Monica Green · Susan Plowright ·
Nicola F. Johnson *Editors*

Educational Researchers and the Regional University

Agents of Regional-Global Transformations

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Foreword: Educational Research that Leads Us to the 'Precipice' of Place

> The quality of human–world relationships must first acknowledge that places themselves have something to say (Grunewald, 2013, p. 624).
> But just as in ecological systems, these margins, or these edge communities, are often places of great diversity and abundance. As such, they are places of hope. They are places that remind us of what is possible and that offer us accounts of collective action that can help us create our own edges, our own vital connection to place. These are the places that can open us, that can lead us to the precipice of our own shared lives (Greenwood, 2015, pp. x–xiii).

This is a book about place-based educational research and a committed group of researchers who with and through their place have something to say. The chapters offer readers various insights into the ways this group of researchers, collectively known as Federation University Gippsland Education (FUGuE), engage with, contribute to and learn, from and about their place. In many ways, this book serves two purposes. First, it illuminates regional places as abundant with diverse perspectives. Second, it offers the researchers themselves a way to better understand their own 'human-world relationships' (Grunewald, 2013) in order to 'improve the wellbeing of human and more-than-human communities' (Greenwood, 2015, xii). Most chapters have at their heart a social justice inquiry into the ways in which education and educational research interact (or not) with a regional place. For the FUGuE researchers, this means paying attention to matters such as distance and terrain, location, particularities of place and 'locational relativity' (Green & Letts, 2007), offering others engaged in educational research and scholarship, a fresh and hopeful way to conceptualise research as relevant and responsive to regional–global matters.

The authors are all proudly educational researchers whose scholarship has located them as integral to the region of Gippsland's wider community. The book project and the research stories are a way to help further define the importance of

'adding the rural' (White & Corbett, 2014) or in this case, 'regional' to research. It also examines the important role a regional university can play to the overall social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of a place. In this way, the book is distinctive and generative. The researchers have clearly engaged in a critique of their own roles and positions and their desires to be agents for change in place. The book contributes to a growing socio-spatial awareness in relation to educational research, effectively using terms such as space, place, boundaries, edges, crossing, borders, mapping and positionality. These words reflect research that is inherently 'spatial' in nature (Massey, 2005), which guards against seeing *any* place as homogenous or necessarily harmonious.

While not a member of the FUGuE research collective, I too write from the position of knowing and being shaped by *this* place, Gippsland, after spending 3 years working as the Associate Dean and Head of School of Education at the same campus from which FUGuE writes. It has been interesting to read the chapters as now both an insider and outsider and to consider the impact of my own experiences. To me, Gippsland was a place of stark extremes. My most vivid memory when driving into the university campus is of the rich green, lush pastures contrasted with the brown, metal sculptures of the Hazelwood coal mine. Water is also a clear memory for me. I recall the extreme weather patterns as a source of much discussion—it seemed to rain a lot! Historically, the land and water reserves have sustained the rich Indigenous culture of the five Gunaikurnai clans for tens of thousands of years, and subsequent socio-economic endeavours ranging from agriculture, coal mining and tourism. As a local place though, Gippsland has also been buffeted by global winds and socio-economic forces, to which the researchers eloquently respond.

The challenges and opportunities in *this* place are clearly foregrounded across the chapters. The more-than-human world landmarks (Greenwood, 2015) such as the mountains, rivers, 'frog bogs' and beaches are inherently framed as part of the researchers' own stories and how they shaped the research designs. The act of reading reminds me of how our own subjectivities shape and define our research endeavours and trajectories. It is quite unique to have a research text that exclusively offers insights into place conscious methodologies from those *within* place. It is a text that highlights the importance of projecting awareness outward towards places (Gruenewald, 2003) beyond the immediate and the local, with a clear and articulated sense of the relationship of the regional to the global, and of the social lifeworld to the natural environment (White & Reid, 2008).

The chapters in this book ultimately bring alive the complex and interwoven layers of regionality, place, space and 'encompassing' (Plowright, 2016) notions of community, all the while providing insights into how educational research and education researchers can respond agentially within and *for* their regional–global

place. This text is one of deep histories, geographies and stories, and is in essence a hopeful response that offers multiple ways for research and researchers to transform their shared lives and places.

Kelvin Grove, QLD, Australia Prof. Simone White
July 2018 Queensland University of Technology

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Preface: Idylls, Smoke Plumes and Educational Research from the South-Eastern Tip of Mainland Australia

Around our staff meeting table, we sit at our laptops in companionate proximity amongst strewn papers, writing paraphernalia, teacups and carrot cake. This place, at the very edge of one wing of our regional university campus, reaches into the surrounding bushland, home to kangaroos, wallabies and echidnas who have all been known to visit. As has been our *modus operandi*, we come together as an editorial group, distracted from time to time by the birdlife and beautiful rosy gold light of late afternoon on view through the large picture window. Framing this idyll of tamed bush edging manicured and sculptured grounds and an obligatory lake—typical of a university estate—are the rising plumes of smoke steam that soar high, almost majestically, from Loy Yang power station to the east, and from Yallourn power station to the north. The smokestacks of Hazelwood power station, literally a stone's throw away, were permanently turned off during the writing of this book—an event of local and global note and significance, and a signifier of the maelstrom that is our region of Gippsland at the south-eastern tip of mainland Australia. In this place, capitalist, colonial and anthropogenic forces collide with ancient heritage, biomes and a sustainable just future. Like the smoke plumes, these global tensions loom over us but serve as the impetus to disruptively transform our patch of the globe into a beacon of what is sustainably and respectfully possible.

We see Gippsland as a 'multiverse', which this book mirrors as a multiverse narrative of the diverse educational research projects through which we enact our transformative intentions. As editors, we represent the 14 authors who form FUGuE—Federation University Gippsland Education researchers, a collective of scholars in the School of Education at the Gippsland campus of this regional university. This book is the collective's second venture and expands on our conference paper which was our revelatory and 'constitutive act' that surfaced the convergences of our disparate research. The conference paper touched briefly on our individual projects and so we came to see it as precursor to an edited collection that could juxtapose our research endeavours to disclose the significant reach and depth of our agency in the region, previously unknown to others and ourselves.

As editors, we steered this project for the collective through many convivial, dialogical, funny, food filled and generative gatherings. Those conversations are constituted in the following chapters, each with its own internal integrity as a research or scholarly reflective project, but collectively speaking to our shared themes of promoting regional standpoints, reciprocity and relationality through research partnerships and disruptive transformations. We hope teachers, educators, Gippslanders all, scholars and research students, and people of hinterland regions around the world, find inspiration from what follows in the same way as we have all been inspired by our collective will to transform.

Churchill, VIC, Australia

Susan Plowright
Monica Green
Nicola F. Johnson
Editors on behalf of the FUGuE collective

Contents

Foreword: Educational Research that Leads Us to the 'Precipice' of Place v

Preface: Idylls, Smoke Plumes and Educational Research from the South-Eastern Tip of Mainland Australia ix

1 Agents of Regional–Global Transformation: Federation University Gippsland Education (FUGuE) Researchers 1
Susan Plowright, Monica Green and Nicola F. Johnson

Part I Regional University Educational Researchers and Transformative Partnerships

2 Reflecting on a Nascent South Gippsland Birth-Year 6 Oral Language Partnership 23
Cheryl Glowrey and Susan Plowright

3 'Little School, Big Heart': Embracing a New Partnership for Learning Generous and Ethical Judgements 41
Susan Plowright, Gabbi Boyd and Sophie Callcott

4 Transforming Hopes and Visions for 'At-Risk' Primary Students in East Gippsland: A Community–School Partnership 57
Nicola F. Johnson

5 An Invited Outsider or an Enriched Insider? Challenging Contextual Knowledge as a Critical Friend Researcher 75
Anna Fletcher

6 'Broadening Horizons': Raising Youth Aspirations Through a Gippsland School/Industry/University Partnership 93
Margaret Plunkett and Michael Dyson

Part II Regional University Educational Researchers and Self-reflexive Transformations

7 Transforming Futures for Koorie Pre-schoolers in Gippsland Through Community-Educative Partnerships 117
Sue Emmett, Cheryl Glowrey and Nicholas Johnson

8 'Making Learning Valuable': Transforming My Practice Through a Service-Learning Partnership in Central Gippsland 135
Linda J. MacGregor

9 Frog Bogs, Turbines and Biodiversity: Bringing Children's Sustainability Knowledge to Life Through Handmade Artefacts 153
Monica Green

10 From Northern China to Hazelwood Wetlands: Navigating Place and Identity Through Science Education 173
Hongming Ma and Monica Green

11 The Lived Experiences of Graduate Students: Transforming University Education in an Online Space 191
Dianne M. Harrison and Susan Plowright

Postscript 209

Afterword: Voice and Agency from the Geographical and Academic Edge 215

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Chapter 1
Agents of Regional–Global Transformation: Federation University Gippsland Education (FUGuE) Researchers

Susan Plowright, Monica Green and Nicola F. Johnson

Abstract The lived particulars of Gippsland, the region, the land, the people and all life, are the heart and impetus of Federation University Gippsland Education (FUGuE) researchers, the chapter and collection authors. To us, Gippsland is portentous as both a wonderful place and prophetic of the transformations required for a sustainable and just regional–global future. The Latrobe Valley, for example, home of our small, new, regional university campus, is both bucolic rural locale and site of several coal-fired power stations. For many years, non-Indigenous residents enjoyed a fairly self-contained place of financial and intergenerational security. However, decades of seismic shifts have written new layers of trauma onto the Gippsland palimpsest that began with European invasions. With global imperatives to transition to a low-carbon economy, Gippsland is a canary in the global coal mine. Assertively locating our research in this region, we address moral and institutional imperatives to act as agents in generating a new regional–global *modus vivendi* from hinterland and a range of other minority positionalities. To set the regional scene, we map territorial and ideational incongruences that the toponyms of 'Gippsland' and 'region' conjure. We narrate how FUGuE contrapuntally emerged from this context and argue that through 'word and deed', FUGuE challenges hegemonic positivist and dominant discourses of what counts as notable research. Like a Bach fugue masterpiece in which each voice has intrinsic integrity but in counterpoint transforms into something new, our interwoven research voices of transformative agency through educational research, disruptively reveal our appreciable, but largely underappreciated, 'impact'.

Keywords Educational research · Regional university · Transformation · Sustainable and just future · Engagement and impact

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Regional Educational Researchers: Place, Positionality and Regional–Global Imperatives

The 'regional', 'rural' and 'remote' areas of Australia are vast, with widely separated human congregations and habitations. To many residents, this space and distance is identity-defining, attractive and affords close connection with, or enplantment in, the natural world. To many, these places are incomparable. The authors of this chapter and edited collection hold these places as intrinsically worthy and are ourselves integral constituents of Gippsland, the easternmost region of Victoria, Australia. Through the lens of educational research, it is the particularities and futures of Gippsland, the region, the land, the people and all life, that are the heart and impetus of the authors. Place in this regard is a central facet that weaves its way throughout the fabric of the book. From our viewpoint, we understand place as a specific locale, in a particular physical location that pays homage to the relationships between people and the places in which they dwell. Such relational exchanges are not unique to the Gippsland region of course, but are a broader reflection of how all of us are connected globally in some way to the places where we exist. As David Gruenewald argues, 'Place … foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places' (2003, p. 3). He goes on to suggest that place is profoundly pedagogical, teaching us about how the world works, and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. It is these particular places with their particular attributes, he suggests, that shape identity and possibility. Although his insights into place ring true for us as Gippsland-based researchers, we believe such an understanding also speaks to the broader ways in which all of us are shaped by where we live and work. Taking this idea to its broadest conclusion, the book not only represents Gippsland as a wider case study that frames our educational research but also affords us the important opportunity to translate and connect local knowledge and issues beyond our region.

As a boundaried or territorial 'region', Gippsland covers an area of approximately 41,556 km^2, some 18% of Victoria's land mass. The region is well known for its primary production through mining, power generation, forestry and farming and begins 85 km to the east of the capital city of Melbourne, extending to the furthest eastern tip of the state. It extends north–south from the Great Dividing Range to the shores of Bass Strait, which divides mainland Australia from Tasmania, and largely, but not entirely, corresponds with the five tribal lands of the Gunaikurnai peoples. In 'official' terms, six local government areas (LGAs) constitute Gippsland (see Figs. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3).

Federation University Gippsland Education (FUGuE) researchers, authors of this edited collection, argue Gippsland is portentous in two senses. It is simultaneously a 'wonderful' place of great beauty and other liveability features, as well as 'prophetic' of the transformations required for a sustainable and just future, regionally and globally. For example, the Latrobe City LGA is the geographic home of FUGuE's university campus and territorially at the heart of Gippsland. It might be described

Fig. 1.1 Australia, showing the state of Victoria and Gippsland

Fig. 1.2 Gunaikurnai clan map. http://www.batalukculturaltrail.com.au/ Permission granted from Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place

as 'bucolic' but up until recently, it also produced up to 85% of Victoria's electricity. Thus, cleared pastoral agricultural land is dotted with coal-fired power stations drawing on deep brown and black coal deposits laid down over hundreds and thousands of years. With other heavy industry such as a paper mill, some of these buildings and sites would be at home in Dickensian England but they meant for many years, for non-Indigenous residents, the Latrobe Valley[1] was a fairly self-contained place of job, financial and intergenerational security. It was respected as Victoria's powerhouse. However, decades of seismic political and economic shifts have written new layers of instability and trauma onto the Gippsland palimpsest that began with European invasions of what were Gunaikurnai lands. More recently, the Latrobe

[1]Latrobe City is the local government area. Latrobe Valley is the vernacular term most commonly used to refer to the same area.

Fig. 1.3 Topographic intersections of FUGuE research projects

Valley has been rocked by privatisation of large industries, a devastating mine fire and the recent closure of Hazelwood Power Station and brown coal mine. With the imperative for a transition to a low-carbon global economy, this place is a social, cultural, environmental and economic canary in the global coal mine, where hope and vision, transition and transformation must be humanly possible.

FUGuE researchers assertively locate ourselves in our regional context to provide a close-grained focus at cultural, environmental and other levels that promise sustainability of these communities (Green, 2015). We act as agents for hope and transformation for a sustainable and just future, taking what we see as paths 'less travelled' (Plowright et al., 2016). For example, in Chap. 10, Hongming and Monica reveal the complexities and ambiguities of Gippsland by moving from lecture-based science teacher and sustainability education classes to a wetland created by Hazelwood (coal-fired) Power Station as compensation to the local community. As the world painfully transitions from fossil fuel energy to a zero-carbon economy, they work literally and figuratively, on the ground and at the coalface. As such, as mostly women, we assert and extend the feminist truism that the 'personal is political' to argue our Gippsland-placed research is not only political but existential (Plowright, 2013). Equally, by publishing together as FUGuE, we can more visibly 'insert' our research 'word and deed' (Arendt, 1958, p. 176) into the world as a political act, giving our regional efforts, struggles and contributions to an urgently required global consciousnesses more visibility, because we research from a satellite campus within a small, new and regional university, while on the global stage we are 'southern-tier' academics (Connell, Pearse, & Collyer, 2018) among other minority positionalities. Importantly though, we do so while seeking out and advocating for Gippsland voices

similarly rendered less, or invisible in contemporary hegemonies. We are thus ‘going against the grain’ (Plowright et al., 2016), to deliberately recognise and reinvest in ourselves, Gippsland and regional lifeworlds in general, as validation that we are anything but marginal, hinterland and second-tier.

As well as existential though, we share a statutory responsibility for regional –global relevance. Federation University establishing legislation in Victorian Parliament requires the university, and therefore us, to have a ‘regional focus, national scope, and international reach’ (Federation University, 2015, p. 2). However, our university is Australia’s newest, commencing in 2014 as an amalgamation of existing regional campuses, including the Gippsland campus that is our institutional home, previously part of Monash University a much larger and internationally renowned research-intensive university. Thus simultaneously, the new Federation University corporation, educational researchers at the Gippsland campus and Gippslanders are all grappling with the necessity of repositioning, transitioning and transforming.

This chapter thus sets out in some depth some of these geographic, temporal, institutional and ideational contexts from which FUGuE emerged and within which we are determined to work in a transformative spirit. An exploration of Gippsland and the contested territories, toponyms and conceptions of regionality, that as locals we daily navigate, forms the first section. We then explain our text-as-fugue compilation and assert that in fugue and FUGuE form, not only do our individual educational research projects—worthy in their own right—become more visible, but that our significant networked and engaged presence across the region is revealed (see Fig. 1.3) through juxtaposing a sample of our work in this edition. Through this collective presence, we illustrate an appreciable impact with, in and for Gippsland(ers) of relevance to regional researchers and dwellers in many parts of the world. We acknowledge Gunaikurnai on whose land we engage in research and recognise that although we have now initiated a relationship with Gunaikurnai (see Chap. 7), our perspectives are almost exclusively ‘white’. With that important caution, we argue in the concluding coda that our research in collection is worthy of recognition and valorisation in conceptions of what counts as meritorious research and that official codifications need to expand to take account of a collective engagement and impact such as ours.

Gippsland as Region: Territorialities and Toponymical Caveats

Gippsland is not a regional totality (Painter, 2008). ‘Gippsland’, like many ‘regions’ (Painter, 2008), is an overarching nomenclature encompassing multiple, distinct locales, each with their own features of topography, geography, demography, politics, economy, climate, industry and accessibility. Mapping each of these across Gippsland would show ‘incongruous’ or ‘noncongruous’ boundaries (Painter, 2008, p. 352) several of which we explore here. To begin, what is ‘regional’ is itself a highly contested conceptualization (Painter, 2008). Looking in on Australia from a

northern hemisphere vantage point, Painter argues that regional Australia 'refers to areas of the country away from the major urban centres but excludes the very sparsely populated nonagricultural areas known as "remote Australia"' (2008, p. 355). In her work, reported on in this volume, Margaret draws on the congruent-with-Painter, but more precise, Remoteness Structure of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). This standard categorises areas of Australia through five Remoteness Area (RA) categories including Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote (ABS, 2018a). The classifications are based on the physical road distance to the nearest urban centre. Using this classification, the western portion of Gippsland is inner regional, the middle section is outer regional and the far eastern section is remote. Officially and politically though, there are six LGAs governed by locally elected councils (see Fig. 3).

The totality of Gippsland as an official region though is not necessarily known to or felt by all Gippslanders, as Cheryl and Susan, both residents and researchers from South Gippsland, know. Many children and parents in their village don't know where Churchill is, the location of Federation University campus and their workplace. As a place an hour's car drive away and 'over the hill', it certainly isn't considered as part of their region. Very much part of their region though is Corner Inlet, one of the ecological marvels of Gippsland (Glowrey, 2018). Along with Gippsland Lakes further east, these two wetland areas are designated as of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, a global intergovernmental treaty. Corner Inlet's waters are a safe haven for birds that know no political borders, flying to and from Siberia every year, and the base of a natural amphitheatre. This enclosing locale within south Gippsland is their region of the world.

Corner Inlet waters are shallow and protected from the southern elements by Wilsons Promontory, an official bioregion (DELWP, 2017), tethered to the mainland through a slender isthmus. 'The Prom' is a 'spectacular area of rocky hills and mountains, dense heathy lowlands, sweeping white sandy beaches and prominent granite headlands surrounded by the cold waters of Bass Strait' (DELWP, 2017, 'Wilson's Promontory Bioregion'). Other designated bioregions include the Gippsland Plains and the East Gippsland Lowlands, while elevated bioregions include the East Gippsland Uplands, Strzelecki Ranges, Highlands–Far East and the Southern Fall (of the Great Dividing Range). The latter are 'dissected uplands' with 'moderate to steep slopes, high plateaus and alluvial flats along the main valleys' (DELWP, 2017, 'Highlands-Southern Fall'). Bioregions are natural territorialities with which other territories (political, cultural) may or may not coincide so that in complex formation, their congruences, incongruences, internal particularities and external contexts shape the lifeworld of Gippslanders. For example, Gippsland's significant forests are highly contested sites seen by some as resource assets and by others as important biodiversity and carbon dioxide sinks that need preservation, because with one other area, the forests of Gippsland form 'the largest blocks of land that make the highest relative contribution to forest biodiversity conservation' (VEAC, 2017, p. 16) in Victoria.

The demographic territorialities of Gippsland include a population of approximately 310,361 across the electoral divisions of McMillan and Gippsland (ABS,

2018b), which cover the six LGAs. The population is clustered mostly in regional urban centres and surrounding towns with a smaller proportion of dispersed farms and in small villages. 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). According to the 2016 census, Gippsland's population includes significant groups of New Zealand, Indian and European migrants, predominantly English, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders constitute up to 1.5% of the population (ABS, 2018b). This settlement pattern displaced the Gunaikurnai people, the traditional owners of most of what we now call Gippsland. One telling of the Gunaikurnai dreaming story says that:

> … the first Gunaikurnai came down from the mountains in Victoria's northwest carrying his canoe on his head. He was Borun, the pelican. He crossed over the river at what is now Sale and walked on alone to Tarra Warackel (Port Albert) in the west. As he walked, he heard a constant tapping sound but could not identify it. When he reached the deep water of the inlets, Borun put down his canoe and, much to his surprise, there was a woman in it. She was Tuk, the musk duck. He was very happy to see her, and she became his wife and the mother of the Gunaikurnai people—they are the parents of the five Gunaikurnai clans (Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, 2017).

The five clans of Brabralung, Bratauālung, Brayakaulung, Krauatungalung and Tatungalung (see Fig. 1.3) each had a place of which they were custodians and had their place in a shared a governance system across Australia that facilitated negotiated coexistence for tens of thousands of years, until white 'civilization' arrived. Since then Gippsland has been a colonial palimpsest of erasing and writing over (see Tope, 2014) Gunaikurnai existence via imposition of western agriculture, industry, infrastructure, settlements and governance patterns, in addition to massacres and the introduction of decimating new diseases.

Thus, to many, Gippsland is not Gipps' land at all. From a position of power, a white man 'found' and named the place after his sponsor who had never set foot on the land. This explorer did not though find *terra nullius*, despite British legal proclamations. It was land inhabited by peoples of complex cultures, political systems and systematic, sustainable agricultural practices (Pascoe, 2014). The Gunaikurnai peoples were one of the earliest First Australians to be displaced, massacred and culturally eviscerated, and the wounds are raw still. For Aboriginal Australians, place and human are integral, symbiotically coexisting for 65,000 or more years. For Aboriginal Australians, place **is** existence. Each place has its human custodians with a specific language to represent it. Maps of Aboriginal Australia show the land blanketed by languages and dialect groups so that no place is left untended or unspoken of. Pascoe (2008, np) writes:

> We know that there were over 250 language boundaries in Australia and we know that they have existed within those lands for many thousands of years because the vocabulary of particular languages is distinguished by reference to geological and climatic events peculiar to their area.

Indeed, it is reported that Gammage, in a groundbreaking thesis that Australia in its entirety was the biggest estate on Earth, proposed that Aboriginal land management was sophisticated, interconnected and even intra-continental (Boyce, 2011).

However, like a palimpsest, a parchment or paper where previous text has been erased and written over sometimes multiple times, traces have survived, and FUGuE researchers are committed to walking with Gunaikurnai peoples as they create and narrate new histories. Nicholas, a proud Gunai, Monero Ngarigo and Gunditjmara man has joined FUGuE through the writing of Chap. 7 which has since spawned new networks and partnership ideas and plans.

In contrast, subsequently applied British and 'western' governance systems have resulted in metropolitan places predominating politically and lexically because of their sheer mass and preponderance of human concerns. In a proportionally representative electoral system, populously dense places have more political representation than sparsely populated ones. As such it follows that 'rural', 'regional', 'remote' and First People's standpoints, as less numerous, are commensurately less represented and less visible in the public realm. Equally, English terms like 'regional', 'rural' and 'remote' toponymically construct these places, in comparison with, and in deficit relation to, that which is metropolitan. For example, a thesaurus tells us those from metropolitan places are 'cosmopolitan', 'urbane', 'modern' and 'sophisticated', whereas 'regional' people are 'parochial', 'vernacular', 'insular' or 'provincial'. The former is represented as worldly and intelligent, the latter in antonymous comparison.

In that vein, toponymically, an area between urban and rural is more likely to be known as peri-urban than peri-rural, while an antonym for 'remote' is *terra incognita*, a place not known. Only from a metropolis, however, are these places out-back (why not out-front?), too far away to be seen and known. These places do not have English language to represent their particularities and are instead homogenised by collective nouns originating in other lands. This leaves the authors of this chapter and collection with a dilemma, because while we seek to speak of our regional particulars and disrupt colonial and other hegemonies, we find ourselves using the very language that form and represent these hegemonies. We see this as unsatisfactory, but for communicative purposes, we are saddled with many of these terms in this chapter and book but convey in the strongest possible terms that we are troubled by them.

Gippsland: Towards a Transformed *Modus Vivendi*

Just as Gippsland is portentous of the need for reconciliation between first peoples and subsequent arrivals, it is a harbinger of the demise of capitalism and the transformations required to curb the rise of global temperatures. Like the snake eating its own tail (Bauman, 2007), capitalism has reached the point where voracious consumption of Earth's material resources is self-harming. 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. Gippsland's forests, in dramatic decline, have been consumed for agriculture, settlement and export contributing to the release of stored carbon. Coal deposits have been exhumed, consumed and transformed into both electricity and

climate-changing pollution in the quest for liquid capital. However, these hegemonic forces of the 'modern' world are shifting so that, as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2007, p. 1) observes, the human condition has passed from a:

> 'solid' to a 'liquid' phase of modernity: that is, into a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behaviours) can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set.

FUGuE recognises that in these 'liquid times', Gippslanders as a microcosm in the global human condition need to negotiate a new *modus vivendi*—an agreed way of living allowing conflicting parties to live in peace—for a more sustainable and just future. Employing ideas from Gadamer, Bauman suggests agreements are built on 'fusions of cognitive horizons', which require mutual understanding borne of shared experience but that sharing experience 'is inconceivable without shared space' (Bauman, 2007, pp. 91–92). Creating shared experiential spaces to achieve fusions of cognitive horizons through educational research is a *raison d'etre* of FUGuE. We determinedly act as agents for achieving a sustainable and just *modus vivendi* for Gippsland and through Gippsland, the globe. In this, we simultaneously respond to the objects of Federation University, the regional university base of our research, which include 'to serve the Victorian, Australian and international communities' (Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents, 2016). The Federation University Strategic Plan (2016–2020) states that it will be 'productive and effective in forming partnerships and engaging with its communities and regions' because it has a responsibility for 'effective stewardship of our environment and resources' (Federation University, 2015). This then is the context from which FUGuE emerged and in which we seek to be agents of regional–global transformation.

FUGuE: Federation University Education Gippsland Researchers

FUGuE is an informal grouping, not a recognised School of Education research group. We emerged in August 2016 in response to the Australian Association of Research in Education (AARE) conference theme *transforming education research*. A casual kitchen conversation between Anna and Susan led to eight of us iteratively producing a shared conference paper through formation of a space of appearance (Arendt, 1958). Formed of human plurality, a space of appearance 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," and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality (Arendt, 1958, p. 199).

In this light, denial of a space to appear before others is to be deprived of reality.

Being FUGuE is a way to assert our reality, for we are a group of mainly women grappling with the 'coloniality of gender' (Connell, 2014) and see with Connell that 'worldwide making and unmaking of gender relations is a significant part of the most urgent issues of our time' (2014, p. 562). Most of us are mature age and some are also only now finally finding time and space to research. We all belong to the small minority of rural education researchers (Bobis et al., 2013) within the education research field, itself dominated in the hierarchy of research funding receiving only 2% of Category 1 funding across Australia (Cutter-McKenzie & Renouf, 2017). We are of the less recognised global south (Connell, 2007) and are thus southern-tier academics (Connell et al. 2018). We research in and for places beyond large capital conurbations politically less represented and are researchers in a small, new and regional university—a sapling in an old growth forest. It is one of the Regional Universities Network (RUN) that has performed particularly poorly in securing research funding (Cutter-McKenzie & Renouf, 2017, p. 5). We thus inhabit, speak and research from hinterland and peripheral spaces. In this context, our quest for validity and visibility, for recognition as being, is visceral.

As a space of appearance emerges from human plurality, a fugue is a creative musical form emerging from phonic plurality or polyphony. Polyphony, crafted into counterpoint, has long been held as a generative 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).

In fugue musical form, the composition begins with the statement of a melodic subject. Progressively, other voices are woven in, in counterpoint, each simultaneously reworking the subject in their distinct and distinguishable way. The art lies in holding the integrity of each voice while creating rich harmonies from melodic junctures between them all. The sum of these harmonic intersections and interstices creates a new auricular tapestry, selvedged by unison statement of the subject in a coda. FUGuE texts similarly weave our distinct research voices and foci to create (con)textual fugues (Plowright et al., 2016). To do this we employ a mapping as method approach where we gather, forming convivial spaces and share our research through 'vignettes of practice', sometimes spoken sometimes written. Early on, this process revealed three interlocking place-based threads—a determination to be a voice for rural/regional standpoints; relationality and reciprocality as central to our research design; and 'disruptive transformations' as our purposive goal (Plowright et al. 2016). Our very way of working disruptively transforms conventional university hierarchies because despite official positioning as Masters and PhD students, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors, tenured or sessional academics, in