle, 2000 p. 197). In the intersubjectivity of the one who is listener and the one who is being listened to, the risk is great disruption, the desire to work with a shedding of labels is hard work, it risks resistance and might work against the ultimate desire for harmony.

How might we listen in ways that shed the objectifying labels of our chronic distress recordings? Questioning the objectifying labels imposed on us by trauma might be uncomfortable, surprising and ultimately revelatory, particularly if in returning to ourselves we find the infinite possibilities of living life to the full—we might discover our being and what we might fully become. When I am listened to, I am heard and being heard is validation of my subjectivity. When I listen to others I am validating and honouring their subjectivity. Thus, we commune in intersubjectivity.

I learned that Tania trusted me because I was invited to join her Narrative Therapy session along with two other adults in her life, one her previous foster carer and the other her previous principal.

Perhaps the reason she chose me to join the sessions pivoted on the day I was teaching in a classroom and she walked in with her friend. They both sat on a desk and lit a cigarette together—within the context of a conservative school and their 12-year-old peers, it was a daring move. I was impressed with their pluck and the situation still makes me smile. I felt the class look at me in gasping, shocked expectation of a student management crisis but all I did was to say “hello” and to say to the class, “It’s ok, the girls will let me know how I can help them soon. Just continue with your work”. I then turned to the girls, and simply invited them to join us when they were ready. They asked if they were going to get into trouble, and I said no, but to let me know what they needed of me. Perhaps it was the unexpected nature of my response that was to reconnect Tania and me in the circumstances of her Narrative Therapy sessions.

Initially in the Narrative Therapy session we are all brought together in an old house, a turn of the 19th Century brick bungalow nearest the oldest part of Hobart. The carpets and furniture are comfortably aged with indiscernible embroidery. The therapist, Christine Wever, has a kind face and soft hair and clothing. Even her golden Labrador conveys a sense of sleepy acceptance, warmth, peaceful calm and presence. Myself and Tania’s principal, Liz, remember that we had grown up near one another—she had lived opposite me in a leafy street above a park. We shared the same name and a birthday one week apart. Tania had been raised in foster care, experiencing numerous families and schools.

The three adults are known as ‘outsider witnesses’ and our role is not to flatter, contradict or appease Tania but to respond honestly to

authenticate Tania's preferred 'identity claims', so that she might recognise them as genuine, valid and current.

Narrative Therapy is a three-step process of interviews, conducted with openness, honesty and integrity.

Christine interviews Tania about their work together, while Liz and I make notes about phrases or words that catch our attention, alerting us to what Tania values or wishes for in her future. In a second interview, Christine asks us, in the company of Tania, about words, phrases or themes that we have been drawn to, particularly about the things Tania values. We are asked to elaborate on mental pictures or metaphors that help us to reflect on the things that Tania wishes for herself, including where she might be headed. We reflect on how these images and reflections resonate with us in our personal and professional worlds. Finally, we reflect on how this process of Narrative Therapy has moved us with regard to our own lives.

At our final gathering we review with Christine and Tania, what is happening for us all in the narratives we share about how Tania wants to be and become in her life-world. Christine plays her guitar and sings the lyrics she draws from all our words, phrases and reflections, to celebrate Tania's bringing her self back to herself. This is profoundly moving.

In her writing Christine refers to the final phase of Narrative Therapy as a "definitional ceremony" (Wever, 2008) occurring through dialogue and mutual re-authoring, validating the authenticity in our being with Tania as narrator. As witnesses, we are not disembodied masks of our professional roles. Instead, the safety of the setting Christine creates nourishes interconnectedness and within the embrace of all our human

intersubjectivity Tania comes into fuller consciousness of her own narrative possibilities (Litowitz, 2014; Jordan, 2012). There seems hope now that she can demystify the objectifying labels and bring her loving, intelligent and zestful self into subjective life-giving being.

Just as the young Genet, raised by a foster family, and labelled thief, converted his label, and became a somewhat “compulsive gift-giver”, (Bakewell, 2016, p. 221), thereby inverting his oppression, we become able to see the objectifying labels in our narratives and subvert them. Christine, recalls us to the power of storying.

This process of telling, re-telling and further re-telling, grounded in people’s lived experience, and focused around what it is that people give value to in their living, is powerfully resonant and highly acknowledging. It’s about people significantly influencing the lives of each other. (Wever, 2008, para. 5)

Both Re-evaluation Counselling and Narrative Therapy give me ways of learning to listen with greater depth and understanding than I might ever be able to summarise but I hope this chapter shows ways that we can become talented in the virtue of knowing and understanding the means to listen with loving attention (Annas, 2011). I continue as witness to the “sacredness of human attention”, and I can only remain in humble awe as I see young people coming back to their self, from living in a role that has always been objectively labelled.

Being listened to enables a coming into being, and seeing that my barnacles have gone. My skin feels smooth. I am aware of my self in the world. At Wineglass Bay the Southern Right shelters in the shallows of the bay, at sunset lifts a side fin to the air, and the students, who line the shore as a singular silhouette, spontaneously wave back. During the night, the

mighty hiss of spray, issuing forth from the whale's blowhole, mixes with the sound of the breeze in the She-oaks.

Courage in emancipatory moments: Failing better

Until then, one of the best things we can do for creative men and women is to stand out of their light.

John W. Gardener, US administrator (1912 – 2002)

There is little in my practice that outwardly resembles the planned sessions of Re-evaluation Counselling or Narrative Therapy, but there is much in its undercurrent that is informed by my developing understandings of the principles of these ways of listening. The oscillations between my intuitive judgement and my conscious bringing to the fore of approaches to listening merge sometimes indiscernibly to me yet these elements are both nevertheless present in my work with students. I have learnt that, in the employ of my understandings about trauma and the role of listening with loving kindness, I can hope to be present for students in moments that are teachable yet there are many moments that flail about like fish on a wharf, pulled from the water.

As a teacher, when I listen pedagogically to my students, I find myself appreciating their individual and collective intelligence, their capacity for creative responses to new problems and experiences. The place of listening pedagogically is demanding—it requires more energy of me and it requires that I give up control and authority over determining what my students will learn and how they should learn it. When I listen pedagogically, with attentiveness to each student's subjectivity, there is an opportunity for me to invite each into a shared space of intersubjectivity, and there I might stand out of their light. When I work with students who have experienced the objectifying labels of trauma, might I be able to stand by such an opportunity out of their light, even when that light is dimmed and flickering

like a failing florescent tube? The metaphor of 'light' is not new to education, as students are often referred to as 'bright' or 'dim' as if they were each hardwired to a specified wattage.

When I taught a class of young men who were somewhere between school and the justice system, I learnt how to apply the sacredness of loving attentiveness, though listening, in a way that surrendered my own ego to the strong possibility that I would fail as a teacher, but that at least these young men would have their voices listened to. I applied, to the best of my capacity at the time, a Freirean curriculum—one that might enable their emancipation—I tried to stand out of their light, at times flickering weakly though it was, and they had a chance to find their sense of agency and of self.

I narrate here my story of some moments with these young men—a story that exposes my determination to stand out of their light, to suspend my fear of losing control in the shared spaced between myself and the young men, for whom life teetered precariously between the blue terrapin of our isolated classroom, at the back of a suburban high school, and the high fences of the justice system. Overcoming my fear entailed recognising and resisting oppressive social and professional expectations of me as a teacher. Palmer writes of this fear with a deep and abiding understanding that the fears we feel as teachers are projections of the fears of our students, "...we cannot see the fear in our students until we see the fear in ourselves" (Palmer, 2007, p. 48). I was not able to overcome the feelings of oppression from the weighty expectation that I would administer to the young men the contents of a photocopied booklet of low-level literacy and numeracy tasks. I just tried to ignore the anxiety and the booklets, working instead on projects with the teenage boys that would take us beyond the safety of the terrapin and black line masters.

Standing out of their light required me to acknowledge the potential of my own capacity to oppress as a teacher might. I had to escape the weight

of such oppression and the oppression of expectations I experience as a teacher. Weissglass describes how the root of oppression attendant upon the teachers' role is found in the void, regardless of the omniscient call for educational reform, between the expectations we have of teachers and the humanity required to be an empowered teacher.

Reform programs that address only the cognitive and behavioural aspects of educators' professional lives neglect an important part of their humanness and fall short of fully attending to the empowerment of teachers. By ignoring the influence of feelings on thought and action, such programs promote a view of school as a factory, whose purpose is to install knowledge into students' minds. Some educators, however, have a vision of schools as communities where 1) people care about and support each other in learning and living, 2) adults nurture young people as complete and complex human beings, and 3) youngsters are encouraged and stimulated to construct their own understanding, rather than memorize facts and procedures. (Weissglass, 1990, p. 351)

Meet my class of nine young men. It is late in the year.

They have slumped up the steps of the terrapin, backpacks slung lazily over shoulders, eaten their toast, drunk their Milo and tidied up without argument. I'm grateful that after their weekend of stolen cars, drugs and fighting lounge rooms that they are all here. I have five copies of this day's Mercury newspaper tucked under my arm, ready to share with the boys.

Our local Opposition Party Leader at state level has just released a policy called 'No school, no licence'. It is a road safety policy due to a recent spate of road deaths that has doubled the state's road toll and, of course, the perpetrators are generally young men. According to statistics, the boys in my class are the most likely to kill themselves, or someone else, on the road between our local school area and the city, within the next 10 years.

Much of our work has been reading newspaper articles about these deaths and what has caused them. One lad in the class has already had a brother die on the roads. They all agree that their illegal driving escapades on the weekends were risky. I was trying to keep the content of our lessons relevant to their lives, providing them the ground for being experts. They have already shared with me their opinion that driving when they are under the influence of drugs is safer for them. Interestingly the trauma surgeon at the Royal Hobart Hospital has confirmed through research sent to the boys that they are correct to a certain extent. In their correspondence with the surgeon they come to learn about the holes in their hypothesis.

When the draft 'No school, no licence' policy was released I printed copies for the boys, and wrote a worksheet about the policy so they could analyse the implications for themselves. They developed a set of class responses to the policy, which were considered and thoughtful, collaborative and comprehensive. I contacted the Leader of the state Opposition Party, who was responsible for release of the policy paper, to arrange a meeting between him and the boys.

I played back the recorded message from the Opposition Leader, which mentioned them personally by name and they were excited about the recognition. In preparation for our meeting, I explained that security measures at Parliament might mean that wearing hoodies would not be a good idea and that metal objects or illegal substances may also not be a good idea. The students cheerfully took this on-board and helped me write up their notes ready for the big day.

Whilst writing their ideas, Marley was leaning back on his chair. Russ punched him on the arm to gain his attention, and said this was Marley's chance to contribute to the law system by law-making rather than law-breaking. Marley looked at Russ quizzically and Russ, in exasperation, explained to Marley that we were going to Parliament to help make laws, that was where laws were made. Marley's eyes

widened suddenly, all four legs of his chair were back on the ground and his amazed, 'Oh, right. Yeah', seemed to be the response Russ was looking for. Marley began contributing to our list of for/against/other ideas. Was I standing out of their light? Well, it certainly felt like it. They knew more than me about the topic, and they were contributing their own ideas and I was being a conduit to them being as empowered as possible. I was excited and nervous, so that tells me I was not the one in control any longer. I felt that pedagogically I was enacting Freirean approaches, by listening openly to the views of these young men in a way that actively sought to address a policy that risked disadvantaging them.

On the morning of our meeting at Parliament, I got to school early to print copies of our notes and to check that the paper work was done for our excursion. We were leaving school at 1.45pm but by 10am I had heard that Russ was being suspended for smoking, Marley was late getting to school because he had spent the morning getting baked (smoking dope). My third student, Patrick was on an ice skating excursion for PE. I felt panicked and I was trying to control feelings of judgment and frustration. It became important to remain open to all possibilities and not to start shutting doors due to my own desire to succeed. I went to see Russ at the principal's office. He was in a fury because his sense of justice had been offended regarding his suspension.

There were two challenges now confronting me, one was that I wanted Russ to come to the appointment because he had strong opinions and was prepared to voice these. The other was that I could see that the school's chaotic student behaviour management had created a counterproductive situation whereby the punishment was going to be metered out not because Russ had done the wrong thing but because his reputation preceded him and a teacher had mistakenly reported him for smoking. Ironically, Russ in explaining to the principal that he was angry because he had not been smoking at

that place or time, in response to a direct question from the principal, admitted to smoking at a different place and time earlier in the day. The principal explained that his honesty had now created situation where he had to be suspended. The heat in my face was a combination of dehydration from a morning spent in hyperactive damage control and utter exasperation that all we had tried to achieve throughout the year was unravelling due to the kind of oppressive systems operating in my school for teachers and students. That this was a normal set of systems in contemporary high schooling was not grounds for me succumbing to a *fait-accompli*, and I fought the rising tide of panic and frustration.

After much negotiation, the principal gave me permission to allow Russ on the excursion, partly because the principal knew how much had been organised and because of an earlier discussion whereby the principal told me that she appreciated my approach with the students. My efforts required my principal to stand out of my light and I recognised that this feature of her leadership enabled me to push the boundaries of my pedagogical approaches. By now Russ had already called his girlfriend's father and told him he had been suspended and was now available as a builder's labourer for the day. Russ's acute sense of justice had been offended by the mishandling of his suspension at school and as a result he had decided to go into the world of adults, where he would be valued for a day's labouring. I felt self-conscious and embarrassed by the way in which our behaviour policy treated Russ like a gormless recidivist.

At recess time I headed off to the netball courts to find Marley and see for myself what kind of state he was in. When I saw him he was looking fine and at my inquiries about his state of 'with-it-ness' and readiness to head to Parliament he assured me that he was keen to go and was straightening out very nicely. In a final gesture of desperation and goodwill, I put my hand on his shoulder and told him that I was stressed about the fragile state of things but he reassured me that we

would be fine. Patrick was now back from ice skating and ready to go. I headed off to teach the next few lessons, consciously deciding to 'only stand out of their light'—a dim flicker though it was it seemed to me—it was still their time to shine.

I had always held a level of contempt for situations where as teachers we tend to wheel out our best and brightest whenever there is the slightest sniff of media. At 1.45 Pat and Marley were ready to go and they jumped into my car. We drove into town and went to a coffee shop where they re-read their notes over ice creams. We crossed the road to Parliament and headed through the airport style security where things went well and the only thing being emptied from Marley's pockets were his lighter and Tally-Ho papers—he had complied with my advice to leave any illegal substances elsewhere, which I guessed were stashed in his backpack in my car. Whilst waiting in the foyer, we watched the live screening from 'the House' where the Opposition Leader we were to meet with was engaged in a verbal barrage with the Minister for Health. Pat was watching intently and noted, "Gee, they're really abusive, aren't they?" Once again, I was less than comfortable with a situation whereby these students who are supposedly the 'dimmer' ones were viewing adults, operating in the upper echelons of power, and were witnessing behavioural norms within these theatres of power that were less than dignified or respectful.

The Leader of the Opposition soon met us in the foyer and was polite and respectful towards the boys, not displaying the slightest patronising tone or arrogance. In his office, Pat and Marley put forward their points. They were honest in explaining the number of suspensions they had already had and why. They explained that they would prefer a compulsory driving course that offered guest speakers and vouchers for a turn at the Police Academy skid pan as a reward for completing a driving course. They explained that a '*No school, no*

licence' policy would mean not being able to get jobs and encourage more unlicensed and unregistered driving.

At school the next day, the boys were very proud of themselves, telling their friends about their meeting. Pat wrote a report for the school newsletter, which I edited and emailed to the office. When it did not appear in the draft newsletter I inquired with the office and it had been withheld because Marley had been charged with car theft and driving illegally over the weekend. He was in remand because it had only taken him a week to break the 30-day probation period handed down at his court appearance.

Might I fail against the conventional measures of teachers' success? It feels like I might. But it also feels like I might not just fail, I might "fail better"—"Ever tried. Ever failed. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (Beckett, in Power, 2016)—because I would rather fail in the struggle to teach for freedom than keep the boys in the terrapin, doing dumbed down worksheets that are safe, risk free and out of the notice of others. I would rather see the boys sitting in the House in Parliament and being a part of the democratic process than being victims of classism. In working with the most disadvantaged students perhaps I volunteer to fail because I think that Marley would most certainly have stolen a car regardless of our dialogue in learning, but maybe he might not die or kill someone else. I often wonder whether I am better off measuring my success by what never happened. Perhaps some suicides or manslaughter, drug abuse or domestic violence, self-harm and inter-generational trauma did not happen because I listened. Somewhere in my work with the young men their voices were heard. Maybe in the future Marley's voice will have good and important consequences for him but I am pleased that he was on the stage and I stood out of his light.

It is an odd celebration of my time with the young men but I recall at the end of the year, Russ rocking back on his plastic chair, studded belt holding

his jeans tenaciously at half-mast. In response to a fellow student arriving late and asking what his eight young mates were doing, Russ bellowed “We’re reading, Dickhead!”

I believe I will always have fear as my companion when I work with disadvantaged and oppressed young people. But I hope with Palmer that I never lose the

...other part of my fear—the fear I feel when I am not in life-giving communion with the young. I hope never to encounter an alienated student sitting in the back row of a class as if he or she did not exist: when the student from Hell ceases to be relevant to me, my life becomes less relevant to the world. (Palmer, 2007, p. 50)

Thus, my own ego must be bid farewell, because if there is to be genuine dialogue in the act of listening, I must abandon a desire for an outcome for the young person predicated to make me feel successful. I must, instead, be willing to risk fear and failure, for the sake of creating emancipatory possibilities for traumatised young people. I have illustrated my pathways through Re-evaluation Counselling and Narrative Therapy into conscious efforts to stand out of the light of students who are victims of injustice and oppression. I have come to see that I have been stretching beyond my fear of failure and reaching towards listening as a sacred virtue. Ranciére, considered that the role of the teacher is to stand steady and not allow the student to fail even though the student may push violently for their own failure, “such a teacher forces the student to...continue the intellectual journey” (Ranciére, Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 6).

Winton’s reflections regarding the adroitness of Elizabeth Jolley as a lecturer of creative writing are poignant, since Winton does not lay false accolades at Jolley’s feet as a teacher, far from it, instead he credits her

contribution to his literary success by saying, “As a teacher she had the kind of humility that allowed her to stand aside” (Winton, 2016, p. 269).

Bred in my bones is the knowledge that my Catholic historicity is always undeniable as my mind now turns to acknowledging the social work of Jesus as congenially divine and his desire for peace amongst humanity as egoless—in our global world there is still oppression, war and many places of violence and no peace, and yet hope persists. In Buddhist teachings, to be able to observe with great compassion the struggles of another, and to then breathe in their struggle, and to breathe out loving kindness towards this person is a practice known as Tonglen (Chödrön, 2001). It consoles me that Buddhism has taken many hundreds of years of teachings, and it may take lifetimes of practicing compassion, to know how to be truly present for a person during periods of re-stimulated trauma. From a Buddhist perspective, we might acknowledge that trauma is an aspect of the human condition but with compassion we might at least support each other to lean into our pain and fears, so that our lives are able to be lived more fully. If I were raised Buddhist, no doubt the same high aspiration might have leapt to my mind—to be with other is to be with self without ego.



*With Leah: Human bonding and the dialectic of the I-Thou relation
With Pamela: Collegial association and replenishing compassion*

CHAPTER 4 TO BE PRESENT

And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger.

Andre Lorde, 2007

To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.

Hans-George Gadamer, 2013

My hermeneutic inquiry into the phenomena of trauma and of listening has held me accountable in my practice, as a teacher and as a principal, requiring of me a deeply reflective stance. My questionings do not provide neat conclusions—I lurch from what I feel is a highly-informed way of working

with children who are deeply traumatised, to occasions where my understandings elude me until I find that I am vulnerable to the expediency of yelling at a child. I have times of utter despair which lead me to wonder what more I need to know to remain present for young people, even when my own soul is being laid bare.

I look to Freire, van Manen and Gadamer to help me to engage in phenomenological seeing, in “the stepping outside of oneself” (van Manen, 2014, p. 188), so that I might grasp the meaning of my everyday world, using a “dialogical disposition” (Freire, 2014, p. xiv). I have engaged in dialogue—where I have great affection for my interlocutors, the kind of love I believe to be essential for enabling transformation—and reflection, which seek to disrupt the fore-structures of my understandings. The dialogues expand the hermeneutic circle of my fore-meanings to ripple outwards, altering the nascent stillness of my own interpretations. My interlocutors encourage the confluence of our individual narratives, the intersecting of personal historical vortices, sharing “understandings other than our own” so that “our understandings must continually encompass more, sift through events differently, and continually reform...continue to unfold” (Warnke, 2002, p. 82).

In two dialogues with trusted colleagues, I seek assistance in continuing the process of ‘becoming’ in my practice. The love I have for the people I have chosen to interview, and to engage in dialogue with, is crucial, since as Gadamer reminds me, the “yes” of the interlocutors makes safe the territory for a conversation (2013, p. 375). My interview with Leah retains its original form and shape, as guided by its question and answer format, with me plying the waters of my inquiry through a range of questions to which Leah provides relevant experiential material (van Manen, 2014, p. 298). Leah’s responses allow me to head off on my hunting trip searching for anecdotes and information into deepening my understandings. My interview with Pamela evolves into a dialogical conversation, where the question and

answer framework of the interview dissolves and the sharp focus of the initial topic is abandoned like a backpack as we charge down an interesting, unexpected trail of inquiry together. Both provide rich and subtle experiential detail as my interlocutors, Leah and Pamela, generously give me access to their interpretive insights (van Manen, 2014, p. 317). As I gaze at artefacts, vicariously lived through Leah and Pamela, I add their gifts to my own collection of lived experiences. Some I record here in the spaces between transcribed voices, but many have become cells in my body and I can no longer distinguish between them as ever having belonged outside of myself. I cannot remember quite who I was but I know I do not remain who I was before these conversations. For that, I am grateful.

I had in mind questions I believed would guide me towards providing a space for a dialogue to emerge from within an interview process. These were questions that had presented themselves to me in preparing for a conversation that would open rather than close possibilities for gaining understandings about trauma and listening. The first thing I learned in reflection is that the ‘how?’ is not enough. Rather I must ask, ‘in what ways?’ My first three questions were to become: In what ways might my dialogues illuminate my understanding of the dialogical disposition? In what ways might such illumination help me to see how teachers can listen to students with trauma? In what ways might teachers transcend hierarchies of power, and transform themselves?

I came to understand my fourth question as an inquiry about the nature of trauma and its effect on learning, and whether listening might be a pedagogical imperative to begin healing from trauma. My fifth question turned into inviting my interlocutors, along with myself, to investigate the ways that listening might offer strategies, first, for making ourselves fully present to listen to the stories of young people who suffer trauma, and then to enable them and us to subvert beliefs that “children from the lower social classes are ontologically incompetent” (Freire, 2014, p. 75).

The phenomenon of trauma requires exploration because it cannot be understood teleologically—the object of trauma does not exist unless it manifests as such, and this manifestation must be recognisable as trauma and not some other aberrant condition of being human. Trauma is existential, it seems to me that it pounds our own ‘tin drum’ like in Gunter Grass’ novel, *The Tin Drum* (1965)—it does not define who we are but it threatens to determine the beat of our lives and the rhythmic narrative phrases of past hurts.

Always somewhere behind me, the Black Witch.

Now ahead of me, too, facing me, Black.

Black words, black coat, black money.

But if children sing they sing no longer.

Where’s the Witch, black as pitch?

Here’s the black, wicked Witch.

Ha! ha! ha!

(Grass, 1965, p. 580)

Trauma was never the event that occurred but the potential de-humanising consequences of it. I have gleaned this understanding through disruptions of my pre-conceived notions, and now I am faced with more questions that require more dialogue.

Following Gadamer to form the intentionality of this chapter is my search to understand the manifold phenomenon of trauma, and so I am required to “forget all [my] fore-meanings” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 281), and suspend any of the arbitrariness that accompanied my pre-conceived notions of the phenomenon of trauma. Through the following two dialogues, I emerge with new interpretations of the phenomenon of trauma and of how listening might support human beings to heal from trauma. I seek to engage the “hermeneutic problem of application”, that is to explore the phenomena of trauma and listening through *subtilitas intelligendi*,

understanding, *subtilitas explicandi*, interpretation and, *subtilitas applicandae*, application (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 318-319). In the two dialogues in this chapter I seek poignant moments where I endeavour to take the fruits of our dialogical labours into my practice as a teacher.

In the nuances of the interviews I use the present tense and reconstitute the way things are said, retaining any grammatical idiosyncrasies of spoken text that convey the genuine thoughtfulness and wonderment of moments held during the interviews. With elisions that appear during speech, I hope to prevent confusion or unnecessary repetition for my reader's understanding. At the same time I wish the elisions to announce pauses when the dialogue has become more intensively reflective. My questioning of the themes that emerge in conversation casts ripples into my hermeneutic vortices. Time and further experience has allowed me to "dwell phenomenologically with the data" from these dialogues, (Jeddeloh in Rehorick & Bentz, 2009, p. 221) and to ask what it means for pedagogical practices to become transformative.

With Leah: Human bonding and the dialectic of the I-Thou relation

Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. The concept of "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 316)

I interviewed Leah due to her experience in Child Protection since I wished to comprehend the ways of being of deeply traumatised children. I contemplate their everyday ways of being, and my everyday ways of being, so that I might come to know how we are in the world together. When I

turn something familiar but unknowable over in my hands, gently looking to the Fibonacci ratio (the divine ratio) in a pine-cone for example, and spend time with its subjectivity, I suspend my own reactions, and find the ways of simply being in its presence with benevolent curiosity. If something is both confronting and unfamiliar to me, I feel my body tighten in response, automatically objectifying, categorising, and I feel myself become wary, quickly shutting down the opportunities for wonderment. How can I possibly begin to understand how to listen with loving attention to traumatised children, unless I have the kind of understanding capable of awakening my benevolent curiosity and conscious awareness of their need of me? As our dialogue unfolds, I find the peculiar, the lack of reciprocity, the awkwardness of a traumatised child's way of being, a way of being that I come to appreciate for the designated role these contortions of the human spirit have in a child's survival. I will never know the kernel of each manifested hurt. I am gratefully aware that these unarticulated hurts lay beyond my comprehension—their sources are abominations to my understanding of what it means to have experienced childhood. The interview with Leah engenders my deep regard for the resilience of children and keeps mercifully hidden the events that have given rise to their need for ethically responsible adults in their lives.

In my work as a teacher and as a principal I was seeing many children whose behaviours were so extreme as to include climbing onto the roof of the school, standing in the middle of traffic attempting to be killed and using a huge rock to smash multiple windows. These students had looks on their faces that were completely disassociated from the present. Teachers were either fearful, or assaulted, or breaching human rights in attempts to control the school environment. I wanted to understand what was happening for these children so I could remain present for them and support my colleagues to remain present for them too, both physically and emotionally. I even hoped if I come to understand these children, we might authenticate a safe school for learning and a place where it is possible for healing to occur. I had read about childhood trauma but this did not bring

me close enough to an understanding capable of altering my existential way of being with such children.

Leah and I recommenced working together recently and I saw that we had grown in our practice and held roles which would allow us to affect positive change, that is practice capable of proactively supporting students with trauma-based behaviours in school contexts. In what ways might I make possible a pedagogy of being present for young people, even when teachers are alarmed in the face of students' behaviours that seem frightening or disturbing?

I ask Leah about her role in Child Protection.

"I am in a case management role. Initially I was in the in-take end where people from the community would notify CP of their concerns and I would record the details. It is then assessed for urgency. The response team will do a home visit in urgent cases. Parents may be asked to sign a voluntary care agreement. Sometimes no negotiation is possible and a warrant will be obtained from a magistrate. Police may become involved. The State must prove that the risk is on-going. An affidavit is written and presented in court. When a Care and Protection Order (CaPO) is obtained, after a 28-day cycle, the case comes up to case management. I will get orders that are very fresh or may have been sitting on case load for up to 18 years. In fresh cases, there will still be an investigation and court appearances involved. When a child comes into care, they may need to leave everything, we have suitcases for picking things up but sometimes this is not possible and occasionally it is not safe enough to get any personal items. In those instances, they leave their pets, bedroom, community and are placed where we have places so it may not include the same school. The risk can sometimes be about life and death or accumulated chronic trauma or a physical threat."

"An example is a little fellow I have who is 6 and his older and younger brothers both have cystic fibrosis. There are questions about medical neglect and one brother has since died.

There are six children. The family went into a cycle of alcohol abuse and family violence. The stress of a degenerative chronic illness, the death of a sibling and chronic violence and mum had an overdose. The kinship placement arrangement had broken down and he was dumped in the foyer of the service. On driving the boy back to his family in his home suburb for a family visit, in a low socio-economic area, on crossing the local bridge, the little voice in the back of the car said, "Oooh, I've missed this place". It makes me want to cry just thinking about it. The children who come into care experience so many losses. Missing something like that bridge is very real."

Hearing Leah describe her role in this way, oscillating between fact and feeling, I become aware that this is what we do, we swing between our bureaucratic roles and our humanity. I have wondered how we synchronise these disparate and crucial parts of ourselves to be in the service of vulnerable young people. There is such a myriad of faces and names of young people I am working with who share these kinds of stories. My stomach turns as I realise I cannot watch a movie portraying the abuses experienced by these children, yet I can and do work with many children at my school whose experience of abuse is too extreme for fictional portrayal.

Leah describes her role with admirable professionalism, but I have also seen her slumped to the floor, in front of a filing cabinet, her face in her hands. I recall Leah's feeling of futility was not due to the child's circumstances but the limit of the resources at her disposal to do her work. The complexity of the boy's life that Leah recounts raises my awareness that when working with a child, I am seeing one broken shard of colour, from a swirling spectrum of hundreds of broken shards turning at the end of a kaleidoscope. We scrutinise this swirling spectrum of broken shards, briefly, partially, looking down the tube at a safe distance. Absorbed in appalled fascination, we turn the interlocking cylinders, hopeful that the movement of broken pieces might generate some order. Leah nurtures this little broken

piece and its plaintive longing for connection to the other pieces of his chaotic origins.

Leah's little broken piece reminds me of a little broken piece called Ella. I can picture 8-year-old Ella, as she runs from the classroom to the toilets to scrawl on the walls in permanent marker. I hear from her case worker that this behaviour is because whenever Ella soiled herself at her mother and step-father's house she was routinely hosed with cold water, made to say "I'm a filthy, f*****g slut" and then bashed. I hear the back-story but even when I am with Ella, I cannot imagine it occurring. I simply pat her back as she lays on the concrete path at school, her body and mind shutting down temporarily—she 'plays possum' when her alarm system trips. I am grateful that my imagination fails to conjure up the pain and horror of Ella's experiences. One of the teacher aides sees me and says, Ella has become a naughty little girl, and I, like child protection workers, police investigators, nurses, film makers, authors and educational specialists, cannot quite bring myself to explain why Ella behaves the way she does. I only have the energy in this moment to pat Ella's back, practice the Tonglen of breathing in her pain and breathing out compassion. I do not have anything left to spend of myself that might raise my teacher aide to a level of compassionate understanding. Ella is one of seven children—little broken pieces of children.

I ask Leah, "Because I know you are a teacher as well, I think we probably share experiences, with children who were in care and who have experienced trauma. Can I assume a child going into care is a traumatised child, because of the wrenching away as well as the causes for their dis-placement? Is this synonymous with trauma or do you get children who have processed this well and who are not traumatised?"

"I think it's fair to say that these children have all experienced profound trauma; the difference is that some will find resilience that they can grow through. The fact is that

children will always blame themselves; they are 'parentified'. They parent their parents and think they need them to survive and sometimes this is the case too. I've had children say that they are worried about their mum because she needs a sleep apnoea machine and they are worried that she's not using it and will die in the night. Parents who make their kids responsible for them breathing makes me pretty riled. Sometimes children miss the role they've given and when they go into care they have no place to use their skills. Sometimes this means that they have a tendency to be really controlling over things that don't make sense to us because some of these children have been trained from a really young age to take responsibility for things we don't understand."

"The things the kids do to survive in situations of acute crisis produces heightened awareness of what they need to do to survive. They put these survival skills into play in constructive ways and also destructive ways. This little boy told me he used to count ants when he was abandoned. I see trauma as something that is fluid and moveable and can be built into opportunity if given the right nurturing."

Leah explores the resilience effects of trauma on young people and I consider how volatile this is. My reading of the neuroscience of trauma helps me to understand genetically determined levels of potential resilience and the manner in which traumatic events can lead to lowering resilience and creating situations of suicide and destructive behaviours (van der Kolk, 2015; Howard, 2013; Porges, 2011). My dialogue with Leah does more than connect the neuroscience of trauma with case studies, it disrupts and disturbs the safety of scientific discourse. Narrative description of trauma is not so safe, it traverses forbidden territory, unlike the cool calculation of logico-scientific depersonalisation, beyond the sensibilities of the rational and empathetic. To describe in detail the kernels of traumatised children might be to engage in voyeurism that I may not be able to sustain as ethical. I stand at a respectful distance. I am left with a hope that understanding the manifestation of the pain of children's trauma, my raised awareness of the children's sovereign responses to their lived experiences, is enough to gain

my attentive presence, my loving kindness, without buckling my knees with gory, angry details. In thinking of Leah's piece of a child who is responsible for their parent breathing—I see the metaphor in the narrative—they must control all that is around them, as adults fail to breathe sometimes, let alone care for them. I see a boy in my mind's eye, sitting at a little desk in my office. His hoodie is up and a greasy forelock conceals all but his mouth and chin. I lend him headphones for listening to music. The music keeps him with me until he thaws, until he trusts that I will listen to what it is he is trying to control. He has sworn at a teacher who told him that he was 'a waste of her time', which is distinctly different to 'wasting her time'. He lives with his disabled grandmother. His mother is on ICE. His Grade 10 older brother had a baby with a Grade 9 girl at our school. This older brother has just died in a car crash, less than a kilometre from our school. I feel like swearing at the teacher too. The dialogue with Leah helps me understand that the boy with the greasy forelock needs to feel in control to feel safe. In my office,

an unusual degree of confidence is the key – a capacity not to be thrown off course by, or buckle under the weight of, information that may deeply challenge certain settled assumptions. Good listeners are unfussy about the chaos which others may for a time create in their minds. (de Botton, 2016, p. 73)

I ask Leah, "After traumatic events, is it possible a young person can be quite fluid and intelligent in the way they can use the lessons that come out of the trauma in a constructive way?"

"There is a basic choice in agency and I think that people in the support service underestimate children's own choice. We get distressed by what we read in files and side-tracked by what we see in forensic photos and make assumptions that children who experience these things are going to be crippled. But my really, really big thing is where I think young people always have choice and with the support of the right people around them they

can choose to move through that and not stay limited. Unfortunately, it is a bit of an equation because the support services is a helping profession and helping professions get a lot of enjoyment out of helping so there's a bit of a disposition around that in order to be helpful you need someone who is helpless. This is where my background in teaching is helpful where I am going to hold your hand for this part as I help you move from point A to point B and so that is why I've had quite a few transformative cases whereas others do not."

The notions of agency and choice strike a chord with me. Judith Jordan clarifies for me that the essence of agency is empowerment, and further explains that, "Mutual empowerment...suggests that both people in any growth-fostering relationship are experiencing more aliveness, more clarity and a greater sense of possibility and potential agency" (Jordan, 2010, loc. 1675). Empowerment is a word imbued with action. I recall listening to a podcast about the trauma subsequent to the 9/11 terrorist attack. The podcast described that people who were rescued or assisted in a way that removed their agency experienced unrelenting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder but people, including children, who had some agency in the immediacy of the attack seemed to encounter a better and quicker recovery. I am anxious to explore agency in greater depth, because as I listen to Leah's observations that the assumptions we make as adults, in positions of power, even if this is very benign, can serve to undermine young people. A question arises for me within my envisioning of a pedagogy of being present for young people, is there an apparently contradictory act of not 'helping' the young person as such, but realising, that by being present in one's pedagogy for a young person we are attuned to the young person's need to locate their own agency?

I sit quietly with the words of Solnit, "the quiet of the listener makes room for the speech of others...like the white of the paper taking ink" (2017, p. 18), I think in part to try and absorb the profound nature of such a simple instruction. I had, for many years, understood that empathetic

personal narratives of one-up-manship in response to another's tragic personal narratives, does little than reinforce the other's continuation of their angst unabated. I had also understood that punctuating someone else's sobbing helplessness with advice does little to facilitate their way out of their maze of confusion. A teacher's painstaking well-meaning intent might be potentially asphyxiating to a young person's enfranchisement. Something beyond an empathetic disposition seems required to make emancipation possible and jolts me into comprehending how

The dialectic of charitable or welfare work operates in this way, penetrating all relationships between men as a reflective form of the effort to dominate. The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance. We are familiar with this from the teacher-pupil relationship, an authoritative form of welfare work. In these reflective forms the dialectic of the I-Thou relation becomes more clearly defined. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 368)

My dialogue with Leah, and my readings of the works of others on the matters of trauma and young people's oppression allows for a new lens to slip across the previously held ones of my mind's eye—like one of those pieces of apparatus at the optometrist's rooms, whereby they slide lens after lens across one eye, then the other, then finally both, until with uncertain murmurs of 'bit fuzzy', 'bit better', comes a final, 'oh wow, yes I can see that much more clearly now'. It is a conscious act and I see with each lens, tried and re-tried, new edges, previously indistinguishable shapes, though so alike, now so incredibly different, in fact, so different as to have incongruent meanings. I had thought, yes, a teacher with a kind disposition, with empathetic presence, is able to support a child to heal from trauma, but it is not a polemic, this listening, it is not a 'yes' or 'no' but a subtle, even elusive form of invitational human presence. 'Invitational'. I roll the word around my mind. I feel its seductive phonetic existence.

Our listening is invitational. It only invites the young person to speak, to not even speak but to express themselves, their need. Our listening is invitational, it does not demand language, or desires for self-healing, it gently says, ‘if and when you are ready’. Our listening is invitational, it is egoless, it does not desire or expect—our listening offers an unconditional dialectic space, for the unconditional communion of intersubjectivity (Litowitz, 2014). Our listening invites agency. This pebble of thought, ‘invitational’, creates a disturbance, the hermeneutic circle ripples, to form another wider enclosing circle, and the hermeneutic vortex shimmers with liquid fluidity, it exists but not in any form that will solidify, it alters beautifully with each lived breath of inquiry. I can grasp why Gadamer’s “circle of understanding is not a methodological circle, but describes the element of the ontological structure of understanding” (Gadamer, 2013 p. 305) but it is in Elizabeth Anne Kinsella’s words that I find the gentle reflection in the pool, that my own “hermeneutic circle is distinguished from the vicious circle in that it is constantly augmented by new information, and the process of understanding is fuelled by this continuous stream of information” (2006, p. 4).

I check with Leah, wishing to further my emergent horizon regarding the temptation to help, to rescue perhaps. “You mentioned the word ‘disposition’ and that your strategy is to support and empower the young person but there are those who seem to need the co-dependence and inadvertently, but tragically, disempower the young person by removing their choice.”

“That is where teachers in a classroom setting can be really key because teaching is in a paradigm of growth and change whereas social work doesn’t always have that framework. If you have a teacher who is sensitive and understanding to all these things, they have a great opportunity to change lives.”

At the time that this interview takes place, Leah and I work in a school where there are a number of students in care. Confronting us is a culture amongst staff of ‘tacit agreement’ with students for low expectations. We feel that some staff consider they have ‘good relationships’ with students but we observe that these relationships might not complement the nature of the pedagogical relationships described by Freire. Freire considers it crucial that teachers support students to understand the rigorous nature of learning, and that essentially ‘coddling’ students putting an emphasis on ‘fun’ is hypocritical. Antonio Darder explores this idea by “not suggesting that teachers necessarily become immersed in the personal lives of students” but that teachers see the student as a whole person and demonstrate a “willingness and capacity to be fully present and in position of the capacity to enter into dialogical relationships of solidarity” (Darder, 2002, p. 98).

My hermeneutic task is situated (Kinsella, 2006) within the schools of my lived experience. These schools have awkward brick corridors, with plaques reminding us that a politician gave Treasury permission, some years ago, for a new block to be built. I see humans run yelling and whooping along the halls, and others, exhausted, seated grasping lukewarm coffee cups like junkies. The buildings, their aging classrooms of wonky door handles and poorly orientated skylights, seem to endow my located inquiry with a touch of gothic horror—lost voices, a malicious setting, powerless victims and, me, omniscient narrator, immune and impotent. These environments lend additional challenges to the teachers who sometimes look into a locker bay, festooned with flung yoghurt and traipse on their way to class, knowing that the next 50 meters of corridors might be alive with echoing foul language and ‘biffo’ that borders on a breach of school rules regarding physical contact.

Voices of my peers are petrified or absent. One might plead for understanding. One might be at school despite a sick 3-year-old at home.

One might have lost her husband only last term and the company of the students as friends is all she has to get herself out of bed. Another might have used all his sick leave due to recovery from alcoholism, and giving advice ad-nauseam to the students in his class, instead of teaching, helps him feel less self-hatred. In the situatedness of my hermeneutic perspective (Kinsella, 2006), I

require a consciousness about who is absent from conversations, and a commitment to assist individuals who are marginalised or subordinated to become active interpreters. In this way a critical hermeneutical approach affords a space for repressed voices to speak out, and neglected texts to get a reading. (Kearney, 1988, in Kinsella, 2006, p. 9)

I am mindful that my questions to Leah support me to come to my own understanding, and lead me to wonder how I might support other teachers.

“In your role, you’re talking about the kinds of trauma that are readily identified by the wider society as being traumatic. You explained to me that teachers can listen to these students with really challenging behaviours but that there are different kinds of listening, one that is empowering and one that is disempowering, and it sounds like a parallel with what you were saying about social workers—some who allow choice and some who intervene too much and take choice away. So, I guess I have a couple of questions: How might trauma impact on some young people’s learning and how does teacher disposition, in terms of listening, assist in empowering young people to become learners again?”

“I’ll answer the second question first. So children who have experienced significant crisis and trauma have a highly tuned sensory understanding and they will suss out pretty quickly whether you are more naïve than they are, and if they decide that you’re going to get them then they will resonate with you. It’s energetic; it’s not something that you can easily define with words because it is not seen but is at an energetic level.”

“It is making my skin tingle because I am recalling situations where that has happened. It is physical, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it occurs on a cellular level. Once they have worked that out, they will ask you to give them the opportunity to bear witness to hear them and to be who they are underneath the trauma, which is a thinking pro-active person.”

“What is happening is that their antenna has told them that you are a person who they can share that stuff with. When that happens, you seem to know what needs to happen next—when my 8-year-old boy tells me that he is gay, being open and present and genuine, my stream of consciousness hooks in because you are being open and present and generous within yourself. So the words that you use are secondary because it is actually a resonance that is occurring.”

In writing about trauma in her book, *Hallelujah Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy*, Anne Lamott describes trauma as

sorted differently in the brain than memory, [it] seeps out of us as warnings of worse to come. Our self-centred fears whisper to us all day: our fear of exposure, of death. And that we will lose those we love most, that we will lose whatever advantage we hold, whatever meagre gains we’ve made. (2017, pp. 5-6)

Through Lamott’s adult voice she gives her child self a voice, recognising her young self as a saviour to her family, which made possible the survival of her “sense of value as a child” (2017, pp. 5-6). Perhaps Lamott’s words provide insights on behalf of other children, explaining that being present for another, that is being able to “manage a flash of mercy for someone we don’t like...including ourselves, we experience a great spiritual moment”, and the fruit of this spiritual moment is to “experience self-respect” (2017, pp. 13-14). My interview with Leah helps me to continually plink small stones into the middle of my liquid hermeneutic inquiry, the circles creating the growing vortex. Leah’s words, regarding cellular memory and energetic resonance, plink another stone, the circle ripples out and I follow its ripple of invitation to question further.

“The words ‘being present for yourself’ does that also mean, that I am being present for this young person’s need and it is not restimulating my own material? You were saying earlier for any person, either teacher or social worker or anyone who tries to be listener for that matter, it can go horribly wrong because her listening may not always be about being present for the child but instead it fulfils her own need.”

“Like you say,” says Leah, “we all experience trauma. There are two things that people who aren’t sorted out need as they come into adulthood and they are, they need to be needed and need to be liked. If you’re getting gratification and like in the role of helper, if that feeds your needs it does not fulfil the need of the child. Sometimes children will seek out people who will escalate their feeling of overwhelmedness. Like the young girl who hooked into some young teachers and went on to shock the social worker—when I spoke to her it quickly de-escalated things but she will seek out the drama, this 13-year-old girl, but sometimes she will seek out the dramatisation because her need for adrenalin is greater than the need to sit still and de-escalate.”

My increased awareness of why developing a pedagogy of being present for young people is so challenging is moderated by my awareness that with each question I ask, pre-conceived notions dissipate. The first ripple has now dissipated, the water is flat, as if there were never a disruption there, but I am aware that the current ripple has only occurred by virtue of its origins existing in the initial disruption. Firstly, I become aware that I am not developing a superior knowledge in terms of increased clarity or superiority of understanding but I am developing a different understanding that seems deeper, not merely more conscious (Gadamer, 2013, p. 307). My awareness of how my conscious efforts to understand both trauma and listening through the development of a pedagogy of being present does not result in smug self-satisfaction or a scientific equivalent to an ‘ah ha’ moment, but instead to a rumbling self-consciousness more akin to perhaps

an emotional response to engaging in the hermeneutic circle, where my hermeneutical reflections are giving birth to “a sharpening of the methodological self-consciousness of science” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 308).

“So, Leah, ideally you would have teachers who are highly skilled, who can see behaviour instead of seeing a naughty child, and can see there is distress going on and that it is presenting in a physiological way?”

“The first thing is not necessarily to classify it as naughty, because that gives a label and a role to something that is trauma, and that can predict future behaviour that is not helpful to that child.”

I imagine the 13-year-old girl, and I see in my imagination a mish-mash of many girls I have taught, each expressing their anguish with expressive arms and angry eyes, loud surly voices and defiance masquerading as confidence. I find in Solnit’s work an explanation for the contradictory nature of my work with young women, girls, and young men, boys. The flight/fight matrix forming our understanding of human response to trauma was based on a study of largely male humans and male rats. Studies of women show a response to trauma as dominated by an urge to tend/befriend, they gather for solidarity (Solnit, 2017, p. 18). Plink. Ripple. I now wonder about the glaring fury from behind black eyeliner. The screeching monologue that is fired like lead pellets, pieces of narrative shrapnel fired from between teeth, reminiscent of Wilfred Owen’s *Arms and the Boy*.

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth

Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And God will grow no talons at his heels,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.
Owen, 1893-1918

It begins to make sense to me, the girl who returns to my classroom, her body shivers in shock, like a giraffe, her shoulders convulse as if fresh from narrowly escaping a *wildebeest*. “He just yelled at me”, she sobs. “He wouldn’t listen to anything I had to say”, she gasps for air. She was talking about the assistant principal, and now it makes so much sense. She needs to cope through speech. Now my heart aches with the realisation that in our male-dominated understanding of the science of trauma, we create trauma. Plink. Accordingly, “being unable to tell your story is a living death and sometimes a literal one” (Solnit, 2017, p. 19). Tell it. Ripple.

“At primary school age,” Leah continues, “you could actually give the child a job to go for a walk because their mind is not going to calm until their body has calmed. He needs space to move, such as being a library monitor or something like that. Some dialogue at some point, but not in that moment, in time when you can talk to the child, because good therapists will talk in an age appropriate way to the child about brain chemistry, so that in the future the child can self-manage, so that child can understand their own physiological process. He needs to know why his heart is racing.”

To know why his heart is racing seems such a modest goal. The implications of such knowing go to the heart of what has become known as ‘mindfulness’. I have spoken to a principal skilled in working with children with significant and chronic trauma in their backgrounds, who, when escorting a child from a frightfully escalated state, says, “just breathe”. The principal acknowledges the difficulty of this instruction when the child yells

back through a reddened, sweaty, screwed up face, “I don’t want to breathe!” This principal reaches for a tactile, safe object like a fluffy ball or a glitter bottle to pass to the child, working to bring the child back into his body. “Breathe,” she gently repeats. When I consider these small pedagogical acts, they are acts of deep consideration and respect, they are acts of hope and love. I know that such a principal is quietly and calmly observing the physiological manifestations of deep harm. I know that this principal listens with great care, feeling for the cellular resonance, listening for the breath.

Our listening is invitational but when an invitation is so alien to a traumatised child that he does not recognise or trust its intent, perhaps then, all we need to do is remind him to breathe and come home to his body.

“If I was going to speak to a small child I might say something like, ‘When your heart beats very fast, that is you feeling stressed, so we need to get you to do something so that when you come back to the classroom you can do X, Y and Z. One of the reasons you might be stressed is that you may be remembering or feeling things that have happened in the past.’ There will be some recognition but the trauma may be pre-verbal. Part of making a child aware of his choice is about the process behind that choice—but if you talk to him about the process behind the choice then he can make a real choice rather than a rhetorical choice. He needs to understand his own physiological responses and begin to make his own choice about that.”

Leah speaks of choice. The transformative possibilities of my dialogue with Leah occur through hermeneutic processes of understanding, interpreting and applying questioning about being present for young people with trauma and endure through divine acts of listening that depend upon always being, as Gadamer requires,

In human relations...to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person “understands” the other. (2013, p. 369)

When we are listening with loving attentiveness and great skill, we are inviting energetic resonance—the ‘I-Thou’ relation is made possible. I return to the ‘I’ of me as listener. How can I invite Thou, if I am not fully present as I? What is my understanding of being fully present as my subjective ‘I’, so that I might make a loving space, a space of invitation for the subjective, ‘Thou’? I contemplate the words of Chödrön, a Tibetan nun’s teachings on *Shenpa*—“the urge, the hook, that triggers our habitual tendency to close down” (Chödrön, 2017). How do I suspend my own judgements to make possible the invitational space of being present for other? Chödrön teaches that we “must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of ‘transposing ourselves’” (Chödrön, 2005, audio). Chödrön is part of a lineage, which means, when I listen to the teachings, I participate in a lineage of teaching. In the teaching on *Shenpa*, Chödrön talks of the teacher needing to seek her own understanding of herself, to be ‘put in the same fireplace’ as the person she is teaching.

As our work continues in a number of schools, with some very traumatised children as well as with a diversity of teachers, we seek each other out to case-manage and de-brief the complexities of our days. The phenomenon of listening, which I think of now in terms of a pedagogy of being present for young people, has become central to my practice. I am mindful of the words a mentoring principal colleague once shared with

me—“Don’t take away their teeth and claws”—in an acknowledgement that we cannot comprehend the battles children may need to fight outside of our schools. I cannot, in my listening, assume the role of righteousness or of peace-keeper, or of the interventionist, but something subtler. At times, the complexity is undeniable and hard to convey. In the teaching of Gadamer, he refers to the means by which we might become aware of otherness—to the indissoluble individuality of the other person, by putting ourselves in his position (Gadamer, 2013, p. 315).

When I practice a pedagogy of being present for young people might it become possible for wisdom to resonate with wisdom, intelligence with intelligence

as they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as permanent re-creators. In this way, the present of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement. (Freire, 2007, p. 69)

With Pamela: Collegial association and replenishing compassion

Pamela and I have taught together for many years and have developed a relationship based on a shared commitment to helping young people at school. She has given me permission to use her first name. We fought bullying from the hierarchy of our school, and stress brought about by the daily challenges of being teachers. Pamela taught me various processes we could use to counsel each other to remain clear about our role and to remain present for our students. It took some years for me to understand the basic ‘principles’ of Re-evaluation Counselling, as I have described them in Chapter 2, and as I applied these principles to my everyday professional conduct, I felt a great sense of skill and confidence in how to be a teacher

who is present for young people. I came to notice the levels of distress experienced by some teachers at my school and how this was affecting their ability to work well, with students, and with other teachers.

Pamela and I thought that an interview approach might apprehend some of the salient ideas and experiences that are part of our professional relationship, and may reveal understandings that we could not successfully illuminate without a dialogical process. With the benefit of years of teaching and learning together, through the act of recording an interview, we could explore the eidetic nature of trauma—its lived experience, and the practice of pedagogical listening. The interview itself became a creative endeavour of listening to each other, and illuminating a much-trodden path.

In this section, my reflections are recorded to reflect the diachronic nature of my inquiry. Three temporal influences act to determine my use of both the present and past tense, as I reflect on our conversation and seek to understand in greater depth, moments of particular connection to events in my working life. I consider how Pamela's insights illuminated moments of my own lived-experience as a teacher and this came to me in the past tense as I reflected back on our dialogue. Other reflections are written in the present tense, as I write hermeneutically about our dialogue, pausing to consider themes arising from "the phenomenological attitude and the presentation of phenomenological insights" (van Manen, 2014, p. 321), such as oppression, sexism and trauma. As themes arise, I ponder at greater length, perhaps to search for touchstones of understanding. Such is the powerful nature of these pauses that I have inserted diachronic reflections in this section, reflections that hold a separate temporality to both my dialogue with Pamela and my interpretive writing. My diachronic reflections invite the reader into my study at home where I feel moved to look up from my screen and sense the emotional connections to my present being and the language which comes to utter those connective moments. In this way, diachronic tensing helps to bring multiple layers of reflection to the fore in

my hermeneutic and phenomenological inquiry. The reflections of my dialogue with Pamela return me to the vortex street, where many of Pamela's ideas led me into multiple vortices of wonderment, enabling me to follow more than one series of ripples.

Diachronic reflection: All is grey

Whilst I am editing this chapter, it is raining outside and the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race is sliding past the glass wall of my home study. The Derwent River is grey, a pale grey river, a dark grey blurry Eastern Shore and a light, slightly glary white grey sky. The mainsails of the maxi yachts are noble gun-metal grey. The glands in my throat are swollen and there is fatigue behind my eyes. It is almost a week since school finished and I cannot shake my lethargy and imploding immune system.

I call Pamela, because I know that if I am to release the blockages in my body's system, then I need to release the distresses of the year. The 'talking cure' is not new. Freud's forgotten partner, Beurer, used the 'cathartic treatment', named after Aristotle's use of the work 'catharsis', meaning to 'purge emotions', for rather extreme cases, (Weissglass, 1998, p. 31), Pamela and I use Re-evaluation Counselling as a way of processing the 'hurts' we experience in our jobs. Through the process of Re-evaluation Counselling we use something akin to "Constructivist Listening" (ibid.) to make sense of our feelings within the context of our lived experiences.

I can feel grief, tight around my diaphragm, pulling down my breathing to a shallow, slow sludge of dirty oxygen. The heaviness in my heart, the ache in the muscles of my legs and the persistent crusting of my eyes through the past few nights are pulling on my immune system like the barometric pressure outside pulls at the mainsails of the yachts, rendering them sluggish through the water today.

When she answers, she asks me how I am. I say I am sad, so sad. "I am listening", she says. This is how we work together. She doesn't stop the pain, she just respects that I need to talk about it, that I might make sense of it.

We conduct our interview whilst sitting on an old sofa covered with a worn bed cover, in a bed-sit in Sandy Bay. Pamela had chosen to do away with having a house to rent to free up finances and possessions so that she could be available for her life work on ending oppression in different places around the world. From the bed-sit, we can see the Derwent River. The soft smells of remnant incense and the damp lower storey of the aging house keep us company.

I sit with my legs pulled up under me on my end of the couch, so that we can face one another and we sit close enough so that perhaps we can reach out to hold the other's hand. We smile at each other. In Re-evaluation Counselling, this body language fully intends to say,

'I am here with you. You have my full attention. Let's take turns and listen attentively.' I had previously shared with Pamela the expectations of the ethics committee at the University for the purposes of conducting this interview, and she is gracious in her understanding that by supporting these processes, she supports me.

"What is trauma?" I ask Pamela.

Pamela pauses, frowning slightly, before she says, "Trauma is any event that has happened in anybody's life that they haven't had the ability to process effectively and so it leaves a remnant in the mind and in the body and in the emotions and it confuses people's behaviour from then on".

"There are people who have been in places like concentration camps and prisons and stuff and one person will recover completely from it and be able to lead full and wholesome lives from it and function well. And other people...because they haven't been able to process it well, it really affects their ability to function well in the world and their ability to learn."

I was surprised at the concise nature of Pamela's response because in our school lives together we engaged daily with the messiness of trauma and to hear it neatly converted to definition, suitable to an interview, was reassuring. Pamela was clarifying for me that trauma is not so much the initial event but the on-going damage done by hurtful events. This was persuading me to envisage, not the initial events that might give rise to trauma, but the effect on the individual's way of being in the world.

I can think of many examples in teaching where a teacher might regard a student according to a measure of an event experienced, rather than the damage wrought by the event. I had three students, from the same class, who had a parent die, two by suicide, and one by natural and sudden causes. Each student reacted differently, with one student being more at peace than the others, one dangerously lost for expression, and another angry. Sometimes I hear teachers say things like, "Well, that student's parents just

separated and they didn't behave like this student!" Now I think, not only are we often witnessing the denial of a trauma but I wonder whether our potential misunderstanding becomes a type of secondary traumatising event. If as teachers we are not attentive to our students' experiences of trauma, might there be a rupturing of the pedagogical relationship, one that says, not only do I not understand you, I also deny who you are? Might it be that oppression ascribes a role for the oppressed, you must not show that you are experiencing trauma? Pamela had recently worked with Weissglass, as part of an international reference group for healing from war, and recalled what he said in this regard—"Students and their families are often blamed for learning and behavioural difficulties that are rooted in social, health, or economic conditions, or in the way schools are organised and run" (Weissglass, 1998, p. 75).

I ask Pamela, "Can you explain a bit more about processing?"

Pamela says, "It would be making sense of it [the trauma] within yourself and seeing that it isn't you that's the problem, and seeing that it's an external thing, and that you're still all right as a human being and you still have all your faculties intact. So, to me processing is where you have used some technique and every person is different as to what technique works."

Processing hurt appears to be the greatest challenge for us as humans and recovery may require more than being resilient or strong as individuals. As humans we need to belong. In Greene I find affirmation that overcoming hostile reality is not an individual act but instead, “freedom of

Diachronic reflection: Shaken by the effect of oppression

Cassey showed me her swollen legs last Wednesday. I asked her what her GP said. She told me that he didn't really say much. I asked her when the baby was due. She had said a few weeks earlier, “Don't talk to me about this f****n' thing. I've been telling the kids that I'm just fat”. Cassey wanted to adopt the baby out. The biological father said he didn't want it adopted out. Cassey's body must belong to the father, as far as the law is concerned, even though she's carrying the baby and their other two children live with her, not him. I think that's why she didn't see a doctor for a long time. I think her smoking and mental illness and being judged as a bad mother meant that the doctor wasn't taking her seriously. I think that's why Cassey is in a coma today. Not much has changed since the early 20th Century if you're not an owning class woman. I talk to Pamela on the phone about this. I cry about old stuff, about classism, sexism and being confused as a child—about my grandson, who is three, trying to protect Granda from playing with the 1976 Barbie dolls house that I have got out of storage. He's already been told this week that only girls play with dolls' houses. Granda is a boy. My grandson is worried about Granda playing with the dolls' house. He tells Granda to stay upstairs instead. Pamela listens to me cry about sexism so that I can remain in charge when sexism is happening around me.

mind and freedom of action [are] functions of membership and participation in some valued community” (Greene, 1978, p. 100, in Kisaka and Osman, 2013, p. 339).

“In what ways do you think trauma affects learning?”

“The word ‘trauma’ is a very emotive word because it doesn't have to be a big thing to have your learning affected. ‘Trauma’ brings connotations of a large external event that everyone would recognise, it would have to be an earthquake or war or some huge thing. But my experience tells me it could just be a very simple comment, by a teacher or a parent, which

at a particular stage in a child's development they actually believe to be true about themselves, and then it impacts."

"It can be just a miniscule thing—but it's how we internalise it—how, whatever that time is that you get to believe that about yourself, and believe it to be true. And when something like that happens externally you either believe it's true for yourself, and you believe it's true for other people, and you behave in ways that then sort of solidifies that within yourself until you process it well enough."

I am mindful of what van Manen calls "pedagogic tact" (1990, p. 169). What might hurt one person may have absolutely no effect on another and this is about context and individuals. I also think of all the miniscule things I notice now as traumas, especially in the vulnerable such as my 3-year-old grandson who is now trying to figure out who can and cannot play with the dolls' house. I think about this because I see the rigid gender roles, the oppression of men, which becomes oppression of women and domestic violence. I feel guilty that I want to turn my face away from sexism but my work on oppression demands that I cannot turn away. As a teacher, and now as a principal, I have a responsibility to "Provide guidance and support to end the put-downs, criticism, competition, bullying, and violence among students and eliminate the racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia that keeps students apart" (Weissglass, 1998, p. 80).

I wonder how hurts affect students' behaviour in classrooms, so I ask Pamela what she thinks.

She replies, "If you believe it to be true about yourself then you will behave as if it is true about yourself. So, if someone said you are stupid, and you believe that, then you will behave in such a way. If you believe that but you pretend you don't want to, then your kids will do lots of distracting techniques so that they don't have to face the reality and the reality is not that they are stupid but the reality is that the first hurt where someone did something, and

there was so much hurt from it that it created a little blank in the mind. And that's the majority of kids, so there are ordinary confusions about your own capacity and ability to learn and then there are those that have had large traumas at a prime time in their learning stage where it really is what I would call a trauma.”

Since this interview, I have experienced conversations with students about ‘learning hurts’ and shown them ways of thinking differently about them. I asked a Grade 9 student why she felt that she could not write and she clearly described to me a situation in Prep or Grade 1 when a teacher had humiliated her for not being able to draw an ‘s’. I listened to a Grade 7 boy who was aggressively reluctant to read imaginative texts and explained that he felt this attitude had been formed in his early life. These young people were able to describe the initial hurts that created “little blanks” in their minds. Asking about and listening to their narratives made it possible for the students to share their initial traumas with me. I was using a strategy from Re-evaluation Counselling known as ‘contradicting the pattern’. I acknowledged their hurt and said I was sorry for the mistakes the teachers had made. That their teachers might have mistaken their views of the students’ reading and writing probably had not occurred to them before. This might have helped them let go of some of their hurt as if in the kind of moment that Greene captures when wonder appears—existentialism espouses that each individual human being has the responsibility for creating meaning in his or her life—“we ourselves are the authors of such miracles” (Greene, 1988, pp. 55-56).

I notice nuances in Pamela’s responses and I am keen to explore some of these.

“I’ve noticed that when you talk about students thinking that they’re stupid, one consistent thing you seem to have is a view of all students as being fully capable. I know as teachers, because I am thinking of pedagogical disposition, we take our view of students to

the classroom, but what is your view of students? It sounds like your view of students is quite different.”

In response Pamela explains, “I think a lot of teachers only see the surface, like most humans only see the surface. But I’ve been through a whole bunch of processes where I have no doubt about people’s goodness and intelligence. My definition of intelligence is the ability to respond to whatever life offers you with new thinking each time, not with the patterned one. Which is very different to book learning and, what in mainstream schools we say intelligence is which is put down to literacy and numeracy but that’s only a miniscule amount of what I see as intelligence. So, my view of kids is I know everyone is intelligent and I know that everyone loves learning and is fully capable and has a great joy. Because I have integrated that into my system, I think adults can smell it a mile away and are relieved to be around that.”

Sella Kisaka and Ahmed Osman (2013), in their article, “Education as a quest to freedom: Reflections on Maxine Greene”, returns us to Greene’s faith in teachers, “It is through and by the means of education, many of us [teachers] believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space and that they become empowered” (Greene, 1988, p. 12, in Kisaka & Osman, 2013, p. 340). Pamela has similar faith. She does not doubt “people’s goodness and intelligence”. She wishes that all teachers might believe their students to be capable of learning. Might we all need to believe that all students are ontologically competent, that they have the capacity to participate in their own lives as agents of change (Freire, 2014)?

Our willingness to reach beyond the surface of things with an ethic of recognising the goodness and intelligence of all individuals might prepare us for releasing potential for activating that sense of social justice that I had previously intuited through my “nagging sense that things ought not to be this way” (Greene, 1973, p. 49, in Kisaka & Osman, 2013, p. 339).

I wonder about how I might work with teachers who are in the ‘a lot’ group that is, teachers who have not got that understanding of students as being fully intelligent and capable human beings. I ask Pamela, what is the major difference between them and us? Is there a ‘them and us’ polarity? What are some of your concerns regarding how those teachers treat those students?

Pamela gazes thoughtfully into the mid-distance between us as she reflects on her experiences. Looking back to me she states very clearly, “Apart from being appalled and very sad for everyone. But because kids are intelligent, they can nut that out, but what happens after a while is that you can really believe that and it feels like for a long time you limit your life but for people who can’t see that they only teach to a small percentage of the students in the class and only show them a miniscule amount of what is possible in life. I am just thinking of teachers who have that view but some students think they are great teachers because they teach great subject matter and they teach it in a way that engages kids but I always question myself around teaching—I am not a subject teacher, I use the subject matter as a way of supporting kids to come home to themselves and realise their potential and capabilities—they may not grasp that in the classroom but one day they may remember and be reminded and take the risk of doing huge things”.

I have noticed that some teachers find it extremely challenging to move from positions of prejudice against students to positions of optimism and openness. The Pygmalion effect is not new to education (van Manen, 1990, p. 187), yet in practice some teachers have enormous difficulty in consciously anticipating that students might respond positively to teachers’ confidence in them. Our emotive responses to our students might be informed by our own prejudices and experiences of oppression.

To connect with students whose negative behaviours act as an armour, might we ask teachers to set aside their natural responses, to in fact ‘bracket’ their responses and instead to consciously assume that essentially all young

people are good and capable of good? When I consider what it means to teach so that children can “come home to themselves”, I reflect on Greene’s reminder to educators that,

Freedom involves praxis – acting together to influence reality, “a transformation of that situation to the end of overcoming oppressiveness and domination. There must be collective self-reflection; there must be an interpretation of present and emergent needs; there must be a type of realisation”. (Greene, 1978, p. 100 in Kisaka & Osman, 2013, p. 339)

There were times in the interview when I felt emotionally tugged into a transformative understanding of how oppression operates in education. The “realisation” that Greene is urging, almost beseeching us towards, invites teachers to see their own trauma, and understand how their own experience of trauma might influence them to oppress rather than emancipate their students’ learning. Greene empathises with teachers for it means, “a profound self-understanding on the part of the teacher, who has to live in a kind of tension simply to function as a free agent, to make choices appropriate to the often unpredictable situations that arise” (Greene, 1978, p. 248 in Kisaka & Osman, 2013, p. 341).

I consider the work I did with two Grade 9 boys who were highly disruptive with very defiant, aggressive and verbally offensive behaviours in the classroom. Over the course of the year, I tried many ways of connecting with the two students but to no evident avail. The boys seemed “unmotivated...[they] appeared to their teachers to be apathetic, disinterested” (Greene, 1973, p. 45 in Kisaka & Osman, 2013, p. 341). My colleague, who was an English teacher and had a background in child protection work, and I developed a series of inquiry units according to the interests of the boys. The boys enthusiastically embraced our efforts, which was a welcome surprise to me. They valued the work we had put into developing the units, more than they valued the actual units of work. They

were quite outspoken about this. They became respectful towards themselves and towards us due to the meaning we had given to their learning. When one of our teaching colleagues asked the boys why they worked hard for us but not for her, they replied it was because she did not work as hard for them as we did. There was genuine goodwill as the teacher was able to laugh and recognise a real turning point for the boys. The boys became curious about their own learning and they wanted to discuss this openly with me because they noticed “we’re getting so much respect now”.

I wonder what experiences, programs and policies Pamela knows about that might confront traditional models of punishment and reward for student behaviour. As Pamela renews our cups of tea and we rearrange ourselves on our respective ends of the aging sofa, I ask her, “What sorts of things are teachers starting to do?”

“It’s interesting. People who choose to become teachers often have interesting patterns, and they have gone from school to school and haven’t taken time to reflect on their own learning and in many ways just keep on repeating the same learning style. For any human to change, especially people who choose to be teachers, there are lots of programs out there now which are disguised ways of people of having a look at themselves. And one of the ways that the oppression of teachers sits is that teachers have to be right, the community sets it up so that teachers have to have the answer.”

“But teaching works when you have teachers who can stand in their power but say, ‘I don’t know that’, which is new. Programs such as ‘rock and water’ enable even tough male teachers to talk about human interaction and being positive and flexible, but it does come back to the teacher’s disposition and what they have experienced in their life and how they have processed stuff. Until somebody’s processed the stuff that’s occurred in their own lives, they will keep acting out that their patterned way of being from their life experiences.”

Pamela was challenging my thinking. She was saying that teachers need to work on their own distress patterns, their own traumas. Most teachers I know are not consciously aware of the oppression existing within the teaching profession, where there is a divide between a teacher's inner and outer life (Palmer, 2012, p. 119). Palmer discusses the importance of teachers living an "undivided life" which is about personal development and harmonising the ethics of teaching with a responsibility for self-care and awareness (Palmer, 2004). Weissglass reflects my own observations about the lived-experience of teachers when he says, "Teachers, however, are often pressured and manipulated into not respecting young people, and into treating themselves and their colleagues poorly" (1998, p. 83). The question of whether there is a particular pattern of behaviour amongst teachers that is most common and most inhibiting for students, might really be a politer way of asking my actual question, emotive though it is, why then were some of the teachers I remember, and some of the ones I work with today, so abusive? I really disliked them when I was a student, and I still struggle not to feel furious at unjust practices.

Pamela, recognises the indignation when I ask her that question, "Why then were some of the teachers I remember, and some of the ones I work with today, so abusive?" She gently responds, "Yeah, yeah...It's where people have a confused perspective of what power is and so they power over, they really don't respect young people's intelligence and their ability to make smart decisions".

I want to know more about this. "So what is it that seems most common among teachers, what is it that prevents students from really moving forward and prevents teachers from being really supportive allies of young people? Do you think that's the biggest thing in teacher disposition that you would shift if you could?"

"It gets back to the nature of young people's oppression. We have all been children and we've all had well-meaning adults around us who made decisions for us but it gets confusing as to how much adults need to make decisions for young people... we are learning more and

more now that young people are born fully intelligent, they just haven't got all the resources or skills yet. But as an adult, unless you have processed what has happened to you as a child, you will keep acting out the way you were treated, believing and behaving towards young people the way you were treated. So, if you were treated really disrespectfully, that's how you will act towards young people.”

I had not expected the change in emphasis from student trauma and oppression to teacher trauma and oppression. When I began my work as a principal I might have been more than well prepared to meet distress patterns amongst my teachers. My long experience in working with children with challenging behaviours was deep and practised. The school of my first principalship sits in a socially disadvantaged community and I expected to have to deal with the trauma experienced by families due to anything from family violence to substance abuse and child neglect. It deeply disturbs me though that I was truly shocked by the abusive practices I witnessed by some teachers towards their students. To this day it feels disconcerting, as if I have cast myself in the role of the Doctor in Albert Camus' *The Plague*—I see the sick around me, yet I know I must arrest its insidious de-humanising effect.

I ask Pamela, “Do you think that's why it takes so long to change the culture of schools? Is it because teachers are so slow to change themselves and that the institutions they work in will change too slowly, despite the research and what it tells us about good practice? Perhaps teachers themselves haven't shifted enough from their own experiences”.

“Yes, David Suzuki said a long, long time ago, when he was talking about the environment, that we have all the information we need. What needs to happen now is that we need to change on the emotional personal level. And that's why it's difficult to change a system.”

“Are there any strategies that you can think of that hits at that fundamental process of changing teachers?”

“The only person you can change is yourself. And if you try and change other people it is not going to work. But it is in changing yourself and your interactions with other people that people will start to shift. If you try and make other people change they will get defensive and confused and so when you have staff meetings to try and introduce all these ways of being, the resistance is huge.”

“We can go ahead and blame people but we have to accept that within the school system you will have a smorgasbord of teachers, and some will be very tight and rigid and afraid, but in order for you to change you have to go back and question everything about your life, to really change, because you have to change at a cellular level. So, you have to go back and face those traumatic experiences. In order to survive in our life we say, ‘I’m not going back there again’. But if we learn that in going back and looking at those things, we find that we still do survive and our lives are much richer for it. On one level it sounds complex but it is really a simple thing to keep liking people and not blaming them and that’s not just kids but staff as well. When you create an environment where people are valued and allowed to make mistakes, people will flourish.”

Avraham Cohen suggests “Educators can learn about the process of inner work by consulting with someone who is already skilled in this practice” (2015, loc. 738/3620). I make tough decisions about staff who I feel are not ready to be in the presence of highly traumatised children and their community. These decisions are not borne of my own childhood traumas but as an adult in charge of a school needing to reform its practices, to enable social justice. I can only continue to do this in dialogue with supportive others. I need to find ways to abandon my patterns of wanting to be liked in my workplace, to re-evaluate this pattern, and to have the courage to make decisions that allow me to “take responsibility for the conduct of...[my]self and providing guidance, organisation, and inspiration for the other humans who fall within the scope” (Jackins, 1995, p. 2).

As a provocation, I comment to Pamela, “We keep on changing the architecture and the curriculum but we don’t support teachers in changing their disposition or provide opportunities just to talk and figure things out”.

Pamela says with delightful faith in our humanity as teachers, “At a real level. But the wonderful thing about this is that all humans, including teachers, really want to come home to themselves, just some of us are a bit more scared than others and aren’t as resourced as others. The basic nature of everything is to come home to themselves”.

With this kind of optimism, I am desperate to know how we might achieve deep change in how teachers see themselves. “Can you explain a little bit more about the phrase, ‘To come home to yourself’? On an intuitive level I understand the phrase, because it sounds as if that is what we are trying to help adults, and students to achieve.”

“So being at home with yourself is where you feel safe and have a sense of who I am, wants and all. So, I have these strengths and I have these places where I am challenged but I still know I am ok and I am still loved. I think that is what a real home is meant to be...”

“That sounds like what a real classroom should be as well; where kids should be able to be approved of.”

Pamela elaborates on what it means to be approved of as a person, even when the students are acting out their distress. She describes a classroom that enables students to ‘come home to themselves’. “There are processes in place where if things happen you can say ‘I will listen to you for a while so you can come back’, the confusion disappears, ‘You can get on with what you really want to do and what you really want to learn’”.

I really wanted to think deeply about ‘listening’ as a way of teachers and students being together. I asked, “How might listening support teachers and students to move from ‘acting out’ into ‘coming home to themselves’?” I want Pamela to check my understanding and continue, “In the context of a school environment, when you say ‘listen to’, I know you don’t

mean the usual 'listen to' as in 'come and talk to me about it and I'll tell you what to do'. What does 'listen to' mean for you?"

I am grateful this is such a relaxed environment because Pamela takes the time to reflect and answer when she has gathered her thoughts about the ideas I am asking her to elaborate for me. "I remember when I first discovered the simple art of listening, I thought, how do you do that in the context of the classroom? I remember being in a classroom about 12 years ago, and I know that everybody has a lack of enough attention, and parents are doing their best but are totally under-resourced; you know it takes a whole village to raise one child."

"There are kids who present with problems, such as a boy who was moping around the school because he was incredibly hurt by the separation of his parents. So, I told him that although I could not give him the time now, because it was not appropriate, I told him he had choices such as going to a counsellor who would spend some good time listening or I could help him put his 'attention out' by engaging him in the work in the classroom so that he could enjoy what he was able to do there. I let him know that I could see he was deeply hurt emotionally and that I could help him with the options. It is important to give them good information and let them know that you can't always help them with resolving the emotional hurt but you can also help them put their 'attention out'."

In the gentle way of acknowledging the life-worlds of students, I return to Simon's notion that intersubjectivity allows for

continuous reciprocally constitutive realization of ourselves and our apprehension of reality. In other words, how we know who we are, how we know our world are issues that have to be grasped in relation to the way people attempt to "grasp the real" within particular modes of knowing. (Simon, 1992, p. 59)

I become newly concerned. When we shut students down, we do traumatise the child, not just through being yet another person who does

not listen and who does not help them process the events in their lived world but also because we misguide them semiotically and explicitly signalling that their world, who they are and their issues do not matter. How might we open the 'pedagogical possibilities' to include the students' life-worlds when they enter the classroom? What might we hope to achieve by giving full attention to the students and listening carefully to them?

I wished to go deeper into my understanding of what we do when we accept the student as the one in charge. I asked Pamela to help.

Pamela explained that we, as teachers, "are stating the limits of what can actually happen. You remind them that they have all these choices. And when they say, 'Awwwww', you can say 'it doesn't actually make sense for you to keep doing what you are doing because it is actually not helping you or anyone else in the classroom'. At one level people do know that the best thing is to be here, but we tend to distract people from the feeling. But if we add that bit of acknowledging it makes a difference and you can see you don't have to fix it".

Energetic Grade 9 boys like to pull their school shirts off before coming into class and just wear their weight-lifting singlets. I think of guiding students back to their own intelligence. The boys would sit on the bench seat together with protein shakes, pull their caps around backwards and slump down with their headphones on to watch YouTube clips. The boys would know they were breaking school protocols. I remember endeavouring to consciously shift my attitude towards these students, deciding not to be conflictual but invitational instead.

One day the boys made their usual grand entrance to our English class. I was bracing myself as I expected their rowdy arrival. They bounced through the doorway, hurdled the back of the bench seat, slid down into position,

and grabbed their smart phones and headphones from their trouser pockets, ready to be in charge. As the rest of the class had already settled to the lesson, I asked them to move across their bench seat so that I could sit next to them. I was able to smile warmly at them because I genuinely liked their energy. I put work I kept for them on the table in front of us with two pencils and said, “If I thought for one second that what you are doing now would help you in the future, I would support you all the way but I know it won’t. I love it that you go to the gym at lunchtime, it’s great, but you both know, and I know that without this part, without me doing my job in English and without you doing your job, it isn’t good for you achieving all the things you want to achieve. So, I’m going to explain the work, and then you can decide what you need to do. I’ll be here to help every lesson with important work but you need to decide to do it”.

I had planned every word I said. My motive was strategic and came from careful and detailed inquiry about the boys in discussions with other staff. I had taken earlier opportunities to assist them with permissions for their gym membership. During interviews with their parents I gained an understanding of the responsibilities and difficulties they had outside of school.

Charging them with their deciding to do the given work in English improved everything and immediately the boys changed how they behaved in class, so long as I let them do one thing that helped them show their muscles, like bench press a desk before starting their work. The weightlifting and boxing was an important part of their life-world—it’s how they were connecting with good men and easing the pressure of adolescence. I was experiencing that research and slight shifts in applying my awareness of my students’ life-worlds were enough to connect us and show me pathways towards pedagogical possibilities.

I ask Pamela, “I can see then, with teacher disposition you can either have teachers who are confused in their use of power and disrespectful and don’t acknowledge anything but barrel through with their lesson to the exclusion of some students. Or the opposite, teachers who attempt to support students but are again confused about power and take charge for the student and say things like ‘I know how you feel because this happened to me and this is what you need to do because this worked for me’, and this takes power away from the student and this is kind of disrespectful too”.

Questions emerged for me throughout our dialogue, laying a new path of inquiry about how challenging ‘power’ is for teachers. I sought other voices on this matter, such as Weissglass, who observes that teachers are themselves traumatised through sexism, classism, racism and other kinds of oppression. Teachers have dual lives. They experience the expectations that they are in charge, they are somehow so beyond human feeling that even being sighted in a supermarket is cause for excitable discussion by students the next day—attending to bodily needs are alien to the world of a teacher, whose personal requirements are eclipsed by the demands and expectations of the community, that they will be everywhere and see everything. And they have divorces, or they experience domestic violence, or they hurt with the exhaustion of mid-year reporting or they suffer from neglecting their spiritual wellbeing. Weissglass agrees that, given these contingencies inherent in the duality of teachers’ life-worlds, it is not surprising that teachers are “often pressured and manipulated into not respecting young people, and into treating themselves and their colleagues poorly” (1998, p. 83). He quotes from Freire’s *Politics of Education* when he points out that this problem of duality has difficult consequences on a societal scale, “It would be extremely naïve to expect the dominant classes to develop the type of education that would enable subordinate classes to perceive social injustices critically” (Weissglass, 1998, p. 112).

I am struck by Pamela's gentle way of recalibrating my own distress pattern, which manifests as my anger and frustration, when emotionally I want to accuse teachers of taking part in perpetuating ongoing cycles of oppression. She calls me gently to a position of compassion. "Yeah, but there is no blame intended here it's just that there are humans who have chosen teaching as a profession, and their disposition energetically can be smelt by students a mile away. What I would call disposition is the degree to which this particular human being who is doing this particular job in life has dealt with their personal past."

My questions curve now towards how difficult it might be to support teachers to reflect on whether they might have survived trauma of some kind. If I could support teachers in acts of reflection, might this enhance our ability as teachers to be present for young people, to be as vulnerable, as fragile, as they are? Some of the teachers I remember, and some of the ones I work with today, are so abusive, my own historicity would have me acting in a not knowing way—ignorance might have led me to behave oppressively, judgementally and blaming, as I thought they were towards me—for me, then, they were teachers who I had judged not to have the kind of disposition that I craved. My inquiry in this thesis has deepened. Reconstituting my conversation with Pamela, consciously and hermeneutically teasing out new understandings from it, about the ways teachers might orient and re-orient themselves towards their students, have opened possibilities for illustrating and understanding more compassionately the dual lives of teachers, and the impossibility of labelling their qualities as oppressive, judgemental, blaming or not. Pamela terms a teacher's disposition "the degree to which this human being who is doing this job in life has dealt with their personal past". And Gadamer asserts that that existentially, a teacher's life is expressed subjectively through the traditions, values, beliefs and prejudices that condition their humanity (2013, pp. 289-310).

I am now led to wonder, how we as teachers might recognise and pay homage to our own subjectivity and if we do, the possibilities for intersubjective relationships between teacher and student become pedagogically irresistible. No longer might oppression by the teacher and manifestation of her own trauma rise-up to sabotage her desire to be there for her student. My next question turns me into new hermeneutic inquiry. What might it mean for me as a teacher and a leader to put in place wonderful support for teachers to experience collegial associations and to be truly human (Cohen, 2015)? This new question triggers my hermeneutic imagination and I feel challenged to inquire into how I might come to find compassion for teachers, when I have a long history of feeling anger and frustration, judgement and blame.

Reflecting on the nature of the emplotment of a story or the evolution of a book's intentionality, Sumara uses the metaphor of "the hinge" to join or swing parts of his plot together (1996). He devotes a whole chapter in his book to this "hingeing effect" of his hermeneutic emplotment, entitled "Reading as Embodied Action" (pp. 83-115), and he particularly works with the thought of being in the middle of understandings in dialogues between the teachers in his preceding chapters. He recalls that Gadamer tells us conversation is meant to be understood in figurative ways and that understandings always emerge from the middle of things. In good conversation, he says, speakers can forget themselves while they tend to the topic and good inquiry emerges about what conversants hold in common (Gadamer, 2013 in Sumara, 1996, p. 126). In our dialogue, Pamela and I held much in common. We were making meaning together and I was asking ever-evolving questions from making meaning from our conversation. Sumara reminds us of Ted Aoki's notion of "dwelling in the middle of a conversation" (Aoki, 1991 in Sumara, 1996, p.126) and suggests that "questions for inquiry eventually present themselves" and through that presentation "participants in the inquiry come to a deeper understanding [of] their common place subject" (ibid.). Pamela and I were dwelling in the middle of an inquiry that upheld us in a bond of hope for compassionate

pedagogical possibilities and for generating intersubjective collegiality. It occurs clearly to me now that the interview that lead to dialogue in this chapter—reconstituted, shared, examined, interpreted and asked deep questions of—have spun on the axes of the emplotment of my thesis into yet other perhaps deeper and more fulfilling vortices of understanding out of the first harrowing parts of my thesis into the last.

Pamela continues, “Like all of us, the older you get there has been more opportunity to either work on and clear up the early experiences or to become more rigid. There is this idea that this becoming rigid is just part of the aging process but I have this idea that the more we don’t look at what happened to you in early life, the more the child in all of us says ‘hey you’ve left me back here’; the more in your silence you hear that voice and you don’t want to look at it, the more rigid you become and tighter and controlling so that you don’t have to hear that little voice”.

“If you try to talk to the pattern you can’t talk to anyone but if you talk to someone’s spirit you can do anything. Most people try and talk to a kid’s or a teacher’s pattern, and by pattern I mean that rigid way of being in the world which is a little bit disassociated from the real human. And this is what is so hard about being a teacher is that we are asked to do inordinate things with a large group of young people and so in order to be able to do that we remove ourselves a bit more and operate from a patterned place.”

I was now fathoming that we were no longer talking about trauma, its definition or even about students with trauma and their behaviours, but something profoundly more confronting in education. We were now talking about teachers, as people whose role is to support young people, but who like all humans, have their own trauma. I was beginning to understand that until we notice that teachers need great support for their own traumas, then creating a pedagogy of being present for young people was going to be

gruelling. I could feel my heart yearning to see my own hurts so that I might find compassion for my colleagues.

I asked Pamela, "Do you find yourself having to re-establish yourself to make sure you are not operating from a pattern?"

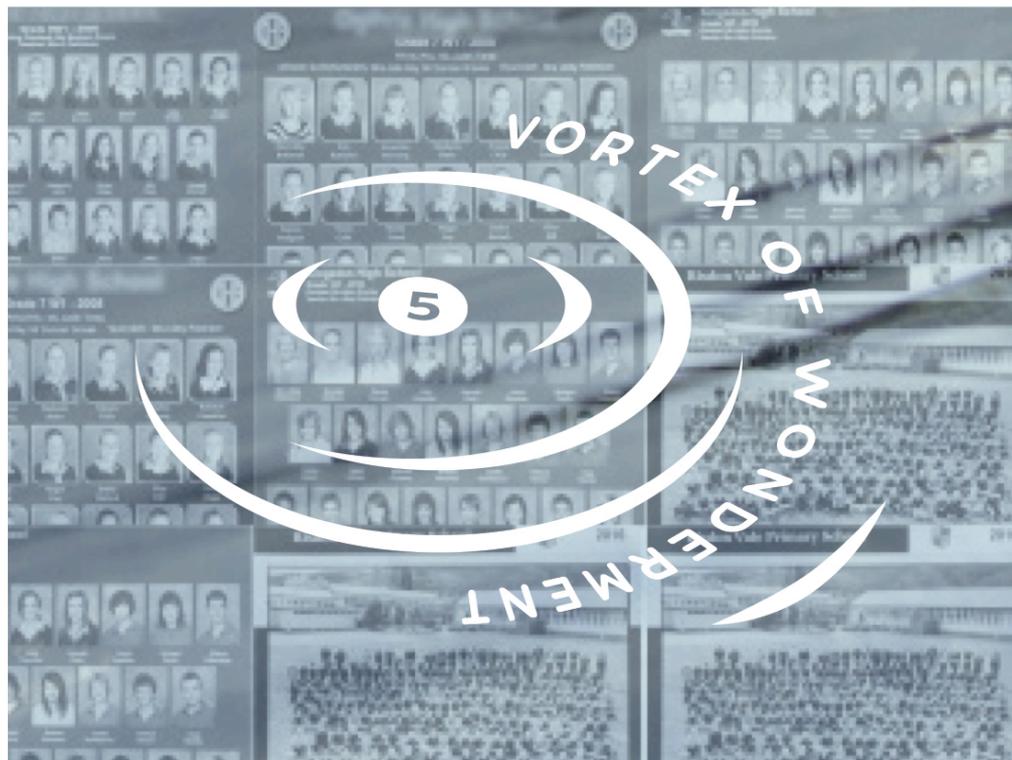
"That's why I work four days a week and nourish myself as a human. If I don't do that, then it is harder to relate. I've experienced huge amounts of stuff during any school day so I have to process that stuff by replenishing and refreshing and starting each day new again. I reconnect with myself and others and set an intent of deep connection for that day."

"If we all set that intent every day, of deep connection, it would make a big difference in the world."

Do we as teachers ignore oppression in terms of the effects of our own trauma? Do we dehumanise ourselves and appear impervious to the potentialities of fusing our inner and outer selves? Does the rupturing between our inner and outer lives hinder our capacity to be present for children? Where might we find the courage to be open to healing our own traumas to enable a pedagogy of being present for young people? The dialogue has unsettled me but filled me with love and compassion for my teaching colleagues. It has rendered the initial concrete pathway of inquiry into a bush track of richer, more promising divides and organic possibilities. I feel vulnerable to losing my way, yet Simon's radical questions written on a piece of track-tape flipping about in the wind on the fragile branch of a tea-tree bough affirm me in my quest,

Teachers embarking on such a pedagogy have to be prepared for a sizable investment of time and energy in an activity that will likely require battles for legitimization and be inherently conflictual. What then enables teachers to sustain themselves in such work? What sorts of collegial associations would help in this regard? How can support be given for one's private life, not only as a source of replenishment and renewal but

in full recognition that love, justice, compassion, and joy are required in numerous places? (Simon, 1992, p. 69)



Perceptions of one's world
Without the life-blood of imagination
A closely shielded comrade
Razed eyebrows
Constant protection
The rupture of being present
The vortices of listening, from I to Thou to I
Not drowning, swimming

CHAPTER 5 TO BE OPEN TO WONDERMENT

It is my fervent hope that the following narratives have the power to evoke the eidetic essence of listening, the “essential necessities and possibilities” (Husserl, 2012, p. 91) of listening when the whole body is listening with loving presence and attentiveness, as a way of transforming responses to trauma that diminish our humanity. When the voices of young people are distorted and are only audible as verbally abusive or are physically rendered,

“by *voice*, I don’t mean only literal voice—the sound produced by the vocal cords in the ears of others—but the ability to speak up, to participate...and be experienced as a free person” (Solnit, 2017, p. 20). Following David Morris in Solnit, I recognise the magnitude of the listening task.

Part of trauma’s corrosive power lies in its ability to destroy narrative, and...stories, written and spoken, have tremendous healing power for both the teller and the listener. Normal, nontraumatic memories are owned and integrated into the ongoing story of the self. These are, in a sense, like domesticated animals, amendable to control, tractable. In contrast, the traumatic memory stands apart, like a feral dog, snarling, wild and unpredictable. (Morris in Solnit, 2017, p. 37)

In the moments when the young people at the heart of each narrative accept an invitation to be heard and open themselves up to a dialogue with me, I am mindful that “ ‘F**k you. Leave me alone’...is sometimes how fear can sound” (de Botton, 2016, p. 60) and that such language is also part of the interpretive space when listening to a distressed young person. It is, as Morris describes, a memory snarling, but one that also must be listened to.

In the process of writing the narratives that follow I have “come to a sense of my own depth” (van Manen, 2014, p. 365) as the hermeneutic vortex swirls with each narrative, raising questions and touching the human condition. I do not wonder about the future lives of these young people, their life is their sovereign right. Wondering who or where they are is to risk that I render these stories for my ego, rather than for advocating their emancipation and the possible emancipation of others. I strive not to diminish their own versions of their lives and seek with ethical intent only to borrow from them a slice of their existence so that I might turn it over in my hands and gaze with wonder at its every moment. I must choose words, for every moment to form fine filaments, barely discernible to casual observation that move with precision though the churning waters that we

share—each narrative is a manifestation of the ripples of my hermeneutic vortices. In my narratives, I have had to suspend creatures and features of vast open waters, the features both microscopic and massive. I have had to constrain my breath to view only fragments of life out of an infinite number of breaths.

The narratives in this chapter combine to be a *bildungsroman*, a journey of personal growth, as I overcome, not my fear—I never overcome my fear—but my delusion. I become like the “ignorant school master” (Bingham, Biesta & Rancière, 2010, p. 2), one that is aware that traumatised young people have voices to which I must listen if I am to learn what they need of me. As my thesis has been moving beyond concern about the ways we ought to be including children with challenging behaviours in their education, my emphasis is veering inexorably towards a type of inclusion—“genuinely going out to the partner, trying to grasp her in her actual presence, but at the same time being aware of the other as something different from oneself...the act of experiencing from ‘over there’” (Buber, in Kristiansen, 1996, p. 221), an encompassing, that calls for the teacher to be fully in dialogue with the student, since “speech, words, voice sometimes change things in themselves when they bring about inclusion, recognition, the rehumanisation, that undoes dehumanisation” (Solnit, 2017, p. 20). In the narratives, I as teacher and the students I work with become rehumanised, though we find ourselves always unfinished (Freire, 2014) since to be unfinished is to be free and sovereign, a subject and not an object.

Themes arise in each narrative, themes that develop the ‘I’ of each young person who inhabits it (Polkinghorne, 1995). Bella’s ‘I’ presents in the flashing of blue eyes and blonde hair announcing every entry to the classroom ahead of a small group of caring and protective friends. Bella’s ‘I’ behaves as if it were a ball in a pinball machine, crashing loudly between near disaster and joyful blinging celebrations. Her perceptions of her world

flipper her 'I' dramatically from one opportunity, danger and obstacle to another. Steven's 'I' crouches in a wallflower existence, observing but not participating in its own life. Steven's entry is shadowy, barely existent and its life seems precarious. His 'I' is without the life-blood of imagination, without the vision of a future and yet, it observes others, not with envy but as if no one has yet pointed out that it would be quite okay to participate in the game. Joseph is a refugee, a boy grown to hyper-vigilance through war, and yet his 'I' is a closely shielded comrade, not a detached piece of self. His 'I' keeps sentry for him but it also keeps watch for others. Jessica's 'I' demonstrates fury through eidetic demonstrations of oppression, her struggle embodied in "anger inhabits [her] and blossoms on the surface of [her] pale or purple cheeks" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 63). I wonder whether I should cheer as if I am her "space-taker" (Howley, 2016, p. 2) or manipulate her to submit to an order that I myself struggle against. Tyler has an 'I' so severely damaged that it climbs trees for safety from the world, hunched in a cage between bouts of relative freedom, every movement outside of itself is a potential threat. This fragile 'I' is still part of a boy and if every visitor to this zoo threw stones through the bars it would spit itself into oblivion and beyond. This 'I' must have constant protection by gentle keepers, a constant team of compassionate carers. And Debbie, whose torture continues, the perpetrator having been absorbed into her being, her 'I' now kowtowing to a malevolence that no longer needs to exist external to herself. Her 'I' suggests to me a brighter future for her, whilst knowing it is gripped by an addiction to violence.

In terms of this thesis leading ultimately to illuminations of selves transforming, it is worthwhile pausing here to consider the difference that Alexandre Derrida distinguishes in this appraisal of Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of the self".

The "I" of the human being, or what [Ricoeur] calls "sameness"...is the constitutive and deep characteristic of the human being. It is the part of the individual that does not change and that makes it possible to recognize him/her. The "self"...is the part of the individual who is

subject to change and contains an element of otherness. In Ricoeur otherness is not only an element of comparison but also an element of involvement, not only an element from the outside, but also from the inside of the being. (2011, p. 173)

I believe that the narratives that follow show transforming selves emerging.

Perceptions of one's world

To understand the past better and in order to make the past a real resource for new experience and future expectations, it is necessary to consider the dialogical nature of memory. Memories are dialogical not only because of their narrative structure but also because of their ontological nature. (Ricoeur, in Dessingué, 2011, P. 176)

I am aware that from within my telling the narratives of these young people, a secondary trauma, one of mine, must be bound. My 'I' seeks to be heard too in these narrated moments—my 'I' seeks a witness to the secondary trauma which has accompanied me as a teacher willing to be present. In my recalling of these moments when I attempted to be present, whilst young people threw themselves against the electrified fences of their dehumanisation, I wonder if these moments happened at all. Solnit understands that “trauma disrupts the narrative of a life because it shatters memory into shards that will not be recognised as a credible story” (Solnit, 2017, p. 37).

Dessingué, in his article 'Towards a Phenomenology of Memory and Forgetting', speaks of an “ethics of memory” that is related to the “work of memory” (2011, p. 175). I retell the story of Bella and myself acknowledging that time and perception shapes the reliability and veracity of how I remember our coexistence. This story of my interpreting is both the work and the ethics of my remembering, of bringing the memory of the past into

perception in the present. Dessingué discusses Plato's idea that the purpose of memory is to "make present an object that does not exist any longer" (2011, p. 170) The remembered 'P' of me and the remembered 'P' of Bella are making "present an object that does not exist any longer" but an object nevertheless, when it breathed, was two human beings whose subjectivities held sovereign perceptions, desires and fears but our intersubjectivity was brought into being through my willingness to be present and listen to Bella.

When Bella was suicidal, threatening to swallow an unfolded paperclip in front of the class, I watched her body, I listened to her breath. I asked her for her overdue essay. I surprised her. In bringing her back to the present concreteness of the classroom, I sought to reassure her that we were all still there in communication with her humanity and her existence as a Grade 9 girl with her peers. With a hateful glare, she refused to hand me the essay, so I practiced what Victor Frankl calls the "Paradoxical Intention" (1988), which is to say, in terms of Re-evaluation Counselling, I consciously contradicted the pattern of her behaviour by behaving in a way that was paradoxical to all expectations of how I might respond to Bella's threats and defiance. I decided that what was needed was to ground Bella's body and brain in the present by 'play-fighting' with her. Bella and I wrestled on the couch in the classroom until she laughed and I had retrieved her essay from underneath her. I ran around the classroom waving it in the air with the class laughing with us. Our conversation was hermeneutical, one in which we were both searching for common meaning in our 'play-fight'—"When the mouth may not speak, the body sometimes reveals: silent testimony" (Solnit, 2017, p. 39)—one that enabled Bella to return to us as herself and not as her traumatised sexually abused self. Later Bella's Christmas card to me said, "Thanks for being more than just a teacher!"

When this narrative begins Bella must already have been overwhelmed by memories so painful that she tried to harm herself violently. How could being present for Bella be viewed by Bella as being outside the role of a teacher? How could Bella view me being present for her as a role outside that of a teacher? What were Bella's memories that led her to believe that we could not and should not know how to save her skin or her life? Remembering might not be invoking an image but a perception. Any perceptions might be alerted and creep in to distort memory as it ages. Sokolowski distinguishes between a memory "introduced between the remembering self and the remembered self" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 70). Two perceived selves can become confused as the remembering self attempts to bring the absent remembered self into the present, especially in the case of traumatic memories. What was stimulating Bella's remembering self? What had she brought into the classroom with her? With whom had she been? Where had she been? What had someone said to her? Why had she become confused? And why had it been so easy to dissolve her confusion by 'play-fighting' with her? And so, what might we learn if we acknowledge a student's sovereign self without demanding an explanation of it and what practices including playfulness might lie amongst our resources to respond attentively to a student like Bella?

In the situation of trauma, what occurs to the manifolds of self is complex. "Phenomenology acknowledges the complexity and the mystery of the agent whose voice not only speaks about the way things are, but registers itself, when it says 'I'" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 129). Bella's 'I' struggles to be heard—with her fierce blue eyes, a flurry of her loose blonde hair, and her cyclonic entry to the classroom. Bella's capacity to say 'I' also creates the human capacity to distort perceptions of 'I' and therefore produces self-perception that is contrary to seeing ourselves as a zestful intelligence. Trauma interrupts the sense of 'I' so that during restimulation (Jackins, 1982), the present intended 'I' is temporarily forfeited in place of the absent and traumatised 'I'. Bella's 'I' has been shattered by adult betrayals.

I crouch over her body on the front lawn of the school, awaiting the ambulance with information regarding an overdose, I lean gently on her rib cage, asking her to feel the warm grass under her body. This I of Bella's we gently woo back into the safety of being attentively loved and medically cared for. Two days later, I order my coffee from Bella, she is standing smiling behind the counter of the bakery in a polyester, franchised uniform. I love this I of Bella's too. With enough listening, her I might mend.

Without the life-blood of imagination

Our speech is not just chatter among ourselves; it is also, if we escape the mist of vagueness, the disclosure of things, which come to light in what we say. We provide a light within which things can manifest themselves, a clearing where they can be collected and recollected...We are real as datives of manifestation, and what we do as such is to evidence the truth of things. (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 161)

Steven describes himself as being an observer rather than a participant in his own life. His faint existence bears this out. Sokolowski refers to speech as a truth telling tool (2008, p. 174). What happens to the "truth of things" if language or safety, or someone to listen is absent? What happens if there is no witness to the narratives that are intelligible to Steven? When the trauma is pre-verbal, it acts out without language, it screams loudly from a doorway or it sits crouched at the bottom of a wall. Might listening to the unsayable (Rogers, 2007) stand in need of a phenomenological attitude which transcends what might appear as a natural event, and instead holds imaginative and possible understandings about what might be emanating from hidden narratives not yet revealed, and held back in the emotional roots of a memory or a memory perception? If so, the onus must be with the listener who is to stand back from the scene, so to speak, and reflect, contemplate and be ironic about it. Imaginative listening calls for what

Gadamer advises, practical moral wisdom or “the self-knowledge of moral reflection”, *phronesis* (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 331-332). Besides *phronesis* stands ‘sympathetic understanding’—the knowledge required to act for another. This is not technical knowledge but knowledge that seeks “what is right - i.e., that [I am] united with the other person in this commonality” (ibid.). I find in Annie Rogers’ painfully acute description of her listening, in *The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma*, an uncommon and telling testimony regarding the vigilance required of me as “I watch for the smallest sign of communication and respond with a small sign too, and then I wait for the next sign, hoping I can read it when it comes” (Rogers, 2007 p. 38).

Under the much-loved Christmas tree, balding of its tinsel leaves, is a small gift. I pull from the wrapping a clear plastic container through which I read a printed verse and see a lapel pin. The verse says, ‘For the lessons you have taught and the friendships you have brought’. The accompanying card has a message and is signed ‘Steven’.

For the past two years Steven has come into my Pastoral Group each morning for the 10 minutes of attendance check, bulletin notices and general administration. There is an expectation that I will see to the wellbeing of the students in my Pastoral Group. Many teachers neglect the bulletin, students often turn up late, forsaking the attendance process and signing in at the office. They find out from mates if they have missed anything.

I genuinely try to make this 10 minutes matter. I read every notice and meticulously check attendance. I speak to individual students to follow-up on issues. Those students who arrive late, continue to arrive late, and individuals I politely speak to try to reciprocate but they just want to chat with their mates about Facebook or what happened on the bus to school.

Bridget enters the room, and I raise my voice in relief that she has arrived so that I can ask her about the latest moves in federal and state politics. Her interest in Question Time on ABC TV provides me with a ready source of political updates and the class have finally noticed that Bridget's autism is not a cage. After 18 months the class takes Bridget's concerns seriously, saying 'thank you, Bridget' when she hands out notices, offering to sit next to her during school assemblies, as they know now that Bridget finds school assemblies distressing and offering her a place at their table for the leavers' dinner.

The boys down the back are tall, they are out regularly on work-placements for apprenticeships. They wear caps and take them off when repeatedly asked to. They all play football and cricket together. When one is away, and I ask where they are, the others mumble about their mate having 'pulled a heart string' or they make other jibes accusing each other of a lack of requisite masculinity.

In the past two years, three of the students have lost a parent because of cancer or suicide. I do not know how they come to school the next day and the day after, miss a day for the funeral, maybe two, and then come to school again as if nothing happened, except I can see their friends helping to nurse the trauma in the way a small select group of friends seem to be able to do. As a teacher, I am largely outside of all these lives. This is a cacophony of lives in just 10 minutes of my morning.

I find I wait for the arrival of one boy, afraid that he might not arrive that morning or indeed ever again. Sometimes I am surprised to see that he has already taken his seat. He has a way of arriving transparently, and when I say 'Hello, Steven', he turns his head to me and barely whispers 'hello' back. I notice with some fascination that his skin is pale and limpid, and his eyes are red-rimmed, almost

bloody. He seems smaller than the other boys, perhaps not—a measurement might prove me wrong.

When he does not come to school, I am alarmed and ask his friends where he is. They say, in the way of teenage boys, with a shrug of their shoulders and a conspiratorial smile, he is probably at home playing Xbox or that he spent all night playing Xbox and is too tired for school.

Steven is also in my English class. I begin to practice connecting with Steven in simple ways. I wonder if Steven's expertise in not being noticed is rattled by my sudden attention. I start by saying 'Hello, Steven', every morning and sometimes, 'How are you?' He answers with a socially acceptable bare minimum, 'Yeah, good'. If he has been away for a day or two, I ask with a smile how the Xbox is going. In response, I begin to receive smiles from him.

After some weeks, my friend and colleague whose office is next to mine asks me how I think Steven is. Tears well up in my eyes. I croak, 'Sometimes I'm afraid we might lose him'.

As the year goes by Steven's absences become less frequent. 'Hello' becomes part of our morning. His smile of expectation warms me, we chat about the school bulletin.

Quite unexpectedly, something changes. In English class we are following ways of using literature to inquire into challenging themes. I notice Steven is particularly sensitive to literary nuance—he shows me he understands characters, perspectives and allegory with acuity. He begins asking me complex questions about metaphor and how it works. I am startled when he raises his hand in class to respond and participate in a class discussion.

He seems to be waking to his voice, he is finding tools for self-expression and finding out that others share his experiences,

confusions, thoughts and feelings. When I encourage students to select a poem and match favourite parts to images and music on a Photo-story program, Steven asks me if I know a poem that he names. It comes from a novel that he knows and wants to find it. I suggest a Google search.

He finds two versions of the poem. I pull up a chair beside him and we read one together. His reason for choosing the poem is poignant.

Once on a yellow piece of paper with green lines
he wrote a poem
And he called it "Chops"
because that was the name of his dog
And that's what it was all about
And his teacher gave him an A
and a gold star
And his mother hung it on the kitchen door
and read it to his aunts
That was the year Father Tracy
took all the kids to the zoo
And he let them sing on the bus
And his little sister was born
with tiny toenails and no hair
And his mother and father kissed a lot
And the girl around the corner sent him a
Valentine signed with a row of X's
and he had to ask his father what the X's meant
And his father always tucked him in bed at night
And was always there to do it

Once on a piece of white paper with blue lines
he wrote a poem
And he called it "Autumn"
because that was the name of the season
And that's what it was all about
And his teacher gave him an A
and asked him to write more clearly

And his mother never hung it on the kitchen door
because of its new paint
And the kids told him
that Father Tracy smoked cigars
And left butts on the pews
And sometimes they would burn holes
That was the year his sister got glasses
with thick lenses and black frames
And the girl around the corner laughed
when he asked her to go see Santa Claus
And the kids told him why
his mother and father kissed a lot
And his father never tucked him in bed at night
And his father got mad
when he cried for him to do it.

Once on a paper torn from his notebook
he wrote a poem
And he called it "Innocence: A Question"
because that was the question about his girl
And that's what it was all about
And his professor gave him an A
and a strange steady look
And his mother never hung it on the kitchen door
because he never showed her
That was the year that Father Tracy died
And he forgot how the end
of the Apostle's Creed went
And he caught his sister
making out on the back porch
And his mother and father never kissed
or even talked
And the girl around the corner
wore too much makeup
That made him cough when he kissed her
but he kissed her anyway
because that was the thing to do

And at three a.m. he tucked himself into bed
his father snoring soundly

That's why on the back of a brown paper bag
he tried another poem
And he called it "Absolutely Nothing"
Because that's what it was really all about
And he gave himself an A
and a slash on each damned wrist
And he hung it on the bathroom door
because this time he didn't think
he could reach the kitchen.

This version was published in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999) who credits Earl Reum for writing the poem.

I look at him. My eyes are full of tears, stinging. He sees that I understand. I am frightened but excited about a connection reciprocated. He asks if I am able to get a copy of the book for him. Steven grins at me when two weeks later I hand him a copy of the book. We laugh aloud together, for the first time.

Later, in class Steven approaches me, standing quietly alongside. I look at him, his face is pale, his eyes as red-rimmed as I had seen them earlier in the term. I wait, smile at him to let him know I am there and listening, if not to his voice, then to his presence. He tells me he is having a bad day. I nod and squeeze his fingertips. "But I know it will be ok. I know everything will be fine", he says. This sounds like a test on his tongue. I nod and agree.

I receive a message to call his mother. My anxiety batters like a moth, not really knowing if a phone call will illuminate a tragic family secret now outed or a chance to imagine a brighter future. When I return her call her only words are, "Thank you. Steven has words now". I realise she has had no voice or witnesses to her own story, just like her son.

Steven describes to me the source of his trauma and the subsequent manifestation of the trauma as deep depression and hallucinations. As he tells me his story, I sit and listen, focusing on feeling loving-kindness, hoping my face reflects benign curiosity, devoid of criticism, judgement or blame. Steven describes his hallucinations, his feelings of disembodiment from a life that he describes as like watching a soccer game from the side-lines.

He offers his journal to me, a scrappy school exercise book where he keeps his own voice, a voice with questions and reflections. He read and later allowed me to have a copy,

Who invented right and wrong morals? Did humans? Did God? Did the world? I say humans personally. For starters, a wrong moral is to end someone else's life and a right moral is to respect and treat every human being as a human being. (Steven's journal)

Steven's emerging interest in philosophy launches mini-dialogues between us. Steven asks me about studying philosophy and religion at college. He asks me what results he might need to go on with this course of study. I share with him a paragraph from Freire and Steven paraphrases Freire's words, "So, you can't really make anyone learn anything. They need figure it out for themselves, in their own way".

I came to understand why Steven needed me to read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Steven's passive disembodied, objectified 'I' was finding emancipation and in its place his subjective 'I' was finding connections with his self and his humanity. In abandoning the isolation and disconnection he had developed to protect himself, perhaps he needed a witness who might make safe the playing field for his re-entry. The novel was giving him a voice to tell his story through borrowed text. The novel was validating his story through a verisimilitude akin to 'truth'. Fictional characters were giving Steven a healing source of imaginative intersubjectivities that he could appropriate and eventually possess of his own accord and in his own right. Steven's novels were becoming the life-blood of his imagination.

Imagination allows us to come home to ourselves, to recognise in our 'I' our hidden self.

On Christmas Day, I open the card that says, "Thank you for being a great teacher and a great friend". The little gift is a gold apple lapel-pin. Later, Steven's mother calls me on a Saturday during January. She wants to check on the edition of a philosophy book she is purchasing for Steven's college studies.

In the narrative of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* the protagonist ends the story by saying good-bye to his reader, assuring his reader that he will be ok.

A closely shielded comrade

Just humanly being. In this village, when people sat together, with gratitude, relief, flies, starvation, truth telling, hope, listening, a vision, and even the grumbling, they reached a new stratum. There is such depth to listening, and an exchange, like an echo from inside a canyon, when friends have listened to me at my most helpless. They heard. Someone heard, heard what was happening, what was true and painful when the centre would not hold. They sat, listened and breathed with me, like doulas. (Lamott, 2017, p. 113)

I am not a child psychologist or a psychoanalyst. I am a teacher with classes of students, lesson preparation, assessments, parent meetings, staff meetings and administration. I am not a social worker or a chaplain, but I do see these children every day for most of the year, and I get to "breathe with" them. I must be careful in this writing not to drift into areas of the trained expertise of others or be tempted to role play within another professional's sphere. Alongside me in these narratives are those people whose own practice comes from deep wells of expertise and lived experience. There are

many people I work with, consult with or ask assistance from, or whose work I read, and who are deeply passionate practitioners.

Sometimes someone enters the space where I am struggling, looks at me with a gentle nod of understanding, and purveys the scene with keen intelligence, like a hound sniffing the air for a scent completely invisible to anyone else, one that I have lost the trail of. At times, I have seen such people act as if by instinct. They enter the room of thrown chairs, death star scissors, and a warm smile goes across their face, a voice lowered to vibrate in a safe register, sometimes their arms wide where a child's face is soon buried in sobbing relief. And later, a calm and skilled phone call to a parent, an offer of coffee, fish and chips for the evening to help the family. Later, these same people convert themselves to highly strategic administrators—they navigate complex documentation to garner support for the child and their family. Sometimes, I am not in the centre of the fray, but looking on as a skilled colleague, dancing a gentle and complex dance, in support of the child and me. I have not mentioned them enough, as I struggle to understand dilemmas within my own phenomenological inquiries. I notice the vortices of my colleagues' lives, touching the ripples of mine—we learn together, “trauma is bigger than expertise of any sort—it's in our midst, in our language, our wars, even the ways we try to love, repeating, repeating. No one is an expert on trauma” (Rogers, 2007, Intro.). I wait for the disruptions, I watch the ripples guide me like a leaf to unknowable shores.

The students' lives are so distant from mine and yet we are here together in schools for prolonged parts of every day. Teachers have many possibilities for creating safe spaces for young people, where loving attentiveness is present, in meeting places, in the “hydrating grace of...new lake[s]” in the sands of their lives (Lamott, 2017, p. 117). In looking to resolve the paradox of mercy—the creation of safe, loving spaces—with the ethical responsibility to stay in the educative praxis, Palmer paraphrases Schumacher,

Resolving the tension requires a supply of love that comes from beyond ourselves, provoked by the tension itself. If we are to hold paradoxes together, our own love is absolutely necessary—and yet our own love is never enough. In a time of tension, we must endure with whatever love we can muster until that very tension draws a later love into the scene. (Palmer, 2007, p.88)

In my next narrative, I come to see that sometimes the traumatised ‘I’ of a young person creates a shield, a companion, with which they protect not only themselves but others. This ‘I’ becomes a comrade, when a young person has experienced the unconditional love of a parent or village, when their young lives have already taught them survival in a war zone, perhaps they already know more than I ever will need to know about vigilance and survival. What could I possibly offer a child whose ‘I’ has seen war?

I walk into the open-plan learning area. I can see five classes in operation across a vast architectural paddock. Against the trunk of a load-bearing column, an African boy sits on the ground, his back resting against cement bark.

I see the teacher who phoned for my help, trying to continue with her class. She told me that a boy refused to do his work, called her a ‘cow’ and then wandered about the room until sitting on the floor. I see what is visible, but I am trying to see what is absent. I crouch next to the African boy and ask if he’s ok. With a directional nod of his head he indicates a second boy, the absent one I have not yet noticed, and says, “He’s the one you need to check on”.

I follow his nod and see the second boy pressing the pointed lead of a pencil hard into his palm, muttering loudly to himself that he wants to hurt himself, stab himself. The mundane presence of his pencil case nearby creates an image in my mind of a mother at the start of the year, buying his equipment, as she entrusts his learning and wellbeing

to our school. The chequered pencil case a store for pencils, never intended to be a quiver of arrows.

I bend down to speak with the boy and I say, "Come on, mate, let's have the pencil". He presses the sharpened tip further into his palm and says, "You can't make me". And there it is, the stance, the grasping for control, entering into a struggle against a teacher. Such is the clichéd nature of his words they seem pre-written, ascribed as part of his role as student and my job description as teacher.

I admit to an urge to grab the pencil from him and to look for a stronger colleague to physically manage the boy. Despite the sense of urgency, I consciously fight the existing paradigm of power and control, and with my heart hammering, and adrenalin beginning to build, I try to transcend the panic and offer the boy a different way of being in control for himself.

"Yes, I know I can't make you. No one can." This seems to momentarily calm him, as if the contradiction of the usual pattern is creating a space for him to know there is a different way to halt his unmistakable terror.

His name is Jeremy. He stands up, and stalks towards the main exit of the room. The important thing is that we have connected and I will try not to let him down. This precious moment is fragile and breakable. As we walk towards the door, he walks ahead of me, attempting, I think, to maintain some of his rage, indignation and control.

I walk quickly behind, trying to keep up, figuring out what I need to say to slow his body down. I ask, "Would you like some space or time or both? How can I help you?" I am relieved and admittedly surprised when he responds, "Yes. I need space and time". He allows me to catch up as he enters the building. He sits at a small table, agitated. I try showing him my resolve to not allow harm to happen to him. He lists again the things he would like to do—cut himself, cut his wrists.

He seems obsessed and absorbed by this. He asks me for a pin or whatever implements for harm I might have. I am relieved that he is communicating and that he notices I am listening.

He gets up, his body on alarm—stillness seems impossible for him. I recall many students before gripped by panic, anxiety and fear, who pace like this boy. He heads outside again, I follow, reminding him that he is not alone, I want to make sure he is safe. He stays nearby me. I sit on the ground and ask if he will sit with me. "Can you feel the ground?" I ask, and he says, "No. I feel light". I learn something from this.

Adrenalin still courses through my body as I work out what I know, what I feel and what I might do next. When he does sit next to me, he searches the ground for other things that could cause pain and gathers short, small, metal bolts left by builders. Although he presses them into his hand, it seems the heat is dissipating from his temperament and he is beginning to slow down his speech about self-harm. I can sense his energy calming. I wait. I feign insouciant interest in our surrounds.

A builder walks by carrying a new whiteboard, alongside our first aid lady. Skilful at working with students, she is respectful and listens carefully to them. I know I can trust her in this moment and I need her help. She looks over and our eyes meet. I call out to the builder, "Do you know where that board needs to go?" The first aid lady replies, "We're not sure". I look at Jeremy and ask him if he knows where it must go and he says he does. The first aid lady calls to the boy, "Come on and give us a hand". He begins to walk over. "Thanks for that", I say to him, "Can we catch up later?" "Yeah, Thanks", he says. The first aid lady turns away to put her arm around the boy's shoulders for a moment and I hear her say, "Good job, mate. Thanks for the help".

There is something bigger bothering me as I pause to scan my mind for what is unsettling. It is the African boy sitting on the floor back in the first building. I retrace my steps.

It has been the better part of a 100-minute lesson and the African boy, whose name I come to know is Joseph, is still sitting on the floor. It is the quietness about him that I find curious. I crouch and ask him what he's doing sitting out of the class for so long. I consciously moderate my voice so that the question is open and not accusatory. He says he was sent out of the class for getting out of his chair to go with his friend who was hurting himself. I asked him why he had done this and he said because he is a friend and that his friend is having a very bad day and is upset. "So, you were worried about him?" "Yes", he replies, "Because he hurts himself but doesn't know how to do it without killing himself". It was as matter of fact as that. "How do you know?" I ask. "Because I hurt myself too but I know how not to kill myself."

My assumptions recalibrate. "Sometimes I jump off the roof of the house or run out near cars when I am upset", he explains to me. "Is that because you are upset about something?" "Yes, because when you are really hurting, it goes away a bit if I hurt myself." "Oh", I say, "Perhaps you might need to find other ways of not hurting". "Yeah, I guess," he says.

I say to him, "That was a really great thing you did for your friend. You're a loving, intelligent boy". He looks at me and says, "That is exactly what my mum said to me but I haven't seen her in five years. She is in Somalia". There is the pain, right there.

"Are you ready to go back to class?" I ask him. "I dunno", he says, "She doesn't want me", referring to his teacher. "No, it's not that" I say, "It's just that she's confused and not sure what to do". I walk over to my colleague and ask her if she is happy to have Joseph back in her class for the remainder of the lesson and that I'll explain later. She is

happy to do this because she trusts my judgement and way of working but there are many teachers who would have refused and demanded reparations.

When I get back to Joseph and let him know that he can re-join the class he says to me, "What is the point of going to class?" I listen to all his question holds. "Because we have never been to Somalia. Because how many African teachers do you see in this school? Because how many kids do you know here like you who have no teachers who understand what you have been through? Because those kids need teachers who are like you." He smiles at me and nods. We don't say anymore to each other as he is already with his teacher and I hear him say, "Sorry about walking out". "That's ok", she says.

As I listened to Joseph, I imagined his mother, in a village in Africa, speaking to him, closely and lovingly, with the intensity of a mother who knows their time together may end. In this moment, I got the briefest, sharpest taste of what it is like to lose a parent as a child refugee of war. I was not the one who 'knew' but I allowed him to show me. His 'I' had been closely shielded by his mother, he knew how to be a shield to his friend and he knew how to be a closely shielding comrade for his 'I'.

Jeremy's 'I' might never have been nourished by a mother's love that could shield against harming himself in deep hurt to death. Joseph's 'I' and his loving sense of comradeship and responsibility for Jeremy returns me to thinking about that "hydrating grace" of mercy (Lamott, 2017, p. 117). Joseph is "the new lake, the ancient lake, there all along" (ibid.) in which perhaps Jeremy can find an 'I' that might draw him back from isolation and the verge of self-destruction.

It's a terrible thing to sit at this computer, pushing down the rising tide of bile and adrenalin that threatens to infiltrate my capacity to think clearly and bring words to this page. An IOS update, a flawed Microsoft

application are hardly my best friends right now. The irony is somewhat bitter today, I try to keep my thoughts on Joseph but the words I need to honour his contribution to my own learning act like congealed cheese on cold pizza before they even hit the screen.

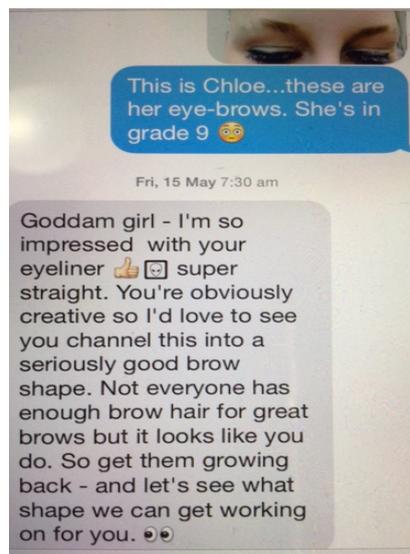
I try once again to focus on the ache in my chest that appears when I think of Joseph. What might his mother have wanted for him when they parted? What wish might she have held for him, knowing all he had experienced? She knew he was loving. She knew he was intelligent. Might she have wanted him to be able to retain a loving heart no matter what? Might she have ached a hundred times more than I ache now with hope, so much hope that we would look after him? God, in those few minutes I had with her son, did I offer enough of myself so that at the very least he could remember who he is, who he can become?

His trauma accessorised him. Far from succeeding in objectifying Joseph, he wore the effects of his trauma like glittering costume jewellery. From his mother's emotional jewellery box, he drew long strands of self-knowing, great bangles and faceted understanding of the best and worst of humanity. When I met Joseph, and crouched down next to him, he held out his hand to me and in it he held a singular glowing capacity for mercy towards others. Yes, we looked at it together in wonder, and perhaps I closed his fingertips back over it and reminded him that this is the gift his mother gave him.

Mercy, grace, forgiveness, and compassion are synonyms, and the approaches we might consider taking when facing a great big mess, especially the great big mess of ourselves, our arrogance, greed, poverty, disease, prejudice. It includes everything out there that just makes us sick and makes us want to turn away, the idea of accepting life as it presents itself and doing goodness anyway, the belief that love and caring are marbled even into the worst life has to offer. (Solnit, 2017, pp. 10-11)

Solnit's words say a prayer for Joseph's mother—they say perhaps I might have done enough in her absence to remind her son of her.

Razed eyebrows



I render this narrative in its visual form above because Jessica herself is a visually embodied narrative in every moment she is at school. She expresses nearly all her feelings through her body—she shaves half her head, wears dark makeup, bruises, dyes her hair bleach blonde and sometimes black, and shaves sections into the outer sides of her eyebrows. On one occasion, she ran after another girl, past the staffroom window, grabbed the girl by a hunk of hair and flung her body onto the bitumen. Abandoning coffee and humming microwave, three staff members leapt over their chairs to breach

the staffroom door, though not fast enough to reach Jessica before she slapped the girl's face. They found her victim rolling side-to-side on the ground trying to avoid the screaming torrent of fury and the blur of Jessica's hands that were winnowing wheat, thrashing her head.

Residing in a shed at the back of her parent's house for some time, a period of which I am unclear, she has little heat, no running water and very little by way of the essentials for arriving at school, yet she does arrive. School has heat, running water and all the essentials. There is a best friend, a boyfriend, and teachers to whom she relates—and she has the best spelling results in the class.

Whilst home has a violent father, school only has bullies, and Jessica's reputation for unrestrained and quick violence when provoked, means that any bullying is a well-aimed verbal insult, projected by a student with enough maliciously deployed emotional intelligence to hit the mark with remarkable effect. "Skrillex", an American dance music producer of hard-core electronica, is their idea of an unkind nickname that would detonate Jessica's short fuse—Jessica's own body art mimics Skillex's.

One day she expressed herself by sitting on the floor of the locker bay tearing up her books, throwing broken rulers and the remains of her school stationery across the floor. She strewed the space with racking sobs of frustration, the skidding across the floor of a drink bottle, a cracked calculator and a library book borrowed for English.

The day after, I hear Jessica enter the school near my office, and I hand her a new stationery pack and invite her to have a coffee and a chat. We talk about a lot of things but mainly about some of the things that happen when all your feelings are on the outside of your body and none of them are being looked after. We talk about her eyebrows and her shaved head. What does it mean, I ask her, when she comes to school with her eyebrows shaved in

sections and then beats up kids who call her names? I wonder whether her look confuses the other kids with this outward encryption of her pain.

I enlist my sister's help to support Jessica to re-envisage her inner and outer self. To re-evaluate the impact her traumatised 'T' is having on her highly intelligent, present and loving 'T'. My sister is a makeup artist and I ask her for help because it would be comfortable and I think she and Jessica might get on.

Jessica, her best friend, my sister and I text each other and enjoy a conversation about what we all want for ourselves. During my time with Jessica I have been asking myself questions about the inherent riskiness in this kind of connecting with students, regarding their physical appearance as the catalyst for communicating. I try to be mindful that my connection is unconditional, and that I am not seeking to 'cure by talk' Jessica but rather to help her to see new possibilities within her own agency and this might mean that she would have to contradict the patterns that she holds for herself.

This is one narrative that has bugged me like a stone in my shoe. I am hoping through the process of this thesis that I might find reconciliation with myself about whether my focus on Jessica's outward appearance interfered with my capacity to honour her subjectivity. Perhaps I, like the bullies, just could not look past it, maybe as a teacher, in my role as a possible oppressor and as being oppressed through expectations of ensuring compliance, Jessica's narrative raises more questions for me. What is my ethical responsibility to Jessica whose visually embodied pain confronts my role yet still makes me smile with great affection for her huge presence, her surviving presence? She fights like a girl should be allowed to fight (Ford, 2016). With enraged indignation, she launches herself at a world that expects her to look a certain way, suffer in a certain way and apologise for her pain.

Constant protection

Phenomenology acknowledges...disturbances of truth, but it does not let them drive it to despair. It sees them just as disturbances and not as the substance of our being. It insists that along with these shadows, truth and evidence are achieved, and that reason finds its perfection in letting things come to light. Reason does not perfect itself in error, confusion and forgetfulness. (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 185-186).

Through this quote from Sokolowski, I return explicitly to the hermeneutic vortex of this chapter. Each of these narratives has been an occasion for a disturbance not only of my preferred existence in my workplace but a disturbance of my peace of mind. I wish for a 'quiet' day at school, one where children arrive in a bustle of excited anticipation, attend class, play nicely during breaks, participate in lessons they find relevant and interesting, and where they depart amid parents who are grateful for the service we provide. I internalise every departure from this utopian mirage as a personal failure. I injure myself as I place a barb on each digression, turning it toward myself, stabbing at myself, demanding, 'Why did that happen? What did I not do? Am I good enough for this job?' These narratives guide me to question whether the violence I do to myself with each encounter is due to my Catholic self-admonishment and self-blame. These narratives guide me to wonder where the well-spring of my desire to stay with each encounter stems from. What is the source of this paradoxical noticing of disruptions? Staying in the vortex of paradoxical intent, the endless ripple of questions is a way to allow the other's 'I' to emerge, whilst battering my own 'I' with its own 'present, not-present, present, not-present' oscillations.

My hermeneutic vortices create disturbances brought about by divergences from my ideal. They sink into my sense of efficacy, which for me seems to disturb my sense of self as a teacher. Perhaps the utopian image I yearn for, instead of protecting me, I have instead turned against

myself, causing myself harm through focussing on me and judging myself wrongly, because I have not yet been able to produce such an educational utopia. Might my narratives, these plinking stones of disturbance, guide me to apprehend that “along with these shadows, truth and evidence are achieved, and that reason finds its perfection in letting things come to light” (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 185-186). Might these “things” be new possibilities that arise from a sense that I have failed my students? Far from willing a utopian mirage into reality, enabled by the disturbances, might it be that whilst ever these disruptions are occurring that I am witness to a struggle by another human being, showing me that they trust they are safe enough to show their struggle, and I am able to be present for them? Might it be that in the awful opposite of the utopian mirage, I am fully alive to the needs of another human being, that the vortices of this chapter have taught me to know it is not failure that I feel—the self-harm done by blaming myself is wasted energy and delusional? Is the job I have, rather not to realise my utopian mirage but to be alive and present, open to the possibilities present when the dystopian reality is unfurling already at the skate-park on the borders of the school each morning?

I can feel an outer circle rippling with soft energy. It begins with the percussive implosion of a hard object smashing the surface tension, breaking it with shocking violence.

Tyler stands on a raised platform with a javelin pointed at me, I am standing between him and the student who is the target of his blind fury. Tyler assaulted five staff last year. I have been at the school four weeks in my newly appointed role as a principal.

With a mobile phone in one hand, I give frantic instructions to the school office for a lockdown, communicate with Tyler’s father and relay an urgent request for help. My heart bangs in my chest like a determined sledgehammer, and through it I hear my voice asking Tyler about his plans for the coming weekend. Calling him with calm

endearments, I force my voice through a pantomime of loving smiles that no doubt contradict the fear in my eyes.

In moments such as these, against my diaphragm, a priest's ear presses itself, the screen of the confessional, asking me in a soft tone, what sins I committed of action or omission to lead me to this point. Yes, I see the ripples, one of Tyler's suffering, one of my culpability. Somehow, I have turned this in on myself. Somehow, my personal humiliation, my professional shame attaches itself to a long held belief that all bad near me must somehow be my fault and mine to fix.

Tyler and his two sisters have been removed from their mother and step-father. The assaults and abuse sustained over 10 years are horrific. They now live with their biological father. There are four younger half-siblings, all removed to foster care. Tyler and his two sisters are tethered to their trauma by multiple chains. They are tethered in a Stockholm syndrome longing for their mother and their home. They miss their baby siblings. Tyler's sister would bang her head so hard in the back seat of the car that it would jerk the car rhythmically as they drive. The investigating police say it's one of the worst cases they have come across—they had refused to leave the house until Child Protection had taken the children.

I sit with my senior staff, head aching with an adrenalin hangover. How can we use what we know about trauma-informed practice and our ethical duty as educators? After many hours of deliberation, we decide to bring in inter-agency support and make clear our intentions. We wish to support Tyler and his father through an inter-agency approach but we know that the corner stone is lowering Tyler's adrenalin and having a secure adult with him in class, one that he likes and trusts.

I ask for my staff to approve spending the equivalent of half our ICT budget to supply Tyler with his own teacher's aide. I invite them to support a non-punitive approach, explaining that if things go wrong,

we will manage the incident and analyse what we need to do in future. The staff agree.

I put together a care team, including a support teacher, a teacher's aide, a school psychologist, the team of three from the governing body of our school region, a family case worker, a child protection worker, and a representative from a children's psychiatric clinic and Tyler's father. The assistance from the psychiatric clinic is a favour since Tyler's developmental trauma is not listed in the manual for diagnosed mental disorders (DSM V)—evidence that in the field one has to at times overcome bureaucratic barriers.

We crowd into a small room at my school, on mismatched school chairs, some of comical smallness for adults to use. The child psychiatrist explains that until Tyler bonds with his father, we cannot ensure the safety of the school—Tyler's trauma is too fresh, the adrenalin and cortisol levels determining his response to everything around him. We send Tyler home for eight weeks and use the time to recover, plan and re-group.

Tyler begins back at school two days per week in Term 2. There are two incidents in quick succession, one involves Tyler climbing onto the local shopping centre roof and police intervention, in another he has taken a large rock, walked along a row of classroom windows, breaking each one with a thrust of the boulder into the glass, as I clear children from the rooms for safety and lock down the courtyard. Our first act is to reassure Tyler with kindness and love, to avoid shaming him when he 'returns' to us. We reconvene as a care team to discuss what we missed. What had restimulated Tyler? What is the pattern? We listen as a team to what we see, hear and feel to make sense of Tyler's world. We notice patterns—areas of the school trigger his immense reactions and play-times without his aide are overwhelming.

Tyler soon attends school three days per week in Term 3. His academic work improves. He begins to socialise, and soon joins in

cricket and soccer at lunch. We listen carefully to the nuances of his behavioural patterns: the colour of his skin pales under stress, clicking his tongue signals distress, cracking his fingers and whistling absent-mindedly are all signs that his conscious brain is disengaging and that an incident is imminent. His teacher's aide intervenes with Milo and Lego to reduce stress.

In Term 4, he asks to join an excursion for bike riding. I send an extra teacher, his father, his aide and celebrate like we've won a national award when he returns glowing with pleasure.

Towards the end of the year, we have a special assembly with a few hundred guests, including the current Attorney-General for our State. Tyler asks me if he can say something in assembly. I ask him what he would like to say. I look at colleagues and take a deep breath, "If we aren't here for this, we aren't here for anything". Towards the end of the assembly Tyler walks up to the dais and I hand him the cordless microphone. He says, "I'd like to wish all the Grade 6's good luck and I'd like to say to everyone, have a Merry Christmas". He hands back the microphone, I look across the crowd to his teacher's aide, she is crying the way I'd like to.

This is no fairy tale. We worked so carefully together—Tyler's care team, listening to each other's views and collating all that we felt we could draw together to create a picture of Tyler. There is no happy ending. When Tyler's therapeutic intervention was withdrawn without our knowing, and we became over confident and perhaps complacent, the resources we had spent on Tyler in one year, became stretched to cover other students in the next, leaving Tyler to fend for himself. The relapse into further incidents was frustrating and enough to make me want to withdraw into old paradigms of a punitive nature rather than pull such a resource-intensive process back together again.

When I consider the depth of the well from which I must draw enough energy to be present for Tyler, I consider my mother's way of saying, "there but for the grace of God go I". She would say this whenever I screwed my face up at someone else's misfortune or at my criticism of someone's perceived shortfalls. She seemed to be able to see that just on the periphery of another's existence, was her own possible existence. In Erich Fromm's *Art of Listening* I am reminded of my mother's capacity to see the need for a bottomless source of compassion, in what Fromm calls the "humanistic premise of [his] therapeutic work" (2013, p. 100), the 'I-ness' of the other. All that repels us and attracts us in the nature of another human being must surely be a recognisable part of our own 'I', since "there is nothing human which is alien to us. Everything is in me. I am a little child, I am a grown up, I am a murderer and I am a saint. I am narcissistic, and I am destructive" (ibid.). Perhaps this is why what seems to us as repellent behaviour in others is so disturbing, because of its potential contagion under different circumstances. When I recognise the 'I-ness' in the disturbance of another's 'I', "it means I have made myself open, that there is a constant openness to all the irrationality within myself, and therefore I can understand my [student]. I don't have to look for them. They are there" (Fromm, 2013, p. 100) and I am perhaps able to stay present a little longer.

As the hermeneutic vortex ripples out, I recall my self-doubt about my work with Tyler. When I am in the moment with Tyler, I wonder what I need to know, what I don't know, what I should do, what I shouldn't do. I tangle myself awake at night wondering how I have failed to protect Tyler and the school. His trauma is not a recognised disability. I wonder whether I should try to work harder to advocate for developmental trauma to be placed on the DSM V so that I might get funding for similar children in the future. In reflecting on the self-questioning that flows in the wake of my own listening to a child who has experienced trauma, I come to understand why Fromm regards listening with loving attentiveness as being,

The best analysis I ever had is as an analyst, and not as a patient and to understand, to feel, what goes on in this man or woman I have to look into myself and to mobilize those very irrational things which the patient is talking about. (Fromm, 2013, pp. 100-101)

Tyler may never be able to survive without a care team. I wonder about his capacity to break from the developmental trauma that cripples his emotional regulation. Given the intensity of need surrounding Tyler, once he leaves our little primary school for high school, will there be enough awareness and support for him? I think his 'T' will need constant protection. Without developmental trauma existing as a diagnosable disability, he will now enter high school or any institution without recognition that he requires extra help.

The rupture of being present

Debbie sees me in the playground where I stand every morning. This is when every parent who brings their child to school can see me and speak to me if they like. It is where I chat with them to open the possibility of connection. It is how I see the way in which families arrive in groups and those at risk who wear dark glasses, push strollers by without ever making eye contact. Debbie asks if she can come and see me. She has been in hiding from her ice-addicted ex-partner. She has moved states to get away and feels that he probably cannot follow her, as he is too illiterate to make travel arrangements and too often incarcerated to be absent from his own network of drug supply and the legal system.

Still, she cannot take her children to the park, sleep well or socialise normally. She says she thinks she has PTSD. A friend who had been to a counsellor had shown her a chart and she had diagnosed herself. I tell her there are many symptoms of chronic and complex trauma,

they may describe how she feels much of the time but they don't define who she is.

Trauma, its definitions, symptoms and emerging treatments, has been held in the realm of recent science, associated with brain plasticity, and understandably in the domain of psychology, psychiatry, social work, and medicine. In recent years, through networks such as the Australian Childhood Foundation, professional learning guides for working with trauma are available to educators. Following Nussbaum, author of *Upheavals of Thought* (2003), I accept the profound change that is happening from viewing trauma scientifically with non-reductionist physiological accounts of brain development, to viewing trauma as an effect on humanity through a philosophical approach to understanding emotion. As Nussbaum says, “My account of the development of emotion will be a philosophical account; I am neither an empirical psychologist nor a psychoanalyst” (2003, p. 179). I too assert who I am in relation to my work, from a similar philosophical vantage. I am neither an empirical psychologist nor a psychoanalyst who listens and reduces evidence to functionality and cure—I am an educator. As I have said before, my aim is not to analyse or heal to whom I listen but to hear them full heartedly, and I hope, with *phronesis*, practical moral reasoning. This has been my learning through my thesis.

In Debbie's continuing story, she describes her fear that her children will be rediscovered by her ex-partner and he will abduct them from school. He would punch her babies in the head and if she looked at them to comfort them, he would punch her in the head too. He tortured her by taking the most significant thing that she could offer as a mother and that was some comfort and acknowledgement of her children's distress by looking lovingly, with deep sorrow and grief at them even when he was beating them. I ask her what she wants to

happen. She requests that we, as a school, be aware that she is fearful of the abduction of her children.

Monday comes and we hold our General Staff Meeting. With Debbie's permission, I communicate her fears. I tell the staff that regardless of how unlikely it may seem to us that an abduction would ever occur, we will honour the genuine nature of Debbie's fear by acting on it. We republish our 'Critical Incident and Emergency Procedures', we review our procedure for lockdown, yard duty and the presence of any adult unknown to us. I report back to Debbie. With her agreement, we refer her children to the school psychologist and the school social worker for continuing support.

Since writing this narrative, Debbie has returned to the town where her violent ex-partner resides. She has taken her children with her and has gone to support an older daughter who has a newborn baby. I search my emotions for signs of indignation, or petty betrayal but find none. I recall Debbie's wizened face, the black leggings hanging baggily from her emaciated buttocks, the faint fug of cigarette smoke and coffee on her breath. I scrutinise the memory of my countenance as we stood in the school courtyard, as her children ran to class, and I see us, her talking to me, me standing close and listening to her voice, her words, listening to the glisten of her eyes that tear up and dry just as quickly, listening to the way her lips suck a lisp against gums receded from lost teeth, and feeling my heart open and breaking a little, knowing that the only thing I could have done is to stand there and let her speak, stand there and believe her fear, stand there every morning at 8.30am until she doesn't turn up.

I return to Nussbaum and the attention she gives to the confusion we have regarding compassion and empathy. In listening to Debbie, and other mothers who have suffered trauma through domestic violence, I feel a visceral desire, a need not to empathise with their situations. My desire not

to empathise comes from a position from where I hoped to find a place to listen with great respect to their stories, not to be drawn into the whirlpooling, excruciating tragedy of domestic violence. I strongly wish to resist any urge to engage in, “a participatory enactment of the situation of the sufferer”, (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 327), even with the awareness that their lot is not my lot, because I do not want to feel that lure of pity or even disgust, those emotional signs that signal that I am above their suffering. I have not avoided such suffering through any conscious effort on my part, or because of a postcode, though this is no guarantee of immunity from rampant domestic violence and domination. I am concerned about falling into a ‘you are victim and I am not’ dichotomy because such a dichotomous view seems, far from creating a ground swell of change within the ‘victim’s class by a non-victim’s class’, capable of creating a view that ‘you are a victim, which is terribly sad, but it is your role, and I am not, sorry about that’. Empathy does not seem enough to give rise to the kind of indignation that might fire agency on the part of the listener or speaker.

Though empathy might not be sufficient, it is “highly relevant to compassion” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 333) because whilst empathy allows me to comprehend pain, compassion demands that we galvanise our ethical responsibility to self and other. Empathy takes us to *schadenfreude*, a delicious, tempting, salted-caramel chocolate guilt kind of happiness that is begat when we realise that our unfortunate circumstances are not our own. I feel tempted to feast on this simply because I have most of my teeth, a circle of safe friends, a safe home and charming offspring, and wanted perhaps to be reminded of how wonderful this is. Standing in the cold of a schoolyard morning, as a mother unfurls the ragged cloth of her life to me, and shares with me some of the frayed edges and tears, surely impels me to leap the stepping stones of empathy and pass *schadenfreude* into compassion.

As Nussbaum reminds me, empathy in the role of listening with loving attentiveness requires more than comprehension of another’s suffering.

Nussbaum says we must avoid the temptations of disempowering pity, objectification and dehumanisation (2003, p. 335). My listening to Debbie spurs something more radical, more robust than empathy. The kind of passion I am seeking to generate through my listening is “an active watchfulness in regard to the humanity of others as well as oneself” (Zaretsky, 2013, p. 177).

Might empathy engage in a pantomime of apportioned facial expressions and vocalisations, absorbing energy but not reflecting any back? Might compassion be that dignity, that unity of recognition that enables the “eudaimonistic imagination” as I make myself vulnerable to the person of another (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 319)—I find not judgement or blame to apportion to the person telling her story, instead I listen patiently until she recognises her own pathway returning her to her ‘I’. It is her words to which I listen. Arnold Zable, a child of Jewish immigrants from WWII, living in Carlton, Melbourne, remembers the words of his father as testimonials of our lived existence and as possibilities for releasing us to freedom.

‘The whole of existence is contained in words’, father claims. ‘Words are the source. They are more durable than the grass we are sitting on’, he stresses, while poking his fingers at the ground. ‘This grass must eventually fade, whereas words eternalise our experience and express the sum total of what we have been in our lives. Words will never die, so long as there are human beings to receive them. All our knowledge and feeling can thereby be retrieved.’...‘Words will always triumph’, he asserts. ‘I am talking of words that express our inner-most feelings. In words lie their potential to break out and be released.’ (Zable, 1991, p. 209)

The vortices of listening, from I to Thou to I

Listening begins with a disruption. A pebble plinks into the calm surface of a moment, sends its energetic ripple out, never ending, a series of ripples that find eddies, banks, currents, sometimes other disruptions, obstacles but inevitably flow. A skilled listener, like a skilled swimmer, will not fight the current but will watch it carefully, reading the nuances of strength, speed, the inherent energy not only in the movement of water but also in the downstream obstacles and opportunities. When the swell rises up in front of an open water swimmer, the swimmer will reach forth an out-stretched arm, hold the curve and energy of the wave in her cupped hand and pull her body up the face of the wave, feeling the wave's energy fold under her torso and surf the back of the wave, looking towards the next one. Listening is like this—I pull my attention, open my heart, look for the energy in the other and try to stay despite the fear. The 'I' of the other is a relentless energy, one I have no control over. The currents of the other's well-spring defy my understanding of hidden energies below surfaces. I am using my whole being to remain present to the energy of the 'I' of the other, to understand it, not fight it.

The energy of the other is a frightening thing, its swirling eddies interrupt our own flow, sending us off course and into the surging currents of other lives, rapids that surge and tumble, “a system of definite powers suddenly decentres here and there, breaks apart, and is reorganised under a law that is unknown to the subject or to the external observer, and which is revealed to them in this very moment” (Merleau-Ponty, in Maclaren, 2017, p. 4). I think of a river guide, she who reads the water, who cheers at the booming torrent of currents that surge into each other, who considers how to throw herself into the maelstrom, she watches, listens, and knows the transformation from stationary to being fully alive is inaugurated through the intersubjective relationship and attunement of her body and being with the energy of the water. I have experienced the trust required to allow a river guide to take me on a journey of ten days through the rapids of the Franklin River. I have watched her as she stood on the bank surveying the scale and power of water beyond our imagining. I have trusted her with my

life, despite the pounding in my chest. Where there is fear, trust brings us to the brink of the abyss that feels like imminent death, and allows us to know that with our hearts pounding in our chests, we will live if we trust. We shoot the wild rapids together, both transformed, both surging with the energy of the truly alive. She screams joyfully for me to dig my paddle in to the liquid tannin, and I have agency too, her life as much reliant on my belief in her, as my life is reliant on her. We surge between impossibly huge boulders beyond time. Her role, the guide, the listener, holds to an ethical responsibility, that whilst ever I trust her enough to place my fear, my life in her hands, she will guide me with great skill to safety, to transformation, and she is destined to come with me.

The cost of trust betrayed in “water that was for a few seconds benign, [would] change its character immediately to that of a mad, rushing sadist, forcing...head and body forward and down and under” (Flanagan, 1994, p. 304). Trust. The pebble plinks and the ripple emerges unbidden at the word. Trust—an onomatopoeic notion in this vortex of the listening relationship of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’. Trust, opens potential. Trust, is the embryonic stage of relationship, the process of mitosis bringing forth the emergence of organs—compassion, presence, listening, voice, making possible our intersubjective existence. Without trust, we cannot authenticate the ethical relationship—a conclusion arrived at by Asalug Kristiansen, in a gentle paper regarding the place of truth in moral relationship between teacher and student. Following from Buber and Knud E. Løgstrup, Kristiansen pleads us to notice that without a mutual ethical responsibility we risk our very existence as a race. I too see the power of Løgstrup’s assertion,

Either we take care of the other person’s life or we ruin it. Given man’s creatureliness, there is no third alternative. To accept the fact without listening to the demand is to be indifferent to the question whether life is to be promoted or ruined. (Løgstrup, 1971, p. 19 in Kristiansen, 1996, p. 216)

We live in interdependence. We choose the nature and consequences of our interdependence, both on an individual level of a single human being showing compassion for a fellow human being, and on a global level, our collective compassion towards global environment and peace, “we carry in our hands part of each other’s opportunities in life” (Kristiansen, 1996, p. 216).

I feel low-level fear, an adrenalin leak that tightens my stomach and keeps my breath shallow when I am working with distressed students. Am I breeching unseen rules and policies? I still experience this disquietude even after decades of practice as an educator. What causes me to feel anxious in my practice of a pedagogy of being present? Buber implies the presence of the existence of risk in being open to the other, “Let us dare, despite all, to trust!” (in Kristiansen, 1996, p. 222). Trust “involves the whole person...giving all of his or herself to the pupil” (p. 219).

When I am listening to the other, I too am other, a participant with other, and my listening “opens up the potential for a non-violent relationship” (Todd, 2001, p. 435). I suspend any hope of particular outcomes to enable the possibility of a space for the relationship of self and other, so that the reciprocity of non-violence might emerge. Within this unfolding, something of the potentiality of lives, some of which have become impeded, is imagined, if only in tiny increments. In an ‘I-Thou’ relationship of trust, truth, once so catastrophic that it could have disclosed a “fundamental betrayal of [the] developing self” can now reveal itself (MacCall, in Johnson 2017, p. 14). In the case of a trauma or a chronology of traumas, such truth telling might embolden the speaker to “allow [truth] to air, bring [itself] up to the surface, [where] you can watch [it] float away” (ibid.).

I do not purport to apprehend the application of a theory, or to systematise a method of listening—to describe a way of listening is like

holding a dandelion in the breeze, listening is there but the very breath floats the umbrella seeds into the air around us, once there, now something more ethereal. I bring my listening to you, like a dandelion, an offering, and in our sharing of breath, we disperse it as whispers of compassion around us, “the bursting of bonds which imprison an unquiet heart” (Kristiansen, 1996, p. 221).

The moral and socio-economic high ground plays no part as our relationship unfolds, “it does not simply mean a sociological other who is marginalised or maligned”, since “the other is what I am not” (Levinas, 1987, p. 83 in Todd, 2001, p. 437), not a poor or oppressed version of myself, but a full and breathing possibility whereby I take genuine responsibility as the guide, the educator, knowing the surging water. I try to “see the seen with all the strength of his [my] life, hear the heard with all the strength of his [my] life, and taste the tasted with all the strength of his [my] life” (Buber, in Kristiansen, 1996, p. 219). Trust removes the moral and socio-economic high ground from under me, it removes the gauzy division between our situatedness, it cannot and does not exist when I think I can make you a better you. Trust only exists when I can say ‘I respect your sovereignty, your agency’. Trust is broken, so easily broken “when one is not taken seriously by the other. And even when the teacher responds to the pupil, does he attempt to impose his own will? The will to determine what is best for the other person...must be coupled with a willingness to let him remain sovereign in his own world” (p. 221). To break trust is another trauma, a loss of faith in the teacher’s ability to guide the child through the churn of the Franklin River.

Not drowning, swimming

The feeling of exhaustion and panic fade momentarily and are replaced by a sense of space, air, lightness, optimism, energy, hope, expectation, pride, self-belief. I find that I can write again, think and read and create again, for

now. I am learning through the writing of this thesis that the trauma does not go away, it resides as a part of me but I learn to observe the effects of my fear and try not to capitulate to its demands to give up. I know that if I give up, I will not have this feeling of inner resistance as I have reason to believe it would be replaced by something more sinister, though I do not really know what.

We experience fear in its physical manifestation, even when the context is an intellectual one, that is, my fear of failing academically is metaphysical, in the way that David Rehorick and Valerie Bentz draw attention to Merleau-Ponty's *Transformative Phenomenology* (1962) concerning the centrality of the body and human experience—"interpretations of meaning are anchored in the bodily awareness; histories are sedimented in body cells" (Rehorick & Bentz, 2009, p. 7). In my own experience of fear it seems to disconnect me from present time reality and it exerts power over me. In the last narrative of this chapter my fear arises unexpectedly in the company of a trusted teacher and friends who keep me safe.

I took a class of Grade 9 students to listen to a living book. Kris was a local lady, wheelchair-bound due to paraplegia—an assault 20 years earlier by two young men in a car had broken her back and severed her foot. She had since competed in World Masters swimming championships and was also coaching the Special Olympics Swimming Team.

I let slip to her that I myself would like to overcome a fear of open water swimming. She suggests that we aim for the Trans-Derwent and the Rottnest Channel Swim. There is Kris, mid-sixties, paraplegic, with Parkinson's and vision impaired—the only excuses I have are fear and laziness.

We meet the next Sunday at Kingston Beach. Kris does not ask me any questions about my capabilities, she simply has expectations of

me. Her confident voice contradicts my own hesitant voice. Kris seems to delight in feigning obliviousness to my nervousness.

Kris slides from her wheelchair and crawls down the beach while I walk along beside her. The first wavelets pick her up and she is suspended in the salt water, free of her disability. I put my head in the water with my swimming goggles and the sensory input, the texture of the sand and wavering light in the water, the haze of unseeable expanse on either side of me threatens to overwhelm. It is only a few seconds before I thrust my head out of the water and gasp in panic as adrenalin kicks in and depletes my available oxygen so that hypoventilation and a feeling of dread and fear fill the vacuum, where perhaps curiosity and joy might otherwise have taken up residence.

Kris does not ask me what I am afraid of, instead she seems to ignore my panic and says, "We are just going to get to the green buoy". And so it is, the expectations and goals help the adrenalin subside—she does not ask what I find so frightening, like almost everybody else does, she skips the futile search for the rational. We make it to the green buoy and swim back to the beach.

Kris sets the next goal as soon as our feet touch the sand—a triangular course out from the beach. Every time I gasp wide-eyed and stricken with rising panic, Kris stops, treads water next to me until my breath has slowed and we head off again. Kris always notices the quickening and shortening of my arm stroke and kick, and surfaces at the same time next to me, looking into my face to calm the growing panic. Each session we go further.

Kris begins to take me for 'weedy training' as she calls it, swimming next to and over the top of submerged rocks with swaying seaweed and marine life. The textures and shapes seem to loom below and out of my peripheral vision. It feels hugely threatening to the point where it is difficult even to keep my face in the water and I keep my eyes

above the water and pull my legs away from the swaying, dark mass below.

In a group, swimming a kilometre parallel with the beach and then along to the headland, over the large and deep rock ledge which juts from the base of the headland, we stop and tread water, laughing and talking. Swimmers share tips about how to navigate safely when the ocean floor is too deep below to navigate by and how to counteract the sensation of disorientation in the swell of a headland. I feel utterly elated, and hold a sense of achievement to my chest.

Sometimes the swell is white-capped and forces my body up and down. Kris is always there, looking for me, offering teaching and reassurance but never letting me take a step back, even when the wave of intimidating panic arises suddenly, threatening to give way. She determinedly ensures that I meet the challenge, that the point of resistance will be moved through, not withdrawn from or struggled against.

At my least favourite beach, with its sharper drop off and heavier beach swell, its dark and large concrete storm pipe and random rocks that suddenly come into view, the large resident eagle ray and seaweed feels utterly disconcerting. Every stroke forward is an effort of will and trepidation interrupts any rhythm. The group are further and further in front but I force myself along. I am angry at the lack of freedom in this kind of stupefying anxiety.

By the time I catch up, my new swim buddies are idly exploring the sea-weedy reef at the end of the beach and suggest we head back to the beach, straight across from the headland, an open ocean hypotenuse. Yachts are moored in the shelter of the beach corner and we decide to swim between the yachts and across the open bay towards a large white building situated near the middle of the beach.

There are strands of jellyfish eggs, like pearl necklaces with pale beads and I occasionally feel them silkily run between my splayed fingers. The water is deep and dark, and I can see my arm and hand enter the water in a trail of bubbles, my breathing and stroke in rhythm with each other. Until, like a malevolent stalker, nervousness begins to intrude on my space and although I try to out-pace it, it catches up and begins to lay claim to my breath and it's not long before it has gripped my throat so that my heart rate is now a fast pounding that does not allow for breathing.

I look towards the white building amongst the row of houses on the beach promenade and I strain my eyes to pick it out because of the distance. In a moment, the intruder claps its hand around my mouth in a suffocating grip. A sharp tang of panic laced with adrenalin surges into my stomach and vomits fear into my mouth. To find safety I spin around in the water to look for the yachts behind us, thinking that if they are not far away, we can swim back towards them, but they are further away now than the beach and the intruder has totally overpowered me—a wave of impossible terror.

And then it quite simply breaks, like a cracked dam wall. It starts when I see some people walking along the beach, tiny figures in the far distance across the stretch of water. I suddenly need to know that we/I could be saved if I can't swim anymore. I still do not know if I screamed out first in fear or whether the fear occurred first but I start to scream, I don't just surrender to it, I *become* it.

There is a piece of my mind, which still understands this screaming as a process. With the fragility of my rational mind I decide to discharge the emotion of fear through allowing the urge to scream to continue unabated through its own robust energy. Through sobs I tell my swimming friends that it is like everything I have ever been afraid of is here, wanting recognition and acknowledgement.

Just as fear arose, it dissipates. The calm and the peace, not just the absence of panic but of a new level of awareness of sky, warmth and hereness settles in its place. My eyes open to the beach ahead and I reach out an arm, push my face to the water, kick with first one and then the other leg, feeling the surge of my own muscles propelling me through the water, and soon enough the sand appears under me.

Why is my subjectivity as the protagonist in my narratives so important? I have a responsibility to express the embodiment of trauma and fear but also seek to recognise opportunities for transformation as each trauma and fear is summonsed through relationships of trust and intersubjectivity. The circumstances of each of these narratives arrived unbidden, or so I thought, but in writing these narratives I have to ask myself, what part have I played in inviting each situation to become something more than a distant and dismissed incident, trivial and of no consequence? As I write, I have “a muddled problem, and words...that—through a meaningfulness that transcends [my] intentions [as] the author—work to clarify and articulate the problem, which is the same thing as disclosing its answer” (Maclaren, 2017, p. 10).

Through my reading of Kym Maclaren’s chapter, “The “entre-deux” of Emotions: Emotions as Institutions” (2017), I am compelled to reconsider my question of the place, or rather perhaps the space, of my subjectivity as protagonist in my narratives. I had imagined my subjectivity to have been already in existence, like a waiting thing, a complete thing prior to each moment described within my narratives, but I doubt my assumption—my subjectivity is not a spider in a web waiting for the vibration caused by the presence of another living thing, causing it to appear, to move, to somehow make the other living body into part of its environment and absorb it into itself—far from it. My subjectivity is constituted when the space between self and other exists, in the “entre-deux”, the third space, the invitational

'between'. In this 'between' our energies blend, reminding me of the way in which I came to glimpse the Yolngu of Arnhem Land, on a chance visit, and was honoured to be allowed to listen to explanations about the essence of Yolngu being, of the being of all things as *yothu yindi*, the child-mother relationship, one of reciprocity with other and the environment or country. In this relationship, fresh and salt water blend, a mixture of the energies of people, spirits, land. Though I came only to an emergent conception of the Dreaming and Songlines—beyond my comprehension of time and place—the use of water, the mixing of fresh and salt water as an expression of the indefinable intersubjectivity assists me to come to an understanding of the nature of Maclaren's use of the "entre-deux", the indefinable yet undisputable between-ness that enables our subjectivities to come into being because of this third space.

The subjects of my narratives were in states of total fear, inculcated with as much vibrancy and terror of drowning as the narrative of my own fear of drowning. I re-evoked in language their terror and mine and the relational complexity of knowing that without an experience of terror in the self, recognising terror in the other is impossible. I wake up with my fear of failing my students, of having no answers for their parents and carers because their fear is my fear. My sensibilities are sharpened by my own experiences, yet are not the same experiences of those of my students, but the knowledge of an emotion, disembodied from the original context, now re-embodied in a new context, gives me the capacity for compassion, for communion with the other. I am seeking acknowledgement, as they are seeking acknowledgement, which requires of me some comprehension, through hermeneutic and phenomenological understandings, of our emotional lives as they are brought to mutual scrutiny. "This also means that [they are and I am] transformed, that [they and I] come into possession, by virtue of this instituting act, of powers that were heretofore not yet [mine]" (Merleau-Ponty, in Maclaren, 2017, p.10). This is why I look to the body, the physical embodiment of fear in myself and my students. I look to the cellular nature of listening and memory, "in short, every human use of

the body is already primordial expression...the primary operation which...inaugurates an order and founds an institution” (Merleau-Ponty, in Maclaren, 2017, p. 11). When I narrate the manifestations of my students’ fears as interlocuters in dialogue with my own fears, I narrate their physical manifestations, seeking a physical solution, to sit with me, to feel the ground, to press my hands to their side, to chat about their eyebrows, to feel my body supported by the water. We then “realise meaning and order in the world” together (ibid.).

In the dénouement of the narratives and of this thesis itself, come understandings that

In order to open up the kind of space where [a young person] could experience the epiphany of overcoming [his] current emotional institution for a new one, [the teacher] need[s] to stop pressing for a new way of construing the situation and allow [him] to discover, to have instituted through [his] experience—in the *entre-deux*—a new living way of being in relation to others. (Maclaren, 2017, p. 32)

In the “entre-deux” the teacher too comes to a new way of being in relation to her student, she transforms, she sees her own fear, turns it over in her hands, screams in an unholy volume her own terror of drowning, before compassion allows her to stay present with the terrified young person in her midst.

As the narrator I acknowledge that my co-existence with my students is a greater source of being than that which I hold within myself, “we learn through each other new ways of being towards the world, and thus new ways of being ourselves” (Maclaren, 2017, p. 18). I am not the same person I was prior to each narrated event, but am changed too. If I wish for my students a particular outcome, if I push onto them a suggestion of who they

should become or how they should manifest, I put at risk the very space for the mutuality of self-understanding and healing.

My students and I have been in a dialectic of intersubjectivity, whereby my listening with loving attention invited a space, unbeknown to me in these times, that would not constitute a failure of my love for my students but instead become the love I have for my students (Maclaren, 2017, p. 21). My fear of failure is not proof of failure, nor is it a coming to understand that I cannot define a process of a pedagogy of being present. As Maclaren says, “removal of all doubt is a misguided aim: love is not of the order of knowledge or indubitability” for if it were it would “no longer be love” (p. 20).

In telling my narratives have I addressed Kearney’s concern about

...conditions of self-identity and self-transcendence [as] essential preconditions for a narrative ethics? Without the former, there is no one to keep his or her promises to the other; with the latter, there is no escape from the narcissistic subject. (Kearney, 1998, p. 246)

I can only be the “reader and writer of [my] own life” (ibid.) but in doing so I have become the reader and writer of a fragment of someone else’s life. My retelling inevitably lacks the texture of my momentary co-existence with the subjects of my narratives. Yet I was there,

I stand before you every bit as fictional as longitude and latitude...the Prime Meridian an act of imagination, runs over the Arctic sea ice, the sands of the Sahara. Do you doubt the sand because you doubt the line? For be assured, in the world I describe, space *was* taken. (Howley, 2016, p. 64)

I was not heroic, skilful, eloquent or organised, but busy, tired, worried, and drawn from the effort of being and of being present. I *was* there and I too, like all narrators, have committed sins of omission, distortion and perhaps

wishful thinking but I have at least committed to “interpret a text in such a way that what is implicitly in it is made explicit” (Gadamer, 1998, p. 102).

I have made explicit the ‘I’ that is often without language, eclipsed by events that muffle the ‘I’s’ cries. I have, albeit self-consciously, noted my own fear of failure—my own ‘I’s quivering uncertainty—reminded me of my own child ‘I’, when opening to the ‘I’ of the other. In listening to Bella, my listening tunes to the call to be physically present with Bella, to pin her body to the earth until she remembers she does not have to die to escape pain a little. In listening to Steven, my listening connects with his humanity, reminding him that he is fully human and that life is imaginable. In listening to Joseph, my listening allows him to remind me that mercy has many forms, that a hurt ‘I’ is still capable—even more capable—of compassion. In listening to Jessica, my listening sits in the tension between enforcing peace and cheering from the ringside that she will draw blood from the brow of her oppressors. In listening to Tyler, my listening knows that I am not enough, that I will never be enough and that I can only hope there are enough others who can and will listen to Tyler. In listening to Debbie, my listening knows that non-violence comes at a cost to ‘I’ and to ‘thou’. My ‘I’ will be awakened to its own experiences of pain and trauma, her ‘I’ will choose to leave me standing alone one morning, having chosen a future that has the familiarity of intense brutality.

Listening is returning to yourself and wondering who you are, where you came from and what you might become if you keep listening longer. Where did I come from? What is the lineage of my own hopes, terrors and desire to come into being with others? My conception of love has its roots, as do my fears, in the intergenerational sphere, within which I am seeking “the inherent historicity of [my] human existence, the ways in which there are advents or developments within [my] life which make for a ‘personal history’”...and continue my mission with Maclaren’s discipline, “How, precisely, should [I] understand this history, though? What accounts for its

unfolding? What is the relation of the newly instituted form of expression to what came before it?" (Maclaren, 2017, p. 26).

I am going back for her the way I remember her
standing on a rock in the rain, her head tilted back
rain pouring into her wide open mouth
running down her upturned face.

Annie Rogers, 1993



*The unconditional communion of listening
Staying with self and other*

CHAPTER 6 TO LEAN INTO FEAR

...and shudders at what terrifies him even more, that some enterprising recorder, a paragraph swallower who to rescue learning is always willing to do to others' writings ... will slice him into sections as ruthlessly as the man who, into the service of the science of punctuation, divided up his speech by counting the words and putting a full-stop after every fifty and a semicolon after every thirty-five. No, I prostrate myself before any systematic bag-searcher; this is not the System, it hasn't the slightest thing to do with the System.

Johannes de Silentio, (pseudonym used by Kierkegaard, 1985)

My learning has a companion, constant, loyal and ever present—fear, or rather the feeling of fear, or even more specifically and intimately, the fear of failure. My questions are, what if we were to look at an aspect of our fear and instead of turning away to find security, what if we were to not turn away and in fact to lean toward our fear? What might we learn about ourselves? What might we find in that space and moment of the feeling of

fear? What choices might we make as a result of our willingness to lean into discomfort, to lean into our fear?

As physical beings, as humans, we are pressed to escape the feeling of fear. By 'the feeling of fear', I mean any kind of apprehension, from the feeling of immense pain, to an annoyance so minor that it barely registers. On being confronted with a feeling of fear, our next move as a physical being will almost certainly be away from the anticipated calamity in order to move toward comfort and surety. As animals that makes complete sense but as humans might this be a limitation? As animals, this 'instinct' keeps us safe and attuned to our surroundings but as humans, this makes us vulnerable to seeking easy paths, patterned behaviours and habits, rather than urging us to investigate alternative responses.

Exploring the feelings of fear and fear of failure in my lived experience as a protagonist amongst many others in my thesis constitutes a narrative inquiry that discloses the ways fear manifests in the everydayness of our lives. When we catch ourselves in the moments of fear, we somehow transcend its lived experience. If we practise leaning into fear we find it becomes possible to discover new responses in ourselves. The narratives have taken us closer to fear so that we find it disclosed to us in its threat. Yet we rise and fear prompts us to know how to go on (Warnke, 2002).

In the narratives, we see what it takes for us not to turn away from fear. For Bella, Steven, Joseph, Jessica, Debbie and Tyler, facing the terror of their lived experience releases them in emancipatory ways, from the fear that turns them in and back from the social order of everyday. Bella returns from the brink of suicide to see life as opportunity. Steven comes to imagine a life without nightmare. Joseph's feeling for others and Jessica's rage become sources of restorative energy. Tyler learns to know that he will need someone to stand by him always, and Debbie comes to see that it is possible to live through catastrophe if she chooses freedom from violence.

For these six people the teacher stands by. The teacher does not allow them to turn away from their fear. She asks them to face it and find ways to tell it. The teacher has her own fear, her fear of failing each one, her fear of failing herself. The teacher learns to transcend her fear through phenomenological questioning and reflection and study and application of her understandings. She shows them ways and they transcend too and transform their fears whilst she transforms hers. She can say she has become a good teacher and she lives more companionably with her fear.

And at last I come to my way of not turning away from my fear, my fear of failure. Fear. It is not that I feel fear as an emotion. It is so old. It has become for me a way of being. It seems as cellular as I can describe myself as having my mother's long fingers, my father's squinty-smiley eyes and an inherited view of myself as being an 'at risk' student in a learning environment. Whilst I was visiting my parents on the weekend I read two notebook entries. My father had written, "I disliked school very much and was happy when I no longer had to go. I only had a primary school education but I regret that now very much". My mother, "I wanted to be a nurse but I never had the...". She hadn't completed the sentence, either because her Parkinson's had hijacked the pen and the necessary dopamine to fire her neurones or because she couldn't decide whether to write "brains" or "opportunity". I have heard her say many times that she was too stupid to continue with school. Besides, her mum had told her she was stupid and anyway, it was the depression, World War II and there were four younger siblings to raise in an isolated hamlet of three timber cutting families at the head of the Hellyer Gorge. I know her well in the pulsing of my heart, like looking at my fingernails and seeing there the replica of her finger nails, the ones I painted on the weekend for her, where I could feel the baby-bird-like flutter of Parkinson's as I held each one. I apprehend this certainty of a genetically conveyed lack of learning as if it were as physical as that. This is how it is when I bracket (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 49) my fear of failure. I ask myself where it comes from, how it comes to reside in me with such chronic persistence and increases with every academic achievement. I

may as well cut off my fingers to prevent them from looking more like mum's, I may as well prop my eyelids with toothpicks to make my smile look less like dad's, I may as well stop learning in order not to feel the fear of failure. As I grow intellectually, so does my fear, it is nurtured, fed, and it lumbers upon a wider ground, to graze, this bovinesque fear of failure.

This is the historicity (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 16, 110) of my own fear of failure, and its determined contemporaneous life. Like a DNA double-helix, they weave their strands in an ontological dance, and form a *dynamis* (Gadamer, 2013, p. 85) for my physical and meta-physical being. Where the phenomenological presence of this fear of failure slips from *noesis* to *noema* (Sokolowski, 2000/2008, p. 59), in the way that having tried to glance again at the spot of light when we close our eyes, in order to gain a transcendental perspective, *noesis*, it disappears due to our very act of looking and becomes once again part of the natural attitude, *noema*, and thence resides as part of the traumatised psyche, part of the cellular being, no longer something other than itself, indivisible. Instead of being the reader of fear, we are Gregor, once a person become a beetle in Franz Kafka's metamorphosis, from subject to object (Kafka, 1983).

I can identify my own contradiction, my very own paradox, and that is, because I can say these things—I am living a kind of “entre-deux” relationship with my fear of failure (Maclaren, 2017), I am observing my fear, while at the same time it exists in its manifold form (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 27), I look at my fear of failure in different ways but still it manifests as real and I have little agency because “reality is its own boss” though I take responsibility “to change this reality and not accommodate [myself] to it” (Freire, 2014, p. 35). Whilst I might have strived for long years to confront and transcend my fear, I see fear raw in my students. It manifests in the natural attitude of a young person oppressed by a system. She cannot surmount her feeling of fear. Her fear rages in physiological ways, in

restless, aggressive and hyperactive cells that respond to an alarm left on so long that nobody else can hear but it does none-the-less shrill incessantly.

There are many times in the day, if not most of the day, and even for days on end, when my everyday work enables me to function without awareness of fear of failure. Interacting competently across a full range of daily tasks with others who perceive that I am 'poised' in my dealings with a dead wallaby at 6.37am, a meeting at 8.30am, a technological problem solving at 11.15am, a ministerial document delivered at 2pm and so on. The natural attitude is pervasive and all is peaceful except the usual awareness that a commitment to yoga or the gym would not go astray, or even that more salads or vegetables might be in order. The natural attitude of fear, the *dance macabre*, is very occasionally re-stimulated during the day but it arises mostly pre-dawn. There is probably a neurological reason for this. I suspect that this is common to all animals, due to synapses firing just prior to full wakening but such rational considerations are not at play when it matters most.

It is 4.13am and the fears have assembled in my mind like guests who have arrived for a dinner party. They mill around the kitchen table of my mind, chattering whilst I toil against the sense of a clock nearby. Even though I have invited everyone here, it is only now that I feel alien to them. As individuals, they are dear friends but assembled like this, they no longer exist in my life as supports but suddenly as a pressing, demanding rabble, threatening mutiny if I do not perform well. And I believe I won't. By 5.28am this is a certainty, as solid a certainty as if it were a new and recurring event in my calendar. I will fail because I am not up to the task. The pre-dawn assails me with what only daylight might reveal to me. I hear only my abject lack of capability, my fundamental inability to produce the goods. My fears listen, I suspect only quietened if I put down my tools and surrender, saying, I am sorry I invited you all here but there is nothing to

feed you so please go home, I need to rest. And I nestle into that new quiet of having given up, where the bed is still warm.

To continue to explore fear in this visceral way would be forever to delve deeper through layers of my own existential fear of failure. To stay here would cage me in to self-pity and self-indulgence. It is transformation I am after. So, how to transform through phenomenology (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008), how to imbue the task of understanding that I have set myself with reflective potentiality? And this is why I return to acts of listening. I listen to what life is, to sets of stimulants that trigger smorgasbords of aversions and attractions, patterned behaviours built from the percussion of traumas. Thus, I lean into the fear of failure, listen and write.

As I write, I write my unfinishedness (Freire, 2014, p. 19). As I write, I do not free myself from responsibility but instead choose fulfilling freedom (Rancière, 2010) with a sense that being emancipated can release me to do the work of resisting oppression, to contribute to my own life and more fully to the lives of those around me. Through the historicity of my family, I disclose my inheritance and the ways oppression influences my unfinished story. Hermeneutic phenomenology inspires self-transformation and transformation in others, and rouses acts of social activism. In the reflexive potential of transformative phenomenology, being aware of fear of failure in ourselves, we can recognise it in others and act to contradict fearful patterns (Kauffman & New, 2004) by responding to them with compassionate listening.

To lean into our fear of failure, which begins as indignation and grows into self-awareness, to lean in closely and listen with compassion and without judgement so that we might be able to hear where the fear of failure resides is one way to become critically self-conscious and fully claim human dignity. With the force of listening, we might

reaffirm the political nature of education, to revive hope in the possibility of change to that order, and to emphasise education's commitment to processes leading to the radicalisation of democracy and the constitution of active citizenship in our societies. (Pontual, in prefix, Freire, 2014, xiv)

The unconditional communion of listening

If we have to act, we have to understand, in some better or worse way, who and where we are and who and where we want to be. From the beginning then, we are involved in the practical task of deciphering the story or stories of which we are a part so that we know how to go on. (Warnke, 2002, p.80)

As I write, to write myself into being, I *will* my fear to get up close. I admit its journey from generation to generation. I see that in giving me the gift of fear of failure, my parents also give me the gift of compassion, the capacity to listen to others and their fear. The sacredness of attentive listening works but alarms keep shrilling the poet Aimé Césaire's caution, "beware, even in thought, of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, a man who wails is not a dancing bear" (Césaire in Simon, 1992, introductory quotes). I remember though that I dance with others listening in the "entre-deux" and that endows us with the sense-making that makes fear real (Maclaren, 2017, pp. 6-7). Fear is in my body, not comfortable nor comforting, yet I cannot will it out but I can lean into it. It is like the notion of truth, we cannot always find it or confront it but as Sokolowski proposes we can find ways to lean into it (2008, p. 56). And Chödrön (2010), in the lineage of Tibetan Buddhist teachings of Chögyam Trungpa, too proposes we can find ways to lean into fear, in "learning to stay, we become very familiar with this place, and gradually, gradually, it loses its threat. Instead of scratching, we stay present. We're no longer invested in constantly trying to move away from insecurity" (Chödrön, 2010, p. 19).

Unanticipated disclosures, moments of revelation, arrive like stones thrown into a multiplicity of hermeneutic circles that spiral ever outwards into new vortices of thought. I had not anticipated the stones as my fear. I had not anticipated stones that ripple in the waters of my fear of failure and oppression, of matriarchal lines of finding voice, from five generations of women who visit me in this thesis, creating stunning hermeneutic vortices of understanding. Disclosed to me is a hermeneutic phenomenological journey imagined as a vortex street where disruptions to my lines of thinking set off ever renewing vortices which flow into and return to each other.

I learn to navigate my vortex street. I arrive at compassion, where empathy has lead me. My line of sight has been meandering, impossible to visualise beyond the next brutal hairpin corner that prevents me from seeing, frozen from fear of failure. Into a tight corner of noticing, my writing has careered around the badly angled camber of my own learning journey. And yet, having braked just prior to the corner and willed myself to accelerate at the apex, knowing that momentum would get me round more safely than over-thinking the bend, I steer ever onward, white-knuckled at the steering wheel, trusting that the road ahead at least exists, although not knowing where it might go next. During my phenomenological journey, I cannot tell where I am going until I arrive at moments of transcendent being.

As I drive once more along the old coast road near my home town, a road that, if I close my eyes I know its bends and straights, is still so familiar. I see the river that I paddled up one day with my friends years ago, I see the double storey brick home of a girl who died during my class in Grade 7, the shop where I bought my friends Alpine cigarettes when I was 13 because a lady and a man sat on a white horse in the advertisement, the site of the old hospital where I screamed for my parents when I was 8, and then the sign for Doctors Rocks. Remembering that my father had told me

that he and his brothers used to fossick for gold at Doctors Rocks, I could see in my imagination a 13-year-old version of my dad in shirt and short pants, out there on the rocky outcrop with his brothers 80 years ago. It is only now that the road becomes phenomenological. I am imagining the scene around me in the manner of the sides of Sokolowski's 'cube' (2000, p. 17). I cannot see these events but I can see their potentiality. I bracket this experience of viewing signposts and landmarks of the stories that I have lived or been told as part of our family mythology. Phenomenology is like this to me, whilst we are experiencing the phenomenon it is like travelling a familiar road with little conscious awareness but when we travel it phenomenologically I pay special attention to all the signposts, landmarks and past experiences.

With a phenomenological attitude (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 122), I describe a richer landscape of experiences than Siri's digitised voice can do with GPS directions. I have tested this theory. Siri says, "800 meters, turn left onto Old Bass Highway". My existential version is, "Ooh, there's the Seabrook Golf Club. Dad brought me out here one day to see if I had any talent for golf and I shot an awesome drive off the 17th just here by the road". Then Siri says, "1.6 kilometers the destination is on your left". My version is, "The seaweed still washes up here behind the rocks at high tide. We'd come out here with the trailer and haul hessian bags of seaweed into the trailer to take back to the garden as mulch". When I write phenomenologically I am writing as my fully-human self, mustering attention to the layers and complexities of the phenomenon I am studying.

In the moments of becoming deeply human (Cohen, 2015), of connecting energetically with others, listening is embodied in my being—it smells, sounds, feels, tastes and looks. Listening smells like a computer lab of old swivel chairs and heated plastic, it sounds like the clattering of keyboards and their spasmodic chatter. It feels like the warmth of a suicidal girl's ribcage under my palms as I press her body gently to the warm grass.

Listening is sometimes the white caps of adrenalin and fingertips quite cool in mine, tasting slightly stale of old coffee. It is musky carpet in an impoverished classroom, a boy's red fringe, the blue of a school jumper and the small smile of a young scared boy who sees all is not entirely lost. In the "entre-deux", listening is unconditional belief, one in the goodness of the other.

To obey the principle of unconditionality is to suspend expectations that one might have for someone or something, to surrender unconditionally to another's vulnerabilities as well as to your own. To obey is to listen with loving attention that does not have its purpose grounded in a desired outcome but instead enables us to return our intersubjective being to the agency which opens possibilities for our emancipated self. Such a principle of unconditionality in which each person can bathe makes 'unconditional communion' possible. In unconditional communion change may or may not occur, it is just that our humanity recognised by one another might feel better.

Paul Bloom, in his treatise regarding empathy and compassion, refers to communion, but with qualification, communion is more likely to lead to emancipatory possibilities for the person who is suffering—"unmitigated communion ends up relating more to empathy or, more precisely, *empathetic distress*—suffering at the suffering of others" (Bloom, 2017, p. 136). The unconditionality of our communion, our being energetically present and listening with loving attention, is not for the purpose of self-harm to us as listener, nor towards attempting to comprehend the kernel of the trauma leading to pain and suffering of the other. Rather, the goal of listening with "loving kindness...is to feel positive and warm thoughts towards [others]...mov[ing] quickly from feeling the distress of others to acting with compassion to alleviate it" (pp. 137-141).

In Southern African philosophical thinking about *Ubuntu*, there is resonance with this idea of unconditional communion, the preconditions for which must exist for us to ‘become what you are’. Michael Onyebuchi Eze, describes the essence of *Ubuntu*, in consonance with my own belief in our necessary relationship to human kindness, by revealing how,

‘A person is a person through other people’, strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance. (Onyebuchi Eze, 2017, para 2)

Damon Young, in his book, *Philosophy in the Garden*, refers Nietzsche’s existentialist challenge to us, using the words of the Greek poet Pindar, “Become what you are” (2012, p. 80). Unconditional communion is a space where we might ‘become what we are’. The unconditionality, the energetic connectivity of human, where one nurtures the other through the act of being present with loving attentiveness has what Darder (2002), Simon (1992) and Donaldo Macedo (1985) might recognise in the work of Freire, as being not only social activism against oppression but the valuable role that the maternal way of listening might bring to emancipatory work. Trauma is, after all, the manifestation of forms of oppression, and the possibilities for healing from trauma reside in our capacity to recognise our own trauma and hence recognise our own role as having been oppressed and become an oppressor, so that we might recognise when the other is

being oppressed. Thus we curtail the chances of their loving essence becoming oppressive.

I asked my friend who is a principal in another school, “Do we act in the role of mother when we listen to our students?” She looked at me, fixed me with a wide-eyed look and assertive drawing up of her body and replied with a certainty that surprised me, “Our most damaged kids are searching and searching and we try to be present for that. They look to us to give to them what they are missing. We are mothers for them, hearing the voice of the child. Hearing the voice of the screaming child, “See me here, see my face””. This response provided from a most emphatic heart has led me to see what had been to me unforeseen in my inquiry, that we, as teachers, play the role of the mother in our listening, bringing the unconditional communion, the sacredness of loving attention, that energetically tells their body you are safe here. The screaming child demands the embodiment of a maternal response. Darder pays homage to the work of Freire as being grounded not only in the minds of the oppressed but also in the bodies of the oppressed,

for our hearts somehow continue to embrace one another, rooted in the solidarity of our shared political dream for justice. Moreover, beyond our words and physical interactions, there seems to exist a living historical connection among us—one that should help us engage suffering and injustice as a human phenomenon. (Darder, 2002, p. 256)

In my closing passages lies my last narrative. I swim into the historical vortices of my lived experience, my family lineage of tradition, belonging to land, beliefs, values, prejudices and handed-down understandings about living (Gadamer, 2013). My voice that I thought drowned rises to the surface of unforeseen understandings and I am full of gratitude for knowing who I have become and am becoming. I am because they are.

Staying with self and other

In raising my voice, I find the mothers who went before me. They rise now into the final vortex of my thesis, the female vortex, the pebble of my mother's existence, rippling in to mine and to my daughter's. Both teach me fear and compassion. Both show me that when other mothers have gone missing, we must fill in for them. We must be there for vulnerable others, no matter what their manifestation of fear. I am writing myself into being, and through the mythopoetic endeavour I now return to learn who my mother is, so that I will not forget. I believe that my historicity, the origins of my cellular being, lead me towards what life is teaching me—that listening with loving attention creates possibilities for emancipating myself and others, how my capacity for listening resides in the being of my mother. I go now to find her, to find the ways in which her psychic feminine being has illuminated the world for me.

She arrived, the blossoming of a cream and pink living thing of complex beauty, from a liquid world of tropical warmth, hence 'Coral'. Her first cries soft, as eyes blinked open in the harsh light of Narrandera November heat. The world at peace, the Melbourne Cup running again this year as a victory against the Great War, and in defiance of the Depression bets are laid amongst the smell of sweat and stale beer. Men's voices rise and fall between the front bar on Narrandera's Main Street and the dole office—both competing for business provided from post-war trauma and unemployment, often times one providing fuel for the other as dole payments are exchanged for a betting ticket and a nerve-settling 10 ounce—'Just one and then home. Just this one and home.'

Coral, the first-born and so now called Bub, is suddenly the last-born, as uncles become brothers, grandparents become parents. Mother and father desperate for financial survival travel south to Tasmania's *Eucalyptus regnans*. Their trip by steamer across Bass Strait is childless and they land in Burnie

with suitcases borrowed from Narrandera neighbours who had travelled from Wales. Uncle Durrām peers through the clear morning from the steamer deck and notes the blue haze of heavily wooded bush beyond the port. The town skirts a steep plateau of bush and timber cutting. His brother Harold, Coral's father, now stands alongside and says they'll be able to buy equipment, crosscut saws and such, in town. They'll find a lift through the Hellyer Gorge and into the bush for work. Dooley, Bub's mother, is still feeling ill. The days on the steamer not having lessened the rising relentless tides of seasickness, another baby growing in the warm ocean.

The hamlet of Parawee struggles into being at the head of the gorge. A cluster of timber huts become cottages with corrugated iron roofs and water tanks. A windbreak of *Macra carpa* makes its way, at first level with the paling fence, and now begins to touch branch tip to branch tip, rising above the roof level. Three more children are born, this time in the cold of Tasmania's West Coast. Harold brings home the blooms of a white *Warratab* and the Cup is run despite the threat of a new and uglier war, one that has vengeance, hatred and greed as its provocateur. Coral is sent for from Narrandera. Her cries, no longer soft as she wails at the loss of the uncles she sees as brothers and Gran who has cuddled her into being. Her shoes raising dust at the sense of a trip to parents she no longer remembers and a place so far away from Narrandera that it is impossible to imagine it being home or even family. Her baby uncle, younger than she is, screams loudest at the departure of his big sister niece, Bubby.

War breaks out across Europe and Asia, black cockatoos come in from the bush and settle loudly into the *Macra carpas* ahead of rain. Coral, in charge of younger brothers and sisters helps to make tea for Durrām in his caravan, propped on stumps of Eucalyptus, a pound of rationed tea is stirred enthusiastically by the children through cold water poured from the water tank into Uncle Dutt's billy. Looking down at his three oldest nieces

and nephew from his caravan door he hurries them inside his tiny space before Dooley sees that the children have wasted precious rations in their mistake. Dooley'll be tough on them, too tough, Durram reckons. He's brought them a swing from Smithton to play on, loaded onto the Bedford after a delivery of timber to Clements Timber. The girth of the tree trunk for milling had been so huge that having had the Clydesdales drag it onto the tray with chains, the truck had tipped up, thrusting its radiator grill upwards to point at the tops of the *Macra carpas* now forming a dense mass behind the huddle of cottages.

Fifty years later and the lounge of Nan and Pop's place in Smithton is dark, and the smell of stale beer and cigarette smoke is exotic to me even if it does make me feel a little nauseous. The glass bird on the shelf tips forwards and backwards, rhythmically drinking coloured water. Us kids have just come back inside after a considerable exile in the backyard with a grumpy sulphur-crested cockatoo in a cage. There's only so many times you can get a cockatoo to repeat, "Hello, Cocky" before we are all bored and beginning to think of games that will inevitably lead to an expertly and painfully delivered smacking that will temporarily numb our buttocks. Pop shows us his arm, frighteningly purple and black with a long puckered drunk line of stitches that zig and zag from his wrist to his elbow. A fall whilst cleaning the inside of one of the tall stacks above the timber yard has gashed his arm into relative uselessness and left him without a job or workers compensation. I would always see the stacks first and feel a bit dizzy and ill from so much damage and smoke inside humans and the bush. Dad is tense, he hates these visits—my aunts are loud and bossy—adding to his eagerness to hit the road back to Burnie in the Falcon 500 stationwagon with four kids sitting along the back seat or piled into the back with pillows to fall asleep on just outside of Rocky Cape. Mum will snap impatiently at Dad and he will say, "Come on, Florence", a cheeky reference to her grandmother Florence who raised her. Dad's teasing of mum's bad mood is a reference to Great-grandmother Florence's fierce manner to all except Bub, and mum's glare at dad is mum protecting sacred ground—the

grandmother who raised her. We are wearing no seatbelts, thank goodness because we fight more in seat belts and mum can reach all four of us with one swipe from her front passenger seat. It's safer without seatbelts in our car.

More recently, after two weeks in Perth, temporarily taking over from my brother and sister as a support to dad, I still feel the impression of mum's hands on my shoulders as I traverse the airport aisles of the Perth to Melbourne Qantas flight. Mum's spine is trapped by canal stenosis. Her pain is extreme and the epidural has failed.

Mum does not know day from night but her compromised and addled brain, dulled by morphine, betrayed by Parkinson's and propped by medicated doses of dopamine is on autopilot. The wars, the Great Depression, hard physical work, tough upbringing, innate resilience and undeniable bent to caring for others make her brain victorious despite all. She is determined to get up during the night to do this or that, go to the toilet and no amount of begging by myself or dad stops her determination to keep the bed clean or the house in order. My 92-year-old father sobs as my mother kneels by the bed in the middle of the night, in what looks like prayer, her hands clasped, her forehead resting on the mattress as we wait for her cocktail of painkillers to help us ease her into bed. Every 90 minutes this is what my father does. After a few days I am utterly emotionally and physically exhausted and over-whelmed the routine.

My brothers and sister navigate the fraught territory of high-care for mum. Our father, so frightened of not living beside my mother, comes with us to the care facility and asks to be admitted in a room nearby. The facility convinces him that he is too strong to live amongst a population who largely have dementia. In his heart this is as bad as being pulled apart. Loud kisses that he gives mum each night as he says goodnight are his plea to the

court of ageing—not sleeping with her is as good as a death sentence for him.

My daughter calls me to tell me she is having a baby. I already knew, as mothers know and now, in the midst of this, I am to become a grandmother. My mother, her mother, her mother's mother, I remember them from Narrandera to Parawee, Smithton, Burnie, Perth. Coral, my mother, and now great-grandmother to my grandchild. I sob. My flight leaves in a couple of hours and the sheer pain of love of generations of women completely and utterly surrounds me. My mum puts her hands on my shoulders. She has crept up on me in the quietness of slippers and little black wheels of her walker. Her Parkinson's-softened voice tells me that she will be okay and not to worry. My heart is breaking with love for my daughter, my mother, my sister.

As I place my bag on the seat closest the aisle, the woman in the window seat stands for no apparent reason since I do not need to push past her. I look at her face and she holds out her hand to shake mine and says, "Hello, I'm Coral". I draw my hands over my face, the sobs break and I say, "I've just left my mother in Perth, her name is Coral". She says, "I've just left my daughters in Perth. I guess we need each other". We hold hands for the next four hours. She tells me about her daughters and I tell her about my mother. Just before Melbourne, I ask her surname and she says "Florence. Coral Jane Florence" and I know in that moment that as much as our culture pushes against such notions, I get to know that women and the way they love transcends all that is physical and knowable. My middle name is Jane, my mother's Coral, my great-grandmother's Florence, and here they sit beside me, embodied in a stranger who is holding my hand.

As I look at my fingers, and see mum's fingers, as I peer at this screen through my father's eyes I consider once again, not only the fear of failure

but also its intergenerational encoding. More recently I wonder at the ‘social activist’ part of me, the part that engages in unconditional communion with my students, my colleagues and the mothers with PTSD. And then I see that these traits too come from the same place as the fear of failure. Social activism, particularly in representing one’s self, is an act of leaning into fear.

In flashback, I see my mother, all 5 feet of her, in her flossy hair, behind the counter of the Rivoli take-away shop in Cattley Street, Burnie, in her flat shoes and light pink, zip-up corner shop uniform. She is tired. Mum and dad have put a mattress on the floor of the storeroom out the back so they can take turns in catching some sleep during the quiet periods of the day and night. Kneeling on the lino floor in my school uniform, I restock the drinks fridge at the front of the shop from a tray of coke cans, pulling the cold ones to the front and pushing the others to cool at the back. Motorbikes pull up out the front of the shop, Harleys in a row at the curb. The entrance bell of the door might have tinkled at the opening of the shop door but it’s muffled under the noise of five large men, in heavy boots, creaking leather and deep voices. They stand back, owning the space in front of the bain-marie, as they peruse the contents as well as the menu board overhead. I pretend to continue to stack the fridge so that I can keep an eye on them, as my mum has her back to them behind the counter, her hard-working shoulders moving as she dips fresh fish into a new batch of batter. The leader of the pack, steps up to the folding section of the serving bench and my mum who instinctively monitors the readiness of people to order, turns around.

She is a tiny 50-year-old woman, head still down, wiping her hands on the front pinny section of her dress, opposite a bearded, leather clad, unsmiling, giant of a man. And then she does something that changes my whole understanding of the world and the people within it. She looks up at the man, smiles, and says, “What would you like, love?” Then he smiles back, softened and returned to himself. I recognise this now. Her belief in

his goodness is unequivocal and absolute and it is not naivety or any such cynical interpretation of her actions but her inherent belief that all humans are good. I recall now, this epiphany, that this is how I want to be in the world and that I already was but did not know it until I could see it. Her acts, her smile and candid question is unconditional communion. Do not turn away, she says, but stay.



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