

REIMAGINING AND TRANSFORMING IDENTITY AS RURAL RESEARCHERS AND EDUCATORS: A (CON)TEXTUAL FUGUE

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Abstract

This paper presents the educational and research journey of a group of rural academics as a (con)textual fugue. We understand a fugue as a contrapuntal composition in which a short melody or phrase is introduced by one part and is successively taken up by other interweaving parts. Through weaving the multiple motivations and methodological underpinnings of the authors' individual research and education aspirations, a collective composition emerges. Our 'fugue' represents the sum of the parts but it also challenges individualised conceptions of research and researcher identity. By conceptualising an assemblage of relational research presences and intentions for 'disruptive transformations' in the rural context to which we are all deeply committed, we present another way of imagining or 'seeing' research. Our 'place' is Gippsland, Victoria, a distinctive and extensive area encompassing regional, rural and remote communities; diverse natural environments and localities; and correspondingly complex social, cultural and economic underpinnings. The establishment of Federation University in this setting, where the authors are situated, has precipitated what Mezirow might describe as a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight and a reframing of habitual interpretations. Through coming together, we create a fresh impetus to pursue a collective but polyphonic purpose, impact and researcher identity.

Keywords: rural and regional education, fugue, polyphony, researcher identity, relationality, disruptive transformations

Rurality, polyphony and plurality

...counterpoint can be read as a representation of the intrinsic impetus of the creative process, i.e., the combination and juxtaposition of opposite elements to go beyond established knowledge and enable the the generation of new and valuable ideas. (Corazza et al., 2014, p. 93)

This paper is a constitutive act of being. Our 'we' emerges through iterative deliberations and writings, sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs, sometimes in the round. Although beginnings are shrouded in mystery (Arendt, 1978), a serendipitous kitchen conversation between Anna and Susan, snatched from the busyness of day-to-day university milieu, has become our story of emergence. With an educational research pastore playing as background music, Anna and Susan's dialogic moment generated a tentative, widely disseminated invitation to all their colleagues, to gather and jointly respond to the AARE 2016 conference theme of 'transforming education research'. Like moths to a light-bulb moment, eight of us, Susan, Anna, Cheryl, Monica, Di, Margaret, Sue and Nicola, from the School of Education, Federation University (Gippsland campus), were intuitively drawn to tapping

the deep wellspring of that which connects and sustains us in relation to our researcher identities.

Over time and through contested talk, intuition became articulation of our founding impulse and question: 'How do our individual stories of educational research in a regional university, reimagined and articulated as an assemblage, shape and inform our sense of purpose, impact and identity as transformative educational researchers'? We became the FUGuE (Federation University Gippsland, Education) collective.

Along with the conference theme, our beginning was also prompted by the generative potential Susan saw in Arendt's (1958) idea of a 'space of appearance' (pp. 199-207). Such a space, formed of 'human plurality', is predicated on the ancient Greek notion that:

the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; "for what appears to all, this we call Being,"²⁸ and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality²⁹.
(Arendt, 1958, p. 199)

Thus, according to Arendt, denial of a space to appear before others, is to be deprived of reality. We are women in a male dominated society. Most of us are mature-age and some are also early career researchers finally finding space to research. We all belong to the minority of rural education researchers (Bobis et al, 2013) in the education research field, itself dominated and under recognised in the hierarchy of fields. We are researchers in a small and new university - a sapling in an old growth forest. We are all deeply committed to our rural locale of Gippsland in Victoria, Australia. As such, we are of the global south and of the 'hinterlands' beyond the large capital conurbations. We speak as a minority into domains dominated by metropolitan literacies and urban discourses. In this context, our quest for validity and visibility, for recognition as being, was and is visceral.

In this space of being, barely visible, the establishment of Federation University as a new determinedly regional university, precipitated for us what might be described as a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight, enabling a reframing of our habitual interpretations (Mezirow, 2000). As the FUGuE collective, we had a fresh impetus. To us though, becoming a collective did not mean an homogenisation of our research. Through the idea of a space of appearance, which comes into being wherever people are "together in the manner of speech and action" (Arendt, 1958, p. 199), we could

maintain our individual distinctiveness while “acting in concert” (Arendt, 1958, p. 244) because such a space is constituted by members who have “the twofold character of equality and distinction” (Arendt, 1958, p. 175). It is a space where “I appear to others as others appear to me” (Arendt, 1958, p. 198). In FUGuE, we found we were simultaneously distinctive and similar to each other. We were distinguished for who we were - for our ideas and contributions - not for what we were, not the position we held nor for any titles conferred. In this space we were individually valued, validated and visible.

As a space of appearance is a community constituted of plurality, so is our chosen name of fugue, a creative musical form that emerges from polyphony. Polyphony and counterpoint (plurality) have long been held as a creative condition:

Counterpoint can be read as a representation of the intrinsic impetus of the creative process, i.e., the combination and juxtaposition of opposite elements to go beyond established knowledge and enable the generation of new and valuable ideas. (Corazza, Agnoli & Martello, 2014, p. 93)

Corazza, Agnoli and Martello trace this philosophical idea to Pythagoras who was among “the first to theorise that harmony derives from the equilibrium between contrasting elements and not from the absences of contrasts” (2014, p. 94). A fugue, our FUGuE collective and our fugue text, although intentionally disruptive, are not “cacophony” (King Keenan, Miehl, Moffat, Orwat & White, 2004). They are a carefully crafted “patterned form of polyphony” (King Keenan et al., 2004, p. 428) formed of, and from, intertwining our contrasting research narratives while developing the ‘melody’ or subject of those concerns common to us all: rural and regional education, researcher identity, visibility, relationality, and disruptive transformation of dominant discourses paradigms and hegemonies.

Our ‘fugue’, we propose, challenges individualised conceptions of research impact by conceptualising, nominalising and presenting as an assemblage our research from, and in an important locale. This geographic and research space is outlined in the following section, which is followed by a retelling of the fugue methodology we created as a work in progress. Following these expositions we develop and ‘vertically narrate’ (Hindrich, 2011) three core but inherently linked themes that

emerged through the telling and analysis of the stories we shared about our research. We conclude with a coda that draws the composition into a whole.

Locating our rural research space: Gippsland

The regional context of our research made a difference and was significant to reimagining an identity as a collective of researchers. Our particular rural and regional context is Gippsland, a distinctive region in south-eastern Victoria that covers an area of approximately 41,556 square kilometres, some 18% of Victoria's land mass. The region lies 85km to the east of the capital city of Melbourne, to the furthest eastern tip of the state. It extends north-south from the shores of Bass Strait, which divides Victoria from Tasmania, up into the Great Dividing Range. The region is best known for its primary production through mining, power generation, forestry and farming. Most notably, Gippsland is known for its extensive brown coal reserves in the Latrobe Valley sourced from open-cut mines over the past 70 years to produce approximately 85% of Victoria's electricity. It is a place of ecological richness including many natural (undammed) rivers, extensive lake systems and waterways, diverse soils, extensive coastlines and old growth forests. However, Gippsland is experiencing significant social, economic and sustainability challenges, including a changing climate of decreasing rainfall and water shortages, rising sea levels, urban development, high unemployment, declining natural resources and a broader transition to a low carbon economy.

The demography of Gippsland includes a population of approximately 256,500 people living mostly in regional centres and surrounding towns with a smaller proportion on dispersed farms and in small villages. According to the 2011 census, Gippsland's population includes significant groups of migrants, people with a disability and Indigenous families (Australian Government, 2013). The Gunaikurnai are the traditional owners of the Gippsland area. The population in the town centres of Moe, Morwell and Sale include people who are among the 10% most disadvantaged in Australia (Australian Government, 2013).

The interconnectedness of rural economy, demography and geography are brought together in the concept of rural social space (Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Locke, & White, 2010), where the daily relationships, actions and meanings of people provide a framework for describing the unique nature of each community (White, Locke, Hastings, Cooper, Reid & Green, 2011). Rural social space is based on the practices of people in place, describing resilience and responses to social and environmental changes, including government decisions made many kilometres away (Reid et al., 2010; White et. al., 2011). In our view, this concept validates our rural focus and research loci as intrinsically important. Compelling our moral purpose is evidence of positive relationships between regional universities and the social and economic sustainability of their communities (Garlick, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2013) and that “regional students who study at their local university are more likely to pursue careers in regional communities” (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 48). Specifically, as teacher educators, our role of preparing teachers to meet the complex issues and challenges of rural education settings is identified as key in building sustainable and healthy rural communities (White et al., 2011). Assertively locating our research in the rural context provides a close-grained focus at a cultural and environmental level that promises sustainability of these communities (M. Green, 2015).

The concept of rural social spaces includes specific and developing ‘rural literacies’ based on knowledge of different geographies and their social effects is critical to research in rural education (B. Green & Reid, 2014). For example, in Gippsland, a series of government reports examined specific Gippsland issues and identified priorities for increasing the early childhood education workforce and provision of early childhood education in the region; improving Year 12 completion rates; and opening access to tertiary education (Australian Government, 2013; McClelland, 2013). These priorities are directly relevant to our research and practice in the School of Education and inform the focus of the new Federation University. For example, Margaret and her colleague Michael Dyson, recently completed the *Broadening Horizons Project* (Plunkett & Dyson, 2016) which was a partnership between the Victorian Department of Education, the regional directors of government departments, chief executive officers of peak industries and individual secondary schools, and tackled the issue of low aspirations for career outcomes. Another example is Anna and Cheryl’s current role

in the formation of a school-university partnership with the Diocese of Sale Secondary Principals Association (DOSSPA) to improve literacy outcomes across seven regional schools. Their research project is exploring the impact on teacher skill and knowledge in local schools through developing a professional learning community of expert teachers from across a large and diverse geographic area of Gippsland.

Other research we are engaged in that explores rural social spaces and literacies includes Cheryl and Sue's commitment to learn alongside the Gunaikurnai through a project to increase early childhood career aspirations and opportunities. It also includes Monica's collaborative projects that advance the importance of place-community pedagogies in pre-service teacher education as well as Di's research which aims to develop an understanding of social presence to inform practices for social and relational activity with remote online higher education students. Susan and Nicola both, in their own way, focus on governance of higher education in the region(s).

Research, like ours, is as vital to regional universities as teaching, and in fact, improves teaching results and employability for graduates (Barrett & Milbourne, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2013). However, in a survey of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Educational Outputs by 13 universities, only three percent came from regional universities (Bobis et al., 2013). As academic researchers in the Gippsland campus of a regionally focussed university, we are motivated by the opportunity to contribute to the sustainability of the region and also the aim of building research through collaboration and partnerships at the local, national and global levels. As such, we seek to recontextualise, reconceptualise, reposition and render more visible, rural education research as an inherently valuable and valued endeavor. Thus we join with White and Corbett (2014) when they say:

By adding the adjective "rural" we are explicitly differentiating research "in" and "for" rural communities and we are doing this deliberately. In our view, there is an urgent need to unpack the unexamined dominance of research methodologies as mainly metropolitan. We judge this bias tends to position the rural in deficit rather than as different. (p. 1)

By adding, and foregrounding, the adjective "rural" to our research fugue, we are explicitly differentiating ourselves from dominant metropolitan research discourses and doing so deliberately because we too challenge the assumptions of education policy and research that position rural as

disadvantaged when compared to norms developed to measure outcomes in metropolitan settings
(Roberts & B. Green, 2013).

Fugue as process: intertwining the parts

A fugue is a musical composition with a loosely defined and minimal form of an 'exposition' of a subject (melody) and an (optional) development of the exposition, ... more complex fugues are comprised of a series of expositions and developments.... "Because its outline is so variable, it is preferable to speak of the fugue as a "process" rather than "form" per se. (Smith, 1996, "Anatomy of a fugue", np)

Onto-epistemological considerations

In starting with the question, 'What's out there to know about our academic work in a regional university?', our initial conversations traversed temporal and spatial dimensions of place that explicitly encompassed notions of distance, disadvantage, moments of history and other social factors. From the outset we worked on the presumption that our individual stories and individual identity of academic life and work were meaningful, and had a direct bearing on a sense of collective belonging and identity. Rather than pursue an absolute truth about our collective practice, we relied on and interrogated our subjective ways of knowing as a way of making meaning of our individual and collective practice drawing on ideas of postmodern emergence methodologies (Somerville, 2007), rural social space (Reid et al., 2010) and research as a well-considered conversation (Howley & Howley, 2014). By contextualising our experiences within a regional framework we were able to examine (reflect on, relate and debate) the 'what' and 'how' of our practices. Acknowledging these various onto-epistemological considerations, we anchored our inquiry into what we might be together, to the overarching research question, 'How do our individual stories of educational research in a regional university, reimagined and articulated as a collective, shape and inform our sense of purpose, impact and identity as transformative educational researchers'?

Fugue as methodology

The paper is situated in an interpretive paradigm that embraces the theoretical framework of transformation (Mertens, 2007). As a group we applied a narrative methodology to articulate and

examine our past experiences, as well as our current and future actions. We did this by generating individual written accounts (narratives), which were eventually brought into a collective space (discussed further in the method section). Through a continuous process of hearing and listening, of interpretation and telling and re-telling; glancing backwards and forwards as part of the fugue process, the individual narratives were instrumental in generating new levels of understanding pertaining to our educational and research practices searching for the harmonies between our contrasting motivations, theoretical and methodological approaches.

A key methodological innovation was the decision to create small satellite working groups responsible for developing specific aspects of the paper (e.g. introduction, literature review, background, methodology etc.). Each small group met regularly and generated written drafts that were developed and housed in a shared Dropbox folder. Our satellite groups later shifted constellation to compose three of the key shared 'themes' that emerged from the analysis. We identify this approach as a transformational research methodology that enabled unusual combinations of academics to work together. Unintentionally, pairs and trios were constituted by pre-PhD academics, as well as early and mid career academics who were either employed at the university sessionally, on probation or tenured. In hindsight, we recognise these non-hierarchical, inclusive and non-traditional combinations as instrumental in enabling and developing our individual and collective self-efficacy, enthusiasm and commitment to transformative education research.

Method

In the spirit of the 'fugue as process' in which distinctive voices are maintained but connected thematically, two central methods were employed to cultivate a shared, cohesive yet varied voice that brought to light a collective storied conceptualisation of practice.

Vignettes of practice

While our initial meetings and discussions illuminated the many shared and overlapping commonalities of our practice, e.g. themes of reciprocity, community engagement, partnership, relationality etc., we also sought to capture and interrogate more fully, the collective's diverse stories

of practice. These written stories not only articulated the more obvious dimensions of our work but also unexpectedly elucidated the implicit and less obvious dimensions of our practice such as the personal and professional motivations, aspirations and values that inform our individual work. As a way of generating a body of data that recorded the nature and intention of our work participants were invited to respond to a set of prompts designed by Monica and Anna that echoed earlier formative discussions and introductory written narratives:

1. name the personal motivations/aspirations/values that drive your research/teaching practice
2. describe key theoretical/methodological frameworks that inform your practice
3. explain how your response to (a) and (b) are applied by you in your research/teaching practice
4. how might the notion/process of a fugue (a) shape/transform your research identity and (b) assist you in considering the collective strength of our educational endeavours?

We refer to the responses as ‘vignettes of practice’ and they served as central reference points from which we could view and interrogate our individual, and eventual collective work.

Mapping as method

One of the hallmarks of our fugue process was to collect and collate photographic artefacts e.g. photographs of hand written notes, written words on a white board (see Figure 1.), and electronically generated writing that documented the evolution of this paper.

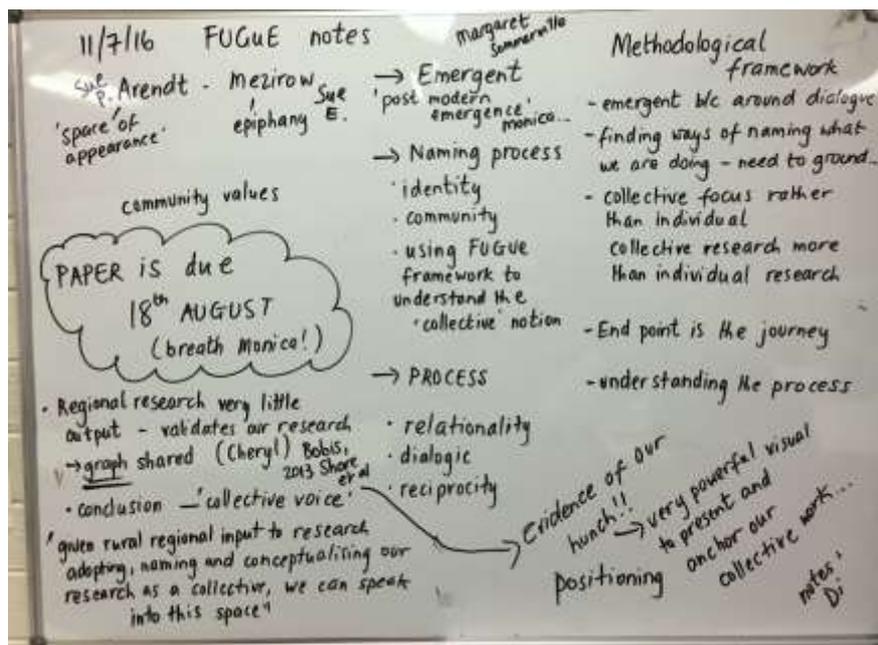


Figure 1. FUGuE notes from board 11 July 2016

We refer to this approach as a method of mapping that not only provided visual representation of the nature and scope and emergence of our individual and collective work, but which also enabled us to make sense of developing themes and knowledge. Furthermore, the visual representations captured significant moments of exchange between the collective across diverse spaces where informal meetings took place between various members, both at the university and in other sites beyond the university.

Data analysis

After the individual vignettes were electronically placed into a shared drop box they were printed into hard copies in preparation for initial coding and categorising. As part of the initial analysis process, Anna and Monica used pens and highlighters to identify some of the preliminary codes within each of the four prompts, whereby the common and contrasting themes that sat within each of the initial prompts were recorded. A number of themes, convergences, or harmonies, emerged through this analysis. We develop three below.

FUGUE harmonies: seeing our collective identity

“harmony derives from the equilibrium between contrasting elements” - Pythagoras
(in Corazza et al., 2014, p. 94)

Combining our individual stories of educational research enabled us to articulate a collective perspective in relation to our role as researchers in a regional context. Close examination of our individual narratives and prompt responses (see methodology section) brings to light three key themes. The first theme is the importance of our rurality and making a place for visibility of our own rural standpoints and the standpoints of rural communities and places. The second theme of relationality was an affirmation and confirmation of a theme that emerged from intuitive dialogue based analyses. The third theme emerged as a reminder to us to name our commitment to transformative or disruptive intentions.

Rurality: standpoints and visibility

Our research projects are located in many communities (geographic, interest-based and online) across Gippsland. The uniqueness of each of these rural social and environmental spaces informs the purpose and methodology for the projects, in part, through researcher ‘insider’ knowledge (B. Green & Reid, 2014) of and experiences living in these places. This emerged through the vignettes with stories of ‘community engagement’, ‘building community’, ‘knowing the community’, and ‘working with the community’. Monica’s participatory-based research conducted with local primary children who attended the Sustainable Schools Expo in 2014 and whose schools were in vulnerable communities (financially, socially, environmentally), is an example. Having lived and grown up in the Latrobe Valley, Gippsland, Monica is intrinsically part of the landscapes and communities in which the schools she works with as research partners, exist. Furthermore, the specific rural places identified by children in the sustainability study were critical in helping them, and Monica, to express their personal meaning of sustainability – for example through the context of the recent coal mine fire in Morwell and the future of Loy Yang and Hazelwood power stations as coal-mining sites (M. Green,

2016). Their interactions with, and responses to, these local places were the heartbeat of this particular project, as with many of our projects, through the physicality of our rural places and spaces.

As such, our projects are shaped by the communities we serve as part of exploring insider-outsider dimensions of the places in which we are rural researchers, but to which we also contribute as a part of the community ourselves. This shapes our methodologies, in how we listen and hear, as well as how we communicate and enact our research findings. In seeking to make these connections explicit, we enhance the reliability of our research (Bartholomaeus, Halsey, Corbett, 2014), and are better placed to know the issues and concerns specific to the community. Our collective identity is thus founded on the shared belief that rural people and their communities deserve visibility and their experiences deserve validation, which through presenting our research together, we further promote. Through working in counterpoint with each other, we are simultaneously deepening our understanding of what it means to be rural researchers and the potential of our work to make a global difference through researching rural particularities. Experience in projects across the region enables us to articulate a shared standpoint in which rural communities matter for their distinctiveness, and in concert, reconstruct the binary with metropolitan discourses and research to see opportunity in contexts that are complex in their own right (Roberts, 2014).

Relationality: presences, partnerships and participatory approaches

Many of our vignettes revealed aspects of ‘relationality’ as a core motivation and method. As discussed above, we collectively recognise *community* and more specifically engagement *with* the particular communities in our region and of our regional university, as central elements of the research process. In this light, relational and reciprocal are central, as a consequence of working alongside communities. As an example, Di pursues research through the notion of online ‘social presence’ exploring ‘lived experiences’ of relationships to inform practices for social and relational activity in online learning with remote Federation University students.

Individually and collectively, our research aims to provide a voice for the region and a footprint of the community in focus, so we all seek to embed deliberate measures to ensure our

research is respectful and useful in ways the particular community understands (Reid et al., 2010).

Participatory and reciprocal approaches prioritise our collective research practices, which often involve multiple stakeholders, including academics, school communities (teachers and children), parents and community members, agencies and industry with whom we establish strong and respectful relations. For example, Cheryl, Anna, Margaret and Nicola are involved in a current research collaboration with The Smith Family's *Lakes Entrance Schools and Community Hub*, which was conceptualised through preliminary meetings that built relationship and took the time to explore the nature of the research in consultation with key stakeholders. For Monica, her participatory research methodologies are designed to enable participants to have an active stakeholder role in the research process. This is especially important for the Gippsland children she has researched with, who make sense of their world in starkly different ways to adults, and have well developed ideas for the type of planet and community they wish to exist in.

These several examples illustrate how we as researchers negotiate our academic research positions through prioritising shared skills, knowledge and expertise with the communities we work alongside. In re-imagining what, and how, research might be undertaken in a region, we recognise these transformational approaches to research as a deliberate disruption of research conventions that alienate researcher and research participants from one another. It is this apparently discordant melody of 'disruptive transformation' that we now develop.

Disruptive transformation: going "against the grain"

In adopting a fugue form we depart, like Virginia Woolf, "from linear narrative progression" (Hindrich, 2011, p. 6) and from conventional conceptions of writing research as an individual project. In writing together we seek to disrupt neoliberal conceptions of 'impact' by proposing an alternative collective research form as an assemblage, a montage, a fugue. This project intuitively attracted us because our individual projects all seek in some way themselves to work 'against the grain'. Our choices of research domains, locales, theoretical perspectives and methodologies all explore "the path less travelled" as Cheryl wrote in her vignette. In our own ways, we all attempt to disrupt

conventional stereotypes and wisdoms, priorities and perceptions. We each speak disruptively from a minority position and our research projects seek out voices of ‘other’ and those (rural) people, perspectives and ideas rendered less, or in-visible in contemporary hegemonies.

Margaret for example seeks to disrupt dominant discourses relating to achievement and excellence, feeling very strongly about the importance of opportunities for bright children which has underpinned the social justice perspective of her research into giftedness in rural settings – which her vignette suggested “is often seen as almost oxymoronic but which makes total sense to me”. From within another dominant milieu of external assessment regimes used for measurement and accountability, Anna goes against the grain by using external curriculum criteria to foster learner agency and proximal goal setting (Fletcher, 2015; 2016). Nicola’s research deploys a critical theoretical approach to disrupt supposed ‘common’ knowledge through challenging historical constructs surrounding technological expertise, Internet addiction, and learning (Johnson, 2014). Sue is also deeply committed to challenging preconceived notions and dominant discourses (Emmett, 2013) and among other projects is working with Cheryl to increase the access to and successful completion of an early childhood education degree for members of the Gippsland community, particularly the Gunaikurnai, who may have previously supposed this was unachievable. Cheryl seeks to amplify voices often overlooked in traditional conceptions of history through employing an environmental history lens, which is expressed as a narrative in which the environment or place is given agency in relationship with people over time (Glowrey, 2012). She wrote in her vignette “It is a history written from the ground up, often against the grain and well-suited to rural and regional places”. Monica also aims to understand the complexities of how humans and the non-human world co-exist using the conceptual frameworks of ‘space’ and ‘place’. For Susan, the actualisation of this paper, in a way enacts her call to academics to disrupt the habits and traditions of hegemonies such neoliberal and patriarchal practices through adopting instead an expansive “encompassing ethic” (Plowright, 2013, 2016) and governance practice. Through this ethic, Susan, along with Monica and Cheryl, promote the encompassing of relationships with, and responsibilities to, non-human entities such as the wild rivers and virgin forests of Gippsland; the history and the future of the rural local and

the global; our Earth and the interrelationships of all life on it; returning us, with echoes of Woolf's "vertical narrative" (Hindrich, 2011) fugue form, to our other themes of rurality and relationality.

Reimagining our identity: a (con)textual fugue encompassing eight voices

Before form, the fugue is metaphorical; its *purpose* is to reveal connections between seemingly unlike things. Its *method* is to develop an idea in never precisely the same way. Its *character* is to demonstrate relationships, unveiled both in terms of new ideas born of old, but also in counterpoint with the old. (Smith, 1996, "Anatomy of a fugue", np)

We, Susan, Cheryl, Monica, Anna, Di, Margaret, Sue and Nicola, are in the collective, now FUGuE in name, fugue in purpose, form, method and character. Our purpose has been to reimagine and transform our identity as rural education researchers through revealing to ourselves, our colleagues, and the education research community, the connections we intuited between our apparently disparate research foundations and projects. By narrating them in contrapuntal juxtaposition in the space of our embodied appearances together and in the textual space of this paper through 'writing in concert', 'we' now identify as the FUGuE collective and our reality is guaranteed by appearing to all - "for what appears to all, this we call Being" (Aristotle, cited in Arendt, 1958, p. 199).

Counterpoint has long been known to be a condition of creativity, of generation of new and valuable ideas (Corazza et al, 2014). Our polyphonic deliberations have generated in us a new assertion of our rural and Gippsland loci and research foci as 'particular' not deficit, as intrinsically valid and valuable. Our contrapuntal paper makes visible our disruptive assertion that our research needs to be seen both individually and as an assemblage; physically, temporally and figuratively located in and from Gippsland. This assemblage, characterised by ideas of and commitment to rurality, relationality and transformative disruption is, we argue, equally as valuable as any individualised measures current government and governance of higher education will assert and measure us against, rendering us all but invisible amongst the forest of research giants. We are inspired by and have learned from, Anna's disruptive project of fostering agentic learning in the context of suppressive external milieu and have learned to see ourselves anew. And now that FUGuE has a reality, we have new fugue projects to pursue.

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