

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**A Tectonics of Opportunity**

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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 #. SMEC – 55- 13

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## Hymn

Care is the cure.  
It is slow,  
It is raw,  
It is pure.

It is simple and bare.  
It is real,  
It is bold,  
It is there.

Nothing is newer  
Or older,  
Or wiser,  
Or truer.  
Care is the cure.

(Leunig, 2017)

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# Abstract

Through this thesis I set out to investigate the forces, processes and themes presenting in understandings of opportunity as experienced through the complex strata of young peoples' lives, where disengagement from formal learning arrangements creates significant displacement against a range of societal norms. The immediate and experienced interplay of forces unleashing or impeding opportunity in the lives of young people (aged 15-17) at the interface between adolescence and adulthood, is at the core of my work, while generating a deepening and evolving study of the nature of social institutions and, indeed, the bonds of the individual and the collective in a changing society.

The tools of my philosophical life harness the strength and rigour of narrative, phenomenology, and writing, within an embodied hermeneutic inquiry. I am guided in this work by an eminent array of those past and present including van Manen, Sokolowski and Gadamer who lead me to develop a deeper understanding of self and hence those who share the ground of my work. My writing purposefully, morally and ethically, synthesises real and reconstructed characters to explore the forces and intensities at work in the interplay of opportunity, disengagement and disenchantment.

While developing this work and processing a time of professional confusion, I was drawn to the life of Rousseau, his work, ideas and writing. Through a need to understand his deep sense of difference I explore experiences of how a society may develop mechanisms for inclusion. In being drawn together, I take time to be in dialogue with the solitary walker carrying his thoughts with me. Rousseau brings, in his writing, an elegant, challenging and engaging mind to my questions and writing of the research narratives that inspire my thesis.

This thesis has significance within a local landscape as it attends to the shifting ground of politics and policy within the Tasmanian arena which is at the heart of the development of potentials and opportunity for a small island population. Through the telling of these stories and experiences, we are able to easily identify with a global analysis of meaningful moments in education. I discuss Tasmania: A State of Learning as a policy document which is the bedrock of my personal experiences across five years in the role of a Youth Learning Officer, working to improve post year ten learning options for young people. The word "opportunity" is a regular player in society as indeed it is in the world of government and policy documents that binds all of us. I explore understandings of

this notion, dilemmas arising and what that may mean for young people navigating at the fault lines of education, work and beyond.

The work engages an underlying tectonic in honour of the inhabitants of this small island and the tortured physicality which brought it into being and place and guides its momentum. While quiet now, Tasmania's tectonics echo in a population's trial between the economic, political, public and private to achieve a flourishing and inclusive landscape.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Where does an inquiry begin? There are many catalysts which invite a questioning and if one is attuned to one's work and profession as one of life's loves, then the questioning is endless as I believe it should be. I am not alone in this believing and I invite many questioning minds to bring depth to this endeavour. This thesis then began equally the moment I began to question my experience of the world and the experience of others and continued to build relevance across a vast array of experiences and career choices making up this life lived thus far. More recently this thesis began, in unity with an inquiring mind as pen connected with paper and my signature denoted acceptance of a position within the Department of Education, Guaranteeing Futures 2004. One key moment of disruption in the multiple facades of life has the power to unleash an explosion of endless cascades around the lives interconnected.

The focus of my investigation in this thesis is to explore understandings and interpretations of the idea of "opportunity", as expressed through educational environments focusing on young adults emerging into adulthood. My research work expresses, through lenses of disadvantage and disenchantment, the tensions between engagement and disengagement in life, work and education where and when "opportunity creation" is experienced, or not, through the experiences of young individuals and family groupings. Opportunity creation, in my research work, is conceived within political, philosophical and historical aspirations for a just society that might enable the youth of our common human community to sustain and enrich their living and being in the world with one another.

My work began by exploring learning, work and life options and ways of creating and pursuing opportunity as it manifests in the daily lives and narratives of Year 10

students within, on the borders and out of, a state education system. The site for this research is my home state of Tasmania, Australia. The stories I found reveal sometimes poorly exposed narratives of priorities, contradictions, impulses and oppositions that were creating unstable environments for individual students and indicating the reasons and ways the students were detaching themselves from educational events. Such narratives take place within contexts of ongoing national and state-based debate, research and concern about the futures of young people as they relate to education. A 2004 study from the Australian University of Melbourne team, Stephen Lamb, Anne Walstab, Richard Tease, Margaret Vickers and Russ Rumberger, *Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia*, had amply reflected the less than ideal narrative for the Australian educational environment. (2004). Later, David Hodgson drew on the work of Bruce Smyth noting, “Australia has one of the worst current records of retention at the post-compulsory level of any OECD country” (in Hodgson, 2007, pp. 177-178). A similar team of researchers from the University of Melbourne, as previously mentioned, later led research into retention strategies and outcomes on behalf of the Tasmanian government, with a particular focus on the work being carried out through the Tasmania A State of Learning, A Strategy for Post-Year 10 Education and Training, and, Guaranteeing Futures. The early 2000’s for Australia and Tasmania was a time of mounting pressure. It was undesirable for Australia to be seen as a lower order player in the education stakes on the global scale. Tasmania, often used as a test site for Australian government departmental changes, was quietly and carefully observed as educational change gained momentum.

“Meaningful learning” and “retention” of students into further education are imperatives that have been highlighted in Tasmania, evolving over many years, and upheld by legislation. The Guaranteeing Futures Bill, 2005, was enacted to ensure young people were enrolled in formal education until 17-years-of-age or had achieved a Certificate 3 qualification. The strategy aimed to remove early leaving trigger points and secure a more solid transition from learning to work or further education, enhancing long term employment prospects. This legislation was underpinned in 2009 by a restructured post-Year 10 curriculum, delivered through the revisioning of the Year 11 and Year 12 college system, into the *Tasmanian Academy* for students studying pre-tertiary level subjects (required for university entry) and a *Polytechnic* providing streamlined access to a wide range of learning options including accredited certificate level yearlong programs. In a cyclical turn triggered by a change of government and leadership, the pain of already massive educational restructure was rescinded with the stroke of a pen and the newly embedded

and functioning environment sequentially and systematically devolved slowly across a span of three to four years whilst awaiting yet another reconceptualised structure. The pain of institutional change is massive and requires wise and carefully managed implementation. Once achieved, reconceptualised systems require time to soften, ease and breathe. The policy and procedures are enacted through strong governance and professional teams and individuals with vision to shape the transition. A public, desperately in need of the best an education system could provide, in the face of plummeting economic trends, was surely not expecting to experience the whiplash effect of a second wave of change and reversion in the short space of five years.

Concurrently, in Tasmania, and indeed Australia wide, data gathered from the homes of Australians, and published in the Australian Bureau of Statistics Report, 2006, bears witness to the fact that one in two Australians are not able to show they have skills that would qualify them as functionally literate (ALLS, 2006). For many, this sounds almost impossible for a state in an advanced western country such as Australia. This statistic helps to remind us that literacy competency is not as widespread a commodity as we might have historically presumed. The ability to read a bedtime story to one's child, to help with school homework or to read the news of the day, are skills that still in 2018, escape many in our communities. Tasmania and Australia are not alone in the challenge to attain higher levels of competency in literacy, numeracy and digital technologies. The Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan, enacted in 2009, clearly demonstrated a financial and educational commitment to all Tasmanians requiring and seeking the skills to be confident and productive in everyday life sharing in all that the community has to offer.

In more recent times the headlines tell us “Tasmanians cannot blame social disadvantage or lack of government spending for lagging behind on key social and economic indicators” (Bolger, 2015). In the annual *Tasmania Report* of 2017, Chair of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Susan Parr, delivered striking but not uncommon observations, based on the recent data.

Tasmanians are the unhealthiest, oldest, worst educated, most under-employed and most dependent on Government benefits in Australia. This is not sustainable and if it continues will condemn a large number of Tasmanians to unproductive lives with compromised opportunities for employment, personal fulfilment and community engagement. The flow on effects mean increasing health costs, more people who feel alienated from society, and who in turn, have no stake in developing communities. (Eslake, 2017, p. 3)

Parr went on to reference the critical importance of good health, access to education and institutions that are responsive to community need and are valued by its citizens. The picture is a grim reality for those who have been born, grown up, worked and stayed on an island of some 500,000 people. Kym Goodes, CEO Tasmanian Council of Social Service, later in the report believes that Tasmanians are exercising their disappointment at the polls and demonstrating a commitment to change with the potential for an enriched community for all Tasmanians. The numerous platforms slip and slide with a high level of fluidity.

Exploring ideas related to opportunity creation over time in this field of study has led my thinking toward a number of commentators and philosophers. Somewhat unexpectedly, I have been drawn to the life and writing of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A careful reading of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* has enlightened the progress of my work, enabling me to revisit and reflect upon the original task I set myself and question the foundations of my thinking at the time. Rousseau, through the narrative of his *Confessions*, presents both a naiveté and a confounding personality of contradictions, raising different worlds of questioning to intertwine with my narratives of young learners. Rousseau as a learner of life provides insight to old and new questions for both the individual and the institutional development of education. Rousseau "loved reading and study..." but questioned "... all the sorry trash which is included under the name of education," through a clear recognition of [his] growing personal style and "[his] dislike for restraint..." (1782/1789/1996, p. 11). Observing that "Everything is in constant flux on this earth" (1782/2004, p. 88). Rousseau pursued a life dedicated to searching for balance between the natural state of the individual and the demands of a social entity.

Though Rousseau, the man, is variously interpreted as a restless genius, as in the work of Leo Damrosch (2005, p. 269), paranoid and singularly difficult, and at times of a destructive personality with the ability to inflame friends, acquaintances, his followers and the politics of the day, as noted variously in the work of Nicholas Dent, Timothy O'Hagan, Michael Simpson, Kenneth Wain and Robert Wokler (Dent, 2005; O'Hagan, 2003; Simpson, 2007; Wain, 2011; Wokler, 2001), his thinking and writing raises within me questions that challenge the development of the narratives I have been writing.

The notion of a social contract has influenced the development of political and civilian thought pre- and post-Rousseau, from the writings of Augustus in the 13<sup>th</sup> century through to philosophers in our more recent histories such as John Locke, David Hume and John Rawls. Rousseau's *The Social Contract* invokes a government to build resilient

foundations that enable a balancing of opportunities or pressures for all its citizens' preservation.

...a state if it is to have strength must give itself some solid foundation, so that it can resist the shocks that it is bound to experience and sustain the exertions that it must make to preserve itself; for all peoples generate a kind of centrifugal force, by which they brush continuously against one another, and they all attempt to expand at the expense of their neighbour...thus the weak are always in danger of being swallowed up, and indeed no people can well preserve itself except by achieving a kind of equilibrium with all the others which makes the pressure everywhere the same for all. (1762, p. 53)

How a society develops mechanisms for inclusion is of primary concern in the work of Rousseau as well as within his life's experiences. He brings in his writing an elegant, challenging and engaging mind into counterpoint with my questions, writing and rewriting of the research narratives that inspire my thesis.

Whilst developing this thesis, a major career change realigned my research perspectives. Over time this change ignited different energies and perspectives with which to interpret ideas such as social distancing, engagement and the power structures of social institutions which create different and personal lived experiences. I moved from a position within the Tasmanian Department of Education, from the Guaranteeing Futures program to management level responsibilities within LINC Tasmania (renamed Libraries Tasmania, 2018). Both agencies are set up to "deliver" departmental goals. One is a state-wide program realising goals through a case management style structure, the other a state-wide networked division with a long and revered history of information and library services. This change in career position was a major event for me causing me to deeply consider the development of the institution as a social entity and a force. It propelled me into a different way of thinking through my original research objectives. I began to question deeply the creation and evolution of governance and the different paths a collective group traverses to achieve a collective end. Through the realignment of personal, career and study imperatives I came to see the possibilities of the work of Rousseau for reframing my original intent, my social imperative and my energy.

Such personal shift and realignment have revealed to me different ways to think, and different directions for perceiving meaningfulness in what I aspire to be, believe and do. Differently, opportunities for developing management skill sets, policy analysis and project management now mobilise and harness my lifetime of experiences in adult

learning, literacy, community engagement, and project management. They deepen my clarity about the personal limitations that I believe previously existed for me. They release newly available potentials. In writing the stories of the otherwise engaged, new lines of questioning emerge. Why the notion of institution? Whom does it influence and through which structural forces? What can we as citizens of this life expect of it? What role can we hope to take in its existence or, when required, its transformation?

In this writing I have called into near view, several works by Rousseau, including *The Social Contract*, *Émile or On Education*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, as well as *The Confessions* and *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. These texts provide springboards for interpretively rewriting narratives of youth, engagement and disengagement, within current social institutional frameworks. They refresh and stimulate my rendering of an individual's quest to find a rightful place amongst his or her collective, or community, as indeed Rousseau himself sought to achieve.

Education has long been cast as a substantial means by which one's opportunities and chances are crafted and structured. John Dewey believed that "...the individual gradually comes to share in the moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together. He becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilisation" (Dewey, 1897/2018, p. 1). Rousseau, whilst seeking to reconcile the natural from the constructed, observed in the world around him, the folly and resultant damage inherent in the thinking of man. To imagine that "... man must be trained like a school horse" ran contrary to his learnings from the world of nature demonstrating how "man must be fashioned in keeping with his fancy like a tree in his garden."

Were he not to do this ... everything would go even worse ... Prejudices, authority, necessity, example, all the social institutions in which we find ourselves submerged would stifle nature in him and put nothing in its place. (1762/1979, p. 37)

Rousseau sought to "...know himself (Cranston, 1972, p. 291)"; and in doing so he sought to understand the forces between nature and civilisation, and thus invited himself into this personal journey—the one of all inquiring minds, to investigate differences displayed by those who disengage and seek to pursue a path of otherwise selection.

Rousseau lived both in the limelight and in self-imposed solitariness; he was both celebrated and denounced. The shifting fortunes of Rousseau's life provide a keystone for the objectives of this thesis. Rousseau, in examining the place of the philosopher in the development of ideas and truth, defends his claims that I hope resonate in my thesis. "The essential thing is to think differently from others..." (1762/1979, p. 269). And so

what becomes of those who hear the different drum (Thoreau, 1854/2014, p. 245), who march out of step, wildly and in their own time? I believe Rousseau shares a place with the otherwise engaged.

Provision of meaningful learning frameworks for all, but specifically the disadvantaged, marginalised and disengaged learner, continues to challenge both secondary and post-year 10 education delivery (Hodgson, 2007; Zyngier, 2004; Biesta, 2006). Transition through the Year 10 / Post Year 10 strata has historically marked a point of loss and extinction of formal learning possibilities. In the spaces between the discourse of economy and policy, disengaged learners can succumb to the forces of a compliance-based solution to under-involvement and unemployment.

The retention of young people in post-secondary education and their participation in further learning opportunities remains a burning question for the Tasmanian educational system. Viewing the landscape from a different vantage point illuminates a deeper level of questioning into the structural frameworks, potentialities and “contracts” between the individual and the institution, and the opportunity mechanisms for the self as a member of a collective. A challenge for each of us as members of a society is to nurture the self and the other within a creative, just and sustaining collective. The idea was shared through time by a number of Rousseau’s contemporaries. Alan White posed the question *Is It Time to Rewrite the Social Contract?* (2007, p. 2). In recalling the thoughts of 18<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher Edmund Burke, White brought to our attention the need for longevity when considering partnerships and contracts, and the cross-generational impacts that must be considered in any balance of accounts.

[Society] is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. (Burke, 1790/2017, p. 54)

Burke reminds us in timely fashion that our achievements will not be realized in the space of one generation and certainly not in the space of a few years as is expected in current political cycles. We have grown impatient. Rousseau recognised the value of developing deep understandings through observation and reflection when in the *Émile* he expressed that, “We must study him to know ourselves...,”(1762/1979, p. 29). In the interplay of the relationship between teacher/mentor and student, Rousseau explored the art of the

transformative self(ves) which was to influence thinking disciplines far beyond his life years.

Through a complex intellectual connection of life works, Rousseau shows us the view of the solitary thinker seeking an understanding of self, who then looks outward “... to scrutinise the act by which people become a people for that act ...is the real foundation of society (Rousseau, 2004, p 13).” This art of revelation through a multifaceted lens, focusing on the creation of self(ves), at other times on experiences in specific institutional landscapes and their relationship with community, learning, language and skills, frames and shapes the foundation of my thesis. I am guided by the precepts in Rousseau’s writings through my exploration of the potentiality of social institutions to empower the creation of contracts of individual with individual, collective with collective and individual with collective. Whilst living and working toward a horizon of hope for evolving and insightful futures in society, I am vigilant, conscious of the positioning of the tectonic plates where political, legal and social justice imperatives stress and strain amongst contested spaces. In *The Social Contract Revisited: The Modern Welfare State* Amir Paz-Fuchs warned that,

...the implementation of the social contract must take into account the change in the characteristics of the relevant institutions and the dynamic inter-relationships between citizens and the institutions. (2011, p. 11)

Within Tasmanian educational institutions, the process of creation, change and restitution provides an ideal and shifting plane to background and question what possibilities there might be for reviewing Rousseau’s notion of “the social contract”.

At the outset, the primary objective of this thesis was to inquire into the phenomenon of opportunity formation, recognition of it, engagement in it and development of it. Rousseau as an inquiring self comes to the dialogue of my inquiry and calls from deep within, different understandings of opportunity through disclosure of himself, and his collection of life writings. Rousseau as a writer and inquirer of life experiences creates in this work an interrogative stratum, within which I might continue to explore notions and realities about engaging or disengaging in learning, and in seeking and applying knowledge in lifeworlds, whilst balancing personal and collective narratives. The events of the period of educational history (2004-2009) in Tasmania, provides a deeply disrupted landscape upon which to explore ways that social institutions influence learning frameworks, through disruption or construction. The work maintains a watchful

eye on the contested spaces where individuals and collectives compete for supremacy as social contracts evolve and change within complex circumstances.

In the events and findings of the work there are occasions which serve to converse with the self and the other whilst generating other selves and potentialities. I question the counterpoints of opportunity and disenchantment that youth and learners meet in educational environments and view the life world of youth and learners through a multiply focussed lens, visioning through the lens of advocates, institutional leaders and makers of policy. This work, which is so deeply a part of my ethics and integrity, serves to honour young people at the edges of learning institutions, and by exploring those complex life worlds, further illuminate the idea of “engaging with the otherwise engaged”.

## A Matter of Ethics

I have deliberated carefully and thoughtfully, through what I knew would be an issue of client confidentiality particularly as it relates to minors, from the very beginning of this academic journey. Students within a small population base are easily identified, even after the application of deidentification strategies, through the nature of life circumstances, life history in the educational framework, plus family and cultural markers which are widely known within the world of education practitioners.

Attending to these concerns I chose to employ the writerly device of reconstructed characters. This method of storytelling and narrative allows the author to deliver narratives of young people, their families, friends, schools and unfolding life experiences through the emerging themes of the work, while layering circumstances, situations, characterisations, issues and more to bring to life events played out across a specific educational timespan through a complex, multifaceted lens. Greater detail is discussed in Chapter 2 of the work to assist the reader in their interpretation of the characterisations. While writing I strive to “always remember that I am not teaching my sentiment; I am revealing it” (Rousseau, 1979, p. 277).

As a professional employee of a state government department, my actions are governed by the *State Services Act 2000* (Government, 2018b), the conditions of which are paramount in my duty as an employee and in the work I undertake as part of this contribution to postgraduate study.

## Heuristic Devices

The voices and expressions of young people are uppermost in my thoughts and priorities throughout the development of this thesis. In equal though different company are the support networks which take the shape and voices of parents and carers and all other support networks that the young call on at various points in their personal travels to achieve the sequential steps through education and into adult life. There are also voices of government, policy makers and sharings from our histories. I have chosen a method to assist the reader in voiced sections of the thesis and so will explain this method at the outset. I trust this achieves continuity and flow of dialogue for the reader, rather than breaking into these sections with explanations at intervals through the text. Thus conversations between myself and students are right aligned on the page. My voice appears in the common text of this work, student voices appear in italics. For example,

I set off down the corridor to find the student for my next appointment. From around  
the corner I hear,  
*I didn't do anything, that's not fair!*  
The door slams.  
Hi are you Damien?  
*Might be! Who wants to know?*

The transitions of font and alignment, I hope, heighten impact, deepen meaning and enable the voices of the young people on these pages to find a place within the consciousness of the reader. To this end I have written student voices in the vernacular and pronunciation of the regions and cultural environments of which they are the lifeblood.

## To a Geology Teacher

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Little Gidding (T.S. Eliot, 1942)*

As a student of words, people, happenings and history I have often wondered in reflection why I became an ardent student of Geology. Perhaps I should thank my mother or equally robust the curriculum of the early nineteen seventies, both insisting on a science subject in the toolkit of the well-appointed matriculation student. While quickly dismissing memories of earlier science like failures in physics and chemistry, I had enjoyed botany from the previous year and held a solid interest in natural sciences, and so it flowed that geology became the natural choice.

Our teacher towered above everyone in the school and stooped slightly to clear the doorjamb as he entered the science lab. He was inspired by everything earth and set about ensuring that the varied mix of students in his care would become equally entranced by the shifting earth beneath their feet. A field trip would see him leading a busload of students to see local outcrops and points of nature, parts of our everyday surroundings with new eyes and understanding. It was his task to bring us to a sense of that which had brought us to this place and this time while seeing also that time is not standing still and the solid structures around us move in a continuum of interrelatedness, each component impacted by a matrix of natural and man-made forces.

In the laboratory we learn to look for that which is unseen turning the visual of the natural world into a map of signs and figures representing the two and three-dimensional layers that will tell this story to others of the place, time and events. Dating back 280 million years this land formed part of Gondwana, covered by a shallow sea,

laying down the tiny particles that would become sandstones and mudstones. It was 160 million years ago that the first signs of the breakup of the supercontinent was attended by massive forces thrusting columns of molten rock up through the layers of the Earth's crust. This event gave us the dolerite of our mountaintops as can be seen on,

Mt Barrow, Mt Wellington and the Great Western Tiers. The characteristic columns this rock forms are defined by fractures (columnar jointing) formed during its gradual cooling, from a few hundred to a couple of thousand metres below the Earth's surface. Similar dolerite is found in India, Antarctica and South Africa, which were all parts of Gondwana at the time the dolerite formed. (Ewington, 2008)

I see that we were connected before we were connected, asking me to think of the ways in which I am positioned in the world, my current world and those yet to be revealed.

Chalk in a large hand flies across the board drawing rough outlines of continents, arrows flicking here then there describing the motion of land masses across a moving sphere. That voice has travelled through the forty something years and for one moment I am in that classroom again. I feel the feelings of the child, sitting somewhat uncomfortably on the science room stool, feet perched for balance on the foot bar. The confidence carried in a uniform of dark green serge blazer and skirt, white shirt, neat polished shoes, clean socks, a comfortable pattern to be carried into adult life.

This small island of Tasmania shared in momentous events while coming to settle in our tiny corner of the globe. A young science continually unfolds our ancient beyond ancient histories and reminds me to tune in with all the senses and imaginings. To examine the structures large and small I must first learn the language and attend to the conventions, practices and procedures of those who came before. I must follow the signs. A system of translation is required, and I am mindful to proceed with exemplary care in the choice and formation of elements and ideas making up the whole.

Geology teaches me that events have their own time. They occur suddenly or slowly but for longer than I will see, hear or be. Their motion precedes me, surrounds me and surpasses me. By a creek for those who see there is a slow movement of silt where water runs fast and has the power to shift tiny particles, moving from here to there. Slowly and slowly the particles shift in the rushing of a winter stream. Two motions inexorably joined in their separate and yet mutual journeying. The water flow continually refreshed by nature's cycle of precipitation and renewal, rushing downwards to meet with other waters making their way to larger waters and onwards to the sea. The tiny rock particles

worn over time tumble in eddies against each other, rocks and boulders finding their place in the base of the stream bed.

Geology situates me in a continuum of slow change greater than myself and teaches me to look and see further than immediacies and connects me to the coming and going of this moment of currency, this short slip of time, these ninety years or so. In considering the ground I walk on I learn to consider lessons of custodianship, care and empathy for the things seen and unseen. I learn to question what is not before me as much as that which is.

Through the study of the structures around me and the earth beneath my feet I am drawn to explore the vast expanse of what came before my limited lifespan. The exposed layers and rocks tell us of forty, fifty, sixty thousand years of generations exploring, living deeply, and developing, by the first inhabitants of this land, our First Nations people. The passage of time and denials of history demand that I attend to all epistemologies and ontologies woven into our separate and shared deeper fabric, revealing the pains and persecutions of this island's colonial past coming to rest unconsolably on our present, reflected in our landscape and our people. The children of the children of the children navigate emerging rivers upon which we may well map future destinations.

It was the study of our endlessly shifting earth which brought me to be at ease to question and question and forever be questing and questioning in my being. In letting my mind wander while sitting in the quiet of the car on a hill one day I was able to describe my work and my place within a continuum of practice requiring much more than a cursory attention to the rules and regulations. This demanded the learning of a new language, understanding the cadence of voice, the rush of borrowed time, paying attention to the whispers and the deafening roar.

New mentors reinforce the lessons of years past and come to my story with their expertise and insights to merge with my ways of being, and to refine my ways of knowing. Gallagher pushes me to think differently about my space in education and the tools I will employ to enable change and choice by bringing Rousseau into the light of my near view. I am not surprised to see Gallagher recognise "...the familiar is sometimes the most unfamiliar" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 124), or in the words of Rousseau, "experience of the strange leads us to examine the familiar" (Rousseau, 1763/1967, p. 33)". Thus, I am reminded and prodded to continually delve into a continuum of ideas for understanding and when I think I have it to delve yet again with reconstructed questions, to come from all sides to uncover what may yet remain unseen.

## Chapter 2

### Tools of Revelation

#### Phenomenology, Narrative, Writing, Hermeneutics...

*Phenomenology is about wonder, words, and world.*

*Researching Lived Experience (van Manen, 2014, p. 13)*

At the heart of my project is the living world of young people and the traditional, cultural institutions bearing on trajectories of choice and opportunity. It is a significant undertaking demanding that I capture and interrogate the experiences and moments in time with honesty, openness and integrity. I seek to attend to the complex narrative and ways of knowing inherent in the lived experience of those who share this story with me, the students, parents, carers and teachers. Educational pedagogies, policies, funding imperatives and the forces of party politics form a layer of structures, shifting and malleable, at other times immovable and solid. Each element inhabits a space. In mapping the landscape, I must choose a set of tools worthy of the task.

While examining my intentionalities Robert Sokolowski, in his *Introduction to Phenomenology* helps to confirm that some of my tools do indeed lie in that field of inquiry. This philosophical undertaking can be both empowered and released by an underlying phenomenology. “It signifies the activity of giving an account, giving a logos, of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 13)”.

Max van Manen, in the preface to *Phenomenology of Practice*, relives with total joy the influences of his student life in the sixties in The Netherlands, the experiences, writers and art movements which brought him to phenomenology. It is a leap from there to here, a small island at the bottom of the world, Tasmania, Australia. In this place I was to find, as did van Manen, “this reflective philosophical thoughtfulness...that seemed to respect

the reality of our experience-as-lived...(2014, p. 13)". Of my own experience, around a table with fellow research students, the panoply of voices came together, seeking to be heard and questing for spiritual interrogation. I found that I too was seeking that mindful and thoughtful path to give meaning and understanding to my work in my quest for enlightenment.

Phenomenology...was also the source of questioning the meaning of life as we live it and the nature of responsibility of personal actions and decisions...nothing is more meaningful than the quest for meaning, the mystery of meaning, how meaning originates and occurs - as well as the meaning of our responsibility for others and for the organic, material, and technological world we inhabit. (van Manen, 2014, p. 13)

Through phenomenology I came to visualise how I could create different understandings for those moderators of programs and politics who are as much a part of this work as the briefly shared space between myself and young people in the throes of becoming young adults in uncertain times. If my work is to have worth and be worthy of the writing, then it must be underpinned by a collective of voices and ways of seeking and understanding a rich interplay of ways of knowing. Every day as a professional, a practitioner and a liver of this life in this world must contain more than the schedules, the priorities of current and past authorities and the ticking of time sheets. They are a backdrop of noise whereupon the inspiring and surprising is slowly revealed.

Conscious of shifting perspectives drawn through my own temporality I welcome the elapse of time between the events to be examined and the reality of the now in which I write. The distance of time tempers my emotions and invites me to take up a more stable and considered position. I have grown and while watching from my intellectual distance I find that my questions dance on the horizon.

In coming to explore the best way to bring forth the voices, heard and unheard, at the heart of this paper I am drawn to the natural process upon which I pour out my thoughts. The place where I question my decisions, my ways of placing myself in the work, ways of being and being meaningful within the lived experience of this collective. At the end of each day I find myself quietly reflecting on the young people, conversations and events of the day. There are notes that form a set of case notes, professional, practical and succinct. An artefact to be shared in the professional arena, to talk when I cannot or am no longer there, a narrative of events transpired and elapsed, the things we did and did not, the probable whys and why nots. This is what is expected but captures such a tiny

corner of our experience. Again, I am looking for tools, capable of melding in purpose and style, strong and light enough for the phenomenological task at hand. A tool that will enable me to carry the stories of those who found themselves in a specific period of time, piecing lives together within the contingencies of a political and educational framework.

The tools I seek must be deeply descriptive and finely tuned, able to attend to the minutiae of the individual mind and equally take in the broad brush of the collective responses in a social project. Van Manen (2014) reflects on phenomenological writing inviting me to examine the strength of words. I share with van Manen the search for the right place in which to write. My notes are often cut short in the passage of a day in my work, the cleaners good naturedly forcing me out to lock up rooms and close the block down. I seek refuge and continuation in the car, laptop balanced on the passenger seat, knowing that lost thoughts now will not be as clearly caught up in the storm of a new day. My notes formal and informal tumble off the keys, in between I gaze out across the various shades of green and grey of today's school. While gazing there is a fusion of the detail before me and all that has taken place in the day, the pictures like a slideshow before me, retelling events. I can slow it down to query and question, what happened there? How could I have enabled a better outcome? What could I have said or done that would have made a difference? Whose needs am I attending to? I can speed it up to review weeks, months and years. The questions spill across my gazing and the two become one. Van Manen would ask, "Where am I then?" and answer that "the writer dwells in the textorium: the virtual space that the words open up (2014, p. 358)", noting that space is not bounded by time or distance.

## On Narrative and Storytellers

This thesis draws on narrative traditions and is enriched by voices from the past and present. Through the stories and the tellers, I bring a conscious intent to observe, question and explore a specific time in educational institutions and a program-based solution to poor retention rates in post-compulsory education in Tasmania. Some voices are strong, made in law, marked in print, representing majorities, defined attitudes and accepted behaviours. Other voices are intermittent, shouted loud from a distance, reverberating on the wind. There are those who struggle to speak what is at the heart, to describe the circle, one must listen with intent to every whisper.

In my third year of high school I broke my left arm falling off a log on the obstacle course in sport. Being my left arm out of action meant that I could continue with schoolwork and so sports lessons were spent in the library or the room across the hall. These months were filled with reading on a range of topics not necessarily in the curriculum or writing. In the quiet of a classroom with my thoughts alone, writing these randomness's seemed a natural progression and from that, poetry of a kind. There was a joy in not being required to explain it, pull it apart or build the words on a structure. Music had always been my stories from very young, but this was the first experience of writing to express feelings, impressions and ideas. Writing continued to be my companion throughout college, university, marriage, two funny and wonderful children, working and learning and exploring the turns of this life. The narrative of the everyday makes for extraordinary moments on a timescape. I often wish for my memory to be stronger and longer. In the sure knowledge that it fails me, I write. Lewis and Sandra Hinchman, in *Memory, Identity, Community* eloquently describe the narrative way which memory has held in its palm for many years.

People tell stories because they need to know who they are and how to behave in a world that is complex and often dangerous. They want to know whom to trust and who is trying to deceive them, why things are done one way and not another. (2001, p. xxviii)

Through our stories we share and place our experiences on the air to be heard by others. Within the space of sharing we learn that we are the same and different, others are the same and different. At the places where there is crossover, we come to know one another. At our places of difference we can come to question and seek to understand.

Donald Polkinghorne in *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, describes the narrative unfolding thus.

The plot of the normal self is bound by the episodes and the environment in which a person expresses himself or herself as well as the projects of the imagination that appear as possibilities extending out from the person's actual history. ... One does not simply act out a story of one's own choosing: the events that the self-plot needs to gather into significance are the result of accidents, organic or social givens, and unintended consequences as well as personal motivation. (1988, p. 152)

The narrative elements of inquiry firmly align with my work over a number of years as a facilitator and guide in life, work and learning options. Meaning unfolds through the relationship of one with the other, to the whole, to the other, returning to the self. The

dynamics of the work of my thesis is based on observation, listening, questioning, conversing and living through shared moments. Those moments or “events” as Deleuze brought his readers to understand, the tiny and often perceived as insignificant, are beautifully and effectively described by Christian Beck and Francois-Xavier Gleyzon (Beck & Gleyzon, 2016) in *Deleuze and the event(s)*. These are the critical points of discovery, shifts of movement which reveal cracks in surfaces—how do we, learner and facilitator/learner, investigate these newly revealed pieces of ground, traverse new terrains, and navigate the journey that inspires and lies before us?

At twenty-one I took up my first teaching position in the English and Drama department of a rural school. Three staff shared an office with the department head. With four years training and two days induction I stood in front of the first-class teacher group of grade nine students and thought, “Crikey, what now!” Having survived the ten minutes of class teacher period, the structure of curriculums and classrooms provided a clear path for the coming years not forgetting copious lesson plans and the words “why did you deviate from the plan?” ringing in my ears. Time revealed that my colleagues were mostly entertaining tellers of story only too happy to share their years of experience and keenly crafted expertise. Gems of planning, purpose and action, accident and uncertainty tumbled out through tiny stolen moments in the daily timetable, crammed between 10C Art and 7B English and every other opportunity through a tumultuous term. I hung on every word with relish at the comedy and absurdities, passion and privilege of this fresh lens on education and the art of getting through high school as a teacher. A meeting place favoured by all members of staff was the teacher aide office where lesson scraps tumbled together in union with the art of practice and knowing over quickly inhaled sausage rolls on the way to complete a round of duty.

The catalyst for the lighting of a fire in young teachers of the time was the opportunity to be in rich and forthright conversation with colleagues across the curriculum, to be earnestly listened to and to have food for critical and reflective practice. Resources were old, books dowdy and dusty tucked away in an equally dusty storeroom and the faithful Roneo copier was the fastest and most reliable way to ensure thirty copies in time for the next class. The experience reveals to me that whatever the lesson or the learning the most important element in the room is the relationship between myself and the young people in my care for that period of time. The realisation that I carried most of what was needed within myself was a powerful insight and liberating.

Five first year teachers arrived the following year and the informal became formal. The young teachers met with a small team regularly to talk and share their way through that most important of occasions, their first year out. There was structure and purpose, a staffroom to themselves to enrich the opportunity for sharing and conversation. I would notice the occasional scoff about one or other of the “old timers” and was conscious of a missing element, the inescapable depth and richness which comes from being part of the narrative in slow and reflective time in the educative and learning continuum. On reflection, I have lived how the profession is served best when one can grow through formal and informal ways of knowing, being and sharing.

I recognise fully within myself the need to share through narrative and storytelling my experiences and the emotions emanating from the events. I look to see the reaction of those around me and maintain or co-create my trajectory based on reactions of the shared world. What is this tie that holds us so tight, the need to talk, to share our words and be understood by another? I look to the growing sounds of my grandson and wonder that at several minutes old we gaze at one another. I am transfixed. Sometime later he will calm from crying in my arms. Later still he babbles and attends to my face, I smile, he smiles. Happy or sad, frustrated or excited there is a sound, a pitch, a cadence to lay clues for the immediate world of caregivers to build understanding. Over time the sounds morph into those we recognise as the early words of mamma and dadda. The words are met with recognition, joy in the face of the receiver, the reciprocal understanding that we have shared something of meaning and as a result the sustaining and critical bond of connectedness. Storying, as an integral part of my being in the world, has chosen me to reveal my inquiry through these elements of my natural self. For me it tells the story of,

...the narrative approach to psychological and social reality [and] appeals especially to those who want to stress the efficacy of human agency, the potential for self-transformation, and the embeddedness of human experience in memory, situation and tradition...(Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001, p. xxviii)

I bring the thinking of Polkinghorne to this shared world of narrative knowing as he guides me toward deeper realms and to see this way as,

...the form of hermeneutic expression in which human action is understood and made meaningful...The competence to understand a series of episodes as part of our story informs our own decisions to engage in actions that move us toward a desired ending. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 145)

These are the stories I earnestly endeavour to reveal.

I am situated in the narrative of education on this island. I shadow the paths of entry, journeying, engagement and disengagement. I carry stories that I share with others, meeting through the shared gaze of recognition, a small smile of I too have been there. I carry stories that remain mine. The total population on this island is small. Each village and town are shaped by a collection of families, relatives, friends and acquaintances where shared knowledge, values, activities and conversations create complex layers of interconnectedness. It follows then that as a writer I should have concerns about the privacy of those who travel with me in our shared stories. How then do I write the stories of my work and share these experiences while maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of clients, required of me within a prescribed and legal code of conduct? I find the necessary inspiration in the work of Tom Barone revealing insights into the New Journalism and techniques explored in the art of critiquing the experienced curriculum. Barone reveals,

These writers seek to penetrate the personalities of real characters, unveil aspects of their experiences, explicate the social meaning underlying important events in an artful, powerful manner that is at once literary and realistic. (Barone, 2000, p. 28)

I come to understand that through this method of storying and writing I can explore the experiences of students and families' central to both my role and my inquiry while protecting identities and occasions of significance that can so easily locate a character in its spatial and temporal landscape.

The characters of this narrative while metamorphosed for protection, continue to deliver the critical elements of underlying dilemmas inherent in the delivery of pathway and transitions support. Through these themes and guided by the work of Barone I see that I must continue to attend to the experiences in detail revealing key events whereby critical perspectives can be analysed. I must ask myself,

Is the experience either a "peak" experience of solitary significance, or (more often) a member of a set of experiences bearing familial resemblances that, like the mineral-laden drops of water falling to the floor of a cave, steadily and persistently form their own protuberances in the life-spaces of the students? (Barone, 2000, pp. 29-30)

Each experience, as Barone suggests has the power to reveal underlying tensions in the physical, emotional and mental attempts of a young person to traverse the thin line between personal and collective choices. I see that through attention to the detail of plot

and characterization, the deep themes of the inquiry can be revealed, an empathy will be developed for the characters which in turn carries them far beyond a set of statistics or a list of socio-economic indicators. The boundaries between fiction and non-fiction become blurred. It is this element whereby the students I have worked with can be treated with respect by building an anonymity via created characters based on themes emanating from the various educational landscapes. Drawing on thick descriptions of the educational landscape the characters come to a new life carrying their impact far beyond their temporality (Barone, 2000, p. 39).

Emanating from five years of intensive work with young people, identified as disadvantaged or disengaged, my learning through writing is enhanced by defining particular elements and investigating the relevance of selected works of Rousseau. My original data, generated from conversations, arguments, discussions and more, invites the voices of parents, carers and significant others to be heard as artefacts of a program at the crossroads of discovery and social change.

My writing purposefully, morally and ethically, synthesises real and reconstructed characters to explore the forces and intensities at work in the interplay of opportunity, disengagement and disenchantment. This process, as described in the work of Peter Clough, serves to “blur distinctions...between researcher and researched, between data and imagination; to insist, that is, that language itself...does the work of inquiry (Clough, 2002, p. 3).” Through the art of “text as occasion”, as a writer I call my reader to ask “...Who are the characters? What is the nature of their plight (Barone, 2000, p.152)?” The characters develop the themes of the real and fully experienced landscape, the one that has been and the one that will continue past this event in time.

A common theme in questioning human existence and the plight of our characters, may lead us to ask, “what is a good life?” In seeking his answer Barone, in part, draws on the work of Richard Rorty and an earlier manifestation in the work of Harold Bloom, to explore the making of the strong poet,

A strong poet is someone who refuses to accept as useful the descriptions of her life written by others. Instead, the strong poet is a strong storyteller, continuously revising her life story in the light of her own experience and imagination. The strong poet constantly redescribes her past interaction with the world around her, constantly reinvents her *self*, so that she may act in the future with ever greater integrity and coherence. The strong poet plots her life story toward her own emergent ends and purposes. (2000, p. 125)

Barone imbues the persona with a moral code drawn from Charles Taylor whereby one must be able to actively assess the conditions of one's being such as good from bad and prioritise that which is worthy of undertaking (Barone, 2000, p. 124).

What are we aiming to achieve in the creation of the self? Rousseau spurned the options of his day believing both public education and society failed in their attempts to bring into being, an educated person.

Swept along in contrary routes by nature and by men, forced to divide ourselves between these different impulses, we follow a composite impulse which leads us to neither one goal nor the other. Thus, in conflict and floating during the whole course of our life, we ended without having been able to put ourselves in harmony with ourselves and without having been good either for ourselves or others. (1762/1979, p. 41)

Prior to the calling of his parents is nature's call to human life. Living is the job I want to teach him...All that a man should be, he will in case of need know how to be as well as anyone; and fortune may try as it may to make him change place, he will always be in his own place. (1762/1979, pp. 41-42)

The confidence and level of certainty through the role of the guide or mentor brings meaning to much that is housed within the roles and institutions in which I have found myself, searching for my meaning and my capacity. Rousseau sought to contribute, through his work with his young student, one who is confident of their place in the world, and who possesses the capacities to question to find that which they can contribute through their choices and undertakings. I find much in the work of Rousseau, to recommend a way forward in the work undertaken in the name of the social sciences. Creating worlds as we do through the creation of institutions, Rousseau demands that we delve deeper into the constructed to understand what has been created leading to clearer horizons of possible futures, it is a worthy undertaking to rigorously examine which compass best guides us.

In the work of Rousseau, I hear the echo of significant voices from another past and tradition and thus am also prompted to seek out those who were influenced by his work and came after. Reading the lessons and experiences of the young *Émile* and that "the lesson always came to him from the thing itself" (1762/1979, p. 124), I am not surprised to find myself transported in time and space to the work of phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl, who would take us, his readers, on a similar journey of learning. Sarah Bakewell in *At the Existentialist Café*, explores the work of the phenomenologists. She

recounts an observation of Gadamer attending one of Husserl's early lectures, affording us a rare insight into the persona.

Gadamer noticed the fingers of the right hand circling the flat palm of the left hand in a slow, turning movement, as Husserl outlined each point - as if he were turning the idea round on his palm to look at it from different angles. (Bakewell, 2016, pp. 36-37)

Bakewell takes us inside the thoughts of Husserl to provide draw clearly what it meant to describe, in phenomenological terms.

It meant stripping away distractions, habits, clichés of thought, presumptions and received ideas, in order to return our attention to what he called the 'things themselves'. We must fix our beady gaze on them and capture them exactly as they appear, rather than as we think they are supposed to be. (Bakewell, 2016)

As I write and examine the past, I am conscious that the point of immersion plays a large role in how I might interpret the events. I am removed once and twice from the events at the centre of this work, which enables me to turn the thing over and over and examine it differently. It is right that my mentors teach me to question and question, to view and view again but differently. I turn to Robert Dostal also to enhance my thinking and join the conversation. Dostal reflects,

The ethic of this hermeneutic is an ethic of respect and trust that calls for solidarity. Gadamer himself embodies this ethic, not only in his work, but also in his life. All those who have encountered him, whether they find themselves in agreement with him or not, have found him, like the Socrates he so much admired, always ready for conversation" (32). And like Socrates' death, Gadamer's death did not put an end to our conversation with him. (Dostal, 2002, p. 32)

Trust and solidarity are a shared ethic which has the potential to do justice through writing and sharing. Our conversation with those present and past continues with admiration and warmth.

## Writing as Revelation

Through the act of writing we continue to reveal the power of thought and words. The fine art of selection and ordering, to create a heightened impact, can deliver a sense of

being in the moment and being with the characters. The delicate art of crystallisation is one of the tools of writing that Laurel Richardson brought to the world of inquiry (2000, p. 963) and which is equally relevant today and has resonance with my work and my writing. By harnessing the crystal Richardson invited us to step outside the normalised methods of validity in textual representation and preferred an engagement with the freedoms which came with the light of the crystal.

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose... (Richardson, 2000, p. 963)

When returning to the world of academic writing in the late nineties, an early reading of Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre enabled me to engage with text, story and narrative in different ways than I had experienced some forty years prior. My ways of writing to inform and capture essential learnings about myself and others was no longer alien to the world of inquiry. I found I was reading texts that resonated with the way I wanted to write to develop an analysis of a theme or topic. In the work of St. Pierre I was heartened to see that “writing as a method of inquiry coheres with the development of ethical selves engaged in social action and social reform” and Richardson confirmed for many qualitative inquirers that writing “is a viable way in which to learn about [ourselves] and [our] research topic (2000, p. 959).”

Language is how social organisation and power are defined and contested and the place where one’s sense of self - one’s subjectivity - is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses - competing ways of giving meaning and of organising the world - makes language a site of exploration and struggle. What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them. (Richardson, 2000, p. 961)

Richardson describes for me the various journeys that I will undertake through my work and the subjects of my attempts to understand. Each of us with our individual discourse attempting to understand priorities of our horizons, to find meaningful levels of conversation and exploration. I am continually aware in this process that while my sights oscillate between the global collective of home, friends, relationships, educational choices, risk factors and a range of varying priorities for each young person, those same young people in my temporary gaze are focused differently in the piece of time that we are provided to be together attempting to seek a common cause. For them there are concerns of maintaining friendships, relationships, negotiating the pressures and expectations of

coming into young adulthood and the decisions required of major players in their immediate field of influence.

My intentionality and carefully tended words on the page are but one part of the complex required to bring into being again the lives of young people and the role I play in assisting a point in the process of selection and elimination of decisions. I am fully conscious of the limits brought to bear on my role and the place in the matrix in which we coexist, these young people and I. Their days are full of weightier importance than mine, and I move continually between the mammoth events and tiniest speck of concern in their lives. We are in continual movement they and I. Circling one another searching and struggling for meaning on different trajectories. It would be false and folly to convince oneself otherwise. Of course, there are those where our trajectories come close and are more easily matched and crafted, for most, however, it is a journey of constant examination and re-examination and learning the limits of boundaries. There are my personal abilities to find connection and understanding, the capacity of educational policy and programming to provide appropriate and meaningful moments in time for the taking, and although we may well find that point in time I remain ever mindful that a solution may not stay a solution for long. Understanding the twists and turns of daily life requires a skill to search and accept the many layers of ambiguity.

## The Art of the Hermeneut

Driving in and out of townships I have time to ponder how I make meaning of the many conversations that form day upon day and the backbone of my work. Within each conversation is a memory of things past. The school as a familiar environment brings back memories of my own times endeavouring to make sense of everyday life made particularly more difficult at points requiring important decisions. The memories flash past as each town, school, student and environment stirs up reflections of a past, my past. Some of the memories are funny and make me laugh, others fill me with warmth and there are those that leave me questioning and filled with a fresh sadness and no answers. I have reached a time in life where it is all right that there may be no answers. My awareness is heightened, and I am strengthened by the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Kinsella, 2006) as I come to understand that,

The horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 306)

I delve into my past to engage with the present and in writing the experiences and lives of young people, previously forgotten or perhaps hidden moments of my own are revealed with purpose. My historicity, I come to see, is vital to everything I say and do, it forms the reason and the subject of the writing and the choices made along the way. Just as these histories come back to guide and inform the present, I make a conscious decision to weave them into this writing as the catalyst that they are. Moments and memories, small and otherwise that have created the underpinnings of my being and equally provide a backgrounding for professional reflexivity.

As Gadamer describes the art of understanding a text I hear elemental similarities between the text and the process in which I am engaged in my work, endeavouring to understand the circumstances and beings of the young people that I have such a short time to come to know and assist. In conversation we explore the text of our past, our now and our futures. As we meet in conversation, we cannot but feel the enormity of the forces which come to bear from the tens and sometimes hundreds of voices in the stories we share and explore. Gadamer demonstrates to me that,

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 402)

I am like the geologist with my pick and brush, gently tap tapping away at the layers to see what is being revealed to me slowly and thoughtfully. The unseen forces of one word or sentence upon another, who can tell where the words will take us and what they will reveal to us. Conversation is the language of my daily passage in this work with teachers, students, parents, educational specialists, department leaders, friends, colleagues and more in the vast array.

Within the conversation is a delicate interplay of question and answer which assists to unearth the intensities and intentions of the work in which we are involved. Each conversation hides or reveals a subculture of intent. I, in side conversation with

myself, must continually ask, “is it right to ask this question now?” or more often than not “what question will bring forward, what till now has been a barrier?” Gadamer takes me into the realm of the dialectic to enhance my understanding of the delicate interaction which forms the core of my work in conversation.

...only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation toward openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further—i.e., the art of thinking ... it is the art of conducting a real dialogue. (1975/2013, p. 375)

Through listening and engaging with Gadamer I come to see the twists and turns of everyday conversation, the moments of value lost on the turning of a word, an interjection taking the moment and the idea off on an unexpected path of flight.

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning ... questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. (1975/2013, p. 376)

Being in conversation with many stakeholders in the work of my subject, reveals to me the multitude of ways of thinking I must master. The conversation with a young student is not necessarily the conversation I will have with a parent or a teacher or an education support professional. Each interaction has its own realities, tensions and boundaries. The art for me as a professional, as Gadamer attests, is to find and allow the “real strength” to emerge (1975/2013, p. 376) by not allowing myself to reduce the moment into argument, and always thinking back to my subject matter. Through an artful questioning I also see how I can manage those who would want to dominate and silence the voices of others.

What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this; that in dialogue spoken language—in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point—performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (1975/2013, p. 376)

The work of the teacher, mentor or guide is in and of itself revealed to me as a deeply, mindfully and purposefully hermeneutic act. Within the bounds of a school environment,

with the ringing of hundreds of voices and agents, Gadamer provides guiding sustenance, reminding me that,

Whoever wants to understand will not be able to yield to contingency of his own assumptions and thereby fail to hear the text's opinions as consistently and stubbornly as possible.... Whoever wants to understand a text is rather prepared to let it say something to him hence a hermeneutically school consciousness must be sensitive to the otherness of the text from the beginning. (Gadamer in Warnke, 1987, p. 87)

With a multitude of players in the process of schooling and education, the capacity for interpretation of our conversations is endless, entwined as we are in a labyrinth of personal and group cultures and traditions, compressed by time. Reading the landscape of my work is my continual challenge, recognising that many landscapes present themselves to me, flashing quickly one after the other, demanding me to be nimble and swift, ever watchful and questioning my purpose, authenticity, ethical horizon and veracity of methodologies. Elements of a complicated dance or a strategic game come to mind, and I, trying to successfully interpret the rules. There is an ever-present sense of success or failure at the heart of the work, being as it is, undertaken in the name of a government department through a channel of approved funding, under constant scrutiny from many stakeholders. So there is a seriousness to this game as indeed Gadamer (1975/2013), Gallagher (1992) and Rousseau (Gallagher, 1992) were intimately aware.

For Gadamer, play as a broad interpretation is somewhat like being in a conversation. "To be in a conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another" (Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p. 110). As I go about my work, I am reminded then to question how I may have changed through the interactions of the day, what impacts am I aware of taking place both to myself and how I may have impacted those around me. Gallagher interpreting from another perspective identifies,

The player who participates in sports learns about her limitations, her potentials, her capacities, and therefore about herself, just to the extent that she learns about others, about team effort, accomplishment, and the resistance of situations. (Gallagher, 1992, p. 49)

Through both the interaction of the conversation and play or the game there is an immersion and a sense of losing oneself within, returning to the self with an element of transformation. One cannot be connected and interact without an element of change.

Rousseau, in *Émile or On Education* expresses in detail the method he employs to reveal important lessons of life. His young student Emile has taken it upon himself to break out of usual procedures and has gone walking alone. The young boy finds that he is not received politely on the streets and feels for the first time the emotions of fear and flight. Little does he know that he is being carefully watched and monitored. On returning home he is admonished by his father but received by his mentor with neither reproach nor favour. Rousseau engages a carefully orchestrated experience to bring the young student to understand the world around him.

It is by these means and others like them that during the short time I was with the child I got to the point of being able to make him do everything I wanted without prescribing anything to him, without forbidding him anything, without sermons, without exhortations, without boring him with useless lessons. Thus, so long as I spoke, he was satisfied; but he was afraid of my silence. He understood that something was not going well, and the reason always came to him from the thing itself. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 124)

I am reminded of a day, hot and humid, a long corridor, classroom doors open inviting some airflow though there was little. I was waiting for an appropriate moment to break the continuity of the lesson to see one of the students I was working with. I stayed out of sight not wanting to be a distraction to sight or thought. The board was filled with information, the teacher repeating what was written aloud, the students transferring what was written into their books. The experience was a familiar one from life as a student in the sixties and seventies and as a teacher in the early eighties. Like a time capsule freshly dug, exuding its treasures of the past or indeed the geologist searching out fossils midst the layers of sandstone. The time it takes to fill a blackboard with information, a double lesson spent in explaining the information, thirty students copying the information from board to book. A hot stifling day in 2007. I gather my mentors around me to ponder this and other confounding processes of education.

## An Invitation from Rousseau

*Each one of us puts into the community his person and all his*

*powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body,  
we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole.*

*The Social Contract (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 16)*

An author or authors bring themselves to us for so many reasons. In a time of doubt I drew a small, forgotten text, *The Social Contract*, from the bookshelf in the search for answers to the question, what am I doing? Disruption will do that. Send one to the dark corners in search of enlightenment.

In reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I was moved immediately to question wanting to know more. What was his life like? What of the inconsistencies, the paradoxes and the breakdowns in the social and emotional fabric of the man? How was a mind and heart of such conflicted spaces able to leave the modern world with works of such significance and bearing across a range of disciplines? What was at the heart of this mind? Through reading and studying Rousseau, I am surprised to find that the words and ideas jump from the page as if he were speaking to me in the current day, like opening the newspaper and reading today's top story. His ideas maintain a vitality and a currency. The further I study his work I see, hear and feel a deep situatedness with my mentors in phenomenology, narrative inquiry, writing and hermeneutics. Alan Bloom, in the introduction to the *Émile* describes this particular work as "...a *Phenomenology of the Mind* posing as Dr. Spock (1762/1979, p. 3)" I come to see that in studying Rousseau's works he will lay before me his ways of understanding and being in the world of his time, in a deep relatedness to our now. He speaks plainly to his reader to ensure a shared insight to the work to come.

... always remember that he who speaks to you is neither a scholar nor a philosopher, but a simple man, a friend of the truth, without party, without system; a solitary who, living less among men, has less occasion to contract its prejudices and more time to reflect on what strikes him when he has commerce with them. My reasoning so founded less on principles than on facts; and I believe that I cannot better put you in a position to judge them and often to report to you some example of the observations which suggested them to me. (1762/1979, p. 110)

I quickly gathered around me a raft of texts analysing Rousseau and his work and found the interpretations enlightening while eliciting even more questions to understand the person at the heart of the matter. After a time I found that it was the words and ideas of the man himself that brought to me the clarity I was seeking. In every case throughout this thesis, it is to the very words of Rousseau that I have returned to align the various histories at work in this investigation.

The years spent outside of my role as a Youth Learning Officer, had raised a level of difficulty to writing richly on the subject, having stripped the immediacy from the experiences, replacing that with a role that was all encompassing, shutting out the light that I tried so hard to recapture. Through an engagement with *On Education or Émile* I found myself, once again, relocated in the role of the Youth Learning Officer, transported to those conversations and times, my mind rich again with the experiences that were at the very heart of my work with the disengaged and young, resulting in this work before you. My conversations with Rousseau transported me in time and revealed a heightened level of questioning through the engagement of this resounding voice of difference.

The goal is less to teach him a truth than to show him how he must always go about discovering the truth. (1762/1979, p. 205)

Rousseau was revealing my truths to me, reminding me of the very truths I hold at my core. This author was encouraging me to be brave and honest in my questioning of an institution, a system, a program, a process and my ways of knowing, being and understanding within and outside of its bounds. Through the ideas of this author and personae the voices of the students came to me once again. Through attending to the voice of this author, through being in conversation, I found a way back to my memories, and my own voice, which through the evolution of policy and government, had fallen silent.

The very first cry to the reader which grasped my attention are the opening words of *The Confessions* where Rousseau lays open his heart.

Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different. Whether Nature has acted rightly or wrongly in destroying the mould in which she cast me, can only be decided after I have been read. (1782/1789/1996, p. 1)

There is a sense of isolation and loneliness in Rousseau's words as he embarks on his confessions. Some would say there is also more than a dash of arrogance. Ample evidence exists to verify a trail of damaged friendships and questionable rationale for major life decisions. It is not my purpose to stand in judgement, when many have taken up that task including Rousseau himself.

One of the major lines of consciousness which come to me through the work of Rousseau is the sense of difference. How many young people have revealed over the years that "I am different?" There are too many to count. A sense of difference is keenly felt

by all of us for we are all different from the very first cells which build our being. We are all unique. Rousseau is then not the only person to cry out their difference. So then there is something deeper in this sense of difference which strikes all of us, differently. There is a phenomenon worthy of my questioning and at the very least attempting to understand. Where does this self-evaluation of difference emanate from? If one recognises uniqueness then feelings of difference may come from outside our core being, in the interactions with the social world. I can hear the voice of Rousseau at the heart of the young people I work amongst, and perhaps through bringing his work to bear on my experiences, may be able to reveal new understandings of difference.

The mix of students forming a caseload in my reality represent fifty individual reasons why school has become or is becoming an untenable daily option as a learning or social activity. For some, school is an escape and even if one turns up late after attending to younger siblings the hours in between is a place to be sixteen instead of the adult in the family. Some are embarrassed to face their peers, a poor choice, a fight, any number of less than best moments haunt the mind of a teenager and become impenetrable walls. Failures, perceived or otherwise have grown to be mountain like by year ten, a series of non-achievements, a constant reminder of being less than and not worthy. There are those living a double life with one foot in high school and the other among the exhilarations of young adulthood with money and little monitoring. Drugs, alcohol and other risk-taking behaviours are time and life consuming and don't easily fit the student timetable, though some manage a blend of some or all of these offerings. Then it could be work that calls, the craving to get out and do something, earn something, prove something and constitute a life. Unhappiness and depression, chronic illness, pregnancy and young parenting all take a toll, but a toll on what? Each event makes it more and more difficult for a young person to fit in with the surrounding environment. Norms, expectations, rules and factors requiring compliance, become insurmountable when one cannot fit into the mould. The more one tries the more uncomfortable one becomes in one's own skin. So many students have related over time their unique experience of choosing eventually to cease trying. Any major event in the life of a young person has the power to change their view of the immediate world. Rousseau lost this mother as a baby and then his father was forced to leave their home when the young boy was nine years old and placed in the care of relatives. The memories of the young Rousseau spark a synergy with the lessons I learn from the stories of disengaged young people. These lived experiences are at the core of this thesis and the relationship with Rousseau in its development.

I do not see as do other men. I have long been reproached for that. But is it up to me to provide myself with other eyes or to affect other ideas? No. It is up to me not to go overboard, not to believe that I alone am wiser than everybody. It is up to me not to change sentiments but to distrust mine. That is all I can do; and that is what I do. If I sometimes adopt an assertive tone, it is not for the sake of making an impression on the reader but for the sake of speaking to him as I think. Why should I propose as doubtful what, so far as I am concerned I do not doubt at all? I say exactly what goes on in my mind. (1762/1979, p. 34)

It is the art of observation, reflection and questioning which delivers the tension in Rousseau's quest for veracity and understanding. Continuous weighing of arguments is the process by which Rousseau endeavours to deliver transparency and honesty for his readers. This process is often misunderstood and interpreted as arrogance. Rousseau acknowledges that his ideas might not be sufficient to deal with the subject but if they lead to better ideas then something has been accomplished. It is this process of continual questioning and examining by which Rousseau endeavoured to present his readers with a philosophy continually under question and forever evolving.

Rousseau spoke exactly as he thought and was hard pressed to understand criticisms that came from the establishment and his fans regarding his work. Rousseau assumed that to speak in one's honesty was the same as presenting an acceptable argument. He discusses the problem of education as a chimera fight against good and evil, where one size does not fit all and where his project in the text *Émile or On Education* has its limitations. (p. 35)

The literature and the learning of our age tend much more to destruction than to edification. A magisterial tone fits censure; but another kind of tone – one less agreeable to philosophic haughtiness – must be adopted in order to make proposals. (1762/1979, p. 33)

While highly aware of the needs of his audience, Rousseau describes the *Émile* as a collection of observations and reflections and written for the thinking woman (1762/1979, p. 33). He addresses himself to the mother of the child as the one most appropriate to take up this initial task in nurturing the soul. Rousseau goes into detail about the practice of swaddling babies and limiting the natural movement of the body. Similarly, he comments at length about the socially accepted act of wet nursing. At the time societal pressure encouraged mothers to hand over the responsibility of feeding to others, while Rousseau strongly felt it was responsible for a break in natural bonding processes between mother and child. Rousseau describes the illnesses of childhood as

tests of strength and necessary in the natural course of growing, and pursues the tension between nature and nurture, and sees a break away from first duties as a potential for the decline of the family (1762/1979, p. 46).

Placing himself in the role of preceptor, Rousseau chooses to write about a child called *Émile*, to enable the process of hypothesis on education to begin. Rousseau fixes the location of the student in a temperate climate commenting on various downfalls other climates. He also chooses a rich child rather than a poor one, and an orphan, one who will look to Rousseau only for his guidance and instruction. One could say at the outset that this is “stacking the deck”, however, I am drawn to read on to find out the answers to my questions. Above all, Rousseau reminds us of the importance of nature in the process of growing the child.

Leave nature to act for a long time before you get involved with acting in its place, lest you impede its operations. You know, you say, the value of time and do not want to waste any of it? You do not see that using time badly wastes time far more than doing nothing with it and that a badly instructed child is farther from wisdom than the one who has not been instructed at all. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 107)

Rousseau’s words leave an impression on me as I find again, the voices of students within my circle of work and coming to understanding. Rousseau believed wholeheartedly

I want to give him a rank which he cannot lose, a rank which does him honour at all times; and whatever you may say about it, he will have fewer equals with this title than with all those he will get from you. (1762/1979, p. 196)

So a rank in life that can be respected beyond the trappings of society and financial standing is that which Rousseau would have for children as they grow into adulthood. He wants his readers to understand the vast distance between what we may want the adult to know without considering the stages of the child and what they are capable of learning. It is the deep study of the pupil which Rousseau believes will provide a new way to look at education. The *Émile* relates on many levels as if it were a recent publication, transporting me from here to there, to here in a contortion of time and learning, enabling new horizons of my experiences in education, learning and mentoring, to be explored. There is a resilience I would have young people develop to enable a clarity and strength in living a choice. I want to explore fully what Rousseau means when he says that “... all social institutions in which we find ourselves submerged would stifle nature in him and put nothing in its place” (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 35). I want to look deep into my heart to question my professional practice within a governmental and political arena,

questioning and distilling the basic tenets of a social contract. Rousseau, in his attempt, made his purpose clear from the outset, stating

My purpose is to consider if, in political society, there can be any legitimate and sure principle of government, taking men as they are and laws as they might be. In this inquiry I shall try always to bring together what right permits with what interest prescribes so that justice and utility are in no way divided. (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 1)

*The Social Contract*, with the turn of each page, enriches my questioning of process and policy that is enacted in confusions of political cycles. I remain mindful to ask what it is that I should deliver to the students who rely on me for some direction in their near future decisions. The voices of parents and carers come to me as they endeavour to draw recognition from the words that are delivered to them from people and policies. Decisions are made, and they must find a way for their young people to fashion the shape and nature of some future enterprise. Rousseau again, enables me to hone my attention to the foundations which may provide direction and some solace in my searching.

Hence, before considering the act by which a people submits to a king, we ought to scrutinize the act by which people become a people, for that act, being necessarily antecedent to the other, is the real foundation of society. (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 13)

To be of better understanding in all aspects of my thinking and working is a worthy undertaking in this project and Rousseau provides an eminent creative which drives me to look deeper and see more clearly.

Rousseau's writing as literature heralded a new style, and one that was to have a lasting effect on many who came after. Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, details the impact of Rousseau's style and how it came to "influence [on] German classicism that introduced the criterion of Erlebtsein (being experienced) and hence made possible the formation of the word Erlebnis" (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 57). have had on audiences of the day through the revelation of what it was to write and come to know "experience". The question and answer of Rousseau's writing style, beginning at the surface, then delving deeper and deeper to sift and sort through the thousands of grains of questioning, brought audiences to similarly question within themselves and come to some understanding of what it was to "experience". I believe this style is refined in *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues* where Rousseau undertakes a grand analysis of his life's professional play and his complex inner self through the triptych of three representational

persona. Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters, in the introduction to this work, provide an insight to the development of the characters and conversations.

The “Rousseau” of the *Dialogues* both is and is not Rousseau himself...he is Rousseau as he would be if he had read but not written his books and had only recently arrived in France. The author of the books is “Jean-Jacques,” the character to be judged by “Rousseau” and the “Frenchman.” (1990, p. xiii)

“Jean-Jacques” represents the popularized character and writer, “Rousseau” an impartial critic and the “Frenchman” the popular French audience. Kelly and Masters note that both Plato and Socrates made use of similar techniques and that it has little bearing on the mental state of the author as many have suggested. Rousseau was again, endeavouring to bring the public to a state of understanding about his writing and thinking through the use of a complex hermeneutic tool. Rousseau sought to understand the phenomenon of which he was the central character. As one of the first writers to achieve a populist type fame, he was also one of the first to suffer the mental anguish of the highs and lows, distrust, and paranoia of fandom in the same way that it continues to be experienced today. We are now able to watch from closer quarters the “turn” of the public tide when expectations are not met. In the age of the internet of things, the thoughts of Rousseau return to assist as I strive to find that balance of interactions in a populist world.

Rousseau comes to my work with a richness of spirit and an eclectic collection of writing as a self-proclaimed person of difference. I welcome him to this world of difference and invite him to our dialogue.

## Chapter 3

### In Dialogue with the Solitary Walker

*These hours of solitude and meditation are the only ones in the day when I am completely myself and my own master, with nothing to distract or hinder me, the only ones when I can truly say that I am what nature meant me to be.*

*Reveries of the Solitary Walker (Rousseau, 1782/2004, p. 35)*

Opportunity has been my strange companion through these years as I worked, read, learned, developed and engaged in dialogue. It is always with me, out there, a blurred ghosted vision, difficult to grasp, eluding attempts to join the wisps into something clear and then sometimes it comes near to demand an unexpected and considered decision. After twelve months in an acting managerial role of a public service sector department, having had to brush up on my decision-making skills, the opportunity to weigh up my individual considerations only was deliciously freeing. My response asked for an input of my human resources, perhaps my intellect, emotional energies, a receptive mind and of course time and money. I quickly shuffled the options through my brain on a bright Saturday morning and heard the words “of course I’ll come to France to attend a Philosopher’s Circle” fall out of my mouth. Easy, when do we leave? How could I not take this most natural next step while coming to know the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the writer of the words which have contributed to the course of modern history and disciplines of thought? With months to prepare outwardly and inwardly, as well as keep working, prepare a paper and selected texts, address my language gap, travelling alone and reading far too many travellers’ tips my anxious moments were sure to disappear once the plane doors closed.

To choose a representative collection of Rousseau's work suitable for sharing with an audience of colleagues in Chartres, France, required the application of a honing tool and trusting my instinct that I was coming to gain insight to this author's intentionality. So it was that I turned to the end of Rousseau's life and *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, a series of ten walks and inner reflections which connect us to a life, and the complex personality that was enmeshed in deep and profound ideological resistance. As a reflective and questioning self throughout life Rousseau's personal analysis is the search of the individual for a sense of place within the confusions of society. Others share in the search for oneself. As I prepare for my adventure into a range of unknowns, I come to see many layers of understanding are being revealed.

Paolo Freire (Freire, 1973) considers resistance as a choice between being wholly oneself or continually divided; Taiwo Afuape (Afuape, 2011, p. 37) as a platform for hope and an extension into possibilities. Gilles Deleuze (Boutang, 2011) viewed the act of creating as a form of resistance in which the writer or artist requires the strength to demand their own rhythm. Such a desire pulses through the work of Rousseau and provides an opportunity to explore resistance as a divisive, a foundation for hope and a creative force. Rousseau as a solitary walker draws the reader into the realms of his questioning self, providing an evidenced, reasoned narrative. While Walk One opens with a depth of despair tracing the history of many years' perseverance against persecution for his writing and ideas, Rousseau now has a higher purpose at hand. "But I, detached as I am from them and the whole world, what am I? This must now be the object of my inquiry. (France, P; 1782/2004, p.27)". The ten walks lead the reader through major passions in the life work of Rousseau, with a view to create a deeper understanding of himself, his decisions and perhaps the last attempt to be understood.

In a months' time I will be in Chartres, France, and I am conscious to leave open spaces for experiences which might illuminate the delicate intentionality of both an author and his writing. I am consciously unconscious of what "there" may invite to my experiences and so I plan to be as fully conscious of what "here" means in my everyday events and psyche.

To that end I have chosen a special place to walk, footfall after footfall on the soft autumn ground. The pages of Jean-Jacques Rousseau nestle in my hand, a self-confessed solitary walker and lover of places of quiet contemplation. As I walk, I watch the late autumn flutter on leaf whispers down and around me, settling in my hair. The walk to the river waits, the muddy and rocky path through the Dogwoods to a cold pool overflowing

the mossy boulders long settled there, inviting the moss and lichen to take hold. On the way I am stopped in my path by a huge fallen tree, already showing signs of seasonal wear. The soft rotting outer bark makes a home for fungi spores and in clumps the blue, white, brown and green caps shoot forth, the conditions now perfect for their short flourishing in the damp undergrowth. As I slip and slide, I consider that Mr Rousseau was perhaps fitter at his age on his walks than I in mine.

As a young student of drama and literature forty years ago, in preparation for the role of teaching in secondary education, I was introduced to this place by one of life's natural leaders and teachers; our responses to the learning task were diverse. I don't recall mine - but one comes to me time and time again throughout life; a photo-dialogue of the stone fences of this place, Hollybank, set against the words of *Mending Wall* by Robert Frost (1914).

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

Over time, the purpose of the stone walls at Hollybank evolved from fences for the lush ash plantations of would be tennis rackets of the 1930's, to their current incarnation as beautiful moss and lichen covered shelters for insects, wildlife and people enjoying quiet and stunning spaces. In places the stones hold their ground, in others they are tumbled into glorious disrepair by man and nature. The poem and the place remain part of my continuing narrative. The combination of rich elements takes me with ease to wander through the broader project of my thesis writing with Rousseau, bringing to the stark present the array of characters that bring their lived experience and voice or silence to the narrative of disengagement. And so on I go.

At the local airport I delve into conversation with a grandfather smiling as he talks with warmth of the pride he feels for his granddaughter, her hard work and academic achievements despite being the child most unlikely to achieve. I share with him elements of my daughter's journey through education and we laugh at the pitfalls to be found in assumptions.

The first international leg reminds me of Australia's isolation in time and history as I share two o'clock cups of tea and snacks with my next seat neighbour. Dubai arrives in the early morning, bright lights, please buy, everything at a price. Language and expression paint a multivariate landscape. I seek out a small place for good coffee and a

sweet treat. The coffee is rich and dark, presented in a small copper pourer, the soft sweet bun is divine. I am refreshed and ready to pay attention to the landscape before me.

Rousseau's final work *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, a collection of ten narratives, invites us to take those walks with the writer as he examines elemental streams in his thinking and life responses, and ways of being in the search for what he saw at the time as a final peace of mind, to be resolved in his ideologies and his notion of self. It is a study of one man's resistance. To find a way across this landscape I too walk, contemplate and consider.

Despite Rousseau's declarations that he did not always remember entirely the course of events about which he wrote, it is clear in his attempt that he was a keen observer of people, conditions, experiences and outcomes which he took great pains to explore in enormous detail. One might say that Rousseau lacked the ability to edit, however his narratives are eloquent and contain line after line of encapsulated life. Early in *The Confessions* Rousseau describes the idyllic days spent with Madame de Warens and notes how the act of reading grew into a more mature art through attention to "language and style, and the eloquence of the constructions" (1782/1789/1996, p. 106). Rousseau was also exposed to matters of the world through the rich array of acquaintances, friends and relatives that passed through the household and he was aware of needing a broader view to balance his early inclination to romanticism through the availability of texts in his father's house. Madame de Warens endeavoured to guide the young Rousseau into meaningful adult pursuits.

Happily, it was not enough to know my inclinations, my tastes, my abilities; it was necessary to find or to create opportunities for employing them profitably, and this was not the work of a day. (Rousseau, 1782/1789/1996, p. 107)

Madame de Warens sought the opinion and assistance of friends and relatives to ascertain the skills and strengths that Rousseau would have at the ready in a suitable career for a young gentleman. And so it was that Rousseau spent time in the company of M. d'Aubonne with a view to achieving recommendations for a future.

The result of his observations was that, in spite of my attractive appearance and animated features, I was, if not quite silly, a lad of little intelligence, without any ideas, almost without knowledge, in a word, of very limited capacities in every respect; and that the highest position to which I had any right to aspire was that of some day becoming a village curé...this was the second or third time I was thus judged; it was not the last. (Rousseau, 1782/1789/1996, p. 108)

Rousseau understood, despite the poor assessments of his abilities, that opportunity is a complex phenomenon requiring a blend of creative elements, drawn from the collection of one's own diversity which is the work of a lifetime. Who can or would take a young person of fifteen or so and decide for them the direction of the next fifty years? Rousseau was himself, adept at taking opportunities where he found them, building strengths over time to give one the best chance to always have something to create a living, in an undertaking which was not completely disagreeable.

Rousseau is at length to provide explanations for many of the happenings of his life, inviting the reader to come to an understanding of the natural processes bringing about the actions of an honest and open man. Rousseau assigned his poor references to the disjunction between his passions and his ideas, the latter requiring reflection and quiet to become fully directed.

My ideas arrange themselves in my head with almost incredible difficulty; they circulate in it with uncertain sound, and ferment until they excite and heat me, and make my heart beat fast; and, in the midst of this excitement, I see nothing clearly and am unable to write a single word – I am obliged to wait. (Rousseau, 1782/1789/1996, p. 109)

Rousseau believed that it was only in the recalling of memories that his intelligence surged, combined with his sharp ability to observe.

I have never been able to produce anything, pen in hand, in front of my table and paper; it is during a walk, in the midst of rocks and forests, at night in my bed while lying awake, that I write in my brain; one may judge how slowly, especially in the case of a man utterly without verbal memory and who was never able to learn six lines by heart in his life. (Rousseau, 1782/1789/1996, p. 110)

Rousseau sets out on his first walk feeling a deep estrangement from his fellow man. “But I, detached as I am from them and from the whole world, what am I? This must now be the object of my inquiry (Rousseau, 1782/2004, p. 27)”. As I walk with Rousseau to understand his purpose through his experiences and come to deeper understanding of his philosophical impact, I am also drawn to seek clarity for myself as a professional of learning and education and take time while travelling to reflect, examine and perhaps revise the nature and direction of my personal walk. Rousseau lays his questions before us, appealing for understanding of the fifteen years of controversy, anguish and disconnection from those who once lauded his work and, at one time, raised their glasses to him. In desolation he proclaims,

Yes, I must surely have slipped unwittingly from waking into sleep, or rather from life into death. Wrenched somehow out of the natural order, I have been plunged into an incomprehensible chaos where I can make nothing out, and the more I think about my present situation, the less I can understand what has become of me. (1782/2004, p. 27)

Pacing his mind through the events and strategies used upon him, Rousseau comes to see that his enemies, after a period, exhausted their strategies, having stripped him of everything possible. Rousseau takes a kind of pleasure in seeing the foe without further stratagem, removing the fear that he once felt, awaiting the unknown. Each side is brought back to a stasis. Rousseau still held hope for the future, and so penned his *Dialogues*, hoping for a

better generation, examining more closely both the judgement pronounced against me by the present generation and its conduct towards me, would find it easy to unravel the stratagems of those who control it and would at last see me as I really am. (1782/2004, p. 30)

A number of different generations have had cause to rethink Rousseau's position as an author and philosopher. Through the *Reveries*, Rousseau turned his eye inward and likening the collection to an appendix of *The Confessions*, sought to "gain new knowledge of my nature and disposition from knowing what feelings and thoughts nourish my mind in this strange state" (1782/2004, p. 33). The small collection of walks gave Rousseau leave to write as he felt, to take a "barometer reading of [his] soul" (1782/2004, p. 33), leaving behind, those who sought to do his career harm and creating for him some sense of peaceful space.

Cocooned in an A380 I am slightly unaware of the passage of the miles, even though I am watching at intervals the digital map tracking our passage across the globe. The elapse of time, tick, tick, time change, tick, tick. I begin to focus only on our anticipated time of arrival. My mind wanders, "I wonder what they're doing at work? I have to find some resolutions to how I am feeling. Perhaps with some space to think and reflect I will be better able to find the reason for my frustrations, my incapacity, and my personal process of change.

As the day wears on, tired, a nobody tourist, I begin to feel tiny cracks appear in my robust, travelling alone outer shell. It creeps in slowly, each disablement a tiny, unrelenting force pushing further and further, tiny fissures open. Seeing, listening, timing, billboards, arrows, the sights and sounds of Charles de Gaulle airport, baggage claim, a

map in my head, waiting, gathering my composure, papers, passport, bag, signs? Endeavouring to hide my confusion though greatly aware that I am managing to hide nothing at all and the vulnerabilities therein released. By the time I reach the train station I feel the full weight of growing up in a small town, small state, small island and despite my years of high school French lessons, unappreciated and unenjoyed, now feel fully the abandonment of language, sounds recognised or not in the air and the distance and suspicion between us. People, ordinary people, like myself see my efforts to explain and are so helpful, the compassion warm in their hurried voices. Those in uniform are less so. The ways of working are different here and I look earnestly to find some realignment of myself. Watching the flow of trains, clock timings, transfer of passengers, with an occasional question, the scene takes on a pattern that I can decipher. Platform numbers displayed ten minutes prior to departure. So simple. Waiting for the next ten minutes to tick away, I reacquaint myself with my stored knowledge of the self. I am not a process person, I am deeply invested in the person, whatever the circumstances may be. Is this part of the reason for a continuing dislocation? Surrounded by process within tides of resistance as, we the people, seek to find our own sense of rhythm and purpose? Shards of clarity pierce the totally necessary process elements of the day. The late afternoon sun streaks through the huge church-like windows at the end of the platforms. In frustration I chide myself. “Good heavens, I’m an adult, I should be able to work out a train station!” My inner child, equally frustrated, calls me to task with “Apparently not!” Time has ticked, and I check with a passenger that I am on the train to Chartres, “Oui, it will be the last stop, you can track your journey here (pointing), get comfortable and enjoy the view, it is very pretty country.” I settle in and listen to the conversations in French floating on the air around my thoughts, such a lyrical note, and continue to ponder the nature of resistances in our path and the very human search for location in the collective for it is a dilemma which has long troubled me.

The Brandalism project began with a lone artist, Robert Montgomery, under cover of night, taking over advertising space with his white on black poems and commentary on the conspiracies of consumerism. Spreading worldwide the movement promotes opportunities for individual thought and action for a more critically examined response to living a life and yet another expression of the notion of resistance.

Creative Resistance begins when we start to imagine what our world – our communities, our friendships, our networks – could be like when we start living by our own rules outside of the logic of progress and profit and learn to construct

the 'goodlife' together by observing and working with the ecological systems of the natural world. To do this we need to create space, psychological and physical. Creative Resistance always begins in the imagination of another way of being together, but has to continue with an act of resistance in the world itself, when a new idea is thrown in the face of the present. ("Brandalism," 2014)

While the notions of resistance emanate from different experiences and take differently constituted paths there remains a consistency of finding one's own rhythm, being clear about the principles underpinning the ways one will or might live. As I live and work, seeking that path to being wholly oneself, finding my platform for hope and demanding my own rhythm the sound of resistance rings clearly in my ear. Conversations revisit, are examined, dissected, different outcomes explored. How does one who is inherently collaborative find a path of creative resistance? Now more than at any time in my professional life is this activator the very thing I require in order to carry on a meaningful and relevant presence and contribution? How does a space of things become the people to which I can find connection?

While working in a world of continual but often strikingly slow change and passive resistance which yes, is an entirely different phenomenon but all too prevalent in my daily experiences, I question my ways of thinking, taking action, my mental and emotional responses and potentials for personal change and development. Rousseau, through his work, provides a platform to question how we as critical selves might learn and work and live.

While people have always been at the centre of my being and concern, as an individual I require solitude to restore, the tension between engaging and being with oneself requires refinement and continual adjustment if a meaningful balance is to be designed, enacted and lived. Rousseau, as a seeker of solitude, examines this tension in his life through his responses and ways of being. Rousseau is much maligned for being a collection of contradictions. How can one be so absolute, so pedantic and yet fail so miserably to meet one's own declarations of the shape of society's expectations? While Rousseau felt a separation from society and anguished to explain himself and his work, there are those who could see beyond the pain. Peter France, introducing the *Reveries*, notes that in the summer of 1776 Rousseau was visited by the Englishman Thomas Bentley who upon reflection wrote,

He is a musical instrument above the concert pitch, and therefore too elevated for the present state of society, and all his singularities and errors, as they are called,

proceed from the extreme delicacy of his sensations...When nature was making this singular being, one would imagine she intended him for an inhabitant of the air, but before she had finished his wings he eagerly sprung out of her hands, and his unfinished body sunk him down to the earth. (in Rousseau, 1776/2004, p. 9)

Denis Diderot, once a dear friend of Rousseau's, eventually came to think of him as "...deceitful, vain as Satan, ungrateful, cruel, hypocritical and full of malice (Mastin, 2008)", a view eventually shared by David Hume, Baron von Grimm, François-Marie Arouet and Voltaire. The huge divide between Thomas Bentley's description and that of Diderot, transports my thoughts to my handful of particular friends, who are like no others. Extraordinarily gifted, refuting and rejecting lines of social compliance, independent beyond one's personal benefit, seeking the company of few while amazing many. The many are often those who take the time to remove their personal investment and ego from interactions, affording the possibility of a deeper mental and spiritual path to knowledge and understanding of a soul. Learning a lesson from one such friend I heard "Why do you always think it's about you?" having asked had I done something wrong to warrant a prolonged silence. The learning was to take many years to bring me closer to understandings around ways of questioning, stating, and thinking overall, to even begin to see two distinct ways of interpreting the world.

I am drawn to ponder the tensions in finding one's own rhythm and being wholly one's true self in my space of solitude, with the crowds milling around me at the Panthéon, in Paris, Rousseau and Voltaire lying opposite one another in their stony, silent encasements. The gentle face of Rousseau looks down on visitors from the modern "pull-up" display device. I wonder at the voice and attend my imaginings to words from the *Reveries* I have been holding in my hand as I walked the corridors.

Rousseau sought to find his own rhythm through a deeply analysed and examined truth to self which speaks to me from *The Reveries*, disclosing as he does in *The First Walk* that

Being without guile, without skill, without cunning and without prudence, frank, open impatient and impulsive, I only enmeshed myself further in my efforts to be free. (1782/2004, p. 28)

Losing faith in his contemporaries he sought happiness in his solitude with nature where pretensions could be cast aside, and he could truly be himself in nature.

I have been able to work for many years in collaborative spaces, requiring strength of perception, patience, clarity of direction and the ability to both drive and balance

competing agendas in the realm of advocacy. Different environments call for different ways of being and so more and more I am seeking ways of a creative resistance. Like new shoes the resulting phenomenon is uncomfortable, it is tight and exerts a pressure into my soul, into the ground I walk.

The resonance and resistance of difference echoes through the vast collection of Rousseau's work. The deep desire to understand oneself and be understood is at the root of Rousseau's personal explorations. The torment of being misinterpreted and misunderstood was the catalyst for major works such as *The Confessions* and the lesser such as *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

The early walks of *The Reveries* expose Rousseau's state of mind through contemplations and the conditions which created his world view. Each walk progresses through a logical analysis of action, reaction, revision. The topics are carefully structured to exact a self-analysis through each journey.

The Second Walk traces the event and aftermath of an unfortunate encounter with a Great Dane, hurtling toward Rousseau at speed, knocking him off his feet leaving him unconscious and with injuries to the face and body which were to take a great time to heal. Rousseau's account serves two purposes. The first was to put to right the number of incorrect suppositions floating around Paris at the time as a result of his incapacity and enforced removal from day to day meanderings, and the second to illustrate one of his difficulties, to understand the motivations of others. The event stirred interest in his activities and once again, those who would benefit from his acquaintance, surfaced to avail themselves of any chances which might flow. Through these events, Rousseau examines the nature of crude flattery and how his contemporaries attempted to manipulate his reputation, further their own successes around him, through him and how he struggled to understand their duplicitous intentions.

I should seem wicked and ferocious to my contemporaries even if my only crime lay in not being as false and perfidious as they are... all kinds of frankness and honesty are terrible crimes in the eyes of society...(Rousseau, 1782/2004, p. 43)

Many modern institutions are beset by the challenge of speaking plainly and operating in a fully transparent fashion. Politeness is not useful if it is a barrier to necessary development be it structural, operational or personal. My journey in recent years has been to develop myself to an extent where my clarity and honesty with others is resistant to mere polite behaviours and the brick wall of polite complicity. Rousseau reminds me that this value is worthy of pursuit while being difficult to attain.

Through the Third Walk, Rousseau examines his sense of being ill fitted to the scope offered in life. Hence, he sought all the more to understand his nature and purpose, a study which he believed he had not witnessed similarly in the work of any others.

Thrown into the whirlpool of life while still a child, I learned from early experience that I was not made for this world, and that in it I would never attain the state to which my heart aspired. Ceasing therefore to seek among men the happiness which I felt I could never find there, my ardent imagination learned to leap over the boundaries of a life which was as yet hardly begun, as if it were flying over an alien land in search of a fixed and stable resting-place. (Rousseau, 1782/2004, p. 48)

In talking of philosophers of his time, Rousseau is critical seeing the study of human nature removed from a study which would lead to an understanding of self. In a brutally honest and straightforward manner Rousseau owns his choice to be fully oneself and the paths henceforth taken.

I reached the age of forty, oscillating between poverty and riches, wisdom and error, full of vices born of habit, but with a heart free of evil inclinations, living at random with no rational principles, and careless but not scornful of my duties, of which I was often not fully aware. (Rousseau, 1782/2004, p. 50)

I often defended myself rather feebly because of my distaste and lack of talent for disputation, but never once did I adopt their dismal teaching, and this resistance to such intolerant people, who had moreover their own ends in view, was not the least of the causes which sparked off their animosity towards me. (Rousseau, 1782/2004, p. 52)

Rousseau set about finding his own “rule of conduct” at a time of intellectual and moral reformation. He sought to decide his principles and opinions once and for all through writing *The Reveries*, so in maturity reassessing his present being and what would carry him through the remainder of his life. It was a slow and deliberate process and considered the full range of complexities and difficulties on which one's life and fast held moral and ethical fabric might be based.

Patience, kindness, resignation, integrity and impartial justice are goods that we can take with us and that we can accumulate continually without fear that death itself can rob us of their value. It is to this one useful study that I devote what remains of my old age. And I shall be happy if by my own self-improvement I

learn to leave life, not better, for that is impossible, but more virtuous than when I entered it. (1782/2004, p. 61)

In taking us on the Fourth Walk, Rousseau lays out an examination of the nature of truth and lies and how one ought to engage in the former, resist the latter, and the vexations of interpreting both.

The difference between my truthful man and the others is that they are strictly faithful to any truth which costs them nothing, and that is all, whereas he is never so faithful to truth as when he has to sacrifice himself for her sake. (1782/2004, p. 72)

Maintaining one's own self-respect is paramount to the values Rousseau lays down for his truthful man. Stepping back to his younger days he relives the pain caused through an act of dishonesty. The young Rousseau, while a servant in Turin, stole a ribbon from his mistress and blamed his co-worker for the theft (1782/2004, p. 64). Through this early recognition of the damage caused, Rousseau came to draw a firm line under lies and white lies, deeming both equally abhorrent. The rationale is somewhat interesting, residing more in the realm of reducing the time required to differentiate white lies from general lies.

Are we to measure our obligations by the single criterion of public good or by that of distributive justice? And can I be sure of knowing all the aspects of a question so well that I divulge my information purely according to the rules of equity? What is more, in examining what one owes to others, have I taken sufficient account of what one owes to oneself? If I do no harm to my neighbour when I deceive him, does it follow that I do no harm to myself, and is enough to avoid injustice in order to live blamelessly?

Recognising the knot he has created from this line of questioning, Rousseau undoes it, piece by piece, coming to the conclusion that the truth is the only way to pursue life. While untying the knot, Rousseau reveals interesting idiosyncrasies about his particular path to truth.

In this as in all other matters my natural disposition has had a great influence on my principles, or rather on my habits, for I have hardly ever acted according to the rules—or have hardly ever followed any other rules than the promptings of my nature. (1782/2004, p. 73)

Perhaps, in these stated tendencies, we can see some of the habits which found friendships come unstuck and enraged some of his colleagues.

Through the Fifth Walk Rousseau reveals his love for the island and people of Saint-Pierre in Switzerland where he happily sought refuge after the stoning of his abode at Môtiers. Leaving his books and writing instruments aside for a time, he set about constructing a strategy for his new passion of biological inquiry, reveling in the beauty, simplicities and complexities of nature. He describes with joy, outings with the Steward and his wife, and with Thérèse, one in particular which saw them settle a clutch of rabbits on the small island. “The founding of this little colony was a great day. The pilot of the Argonauts was not prouder than I was, when I led the company and the rabbits, from the large island to the small one” (1782/2004, p. 86). Rousseau continues in this walk to ponder on the things which bring one joy and sadness, and how he could transcend the foibles of society through imagination and reverie.

Emerging from a long and happy reverie, seeing myself surrounded by greenery, flowers and birds, and letting my eyes wander over the picturesque far-off shores which enclosed a vast stretch of clear crystalline water, I fused my imaginings with these charming sights, and finding myself in the end gradually brought back to myself and my surroundings, I could not draw a line between fiction and reality; so much did everything conspire equally to make me love the contemplative and solitary life I led in that beautiful place. (1782/2004, pp. 90-91)

The Sixth Walk explores the nature of the contract between the benefactor and the recipient, duty and the social contract. While picking the path for his walk Rousseau realizes that he has taken to choosing a rather circuitous route to the fields. His usual route by the Porte d’Enfer has been ignored and he sets about understanding his true intent. It comes to this. A woman and her crippled son, who have a stall at the market have come to look for Rousseau on his walk, and the kindness shown to the young boy by way of little gifts and money. The boy and Rousseau enjoyed each other’s company. The chance meetings went on for some long time, turned to habit and then took a turn to duty, changing the tenor of the relationship totally.

...I often found my good deeds a burden because of the chain of duties they dragged behind them; then pleasure vanished and it became intolerably irksome to me to keep giving the same assistance which had at first delighted me. (1782/2004, p. 94)

Rousseau remembers his times of prosperity and how he had not refused a request for assistance if he was able to do so. Being naïve of intent he had not perceived the connections and obligations this would chain him to.

...I came to see that all our natural impulses, including even charity itself, can change their nature when we import them into society and follow them unthinkingly and imprudently, and can often become as harmful as they were as previously useful.

Rousseau uses these experiences to examine the intent of man in general and himself in particular, as he works to understand the contract between benefactor and recipient, through recalling times of prosperity and when living quietly and at a distance from such influences.

The Seventh Walk leads Rousseau to examine the newly expanding study of medicine, coming full circle to expound the superiority of herbs, their mixtures and a simple life as remedy for a range of ailments.

My meditations and reveries are never more delightful than when I can forget myself. I feel transports of joy and inexpressible raptures in becoming fused as it were with the great system of beings and identifying myself with the whole of nature. (1782/2004, p. 111)

In the Eighth Walk, Rousseau takes the reader through a reckoning of his dark times and the plot against him, or more importantly, how he raised his mental state from that place to live peacefully and happily. Through a process of self-examination Rousseau comes to see how self-esteem had crept in to replace a true love of self and tied him to the “tyranny of public opinion” (1782/2004, p. 129). Only through this deeply exposed recognition is Rousseau able to release himself from its grasp and once again find simplicity and solace in reliance on oneself.

Rousseau attends to the matter of his children in the Ninth Walk, his reasoning and their fate in the Foundlings Home. The subject looms large in any critique of Rousseau’s life, and is best delivered in his own words.

... there is no doubt that in doing so I was influenced most of all by the fear that any other course of action would almost inevitably bring upon them a fate a thousand times worse. Had I been less concerned about what would happen to them, since I was not in a position to bring them up myself, I should have been obliged by my circumstances to leave their education to their mother, who would have spoiled them, and to her family, who would have made monsters of them. (1782/2004, p. 139)

Rousseau presents an interesting and troublesome dilemma, one that continues to haunt families, communities and society to this day and become more and more multi-layered as societies change the shape of what it is to be a family.

Through the Tenth Walk Rousseau returns to the love of his life, Madame de Warens and his vow to honour the investment she had bestowed upon him.

Rousseau's work demonstrates a constant questioning, of self, those who criticised him, those who engaged with his work and those who did not. Many have criticised the findings Rousseau settled upon. I am still drawn to the tenacity with which he pursued the spirit and logic of his principles of living, believing and action through all levels of life, public and private, individual and collective. Having re-examined the basic principles of his beliefs he is able to set any future task of this nature aside, content in the knowledge that his efforts would be, "...hair-splitting metaphysical subtleties which count for nothing against the basic principles adopted by my reason, confirmed by my heart and bearing the seal of my conscience uninfluenced by passion" (Rousseau, 1782/2004, pp. 55-56).

For those of us who would see into the thoughts of Rousseau and the ways in which we might contemplate his path of resistance, his call to hope and potentialities, allowing the fullness of his rhythm to write the melody of a life, *The Reveries* is an interesting start, beginning at the end. Perhaps the end is a good place to contemplate one's journey from in order to face the truth of one's life. The walks are brief encounters with ideas expressed elsewhere in Rousseau's major writings. The collection was never intended as a great literary work. Rousseau never claimed to be a great philosopher.

As I walk from the Panthéon into the middle of a rainy Paris day the gentle smile of Rousseau comes with me. Is it gentle, is it unsure, is it a mind deeply considering the way? By the Pont Neuf, cardboard over his head and clutching a small sleeping dog to his chest under his coat, sits an old man. A bowl holding a small number of coins is also gathering the rain. No-one stops as the rain gathers momentum. I bend down and add my coins to the collection patting the little dog, warm and cosy in its refuge. "Merci, madame, oh merci, merci beaucoup." As Rousseau had explored in *the Reveries*, we marginalise at our peril and how does one differentiate one beggar from another, one circumstance from another, apportioning our duty in appropriate measure. What seemed a kindness on a rainy street in Paris, was transformed by the time my travels took me to the streets of New York where every side glance is a mistake and an opportunity for the opportunists. The statement from my daughter in Facebook makes for a humorous

reminder, “This is ‘Mummy’ getting fleeced by the Tibetan monk, \$20 for a prayer for peace and a bead bracelet.” In Washington DC, public transport at peak hour was peppered with young mothers, the obligatory story hastily scrawled on a piece of cardboard, hoping to make up enough for a room, food or formula. My acts of generosity and the boundaries of humanity were under pressure and examination. I find my attitude shifting based purely on the consistent, blatant pressure and manipulation to demonstrate benevolence. My daughter reminds me to tap into the culture, access to birth control, the right to choose lobby, fundamentalist religious powers. I admonish myself and find myself returning to Rousseau’s Sixth Walk. There I am reminded of the story of the crippled boy, their happiness in each other’s company at first which eventually brings Rousseau to take another way around his walk, escaping the undeclared contract of obligation. Life is a finely balanced exercise. It may not always hold up well under the scrutiny of others or indeed under our own troubled gaze. A sense of difference haunts us all for indeed we are all different and feel that difference distinctly.

Rousseau, throughout his life and his work across music, philosophy, politics and botany sought to understand and to be understood, to find both solitude and community. He questioned the path to one’s own natural rhythm and resisted the path of ease and complicity by rejecting the popular and the criticisms of his contemporaries. The candid nature of Rousseau’s writing attests to his humanness, the evidence of our human frailties at odds with our moments of high excellence and considerable contribution. This choice as so many writers after have attested to, makes all the difference (Frost, 1969).

## Chapter 4

### On Education: Situated in a Strategy

*... all social institutions in which we find ourselves submerged  
would stifle nature in him and put nothing in its place.*

*Émile or On Education (Rousseau, 1762/1979)*

Rousseau presented *On Education* to the reader in 1762. Through observation, reflection and the author's characteristic questioning he endeavoured to understand the best mechanisms to bring a young mind fully to self-actualisation and hold a place in society. To this end Rousseau drew his imaginary student, Émile, as a rich rather than poor orphan, under his sole care, delivering the necessary construct for the young mind to more naturally be open to direction. "The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases. That is my fundamental maxim. It need only be applied to childhood for all the rules of education to flow from it" (1762/1979, p. 84).

I see that it is unwise to take Rousseau's maxims on their word. It is only by duly mining the depths of example and description that I come to see what Rousseau had in mind for the student. Rousseau observed that society had unseated man's natural faith in himself and his strengths and replaced them with a constant and insatiable desiring. He would have us remember, "to live is not to breathe; it is to act..." and in so doing release the entirety of our "existence" (1762/1979, p. 42).

Rousseau helped to shape the direction of education as a role for a responsible society; ideas that fed the Industrial Revolution, the emerging shift in social demographics from country to city and the resultant change in concepts of childhood, education and work. Ideas that amongst others would feed into the destinations of so many of my generation schooling through the sixties and seventies.

Education was a high priority in my family. My father was definite and open about his sense of poor scholarly achievement. School ended at Grade 6 and learning continued in the shipyard. The surge in industry and manufacturing of the early fifties presented opportunities to a young couple and my father moved states to work the remainder of his life as an engineer in papermaking. My mother had trained to be a teacher and after a short career became mother and caregiver to my older brothers and I. She would often say “that’s just the way it is,” though I could see she wished it were otherwise and I sensed all too strongly, it was the reason behind her unwavering and unforgiving deviance from excellence in the classroom.

On Saturday mornings my brothers and I regularly accompanied Dad to the plant, a huge acreage of industry billowing smoke and dust across the town. I understood little of why he had to work on Saturday only that it was his responsibility to make sure that the machines ran smoothly to produce the rolls of white and coloured paper to put on ships and send around the world. We followed our father as he went from machine to machine dipping his hand into the paper pulp, filling jars with samples for our next school project. We all knew a lot about papermaking although at times I wondered if the whole purpose of the collection of machines was to break down and be repaired by my father. I was eight years old.

As I grew older and listened differently to his stories, characters in the plant, the role of the unions, and the rights of the worker filled the air. I continued to question how someone with a poor education could also be the person responsible for keeping the plant running and rolling out the production of the paper. I would sit by my father as he ate his dinner, late as usual, and with pencils before me and under his instruction I would colour in neatly the bar graphs that showed production for the month. It was my mother who talked and taught the connection between production, money for the families and the shops in the town. Coming in off night shift as I left for school my father often sat down to toast and dripping for breakfast and I would sneak a bite on my way out. Further up the hill I’d call in to collect my friend and chat with her father while waiting, the fresh smell of pulp smoke from his overalls in the air. “What’s your dad having for breakfast this morning Lyn?” “The same as you, Mr Green,” and we laughed as he ladled out the dripping and smeared it richly across his toast. Another friend’s father was a staunch representative for the union and the rights of the worker. Visits to one another were achieved on the quiet during strike action.

A good education was the expectation of the community and each of my peers would engage differently with the process. Even at that young age the difference between academic and practical paths clearly set each occupant on a distinct journey. I questioned this throughout life and it is a dichotomy which continues to plague notions of successful educational outcomes at community and government levels. It was the Whitlam era and there were trades for our boys and university for me. At a dinner gathering in 2014 early comments around the table reflected the news of the day and the passing of Gough Whitlam. A colleague asked for a raise of hands from those who had been able to attend university and fulfilled their Bachelor of Education degree as a result of the Whitlam government policies; almost half of the group responded. The sadness for that loss of strength and vision was real as those affected including myself were so aware that our families' economic position would not have otherwise brought our achievements to fruition.

An English Literature teacher once boomed out to a class of tired sixteen-year-olds, "if it was easy, it wouldn't be worth doing!" Equally a frustrated mother demonstrated real anguish and pain at any suggestion of not being good enough to complete my studies. It was a horror not to be contemplated and palpably brought home the knowledge that one carried the weight of all the young people who were not treading that same path. As coast kids we piled onto the bus after last lecture Friday afternoons and headed out of the city. Two hours of singing and laughing later and around the last bend in the road the smell of the sea mingled with the smoke of the mill and we were home to a car and a waiting parent on pickup duty. Fridges were full of favourite foods with enough left over to stock a box for the return trip on Sunday night. Parents shared the load and often took others home as shift work and small businesses needed attention night and day and not all mothers had their licence.

Finally in 1978 with a Bachelor of Education and Diploma of Teaching, I set off to rural Tasmania to teach for five years across Grades 7 to 10 in English, Drama, Music, Art, Health and Literacy. It was literacy proficiency in the transition from Grade 6 to Grade 7 that took up many of my non-teaching hours. I could not help but be concerned for students who struggled to meet the demands of their new school environment and who without assistance would become frustrated, lose motivation and often cover up with negative behaviours. These same students would be seen four years later struggling to complete Year 10 and sometimes leave to take up unskilled jobs in agriculture, forestry, processing at the local butter factory or the few retail jobs available in town.

As a stay at home parent for nine years I was able to reflect on changing perceptions in education and the workforce, listening to stories from lives in our small community and the repeating narratives of low levels of literacy and numeracy, low educational attainment, lack of jobs and opportunity. These were to be familiar threads on my return to the workforce as a case manager for long term unemployed jobseekers and New Apprenticeships administrator. While still working in the apprenticeships system I attended a community focus group to join the discussion on raising the school leaving age and how that might impact the Tasmanian population up to 2020 within the Tasmania Together framework. Points of reference included building cultures of lifelong learning, current and potential leaving ages, Tasmania's ability to prepare for emerging global economies, considerations regarding education in both highly centralised yet widely dispersed environments and a full spectrum of topics which would impact families making decisions in the coming years affecting their response to post year 10 decision making with their sons and daughters.

## Listening to the Archives

I have a collection of old documents from the Tasmania Together period of political history in our island state. They lie on my desk, a somewhat ragged collection of photocopied papers, pamphlets and documents. They are originals from my saved memories, collected and stored at the end of a period of employment because "it might be important to keep them". They bear the logos of a previous government, the face of a premier now passed on, the cheery yet determined smile taking me back to 2001.

Reflecting on the politics of the period it was a time of unusual hope and optimism. Tasmanians had participated in a lived experience that was audible, visual and perceptually present. We had been asked to participate in the questions and the answers of our time. Like never before the government of Jim Bacon had asked us to demonstrate our needs and priorities across communities through a range of devices drawn to invite inclusion and public consultation. "As a world-leading system of community goal setting and decision making, it [Tasmania Together] is enshrined in law and used to guide decision making at the highest levels of the State Public Service" (Cabinet, 2000, p. 1). We could see our input reflected in the documents. Voices could be heard. In 2001 the vision of Tasmania Together told us that:

Together we will make Tasmania an icon for the rest of the world by creating a proud and confident society where our people live in harmony and prosperity.  
(Cabinet, 2000, p. 1)

It was a rare process amongst Australian state governments, Tasmania being the first to attempt a "...20 year social, environmental and economic plan..." (Cabinet, 2000, p. 1). The vision was shaped through extensive community consultation. Perhaps more astounding for those like myself, linked career wise to the waves of voting cycles and policy change, this process had the support of key political parties, while the benchmarks harnessed both policy and budgets of government departments. The call from many government employees, to ensure key social sector interests such as education and health be managed and effectively quarantined from the vagaries of the election cycle, seemed to have secured a long range vision. Did this mean that our government, opposition and those with vested interests could at last put aside differences and operate for the public good? This is a question to be revisited at a later point in the living narrative of a state and its political decision making. In the meantime, let us investigate further, the document which introduced the Tasmanian public to the educational goals and strategies planned for the state.

## Tasmania: A State of Learning: A Strategy for Post-Year 10 Education and Training

It was the mid 2000's when I returned to the Department of Education relishing the chance to contribute to post-compulsory education through the state government strategy *Tasmania: A State of Learning: A Strategy for Post-Year 10 Education and Training*. The Honourable Paula Wriedt MHA was the Minister for Education and she called on Tasmanians to think differently about education.

Our community has demonstrated a commitment to improving young people's participation in education and training; to enabling second chance learning opportunities for people of all ages; and to building educated and skilled communities able to respond positively to change. (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 1)

The Minister paints an opening picture of the working life of Tasmanian youth which is to be underpinned by eleven different jobs during a lifetime, across perhaps four different

industries with the need to up skill and retrain at various stages. The picture broadens and leads us to consider what it means to be a lifelong learner, pausing quickly to position Tasmania in a rapidly changing global economy which “demands that we create and maintain partnerships to enhance learning opportunities and to support learners. It is these demands that have shaped the strategy’s development.” Taking pride in the depth and breadth of involvement the strategy recognises the input of “individuals, groups, organisations and agencies” (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 1), and the state-wide communities that will in the future be called on to support learners of all ages to take up first and second chance learning opportunities (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 1). The minister presented the community with the challenge to reconstruct learning as “...everyone’s entitlement – and everyone’s responsibility” (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 1).

The strategy had a story to tell with its attendant highs and lows for participants and non-participants in the Tasmanian education system and reflected how a changing world required major structural and participatory restructure across local and national learning environments, if Tasmania and Australia were to build on its current standing in global education.

The word opportunity flows liberally throughout this strategic document, it’s aim, to bring about a change in thinking and through that revolutionary philosophical shift, change the daily lives of Tasmanians and their lifelong outcomes. At first glance one might interrogate the undertakings and immediately wonder at the time factor. How long could one expect this monumental cultural shift to take? How many terms of government are needed to bring about a shift in the collective value system of students, parents, institutions, business and industry, not to mention competitors in the serious game of winning elections? As an inside “player” I could see that part of my role would be to translate the messages hidden in the complexities and contested language of policy and be a bridge to communicate the need of the government of the day, somewhat akin to a cultural translator. The tension between policy builders and cultural translators is enormous.

## Policy Meets Public

Something happens when policy meets public. The glossy booklet, the storied graphics showing young people as productive, clean and brushed, well-educated, happy transitioning soon to be adults. While maintaining a comfortable vision, there can be a loss of cohesion with the messages of how we might get there, how we can achieve that part of the story for all our young people. The backstory required to bring dream into reality becomes blurred and certainly for the young people and families that I was to work with, the backstory was everything, it was the reality of their lives. The carefully researched markers of educational success or failure, massaged into dot points were fouled in shades of misinterpretation, became smudged and broken against a strong counter story. And so, the conversations began. Some voices were louder than others. Some had the benefit of positioning and media. Perspectives clashed, priorities appeared to be in totally different realms. We heard the syncopation of sound, the positive and perfected against the troubled and concerned as parents tried to make sense of the dialogue and what it would mean for them in raising their families. Concern for the following year was immediate and then what? Those struggling already read cost and impost between the lines and joined the ranks of the fearful. Each campaign creating the need for another, one step forward and two steps back.

**Retention rates from Year 10 to 12 compared reasonably favourably at 75% alongside the national average of 77%.**

*So why do we need to have our kids at school for two more years?*

Participation by 15-19 year olds in all education sat at 71.1% against a national average of 77%, while participation in schooling was 53.2%, above the national average of 49.7%.

*What does it matter what's happening in the rest of*

*Australia! Anyway, we're doing ok!*

*The government should spend time working on jobs here.*

*It's not our fault kids are sitting around doing nothing.*

The 2001 Year 10 Destination Survey showed that 17% of Year 10 leavers did not go on to Year 11 in a school or college, however, one in two early leavers was involved in vocational education and training or some level of employment.

*If kids want to go on, they can and if they  
want to leave they should be able to.  
What are we supposed to do?*

30.2% of the population held an advanced diploma, diploma or certificate 1 to 1V in 2002, while the national average was only slightly higher at 30.4%.

*It's all right for you lot, we need our kids  
to get out there and get a job!  
As if we could change anything!*

In sealing a case for change the strategy went on to highlight areas of underperformance. Tasmania has the lowest proportion of people who have attained post-Year 10 qualifications (52.2% compared with the national average of 67.3%).

*Well once you leave school it's not like you want to stay  
there forever or keep going back. What's that about? I finished after Grade 9  
and I've always had work in the sawmill.*

Only 37.9% of 24-year olds had obtained a skilled vocational qualification compared to the national average of 49.2%.

*It's too expensive to go to TAFE, have you seen the cost of the fees, nice idea! If  
you get an apprenticeship, you're stuck on lousy pay for four years. Kids can't  
survive on that and we certainly can't afford to pay for their upkeep. The  
government just wants more, more, more. When does it stop?*

Tasmanians holding a bachelor's degree or higher sat at 11.4% against the national average of 17.8%.

*Geez, well none of my kids'll go to Uni,  
what's the point, all those years wasted when you  
could be out working and getting set up.*

All conversation data available at (State of Tasmania, 2003, pp. 4-5)

For the government the overall landscape outlined a low skills base requiring a focus on post-Year 10 education and training to transform industry, business and the Tasmanian quality of life (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 5). Parents struggling to keep their young people at school saw a heavier impost on an already difficult life, with no long term meaning or benefit in their family's circumstances. Yet the Strategic Framework went on to remind Tasmanians of the broad community consultation undertaken to build the bedrock of a new system across all ages and learning sectors, breathing new life into a collective of shared values and purposes which had the potential to create positive futures for all.

## Guaranteeing Futures?

The strategy for post Year 10 education and training was based around four connected and guiding building blocks: Guaranteeing Futures, Ensuring Essential Literacies, Enhancing Adult Learning, and Building Learning Communities (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 10). How long does it take to guarantee futures, to ensure that a person has the literacy skills to manage daily personal and working life? One might also ask how long it takes to enhance adult learning and bring a community to see itself as a vital and active centre of learning? These are some of the questions that I pondered while attempting to breathe life into the pages of the policy documents.

Guaranteeing Futures was established in 2004 to meet the needs of young Tasmanians in transition from compulsory education to independent young adult hood. Articulating a noble vision for individuals, for communities, for Tasmanians, the underpinning values of learning, people, participation, achievement, flexibility, diversity, innovation, collaboration and responsibility was something we all hoped to bring into actuality (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 10). The outcomes aspired to deliver,

Individual pathway and transition support for young Tasmanians  
Multiple and flexible learning opportunities and pathways that cater for the needs of  
young Tasmanians and their communities  
Coordinated provision of education, training, employment and related services for young  
Tasmanians  
Partnerships between young Tasmanians and their parents; education, training and other  
youth service providers; government; business and industry; and the community  
Increased retention, participation and attainment by young Tasmanians in education and  
training  
Improved personal, social and economic outcomes for young Tasmanians  
A skills base that matches labour market requirements in Tasmania's growing economy.

(State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 11)

Key drivers of the initiative included the framing of a legal requirement for participation in education and training to year 12, a youth pathways policy, a curriculum and funding review, area taskforce strategies targeting local development and support for communities in need, and youth mentoring programs. And there I am on page 15 providing pathway planning and transition support to Year 10 students. My colleagues working in all schools developed the model and resources for pathway planning across grades eight through ten, ensuring that all students in a year group participated in three, one to one careers information and options sessions per year, being mindful of the individual student's development across the years and the likely fluctuation of aspirations and interests. The student developed a personal resource across those years which was stored by the Department of Education and shared with parents and carers at the end of each yearly cycle. On reaching Year 10 the student had an able resource in their Pathway Planner who could assist with the transition to Year 11 and 12, assist with subject selection, harnessing additional resources if required and meeting with parents to engage in informed conversations about the next steps.

As one of seven Youth Learning Officers around Tasmania my role was to provide individual support and pathway planning for young people who had disengaged from mainstream school or who were at risk of not completing a further two years post Year 10 education and training. Youth Learning Officers operated on a case management model with 50 students across five schools. The aim was to target those most in need of assistance with the available resourcing.

Year 10 coordinators and teachers referred students who may benefit from engaging with a Youth Learning Officer; eighty percent of the caseload being students who were at risk of not continuing in education and training past year 10, and the

remaining twenty percent being students who were already disengaged or not attending their school of enrolment because of chronic non-attendance, suspension or exclusion. Youth Learning Officers worked across the school community interface, ensuring students benefited from a network of education, training and employment and community services as they moved beyond compulsory education.

Discussion toward the end of term one with senior school staff resulted in a list of fifty referred students. After meeting with the students and establishing a willingness to participate and their focus for participation, further meetings built towards a transition plan that was relevant to the student's circumstances, aspirations and changing needs. The planning process centred on an understanding of self in relation to motivations and values, working towards an understanding of the systems and options available for further learning or employment. Practical work included the gathering of a portfolio of documents for each jobseeker and a focus on personal skills to assist in interviews, meetings, and local networking. Term three created opportunities to prepare a sustainable process which would support the young person's choices throughout the following year. This may have included engagement with early introduction programs, taster days, work experience activities, visits to prospective choices or support to find employment. Activities were limited only by the imagination and the commitment of those involved.

All Youth Learning Officers (YLOs) brought themselves fully to the role of working with vulnerable young people within a set of government guidelines. Through collegial meetings, planning and sharing we gathered around us a model of working that reflected a desire for integrity, equality and understanding within our professional vision. As practitioners of pathways and careers within a school environment there were times when all had to rise to the challenge "but you're not teachers!" Some had been in previous lives while others had immense experience of the employment and training sector, social work, youth work, and community engagement. The breadth and depth of experiences and networks was indeed the key to success in the role. It was as if Jennifer Greene had overheard our conversations when she articulated so succinctly the value of a mixed method approach to research, her words heightening the personal and professional goals we strove to emulate and adopt.

Understanding that is woven from strands of particularity and generality, contextual complexity and patterned regularity, inside and outside perspectives, the whole and its constituent parts, change and stability, equity and excellence...the generation of important understandings and discernments

through the juxtaposition of different lenses, perspectives, and stances... (Greene, 2007, p. 208)

The program aimed to begin fully in the present rather than reliving past failures. The young person could then look forward and plan for a future regardless of past experiences. My aim was to work with students in a way that enhanced and supported opportunities in a direction of their choosing based on informed and realistic decisions. The YLO was a facilitator, a source of information, a network of capable contacts, transport, access to financial assistance and a sounding board for ideas and plans.

The importance of the role of the caregiver in the life of a sixteen-year-old cannot be underestimated even for a young person living amongst fluctuating life circumstances. Discussions of futures and possible pathways are tested against the experiences of peers and whichever member of an older generation is most readily available and able to listen. Tracey Frigo, Jennifer Bryce, Michelle Anderson and Phillip McKenzie in *Australian Young People, their families and postschool plans: a research review*, noted that the notion of options is put out there for reaction and comment, weighing up possibilities within the family structure (Frigo, 2007). The work of the YLO involved interaction and deep dialogue with the adults and major influencers in the life of a young person. At times, contact with a caregiver was the only contact and thus the role could be realised through a conduit, relaying back and forth. There are many ways to count contact and actualise a role, also highlighting the importance of support mechanisms for caregivers who may have precious few within their immediate community.

Year 10 is still viewed as a jumping off point in many families, a time when young people are told that decisions are theirs to make. Their choices may be in fields that parents have had little exposure to. A student from my teaching days related that she felt in the 1980's that her decisions were her parents. Now as a mother of two she values highly the freedom for her children to choose careers and life pathways, not for money or success, but to incorporate happiness, satisfaction, lifestyle and health. Within the years of writing this thesis, community and certainly global focus has undergone major cultural and structural shift in understandings and interpretations of what constitutes a career, a pathway, a qualification and a life. Watching and experiencing the trajectories of my own young adults and those of friends is a salutary lesson in change. The long game of planning and persistence and the short game of capturing chance continually changes position and one is required to be attuned to shifting ground and being nimble and fleet.

## Culture Matters

To drive through the school gate every morning is to cross the “border” (Giroux, 1992) from one world view to another. There are no border guards, mmm, but then perhaps there are. Rain, hail or shine, the lone teacher is in search of the late, the absconding and the smokers. To go through the gate is to become in a different world. I walk across the yard to the talk and chatter of the young, snippets of conversations, the immediately meaningful and the suddenly differently meaningful. Sometimes on the air, one hears something that was not meant to be heard. In an environment of mandatory reporting, one must be clear of responsibilities in the protection of minors. The simple act of walking and hearing can shift the trajectory of the day, week or months.

Unseen and yet pervasive are the guidelines, rules and boundaries, beliefs, signs and values which give structure to the multifarious movements and groupings which make up a school community. Carried within, in each person, are another set of beliefs and values which are a construct of the known, the comfortable and signify a working personal code. Each person moving within the boundary of the school zone carries with them a personal cultural code that fits and works in their everyday mode of being, in their world. Some time ago Barbara Rogoff (2003, p. 7) caught my attention as she discussed in what sense “...culture matters...”. Anthropologist, Sir Edward Tyler defined culture as “...that complex whole which includes, knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Peacock, 2001, p. 3), (Eagleton, 2000, p. 34). Rogoff (2003, p. 3), through a human development lens noted that “ people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities - which also change.”

For James Lowe Peacock, a notable element of culture is that it survives even where little else can, in the most horrendous and savage systems the world has been able to conjure through our known histories (Peacock, 2001, p. 4). This is then no ordinary force in the stories of human existence. Peacock, in his exploration of the factors which bestow power in the cultural context, highlights that culture is taken for granted. Even as individuals claiming to act with rational intent we are constructed in our responses by cultural forces. Culture also draws power from the notion of a shared element in life (2001, p. 6). Take a person out of their sharedness, the familiar and known, and one has

the power to create uncertainty and fear. Peacock suggests through a process of encounter with the other there is an opportunity to address anew our own understandings of culture.

Sitting on a low concrete wall in the main street of Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, writing postcards. A pillow tucked under one arm, the plastic wrap now wet from the forty degree heat and sweat. Postcards, having a wonderful time, the weather is fantastic. How do you do justice to another culture on a postcard? Of course you can't. A woman comes to sit beside me on the wall, a big woman. She sits beside me and against me despite the relative metres of wall that remain unoccupied. I feel her body against mine and our shared body heat. I look around wondering what is going on, why so close? Her huge smile greets my gaze, a nod and a "Hullooh". We exchange simple talk about the heat and I turn to my postcards. At lunch with my friend I am told that people are seldom on their own in this cultural setting. One would feel sad for a person sitting on their own and move to keep them company. Children and relatives are offered as a cultural and social sharing to the single people who arrive to work on the island. To be without family is an unknown. I found that even after a number of visits to the island, living was always as an outsider and done with a great sense of respect through both knowing and not knowing the full cultural boundaries. In a near and local context, a student is encouraged to phone a work placement to make contact and set up arrangements for their arrival. In handing the phone over, I'm sometimes met with, "I'm not talking to someone I don't know!" Rorty in a mental wrangle with Dewey regarding truth and the functions of education, comments on the popular view that primary and secondary education fulfils the need of an adult world to teach the young what they think is right (Rorty, 1999, p. 118). Ensuing from that premise is a vast array of questions asking, who decides what is right? Rorty invites us to delve into the deep spaces of history and culture to find what might be a way toward meaningfulness for the young in our education systems. Each inspired inquirer leads me to a deeper understanding, revealing that all interaction has a social and cultural element to which I need to be mindful. It is a force worthy of investigation, immersion, interpretation and to whatever extent is possible, understanding.

Whatever definition of culture is settled upon, there is a sense of comfort in John Bodley's assurance that "...culture is an observable phenomenon, and a people's unique possession" (1994). And so driving through the school gate I take my unique possession and carry it proudly (knowingly and unknowingly) in my behaviour, interactions, thoughts and language, alongside the other few hundred souls.

## Chapter 5

### “Opportunity”

*A man and a citizen, whoever he may be,  
has no property to put into society other than himself.  
Émile or On Education (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 195)*

*...students will be provided with opportunities  
to develop enterprising capabilities,  
to learn about the world of work and to  
make effective career choices.  
(State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 15)*

#### Understanding It!

Opportunity is more than a word. It actively peppers our tabloids, literature, online content, billboards and advertising in the public arena. It is a word which slips off our lips with gay abandon as if it grew on trees or the streets were indeed paved with this ephemeral stuff of potential. It rings out from phones, TV's and newscasts as the only thing holding us back. Depending on the sources people hold as credible, the words heard with consistency and regularity have the power to influence perspective, response and action. Like the light refracted through a crystal (Richardson, 2000) dancing colourfully in different directions, enhanced or dulled by the surfaces hidden deep within, I want to understand why this word is used so loosely and freely. What does opportunity alone offer, reducing context to a projection encompassing all possibilities? I particularly want to understand the impact of this concept in the collected government dialogues of 2004 to

2009 (Guaranteeing Futures), and how it influenced my work and the choices of young people transitioning to work or further education and into life during that time.

Etymology situates the word in the history of language around the fourteenth century. I find the word is used to denote,

a situation in which it is possible for you to do  
something that you want to do,  
an appropriate or favourable time or occasion  
a situation or condition favourable for attainment of a  
goal  
a good position, chance, or prospect,  
as for advancement or success.

(Websters New World College Dictionary, 2010)

By graphing and tracking usage of the word on an historical timeline, the dictionary exhibits how sharp escalations followed by equally sharp and sudden declines can be noted across the seventeen and eighteen hundreds, and I pause to ask when such a word may have been in or out of favour. Wars and revolutions, contentious times of sudden highs and lows could have engendered hope or despair depending on one's allegiances.

From an alternative viewpoint, if opportunity is mere chance, then are we cast to the four winds with nothing to anchor us in outcome for effort, our human ability to strive based on the known, the solid consistencies? Are we left staring in the face of contingency as Rorty suggests in *Contingency, irony and solidarity* when he asks if we should “treat everything – our language, our conscience, our community – as a product of time and chance” (1989, p. 22). Is that in itself a bad thing? What is the connection between the two?

As I unravel the terms and conditions of my role and relationships with students and their networks, I explore what I can take from the word “opportunity” that can be meaningful, graspable, understandable and translatable for young people. I expect that as the government of the day has promised opportunities for learners in their documents promoting the Guaranteeing Futures program, students, teachers and parents would be some of the first to ask, “What opportunities are available?” Instinct and past experience as an employment consultant tells me this is a loaded and complex concept as opposed

to a straightforward question. Opportunity gathers in the world of things outside ourselves and the world of our deep within. Learning to recognise and navigate chances and potentials, sliding in and out of view in a swirling social mist, is the hermeneutic brief assigned to each of us for life. It is the stuff of our hopes and dreams and our stark realities. It has the power to raise us up and tear us down. Learning to harness that power is an integral part of that complexity of forces at play and part of the outcomes one might envisage.

I share my questioning with others to help me grasp the multitude of understandings around the notion of opportunity. I quickly become aware that the youth that I work with see opportunity as a short-cut or a fast track to the achievement of their currently intangible possibilities and so, for a time, I change my language in discussing what could happen for them around a set of circumstances. I put “opportunity” on the shelf for a time until we more firmly, occupy a shared understanding around this notion. I talk in terms of the conditions that would need to be in place to bring the “something” about, what would that look and feel like, who would need to be involved and how could we help these circumstances to come together?

Exploring the thoughts of Rousseau, leads my musings into questions of happiness and what makes for a good life. “The happiness of the natural man is as simple as his life. It consists in not suffering; health, freedom, and the necessities of life constitute it” (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 177). Rousseau would have us return to the basics of nature to reveal what natural man needs most. As one of his central tenets, I as the reader am cautious in my translation of the seemingly simple revelation knowing that the vagaries of health, freedom and what is necessary to sustain life is a confounding complexity all its own aside from historical context. In relating to my own group of students I take a number of lessons from Rousseau’s revealing and “try to teach the child everything that is useful to his age” (1762/1979, p. 178), unpacking the options available one by one. With each option, and in the act of choosing, a set of delimiters or possibilities are revealed offering yet more choice and decision making. A workflow diagram comes to mind, if this, then that, if that, then those. Did you touch it—no problems. Did you open it—yes—oops! —close it—no problems!

In the workflow diagram scenario the aim is to restore equilibrium. Each choice could be translated as a pathway to not suffering. The young people bound in the pathways of this work may well be said to have already made choices to remove suffering. In choosing to reduce or remove schooling from their daily needs, they have rejected

bullying, the power hierarchy of the education system, the battering rams of daily life against an evolving and emerging sense of self as a young adult and perhaps even managed to restore within the home, a sense of peace, albeit a premise built on unstable ground. Equilibrium of a sort has been restored through choices made, removing also the likelihood of continued trauma. In this space a sense of self and surrounds can be restored and nurtured through a distancing from the everyday. For other young people the act of distancing occurs in front of my eyes, face to face, I see and hear the strategies that remove them from their rightful place in the school year group, sacrificing their freedom to choose.

*I won't be able to do any of those things, I'm not very smart!*

*I can't read and write very well so I won't be able to do that!*

The simple act of agreeing to participate and being unwell on the day, or admitting their difference and stating,

*I don't have the right sort of clothes to wear!*

Acting out to self-sabotage rather than be selected and still experience failure!

For some students the years at secondary school reveal a litany of unexplained sick days and reasons to go home. After ten years of schooling and carefully crafted avoidance behaviours, a deeply entrenched narrative of malady may have developed, robbing a young person of one of the basic premises for a happy life if we are to look to Rousseau for enlightenment and understanding. Years spent honing dysfunctional approaches to health, (including others to support the dysfunction) as a distancing mechanism, will not be broken in a matter of months. A family, extended family and friends form a close-knit web of complicit deceit to maintain the equilibrium of a “happy” child. Rousseau provides basic principles around which I can question understandings of opportunity and how that may look, sound and feel within the community of education and the community of life.

While opportunity in and of itself may open a set of vast options, I am reminded that within my context and those of the young people within the framework of Guaranteeing Futures, the opportunity set is actually quite small. For young people this is not to be seen as a negative. If I venture to the supermarket and gaze across the fifty or

more options for butter, margarine, blends and the rest, I likely will choose based on previous choices, the packaging, price, and whether it spreads easily from the fridge. I will try to make sense of the options and limit my choices to a realistic offering. Making a different choice, even after receiving recommendations, may take some time to bring into actuality. A large opportunity set may have little real impact on outcome within a set of circumstances for young people I am working with. My task is to help us, and the broader support network understand this opportunity set and the attendant workflow diagram plotting a pathway based on the freedom to choose. There are those who help me to examine differently, existing frameworks of choice and freedom.

Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economics for his work in welfare economics, social choice theory and the problems faced by those who struggle for essential freedoms helps me to navigate the territory around freedom to choose. Sen explores opportunity within the mixed territory of a philosopher economist, viewing the very human through a logical, analysed reality. Sen is attributed with early developments in what is now called the capability approach which was founded on two basic premises, “that freedom to achieve well-being is a matter of what people are able to do and to be, and thus the kind of life they are effectively able to lead” (Robeyns, 2016). In *Development As Freedom*, Sen explores development as a dichotomy between “expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” and the removal of “unfreedoms: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states” (2001, p. 3). I find Sen’s view of a dual action meaningful. My personal experience has been that defined government funding models can create an adversarial environment leading to each side viewing the other as antagonist, leaving little space for a dialogue of good will. In a design of freedom expansion and unfreedom removal, there is recognition of determining factors outside the domain of the individual creating potential for greater equity at the outset. Sen furthers his discussion by sharing baseline understandings in the complex flow of energies around opportunity.

What people might positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people’s freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in the making of public decisions that impel the progress of these opportunities. (Sen, 2001, p. 5)

Sen's work highlights the enormity of the permutations and refractions, potentials and possibilities, for each individual, each grouping, each community, each country. Within this seemingly endless array, Sen's ideas do provide a carefully nuanced background, a set of signposts, as I develop my thoughts on opportunity, freedom and justice.

As a colleague and co-author with Sen, Martha Nussbaum, in "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice" (2003) while sharing a number of Sen's platforms and departing on others, contributes a set of ten central capabilities to my internal discussion, which ought to be delivered by a government in order that a people can achieve a "dignified and minimally flourishing life." The echo of Rousseau can be heard as Nussbaum's list carefully considers the basic human needs constituting "life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one's environment" (2003, pp. 13-14). Rousseau recognised within advancing societies, the evolution of changing needs as a marker in the downfall of man. As the world develops with greater and deeper complexity, it is reasonable to expect that understandings of necessity evolve to meet a wider range of possibilities. Nussbaum, in a similar way to Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, cautions her readers to consider her list in broad terms, such that will allow individuals in a legal framework to create that which serves their particular situation best. Nussbaum adds that, "ideas of activity and ability are everywhere, and there is no culture in which people do not ask themselves what they are able to do, what opportunities they have for functioning", anchoring considerations of opportunity and capabilities firmly in the discourse of "entitlements of all citizens based upon justice" (2003, p. 10). Nussbaum echoed Sen's beliefs in "Creating Capabilities The Human Development Approach" when she asked

What are capabilities? They are the answer to the question, "What is this person able to do and to be?"...they are what Sen calls "substantial freedoms," a set of (usually interrelated) opportunities to choose and to act. (2011, p. 21)

What can I do? What can I be? These are the questions on the lips of the young people in front of me, viewing themselves in a triangulated set with home and school. Capabilities are at the core of our time together and their time into the future, how they view their efforts in every endeavour, how they quantify the result or not. My goal is to raise each individual's aspirations and consolidate understandings of capability, taking every opportunity to demonstrate that each and every one is richly capable. What is perhaps not celebrated enough within the careers trajectory of secondary school is the diversity and

capacity for choice so that it can more readily be recognised at the point of discovery. There is a tendency to think in terms of job scarcity, which is true to a degree. What is perhaps less visible is that young people need the good news, stories of hope to enable thinking in positive terms. One must have a reason to try, it must be seen as a possibility. Choice is nothing if it cannot be recognised. The power to choose, to exercise one's rights and freedoms are potentially weak and poorly exercised if one comes from an environment that continually tells the story that there's no point trying, there's nothing out there. In a family of say three children, the eldest who has been looking for work for two years. The sibling in Year 10 has heard a story of rejection for two years. They no doubt will have heard that services have not been helpful and have not been able to find any work for the older sibling. They will also have a full conversation around how hard it is to make do on a welfare payment and perhaps the subject has been the cause of argument and anguish at each step along the way. The youngest in the family, say in Year 7, has been hearing the outpouring since they were ten or eleven. How that story translates over the course of the growing family will not change unless there is an opportunity for a different language and a different conversation. The chance to empower in communities, must never be ignored. Schools have an amazing opportunity to change the dialogue by enhancing the chances of families. Many times students meeting with a Pathway Planner or a Youth Learning Officer, would take home job information for a sibling. There are or ought to be, many occasions for broadening the view. The system may be a blunt instrument, but people are not and have the capacity to drive a bolder humanity.

Robert Sugden gives me cause to think of opportunity as a space for individuality (2003, p. 783) and following from that, based on the work of John Stuart Mill, the premise that

human beings are generally capable of discovering the modes of life that are best suited to themselves as individuals. Because of the diversity of human nature, because of the specificity of each person's knowledge of his own affairs, and because of the special interest that each person takes in his own well-being, the most effective way to ensure that each person's mode of life is well-suited to him is to allow each to carry out his own experiments in living. (2003, p. 787)

I feel immediate connection with the notion of "experiments in living" as these are the very ways of ephemerality that I see will form the twists and turns of experimentation for the young people I work amongst. It is a range of "experiments" that can be offered,

melded with the workflow diagram in my head, tracing choice options, actions and outcomes which are at the heart of the act of responding to opportunity.

I am rather loathe to use the word “outcomes”. It is a word of government, a way of assessing, proving output for a dollar value input. While knowing within myself that I will have to justify these “experiments” at the end, for those connected to one another for the duration of the work it has more value to think and be in conversation around “experiences”. Together with a mindset of capabilities we are able to be part of a complex of lived experiences, raising and enhancing self-awareness and individual capacities to analyse, select, refine, and select anew. It is not a matter of success and again Rousseau reminds me of the elements which could be uppermost in my understandings.

It is inept to demand that they apply themselves to things one tells them vaguely are for their own good (without them knowing what that good is) and to things they are assured they will profit from when they are grown up (without their taking any interest now in that alleged profit, which they would not be able to understand). (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 178)

In coming to know the capabilities of my students and enabling them to experience the freedom of choice through their lived experiences, I trust they will construct a set of personal tools which will carry them through the early years of adulthood and enable a positive transition, not only in the initial phases, but at all points throughout life. The messages then must be relevant to all years and ages, must enable one to learn how to search and seek into a future which looks different to now.

## Revealing It!

It is confidence by another name this thing of opportunity. It is walking tall, feeling full, accomplished, nervous yet at ease, in the right place at the right time. It is a smile and a sparkle like no other. Rousseau knew this and reminds me of my potential responsibility in the complexity of revealing the haecceity of opportunity.

... you should be well aware that it is rarely up to you to suggest to him what he ought to learn. It is up to him to desire it, to seek it, to find it. It is up to you to put it within his reach, skillfully to give birth to this desire and to furnish him with the means of satisfying it. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 179)

I agree that it is definitely not up to me to make decisions and rather I should be seeking to reveal and offer choices as a means within itself. I lean toward Sugden’s exploration

through the work of Mill, finding that “the activity of choosing a plan of life for himself and following it through, the individual develops faculties of reason, judgement, discrimination, and self-control” (2003, p. 786). The act of choosing in itself has an impact on the individual and those around him. I see this carefully drawn and rolled out before me in the everyday moments and events I share with the students.

While I continue to wonder at the place wherein the intangible opportunity resides and how it might be translated, I share with my student’s options for courses, a work experience possibility, a casual part-time job possibility. I observe reactions, noting the presence or lack of understanding, maybe a spark of interest or perhaps no reaction at all, and I continue to gently question, to ascertain inherent silent wants, needs and desires yet still too afraid to come to the fore. I am attentive to readiness and the impact of right moments. I accommodate, collaborate, tell it like it is at times, revealing hard truths and questioning beliefs, rationalise, and enable compromise to occur quietly, seeming to not notice that our wind has changed direction, creating space for a young person to change their mind. Trying situations out for size and fit and changing one’s mind is part of the process, as Hinchman and Hinchman would have me understand.

Inevitably, a certain degree of social negotiation is required as individuals struggle to craft personal narratives that are consistent, believable, and flattering, both in their own eyes and those of others. To avoid ‘ontological abandonment,’ individuals must work out strategies enabling their self-narratives to dovetail with those of others in their community. (2001, p. 121)

Brave is the young spirit who goes against the grain and chooses to be the first in family to go forward into post-year 10 education. Or the young person who is first to attend university, rather than take up a parental preferred line of study or trade. A parent can more readily and fluidly help where the parameters are known, whereas untested ground can be treacherous for all. Together we create a flexible and movable plain where concepts of ‘a right fit’ and ‘a wrong fit’ are redrawn. For the young person the situation must also fit with a family or a community. Perceptions held by others is another strong component of the complexity of choosing or rejecting.

Choice is part of our unwritten culture, the part of us which feels right in some situations and wrong in others. How can we make a choice for something that looks enticing and interesting when it feels so uncomfortable? How can my dreams and my thinking be all right when everyone is telling me it is wrong for me, or just simply not for me in the scheme of things. This choice over here would be better for you. If you took

up that choice, you'd be close to home, it would be easier to get to school/work or wherever, your hours would fit with the rest of the family, I wouldn't have to get up so early if you took this choice, you'd still be able to see all your friends if you stayed here. So many reasons to stay within the ontological sphere. It cocoons, it helps us breathe, we can see how to make this thing work, this is a thing that we all know, we share those stories and have done for generations. This is our conversation. This is our story. This is a landscape that we have walked. This is the one for us.

Once revealed an opportunity may be disappointing. Perhaps it is not shiny enough, quick enough, not whimsical enough, not matching my dreams enough, too hot or too cold, too normal! Working a normal nine to five round is far from everyone's ultimate goal. Seeing one's parents enslaved by the nine to five does not necessarily recommend that lifestyle choice to the young. Not experiencing that phenomenon has an entirely different impact. When no-one in your family or street goes to work, the collective impact reverberates through communities. There is a required shift of consciousness as to where money comes from and its ascribed value. A government can be cast as the enemy for not providing enough. And where does one lay the blame because it is someone else's fault, this pain could not have been self-inflicted? Talk of aspirations reform, perhaps into something smaller. When the pressure of economic reality reshapes for everyone around you, personal narratives shift to protect notions of family, relationships and expectations. The satisfaction which flows from a job well done, no matter how simple, followed by thanks and praise, is often underestimated by the young. It may be a new experience. In the eyes of an employer they may be "just what we're looking for!" Rousseau reminds me to always see the value, regardless of the outcome every person retains their sense of value.

Rousseau takes great care to lead his readers and students to the lesson of the day in its own specific point in time. *Émile*, in 1762, is not unlike the students of my experiences in 2004, such a vast expanse of history and culture and yet as I learn from Rousseau, some things are immutable. While trying to engage his young student in geography, and the sciences through astronomy, *Émile* is unimpressed with his teachers bank of facts and knowledge. So many math teachers throughout my education were frustrated by the cry "I won't ever use this!" In the same fashion *Émile* and Rousseau decide to leave the lesson of the day having ventured far enough, perhaps, to know how to fix the position of the forest north of Montmorency. On the following day teacher and student take a walk before lunch and find themselves lost. As time marches on, the day

becomes hotter and both wish for the comforts that home would bring. Rousseau lays before us the conversation of revealing which brings the young Émile to see that they have a watch, it is noon, their previous observations of the positioning of Montmorency in relation to the forest where they now bide, frustrated by circumstance. Teacher and student, one then the other, slowly revealing the lesson of yesterday as their solution for today, of north and south through the positioning of Montmorency in relation to the forest. Émile comes to their rescue through the revelation to be found in the wonder and power of a shadow.

ÉMILE (clapping his hands and letting out a cry of joy) Oh, I see Montmorency!  
Let's run fast! Astronomy is good for something.

Note that if he does not say this last phrase, he will think it. What is the difference, provided that it is not I who say it? (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 181)

I too learn quickly that there are revelations that must come from my young charges for the lesson to be valuable and lasting. I too, like Rousseau take these young ones into our local version of nature.

Our lesson for the day might be learning and seeing first hand, which retail, cafes and food outlets could be seeking a young person for casual or part-time work. The walk down the centre of town is more enlightening for I than for my charges. Their comments command the air and suddenly we are deep into the why and why not of shops and places to drop a resume. At the age of sixteen these young people are firmly fixed in their place in this town. Just as I look out of place in some of their neighbourhoods, they are uncomfortable in some of mine. We wander uncomfortably down the main street of town so that I can see where personal boundaries lie.

*Well I'm not going in there!*

Can you tell me why?

*Well just look at the girls in there, I can just see me in there, riiiiiggghbbbt!*

I could see her in that shop but not she and if this opportunity were to be attainable it had to match the picture in her head.

So we walk and talk, learning about each other. It's important that the students also learn that they can trust me and how I strive to enable the choices they may make. We stop for some afternoon tea in a café where young people clear and clean the tables. Soft drink and cheesecake, coffee for me.

How old do you think that waitress is?

*Wasn't she at school last year?*

(In my head - that was a lucky pick!)

How do you think you'd go working somewhere like this?

*This wouldn't be too bad, like it's not too big. How do you know how to make up the things on the menu 'n stuff?*

Our chatter in location, with a revealing visual, is a learning ground about sandwiches, salads, baking and cleaning, and the challenges of customer service before returning to school in time for buses home.

As I walk back to the car to end the day back at the office, I'm drawn to reflect how talk of opportunities can easily be transmuted into talk of dreams. Dreams without strong underpinnings of process and required personal input are seldom enough to create viable choices. Their dreams are many, but what actually makes up the opportunity set for a typical group of young people, coming to the end of Year 10 in a Tasmanian high school? At the top of the government's agenda would be remaining at school and completing Years 11 and 12. Ideally this would then be followed by an undergraduate degree at university in the north or south of the state depending on specialist areas. For students not wanting or able to take on that choice there are a variety of vocational education and training options at TasTAFE (Tasmanian Technical and Further Education institution), including foundation courses and Certificate 3, 4 and Diploma courses. Also delivered through the vocational sector and in conjunction with business and industry are apprenticeships, traditional trade areas such as Carpentry, Construction, Electrical, Plumbing, Automotive and newer offerings in Hospitality and Tourism. A three-year apprenticeship with a blend of work and learning at a vocational school, offers a strong base for young people. Traineeships are a shorter option within the apprenticeship system, offering a one or two-year term, full or part-time, also with the option to blend work, earning and study. Many fields of work, such as Hospitality, Tourism, Forestry, Mining, Entertainment, offer casual work, constituting more and more jobs readily available to both male, females and the youth sector.

The case for academic or vocational learning has long been debated and continues within our communities and the halls of government. I am continually perplexed that as a society we have not been able to resolve this debate through our evolving

understandings of education, learning and the creation of meaningful selves. Still the debate rages on. Rousseau explores this contentious ground in considerations for the future of his *Émile*, recalling a previous conversation with a mother, convinced that Rousseau's views on a vocation would surely reduce her son to that of a social outcast.

“A trade for my son! My son an artisan! Sir, are you in your right mind?” I am thinking clearly, more clearly than you, madame, who want to reduce him to never being able to be anything but a lord...and perhaps one day less than nothing...The goal is less to learn a trade than to conquer the prejudices that despise a trade. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 196)

By elucidating the rise to a position of being rich and famous, Rousseau demonstrates the double bind encapsulated in the dilemma, such that having amassed a collection of resources, one requires more and more resources to maintain the position. Hence his favour for seeking a trade for his young *Émile*, a position of self and life that can never be taken away. Within that Rousseau explores the possibilities open to *Émile* and settles on an understanding of what within their circumstances, signifies a “decent” trade.

It does not suffice to choose a useful trade. It must further, not demand from those practicing it qualities of soul that are odious and incompatible with humanity...there is no decency without utility. (1762/1979, p. 197)

Rousseau rejects trades that are connected to the government, such as policemen, spies and hangmen, alluding to the potential outcomes of “uselessness” (1762/1979, p. 199) and the vagaries of changing climates in the political arena. Refining his thoughts around the selection process of a trade for *Émile*, the art of observation is raised as yet another critical element pertaining to the careful and detailed process of selection for an individual, to create the ultimate fit.

There is a great difference between enjoying some kind of work and being fit for it. We need sharper observations than is thought to get assurances of the true genius and the true taste of a child who shows his desires far more than his disposition, and who is always judged by the former for want of knowing how to study the latter. I would want a judicious man to give us a treatise on the art of observing children. This art would be very important to know. Fathers and masters have not yet learned its elements. (1762/1979, p. 199)

At regular intervals across the calendar I meet with colleagues to discuss the state-wide impact of our roles, share our observations and learn from one another the arts of our

craft in working with young people. All, at some point in our gatherings, highlighted the importance of quiet contemplation and observation to detect the unspoken and discern the subtleties of disposition rather than the outward indicators of desire. For our *Émile's* Hairdressing appears very attractive. They have not yet been exposed to the difficulties of long hours on one's feet, the use of powerful chemicals and allergies, carpal tunnel syndrome from repetitive scissor movements and the demands of exacting clients. Bakery is desirable to some before the experience of 2 a.m. start times. The Chef looks resplendent in his or her checked pants, clogs and immaculate chef's jacket, till the feet are sore, hands are burnt on oven shelves and while everyone is out having fun on a Saturday night, you are working till late. Dreams become blended with firsthand knowledge and are crafted into a shape that fits well with all aspects of life.

It is worth mentioning that Rousseau also takes me on an interesting journey into the seventeenth century and his attitudes around the division of labour between male and female. In stating "never did a young boy by himself aspire to be a tailor" as "the needle and the sword cannot be wielded by the same hands" (1762/1979, p. 199), I take pause to question the fixed viewpoint presented, which continues on to pay little respect to those of oriental heritage and those men of a quiet nature. Now in my sixties I find myself reviewing the journey across the past forty years and impacts on the employment sector. I think of a young man wanting desperately to become a Hairdresser, enduring the laughter and ridicule of school acquaintances, while being supported by his parents in his aspirations. While we have come far through the cultural divide between the sexes, examples of harassment in the workplace are far too many to ignore that we have still far to go. Girls wanting to achieve work experience in Automotive or Building will have a more difficult journey and need resilience against the "friendly" banter of a worksite or workshop whereas the male hairdresser is further advanced in staking a claim to that career.

*Émile* is still without a trade. Rousseau considers metalwork as useful but dirty and dangerous and so that is cast aside as a potential for his young man. Equally discarded are,

those stupid professions in which the workers, without industry and almost automatons, never exercise their hand at anything but the same work—weavers, stocking makers, stonecutters. What is the use of employing men of sense in these trades? It is a case of one machine guiding another. (1762/1979, p. 201)

I am reminded of today's factory process workers in car manufacture, canning, juicing, milling and so many more where psychological testing confirms or rejects a worker's capacity for repetitive tasks. The future is already upon us with robotics and a fast-paced technology leaving many workers behind.

At last a suitable trade is found for Émile as a carpenter and it is more than interesting to note the reasons for this choice.

It is clean; it is useful; it can be practiced at home. It keeps the body sufficiently in shape; it requires skill and industry from the worker; and while the form of the work is determined by utility, elegance and taste are not excluded. (1762/1979, p. 201)

Rousseau's careful process of selection is echoed in the hearts of many parents, wanting to achieve the best for their not quite adult young person, who has a mind to conquer the world. Unlike Rousseau, they cannot stand beside their charges and learn together, they must send them out into this new experience alone, while supporting and mentoring from behind the scenes of the workplace. For a short period of time in my role, I am able to stand a little closer, visiting, assessing stability or addressing signs of tension, and providing support while personal agency grows in the early stages of learning a trade.

For some of the young Émile's on my caseload, opportunities are created through government funding for students considered to live and school in remote or disadvantaged areas, in the form of accredited courses (or modules from these nationally recognised courses). Hospitality (Cooking and Bar Service), Automotive (Panel Beating & Spray Painting), Construction, are chosen for skill sets likely to assist young job seekers into the current makeup of the workforce, also considering generic skill sets which carry across many workforce profiles. The advantage of this provision can be demonstrated in the difference between two young people seeking employment at the end of year 10. Consider the appearance of two resumes. One is able to include a nationally recognised course or module descriptors on their resume, indicating time and effort invested, resilience to successfully complete and a range of useful workplace and industry learnings achieved. The other young person completes year 10 with a list of standard subjects completed. The former option provides an excellent springboard for a young person regardless of post year 10 choices, and a demonstrable display to place before employers in the job seeking process. Time spent in these "experiments in life" (Sugden, 2003), develop the personal, mental, emotional and life skills necessary to carry one through more complicated choices of work and life. The process of revelation, as Rousseau has

previously suggested is an integral and critical component of the learning and the final outcome. That is not to say that the young person with a resume exhibiting a list of year 10 subjects, will not achieve their desired next steps. Suffice to say some of my caseload students benefit immeasurably from practical experiences.

The shape of funding opportunities in the schools where this work played out saw some students having the choice of accredited training as part of year 10 options, other schools received funding to support alternative learning options such a school garden or auto shop sessions. Each offering required a careful blending of school hours and training hours, some requiring travel, others offered on site at the school. It is such a simple thing to describe these options, while the enactment is a complex matrix of forces. I will explore this further through an exploration of a student applying to join a course in Hospitality.

Funding is a negotiated act between school and government representative. Proposals are written and assessed for viability both in a dollar sense and potential achievements for students. Not all of my students had the opportunity to participate in alternative learning offerings. Where that was possible however, students gained in all aspects of their personal development, resilience, creativity, as a member of a small society of learners overcoming obstacles toward the same goal.

It begins simply, a course offering in Hospitality for Year 10 students, a simple flyer that we hope will make it home and not die in the bottom of the school bag. A backup notice on the school newsletter also goes home and is posted at various points around the school. An information evening for parents is held to impress the importance of everyone's support for the student taking up this opportunity. Time is short, fortnight hence for applications to be submitted. Three of my students are very interested, the fear on their face around writing an application is clear. We spend some of that precious time decoding what is required?

The Grade 10 Supervisor wants to know why you want to be selected to participate in this program, and what you think you'll gain from being involved.

*Well I don't know what to say! Far out! Why do they have to make it so hard! It doesn't matter if I don't do it!*

How many lines do you have to write? Mmmm, about ten. How about you talk, and I'll jot down what you think on this writing pad? Let's just see what we can come up with.

*Mmmm, well I really like cooking and I think it would be so cool to work in a proper kitchen  
and learn how to prepare all those fancy things.*

Aha. Anything else you'd like to tell them?

*I do a lot of the cooking at home 'cause mum works late and dad does shiftwork, so I have the  
four of us to feed.*

How do you work out what to cook to keep everyone happy?

*Mum helps with ideas and ways to get the little ones to eat their veggies, like putting them into  
bolognaise sauce with spaghetti, sneaky (chuckling).*

Anything else you think might help them consider you in a course? So the cooking and preparation is important, what other things would you have to know about?

*Well I know mum talks about safety and keeping things really clean.*

Yes, they're very important. (I show her my notes.)

*Oh wow, I've got heaps to write about!*

Of course you have, and maybe mum and dad would like to look at it, I'm sure they'll both have some ideas to share with you.

Different conversations occur with the hope of facilitating two applications for kitchen operation and one for beverage service. The following week only one of these students is at school, with their application already submitted. I call after the deadline and applications from all three students have been received. The next step is preparing for an interview. The same nerves, stressors and insecurities crowd each new event, taking small steps closer to a new vision of how one might approach new situations and challenges. By sixteen the students have quite a clear yet silent view, of the barriers which stare them down every day. Many learn all too early to avoid disappointments through non-engagement. Still, each bout of *I can't* is met with an equally convincing, *oh wow I never thought I could do that!* Each step is supported to achieve the desired end. Each of the students is notified they are successful candidates for the course. I am so pleased for them, they have followed through and I am grateful to be able to follow through with each one as they face the challenges inherent in completing. These are the first steps in taking up the power to enter individually into a contract of one's own choosing and experience fully, the layers of subtlety and transformation emanating within, through and around the process. The opportunity is a set of circumstances, a chance, a conduit through which one may apply one's capabilities and achieve one's goals.

## Releasing It!

I watch my two grandsons, twenty months and three years, at the park with their bikes, a tricycle for the younger and balance bike for the older. Each with the equipment suited to their age. Pedalling is required to achieve a forward motion, as an adult of many years I'm seeing anew the difficulty of learning to pedal forward in a constant motion, resisting the temptation to pedal backwards engaging the brake. Working together with the person providing the balance from the rear bar also takes a great deal of concentration and a new type of skill. After a time frustration takes hold and we circle back to the car to swap the bike for the scooter. Off he zooms into the park, past the ducks and back to meet us again, confident on the two wheels over which he has excellent control. The younger of the cousins joins the park experience and with his tricycle pedals on down the path, determination on his face. We walk slowly, keenly watching his progress, helping with the art of steering. When he becomes tired, we share in pushing the bike until we reach the playground where there is room to explore, run, jump and play unfettered by the frustration of learning new skills on new devices.

The students going forward into a training program have their training wheels on. Like my grandsons they watch older ones and believe they know what to expect and how to respond. The program requires a substantial commitment from the year group teachers, to work as a well-tuned team, supporting the students to participate in a blended learning process. At times homework may be missed, parts of learning within the school curriculum have to be sacrificed to achieve two days a week in the alternative program. It is a huge ask that everyone connected to the process will maintain a positive language when program and norms clash and usual outcomes of the school year require adjustment. There will be arguments and collegial friendships will be tested. While seeing the total benefit of a Hospitality learning program for Year 10 students, requiring two days out of usual subjects, it is difficult for some teachers to keep pedalling forward without the temptation of pedalling backwards engaging the brake.

All the students are excited about beginning something new. I watch as friendships adjust, new ones develop, the choices made leaving behind for short times one's long term friends. Feelings are tested, and understandings of friendship examined and re-examined as some go tentatively or confidently to explore individual choices. Each of my students have additional conditions to weigh and balance in the endeavour of beginning, continuing and completing this project of opportunities. Each comes with different learning challenges and levels of confidence. Each will adjust differently to the demands

of life outside the home town boundaries. Each one has responsibilities that demand a set of maturities. There is David whose mother is often ill and needs support from her son. Jacinta will be required to be strong in her resolve to take up new situations testing her capacity to maintain consistency through challenges. Melanie is so keen, and her biggest challenge will be getting the bus to town and the early mornings, not being available for home duties and getting other kids in the family ready and off to school. This will challenge the resolve of everyone in her support network. For each young person opportunity presents itself in balance with a corresponding opportunity threat.

Beginning new and afresh is always exciting and finding out what to expect of their hospitality course was a little like Christmas in the middle of the year. I happen to be doing my usual round of visits on the day new uniforms are being distributed to students. I walk into a classroom of boxes, flying plastic bags and excited teenagers. The familiar black and white check of the chef's trousers, followed by the coat without buttons, followed by the separate packet of detachable buttons, faces questioning, the neckerchief and the very much understated cap of the underling chef in training. Each item brings a set of comments and questions, faces and a flurry of gestures. The shoes come next, removed from boxes with an array of disappointments on display. No trendy track shoes here, they are serviceable, black, steelcaps, uncomfortable when compared with well-worn runners. The faces say it all and I recognise there will be some convincing before the uniform is complete. I also anticipate the resistance will take on the form of carefully hidden track shoes in bags and onto feet until the act of banning from the kitchen raises the awareness of work, health and safety guidelines to a level of compliance. Along with compliance will come the development of respect for the chef and respect for the learner.

As the course gets underway, I adjust my place in the students' support network. They now have a new set of key personnel to build relationships with in the form of the chef and hospitality support staff. I make my role for the students known at the college enabling visits and the sharing of information. I shadow and translate if new arrangements put out signs of struggle. I endeavour to ensure the home network for each young person, understands what is happening and why, in both the highs and lows of the process, enabling them to be part of the solution where needed. This may be a new experience for them which at first feels strange. Together we decipher what might be needed to take each step.

Each week, for each of the students, identifies responsibilities which may have been able to pass by thus far in the years of high school. One of the early hurdles is understanding that every new topic is not full of excitement. Work, Health and Safety and Food Hygiene while critical to the smooth operation of a hospitality outlet, is not the topic of choice in the early days of the course. Initial murmurings subside as the importance of each aspect begins to take shape in each student's mind, content and purpose coming together through practical application. The early weeks see David managing his new timetable well, being on time for the early morning bus ride and arriving with a clean set of work clothes for time in the kitchen. Melanie has already experienced a couple of slip ups with catching the bus. Weekly feedback from the Chef and tutors speaks clearly to me.

**Are you sure she wants to be in the class?**

I know she really wants to be here and do well. It is a big adjustment for her. I'll take her  
through the expectations again.

**We don't have time to waste. If she misses again next week, we'll have to consider  
putting her out of the class, she's taking up a space someone else could have.**

As we part ways in the corridor,

**...and tell her to wear the proper shoes!**

In preparation for the following week I take time to discuss the course with Melanie. I'm not surprised by the responses.

*It wouldn't be so bad if we didn't have to catch the bus so early, everyone yells at me for making a noise  
so early and waking up the kids.*

Yes, that must be difficult for you, it's probably tough on everyone, the change  
of routine.

*Look maybe it would be better if I drop out, if someone else wants the spot. It's no big deal anyway.*

You worked quite hard to get here, didn't you?

*Yes, I guess so.*

How would you feel if you stopped now?

*Well no-one cares if I do it or not.*

Do you want to keep on with the course?

*Yeah, I do, it's just been hard to get used to the changes. I'm so tired in the morning.*

We talk about compromises, putting the phone away before midnight, maybe getting the bag packed for the next day straight after getting home from school, or perhaps after dinner, offering to help with the washing and ironing to make sure the uniform is clean and pressed on the days needed...and the shoes. There is no getting around the shoes. We share a laugh, noting the similarities to her brothers concreting boots, but also pressing that each workplace has its own type of uniform and safety comes first. The odd tale about dropped knives, boiling water and the like and the sensible black, slimline, steel-caps change face. By the time Melanie attends her course in the following week, I've had a similar talk with her mum and her grade teacher at school, we get ourselves on the same page to ensure that Melanie can make the adjustments to bring her personal timetable into line with the one required for the course. An acquaintance from school offers support, she's an early riser and helps Melanie get to the bus on time. They munch toast on the way to town as they watch the morning's movie.

David is meeting the needs of the course beautifully, up until the point that assignments are given and require completion by a deadline. The reading is a challenge. David has experienced difficulty with reading and writing throughout high school.

What do you think might help you with the assignments, David?

*Mum said she would help if she can.*

Yeah, that's great. Do you think some extra time on them at school could help?

*That sounds good.*

Ok, when I come down here each week, I'll make sure we can spend time working on whatever needs completing that week, and we'll get your teacher on board too.

*Wow, that's a relief. The chef says I'm doing really well in my practical.*

I know, he says you're a model student. (David is a bit embarrassed, but more than a bit pleased with his achievement.)

While David and Melanie work on their kitchen and cooking skills, Jacinta is deep into the arts of bar service. While the others get accustomed to hot kitchens and dirty aprons, Jacinta learns to polish her shoes, tie unruly hair into a neat bun and how to talk comfortably with customers. The teacher has been involved in training young people for many years and is used to the ups and downs of their busy lives as they make time to meet their learning requirements. The early weeks are quite smooth for Jacinta.

Notices are posted, and invitations sent out to invite people from the community to a pre-Cup Day (horse racing event) drinks and nibbles evening. The nerves start at a low ebb and brew as each week is ticked off the calendar. David and Melanie are excited to be taking on such a large responsibility so early and wonder if they will be able to achieve what's required. Reassurance is provided in small amounts regularly to ensure that the active mind of the sixteen-year-old doesn't get carried away in the theatrics but enjoys the excitement of stepping out and up. Something different seems to be happening with Jacinta and I take some time out to meet one to one.

How are things going for you in the course so far?

*Ok, I suppose.*

I hear that you're doing very well in beverage preparation and are one of the fastest when it comes to service.

*I like to get things right and keep the bar clean and tidy. Some of the others are so messy and they don't listen to what they're told. It's so annoying, especially with the function coming up!*

Have you noticed anything like that in how you all turn out for work?

She smiles and laughs. Jacinta is immaculate for each training day, helping others to tie their neckerchief, put hair up, polish shoes and see to the fine tuning that turns these young fresh faces into something which looks just slightly older, more confident and further along the line to becoming a professional in the Hospitality Industry. Jacinta finds it difficult to understand how others might not share her view or comply to the level specified. This was always going to be her challenge and as pressure is applied, I can see stress levels rising. Jacinta talks through each week the events which have frustrated her, and we share solutions which will help her focus on her own work, leaving the distractions of others to themselves. I keep her parents and teachers informed, everyone sharing strategies to maintain places of calm for Jacinta in the hectic world that is working in hospitality.

Each busy week comes and goes and finally we reach the testing ground of the event. I check in with students early in the day, it will be a long one for them, requiring them to stay into the evening. All have organised a ride home with parents sharing the travelling and transport. The kitchen is in full swing as I look around the door cautiously. This is clearly not a day to take their attention away from the job. David holds up a tray of pastry scrolls which have just come out of the oven and I give it the thumbs up. Melanie

is plating up Smoked Salmon Blini, finessing with a sprig of Dill. Smiles and approval to all and the Chef shows his delight with their work.

From the bar I hear some loud words and go through to see how their preparation is coming along. There is tension in the air as I ask after Jacinta.

*She just threw her apron in the sink and stormed out! I don't know what's wrong with her!*

Did anything in particular happen?

*No, we were just getting the full bottles of spirits into the fridges as backup for tonight and she lost it!*

Any idea where she might have gone?

*Don't know and don't care! Some of us have work to do!*

I wander the corridors of the building, check with teachers, reception staff and yes, they saw a young girl leaving with a backpack. Out on the street I scan up and down with no sign. Walking up the drive and thinking I might have to check all the way to the bus stop, but still scanning around, I notice someone sitting on the garden wall at the side of the building, almost hidden amongst the shrubs. My heart pounds. Getting closer I can hear her sobs and see the tears streaming down her face. What a tough morning it has been for her! The frustration of a world which does not see things as she does has bubbled up and over leaving her confused and angry, the only way out, to leave and not go back. After all, what will everyone think of her? It takes some time. I let reception staff know we have found each other and that we will be over the road at the corner café. We each order a drink and some cake, availing ourselves of the paper napkins to dab the tears away and wipe a nose.

*I'm walking into town to catch the bus home.*

Is there anyone at home today?

*No not till after work.*

Oh. How did things start going wrong for you today?

*We were getting the bar area clean for tonight. No-one cares how it looks or if there's streaks on everything, we have to do it again if it's not right. I just said to everyone that we should do it right the first time or it's a waste of time. They just kept on going the same way and I could see the glasses were still smeared so I reached out to take it away from Mandy and it dropped and smashed on the floor (starts crying again) and Mandy yelled at me and then the teacher came in and said it was my fault and we were acting like children. Everyone in the class was telling me off. I just wanted to do a good job.*

Of course you did, and it can be frustrating when other people want to do things in a different way. We talk a little more about differences, about her friends and family members, the situations that occur and how they have been worked through in the past.

Do you think there's a way that you might be able to handle this kind of situation if it happens again?

*Mum tells me that sometimes I have to let people do things their way, still do things the way I think they should be done but don't be pushy with people. I know I like to have things perfect.*

It sounds like you and mum have worked out some good ways to cope with everyone's different ways. This sort of thing happens when everyone is a bit stressed, especially getting ready for something important.

*Yeah, I guess the class wants everything to be right for tonight.*

Speaking of tonight, do you think you'd like to wander back with me and see if we can help everyone set up?

Back on the job quiet apologies are made from all sides, everyone realising their contribution. Words of encouragement from the teacher give rise to the energy levels and all is in full swing again. I leave to visit other students throughout the day and return for the end of the evening event. David and Jacinta are washing baking trays and look exhausted but happy. Behind the bar the mocktails are a hit and the customers are impressed with the food, the service and the students. The kitchen staff are called out to join the bar staff and speeches are made, thanking everyone for making the evening possible and explaining the importance of the course being undertaken by the students. As the audience shows their appreciations the faces of these young adults light up. All the differences blend into a shared pride for their town, their school and the people who have helped them reach this point. As the guests begin to break away, the students hug one another, congratulations ring in the air and it's back to finishing the washing up.

The course continues with almost weekly difficulties to be overcome, we all work harder to help with assignments or build the growth that will allow the students to resolve problems and develop new social skills. At the end of the course everyone is challenged yet again, preparing for an event for parents and family, teachers and mentors. The students are young professionals now, they demonstrate their teamwork as they dodge quickly around one another behind the bar. They back one another up if there is an unusual request, they seek assistance seamlessly, unphased by not knowing everything. In the kitchen the chef calls out orders, to the sound of "Yes, Chef! Three minutes, Chef!"

The finely tuned organised chaos of the commercial kitchen, everyone on task, at their station, total concentration, eyes on the task. As the evening nears the end all students are called to gather. The speeches reflect on the contribution from government, schools, trainers and teachers, mentors, families and friends. As the applause rises the faces of the young students glow with the light of their own hard work to achieve and complete the course, to fulfil their promise to themselves, to overcome personal and shared hardships. This is like no experience that can be had in most classrooms. Pushing oneself past the usual daily boundaries, delivers an uncommon delight and satisfaction. This is not something I can deliver by talking to the students. No amount of clever stories, tasks or games can bring this feeling forth, nor put that glowing pride on the faces of everyone involved. Hugs are delivered all round as parents express a mixture of disbelief and total awe for the efforts of their son or daughter. With certificates in hand they wander out into the night knowing that when the year ends, they will have achieved as in no other. Some will use their new skills to gain work while others will use those lessons learned to help them travel through college and perhaps later, university. Through the dynamics of a small course, a chance, an opportunity, these students have not dropped out of school and have achieved more than they imagined possible.

## Chapter 6

### Deep and Fleeting Conversations

*Begin, then, by studying your pupils better.  
For most assuredly you do not know them at all.  
Émile or On Education (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 33)*

Wind blows in from the strait crashing waves against the breakwater of the port, huge rocks intelligently placed to protect the port from nature's unrelenting punishment or gentle consistent, tenacious wear. I walk across the sandscape displacing size eight shaped indentations. The action of footfall, force, shift, withdrawal, release; I watch the grains of sand fall away into new shapes on momentarily transformed sandscape. Each grain of finely polished and tiny rock tumbles for position, invited by silent gravity to achieve a point of settle within a shifting landscape. Each grain finds a place determined by size, shape, weight, corresponding edges minute and exact to fit with each other singular grain of the complexity. Each over time, under pressure is transformed, becomes something different, something beautiful.

It is July; cold, wintry, the start of term two in the school year of the southern hemisphere and each day is a different road, a different school, to gather information and impressions, looking and watching for signs, comments, interactions that might indicate a meaningful direction. Over a twelve month span, fifty young people will be assigned to my caseload. Some of these young people may be at risk of not continuing past Year 10 with their education, others may require support their school is not able to currently provide, some will already be hard to contact and attending occasionally, others still may be attending

every day and getting little out of it while creating various levels of unrest for themselves, others and the school. Fifty young people, fifty different conversations. They will question, choose, make decisions, discard, pick up and put down and pick up again in the process of creating the next step and the next in their future. It is a messy process. Labelled Generation Y this group are supposedly the stimulation addicts, intense and easily bored but the masters of multitasking, incorporating a healthy scepticism, a demand for integrity and honesty, variety and choice. The result of choice and pressure to succeed, is a generation who are stressed and confused. Peter Sheahan, one of Gen Y's eager brigade saw the value in not only helping us to understand this generational stream, but perhaps, more importantly, saw the total necessity of helping employers understand what they are dealing with in recruitment, training and longevity of employment (Sheahan, 2006). Generation Y is unlike any other demographic that has come before.

I bring the tools of my trade to the matters before us and grapple with the best means to be a positive agent in this process. I seek to meet responsibilities to the students, parents, schools, partner programs, business and industry stakeholders and the state. Each individual or group maintains a vested interest. It is my role to question and interpret from the clues available. It is more than likely that I will be in cross conversation with a student and parent or any other party, helping each one gain an understanding of the other's point of view. I have a role in helping students, parents and carers learn about the journey toward employment and the priorities of employers. Similarly, communicating the expectations of learning institutions around courses, options, requirements and systems is of prime importance to these young people and their families. I can take nothing for granted and must question continually to build a solid base on which all those involved can find a shared space and stability. My previous experience of multifaceted programs tells me that the work left undone creates space for misunderstanding leaving room for error, having the capacity to impact negatively on young people and their plans and circumstances.

The required outcomes of the program Guaranteeing Futures are based on viability, sustainability and retention. These are not necessarily the priorities of the students or their parents and carers, or indeed their schools. The selection of students for the program and follow-up with teachers, can reveal existing biases, yet another weight the student may be carrying. Other elements that may come into play are emotions around competence, family history and trajectories, notions of ease and difficulty, majority influence over minority instinct and intuition. Travel, transport, cost and timing mix with expectations and life realities to stratify a complexity of forces on single decision points

under pressure. I seek to maintain perspective in the midst of procedure and protocol. Rousseau brings to mind,

Our true study is that of the human condition. He amongst us who best knows how to bear the goods and the ills of this life is to my taste the best raised: from which it follows that the true education consists less in precept than in practice. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 42)

Looking for that which resonates beyond the formalities of this role I am amongst, leads me to ponder the value or otherwise of small moments in time. Placing so much importance on what may later be of no great importance in the final outcome, to keep each moment in perspective.

To live is not to breathe; it is to act; it is to make use of our organs, our senses, our faculties, of all the parts of ourselves which give us the sentiment of our existence. The man who has lived the most is not he who has counted the most years but is who has most felt life. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 42)

It is the possibilities of life that I endeavour to bring to the young people I work amongst and enable them to see and feel the potentials that could be.

Conversation is the central medium for all involved in this feeling of life. It is in the what we talk about, what we don't talk about, whom we talk with or choose not to talk with. It is in the talking and thinking and feeling which can bring all of us to a different place. Richardson comes to mind as I reflect on the place and importance of language and interaction within this role and the work I set out to achieve.

Language is how social organisation and power are defined and contested and the place where one's sense of self – one's subjectivity – is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses – competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world – makes language a site of exploration and struggle. (2000, p. 961)

It is also in returning to Richardson and Rorty that I am drawn to ponder the contingency of language (Rorty, 1989, p. 7) and that “what something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them” (2000, p. 961). The child describing with a laugh how dad lost the plot and put his fist through the bedroom wall, right next to the child's head, is in one instance a story of bravery and resilience to be shared fully in graphic detail, unaware that to other ears the description draws a background of violence within an environment of danger and is the basis of a mandatory reporting incident. It depends where you stand.

At times the conversations will be hastily called across a corridor jammed with students and teachers, or out in the yard from a distance, sometimes on the phone at length, in the car reflecting on a visit to somewhere interesting and thought provoking, both driver and passenger looking through the windscreen into the long distance at a new horizon. The contents of each conversation cannot be quantified or signified, and so I observe for the tiny inflections, the raised eyebrow, a twitch, a flick of the hair, signs of unease, fear, too hard but wish I could. The conversation is the place of our work and our learning, the uneven ground we walk upon looking to find ourselves and each other. I remember well that Rousseau and Gadamer have helped me to see that which is hidden in the conversation. I attend to the lesson of the conversation, the transformative action for each self, revealing the possibility of new selves. I am acutely aware of the influence of the conversation on myself and for those I work with, choosing language and direction with constant care. Rousseau recognised the value of developing deep understandings through observation and reflection when in the *Émile* he expressed that, “We must study him to know ourselves...,”(1762/1979, p. 29). I note, within the conversations with students, their questioning and holding me to account for my ways of thinking, and I must be accountable. In the movement of the relationship between mentor and student, Rousseau connected with the art of the transformative self(ves). Gadamer furthers understanding of the transformative action.

To reach an understanding in a 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. (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 387)

I carry the knowledge of transformation within me to work with respect for all who are in the continual conversation of this work I/we do.

To conclude this section I want to consider Michael Apple’s particular view on how we might perceive learners. He says

We do not confront abstract “learners” in schools...instead we see specific classed, raced, and gendered subjects, people whose biographies are intimately linked to the economic, political and ideological trajectories of their families, to the political economies of their neighborhoods, and-in an identifiable set of connections - to the exploitative relations of the larger society. (Apple, 1986, p.5 in Gallagher, 1992, p. 252)

There is much in Apple's comment about how I might attend to learners in schools. As one of the critical school of hermeneuts, he will seek out the hidden power imbalances in both the local circumstances and broader streams of society that serve to disadvantage. It is easy to recognise my students in Apple's descriptions, it does not serve any greater purpose to think of them in terms of their economic status, family circumstances, class, race or gender. At the outset I want to meet them as young people who may choose to have some assistance as they make their way through an important stage in their development. I could have written "crucial" and chose not to. Time and change has taught me that as lifelong learning becomes more and more embedded as necessity in educational frameworks, the once crucial sense of decision making at particular launching points in life, have been diluted to some degree. The bargain inherent in a requirement to participate in lifelong learning, is for governments to ensure ongoing access to learning throughout life, in a format relevant to individual, community and society's needs for growth and wellbeing. Tasmania Tomorrow and Guaranteeing Futures embedded policy on the premise that those completing Grade 10 would be at a disadvantage throughout life if not enabled to achieve post-secondary learning in the form of Year 11 and 12, or accredited training in a vocational field, before continuing into the workforce or achieving entry to university. While no-one would want to see or encourage disadvantage, access points to learning have increased, somewhat easing the crucial nature that once existed.

I am not blind to the deprivations and struggles I see in working with young people. Where I have a place and means to alleviate that struggle I will. That is one of the positives of a program based approach to student assistance, providing fiscal and situational change for families in need. I am highly conscious that I must carry myself beyond and in spite of the societal markers that Apple applies to our students, concentrating on the person within the descriptor.

## To the School

A meeting with a school principal or grade supervisor may be for the first time or from a school I have worked with previously. Specific teachers, social workers, psychologists, youth justice contacts among others may be mentioned in the initial conversations. Together we work through the list of names, ten from each school, sometimes a couple more, or "Maybe just another one, I'd hate to see them miss out," says a concerned teacher. There might be a comment "Do you think they deserve it?" Reasons for and

against, would come forth. As I don't know the young people at this stage, I always encourage that we try before counting them out. With list balanced on my lap I make hurried notes as the descriptions tumble out of a hurried meeting.

*So Michael is struggling at the moment to get to school. He's a bright kid caught up in negative peer group pressure and would benefit from some outside input, particularly around careers. He'd probably do well in a trade and has enjoyed his time in automotive, but he's just being a pain to everyone at the moment, oh, and you might have trouble catching up with him but give it a try.*

*Then there's Cassandra, gorgeous girl, she's experiencing some disruption at home and while the family settles into new routines in separate locations, she could use some additional support to navigate to college. I've spoken with her parents and they would welcome the help.*

*Phoebe is pregnant, she'll stay at school as long as she can and wants to be able to hook into college after the birth. Having someone to keep an eye on that and assist with arrangements would be great for her.*

*Jed has been in detention and just trying to settle into school. If you could keep the lines of communication between his youth justice worker and college open, just as an option, it may help smooth the path for him.*

*Adam lives with his grandmother. She does a great job, I think any assistance would be useful to them and as they live out of town, getting the hang of transport and travelling could be an issue...whatever you can do.*

*Tegan is partying pretty hard at the moment and we're not sure what's at the bottom of that, but she is a great kid and could use some additional assistance or perhaps someone to talk to...*

I pack the caseload notes tidily away in a file. I take the information about contacts and existing supports and mentors. At the outset I want to meet with each young person and take them as they stand before me or on the phone or in a text. Each one will come to this relationship as they choose, and I endeavour to leave my mind open to possibilities. The opinions of others have been formed in a certain context and environment. I come

from outside that context, at the end I may hold the same or similar opinion, or I may not. I am open to the natural forces which come to bear and play on the landscape where we meet. I turn my attention to the young people suspending untested stories and here say and attend to the person and the experience before me.

## The Circle: Listening and Learning

I would at times sit in my car and observe the ebb and flow of the school population as it prepared for the day. I have always been struck while observing, that a school has a tone, a sound, a tension, a series of revelations if one watches closely and breathes it in. There are intentions, agendas, the up-and-down of one day to the next. Each person emanates an energy of their own, reflecting the light and energy of those around them. My mind would wander to the work of the day and how I would interact or facilitate for each student. At times the intent of the session would be diverted by greater urgencies in the life of a sixteen-year-old. Was the priority the putting to rights of whatever misdemeanour had occurred or listening and learning?

Term two of the school year is the launching pad for conversations and I listen and listen some more. It is the time to build trust, establish the strength of support networks for the student and where further scaffolding may be required. The morning attendance sheet reveals the whereabouts of my students and how I may best bring about some contact or assistance. I build a personal timetable indicating follow-up at school, home, alternative program or maybe Macdonald's local, whatever will maximise the limited time per student to weekly time allocation. The fifty students quickly turn into sixty and sixty-five. I am not surprised by the demand.

My aim at the outset is to keep it simple. For most students, this intervention is unexpected so an understated offer of information or support and assistance at the outset is less confronting. No-one wants to be special, until later when maybe the meetings take on a level of "cool".

"We'll look at options for college, TAFE, other training places and courses, all kinds of work and careers. Does that sound like it could be helpful?" Reactions vary.

*"Can I come to see you each week?"*

*“Yeab wicked, can I get out of Maths? (Laughs). No really, I know what I want to do but I’m just not sure how to bring it off.”*

*“Why do I have to come to see you, like, why have I been singled out?”*

At times, I am only able to say “Hi, my name is Lyn and I’m working with Grade 10’s to help with” ...to the sound of a mobile cutting off. It takes persistence. And why do I persist? What is impossible today may be a totally unexpected call back in a months’ time or later still. One must be open to surprises and suspend judgement.

Throughout the process I seek out those who are invested in the young person or they seek me out. These are the people who see further than a string of misdemeanours or a poor report. I am grateful for the wonderful conversations I have been able to experience through dialogue with parents and carers, grandparents, uncles and aunts. These are the people who see differently, who can translate the happenings of a young life and gather that knowledge into the working present. Delivering students home at the end of a business visit I’m proudly introduced to Grandma, surrounded by a mountain of tomatoes in the kitchen, the wonderful smell of pickles and sauce on the air from the street. The girls are immediately transported into another world, capably organising the deliveries to family, friends and neighbours that would happen that evening, while Grandma and I transfer information quickly around our visit today.

*They’re good kids really, they just need a chance.*

Yes, I can see that.

*The bakery’s looking for a young person to do after school.*

The response is divided revealing subtle differences in potentials and possibilities I may be able to explore with each person. For one a casual job is money and independence and for the other a challenge, a step too far for now.

*I look after them mostly. At least then I know where they are and what they’re getting up to.*

*I hope you were good for Lyn? (She eyes them off with a grin.)*

They were great, thanks for letting them come on the business visit. See you soon.  
Back at school the following day,

Your Gran seems like a great lady.

*Yeab, she’s pretty good.*

Their love for her and pride in what she does to help people is clear on both faces.

So we continue where we left off and explore a little further. It is a good time to experience the fast pace of casual employment opportunities. One girl overcomes her fear of making a phone call to organise a visit and interview and her friend needs more time and reflection. And that's fine. Each young person in their own time and their own way.

By the end of term two we have talked a little or talked a lot. We have explored dreams and realities for the next year and the future, considered personal strengths, weaknesses and wishes; completed resumes; written applications and talked interviews, barriers, confidence, getting places (most of my students are rural), living, renting, sharing, college subjects, TAFE (Technical and Further Education), VET (Vocational Education and Training) programs, work experience and attended taster days - the personal and education based springboards and platforms that could contribute to weighing up one's future options. I have had conversations with parents and carers, grandparents and uncles and aunts or perhaps only the young person intermittently or regularly each week.

I walk in the direction of the office for one last opportunity to check on information for a student that I haven't been able to contact all term. Suddenly the semi busy corridor floods with students and I can hear "Fight, fight!" above the race for the external door. With a sense of responsibility, I allow myself to be flung out the door with the crowd to see two senior boys punching, ripping and gouging and blood already let on each side. A ring instantaneously develops, "fight, fight, fight, get into 'im, ya tosser!" followed quickly by the shouts of a senior teacher pushing through the crowd, physically pulling the boys apart and sending each to their own corner of the first aid room. It was over in a flash. As we re-entered the corridor students mentioned names and ah yes, one was the young man I was yet to catch up with. Passing tissues and some water and waiting for first aid was an unexpected end to the term but at the same time an opportunity for both of us.

Gazing across the names in the database I ponder how I know some students quite well, some superficially and some not at all, for in fact what do I really know? My knowledge is relative to the cause. My role is to be an enabler, to make opportunities visible through the sharing of information and massaging the timing of events across the educational calendar.

It's raining as I drive back to town and school breaks for two weeks' holiday. While working through this period it is time to reflect on the place we have come. Some students are quite set in their plans for the immediate future and will now work towards

constructing and fabricating to bring it about. I say constructing, because it is hard work and requires design, planning and energy. The hard work must also happen in my quarter, as I strive to understand the hidden motivations and goals which, while elusive, can deliver stronger forces than the shared motivations.

## The Circle: Attending to Priorities

As we launch into term three the prospect of the year closing begins to create different measures of anxiety or excitement amongst the students.

*“I can’t wait till the end of the year,” Damien says. “There’s no point doing anything, it won’t make any difference. Most of the teachers don’t like me and it doesn’t matter what I do they always think it was me when something goes wrong.”*

*Bree is despondent. “I’ve been banned from Maths and English and the only subjects I can go to is Options and I hate those so what’s the point of being here. I work better when I’m on my own. I’ll be sixteen soon and won’t have to come to school.”*

*Mick wishes he had worked a little harder so that he could get an apprenticeship at the end of the year.*

*Hannah is depressed and says, “I don’t care” to most of my questions.*

*“School sucks... I only come to see my friends!”*

In the heat of November, the last school month of the Australian year, college teams make their way through the feeder schools, building viable programs for the following year. Enrolment in Year 11 is a comforting option when other plans have not evolved.

*“Well if I don’t get a job over the holidays, I’ve got to do something.”*

The end of Year 10 approaches and students relate that they are waiting for something to happen - the end of the year and for some the chance to do something different. They hope for something more interesting, less controlling, more satisfying, more anything and less boring.

The summer holidays test the development of a working relationship with the students. Plans shift and change. What seemed like a good idea two months prior are affected by other discussions and priorities in changing friendships as transition takes place. Critical or destabilising events often distance the student from contact. The more

critical and unstable the event, the more likely the student will avoid contact or a perceived interference. Those who contact are in the minority, asking for assistance is not a widely used tool that has been developed over the secondary years. By now choices for Year 11 have been made.

Danielle says, *“I don’t think I’m suited to college and I’d just rather get a job. Something that’ll help get me into real estate.”*

Jamie is going to college, even though her plans and career intentions would suggest a different path.

Liam says, *“I don’t really want to go to college and the travelling wouldn’t be all that great. So I think I’ll do VET (Vocational Education and Training) next year.”*

Bonnie hasn’t attended since the start of Term 2, doesn’t know what to do and, although we’ve met regularly, she’s now disappeared from view.

Damien has completed the year. *“I reckon Start@TAFE will be good, I hope so anyway. I really want to work with cars and if this can help me then that’s the way to go.”*

It’s November and the focus is on the Leavers Dinner; did I mention the Leavers Dinner?

*“I’m not wearing a dress, there’s no way! I’m not gonna look like some poufy, puffy geek!”*

I ask about her subjects for college, *“Oh, I dunno, it’s on that sheet they gave me!”*

Bonnie does not attend the dinner due to her absence over third term.

*“It doesn’t really worry me really...well yeah it does but I know I haven’t done the work so I can’t go.*

*It’s cool. That’s the way it is. I’ve got other shit to worry about anyway!”*

Bonnie is working at a local shop and has been for three months, but the last Friday in November sees her in the front row with her grade ten mates for the final assembly.

## The Circle: Summer Haze

December already and the round of daily visits to each school is suspended and allows time to plan, reflect, attend training sessions, meet with colleagues in the employment service sector while keeping in touch with fifty young people who have been transported into the holiday zone.

“I can get you an interview on Thursday.”

*“I don’t really want a job yet, what about the holidays?”*

“Many of the apprenticeships will be filled over December, January and February, there may not be much left.”

*“Yeah whatever!”*

“I’ll call if there’s anything around of interest to you.”

*“Nah, I’m right. Dad’s got a mate, he’s gonna find me something.”*

Clunk goes the phone.

The prospect of a job is a testing ground for motivation and commitment and as much as I don’t want to see someone burn their bridges, I also need to protect the network of employers who will offer strong supportive opportunities. Jobs that will withstand a few too many sick days, failure to call in, being late, being unavailable for weekend shifts, and some of the excuses that are used to fend off pesky employers in your first job. Some students are working already and will do so for most of the holidays. Smith (2004) draws attention to the propensity for formal part-time work amongst the life experiences of youth, beginning in the early teens.

“How goes it, Damien?”

*“Oh hi, yeah I’m good. I’m working up the bush with my uncle, we’re having an awesome time. David’s here with me too.”*

“That’s great. Are you still set for TAFE next year?”

*“Oh yeah, we’re just doing this to get a bit of money. I need to get my car fixed up.”*

“Ok, enjoy the holidays and your work, be safe.”

A two-week introduction to Hospitality program for Year 10 leavers is on offer, a perfect vehicle for students to prepare for work or further training in the New Year. Jamie is enrolled for college, but also wants to get ahead by the shortest possible route and we

have discussed the apprenticeship system, school based new apprenticeships and VET in the college system to prepare her for the options which she could pursue while gradually building an understanding of the realities of each avenue. With the variety of possibilities, it can be confusing.

*“Why can’t I just go and do a full-time course to become a chef? I don’t want to hang around for four years. But yeah, that sounds good. What do I have to do to get in?”*

“We’d need to fill out an expression of interest form to let them know you’d like a place on the course. When could we do that?”

*“Well how do I do that? (Raised voice) I’m not going in there on my own!”*

“Did I suggest that?”

*“No! Sorry!”*

Work placements rely on meeting industry standards which can be judgmental and inflexible in comparison to the relative flexibility of school. Students need to be prepared for these expectations and be supported in their efforts. Negotiating with institutions to work together to provide that support is also a key part of this process. The drive to collect and return a student from home or school is a time for reflection, questioning, testing understandings and expectations, commitment and listening to the stories of daily life. So many factors can sabotage every plan and every opportunity.

Tania is preparing for an interview for VET Hairdressing, a highly competitive program. She is understandably nervous but well supported by her mum who is accompanying her to the interview. I’ve had to assess my level of support: do I take them, or meet them there? I believe it is important for them to share this experience. We have already completed cold calling to businesses to boost confidence and practise discussing goals, personal attributes and fielding new questions. On the morning of the interview there is a call.

*“We’re lost, mum’s not sure where to go...yeah we’re just near there...I see it...we’re just turning down now. What if I stuff up?”*

“You’re going to be fine. They know you’ll be nervous, and they’ll try to make you feel more comfortable. Remember the things we’ve practised. I’ll call to see how you went.”

Caught up with others on the caseload I call home the next morning and speak to a very proud mother. Later, on Tania's mobile through excited squeals,

*"I can't believe I got in!"*

*"Your mum is so proud of you."*

*"Yeah, I know, I think she wishes she'd done something like this, but she gave it up to stay at home and I'm glad I pushed myself to go for it."*

Samantha would like a traineeship in Business but if one is not found over the holidays, then enrolling in TAFE Certificate 2 in Business will bring the desired result. I check the internet daily for jobs, but there is nothing of interest. We also discuss dates for TAFE enrolment and a plan for getting from home and back. Half an hour out of town with buses only running in the morning and night make it difficult to attend interviews. Parents don't want their children hanging around all day with nothing to occupy the hours, and their own work commitments make it impossible to help the son or daughter to follow-up work opportunities.

*"There is a business traineeship listed with Jobs Are Us."*

Silence. A review of the job network follows and mental note to self to endeavour always to overcome the information as needed situation.

*"Where is it then!? (Translation: who is the employer and what kind of job is it?)"*

*"We would lodge an application and if you're selected for interview, you'll be given details of the employer, so you can attend an interview."*

*"Mmmmm, I'll have to think about it."*

I check to see that Jamie is ready for her course, but the phone doesn't answer through the evening, which is unusual, she's always at the end of the phone. There is no Jamie at the first session at TAFE. I call each day and three days later find that she has moved to a remote rural area to stay for the holidays with a relative. Jamie has been fostered for the past four years and is now making her own choices about living.

*"I'm glad I caught up with you."*

*“Yeab sorry, the phone doesn’t work up here.”*

“So what’s going to happen for college?”

*“Dunno, I’ll come back to town when it starts.”*

“Where do you think you might live?”

*“I dunno! I’ll work something out by then.”*

I suggest further providers and ways to access assistance and make a note to follow up closer to the time.

I keep in touch with students over the month to wish them well for the holidays and to check for changes in the interests and plans for the new year. Damien is working in the bush, and this could be where he chooses to stay, although he is enrolled for Start@TAFE. Liam is waiting for the potato harvest to start, his only source of income over the holidays and until he turns sixteen in March and is eligible for youth allowance. Many of his friends turned sixteen in year 10 and have been experiencing the small financial freedoms of having one’s own money. Liam is still asking his mum for the small amount of money he needs to keep up with his friends.

Throughout January, the focus is on jobseekers actively looking for opportunities, and time is spent refining resumes to suit positions advertised or to actively canvass employers. For most students it is time to maximise the holiday experience. College and jobs, courses and TAFE are far away for at least another month. On seeing some hot job prospects in the paper I do ring around, with little response. I call students to ensure they are ready to begin college and to revisit with those who may still be unsure.

*“Yeab I’m all set to go. I’ve been working so much over the holidays I haven’t had time to think about it really. I’d rather have an apprenticeship, but it will be good to do that VET program and hopefully then I’ll be able to get into an apprenticeship.”*

A traineeship for a large local employer is advertised through the Australian job search website and I leave a message for Samantha which she returns later that evening. Having had time to think about the process she is prepared to take the chance on something unknown and she submits an application. Called for interview the following Monday we practise interview questions on the half hour drive from home to town. Her parents both work and are glad of the help with transport. A week later and Samantha is notified of her success.

Early February and a delay in student assistance arrangements is just another stress to add to pre-college nerves of new experiences.

*“Well I’m not going without me books. Everybody’ll think I’m a dork!”*

We discuss that there will be quite a few dorks and that I will make sure that the necessary equipment is available.

It is finally 14 February and in various places across the state the phenomenon of first day of college begins. Sun shining, hair washed, straightened, curled, waxed and gelled, clothes looking just right in the casual “just threw it on” kind of way after weeks of careful consideration, new bags and backpacks, shoes, boots, Texas and surf shorts, torn shirts; the energy required is enormous and perhaps the parents at home or work breathe a sigh of relief that the moment has come, and they can relax till the next crisis.

*“They’re looking at me!”*

“I don’t think so, everyone is finding their way to class like you.”

*“How will I know where to go?”*

“Your teachers will help you through the day, ask them and ask other kids, you’re all working it out together. How’s your housing application going?”

*“I go to housing on the first and court on the 10<sup>th</sup>!”*

“Court! What’s that about?”

*“Gotta go, don’t want to be late on the first day.”*

“I’ll call you.”

*“Yeab! (racing down the corridor and making a quick escape from difficult conversations).”*

Drysdale (Hospitality Training Provider) have just advertised courses. Arriving at Bonnie’s home where she is bunking down in a corner of the living room, she is fresh and clean from the shower and always presents very well in her best gear. Working casual hours at the local bakery has provided some financial freedom and she has new sneakers and jeans and is equally proud of her new sound system. She is used to packing everything in the bag when needed. The interview takes 15 minutes and explains the course requirements and benefits for the student. Bonnie shines as she listens intently.

*“It’s exactly what I want to do... how awesome is that!”*

“Now how will you get there every morning?”

*“No problems, I’ll catch the bus, just out on the main road and then I can walk up from town.”*

## The Circle: Risk, Engage, Explore

By the 16<sup>th</sup> February I have been able to contact Liam who is now unsure of what he wants to do. Opportunities are few in his community and, with no transport to and from the nearest town, casual work is always impossible to maintain, and full-time jobs are reasonably scarce. We talk about how the course will give him the chance to attend TAFE and gain skills which will help him into the hospitality industry, also giving him the chance to do work placements and put himself in the eye of local employers.

*“Yeah I couldn’t put it in ‘cause I didn’t have my birth certificate. I was thinking about just doing the potato harvest and then seeing what I can pick up after that.”*

We discussed again the opportunities of different industry areas, local opportunities, personal interests and I leave him to think on it for tomorrow.

A week later Country Education Centre begins for the year minus three of my students. A few calls later and I ascertain that they all have nerves about attending.

“Can you tell me why? Has something happened?”

*“I don’t know, I just don’t want to.”*

“Ok, would you meet me next Monday and we could talk about other options we could look at for you?”

*“Yeah that would be okay. Would you like to talk to mum? Thanks for calling.”*

Mum and I discuss the beauty of living in the country and the difficulties for the young people in the region, transport and not yet old enough to have a licence, limited opportunities in employment, training and further education and the difficulty and hours spent accessing services in the city. Mum wants Liam to have the best possible chance of work in the future. A family illness will take her to the mainland till the end of the week and I’m unable to convince Liam to come to school for the week as transport will be more difficult while staying with friends.

Two weeks into the college year and I have a meeting at 1:30 pm with Jamie. A text at 11:30 am leaves me wondering how best to respond.

*“If ur not busy can you come pick me up cos I’m bored, and this is crap.”*

Conversation with self. I think I’m busy. Yes, you look busy. I’m in a meeting, aren’t I? Definitely. Responding will achieve nothing and so I turn up a little early at the end of the day and text that I’ve arrived. Jamie appears as I get out of the car. Back and forth, around and around with the same outcome as we sit in the sun on the lawn.

*“I’m not going!!! I didn’t want to come to college anyway. I only did it ‘cos everyone said I had to. I really wanted to do that course at Drysdale and now I suppose it’s too late.”*

After meeting with Jamie and listening to what her desires are and how she thinks she could best achieve them we decide that Drysdale is the best option followed by a traineeship to put on-the-job routines in place. The influence of teachers, family and friends has a huge impact. Drysdale is a gamble, but also an opportunity I feel I must follow.

Start@TAFE has been rejected because

*“Why would I take a year to get something that I can do in 16 weeks, it doesn’t make sense.”*

*“There are some other things to be learnt along the way aren’t there?”*

*“Yes I know I have to learn to be more patient.”*

*“How do I know you’ll follow through with TAFE?”*

*“Because I will, because it’s what I want to do.”*

Not yet the end of February but the end of a busy week and Jamie and I attend the information session at TAFE, going over our interview preparation in the car and she catches the bus home. She will most likely be accepted for the course. On Sunday night I send a text to Bonnie as she begins her course in the morning.

*“RU okay for tomorrow?”*

*“All ok, call me afta 4 see how it went thanks B”*

The following day a lunchtime text tells me,

*“This is gr8 thanx for helping me get in c ya sn”*

*“I think you got yourself there, be proud.”*

Unknown to her, Bonnie is teaching me how to talk text. Sometimes I still need to ask for translations.

Liam is attending his VET Centre tomorrow. The bad news is that, due to the protracted decision making process the centre has released unused course places for other centres, resulting in no spot for Liam to attend TAFE in hospitality. Options would either be retail or automotive. Discussions tomorrow with the teachers will hopefully come to a solution which has some meaning for Liam. Catching the bus to TAFE is all right if you are used to catching buses. If you live in a remote location and had never caught a bus, let alone to the city, and are wondering about where to disembark how to find the “back” gate to TAFE and which building to go to when you get there, can be challenging. I will spend from now till after Easter encouraging students to catch the bus.

“You know where to go now, don’t you?”

*“Yeab but I just don’t like catching the bus.”*

“Are you being bullied?”

*“No.”*

“Aren’t the movies any good?”

*“No (laughing).”*

“Your mate will be there too in the morning. Would you like me to come down and wait with you (joking)?”

*“Definitely not!”*

“Ok, would you like me to wait at the bus stop in town and walk through to TAFE with you?”

*“Yeab, that would be good.”*

A call from the Further Learning Centre confirms that Liam is fairly happy to enrol for Automotive and all has been arranged. I meet the bus for Liam and his mates’ first day, ready with their new protective gear and boots.

“What time did you get up this morning?”

*“Um, well, I have to get up at 5.30am and Kent’s brother picks me up at 6.30am to get there for the bus at 7.00am.”*

“How’s that going to be through winter?”

*“Mmmm, not much fun I suppose (we laugh).”*

By mid-March Bonnie is surprising herself but not her teachers at TAFE as they felt sure she would do well from the start. A bright spark with strong internal resources that are helping her overcome twelve months of uncertainty, couches, floors, caravans, arguments and worse. She is shining. We are here!

It is Jamie’s first day at TAFE and I’ve arranged to take her in so we have a little time to talk about expectations and how to deal with those if they don’t match how you thought it would be.

Monday 20 March and I visit Tenille at TAFE and sit in on a class dealing with the management of difficult situations with clients. Later we move through to the salon and the class is instructed in hair braiding followed by individual practical. Observation is vital for me to then be able to translate for a young person the situations they may never have experienced and find confronting or challenging.

An appointment with Bonnie reveals that she is leaving in two weeks for the mainland and will not complete her course. Nothing will dissuade her as she’s been invited to join her boyfriend and next week she’ll work to make some backup money for the trip. With the change of plan, information and contacts are gathered to assist Bonnie for employment or training when she arrives and all theory units and some practical are assessed to add to her resume. A text at 10.30pm has me smiling.

*“I was wonderin dat wen u do me resume can u do me a couple of copies plz n I passed me coffee test 2 day Rock On”*

*“Hey well done you! Will have your resumes done tomorrow.”*

*“Thanx matey.”*

By 26 March Tenille admits to having problems with attendance and there are concerns at home with a younger member of the family causing enormous anguish. The need to be at the bus stop on time each morning has little relevance in the list of competing priorities.

*“Can you tell me what’s mainly giving you grief with the course?”*

*“Well some of it is the stuff with Allie. She’s going into town all the time and getting into trouble. There’s no way I want to be caught up in that and I’ve taken a stand and that leaves me right out on the edge.”*

*“Are there other things?”*

*“I know you’re only going to say I have to learn to get on with all kinds of people, but honestly that woman just needs to get a life (different expectations).”*

I suggest we take some time to look at examples of different behaviours and strategies to bring their understandings closer together.

At the end of March Damien is doing his first aid course as part of his TAFE program. When I call in at 11.00am he has spent most of the morning avoiding class and I raise the literacy issue. Damien talks about his problems quite freely but still resorts to old tactics to get out of potentially embarrassing situations. He walks in and pops his head over the room divider.

*“Hey how’s it going Damien?”*

*“Hi, yeah good, I’ve got this first aid thing today.”*

*“You know you actually need to be in the class to get your certificate?”* (We all have a good laugh.)

*“Well I might have a few problems with it, you know!”*

*“First aid is such a great thing to have going into forestry. So the questions are multiple choice where you tick the box, and someone will read the questions to you.”*

*Audible sigh of relief!*

*“Oh that’s ok then, even I can do that.”*

Waiting for the lift together I realise I’m pressing the wrong button. Damien reaches across in front of me to get the right one and says,

*“It’s ok Lyn, we’re all disabled in some way. (more laughter)”*

It is the Easter break and students are either settling well into their work or beginning to show signs of wear. Those who travel, now face the months ahead with cold early mornings and winter illnesses. Liam is enjoying his program both locally and at TAFE. Even with a late change to manage he is happy with his progress.

At the first opportunity after Easter, Tenille and I meet with the VET Coordinator to discuss the viability of continuing in her program. The high cost of places means that students must meet responsibilities for full attention to all aspects of their learning. Tenille has worked hard to achieve her current position. Preparing fully for the initial interview, wearing business clothes (uncomfortable when trackies and hoodies are the order of the day), managing hair and makeup, even making an effort to communicate in what is deemed the appropriate manner for client service can be a remarkably high hurdle moving straight from year ten to a service industry. Tenille can achieve this but does she want to and is the timing right? A text at 7.00am says

*“Sorry for the early hour I just wanted to check what time we are meeting. See you later T.”*

The meeting covers attendance issues taking into account recent ill health, completion of assignments and most of all the ability to cope with the new environments being encountered. We come away with a renewed commitment for the course and to achieve what was hoped for at the outset.

By late April Jamie’s attendance is beginning to falter and, although she was ill for the first three days, I am now finding it difficult to make contact. Tutors say she is one of the better students, although the whole class are having trouble in different ways. A surprise text from Bonnie pops up on my phone. I share it with those who have helped her in the past year.

*“Hey Lyn, how r ya? It’s me its awsum ere n iv got a ful time job ay! Ere me new num xo”*

Her teachers and I wish so much good for her and hope that resilience will see her through uncertainties at such a young age out there on her own.

I call home to touch base with Damien and while talking with his mum find that he is working full-time in the bush. TAFE will hold his place for two weeks as a safety measure.

*“He’s a good kid, but they all seem to go off the rails for a while.”*

“He’s been doing very well in his course and finding out that he has abilities he never thought possible. It’s been a valuable experience.”

*“I worry about the influence of other people sometimes and you try to teach them to make up their own mind about the things they do but there’s a lot of pressure on kids. They don’t always do the right thing.”*

“Is the job an on-going arrangement?”

*“Yeah well the guy reckons he’ll put him on a traineeship if it works out.”*

Damien would be going into his Automotive units next term and I’m unable to discover if this is the reason for his disappearance into casual work, where perhaps he feels more at ease.

It is May already. Liam was absent from TAFE yesterday and I receive a “wasn’t well” message. There have been a couple. News trickles through the cracks that footy practice has changed to an earlier timeslot. Footy or TAFE. Further education is not winning this game. Discussions with the course coordinator shed some more light on the absences and we work towards a solution for Liam.

*“TAFE is just the best. I had no idea it was going to be this good. I got 95% for a test last week and I’ve never got anything like that through school.”*

“That’s fantastic. Your tutors are so pleased with your work.”

*“Are they? Um that’s good. (Embarrassed)”*

“So what’s so different about TAFE?”

*“Well you’re there because you want to be. They’ll do everything they can to help you but you’ve got to put in the effort and do the best you can. I get heaps done.”*

Reports are due and some students are still endeavouring to find a stable place. I meet with Tenille and she remains uncertain about college. There is some discussion about changing colleges as a friend attends the alternative option. Although not prepared to lose her place at TAFE, this is the only element of training maintaining her studies at present. A quick revision of the benefits of college for next year, the coffee break is over and she heads back to shopping with mum.

Jamie has come out of hiding and is not returning to TAFE, no reasons given. With two weeks of term left, she has agreed to try the alternative originally rejected but better suited to her age and interests. Attending only 1.5 days of the agreed three means that this option is also closed. In the last week of term I discover that she has secured casual work at a local shop and TAFE have also offered her a second chance.

*‘I’d like to but then I need to work too. Margaret wants a full-time junior and she says I could have a Traineeship if I want.’*

*‘It’s a difficult decision to make, hey?’*

*‘Whatever I do someone’s gonna be p\*\*\*\*\* off.’*

‘You’ve been turning up to work on time, working well by Margaret’s account, and there is a chance for training and a qualification which is a solid option.’

*‘I wanna do both!’*

‘That’s not going to be possible if you want to take up the unit that will be available soon, but you have the holidays to think it over. Will you let everyone know your decision?’

*‘Yeab I’ll do that.’*

Jamie is nearing the top of the list for a supported independent unit. Excellent and finally! We have been waiting so many months. This will of course open another raft of complications for a 16 year old living on her own. I’m grateful that the unit comes with a support worker to assist with budgeting and life skills training.

## The Circle: Release and Breathe

As the days of June slip away it is time for last calls, last hurried moments to make things right realising I cannot make things right and that was never the task from the beginning.

Damien’s work has fallen through and he would like to return to his program next term. More calls and he is re-enrolled, and he and his mum breathe a sigh of relief.

*‘I just want to know that he’s doing something worthwhile. I don’t want him sitting around wasting his time!’*

In stepping beyond Year 10 these young people have each tested new environments, their responses, perceptions and boundaries. Samantha is well on the way to achieving a Certificate 2 in Business. Bonnie has experienced success in a learning and training environment, which gave her some skills and knowledge to support relocation and find work. Jamie, although wanting to complete her training, but needing to have friends and known people on hand to feel comfortable, moved into work where she was able to have both. Damien gained his First Aid Certificate and found that there are many ways to succeed and learn. Liam experienced confidence and fulfilment from learning in

a rural year 11 environment with access to training at TAFE. After decisions were delayed and changed it did not matter what area of endeavour was being covered but rather the quality of the experience. Tenille prepared for and stepped outside her perceived boundaries. She is the first to admit that it is hard work but that she has learnt a great deal about her personal resources. And throughout this process I have tried, tested and re-shaped my own personal resources to be the best possible activator and catalyst for this work. Their stories continue to be written.

## Distant and Quiet Voices

I accept reluctantly, that I am at the end of the YLO program cycle. It is time to establish the details of the next caseload while knowing that there are signs of instability in the one to which I am saying goodbye. There it is again, that nagging sense of discomfort as students follow choices and make decisions which can be in sharp contrast to an adult view of what might work best. I remind myself to be ever mindful of the priorities for each individual. Even when I may not be granted entry into their world it would seem that one must be prepared to work with the multidirectional nature of possibilities. What are the realities for a student who goes to college but must find independent living and an income to support those changes? How do you access services an hour and a half away on a regular basis and convince others that it is worth the effort required? After spending a lifetime at school where failure was the only certain outcome, how do you persevere in a new environment where that possibility gnaws at your confidence daily? My earth shakes and trembles as I observe and feel the uncertainties, the constancy of variables, shifting grains of sand beneath my feet. I know the options a, b and c. How to deflect if “a” doesn’t work out, the benefits of each and the payoff of each decision. I know and am comfortable knowing that sometimes “c” is the best starting point and not an admission of “not good enough”. Every conversation has been with purpose under the careful and mindful gaze of a fluid becoming.

For each engagement with some positive thread, there are those who expend concentrated energy to maintain distance or diversion, or sometimes just have too much going on in life to be able to let something else shift their focus. Involvement with drugs and alcohol shatters families and friends wanting only to find a successful intervention to the horror in their lives and asking for help from whoever will listen. Sometimes it is the young person dealing with parental substance abuse while they try to create some sense

of normality doing the shopping, cooking, cleaning and washing so that they and their siblings can attend school each day. Court proceedings, incarceration of self or family members or friends, teen pregnancy, mental health breakdown, family fractures, loss and bereavement, blended family power imbalance leading to homelessness, couch surfing, involvement in high risk relationships all bring a crushing and crippling impact to families and the communities who would support and enable their growth. Many of the divergences of life are played out in silence till someone knocks on the door and the phone conversation of this morning has been forgotten in the party of this afternoon as mum makes her way shakily to the door, gathering a semblance of normality around her.

For each condition of an unhappy and struggling society there is a name, a Carl, a Teagan, a Drew, bravely trying to work out how to be despite the power and pull of faulty social institutions. Rousseau gleaned from observations of society that,

... a state if it is to have strength must give itself some solid foundation, so that it can resist the shocks that it is bound to experience and sustain the exertions that it must make to preserve itself; for all peoples generate a kind of centrifugal force, by which they brush continuously against one another, and they all attempt to expand at the expense of their neighbor ... thus the weak are always in danger of being swallowed up, and indeed no people can well preserve itself except by achieving a kind of equilibrium with all the others which makes the pressure everywhere the same for all (1762, p. 53).

Is it this equilibrium that we seek to build a life worth living? What of those who would prosper at the expense of others? Finding the balance, a balance, any balance is not in the hands of the child. The child is at the mercy of the life into which it enters the world, as to which Rousseau would attest. While the words “Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains” (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 2). may raise the ire and rouse the spirit to resistance, what of the child in a life not of their own making where self-interest overpowers love and care of one’s own? Zygmunt Bauman in *the art of life* also attests to the matter of fate in the outcomes of the life of a child when he says

Being an individual (that is, being responsible for your choice of life, your choice among choices, and the consequences of the choices you choose) is not itself a matter of choice, but a decree of fate. (Bauman, 2008, p. 53)

It is the matter of fate which governments should strive to turn around, to strengthen communities, families and individuals to enable fate to be overcome.

Within the silences there are those who are drawn into danger by the clever and the careless, at risk or worse, used by the unscrupulous to make money via a range of modern and available vices. These voices come in whispers on the air to me, travel with me every day. These are the young people dancing on the edges of the fiery rim, where danger and dysfunctionality burn. They too were on my caseload list, perhaps with phone numbers and an address. Sometimes there are conversations with a distraught parent, listening to the strained sobs over the phone, opening an opportunity for a meeting, a coffee and the offer of information and a warm introduction to someone in a specialist service area. So many offers not taken up, parents and carers lost themselves, like their child. Usually if one watches carefully and listens attentively the name may pop up in conversation and sometimes out of the blue a face appears seeking somewhere warm, a hot drink, a pie, conversation without expectation, and is gone again. I throw in the necessaries of “do you have somewhere to sleep tonight and your mum would like to hear your voice?” but never the offer of money, money that would go the way of all the other money and relationships. These are the voices that strip the heart bare from our collective barren spaces and inabilities. These are the places where Rousseau would bring some solace in the knowledge that, “those who think themselves the masters of others are indeed greater slaves...” (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 2).

Of the sixty or so students on any final caseload list, perhaps three quarters are contacted, engaged with at a range of differing levels and enabled to undertake choices of their own choosing and meaningfulness into the following year. The intangible which cannot be captured is the degree to which these deep and fleeting conversations may have been retained. One session per fortnight, if lucky, an hour at most, perhaps I am being generous in my calculations as time passes between event and the now of processing memories. Time has many lessons for me and hence my awareness of the meaning of “deep” and “fleeting”. Some moments, caught as a student hurtles down the hall, scraps of information exchanged, critical pieces of the puzzle, suddenly slotting together, or the necessary transfer of dates, times and arrangements for each of us to be in place. With time at a premium, the hierarchy of information, what must be said, must be said comes into a full and piercing light. A depth of awareness can be achieved in a fleeting moment. Patience. My practice has required patience to endure fractured moments, competing priorities, life moments, aftermath moments. I have been asked to create a singular, heightened lens that enabled me to make a meaningful collection of moments for each young person.

I recall the Rocks, Pebbles, Sand analogy familiar from so many training sessions. It goes like this, I take a large jar and fill it with rocks, asking those around me if the jar is full yet. Many will say yes. I then take a container of pebbles and shake them down in the jar to fill the spaces between the large rocks. Some are on to the trick at this stage. I ask again if the jar is full and feeling sure that I have used up my tricks, they will laugh and agree that the jar is now full. Taking up another container I tip sand into the jar which gently trickles down between the pebbles and rocks, filling still more spaces in the jar. Asking for the last time, “is the jar full now?”, I pick up the last container and pour in the sea, fresh from the beach. The liquid smells of salt and oceans, trickling quietly and slowly into the tiniest gaps in our jar. I watch as the dry sand dampens and changes colour, adding more liquid till the sand is saturated and the water level reaches the top of the jar. Attaching value to the size of the rock, pebble, sand and liquid can be a useful way to think about the things we value and protect. Do we start first by considering health and wellbeing, freedom and justice as Rousseau would suggest (1762/1979, p. 177). Each individual would allocate the range of values differently to each item in the jar. Perhaps many of us would not even think to consider our own intrinsic cultural influences, perhaps constituting the sand that fills the tiny cracks and spaces in the experiment of life. What position in the jar of rocks could I hope to hold? After reflection perhaps the liquid sea pouring in between the tiny grains is made up of the myriad connections and experiences making up the deep and often fleeting moments that are created in our consciousness and the writing of each individuals personal story.

The social order has a large stake in people’s self-narratives, insofar as they can enhance or inhibit its smooth functioning. Our micronarratives are typically “nested” within, and inseparable from, cultural macronarratives, that shape their possible outcomes and meanings. Inevitably, a certain degree of social negotiation is required as individuals struggle to craft personal narratives that are consistent, believable, and flattering, both in their own eyes and those of others. To avoid “ontological abandonment,” individuals must work out strategies enabling their self-narratives to dovetail with those of others in their community. (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001, p. 121)

In the sometimes deep, and sometimes fleeting moments of time granted to us, the young ones and I, to converse and practice those experiments in life, it is this sense of “ontological abandonment” which looms largest as a deciding factor in many of the initial choices in this early phase of life. For some of the students who are reasonably well supported in choosing and following a pathway, deviations from dreams can be viewed as

more easily possible. For others the dream is paramount and held with tenacity regardless of fit. With age, development and experience life will reveal so many more options for exploration if one has confidence in the construction of a self-narrative.

## Chapter 7

### Opportunity Revisited

*Well prepared minds are the surest monuments  
on which to engrave human knowledge.  
Émile or On Education Rousseau (1762/1979, p. 184)*

Ten years, it seems, is a short and quick elapse of time, as I watch the small world of education, at my back door, stretch and reshape. I am at close quarters, yet I feel the sound of hierarchies delivering quietly. Technology speeds us into the future in an instant ... and is useful for distancing, releasing us, citizens, from the machinations of decision making. The to and fro of deep inclusive community conversation has gone quiet on the ear. Still I watch and listen with care to our institutions stretching and straining in the quiet. Mistakes, errors of judgement shake our reality, BOOM! Disbelief and then the history slides quietly, quickly into a safe hiding place, out of sight. The ether shapes and reshapes, mists and blooms. Stories filter through the systems, softened, cleaned, released. We question. We lose track of time. Tick, tick, tick. And we forget...

Is it in our complicated, yet fragile, DNA to question and seek answers? Perhaps it is not in our biology, perhaps somewhere deeper toward our non-biologic heart, the soul, or in that part of us which makes us spiritual, questioning beings. If it were not in my makeup, I could happily release from the continual examination of the shifting state of play that delivers change across our country and the wider globe. Each community explores differently interpreted becomings to answer the call of their near society. The questioning mind rises up, stirs and questions, extends a hand to sift the tumbling grains

of sand, venturing out in search of solid ground, finding still more tiny grains of shifting sand.

Through social media and the online world new ways of knowing and becoming are released, ways of managing the knowledge of self and how we might interpret ideas of opportunity. The notion of time has changed. In my teen years I was stirred by the knowledge and vision of a planet in constant movement, fire and fury, in a television program I waited for weeks to watch and was never able to access again. The young of today can access in seconds information on any stream of thought, over and over again, access at a swipe. All change releases a tide of opportunity and the moral, ethical and social responsibility to shape the contracts of change we as citizens are prepared to live by. Each generation attends to the question of viability of the contract notion and produces a different set of undertakings by which to live. All too often I note that the change, the shiny, sparkly new, grasping for attention, races ahead leaving social responsibility slowly following, forever to be behind. My DNA can be read, dissected, reconfigured. Already there exists the capability to produce a baby from three parents or to select and deselect for certain traits and sex in the fine mix of DNA. Perhaps more than ever I should reconsider what is emerging for the individual and the collective, in this triple fast factored world with an often unrecognised set of possibilities and opportunities.

Rousseau, in his search to examine the nature of man considered in *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*,

Nature commands every animal, and beasts obey. Man feels the same impetus, but he knows he is free to go along or to resist; and it is above all in the awareness of this freedom that the spirituality of the soul is made manifest. For physics explains in some way the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas; but in the power of willing, or rather of choosing, and in the feeling of this power, we find only purely spiritual acts, about which the laws of mechanics explain nothing. (1754/1987, p. 45)

In separating man from animal further Rousseau cites man's continual drive for "self-perfection" as the core element which refines and cultivates all other aspects of man's nature. Rousseau casts doubt on man's ability to create a happy existence free from intervention. Guiding all is a being unnamed, able to raise mankind beyond the follies and mistakes of his human making, similarly ensuring that man's hand in the creation of institutions receives firm steerage.

...human establishments appear at first glance to be based on piles of shifting sand. It is only in examining them closely, only after having cleared away the dust and sand that surround the edifice, that one perceives the unshakeable base on which it is raised and one learns to respect its foundations. (1754/1987, p. 36)

Rousseau was less complementary of man's creations in later writings, particularly in the *The Confessions* casting considerable doubt on the status of recognised educational processes and the institutions involved in their delivery (1782/1789/1996, p. 11). I wonder what Rousseau would have made of man today and the new institutions that have been created?

The mixture of time and change has delivered in my lifetime this new set of institutions through which the individual citizen can interpret and translate life's opportunities and circumstances. Brandon Stanton tells the story of the development of the online phenomena which has become Humans of New York or HONY.

Humans of New York began as a photography project in 2010. The initial goal was to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers on the street, and create an exhaustive catalogue of the city's inhabitants. Somewhere along the way, I began to interview my subjects in addition to photographing them. And alongside their portraits, I'd include quotes and short stories from their lives. (Stanton, 2018)

Over twenty million followers tap, slide and scroll into the HONY website and through social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. What began as one man's passion to be a conduit in the art of humanity now swells the physical lines of connectivity to enable a heightened global awareness of our wondrous differences delicately underlined by the joy of our similarities. HONY is but one example of the way technology has quietly moved into our lives to change the way society operates. With that change, naturally, given that man has the guiding hand in the process, there are positives and negatives to be balanced. Technology, racing ahead, leaves us huffing and puffing to catch up while hastily working out how to manage the moral and ethical responsibilities. This is the nature of the world young people of 2018 inhabit. The life clock ticks on quietly in the background, continuing to seek a natural balance...

Picking up my smartphone, swipe to unlock, tap for Instagram, revealing the feed for today. I see the face of a young person sitting on a park bench, looking slightly bemused with the world, while relaxed and perhaps at peace with himself. The gentle smile and curly hair remind me of Rousseau and brings me to smile. What story does this

person have to share with me today? I want to know more about the circumstances of that smile.

Have you ever thought about how we're living in a society designed to give us anything we want, but we're essentially the same people who lived during the tribal times? We're catering to the same base needs like warmth and sex and social gratification, but we're doing so through unnatural means. If you think about it, the scrolling mechanism on a phone is a bit like strolling through a forest. We still come across unknown things. But now the first judgement that comes to our mind is immediately reinforced. We can say "I like it," and we'll be given more of the same. Or we can say 'I don't like it,' and the thing will go away forever. That single mechanism ascribes permanence to our most basic instincts. "We're never forced to ask: 'Why do you like it?' Or 'Should I like it?' We're living in a world that always adapts to us, so we never have to adapt to the world. I wonder how that affects us. I also wonder why we like squirrels but hate rats. Because they're both rodents. (Stanton, 2018)

I hear strains of Rousseau talking about man as he is in a state of nature, what he should aspire to in the vision of his truthful man, and how society eventually depletes his being. The thoughts of Rousseau meet in universality with the young thinker as he wonders and sits on the street bench. The questioning of so many through time. I am also drawn in those moments of the mini-read to process a meaning, make it part of my questioning and behaving. Do I follow in step or do I question? Will I question next time before following? This is the world and the learning of the young person of our today. Their teachers and mentors are no longer stood in front of the whiteboard, thirty to a room. Well, yes, they are for many, but not forever. They are the young story writers projecting in the daily feed, the politicians, scientists and adventurers taking us into the continuum of history and dropping us back down in our living rooms, having been around the world and back.

Access to information, building knowledge through sharing and understanding has an undeniable power. I can watch from afar as a young man teaches himself by limited internet access, to build a mini hydro system for the village, or with only hands and a knife to dig a well, line it with jungle greens to filter the water, incorporate a bucket, winder and handle, enabling the women to collect water closer to home and with greater safety. Each act of learning creates opportunity, redrawing the boundaries of time and necessity. This is also the world in which young people everywhere have a range of possibilities in which to position themselves. Once it has been seen it cannot be unseen and there lies the duality

of moral and ethical responsibilities in our contract of life. Closer to home I see different examples of need.

The National Broadband Network project in Australia is expected to have cost \$51B thus far as we near the end of 2018, and the rollout continues. Considered the largest infrastructure project to have been undertaken in Australia, the work is seen as a vital component of maintaining relevance and currency in a globalised world of technology. Business and industry find that they must keep pace as countries like China and India race ahead. With the release of *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2018* (Thomas, 2018), there came a transparency around matters of digital awareness. Of the seven states and one territory listed, Tasmania is seventh in the ranking. This does not come as a surprise. Those in the business, industry, education and employment sectors feel the pressure daily to upskill existing and would be employees to enable both individuals and the collective of the business to maintain pace with new technologies. The attendant flow on effect to families and communities is clearly seen be it either positive or negative. All of Tasmania has felt the pain of business closures and retrenchment as more traditional work practices are overtaken by companies who are smaller, larger, smarter or quicker to read the signs of change.

A number of not insubstantial factors weigh on Tasmania's ability to decrease the digital divide currently experienced. We have an aging population. The index notes that people 65 years and older are the least digitally included group. Then there is affordability of internet services. Tasmania has a population where one-third receives some form of government benefit, reducing the likelihood of affording an internet connection. The index also notes that those with a mobile only connectivity are also disadvantaged. People with a disability are highlighted and also people who did not complete secondary education. I have previously drawn attention to statistics surrounding literacy in Tasmania and that 49% of the population has not attained the literacy and numeracy skills to be fully functional in daily tasks (Statistics, 2006). Finally, geography is seen to play a critical role which affects all Australians outside urban areas. With large rural and regional expanses Tasmania is further disadvantaged. The report demonstrates areas of improvement, now that the issue has been firmly on the radar for the past four years (Thomas, 2018, p. 6). Is this a further example of our intellectual grasp, racing ahead seeking the new, the fascinating, for the bright and shiny outrunning the attendant responsibilities of society? Do we get lost in wanting all to see the cleverness which we have fashioned and forget to check where this self-love will lead?

Many of my current clients in a library setting, fit one or more, of the noted factors of disadvantage. Areas where the internet is not yet available or intermittent, households where there is one mobile phone with limited data access, lower levels of literacy raising difficulties to access customer information provided by the government, agencies or retailers and older persons with little experience of technology in their family sphere. Libraries in Tasmania, as part of the Department of Education, joined a strategy with other government departments to assist government benefit recipients to upskill in basic email, internet and website usage. Department processes had moved to online platforms some time ago, leaving clients very much behind in the race for inclusion. Embarrassed and feeling excluded, with no alternative, the people began to approach for assistance at their local libraries and the work began. How wonderful to help someone set up and use an email account, pinging emails back and forth to one another across the computer room and seeing the smile of achievement as they overcome another hurdle to managing current and future daily life. Recently, a new government publication was released. The format is excellent, written in plain English, the print selected for readability, clear pictures and diagrams. I cannot fault it though as previously described, many professionals have been working with disadvantaged community members for several years now to build capacity, confidence and access to increasing technologies. The lag between innovation affecting large numbers of people and appropriate policy response continues to reflect a huge divide. Again, I stop to ponder if the new norm is to be caught in a constant time lag between the creation and manifestation of change and the infrastructures required by a people to learn and respond to the change.

Equally trapped in the swirl and lag of new practices are the young people transitioning from school to early adulthood. Employers have expectations that the new young will be fully competent in technologies, and some are, where computers are in the home, and are used regularly to complete assignments, prepare documents and carry out research. If that is not the case, competency development rests with the school to provide equipment and conditions for the student to acquire skills in school time. One student clearly has the upper hand. At employment time, the young person who can quickly adjust to technology in the workplace will be selected over another requiring greater skills development and training. The assumption that a high level of competency on a smartphone, transfers in a straight line to PC skills, is a poor one and many employers have questioned their recruitment outcomes based on this poor assumption. The work to coordinate digital skills development between the curriculum and the workforce

continues. Again, the lag between uptake of technology and skills development to fully realise the intended outcomes, creates disadvantage while we try to catch up.

Employers are also caught in the positive, negative bind of technology. Relating directly again to the Tasmanian experience, employers find that as they upgrade systems aiming for higher levels of productivity, resulting conditions may reveal challenges amongst their workforce where levels of literacy are lower than expected. With the advent of the *Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan* (Education, 2010), Tasmania embarked on the work needed to assist all age groups to improve their literacy, numeracy and technology skills for work or personal priorities. Through Libraries Tasmania and a state-wide network of Literacy Coordinators and volunteers, Tasmanians are now able to freely access tuition, one to one or in small groups, at a time and place suited to their needs. Through the 26TEN campaign (Government, 2018a), which stands for twenty-six letters and ten numbers, stigma around core life skills has been significantly reduced, encouraging all members of all communities to become part of the solution, identifying that we will all know someone who could benefit from assistance. Employers can access targeted funding to assist their business to provide appropriate learning programs for the nature of the work required. Gone is the one size fits all type of solution recognising that everyone has a different learning need and timeframe.

In the streams of education, business and employment matters alone, the pace of change continues to draw my focus and I question how the elements may play upon current and developing landscapes for young people moving into adulthood. A regular commentator on such matters, Jennifer Westacott, CEO Business Council of Australia, spoke to the National Press Club of Australia in 2017 on the subject *Future-Proof: Protecting Australians Through Education and Skills* (Westacott, 2017). Westacott pre-empted her presentation by inviting the audience to recognise that “the world of work is changing”, and that Australia can “protect its people by ensuring we have the most skilled, the most trained, and the most resilient workforce on earth.” The vision was and remains enormous and while “business employs 10 million of the 12 million working Australians” (Westacott, 2017) perhaps our social and cultural undertakings are ways we might make promises we can uphold. The specifics of Westacott’s view are interesting, blending tertiary education (university) with vocational education and training (VET) currently delivered in Tasmania through years 11 and 12 and the college system, plus Trade Training Centres. Her proposal puts to rest a long-standing cultural division between trade and academic careers. The subject was raised recently via a politician’s post on social media,

wondering why apprenticeships are not held in higher regard within the community. I could not help but add my weight to the discussion, disappointed that we are still (my whole adult life) having this conversation. From a family of three where two took up successful apprenticeships and one attended university, I have been a staunch advocate for choices based on skill and interest. The notion that one pathway privileges one form of intelligence over another should no longer be part of a viable dialogue and yet it remains. As I wrote my comments on Facebook, the naivety of many years became clear. Who benefits from fostering this divide? Certainly not our youth seeking skills development and a springboard toward employment. On a small island with a small population of some 500,000 inhabitants, the education sector is a small pie to carve up. Funding is at a premium for each competitor. The Business Council proposes traditional silos be redrawn, recognizing that it is possible to “[maintain] the unique character of each sector” (Westacott, 2017), the academic and the vocational, while delivering funding equity to students through a shared governance model and the creation of a Lifelong Skills Account. Eventually over time as learning cultures change, such a restructure would “encourage[s] people to use qualifications, to build a strong foundation, and then dip in and out of short, accredited modules to effectively create their own ‘credentials’ that allow them to upskill and retrain throughout their lives” (Westacott, 2017).

A short twelve months later, Westacott was again invited to the podium at the National Press Club, presenting on *Australia at Work: managing adjustment and change* (Westacott, 2018). The speech takes the listener to the heart of what is important to the organisation for all Australians, focusing on jobs, education and skills development, a high-quality health system and a country able to deliver power security while committing to act on climate change. “We believe there is nothing more important to human dignity than a society where people are free – free to make choices and free to live their lives how they want” (Westacott, 2018). Once again, I hear the voice from the pages of *The Social Contract* as Rousseau poses the problem of his time, which continues to trouble us.

‘How to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before.’ This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract holds the solution. (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 14)

Streaming back through history to the current day, Westacott goes on to recognise the enormous pace and drive behind the current change in how we work, and through the

work of a recent Business Council project, how they “explore[d] the forces of adjustment and transition in our workplaces...And whether our structures and institutions are set up to manage the evolution in a fair and just way” The project noted that higher rates of change are occurring in how we carry out the tasks that make up jobs. Those in the job market who are at a higher rate of risk are workers who are low skilled, older, located in regional areas and already experiencing disadvantage. Literacy levels and the ability to upskill are more critical than ever before. In summing up Westacott draws our attention to what could be considered as our ongoing collective responsibility.

...we can choose to trample or unleash human endeavor. We can choose to trample or unleash the forces of imagination and private enterprise. We can choose to give people the skills they need or leave them behind. But, the cruellest and most unfair thing we can do is to pretend that Australians don't need to adapt. How we manage this period of adjustment and transition is all about the choices we make. (Westacott, 2018)

Transitioning young people are implicit in the findings of the Business Council project of 2018 as they stand on the rocky ground between secondary and post-secondary education, work and setting up for a life of skills development, adaptation, change and personal flexibility. While the job market, business and industry are key players in the creation of future opportunities, of equal or higher importance is the art in the creation of the individual. It is the individual person who will respond to external change, drive the consumer forces of the future and shape the social landscape of the world in which we live with one another.

The young person of today, I hear regularly in the media, will have seventeen or so occupations across a lifetime. This has long been the measure of how careers and the workforce indicators of success or otherwise have been calculated and described. Does this type of dialogue serve the purpose of the young person crafting a career as we rush towards 2030, 2040 or 2050? Is this type of language big enough to enable us to explore our individual horizons and beyond?

A revision of language and points of access to careers has already occurred. No longer the one or two online sites for young people to hunt for local and further afield possibilities for work options. Web sites are now a must for any business and social media ensures that possibilities are shared through immediate and other networks, potentially adding to a knowledge base and more practical talk around options, moving away from the dream-oriented notion of opportunity. Options are more closely tied to making

choices whereas opportunity has in the past and probably still is interpreted as something which is offered or placed before one. Options has a notion more centred on the individual and their choices in life.

Foucault posed the notion of Entrepreneurs of the Self in a series of talks in 1978/79 and it would seem to be more relevant today than ever. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, French Sociologists, cited in the work of Mauricio Pelegrini (Pelegrini, 2017), *Foucault and neoliberal society: the worker as "entrepreneur of self"*, provide an analysis of Foucault's view at the time.

The new government of subjects in fact presupposes that the enterprise is not in the first instance a site of human flourishing, but an instrument and space of competition. Above all, it is ideally depicted as the site of all innovation, constant change, continual adaptation to variations in market demand, the search for excellence, and "zero defects." The subject is therewith enjoined to conform internally to this image by constant self-work or self-improvement. He must constantly strive to be as efficient as possible, to appear to be totally involved in his work, to perfect himself by lifelong learning, and to accept the greater flexibility required [e.g., austerity measures] by the incessant changes dictated by markets. His or her own expert, own employer, own inventor, and own entrepreneur: neoliberal rationality encourages the ego to act to strengthen itself so as to survive competition. All its activities must be compared with a form of production, an investment, and a cost calculation. (Dardot & Laval, 2013, pp. 330-331)

As a worker I can immediately relate to the descriptions of Dardot and Laval and feel for those who will spend a lifetime of work in this type of zone, one that calls for total excellence, ever the lifelong learner, subjected to the continual mercy of the market, to be all things to the self and one's own economist. I can relate as one of the busy worker ants, participating in six monthly performance reviews calling for continual improvement, asking oneself, how might I contort myself, my knowledge, my being, my ethics, to comply with the needs, demands of the institution? Gone are the days of an achievement of one degree, one area of expertise, reaching the apex of the triangle. Perhaps it is no longer a horizontal scale that we are required to consider but rather a multidirectional scale with a hair-trigger reset button. This description paints rather a grim picture of the future. This is a future that is with us now and has been the reality of workforces for many years. To escape the mental blackness or at least reshape it, is there another way to reflect on the world of an entrepreneur of the self?

I see around me young adults in their twenties and thirties having worked in conventional jobs, undergo a slow evolution created around their passions and the things they love, and are committed to, in life. Knowledge is their catalyst and their freedom. They live, work, maintain an income, learn and learn again, pursuing avenues presented or those that look interesting, tempting, quick let's go down that tunnel. They share their knowledge freely with others, become teachers and mentors to spread the learning, build networks of like-minded souls from community to community or around the world. They seek truths and knowing in their field, are unafraid of experts and freely connect and interact to add to their collections. They are inspiring, positive agents of new ways and new ideas. One of these young people is a father, a son, a brother, a Maker, a Builder by trade, a former Information and Computer Technician, a Buyer, Recycler and Upcycler, citizen of young citizens of thinkers and community capacity builders. Another is a daughter, a mother and teacher of all midst her connections, a conscious raiser of a conscious human being, a roller derby great, a sister, a builder of capacity of sustainability, a reducer of plastic, of damage, of thoughtless, careless acts and citizen of thinkers and community capacity builders. Another is a grower of crickets and mealworms, an Entomologist, eco-guide, rafter and climber, a mentor and teacher on the future of food and insects at our tables, a collector of positive and challenging thinkers and a citizen of thinkers and community capacity builders. The list could go on. There are the farmer's markets where purveyors of entrepreneurial lifestyles and its rich pickings, boast the organic, free range, hand raised, no additives or preservatives, deliciousness and fresh living. Restaurateurs trade fresh goods for meals, who build community up and down the street where once there was no soul, the traders of good-will and good friends, stretching the boundaries of the self and one's life. Les Todres, seeking to understand spiritual freedoms says

...one can have an insight into the restricting power of one's particular organisation of self and world; perhaps how it came into being and something about the power which maintains it. One can also have an insight into the possibilities for living, which this structure has obscured and perhaps feel a more unambivalent invitation to embody some of these possibilities. Such specific forms of self-insight pave the way for actualizing a more flexible self-perception, perhaps one more in accord with the freedoms and limits of human existence. (Todres, 2007, p. 139)

I wonder at the limits and restraints which might be revealed in the spaces between public and private sector influences, each with its constraints and dilemmas.

Technology brings us closer and closer by the day in one sense, enabling one to see the ways of knowing and ways of being of the other, not previously experienced. Experiences beyond the town, state and country reveal startlingly new opportunities for personal growth and life experiences. No longer are we waiting for the local job market to throw us something interesting and enlightening to match our dreams and delights for employment. Current vistas are restricted or released by the size of the lens. When a possibility is revealed for the first time, it can then take shape as an option of choice. This requires a different set of skill development and engagement. Are our institutions setting our young people up and preparing them for this sort of thinking, doing and creating in the world of the entrepreneur?

Among those helping to create a different language and way of understanding self-creation is Kuba Szreder. In *Mobile Autonomy: Exercises in Artists' Self-organization (Dockx & Gielen, 2016)*, Szreder takes up an investigation of the world of the projectarian in relation to the world of art and the nature of work in a post-Fordist capitalist society. In the chapter *How to Radicalize a Mouse? Notes on Radical Opportunism* Szreder describes the new and constantly shifting reality of the radical opportunist. While in some quarters seen as a negative force, “opportunists are [now] those who confront a flow of ever-interchangeable possibilities, making themselves available to the greater number of these, yielding to the nearest one, and then quickly swerving from one to another” (Virno, 2004, p.86 in Szreder, 2016, p. 185). In the world of the projectarian Szreder recognises

...Foucault’s term – entrepreneurs of the self), because projects enable them to capitalize their innate capacities, social connections and experiences in exchange for monetary or reputational gains. They are owners of their own biopolitical means of production. What they lack and compete for is access to networks in which they are able to actualize their potentials in order to build their trajectories and ensure survival. (2016, p. 186)

There are pluses and minuses in the world of the new entrepreneur, it would seem, and a strong knowledge of networks and markets would be just the starting point. In the world of the young this requires the building of knowledge as individuals approach their late teens if one is to be prepared for the steps required to build capacity. Szreder poses that one is either a cynical opportunist, one who pursues their individual interests while

submitting to neoliberal hegemony, or a radical opportunist who in contrast attempts to tactically politicize the project-related systems of production in accordance with such values as solidarity, equality and self-governance (2016, pp. 196-197). To take on the mantle of the radical appears to be the choice offering both the greatest personal freedoms and freedoms for all in a fine balancing act between the personal and collective.

Technologies and developments through the internet have given rise to a world of connectivities, delivering sometimes yet unknown positives and certain negatives, outstripping our biology in the bid to keep pace. Leapfrogging is an old term re-designed for this new world and language. It describes a set of circumstances where existing structures become complacent in their position of power, giving rise to networks of possibilities for the innovators and risk takers to leverage.

When the radical innovations eventually become the new technological paradigm, the newcomer companies leapfrog ahead of former leading firms. More recently the concept of leapfrogging is being used in the context of sustainable development ... which may accelerate development by skipping inferior, less efficient, more expensive or more polluting technologies and industries and move directly to more advanced ones. (EDUCALINGO, 2018)

Technologies take once linear, first one step then the other, lessons of learning and remodel them to deliver the most relevant and elegant solutions.

The skills required to operate successfully within this evolving landscape, are revealing a very different face and shape to those we thought were needed ten years ago and certainly twenty years ago. In the field of education, and perhaps a little late, our screens are now filled with stories to raise awareness of STEM or better still, STEAM, incorporating Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Maths and Medicine, for the entrepreneurs and curriculums of today and tomorrow. Being actively challenged are past notions of gender related uptake and role models across all gender experiences come to the fore to champion critical thinking and dialogue around potentials and possibilities.

Professor Peter Taylor, head of STEAM Education and Director of the Transformative Education Research Centre (TERC) in the School of Education at Murdoch University, Western Australia in the research paper, “Why is a STEAM curriculum perspective crucial to the 21st century?” provides some insight into the current and future needs in skills development, which is driving how the youth of today create and recreate themselves to meet a world of work of continually unknown quantities.

Given the rapid emergence of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, DNA mapping, robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printing, biotechnology and the ‘internet of things’, business and industry leaders are calling for graduates with liquid skills that enable them to adapt to a fluid working landscape throughout their lives; to prepare for jobs that currently do not exist, but that will be essential to the nation’s economic wellbeing. Liquid skills include the ability to work with others, verbal communication, creative and critical thinking, active listening and active learning, and a disposition towards lifelong learning.(Taylor, 2016)

Can we imagine a time when a skill set overtakes a qualification in the employment sector hierarchy of needs? The discussion has begun and perhaps our futures will incorporate both depending on stage of life decisions, cost, appropriation of narrowly specific skill sets and the rate of evolution in market driven employment sectors. The entire market of learning and education has also become a multilevel complexity in contrast to traditional models. Learners are able to dip in and out to gain the specific requirements of their time or engage in more fully rounded experiences depending on need. As choice expands and place is less governed by a map, the parameters of a good education will continue to be recreated.

One of the new essentials in becoming an entrepreneur of the self, is a readiness to embrace risk, a subject taken up by John Paul Lederach in *The Moral Imagination*.

Risk is mystery. It requires a journey. Risk means we take a step toward and into the unknown. By definition, risk accepts vulnerability and lets go of the need to a priori control the process or the outcome of human affairs. It is the journey of the great explorers for it chooses, like the images in the maps of old, to live at the edge of known cartography. Risk means stepping into a place where you are not sure what will come or what will happen. (2005, p. 163)

For the young person transitioning to a next platform in the journey to adulthood there has always been risk and the uncertainty of the unknown. It is all unknown till experience brings it into being. In the slow rise from birth through childhood and the teen years, nature leads through tried and tested experiences, from the security of the known to the unknown. Within the guidance of the family and mentors, the young person gains the knowledge and skills to test and brave the unknown, or sometimes they will not. New skills for a new tomorrow are not just the domain of our young people, but necessities for us all. Expecting that the youth of today will forge on alone is not only unrealistic, it is disrespectful to the needs of the growing mind. It is more critical than ever before, that the entirety of a young person’s learning network has the capacity to finely tune the

complex matrix of activators and enablers to catalyse a given environment into a tangible opportunity. Just as the ability to read and write has shaped the current woeful literacy statistics as previously mentioned, so digital access and inclusion will shape the unknown future for the current generation and beyond. That generation includes all levels of the human welfare network of each young person.

While it seems a crime to play with Lederach's considered mapping of risk, memes of the moment have reframed this very idea into "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space" (Goodreads, 2018), popularised by the author Stephen Hunt. Known for his work in fantasy, incorporating steampunk, that fascinating blend of Victorian passion for the new sciences, mixed with new worlds, blended still with the culture of steam power, it is worthy of note that Hunt, himself, is also recognised for his significant contribution to web-based content, yet another example of the breadth of interest, skill and creativity required in the making of the new self(ves).

While I consider the act of taking from here and there as an act of creation, the term bricolage comes to mind. Coined by the French social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, bricolage refers to "construction (as of a sculpture or a structure of ideas) achieved by using whatever comes to hand (Dictionary, 2018)". Jeff Vanevenhoven, Doan Winkel, Debra Malewicki, William L. Dougan and James Bronson (2011, p. 53), in "Varieties of Bricolage and the Process of Entrepreneurship", examine the mobilization of internal and external resources in the process. Focusing on entrepreneurial skills through a business venture lens, the skills descriptions themselves, add another layer of perspective to that which we may need to foster in the youth of now and the future.

Entrepreneurs utilize the techniques of bricolage...to parse, to re-conceptualize, to appropriate and to assemble resources and to rework and to present narratives about the entrepreneur, venture and/or the process in such a way as to solicit further contributions of resources that can sustain and/or advance the venture.

The ability to create a multifaceted view of people, situations, connections, to think differently about the everyday, including oneself, to communicate broadly, convincingly and with purpose form part of the entrepreneur's toolkit for bricolage.

By attending to stories of difference, arising in the online classroom of the internet, I gain insights to a new set of ways of knowing and understanding what one might become. The young Australian entrepreneur Jack Bloomfield outlines his rise through e-commerce, while still at high school.

Between the age of 14 and 15 I was trialing different side hustles like Forex trading. I made a few thousand dollars here and there, but I got my big break when I was 15. I got into the world of e-commerce, and I started out selling carbon fibre money clips...I now have over five e-commerce stores turning over thousands per day. Through that time I have scaled my personal brand up and I now have more than 17,000 followers on Instagram with hundreds of connections within Australia and overseas. (News.com.au, 2018)

Mr Bloomfield is not alone as a young person designing their own employment and their future, taking risks and responding to evolving spaces. The Fortune website introduces eighteen under eighteen-year-olds who have made an impact on their corner of the world or beyond, each exhibiting a unique set of skills and intentionality.

Casting an eye across *18 Under 18: Meet the Young Innovators Who Are Changing the World* I gain insights into the mindset of a young innovator/entrepreneur. There is Noa Mintz, who at age sixteen, has created a childcare agency serving her locale of New York and the Hamptons. Her priorities are customer service for her four year old business. With now competing priorities in business and education, she has recruited two additional people with extensive experience to manage the day to day requirements of the business. Her long term vision is to be involved in projects that are a solution to a problem. A message that Noa carries across her schooling and business worlds comes from her middle school principal. "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable". Mehir Garimella, age seventeen, has created the business Firefly, which produces a low cost drone specifically designed for high risk environments and use by first responders. His long term vision is to "Lead[ing] ambitious, high-impact research projects and try[ing] to bring them to the market...I do know that I want to use computer science and robotics to make a difference". Mehir also understands that the future lies in problem solving. Shubham Banerjee is fourteen and founded the business Braigo Labs. The business brings Braille printers to those with visual impairment at low cost to the consumer. Incorporating Bluetooth and Wi-Fi capabilities, the device prints directly into Braille. Shubham's long term vision is to be involved across the field of robotics/medicine collaborations. Words which ground him in life are "Be humble," and "Innovate for the right reasons — money is not one of them"(Marinova, 2016). Each of the 18 Under 18 has watched and waited for a shard of light to surface, taken this moment in time, matched circumstance with capacity according to their abilities and tendencies, and acted. Some register a higher level of economic intent, others, as Szreder anticipated in the form of the radical opportunist will

use conditions to enable solidarity and equality to flourish (Szreder in Dockx & Gielen, 2016, p. 184).

I began this chapter asking questions about our biology, morals and ethics keeping pace with technology. It becomes clear to me that the questions of our past and our now are already old, they have outlived their purpose. The questions of today will not answer the issues to be faced in the time and spaces of the new digital age. The new institutions are like none that we have seen before. How do we even begin to imagine the structure, size, components and operations? I have highlighted but a tiny selection, a few examples of the making of the entrepreneurial self from a range of perspectives, evolving over time with attendant gains and challenges. Before I leave this matter there is one iteration, in particular I would mention, as it hails close to home, from Melbourne, Australia and is, I believe, an elegant example of what Rousseau knew to be true in the art of education and the artistry of the creation of the self(ves). You will find the words below on the Future Crunch website, from creators Prof. Gus Hervey and Tané Hunter (2019).

We give you rocket fuel for the brain.

We show you how the world is getting better.

We help organisations navigate the future.

We're your field guides for the next economy...

We're a group of scientists, artists, technologists and entrepreneurs that believes science and technology are creating a world that is more peaceful, transparent and abundant. We're determined to share that story...to make people think differently...We use our diverse knowledge and skills to provide unexpected perspectives on the story of the human race in the 21st century.

Our mission is to foster intelligent, optimistic thinking about the future, and to empower people to contribute to it. (Hervey & Hunter, 2019)

These are the messages I would want young people to be hearing, engaging with and sharing amongst their networks.

Imagine for a moment that you stop listening each day to the news of war, degradation, catastrophic climates, the global collapse of humanity which to some extent describes the popular brand of television news we experience daily. Let us also imagine then that we replace it with something different. Future Crunch have recently posted a list of their good news for December 2018.

The world's largest shipping company is slowly ditching fossil fuels, and has just committed to eliminating all of its carbon emissions by 2050.

Last year, 120million people gained access to electricity. That means that for the first time in history, the number of people without access is less than one billion.

Germany has announced one of the most ambitious waste management schemes in history. The government plans to recycle 63% of its total waste within the next four years, up from 36% today.

It's so easy to scan across a list and think, "oh yeah, wow, that's great," but let's take it a little further. I want to comment firstly on worldwide shipping. It takes place while we eat, sleep, work and play. Having grown up near a working harbour, a firsthand picture reveals the impossibility of handling and re-fuelling with enormous quantities of fuel without mishaps, spillages or leakages, compromising our waterways, marine and animal life and the vegetation and micro species they rely on. Stand on any large commercial vessel in harbour and look over the side to see the carnage. Leadership from the largest companies can demonstrate a will to act differently, a will to see a different possible future. I would also like to comment on access to electricity. I have listened in amazement to young migrants revealing how they worked hard all day in their camp assisting families to improve their conditions and taught themselves to speak English by candlelight at night. Access to power presents a significant challenge to poverty. The third example from Future Crunch exemplifies how we are seeing individual countries build effective solutions to their portion of the global waste management challenge. Bit by tiny bit, change occurs.

Rousseau and Future Crunch have come, within their own historicity, to share and promote a value, "...to think differently..." (Hervey & Hunter, 2019), (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 269) which has the potential to catalyse the way we mentally, physically and emotionally perceive of our past and our futures. This tiny snapshot reveals to me that regardless of the pace of today and tomorrow, qualities of character and a purpose for good are at the core of any undertaking if it is to be meaningful. Mentors, whomever they are and whatever their expertise, play an undeniably vital role in nurturing the young to be their best. As I scroll through the achievements of these young people, I am sensitively aware of the different conversations in different environments that are required to enable the entrepreneur and innovator to release their ideas into the maelstrom of

competitive forces. The smiling, eager and excited faces in full colour jump from the computer screen to tell that story.

The forces at play in the years of Guaranteeing Futures pre-dated the emergence and culture of necessity of the smartphone. Access to the internet, if still on the critically sick list today, was still worse in 2004. The students at the heart of my work had phones, texted rather than called due to cost and were constantly running out of credit, or prioritised credit for family and personal communications rather than school or work. Their experiences did not bring them eager, excited and resilient to play at the game of learning and schooling. There was anger, frustration, trying to succeed with an incomplete set of tools, often carried across six years of primary school and four years of secondary school. Words, words and more words piling up the understandings of failure, you're late, you're stupid, you're annoying, you're no good, you'll never do anything worthwhile. Why can't you be like the other kids? In what magic corner lies the remedy to such desolation and destruction? I hear again on the air, it is confidence, this thing of opportunity. It is the building up, the nurturing of self-esteem, the passionate attention to the art of difference and the wherewithal, the mechanisms and strategies within our institutions to sustain strong families and connected communities central to the development of the child.

Reflecting on my own position in the changing world of work, and at the farther end of the experience from our young innovators, brings me to personally question a rise through the ranks of whichever career path we have chosen, to land in a highly administrative role, which is still an encompassing norm in many spheres of business and government. Conversations with colleagues attest to the yearning for the points of replenishing difference one is able to achieve in working with people, the people who are our clients, customers, our reason for being in place, our reason for arriving every day with heightened purpose. It is the moments with and for people which give meaning to the mountains of administrative activity supporting our created institutions. This is a sign of where we are currently in the journey to new horizons, in the middle somewhere, carrying the baggage from the past in our non-paperless, paperless offices and not yet skilled or visionary enough to take a leap of faith into the unknown. It is a slow process and calls for structural and fiscal resources that have not yet arrived. I stand at the paper shredder and am caught between laughing and crying. As vigilant, arrogant teenager, I chastised my father for working at the local paper mill, contributing to the environmental

death of our bay and the very air we breathed. Poor Dad. Mostly he had patience and would share with me, the emerging sciences which would eventually clean the air and water. Are we there yet? Not yet but there is an ongoing will and perhaps that has greater sway than we think.

While the technologies race ahead and we of all ages strive to keep the pace, creating selves worthy of the new ages and ways of being, I am mindful to look further than the shiny and bright to find that which will sustain our very human and fragile souls and provide nourishment for the constant flexing and growing still to come. We have seen how capabilities build the muscle, the platforms and springboards, launching pads and energies for the next foray into a world of unknowns. Alongside us as individuals, are the institutions of our society, our families, schools, health systems, food production, environmental care, monetary systems and governments able to sustain the systems and processes which could enable equity for all. Bauman reminds me of the difficulties traversing the borderlines between individual and government and the dangers that would rob one of agency and the right to say, “I will”.

Will and choice leave their imprint on the shape of life, in spite of all and any attempts to deny their presence and/or to hide their power by ascribing the causal role to the overwhelming pressure of external forces that impose ‘I must’ where ‘I will’ should have been, and so narrow the scale of plausible choices. (Bauman, 2008, p. 53)

The young are “there” in so many ways and remind us daily that they have the voice, the energy and know that they will, they always will. The swell of agency amongst the young in such social projects as #MeToo and the silent and voiced protests for gun control are testament to a group that is connected and informed in their solidarity. Whereas information of the past has been a sharing over time bound through patience to realise the development of ideas. From here to most places on our planet can now be achieved with a tap and a swipe connecting like and different minds collecting a groundswell in a day. The classroom is boundless, and ideas flow back and forth in continuity. The moral and ethical turn taps at the door of our biology demanding that we keep pace. A continual emergence of skills will be required and are already in use. The structures of school buildings, curriculums and all the supporting structures could be irrelevant within the next twenty years or less. Professor Neil Selway, from Monash University, previously the Institute of Education at the University of London, has a prime interest in digital media and the sociology of its impact on learning and education. In an interview with journalist

Geoff Maslin a picture which is not too different to what we may be able to imagine now, emerges where

Students will no longer carry school bags laden down with books to their classes. Textbooks, along with computers and laptops, will have disappeared from the classroom, as will paper-and-pen exams. Then again, even the classroom itself may be empty of students.

Professor Selwyn predicted

By 2023, “virtual schools” will have sprung up where students learn online, just as Australian university students have been doing for the past 20 years. Professor Selwyn says the US is already far down the track of establishing online schools, with up to 2 million students enrolled in virtual K-12 institutions where they are taught via the internet. (Maslin, 2013)

We are part way there. The potential and possibility appears to have some difficulty leaping forward, dragged down by realities of funding. Although perhaps that is not such a bad thing. There are equally those who aspire to a very different learning environment which while incorporating the technologies, embraces our ability to create sustainable, spiritually invigorating environments to teach the critical skills that young people will need. The realm of the teacher is also undergoing a transformation. It is exciting to imagine what could be created. Perhaps that is the real potential, to break out of the bricks and mortar and prescribed ways to unleash everyone’s potential.

## Chapter 8

### Cost Benefit Analysis

*Suppose we draw up a balance sheet, so that the losses and gains  
can be readily compared.*

*The Social Contract (Rousseau, 1762/1968, p. 20)*

Rousseau's reference to a balance sheet was of course talking about the transition of man from a state of nature to being in society under a social contract. Acknowledging the immense difference between the two states of consciousness, Rousseau notes that the first loss is a natural liberty, replaced by a civil liberty and the right to property. Man at the crossroads between existence in nature and civil society also gains from "moral freedom, which alone makes man the master of himself; for to be governed by appetite alone is slavery, while obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself is freedom (1762/1968, p. 21). Rousseau wasn't talking about young people making their way into Years 11 and 12 and post-compulsory education, however he could have been. Have not some of the lessons learned in our shifting tides and landscapes been about how to govern our appetites? Have we not also learned how to choose for ourselves beyond the laws of schooling or work, each one finding their own freedom in their aspirations, potentialities and achievements?

I wonder how I might calculate, analyse or interpret the sum of events in a piece of history, a piece of history in which I was one of the players. There are elements within the space of time that can provide an account of things transpired, the human cost or benefit, things learned, things carried forward. Within this act of analysis or reckoning, I note my awareness of conscious and unconscious bias. I note the many years of experience I have gathered through government contractual processes and programs. I have learned to be attentive to the work before me and the clients which I hold in my

current vision, as these are the only elements of the contract over which I have guiding control. Through the attention to the client and outcomes delivered, I may or may not have an element of control over the continuance of a contract. Even delivering relevant success does not exclude a contract from cessation. I have learned to wear the outcomes of decisions made and while questioning still goes on, I have learned to adopt the art of the deep and fleeting, revisioning as an entrepreneur of the self.

In my earlier years the work in front of me was all important, I was perhaps too naive to see the webs and workings of deep intent. It is only in later life that I have sought to interpret more deeply the changing waves of everyday governmentality, which lap gently or otherwise at the sides of my boat of intentionality.

Sitting in a café in March 2018, at lunch and considering my vote the following day, I took the time to read an article entitled “*The Pipeline to Power*” (Inglis, 2018, p. 4). Inglis took his readers back to April 10, 2010 to a day “etched in Tasmanian political lore.” A month prior, voters returned a hung parliament with 10 Labor MP’s, 10 Liberal and 5 Green’s necessarily requiring artful conversation and negotiation to enable a living, breathing, workable government to be brought to life, and all just as the Global Financial Crisis came to light. The major exponents were David Bartlett MP, Premier elect, Nick McKim MP leader of the Greens Party and Will Hodgman MP leader of the Liberal Party. A Labour Green alliance was the dread of many Tasmanians, likening it to the worst outcome possible in the circumstances. A Labor government fully at the mercy of Green MP’s to get decisions and policy through parliament was seen by many as a totally unholy accord. I recall the events vividly. It was the time of government in which I was immersed, to contributing to the outcomes for the Department of Education. The faces of David Bartlett MP and Nick McKim MP staring out from the newspaper page were those that endeavoured to lead a government of difference. The story relates to a community bike ride up The Pipeline Track.

“We lost our breath and ended up putting the bikes down and just sitting down and having a chat ... What we need to do is find a mechanism ... that allows us to agree, but when we disagree, it doesn’t mean the government’s over ... We set a goal of, ‘we’re going to make this government last for four years,’ Mr Bartlett said. “In some ways, we did better public policy in minority than we did in majority,” he said. (Inglis, 2018, p. 4)

In the same article, Richard Herr, political analyst noted that minority governments in the state, have in the past delivered relative success. Herr also commented that the situation

was known to cause frustrations within the departments dealing with government procedures and the drawing up of law, being unused as they were to the negotiation of issues (2018, p. 4). Mr Bartlett believed the minority government model that he and Senator McKim constituted might have been one of his greatest achievements as premier, notwithstanding that less than a year into his term, David Bartlett resigned as premier and months later quietly removed himself from politics altogether. Rousseau, ever mindful of the vagaries of public life was certain that *Émile* would have more to hold onto than mere position and pomp, entreating his reader also to seek a life of greater substance with the warning,

What will this gaudy imbecile, who does not know how to make use of himself and puts his being only in what is alien to himself, do when he is deprived of everything? Happy is the man who knows how to leave the station which leaves him and to remain a man in spite of fate! (1762/1979, p. 194)

The following day Tasmanians went to the polls and returned the Liberal government under Premier Will Hodgman. Of those reading the article, as I did during a Friday lunch, some would remember the days in 2010 as the worst the state had experienced and some, perhaps like myself, remembered a time of rising potentialities. I have no doubt the newspaper was sure of stirring emotions in favour of a Liberal win, later revealed to have received contributions for advertising far in excess of any other party, renewing the call for capped contributions to political parties. Rousseau, while revealing his observations through the *Émile*, reminded his readers of the volatility of the political and social order of his time. The distance from 1762 to 2018 is not so great, when one is compelled to measure how far we have come.

You trust in the present order of society without thinking that this order is subject to inevitable revolutions, and it is impossible for you to foresee or prevent the one which may affect your children. The noble become commoners, the rich become poor, the monarch becomes subject. Are the blows of fate so rare that you can count on being exempted from them? We are approaching a state of crisis and the age of revolutions. (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 194)

It was Rousseau in the Social Contract who asked his readers to ponder the shape and perspective of government when he said, “In the strict sense of the term, there has never been a true democracy, and there never will be” (1762/1968, p. 77), while imagining something akin and yet not to the system we currently embrace. Rousseau did highlight

the difficulty in separating public and private which remains a challenge for democracies in general.

I let the the words of Rousseau sift through my mind as I allow my thoughts to wander through the achievements within the program of Guaranteeing Futures and the five or so years of work, energy and caring that was invested by a team of dedicated professionals. I also then immediately question my musings. Perhaps this is not the best way to evaluate time spent for achievement. Is it even evaluation that I am want to do. I think not. The time for that is past. The evaluations have been made and the final actions taken. If I was to pursue that study the insights of Gadamer would provide another way to think about the historicity of the events and the dialectic of the time.

We will understand historical events only if we reconstruct the question to which the historical actions of the persons involved were the answer. (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 379)

Gadamer's way would see me asking questions to resolve any misgivings or doubts I may have outstanding in my bank balance. I would ask if we (the program and the staff) were the answer for a time then what was/were the question(s)? The solutions, of course, were laid out in the first page of *Tasmania A State of Learning: A Strategy for Post-Year 10 Education and Training* (State of Tasmania, 2003, p. 1) This is how we will create a learning culture which values and enables participation in lifelong learning. This will enable all Tasmanians to contribute to increased productivity and benefit from stronger activity through more sustainable employment. Between the lines was the states need to achieve higher scores in the national statistics debate in education, leading to productivity, wealth, creating one's place within a successful community.

So at the outset something was lacking. Seeing Tasmania slip further and further into a welfare state mentality was not sustainable. Year 10 attainment was no longer enough. Tasmanian young people were falling behind by national and global standards and in a globalised market they would be forever marginalised, and in their own state significantly marginalised, leading to a population of adults who would be continually marginalised. The trend had been ongoing for many years and had to stopped in it's tracks. Because our children were not staying longer at school and remaining open to learning more throughout their lives, their ability to contribute and to live lives of their choosing was diminished, hence the livelihoods of communities was similarly compressed. Perhaps we had outgrown ourselves and our self-created norms. To move outside the comfort zone takes a brave and daring move. Perhaps it was what Tasmanians needed to be able

to come into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as active, thinking participants in their personal and community trajectories. Some parents of a Grade 10 leaver had come to anticipate the additional income that would usually ensue when one is not able to find work. Families had come to depend on that income as their right, already factored into the household “earnings”. Staying at school was not a consideration until of course the policy change, the Guaranteeing Futures Bill, requiring young people to attain a Certificate 3 or remain in education till they turned 17. This action would quickly turn retention rates around, inviting a better reading of Tasmania’s status at a national and global level. The renewed social plan for the state was complete.

It is beyond me to provide the actual weighing up of dollars spent for outcome achieved. Always this will be what drives public policy, directly reported through continuance or change. Every household must live within its means. One can throw figures into the air. Staff teams in three regions, seven operational staff state-wide, each with a leadership team, each package costing x number of dollars annually, access to government vehicles, each site requiring power, phones, support staff, laptops, phones stationary and mobile, printers, stationery, office furniture, occasional catering, and all this by no means exhaustive. By compiling a list I can immediately see a tipping of the scales. One would then be drawn to enumerate quantitative and qualitative analysis of outcomes achieved. At the end of each annual cycle, Youth Learning Officers submitted a breakdown of students, barriers, goals and achievements. Across five years, seven officers, each with a caseload of fifty plus students, the rate of students achieving a stable and sustainable post year 10 goal was in the 80-85% range. Qualitative stories of success were also gathered to enhance the high success rate achieved. The virtual distance between quantitative figures and qualitative reality has always, in my experience, been a stumbling block for program-based responses to socio-political issues. Outcome for effort + resources + overall expenditure is a loud voice in the narrative for social change.

A government comes to their task wanting to achieve good for the community. Each side will interpret the social landscape differently from within their questions. One government comes to the task and observes,

*Our young people need to be better educated, to stay at school longer, to achieve higher pay and build a stronger economy. What is missing? Where are the existing systems failing to deliver? What do our students and families need?*

*What will serve our businesses and industries, and encourage our students to complete*

*Years 11 and 12?*

*How can we think differently to insert additional social benefit into the existing system.*

*How can we best deliver on our obligations to build a strong lifelong learning  
community for all?*

The reply at the time could have been,

*we need a strong connection to pathways and career options beyond the final year of high  
school.*

The discussion could have continued,

*we need a mechanism which will provide this in conjunction with our existing education  
system. Clearly schools and teachers cannot be expected to cover this in the curriculum.*

*There are those outside of teaching who have stronger skill sets in the delivery of career  
focused outcomes with students.*

In the same set of circumstances and with the same pressure of social conditions, another government, moved by an alternate set of priorities, might think to themselves,

**We are already invested in a strong education system.**

**The question we must ask then is, Why is this system not delivering the  
imperatives clearly required to meet annual government reporting mechanisms?**

In August of 2014, shortly after the election that heralded the end of fourteen years of Labor government and the first term of Premier Will Hodgman and his government, Duncan Abey, of *The Mercury*, took up the story. He commented on changes within the Education Department, particularly noting those to Guaranteeing Futures programs and careers support for students across the state. Highlighting key aspects of the change, Mr Abey said,

THE Hodgman Government is facing blowback from school parents and the education union after a program that delivered one-on-one career and life counselling to senior students in all Tasmanian high schools was scrapped in favour of an internet-backed module delivered by teachers.

From next year, the work done by 50 dedicated Pathway Planning officers — who operated within the Guaranteeing Futures program — will fall to teachers, who in conjunction with an online tool already used in the US and Singapore, will deliver the program to Year 10 students.

It is understood that Pathway Planners and teachers were only informed by the Government yesterday as the budget was being handed down. (2014)

The Australian Education Union believed the decision to be “inconsistent” of a government dedicated to seeing the increase of retention rates beyond Year 10, the decision increasing workloads for classroom teachers, who would require additional training to make up the gap. Abey continued. The Education Department Minister, Jeremy Rockliff said,

...the Guaranteeing Futures program would be superseded by My Education [ME], a K-12 initiative that would “embed” a whole-school approach in the curriculum rather than just focusing on those students in the final years of school...

ME formalises the positive role that teachers have always played, and continue to play, in influencing the career planning of their students...

...while this policy delivers a saving of more than \$12 million over the forward estimates, its greatest value will be helping to achieve our vision of creating a job-ready generation...

...ME will be implemented in a staged rollout, with extensive consultation with pathway planners and a number of other stakeholders...(Abey, 2014)

Parents and students protested the changes citing family members who may not have chosen applicable courses or continued on to tertiary education had it not been for the opportunity to engage in deeper conversations over time, growing a personal confidence, leading to a facilitated future pathway. Perhaps the crux of the matter at budget time was in paragraph three and the saving of \$12 million and the sudden interest taken by teachers, according to Mr. Rockliff, in becoming careers and transition experts through an online tool already favoured in Singapore and the U.S.

Mr Rockliff said employment options would be explored with the Education Department and across other agencies for those affected by the decision. (Abey, 2014)

If you read the last statement quickly you will not feel the dereliction of duty from employees walking out of their program for the last time. You will not feel the disappointment of students and parents experiencing a service cut off mid-cycle with no preparation or warning. You will not notice students who struggled to make a

commitment, left with their next step shaking tenuously. No-one will see those left behind who are tasked with the uncomfortable transition delivering difficult stories, and filling all the human resource gaps.

So it is that program solutions to government issues are prone to climate change of the institutional kind. One factor uppermost on the agenda is funding. When budgets are tight a designated bucket of money, say from Project X, becomes appealing and is relatively easy to re-position with a credible story, ripe for the picking. The policy area encompassing youth and youth issues, including education, have long seen pilots, programs, a range of alternatives and the like to offer solutions to ongoing, systematic issues around engagement, retention, transition and employment. Grant Rodwell, a researcher with the University of Tasmania in "A bridge too far?":The politics of Tasmanian school retention rates" states the case of the failed Tasmania Tomorrow policy, estimated to have cost Tasmanian ratepayers \$70 million (2017, p. 159). Prior to this and in similar form, statewide curriculum policy under the name *Essential Learnings*, in the years 2000-2006, was thrown out at an estimated cost of \$80 million (2017, p. 158). Rodwell notes the politicizing of government bureaucracies as one underlying cause of unrest and major political change. His recently published book, *Moral Panics and School Educational Policy* (Rodwell, 2018), examines the notion of moral panic through an Australian, United Kingdom and American lens, identifying key players and the attendant impact on the educational landscape. In an interview with Lucy Stone of The Examiner, Rodwell outlined some of the key components of his view.

The 'moral provocateur' will perform a stunt or create outrage deliberately to gain the attention of the media.

'Moral entrepreneurs' are another key ingredient: people who will feed on the panic and continue to develop outrage, fear or drama, Dr Rodwell said. (Stone, 2017)

Both the provocateur and entrepreneur are easily recognised in the Tasmanian landscape of moral panic. We do have a history of branching out to innovate, only to retreat all the faster when challenged or questioned. There is security and certainty in the re-creation of norms.

The innovation of Guaranteeing Futures under the banner of the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative had its high notes. There were, in fact, many. Students in Grades 8, 9 and 10 engaged in direct conversation with their Pathway Planner around a year group specific pathway plan. The plan was read and signed by a parent before becoming part of the students ongoing high school profile, encouraging the information and conversations

to spread to family members and friends, sharing knowledge about options for further education or employment. Often parents would visit with the pathway planner wanting to talk about the plan, their child's passions and interests and where that may lead, or how they could encourage those discussions to continue at home. One school comes to mind regularly, as I recall the activity of the Careers Room, funded and resourced through a range of grants on an annual basis. Around lunchtime it was always buzzing with activity. A Resume happening at that computer, an application letter at another. On the phone another student organising their work experience visit and "will you guys be quiet, I'm on the phone!" Students from all grades could access information or assistance, the interaction between age groups as important as the event of the moment. The room was an exchange of a kind, a student powered exchange and place of becoming. Much in education is slow and takes long, careful attentiveness to see progress. When a young person is challenged, overcomes their fear and glows with an inner pride, the moment is inescapably exhilarating for all who are there for the experience.

Pathway Planners were assigned a school or shared between schools and so became a regular within the staffing framework, attending assemblies, information sessions and staff meetings. Their reputation grew quickly as the quality, consistency and contribution of their presence became earnestly felt within the school environment. The demand for their expertise ballooned, filling the previously large gap in careers information and knowledge sharing that was felt in many schools. Their work recognised, supported and complimented existing programs such as the annual signing of the No Dole charter, an initiative of the Beacon Foundation, a national not for profit organisation which sought to achieve stronger post Year 10 engagements for students through a year group affirmative action pledge and signing ceremony. Pathway Planners also instigated new work experience programs for students or supported those already in place enabling more to be achieved with the available resources. This element alone led to the formation of new and sustainable working relationships between schools, key training providers and employers and jobseeker organisations, creating invaluable links and lines of recognition throughout the wider community enabling a proactive dialogue around employment and jobseeker candidates realising a truly "joined up" style of service, often talked about in government circles and not easily achieved.

At the centre of all the work achieved through the efforts of the Pathway Planners, commenting as an observer to the role, were the relationships of trust, transparency and professionalism in shared learning that were created throughout each

school population. The growth developed through each pathway plan for each individual student, while difficult to quantify, I believe was enormous. The opportunity for dedicated one to one conversation is rare in a school, and when the subject is about self-creation the flow on effect is invaluable.

### The Child Most Likely...

For the students working with a Youth Learning Officer (YLO) it was different. These young people felt the pressure of the end of their high school years and the impost of decision making that would take them into Year 11 and 12, a vocational training pathway or perhaps, for a few, the fear of transitioning to the potential instabilities and uncertainties of the workforce.

At the closure of each cycle there is a report to write, distillations from my case notes, indicators signifying retention, justification for existence of the strategy, the policy and the addition to the institution of education in a small island state. The case notes always hold much more than the justifications and outcomes. While the list often read and looked like the table below, essential information to convey what was achieved and what could be expected into the immediate future, there was much more behind the neat columns, rows and names.

<b>Student</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Bent, Abbey	Lake High School	Newgate College
Cummings, Nigel	Lake High School	River College
Freeman, Stephen	Lake High School	Part-time work > 25 hrs per week, Lakeside Automotive
Gator, Alan	Lake High School	Traineeship – Certificate 2 in Hospitality

If I look down the list of names for each school, the ten or so allocated names and the ones scribbled hastily in pen at the bottom, those extras that we couldn't leave behind, I cannot but smile. Every name brings back a memory and something about which to smile. I cannot help that some illicit a broader smile than others. It is not necessarily the ones

that I had more contact with or the ones who achieved their chosen path. Notions of success are such a widely varied and contested space in the memory. I would like to share some of the ones that despite all odds, achieved though not necessarily through the outcome of retention.

## Outcome 1

Let us consider Peter. He was almost out of school completely when I was allocated a list of students from his school. He attended rarely, sometimes for Information Technology but generally not. Watching a group of students gather for their talk with representatives from Newgate College, I hear his name called and pick him out across the room. I've talked to his parents, bullying and boredom the main topics. For two school terms we have not met. I take a chance and ask him for five minutes before the presentation begins. I have time to introduce myself and see that Peter needs additional time to process if asked a question. I let him know that I hope he gives college a try because "it will be different." That in a bigger pond he will find many more friends that share his interests.

As students began college Peter was there, although I could tell from the look on his face that contact was not on his agenda. So I kept my eyes open and watched as he made friends, joked and laughed with them. He was doing well in his chosen subjects. As the end of the cycle came arrived, he overheard me saying goodbye to another student and came after me as I walked away. Coming up beside me he said, "How did you know?" I had to get him to remind me. "How did you know it would be different?" Dear Peter. Our brief conversation flashed into my mind along with all the reasons, because you're older, they (the bullies) are older, there are bigger things to be concerned about, hopefully you are taking subjects which suit your skill sets and interests, you have friends who support you and like you, you have rarely missed a day, you are treated as a young adult here, you can be yourself. Peter watching his friends waiting for him needed something short, "High School can be tough, but college offers you more and is usually very different for a lot of students." He nodded, said thanks with a small smile and ran off to his friends. At a personal level, the piecing together of these tiny experiences, means everything, and says so much more than will ever be recognised about my practice as a professional in an educational process. For me, it registers that I responded with care, that I listened carefully in conversation with Peter's network members, that I watched, waited and acted as

appropriate to the moment. Peter did not need much from me, perhaps not anything. I am glad that in the one short moment that counted, I could offer words that were enough.

## Outcome 2

I am sitting quietly in a café reading the daily paper over coffee and small pies, a refuge from work for the lunch hour. I turn the page and look up at the young man standing beside my table. Big smile, fabulous hair and clothes, just like in high school.

*Do you remember me?*

How could I not remember Gareth, the young man who was let glide out of school, picked up the next day to begin an alternative learning program, through which he could take a taster course in his chosen field of hairdressing. All achieved through building good networks with course facilitators and perhaps a little pleading as the course had already started.

*I finished my apprenticeship eighteen months ago and I'm working with the same salon, full-time. I know we've passed each other a couple of times but I don't think I've ever said thank you for everything you did for me.*

(Not a little stunned) There's been a lot of effort on your behalf to reach the point you're at now. Congratulations on reaching your goal and being where you want to be. It gives me a great sense of joy to see you so happy.

We chat a little more and he asks if it is ok to hug, which we do, and he leaves me to my coffee and memories. Such an unhappy young man when I first met him, in his second high school and not faring well. Tall, stood out from the crowd, certain he would become a hairdresser. His language told me he was wise to power plays going on around him, he easily deciphered manipulated stories that saw him left with no further chances, out the door, halfway through Grade 10. I let my mind wander and remembered how I had called his mother to arrange a meeting the following day at an alternative learning program, offering units in hairdressing. Gareth had ironed his own shirt and trousers and paid full attention to his hair that day. He did not need any verbal support in his interview, I had already decided he would win or lose a place on the course through his own efforts. Demonstrating maturity as he spoke about the actions that had led to this day, Gareth presented his case, fully exposed to reality, taking responsibility for his past, present and future. He was offered a place on the course, and there were challenges. Would we expect otherwise at this age?

### Outcome 3

At the local bakery, again, I look up from my purse and credit card to a beautiful smile and the familiar words “Do you remember me?” Of course I remember, spirited, unsure, testing boundaries, led by those more forceful, capable and captivating, something about her that shone from within. She was not unsure now. Lucy had worked part-time after completing Grade 10. Finding the income restrictive she had taken up a position with a large bakery chain where the hours and conditions suited her needs more. With a keen eye on mainland travel she had worked in Western Australia and Queensland, now returning to her home state. Lucy had been accepted into a nursing degree and was to begin the following month, sure of her capabilities and the challenge ahead. I listened as she engaged with the customers, she really knew these people and invested time and caring into what some would see as a mundane role. Lucy made it into so much more. In an area with a high demographic of aged care facilities and customers in the fifty plus age range, Lucy was a critical link to the success of the business. Customers knew her, they knew her aspirations and were truly sorry to see her leaving soon. She had impacted their lives in such a positive way. Choices made at the end of Grade 10 had provided Lucy with time and space to experiment with life and herself. Her confidence within herself and whatever role she undertook from here on, was a palpable energy that would withstand the challenges of a demanding career.

Peter, Gareth and Lucy, on the table of students and outcomes, would have appeared to be unspectacular. Each encounter, resurrected from my memory bank, makes each one entirely special and spectacular. This tiny sample serves to illuminate the vagaries of short term data analysis. Twelve months is a short span of time through which to exemplify student outcomes. What may seem negative in one snapshot, could be completely reversed in the following twelve months and the one after and so on. Sadly the longer view may not be considered as an analytics imperative. Peter, Gareth and Lucy gave no mind to where they ranked in the outcomes for their year group, they were busy living life, becoming young adults and finding out who they wanted to be. Close your eyes and listen to the voice of John Paul Lederach, in *The Moral Imagination*, as he describes the act of stepping from solid ground into a running river.

When you step into a river, you enter a dynamic environment. Water moves. It is fluidity defined. You can never step into the same river twice. It is impossible, given the intrinsic nature of its dynamic quality. Yet you step back from the river and walk to the top of the mountain, or watch from the heights of an airplane

window, and suddenly you can visualize the form and the structure the river has carved. You gain a sense of its purpose, direction, and flow. (Lederach, 2005, p. 164)

Stepping back to take in the broader view I hear a voice calling. “Do you remember me?”  
I remember them all.

## Choice at Seventeen

How much we expect of the young. At sixteen, seventeen or eighteen, in one’s second decade of life, living and learning, the choices made were once for the majority, or all of one’s life. My memory is clear, seventeen, a form to sign locking me into four years of study in the pursuit of a Bachelor of Education, and if effort favoured me, followed by a Diploma of Teaching, and then a career in teaching. I had packed the form neatly in my case, hopped on the bus for the two and a half hour ride home. The expectation was that I would sign happily and at once, here’s the pen, just do it! I want to think about it. What if it’s the wrong thing for me? It won’t be, just sign the form and be done with it. I took the form to my room and cried. The thoughts shooting through my head were the same as many other seventeen-year-old’s that I shared the bus with that weekend. What if I’m not clever enough? Is this what I am meant to do? Do I want to do this for the rest of my life? Maybe there are other things I would be equally good at doing? How will I know? Yes, I know it leads to a good job, but what if I don’t like it? Liking an opportunity was not necessarily the major concern in 1974. Stability, good working conditions, good pay and a role that had recognition in the community, something that would be respected, these things mattered when choosing a career for life.

Still...where was the conversation that began,

I know you’re scared.

I know this seems daunting.

You can do it, I have confidence in your ability.

No, these were not the conversations of 1974.

You must have a good career.

It must pay well.

It’s all very well to get married and have a family, but you need  
something to fall back on.

Mothers of the baby boomers were all too aware of the restrictions on their life choices. As a young person growing up, I was not able to read the signs of frustration in the

women who made sure we, the baby boomers, male and female, secured a “good” position in life. The quiet wisdom of those words reverberated through the years for so many women, like myself, re-entering the workforce in the late eighties and nineties. While a qualification was not the total answer to freedom of choice in the job market, it registered a set of skills and demonstrated an ability to achieve, “...but things have changed” (Dylan, 1999).

## Revising My Social Contract

When something of note passes there is a moment in time between loss and steps toward a revised normality where most often, if we are attentive and astute, we pose questions. Not just questioning to trouble and test, but a questioning which seeks out honesty and transparency of being, through a lived and living experience. An analysis which notes what learnings can be taken from the crafting? Did it matter? What was its importance? What was it that begs a question? What might be the new questions for a government of today?

At times in life we cluster to belong. There is the hive, the pack, the clan, the gang, the murder and much later the committee. In Grade 7 there was Jodie, Brenda and me. Sometimes, in our difference we become each other’s normal. The stability of consensual acceptance, acceptance of the myriad differences until one cannot tell what is different and what is not. We spent weekends listening to Brenda’s 45’s on her portable record player. She was older and had pocket money. Each single played over and over and over until we had remembered the words and could sing the songs, word perfect in our heads. There were The Monkees, Credence Clearwater Revival, Freda Payne and Suzi Quatro. In the event of starting high school, the songs in our collective heads and where we spent our noncollective free time was all important. Who are you sitting next to in Social Science? Who are you having lunch with? Why did you say that in Science? Who are you walking home with? Are you catching the bus? Being alone was the consummate difference.

By Grade 10 three had grown to a gang. A gang who hung out by the huge gum tree at the bottom of the hill. Teachers casting a wide net on lunchtime duty would look unfavourably on our chosen spot, suspecting that one or all of us would abscond, so close to the school boundary. They needn’t have worried. We were a gang of social justice do gooders that left the teachers shaking their heads. We were on the side of the oppressed,

seeking out the injustices of the archaic and immoral school system. Students who were banned from this and excluded from that had a ready-made defence at their quarter, not always appropriately. Rarely did we and the authorities see the same side of the laws of our small school community. In those encounters there was a stretching, breathing deeply, examining the events and things that mattered, why they mattered and what could be done in response. Grade 10's are still known for their passion, transparency and action, well placed or otherwise.

This serves to refresh my memory. Where did my intentionality begin? The subtle markers were there from the beginning, events and people which lead to actions, which lead to events and people. Knowing at four the hierarchy of the neighbourhood children, my place in the ranking low, quiet and unassuming. Walking to the shop, the others chiding me for my slow pace, not eating my biscuit fast enough, "You can't have an icy pole if you don't finish your biscuit!" as they dragged me by the hand up the street. Even at four I was hard pressed to see the relevance, logic or sensibility of "If this...then that" thinking. Continually in my head, but why? Does it really matter? I learned early to be careful what I actually voiced. Was it then that I wondered about the rightness of some and the wrongness of others, of me? Or was it in the classroom struck with horror that I had all the Maths questions wrong? Perhaps in the playground defending Alice who lived in my street, unable to fend off the bullies, an easy target in her slowness, unable to understand the litany of daily cruelties. We lived in the same street. Sometimes I would see that we were walking down opposite sides of the street at the same time on the way home. She would look shyly across at me, turning quickly away. I would cross the road and walk with her, talk about nothing until we reached her house and said goodnight. She never assumed that we could walk together. She knew her place too. We all had a place.

I remember so well the long corridor of my primary school, Grade 3 at the end, then Grade 4, Grade 5, the corridor turned 90 degrees, Grade 6 around the corner, followed by Grade 2 and Grade 1. In Grade 3 I remember a neat row of stones lined up across the front of Miss Smith's desk. While I was never the recipient of a carefully aimed stone, I have memories of those who were, ducking under the desk to miss the projectile for some recent misdemeanour. A hard but immediate lesson in crime and punishment. Every day, the smell of freshly waxed and polished floors, bags hung on hooks outside each room. I often wondered why the classes were set out in that odd order down the corridor. In Grade 6 it became obvious, the Principal always taught Grade 6 and being located at the centre of the school he could fly out to each corner and any emergency

within seconds, booming voice sharply pulling a class into line or chasing a miscreant down in the yard and marching them back to his office. We would sit dead quiet in our classroom, looking straight ahead, listening to the “whoosssshhh thwack” of the cane across the first hand followed by the second. In Grade 8 it was the strap, administered to girls or boys, most often for making it impossible for the teacher of the day to deliver their lesson. By Grades 9 and 10 physical punishment was the domain of the Vice Principal and then none at all. We had all evolved and progressed in the food chain.

The early years of schooling create memories that stay with us throughout our lives. We could all write books about them and teachers and educators could write books about their particularity of experiences in schools with students, within the ever changing shape of schools and institutions of learning. Each individual lens producing slightly different permutations through the refractions of the crystal (Richardson, 2000, p. 963). Many a time I would carry my case heavily to the car, re-conversing in my head, wondering what is to be done about this one, and that one, “I must phone them in the morning”, and oh (deep sigh), what can I do for that family? Or the times of laughter, revelling in the particular views of the young. Then one afternoon, the school empty of students, the cleaners almost completing their rounds, the PA system cracked into life “Would the two young people having a lovely time on the oval, cease and make your way home, now!” Seconds pass. “I’m still watching you, go on, get going!” The life of a learning institution can have an energy and quality that is exhilarating and motivating in the right hands and if you are placed to maximise your potential through its gaze. Lederach shines his light on the flow of ideas and energy that we might look for in the creation of enlightened places of learning and with whom we might people them.

People find innovative responses to impossible situations not because they are well-trained professionals or particularly gifted. Innovative responses arise because this is their context, their place. The essence of the response is not found so much in what they do but in who they are and how they see themselves in relationship with others. They speak with their lives. (Lederach, p. 165)

Lederach takes me to the core of what I had always needed to question and to respond to with my being. He is talking about the kind of people who make a difference because it is there to be made. They go about the task quietly, doing simply. These are the people who don’t look around keeping an eye out for who might be noticing their actions. They are busy, heads down getting on with business, engrossed in finding the solutions of the day because at that point in time it is the most important thing to someone who has a

need and because they have a need, it matters. We spoke with our lives. Those of us who made up the Pathway Planners and Youth Learning Officers of the Tasmania Tomorrow, Guaranteeing Futures strategy and policy. In the full knowledge of a governmentalist solution to a long standing social and economic problem, we brought our lives and our intentionality to expand and breathe life into the offered innovation. The policies and strategies provided a map, a guide, and a set of outcomes. It was necessary to build teams who could deliver on the what and the how, who brought expertise from the world of business and employment, who could release confident self-creation in their charges. It wasn't entirely the strategy that drove us each day to work that bit longer, harder, asking others for more commitment, asking ourselves for more everything. It was the students. It was their parents, grandparents and aunts and uncles. It was the worker who asked you to try because they had tried everything else. It was the face of the lost, the confused, the silent, or the rebel or the resistant. The crash, bang, fuming rage of a familiar voice living up to "everyone's" expectations all the way down the corridor and out the front door. It was the same voice returning quietly, respectfully, an hour later, to apologise to everyone, receiving wrath, mirth or understanding, taking each in their stride to try again tomorrow. It was the quiet and unassuming who could not put themselves forward, needing a watchful eye to notice a tiny hand raising at the back of the class, "yes I'd like to go on work experience" in a whisper. It was the ones who weren't present, who had to be found, to maybe become lost again or referred to others who would be able to do more, bring more to the situation. Rest assured there is no heroics at play in this work, there is no time for such "bullshit". There is time for people, always time for people and how we saw ourselves in relationship with those people. Each and every situation asked for a different attention. It was a reminder that a school can be a family of sorts and everyone has a part to play in the caring for and building young children into young adults. Some of my students were best mates with the cleaner, the groundsman, the librarian, the canteen manager or someone in the main office. Each and every one saw different sides of each and every one. We paid heed to the sharings and learnings to be gleaned from every part of the network, understanding that the loudest story could not always bring us closer to honest and transparent engagement.

I mentally and quietly question the now of schooling and education, and what is to come for us all who care, and that is after all the majority. In "Constructing Identities and Making Careers: Young People's Perspectives on Work and Learning", Helen Stokes and Johanna Wyn concluded that

... new policy approaches are needed, which recognise the breadth (and depth) of learning that occurs across different sites in young people's lives, that challenge the dichotomy of 'adult' and 'youth', and that recognise the blurring of boundaries across formal and informal learning sites. (Stokes, 2007)

Stokes and Wyn voice a shared view, though with structures and systems which take years to embed in everyday cultures, one of the challenges of the technologies of the now and future will be to acquire the ability to create policy, make funding decisions and enact innovations in a vastly different manner than is currently in place. Just as we the workers must continually update, rethink and repurpose, so the systems which demand our attention, feeding and fuelling require a mechanism to bring them into the current sphere of understanding and need. I can see a time, or perhaps we are already there, when our systems will not keep up and will be left behind in preference for the nimble and fleet.

Aside from the structural elements of learning I wonder too, where the kind and gracious acts will come from in the new policies of our tomorrows. Lederach comes to my heart with timely words, bringing thoughts on vocation, for have not I been thinking about that very thing for some time now?

To deeply understand vocation as voice, we must go beyond what is initially visible and audible, to that which has rhythm, movement, and feeling. Voice is not the externalization of sound and words. Literally and metaphorically, voice is not located in the mouth or on the tongue where words are formed. Voice is deeper...Voice is located where breath dies and is born, where what is taken in gives life, where what has served its purpose is released anew. Voice is located at the source of rhythm, the internal drumming of life itself...

Voice is the essence of being a person. Where you find that meeting place, the home where heart and lungs gather, where breath meets blood, there you will find voice. When you find your way to that home, there you will find yourself...You will find the place from which your journey begins and to where it returns when the road is confused and hard. This is the deeper sense of vocation. (Lederach, pp. 165, 166)

Lederach echoes and revisions the voices of those who have earlier enriched my writing, Deleuze (Boutang, 2011) who came with thoughts of resistance in the artist who finds their own personal voice and demands their own rhythm, Afuape (Afuape, 2011) who helped me see that resistance is a platform for hope and a branching into possibilities and Freire (Freire, 1973) who drew resistance as a choice between being wholly oneself or continually divided. To be whole, to have hope, to pursue one's own rhythm. To find voice

and vocation. May I dare to say that whatever shape the opportunities of the future take, the ultimate value lies in human agency and the ability and freedom to make choices. One without the other leaves us climbing into the boat without a paddle. A sense of vocation, while answering the inner call that we may feel, is not an easy path to take. Rousseau found that in his dealings with the philosophers of his day.

...these overbearing dogmatists could not patiently endure that anyone should think differently from them on any subject whatsoever. I often defended myself rather feebly because of my distaste and lack of talent for disputation, but never once did I adopt their dismal teaching, and this resistance to such intolerant people, who had moreover their own ends in view, was not the least of the causes which sparked off their animosity towards me. (1782/2004, p. 52)

Rousseau who struggled to be heard, to be understood, to fight for change, to reveal new landscapes and ways of interpreting our world is in good company with those who resist and take up the call to find their voice, their vocation, to continue the making of entrepreneurs of the self.

Progressions of a type will continue apace. The need for question and answer is inherent in our being. Understanding, knowing, harnessing natural resources, improving on that which came before. It is how we make sense of the everyday and the newly discovered. Lederach would take us within to find that place which will be forever ours, forever mine as the shifting tides of the world of work throw many of us on the scrap heap, not fleet or nimble enough to read our future. Lederach would have me search within to find that place which has always been my home from the very beginning. This has been and continues to be my undertaking through a range of iterations within the creative of vocation. At times my voice has been loud, my energies high with passion. I have learnt many lessons on humility. Each iteration brought new shape and form to my energies, I learnt to hone the tools of each trade, to have respect for my mentors, to have respect for those I struggled to understand, and to be forthcoming with those who struggled to understand me. I had to learn about power, the ways I could turn it into an act of enablement and agency and the ways it could twist and cripple myself and others. I had to learn about the power of hope through the lens of disappointment and dejection. As I move into another personal phase I am drawn to wonder again about who I was for the students of my Guaranteeing Futures days and what I should continue to aspire to be. What are the things that describe me? I am drawn to understand more of what Rorty calls the liberal ironist, given that in *Contingency, irony and solidarity* he is presenting a view

that accepts the singularities of public and private and that the two sides may not be reconcilable. Rorty continues,

I borrow my definition of “liberal” from Judith Shklar, who says that liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do. I use “ironist” to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. (1989, p. xv)

Rorty believes that solidarity is achieved not by removing the likes of prejudice in the world but by increasing sensitivity to the suffering of others, enabling others to see the sameness in all of us. I realise my own faults at play, focusing on breaking down when it is not easier to raise up. Rorty uses the art of language to redescribe who we are and who others are, what we feel and what others feel. This very strategy finds a home in the work of natural history science communicator David Attenborough and world renowned conservation photographers such as Cristina Mittermeier, Paul Nicklen, Joel Sartore and Melissa Groo who apart from pursuing their major fields of work and activation, also know the value and impact to be had through leveraging social media. Through their online presence and work with public and private entities we come to see the humanity in the world around us, in the faces, habitats, relationships, realities and tragedies. Whether it be a polar bear mother hunkered down in the snow storm with her cubs, rare birds or remote peoples, the photo story brings us face to face with ourselves and our desires, aspirations and decisions. We are no longer at a distance or removed. We look deep into the eyes of another being and see ourselves. We are moved. We are transformed. This is a type of power through which we can change our circumstances and our world, by elevating the other.

As with the questioning self of Rousseau, I would follow his example to meet and test my own realities.

Let me seek it with all my might while there is still time, so that I may have an assured rule of conduct for the rest of my days. (1782/2004, p. 53)

I seek something looser and more vibrant from Rousseau’s description, while I concur that I will seek it with all my might, regardless of how my landscapes may shift and churn. Rorty in *Philosophy and Social Hope* describes the relationship he believes to be so important in education. While speaking about higher non-vocational education in America, his

words take a stand for a much deeper educational picture, one which is worthy of our aspiration.

...the sparks that leapt back and forth between teacher and student, connecting them in a relationship that has little to do with socialisation but much to do with self-creation, are the principle means by which the institutions of a liberal society get changed. Unless some such relationships are formed, the students will never realise what democratic institutions are good for: namely, making possible the invention of new forms of human freedom, taking liberties never taken before. (1999, p. 126)

Rorty would disagree with Rousseau's struggle to situate man happily between the state of nature and the civilised society, believing that there is no such "thing as alienation from one's essential humanity due to societal repression." To my mind there is an element of separation in the historicity of these writers on this point. Rorty and Rousseau are closer in thought when I consider "the process of socialisation, followed (with luck) by the self-individualisation and self-creation of that human being through his or her own later revolt against that very process" (1999, p. 118). At the very core of human transition from one moment in time to another, regardless of the point in history, is understanding. Understanding the complexities and the tools required to reach. At times it could be for a goal, the act of reaching can inspire a goal. Other times it is reaching for some unknown to quench a sense of not knowing, to strive for something that is beyond the here and now. It is knowing that one has the freedom to reach and the freedom to return.

Systems will shift and change, people too. As a person who has spent much of my working life in contracts both public and private, the thing that always remains regardless of, and sometimes in spite of the guidelines and policy, are the people. Each system has its strengths, beliefs and its shortcomings. It is the people who are the great leveller, overcoming shortfalls in funding, outdated buildings and structures or a dearth of human resources. Always it is the people who make the difference. I believe in public education and I also believe in the public's right to question and drive education to achieve the rights of the individual. Without the public and the people a system becomes the total fixture of the powers of the day.

In our state primary level education (Kindergarten to Grade 6) the involvement of parents has always been invited and encouraged. With the rise in dual working parent families it is more challenging to be involved at school. Our high school system (Years 7-10) has historically seen less parent involvement, more so due to the age group and

growing independence of the young, not to mention the usual embarrassment of a parent turning up to high school unannounced in the territory of the teenager. Schooling of any age which invites and harnesses the energies of parents and the public at large can only benefit all in whatever form that might take. The shifting of social structures which currently prevent a more fluid blending of learning experiences, is happening naturally or in created environments around the world and offers food for the creative journey in the recreation of learning habitats.

Rousseau would have delighted in the move of recent years toward productive school gardens and programs which enable a young person to drive their learning in the direction of their desires, under the mentorship of their teacher, harnessing all that is required within the curriculum, while fostering planning, decision making, and entrepreneurship. There are exciting examples around Australia, and of course Australia looks to other countries to learn and engage, forever replenishing our insights. Neighbourhood Houses (N. H. Tasmania, 2019), Men's Sheds (M. s. S. Tasmania, 2019) and Libraries Tasmania (L. Tasmania, 2019) programs similarly invite adults to engage through building, planting, growing, harvesting, sharing as a way to promote and strengthen community, mental and emotional health and bring lifelong learning within the interest and reach of all. I work in the hope and trust that innovation and creative answers to "wicked" and gnarly problems will forever be entertained. Sometimes it is the strange and the different that should be on our nearest horizon and viewed for more than a longish while.

The experiences of Guaranteeing Futures remind me every day, when administration would swamp the desk and there are hardly times for collegial conversations, to look to the people to refresh my intent, my energies and my path. I thank every young person for their engagement, or for taking another route. Twelve months is a short time to create change. It is enough time to create change. It all depends on perspective. I liken it to Rousseau's description of the man opening a watch for the first time, not knowing what it is for, how the parts work or what one might do with it. So much in life is unknown, I wish to be open to the unknown, to be surprised and impressed anew each day, to laugh and wonder, to be amazed at the workings of life, to take up my freedoms and wave them in the wind of change in a flurry of colour.

I judge that there is an order in the world although I do not know its end; to judge that there is this order suffices for me to compare the parts in themselves, to study their concurrences and their relations, to note their harmony. I am like a man

who saw a watch opened for the first time and, although he did not know the machines use and had not seen the dial, was not prevented from admiring the work. “I do not know...what the whole is good for, but I do see that each piece is made for the others; I admire the workman in the details of his work; and I am quite sure that all these wheels are moving in harmony only for a common end which it is impossible for me to perceive.” (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 275)

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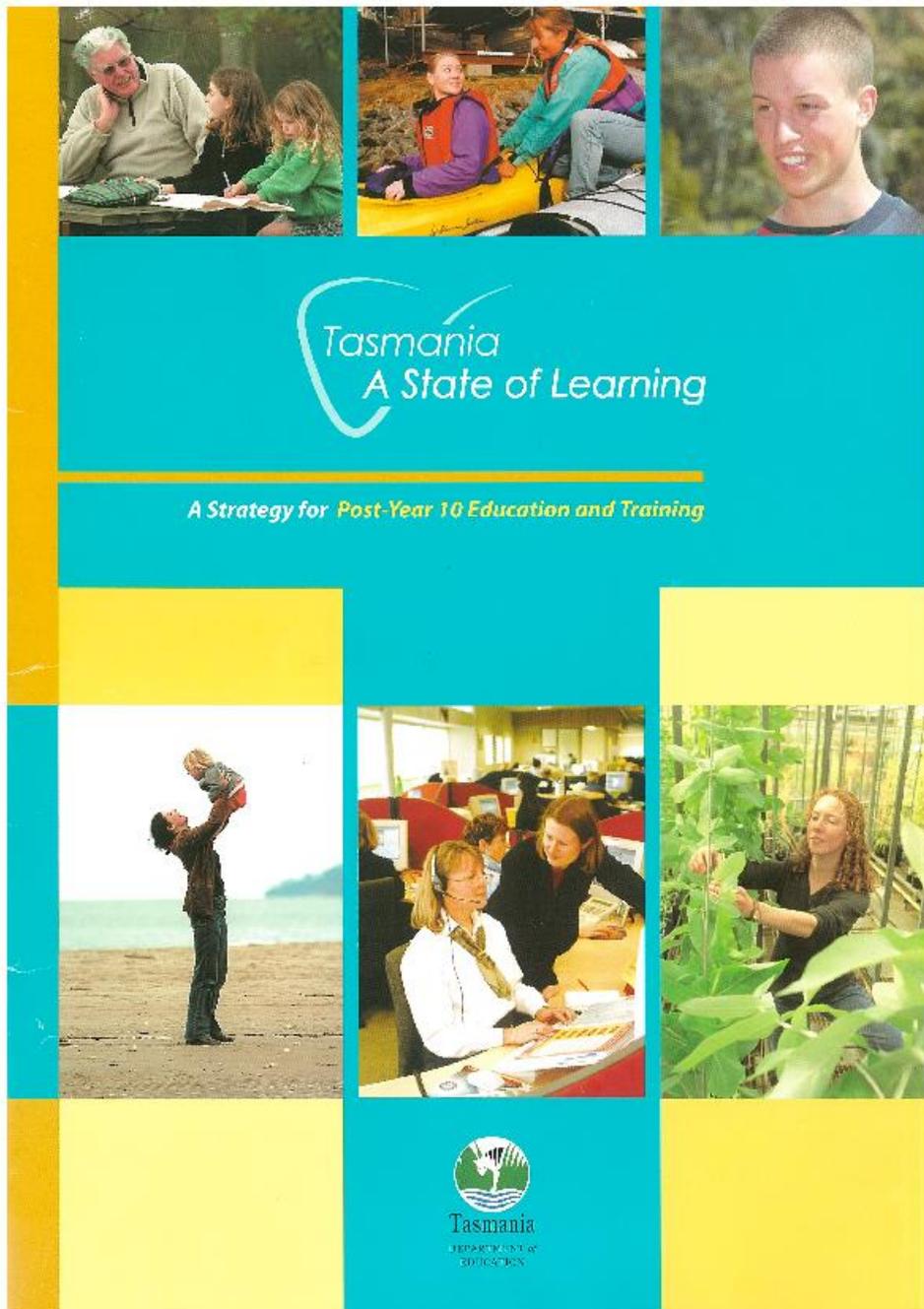
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# Appendix 1



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