holding on and letting go

what if skills for decisions in employability actually hinder ready-for-anything flexibility

21 July 2015

People are changing the way they manage their lives. Careers work cannot afford to neglect the news. But it comes with a [warning about priorities](#) - should careers work embed prevailing expertise, or rebuild it in response to change? It's a balancing of convention and reform - guess which is a way foward and which a blind alley?

Reform needs new ideas. The new idea here understands contemporary career management as a process of 'holding on' and 'letting go'. The idea cropped up first in [narrative thinking \[BL35, BL36\]](#). It can connect to policy, professionalism and practice. It would expand the careers-work repertoire. More importantly, it can position clients and students as agents of change.

To get anywhere with this means documenting how a person *holds on* to friends that matter, to assumptions that feel right, and to privileges that stand a person in good stead. But people might instead *let go* of friends, or assumptions or privileges if they are found to obstruct what that person finds important.

Navigating the pushes and pulls of these dynamics is among the most significant features of contemporary career management. Knowing when to hold-on and when to let-go enables people for ready-for-anything flexibility. Was there ever a time when that was more needed?

Much of the evidence and analysis here is heavy-duty - with occasional tongues-in-cheek. It will stand some back-and-forth revisiting. The analysis is illustrated with examples of useful encounters, materials and practice. The evidence uncovers five dimensions...

    1: **connection**   finding links to what's happening and with whom
    2: **reach**   developing ready-for-anything flexibility
    3: **buoyancy**   making good use of bad news
    4: **grasp**   establishing learning for life-long living
    5: **direction**   realising independent critical-thinking and creativity

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a shorter but fully referenced version of this appears
in the [The NICEC Journal](#) for Autumn 2015
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1: CONNECTIONS

There are causes-and-effects, there are meanings a person attributes to those events, and there are purposes set in motion by those attributions. Defending convention or pursuing reform, careers work needs to [track those links \[BL41\]](#).

The possibilities are varied, dynamic and expanding. In one way or another people are connected to family, friends and school-or-college contacts. There are neighbourhoods, where communities can link to locally-based agencies. Links to shops, bars, advertisers, stylists and media are constantly appearing - both off-line and on. Connections to politics, campaigns and demonstrations are being forged and broken as you read this. All raise question about what's worth holding-onto and what can be waved goodbye. People act on and live by their answers - they move and shake.

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move or shake

professional thinking has a spectrum of links that clients and students deal with. How much of it can you and your colleagues recognise as significant in their lives?...
there's what everybody seems to know...

- people act on **instinct** - impulsively looking for immediate pay-offs
- they are most aware of their **individuality** - at the extreme as though in a social vacuum
- but lives are also **situated** - what people do reflects where they live
- and there is **background** - where people learn how people-like-us manage all this

> no big surprises so far, but more to say about social settings...

- individuals are located as a members of a **community** - with its agreed way of doing things
- it is also where **attachments** are forged - shaping give-and-take relationships, loyalties and aspirations
- and each locality nurtures a **culture** - with its shared beliefs, values and expectations
- social **enclaves** are formed - each with its own set of sympathies, tolerances and hostilities
- the dynamic of such social life is **habitus** - where the inhabited culture shapes habits-of-mind

> political influences rate more attention...

- social **polarisation** builds over time - separating into 'like or not like us', valued or disdained, becoming strangers to each other
- by contrast a **nudge** is immediate - reinforcing behaviour which serves such interests as market, profession and business
- while **stakeholding** is deeper - more than shareholding, it represents the interests of customer, citizen and worker
- among those **interests** - are some people's beliefs in the certain deserving of one's own success, and the probable deserving of other people's failure
- more inclusive interests voice **identity politics** - opposing discrimination on gender, race and sexuality although, though less on class

> change provokes fast-developing accounts of career influences...

- influences are defended in **political theory** - voicing beliefs, interests and evidence ranging from economic necessity to planetary survival
- people are increasingly asked to show **resilience** - seen as a 'good' upbringing for building character
- and **intuitions** are not lightly to be dismissed - our brains know more than we know they know and that insight can be worth heeding
- but ideas of **enlightenment** oppose entrenched interests - urging independence-of-mind, and expecting to be taken seriously in education
- enlightenment also signposts **critical thinking** - which undermines arbitrary controls by developing reliably-informed progression
- and **creativity** takes a similar stance - refusing to settle for how things are with an inventiveness which reconnects how life is experienced

Reality is muddier than analysis. Instinct and intuition are not easy to tell apart. Impulse can both trap and liberate. The claims of stakeholders are contested. But what are their drivers? - different interests [BL32] (pragmatically served) or different philosophies (epistemologically scrutinised)? Some interests are rooted in the memories of a privileged and ageing generation. And the polarisation of interests can thwart reforming zeal in all but the bravest (pp.20ff). So independence-of-mind calls on courage. And, full circle, some of the bravest political action is rooted in upbringing.
Links in all directions - and few certainties. There's no straightforward conversation to be had about holding-on-and-letting-go. But how refreshing to find a celebrity [ref to Martin Sheen] recognising students changing the world. And what more-important education agenda could there be?

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who shaking what

It's an education agenda, but it's also political - about who who gets to do what in society. Politics is getting clever [BL50] about this - enough to lead and mislead. A framework for action is based on three elements. Firstly, any dominant group is an 'establishment'. It is supported, secondly, by 'outriders' - research-and-development outfits capturing connections for the establishment. Some of these are careers outfits. Thirdly, all politicking needs to persuade people about 'what everybody knows', and that frames an 'overton window'. Named for its inventor, it contains what people can be persuaded to believe - and that need not be truthful. The products appear daily in the media. And students who know how politics works can outflank it. There is such student politics. Does it count as education for citizenship?

Students and their helpers never more needed to engage politics. There's no shortage of myths and findings to probe. The evidence is that however much a politico thinks he knows he probably doesn't. So there is a world-wide search for people ready to deal with politics in their own terms. But how many regimes can you list where the population is schooled in superstition, myth and compliance, rather than educated for independent and critical creativity? I can't help wondering whether you listed any part of the UK.

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2: REACH

People are developing their own ways of dealing with work-life. They reach beyond career development and its information, advice and guidance (IAG). They reach towards career management - which is not the same thing.

At the same time political interests are becoming more of a problem. They talk of individuals making economic decisions based on impartial information [BL66]. It's narrow thinking, fitting into an overton window framing business interests, political time-lines and habits-of-mind.

Time is up on both IAG and impartiality. Neither deal with the accelerating change and complexity [BL41] of contemporary lives. Research into work-life experience [BL14] speaks of a search for work-life balance and a rejection of arbitrary demands. It intensifies pressure on education, looking beyond self-advancement and towards finding meaning in their lives. It calls for a hold-on-let-go career conversation - and bigger windows.

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career conversations

Talk of IAG conjures two favourite words: 'choice' and 'decision'.   Choice speaks of acting on 'this-or-that?', decision on now-or-when?'. Both lurk in this conversation between questions and answers...

'does it have to be sciences or arts?'

'no, you can get a better deal from the college'

'suppose I just can't face any more exams'

'there are jobs where your personality will take you a long way'

'if I don't grab it now do I lose the chance?'

'not necessarily, the firm might respect you asking for time to think'

'I thought you were supposed to tell me what to do'

'I can't do that, but your test and inventory scores are very promising'

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this and similar inserts are illustrative
of possible conversations
based on what I remember and can imagine
you have more recent memory and imagining
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Such conversations go down well with some interests. They attend to what evaluators need. They get frequent airings in the literature. The influential approve [BL21] - including politicians, employers and conventional leaders. But something gets lost in the applause...

'you can get a better deal from the college'
'so what makes it better?'
'there are jobs where your personality will take you a long way'
'but all my mates are leaving now'
'a firm like that might respect you asking for time to think'
'will the firm want to listen to me talking about my baby?'
'your test and inventory scores are very promising'
'they'd feel more like the real me if they contradicted each other'

There's surprise, puzzlement and ambivalence here. Research suggests it's what drives creative change. But convention has little to say about change-of-mind. So reform needs a counter-narrative [BL35] featuring departures, turning-points and new-horizons. Reform calls for an expanding dynamic of change rather than a narrowing settlement of choice.

Wide-ranging talk like this can shake confidence - conventionally upheld as a condition for success. It's true that positive talk of confidence comes across well. But evidence suggests that the habitual use of rewarding talk can hold back learning (17/07/2015 pp.12-13). And there are well-documented accounts of over-confidence, misleading confidence and deluded confidence. They identify self-contradicting [NICEC Journal 28] and self-serving [BL29] beliefs.

These exchanges feature conflicting interests. Some attempt to capture education [BL44]. Stakeholders reach for release. Either way, they raise hold-and-let issues - with degrees of not necessarily helpful confidence. Somebody once mentioned how a reach for the meek will get things right. The evidence on confidence suggests that he had a point - or she.

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affect and effect

A long-standing account of learning from experience [BL14] illustrates the affective dynamics of conflicting interests. And, on top of everything, career management is a response to change [BL41]- charged with affect. Clinical evidence sets out a spectrum of affect. It starts from fight-or-flight instinct. It moves into an account of approach-or-avoid emotion. It settles on a sustained feeling about how things are. But it has all has been lumped together as 'emotional intelligence' - said to be good for personal development. And, while that supplies a conventional account of what works well or needs help, reform needs an account of what transforms.

professional thinking [BL29] sets out a three-fold spectrum of career-management affect. What sense do your students make of it? And recognise in their experience?...
> thinking on feeling-good in upbeat experience...

- **self-esteem** - widely thought to be necessary to achievement
- **confidence** - said to be needed for risk-taking
- **ambition** - held to be made possible by both

> thinking on demanding attention is less upbeat than astringent...

- **self-regulation** - appeals for a disciplined state-of-mind
- **character** - deals with difficulties and obstacles
- **resilience** - is a bouncing-back response to loss or failure
- **mindfulness** - a special focus on here-and-now reality

> thinking on transformation engages the excitement of change...

- **independence of mind -** interrogating and confronting arbitrary influences
- **critical-thinking -** an unwillingness to settle for the way things are
- **creativity** - transforming how people see reality and how they will now live in it

There's no consensus [BL40] here. There are view-points reflecting mixed feelings, different interests, and conflicting priorities. It is a narrative. And in a narrative nothing need be unchallenged, or under control, or

believed without doubt. The thinking speaks of a rounded story [BL36] which has muddles to unpick, bad news to confront and minds to change. Nothing is taken for granted.

Careers work has plenty to consider - ranging from precarious employment, through arbitrary religious demands, to neglected child care. It brings stress-related anxiety where bad feelings can bury everything. It's hard to know where 'passion' belongs on this spectrum. But suppose it were a willingness to risk, endure, and suffer for something bigger than self? Wouldn't that change some minds?

And there's no ready-made script here. It's a hold-and-let-go process reaching beyond feel-good, and beyond demanding-attention, and leading to start-again transformation. Ready-for-anything flexibility is attainable when nothing is thought inevitable.

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3: BUOYANCY

The idea of self-regulating character has a tough 'get-over-it' tone. As a teacher and lecturer I never found such 'pull-yourself-together' talk doing much to help angry or panicky students. And, these days, there's plenty to be angry and panicky about. There are also ways of making good use of bad news[BL44], and that's part of what I'm calling buoyancy [BL41] - staying afloat in turbulent conditions. It's learned in day-by-day encounters. **professional thinking** [BL29] takes account of such encounters. Your colleagues will recognise them. But which do they think it worth strengthening as links?...

> the most basic learning encounters are inter-personal...

- **families facing tough times** - for whom coping is a priority and who may prioritise a shared sense of what's right-and-proper
- **privileged families** - whose wealth and contacts mean that they can expect success, protect these advantages and share them with chosen beneficiaries
- **neighbourhoods** - where shared experience unites people, but when little is shared people become strangers to each other

> locally-learned like-mindedness forms groups...

- **gangs** - where insiders display loyalty and allegiance, and outsiders are treated with hostility
- **devout** - valuing what is thought of as spiritual and sometimes looking for religious obedience
- **associations** - loosely organised clubs, societies and websites where people follow shared interests

> institutions shape and frame resources for learning...

- **organisations** - with rules and roles like those of sport, clubs, cadets, leisure centres and scouts
- **schools and colleges** - valued for what is examinable, but also for meeting your mates
- **businesses** - where learning needs to be about customers, effort, costs and supply-and-demand
- **services** - such, as careers and youth work, where people learn to deal with what's going on in neighbourhood and officialdom
- **officialdom** - both nationally and locally shaping who gets access to what learning services and opportunities

Conventional thinking has developed a lot to say about 'me-and-my-plan'. But wondering about which these locations are serving whose interests is a reforming conversation. Different locations, differently understood,

make different sense of that. And community-interactive [BL28] talk signposts its possible breadth. While other evidence speaks of students learning from each other.

And so reform talk is shared, exploratory and releasing. It includes explaining to herself how she manages her life, or why his children are so precious, or how they feel about the invasion of change. And an employer at the civilised end of the commercial spectrum can recognise the value of that learning. So there can be plenty of hold-and-let reform talk. Conversation is buoyant when it lifts people, to where they can see how things are, and what needs changing, and where to make a start.

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education for a change

Dealing with change can be thought to depend on character. Causes and effects then tidily fall into place: character comes from 'good' upbringing, and 'bad' upbringing causes failure. Research probes the thinking, exposing it's self-serving unfairness. The poor are deprived by an officialdom which chooses to see them as authors of their plight. While educators are vulnerable to attempted capture as agents of control. Snobbery is a prototype of such discrimination, laying blame where no blame belongs. The damage is at its greatest when provoking anger about who is worth holding onto and who can go and fuck themselves. Wherever those feelings are, that is an educator's starting point - the opening of a conversation. Educators need to hear talk of 'where we live', 'what it's like' and 'how we feel about it'. They also need to hear about 'who we know', 'how they are respected', and 'why they can be trusted'. So how do educators rate in this exchange?

It's worth asking what teacher-talk gets as much as a nod...

'learning gets you ready to claim your place in society'
'that means your work-life and citizenship'
'there's no hope in giving up on either'
'not for you and not for anybody you care about'
'a free society means people have the right to live by their beliefs'
'but nobody has a right to impose their beliefs on you'
'not the people who treat you badly'
'not the people who are close to you'
'we all need each other's help in finding how things can be better'
'not forgetting the past but not living in obedience to it'
'you and your people can be bigger than that'
'learning how big you can be is what education is for'

Would they know what this teacher is talking about? Anything to say to each other? Worth setting down? Suppose they come up with another version - by making a movie, showing others and hatching a plan? So they are revisiting remembered experience, but attributing new meaning, and finding reformed purpose. That can become self-propelled hold-and-let. Then it's buoyancy.

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what's left of rights

Not everybody sees education that way; and it really is vulnerable to capture [BL44] by dominant interests. A much-canvassed interest in education is for employability. But employability is a moving target - not a cause of anything, but a wavering effect of recruitment rates. Nonetheless it's pushed by commerce, majorities and convention.

It's put to a test by the idea of career image - looking good to recruiters in...
'appearance' --- *'attractiveness'* --- *'self-presentation'*

Call it the cosmetic curriculum. And the best career work in the world can't jig it to create jobs or improve conditions. What it can do is change the pecking order for available work. But that doesn't favour ability, it

favours people who can fake it, because recruiters are not hard to deceive. Is this what convention means by employability: business assigning success to image? faces-that-don't-fit discarded? myth excluding reality? There are faces-that-don't-fit all over: students who kick over tracers, independent researchers held back, dissenting educators supressed, compliance commodified, the erosion of student rights. At the same time the idea of competitive employability [BL68] fails to understand work-life motivation. Workers in demanding jobs find monetary rewards a disincentive. They look for meaningful work satisfactions, which - as it turns out - prove impossible to fake.

The cosmetic curriculum will collapse - it loses its edge when everybody learns to do it. It's a product of playground economics and will be displaced by a reliable account of how things are. It has nothing to say about issues ranging from work-place well-being to planetary survival.   But suppose it survives? You'll notice compliant workers, uniform in 'appearance, attractiveness and self-presentation'. While reforming independence-of-mind, creativity and critical thinking will have their unfit faces excluded. Try to imagine that.

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4: GRASP

Dealing with the realities of career management calls for what I'm calling reach and grasp. I mentioned reach earlier - learning that helps here-and-now action. But reach needs grasp - carrying learning to some there-and-then action. Any hold-and-let process needs breadth in reach and strength in grasp. And in any collection of education aims that grasp is part of meta-learning - learning to learn. It is knowing what to do in who-knows-what futures. It is not learn-and-score now, it's learn-as-needed later. The more unexpected the later the greater the need for grasp.

It's no quick-fix. Meta-learning's grasp is engaged stage-by-stage: from getting a sense of what's going on, through sifting that into useful order, onto focusing what matters, to getting an understanding of the causes-and-effects to be managed. The career learning [BL28] research sets out how to practice the process so that it becomes second nature.

But most learning is forgotten - because it's disposable, out-of-date, not used or inconvenient. Meta-learning thrives when it reminds students of their lives so that their lives remind them of their learning. This learning is then transferred from where it's gained to where it's used. It's learning for living [BL41], it's infinitely reusable [BL33], and it's ready for anything.

Enabling grasp is no pushover. Few are in a better position than educators to do it (23/01/2015 pp. 26-29). But convention pushes them for prescribed performance, and meta-learning doesn't lead to ready-made prescriptions. Indeed, students - having learned hold-and-let processes - might let convention go.

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meta conversation

So - with no ready-made answers, to unforeseen futures, in ready-for-anything flexibility - how can the conversation go? A conversationally-worded version of career-learning [BL28] opens up some wondering...
in **finding out** - wondering...

'what's going on?'
'am I being pushed?'
'held back?'

in **sorting out** - wondering...

'why does it matter?'
'what can I be sure of?'
'who's involved?'

in **checking out** - wondering...

'who and what is important?'
'why?'
'what can anybody say and do about this?'

in **figuring out** - wondering...

'what will I say and do about it?'
'with who and about what?'
'how will that work out?'

There's no prescribed endpoint here. But that doesn't exclude evidence of outcomes. A feature of creativity [BL47] is an unwillingness to allow the past to control the future. And some versions of resilience thinking show how impatience damages the process. Similar losses are found in work-life where there is unresisted control. And creativity is found to depend on the very ambiguity that impatience represses. In positive terms this means that new thinking is enjoyable. So, could joyousness be an outcome of education? The question is worth asking because teachers are reported to find the curriculum 'staggeringly dull' (17/07/2015 pp. 6-7). I wonder whether Ofsted knows about this. Or whether a conversation about grasping uncertain futures with no prescribed anchorages calls for a greater breadth of mind.

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grounded help

And having no ready-made endpoint does not consign grasp to a social vacuum. Meta-learning works in social settings - agency, church, museum and more. It is a grounded network where people apply grasp to life.

professional thinking [BL29] can here re-examine the help it offers as part of a range. But what most count are students' ideas about who in that range is worth calling on - or not...

> there are formal outfits claiming trained expertise...

- **careers services** - often what people first think of, but seriously under-resourced, providing information to identify work-life possibilities
- **careers education** - delivered as 'lessons' in schools and colleges, though variable in materials and in designated staff
- **mainstream education** - where educators get to know students over a prolonged period, including the few who can link learning to experience
- **colleges, apprenticeships and universities** - offering opportunities to compete for improved life chances, and for adventures with new people

> in some outfits the offer is supplementary to core commitments...

- **churches, mosques, synagogues and temples** - based on deeply-held and detailed principles, and sometimes more diffusely spiritual
- **community agencies** - often with links to education and sometimes voluntary, with an understanding of local conditions and experience
- **libraries, museums, galleries and collections** - where visitors gaze at what fascinates, look for more, find surprises and buy reminders

> some on-line outfits are professional, some fun, some irresponsible...

- **career websites** - often careers-education-based and digitising its material, some of it interactively diagnostic
- **dedicated websites** - setting out specific aspects of career experience, usually in narrative form and for interactive use

- **social media** - on-line exchange of impressions and advice, including career concerns, which may be poorly informed

Different sources are familiar to different people. But each is <u>designed to help</u> - formally or informally. Some do more harm than good. Some are <u>under threat</u>. So students need to be savvy in their use.
This is not comfort-zone stuff. Nothing moves until students find help worth holding onto or contacts needing to be let go. And that's troublesome, because it turns things on their head - whatever information, advice and guidance there may be is conceived by students and offered to helpers. This is not convention: meta-learning enables students in a life-long grasp of agency - and that agency can be for reform.

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5: DIRECTION

Change is not what it used to be. Once upon a time humanity learned to live with change brought about by such innovations as migration, cities, telescopes, print and industry. Each brings crisis, and we deal with it by seeing things differently - and doing accordingly. But that *was* change-after-change, this *is* change-upon-change. Today's crises simultaneously ride on massive increases in commercial leverage, dizzying technological advance, and constantly repositioning cultures. It's been called a '<u>crisis like no other</u>'. Sociology characterises it as <u>liquid modernity</u> [BL16] - the imagery is of evidence drowned by celebrity, reflection sinking in impatience, and producing a pathetic splash compared with consuming.
The imagery of clinging on was never more apposite. It's true that we <u>mostly learn from failure</u> [BL50], and that now means learning to stay afloat in the backwash of change. Careers work cannot, so to speak, duck this. And in the resulting conversation convention will find few twentieth-century answers to twenty-first-century questions.

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finding chaos

There's no shortage of career conversations - lots of talk. Conventional wisdom positions walking-the-walk ahead of talking-the-talk. It's wrong - we need the talk to signpost the walk. So what might students find worth talking about? Careers work has a good lead on this; looking for student's signposts by inviting them to talk about...

'...songs, movies and stories - I'll never forget'
'...memories - that bother me'
'...dreams - that keep coming back'
'...experiences - that surprise and excite me'
'...what somebody said - that makes me think again'
'...surprises - I find hard to forget'
'...people I've met - like I've never met before'
'...new possibilities - that have just come into view'
'...pressures - that are hard to resist'
'...people - that I could never let down'
'...relationships - that I'm beginning to question'
'...promises - that I won't break'

Until such talk been heeded the conversation has no starting point. Listening to <u>what is going on in a life</u> belongs to thoughtful careers work. But not to all of it - and there is some jostling for position. <u>Cognitive behaviour therapy</u> and its variations pursue one-off mind control rather than enduring understanding. <u>Career coaching</u> speaks only of individuals and winning. <u>Psychological constructs</u> use expert insights to shape individual memories. <u>Chaos theory</u> is a newcomer, boldly taking on change, but bolstering practice in an alliance with psychological constructivism. The publication of that chaos-alliance has been welcomed as <u>'the book we've all been waiting for'</u>. Not by me.

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managing chaos

When psychologists run out of things to say about career they'd do better turning to sociology than to chaos theory. Physics increasingly sees chaos theory as a fad. And, anyway, the unpredictable is not necessarily chaotic and feeling chaotic is not the same as being chaotic. But the chaos-alliance plot-line wins converts - chaos feels like hell and psychological constructs look like salvation.

But it ain't necessarily so. There's no case for upgrading chaotic feelings to chaos theory. The alliance is right to acknowledge chaotic feelings. But the narrative needs more than psychological constructs offer. A convincing narrative [BL35] speaks of both individual and shared experience. Chaotic feelings stem from a spectrum of the who-what-how-when-and-why of what's going on. And there are people in there, doing their thing. So both psychological and social constructs must feature.

But social constructs can't count on a good press - identity politics don't like them. Anyone defending the rights of gender, race and sexuality see social influences as entrapment. Actually the evidence is better balanced - socially acquired beliefs [BL28] are not bound to mislead, and individually held beliefs are not bound to be reliable. Emerging evidence shows how we need to be clearer about race and class interaction. Some dangerously dare to confront the confusion of race and class. Too dangerously? Worth talking about? Because any conversation coming out of this spectrum must face the pushes and pulls of all its dynamics.

None of this can bring a halt to change-upon-change or dissolve chaotic feelings. But it can release the depth and breadth of an independently-minded, critically-thinking and creatively-engaged humanity. And that will call on both psychological and social constructs. The conversation then becomes less about experts developing career, and more about students managing career. The insights that count speak of the feelings they start from, the hope they look for, and the purposes they find. Their management of these let-go-hold-on processes transforms entrapment into release. Students become their own life-enhancing researchers - as well as agents of change.

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space and credibility

This is no hit-and-run agenda. It expands the reach and grasp of career learning. It confronts chaotic feelings, bad news and deception. It enables the transforming use of all such confusion. It releases independent, creative and critical thinking into a change-upon-changing world. And it processes a troublesome but necessary hold-and-let process. It overtakes convention and engages reform.

This is learning that can only be acquired stage-by-stage [BL28]. Students trial methods, gaining a tangible sense for what needs to be done. Real-time practice connects learning to living. Rehearsed tactics gather feedback to sharpen ready-for-anything flexibility. These are heavy-duty demands on educators, who need to be in position to design programmes and make them happen. It means establishing credibility with colleagues and students, and alertness to the significance of students claiming their rights and finding fulfilment. Not every teacher is like that. But this work doesn't need a recruited many, it's looking for a committed few - with their expanding repertoire for action.

This reform is widely applicable. The hold-and-let process may be most engaged by the decade-upon-decade experience of older people. And it is particularly applicable to people for whom blame-upon-blame has squeezed out all ambition [BL26]. But we must fully round out the range of applications. And that means calling on the future altruism of the self-excluding, whose past engineering has given them minority advantage at majority expense. I think that would count as reform.

This work needs more time and space than convention, from its marginal position, has been able to find. It needs the knowledge, commitment and credibility [BL47] that can only come from mainstream curriculum [BL21].

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sensibility and sense

It's no doddle - this kind of bothersome thinking is best set out as narrative [BL35]. And educators can find any number of images. The well-written ones intrigue: like the pretty as courageous; the victim who changes everything; bad news as loss and gain; entrapment that brings release. These are stories that rise above cliché and engage year-on-year questioning. They belong to a curriculum for reformed careers education. But where in curriculum? Conventional thinking looks for links with science, technology engineering and maths

(STEM). But narrative thinking links to history and literature [BL15] - history for its cultural perspectives, literature for its personal proximities, both asking...

> '...what sense are these people making of their lives?'
> '...what sense am I making of these people?'

Few storytellers better pose such questions than the creator of Elinor Dashwood. Her narratives recount cultural and personal sensibilities - telling of a culture that can't let go of gentility, and a gentility that can't take hold of opportunity. For Elinor hope needs unforeseen chance to realise a longed-for-life. The story still works because, in both yesterday's and today's cultural enclaves [BL41], there are hold-and-let entanglements. My early-life theological training drew heavily on history and literature. It persuades me that these two disciplines might be where light is most usefully thrown on what can be learned from religion - and what can't. In all events, history and literature is where curriculum pushes at conventional boundaries, welcomes surprises and risks offence. It's where well-written accounts illuminate experience. And if, for some, it points to STEM then that will be a more reliable signpost - not bowled over by persuasion but realised by discovery.

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which way forward

The chances of survival rest on two make-or-break questions. From a long-ago savanna to a barely-recognisable high-street people need to know...
> 'what's going on?' ... and ... 'what can anybody do about it?'

Survival is more likely when causes are identified earlier, so that effects can be based on them later. This is horse-and-cart thinking. - things work out better that way round. But not everybody sees things that way round. People who think they already know what to do harness their horses to jump the causes and gallop in pursuit of effects. The trouble is that it's the causes that are present realities; the effects are merely future constructs. Any other talk is evasion.
And evasion need to be managed - which, the evidence shows, entails manoeuvring [BL50]. That evidence is of obfuscating facts, capturing support and - if all else fails - telling lies. Part of it recounts devious economics-politics collusion. Conventional thinking has found no way out of the mess. Its allies in commerce and politics trot out answers to questions they've never bothered to ask. This is obstructive and needs to be let go. Establishments position their influential windows over decades - in the UK the 80's saw a massive and sustained re-alignment of priorities. But there is no correct alignment. The window outlines the sort of society that the politics needs the electorate to favour. This is not rectitude, it's manoeuvring.

Reform looks elsewhere - among agencies which are neither politics nor commerce but civil society [BL33]. Those interests are best represented by locally-rooted and in-touch stakeholders [BL29]. And contemporary stakeholders speak of changing expectations [BL22] concerning what can and should happen. People are learning to see things differently, triggering new ways of managing change [BL37]. And in contemporary change-conditions - needing ready-for-anything flexibility - independence-of-mind, critical-thinking and creativity are essential to reform.
The argument is an extension of decade-by-decade thought-and-action. A version begins with matching [BL74] people to destinations. Its listing of information allows the assignment of an individual to what is judged suitable work. But, early on, thinking acknowledges the dynamics of social groups engaged in community-interaction [BL28]. And that calls for an understanding of how social links, set up in families and neighbourhoods, feature in what people do. That thinking then calls for an understanding which can deal with growing complexities, triggering learning theory[1] as a progressive thought-and-feeling process. It enables people for self-propelled career management in finding and negotiating fulfilment in life. But both community interaction and learning theory are most convincingly expressed in narrative [BL69] terms. People find more sense in recounted stories than in collated lists.
Research-and-development is unstoppable. So we should not be surprised to find a process for interrogated what, in all this, is worth holding onto and what must be let go. Reform is an assembly of thought-and-action in support of ready-for-anything flexibility. And that calls for more than a single test of validity. But, whatever the test, it can only be administered by stakeholders. It's a local call, because the curriculum is community property.

The thinking poses two supplementary questions concerning community realities and possibilities...

'...what works for how things are?...'
'...and what does not?'

They are hold-on-or-letting-go questions.

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post-script

What I say here draws on learning from my students. They give us moments we can't forget. I taught sociology in all-through state comprehensives, during the 60's. (I could be Michael Gove's worst nightmare.)

For good reasons it's better that you know about those influences on me.

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[1] Chapter 3 in A G Watts, Bill Law, John Killeen, Jennifer M Kidd and Ruth Hawthorn (1996) *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance - Theory, Policy and Practice.* London: Routledge