

Reimagining Higher Education as a Learning Experience

Reimagining Higher Education as a Learning Experience:

Another Way

By

Edward Brooker

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Dedicated to Charyl and Naomi

Thank you for your continuous support and feedback

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PREFACE

Every trail has its end, and every calamity brings its lesson. As a wandering flaneur, I recognized my world as a text that is in continual need of re-reading.

I just completed a 10,000 km road trip, a journey which reminded me of how travel informs us at so many levels. Our experiences are enriched when we encounter new people and new perspectives. We discern what is important and what is not. Every trip has its finish, or as we would say in Marketing, every product has its life cycle. What we mentally bring forward from the journey is the key souvenir. We learn from the calamities.

One does not go to college to learn how to travel. It is a learned experience. So why do we still hold onto the belief that college is an education experience, where students are expected to forgo the aforementioned? The question's response is predicated on six interrelated factors which impact our approach to teaching and learning.

The following narrative challenges you to journey alongside the author as I take you on an unconventional journey which endeavours to take you up and down, around curves, ignores posted signage, brakes, when necessary, but also provides the ultimate look at unforeseen vistas. By the end of the book, your perspectives on higher education may be quite different from that at the start.

PART ONE:

CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION - AN ODE TO FREEDOM

We build too many walls, and not enough bridges.
—Isaac Newton

Just, Un-Just, Ad-Just, Re-Adjust

Knowledge is like fish. It doesn't keep well, yet once the mind seizes it, it clings to it like lichen on a rock. We hold on, perhaps too long, to information or facts as we see them. In so doing, we often neglect to consider an opposing, let alone differing opinion. Instead, we double down on what we see as right while judging the other as wrong. Didactic, dual thinking.

Information imprisons us, yet we don't see the walls. Our mindsets blind us from considering other options, limiting our output. It's just the way it is.

Broadly speaking, our society inadvertently accepts existing norms, trusting that they are appropriate rather than questioning their validity. Challenging the prevailing orthodoxy is rarely given a fair hearing, either in the popular press or in intellectual periodicals. As a result, those of us who have the audacity to occasionally express different opinions compared to the norm run the risk of unfavourable attention and commentary from various sources ranging from our family, to co-workers and the media.

Consider the word 'just'. We often use the term to refer to our sense of justice – what's morally right and fair. It's reasonable, acceptable. For us, 'just' is about correctness, as in "that's just what I need."

Let's shift from reasonable and justified to its opposite. We simply add the prefix "in" and we are now dealing with 'injustice', originating from a Latin phrase that means "not right, unfair treatment: a situation in which a person or a group's entitlements are ignored."

Adjusting fine tunes and improves while *readjusting* suggests further adjustments are undertaken.

These four words – just, unjust, adjust and readjust – lie at the heart of this manifesto. It questions what, how and why we categorically *justify* our entrenched knowledge and conduct, applied both to ourselves and later to higher education. Note the narrative purposely crosses boundaries to explore two topics, each of which has validity on their own, although a combined review offers collaborating evidence to justify why we, as individuals, and we as supporters of existing higher education practices need to consider interchangeable concepts. By exploring their interactions, we are able to readjust our thinking at many different levels.

Just a Power Battle

This is a book on justice. Finally understanding the totality of a binary decision's overall impact, I speak from first-hand experience on initial injustice, and the subsequent lifelong journey to understand, often through failure, what could be and should be undertaken to adjust, readjust, etc. to finally reach an understanding. In that sense, I have subconsciously held onto information for a great length of time in order to understand the reality of it. Now I want to release that knowledge – so others can learn from it, but also to free my own mind. In doing so, I can prepare myself for new intake, fresh ideas, and put this chapter to bed, so to speak.

You will see frequent references to cycles in this book, although the terminology may differ. Consider an infant's first cycle – birth to nine months old. At this point, children are unable to distinguish any differences between themselves and their mothers. This is also when children develop trust. If the basic needs of nurturing, care, food and love are met, trust is developed on an intuitive level, and there is no place for shame, low self-esteem, or insecurity. If these needs are *not* met in infancy, trust issues evolve, followed by shame, childhood wounds, anger, fear of abandonment, and addictions as the child grows older. This cycle influences the basis of future relationships. The bond impacts, amongst other issues, the individual's relationship with themselves. From a child's perspective, if the parents cannot be trusted, how can the child trust others?

Nine months into life, and a potential power battle begins. Without providing personal details, I was forced to contend with this reality. It's life changing. It's taken years to address.

The upshot is learning to stand up for oneself, albeit through much trial, and too many errors. One becomes acutely sensitive to money, power, control, and privilege. As time goes by, the nuances and the motivations become exposed such that the underlying reasoning supplants the mere details.

We're very aware of various power and control issues. We see those with authority trying to retain influence, even if that means dividing us further. We witness others who want the power and focus their efforts on achieving it. We're aware of people who had the power, and want it back, but also of the powerless clamoring for a voice. The latter was recently illustrated by protestors of government COVID regulations, for example. In many situations, it becomes an US versus THEM battle (see Figure 1). We potentially become the slave, not the master of an impulse.

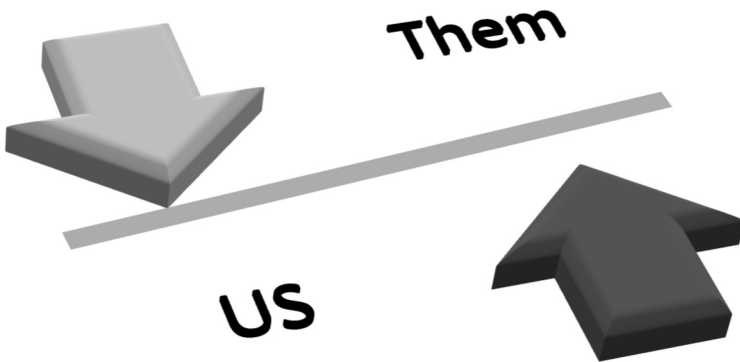


Figure 1.1 Us vs. Them

This narrative is no different, given that various issues are examined from opposing perspectives. A patient reader will come to realize that I am advocating a middling solution rather than an either/or. The dividing line can be reinterpreted as the word AND – Us *and* Them.

The narrative is not shy in asking tough questions, given their symmetry with sandpaper. As such, sandpaper comes with varying degrees of grit,

designed to reduce, if not remove, what may be deemed as unwanted. Certain questions and commentary may finely rub along the existing grain – akin to incremental directional improvements. At other points, the questions and dialogue may resemble a provocateur eliciting agitation, stirring the proverbial pot to bring about a response. The conversation is purposely scraping across the grain, leaving indelible marks, if not gouges. Will the veneer stand up to such actions?

Speaking from experience, going against the grain, regardless of the situation, is often unappreciated. I'm still trying to figure out, although getting better at it, how to express opposing views to what's generally accepted. Therefore, I appreciate and take solace in Michael Coren's comment, "We're made by God to be thinking individuals who want answers, and not robotic creatures who simply obey. Christ turned [his] world upside, challenging the comfortable and the complacent."

Jesus was a disruptor, as were Da Vinci, Luther, Newton, Einstein, and Jobs. They, along with many others who you will meet in the upcoming chapters, illustrate the relationship between interaction, change, and ability. Change is an applied force exerted on inertia. We're all capable of enacting this, but we're too often encased within our own comfort zone, too reticent to drive a market, allowing ourselves instead to be market-driven. The resultant myopia does no good. What if we first of all acknowledged this, and secondly, became inspired to tackle the issue, one step at a time?

This book is written for that purpose. The commentary addresses our collective context, prior to examining six traits from opposing perspectives. We tend to favour one perspective over the other, often because it's the easier way. What will it take to try another tactic? Each step forward should enlighten us to continue the journey where we eventually take a holistic new approach to how we lead our lives. The result would be dramatic. You will soon notice your own hidden criteria to move forward, at your own pace, and in your way. I'm just trying to get you started.

How This Book Came About

Growing up, I harboured many personal questions related to family, career, and control. It's only now that I am able to connect the impact of parental power on my upbringing. It was a different time, yet I discerned a key missing piece to the puzzle of life. Abandonment is too strong, but I will support the notion of temporary abandonment, on several occasions. As a friend frequently comments, "It is what it is."

Authoring this book has been a tremendous eye opener, particularly in the various connections I have made between research from many different disciplines, from ferocious reading of both fiction and non-fiction, and an ongoing curiosity – wondering why I seem to have so many disputes with others.

I now feel as if a film had been taken from my eyes, so that I can see and understand the past, the present, and even the future from a very clear viewpoint. The term, ‘deja-vu’ may be appropriate, for it suggests seeing the same thing as everyone else, but from a very different, unique perspective.

The most amazing discovery for me is that my outlook has not changed much since I was a child, nor has my ability to effectively neutralize those who I discern to hide behind a phantom power. Definite improvement, given my new found knowledge, but still a work in progress. But aren’t we all?

My life journey has included academic highs and lows – having to quit high school due to abysmal academic performance, yet eventually accumulating a series of diplomas and degrees, including a PhD focused on tourism innovation approaches. The educational pursuit for the most part paralleled various family disruptions, extensive international travel, job losses, career changes, part-time/full-time/unemployment, and, through it all, a constant search for self.

At the start of the doctoral pursuit, an academic supervisor suggested the undertaking (started while in my late 40s) would help me make sense of what I had been doing all my life ... searching for other more meaningful ways. It took several years beyond the academic completion to understand and appreciate her insightfulness and the comment’s value. I was able to see how perceptive that comment was. An ‘Another Way’ street sign is now prominently displayed in my office, prompting me to never forget.

Yet now I see how this writing exercise has aided me in making sense of my life. Now retired from my multifaceted professional career, I am in a position to not only share the what, but also the how and why *another way* is so valuable.

In hindsight, I wish I knew then what I know now. A part of me is curious as to what would have happened if ... I had more self-confidence; I had asked more questions; I had understood how to channel anger beyond emotional eruptions; I had never taught at a college; or I had taken up artistry much sooner. These all remain a mystery. Better to make sense of the puzzle and offer up a comprehensive picture of what actually could be.

By picking up this book, I am led to believe that you yourself are curious as to what secrets I can share with you – some which you may already be familiar with, and others which you may not have previously considered. If you patiently contemplate the diverse information, you will ultimately understand how they all link together. The broad evidence should lead you to a deeper understanding of what it is that we do without question, how that causes both short- and longer-term issues, and why it's so important to consider and learn from multiple sources, ranging from nature, the arts, science and business, to psychology and well-being.

This book purposely strays from categorization. It's a call to let go of our crutches, those elements we hold onto to get us through the darker days. It provides multiple choices and numerous exit points, where you, the reader, can stop and wander off and then come back and pick up where you left off. It can be read all the way through but may be best if it is consumed slowly, to enable reflection, to generate questions, to look back to see how this new insight links with what you may already know but have not given much time to. My hope is that we'll share a common ground after your reading is complete.

Why that title?

Although the book's premises are primarily based on connecting human tendencies with our education system, it's important at the outset to stress the value of interdisciplinary thinking. By understanding our own natural tendencies, it becomes readily apparent why the various issues discussed in the upcoming chapters are directly linked to how we perceive and support the status quo. Considerable effort is required for us to come to grips with the key problems (the what), how we got there, and why it's so important to change.

Additional signs are emerging where those in power are beginning to question traditions. For example, Canadian officials are reviewing whether military education needs to be rethought. In the words of a former Supreme Court judge, now may be the time to rethink the Royal Military Colleges' approach to education. She cites similar issues which parallel the findings presented in the upcoming chapters – the colleges appear to be institutions from a different era, with outdated and problematic leadership. Alternatives must be explored with an open mind.¹

¹ Friesen, J. 2021. Arbour report recommends rethinking of military colleges, emphasizing socialization and sexual misconduct. Accessed from <https://applenews/Aw3WEo2--QFeSAdr341-LQQ>

The noted review suggests the need to resist continuous operating systems which have outlived their value. Instead, officials and stakeholders need to embrace the freedom associated with letting go. Freedom represents a goal, an ambition which many of us stop pursuing. For umpteen reasons, we allow ourselves to be a slave, a prisoner. We gasp when we read historic accounts of slavery, human trafficking, or war prisoners, but pay little heed to our own situations where we purposely allow others to control our thinking, our ambitions and our actions.

As Björn Ulvaeus, a member of the musical group ABBA notes, we *allow* ourselves to stave off freedom, independence, and individuality. We're not comfortable wandering off on our own. Why is that? This book addresses that question from various perspectives as the answer does not fit into one box, or category. It's totally personal, yet the traits are commonly shared by so many. The following material is both an ode (albeit a long one) and a call out to freedom.

The ancient Greeks performed an ode to publicly celebrate athletic victories. Consider the following narrative as one that similarly celebrates the victory that's within each of us – the freedom to wander from traditions which have purposely held us back, whether personal or institutional. The writing honours an ode's three-stage format such that the narrative is similarly divided into the beginning (the strophe), the middle (antistrophe) and the epode (the revelation). Within each section, the discussions loop through a similar framework to inform the key relationships between the three aspects.

Ultimately, the goal is for you to sing your own ode to freedom, possibly inspired by what you have read here.

Symmetry underlies so much of the narration, whether the comparison is between a Latin root, a Greek philosopher, a Church reformer, a scientist, an amateur, an author, a poet, a musician, an entrepreneur or a friend. In doing so, I believe the various insights are relatable to you. For example, consider Sir Isaac Newton (SIN) a key scientific figure, particularly in the area of physics – a subject I purposely stayed away from in high school. Many of his experiments revolved around the relationship between inertia, force and changes. Soon, you will see a similar pattern, presented in several, totally unrelated, manners. Enlightenment comes our way when we're prepared to look beyond our own gaze, and see what others are thinking. The symmetry can be amazing. Connecting two disparate subjects creates fresh insights.

Organization

Your journey through the material has been organized to consider the just (context); the injustice (context); adjustments (different tact); and applied readjustments (going forward). Chapters 1 through 4 explain the nuances of the three-stage pattern that underlies so much of what we do and don't do. As such, they're foundational. From there, in Part 2, a volleyball game breaks out, in which six specific attributes – conformity, comfort, convention, clues, imagination, and inquiry are contrasted. Opposing perspectives for each characteristic are presented, or volleyed across a dividing line if you wish. This back and forth continues until each of the six concepts is explained.

Although presented as two opposing tactics, a great fluidity enables us to shift our position on the imaginary continuum, where we may exhibit an offensive stance one moment, followed by a defensive stance the next, depending on the situation. The six binaries should not be interpreted as an either/or scenario. We may be at one end of one continuum, higher on another, and as circumstances change so does our position. Yet the range of movement still provides us with a clear sense as to how we tend to operate.

Part 2 concludes by discussing the value of the continuum's middle zone, prior to applying the established narrative to contrasting traditional higher education with the overlooked learning perspective. As such, the Part 3 dialogue resurrects two vastly different Latin interpretations of education. One is very traditional, as seen in today's colleges and universities. The ensuing chapters focus on how this plays out in career preparation, and the alternative – learning. After considering the valuable relationship between failure and learning, I promote the concept of wandering, prior to examining changes within the higher education system. I provoke the reader to consider the relationship between these newer ideas and how they fit with the prior six attributes. Are we paying sufficient attention to these scenarios?

Part 4 acts as a post-liminal review of what is currently occurring within higher education reform, with various new ideas in play or under consideration. I present a series of provocations which again act as a counter to these initiatives to prod you to consider for yourself whether we, as a society, are pushing enough to improve an historic system. Are we utilizing the earlier described attributes to our advantage?

Purposely, no chapter summations are offered. In keeping with the overall message, it's up to you to determine what was of value in reading a specific

chapter. After all, it's your impressions that are of most importance. In so doing, this approach differs from the traditional outlook.

Ultimately, the material focuses on authority – who has it, how is it used, and why do we allow the other to have our power? Where's our voice? Power is a treasured resource, but those who currently have most of it are becoming complacent, and we seem to follow along despite the opportunity to speak up. The treasure is there for the taking, if we have the nerve, the confidence and the ability to make appropriate moves, informed by broad input.

To find the treasure and its associated freedom, we have to learn to take self-responsibility, to take it step by step, while continually reflecting on where we are and where and how we want to go, while managing what comes our way. In so doing, our focus changes from a potential destination and its perceived rewards to living in the moment, being ourselves, and humming our own Ode to Freedom.

CHAPTER 2

I HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE

Think for yourself, not of others. Think of others, not for others.

Thinking

You may not realize it, but you've lost your mind. I'm still searching for mine. But in that search, I've realized how much I had let someone or something else guide me. I'm sure you're no different.

Perhaps it's time to engage in some creative destruction, employing a new thought process to replace the old one. Well, perhaps that sounds a bit radical, but as I am discovering, there's a huge space between the old way and the really new. My search is essentially outlined here. The writing has aided me tremendously in understanding so much of what I've resisted for far too long.

It's extremely important to think for ourselves. Take the latest omicron breakout. What should we do? After two years of listening to others espouse what we should be doing, it's high time to think this through on our own and use our best judgement. Those with the power have had umpteen chances to get a handle on the crisis, but it's slipped away too often – too many reactionary procedures which collectively, don't provide me with any sense of trust.

This book challenges you to think. I may not ask you direct questions upfront, although I do towards the end, once the overall presentation has been made. Yet, it's my hope that you carefully contemplate the various points raised. Keep asking: Where's he coming from? Is that his personal opinion? Do I agree with the point? Do I care about this? Challenge yourself to pick apart the excuses you've used not to consider something differently.

Ultimately, the material subtly challenges you to reflect on your fears, your comfort zone, your beliefs, your flexibility, your aims, and your line of thinking. It's exactly what we need.

We, as a society, a community, a tribe, and as individuals, need to question our complacency, and how we've allowed ourselves to become so vulnerable to the whims of others. Fortunately, we have many examples of those before us who had little use for the status quo, preferring to think, teach and act in revolutionary ways. They push us to imagine, to question our preconceived ideas as to what is just and unjust. For that we run the risk of being ostracized by others, those who believe they have the authority and power over us. Those who don't like being questioned. Collectively, we need to stand up and push for change – from incremental improvements to radical readjustments. It's beyond one person to call out what's wrong. It's time for action – at both the personal level and in higher education.

A powerful framework

The following dialogue is based on a simple, yet powerful framework, hidden in plain sight, but yet overlooked by most. I first came across the model in my continuing search to make sense of previously undocumented innovation patterns, although the source was based in anthropology.

Arnold van Gennep, was fascinated by regular and significant transitional rituals in a person's life. His 1909 book, *The Rites of Passage*,² documented common ceremonies, including birth, puberty, marriage and death which may differ in detail but share commonalities,. Two important outcomes arise from this work.

1. van Gennep termed the three stages pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal. An interval exists before a change occurs, followed by an open-ended duration where the results of the change are felt.
2. The concept is of interdisciplinary value. While initially situated within the anthropology discipline, its application has near universal use. We therefore find great value in connecting ideas from external sources to aid our own understanding.

Stated differently, the three stages revolve around context, change, and the result. Victor Turner, another anthropologist, further built on van Gennep's work by focusing on the liminal stage. Turner described this situation as betwixt and between, an unusual period of an undefined time length whereby we, at times, temporarily leave our normal status, and invite new

² van Gennep, A. (1909). *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee, 1960, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

possibilities. We're temporarily more adventurous and inclined to try something else.

Existing boundaries change when we're in a liminal space or time. Just think what it's like walking out your front door; inner restrictions are no longer in place, but, rather, replaced by others. The door is the threshold. What happens outside may be very different from what happens inside.

Think about a vacation that you went on. Did you act differently? Perhaps more relaxed? Did you eat differently? Spend your time differently? The liminal enables us to take a break from our norms, to experiment, albeit temporarily, to have fun. Previous boundaries no longer exist. Is it any wonder that college students may be more exuberant during their winter break?

The liminal period may extend beyond a week or two, depending on circumstances. For example, my daughter moved out west for a year, leaving her normal home and work environment to live in a different situation. It's not her first time either. She's lived in Germany as a high school student, and spent a year working in Australia, post university graduation.

Within an educational context, several students take a gap year between high school and starting college – a pause from academia that allows them a necessary break to regain their perspective – to see the bigger picture. Where do they wish to go next? What discipline? New combinations are imagined and possibly pursued.

Liminal represents a threshold, a point of change. It can be a physical, psychological, automatic, or a conscious decision. All change is preceded by an initial context, and followed by a result, regardless of its impact. Inertia – Changing force – Change.

Pixar Animation leverages the same framework

Additional examples illustrating the framework's symmetry are presented in Chapter 4, so for now, let's explore how Pixar Animation relates to this model. To set the stage, Pixar Animation has produced 13 feature films which have grossed \$7.6 billion. The films have garnered multiple Academy Awards for best-animated film along with many other Oscars. Each movie aligns with van Gennepe's framework!

Of course, it's not called that. The movie maker's story telling method clearly follows what is referred to as a Pixar Pitch. I am confident you will pick up the similarity. The Pitch is based on only six lines, which collectively move the film's plot along a context – change – result storyline. Context is presented through two lines which start with ... “Once upon a time”, and “Everyday”.

The film *Finding Nemo* starts with **Once upon a time**, there was a widowed fish, named Marlin, who was extremely protective of his only son, Nemo. **Every day** Marlin warned Nemo of the ocean's dangers and implored him not to swim far away. This plays out for a few scenes until the music changes dramatically, suggesting a change is in the wind. Cue lines three and four.

One day in an act of defiance, Nemo ignores his father's warnings and swims into the open water. **Because of that** he is captured by a diver and ends up in the fish tank of a dentist in Sydney. Of course, we know the tale is not going to end on such a downer.

The last two lines liberate Nemo, turning a negative scenario into a positive one **Because of that** Marlin sets off on a journey to recover Nemo, enlisting the help of other sea creatures along the way. **Until finally** Marlin and Nemo find each other, reunite and learn that love depends on trust.

The six-line framework is not restricted to just Pixar Animation. It represents a simple, yet effective method to relate a story. In a closing chapter, I rely on the method to outline a potentially provocative post-liminal response to the existing context and the need for change within higher education.

Be Cautious, Nonetheless

We like frameworks such as the Pixar Pitch for their simplicity, their guidance, and their widespread applicability. Used properly, they can be effective. But we must recognize our own propensity to rely, perhaps too much, on these models to help us understand reality. Take, for example, the still misunderstood Fixed vs Growth Mindset discussion.

Carol Dweck, a Stanford University professor, differentiated people's outlooks, naming one a fixed mindset and the other a growth mindset. The fixed mindset prefers a status quo approach, while the growth mindset is more open and adaptable to change. On its own, the research is interesting,

if not valuable. The problem arose, and still abounds, where the two tactics are taken as a literal either/or; one displays either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. Unaware of Dweck's research at the time, I was participating in a standardized teacher-training program at my college. It mattered not as to what discipline you were teaching or how much teaching experience one possessed. It was in such a session that a professor, a peer, presented the fixed/growth dichotomy as the either/or approach.

I had trouble accepting this 'knowledge', for it contrasted with what I had discovered earlier on my own. In fact, my colleague and I had just published a paper on the issue whereby academics relied too heavily on binary opposites, ignoring a potential middling space. My attempts to question the lesson were not appreciated, so I reached out immediately to Dweck herself. Within two hours of sending out my query, Carol responded by confirming that, yes, the two concepts are not finite points, but rather represent the end points of a continuum. We often take up a position somewhere between, leaning towards a fixed mindset at certain points, or a growth mindset at others.

Yet the college continued to instruct its staff/students on the either/or approach, an understanding further presented by several authors of business books, who simply repeated the same fallacy. At some point, we all need to question and to stand up for our own beliefs, regardless of how others take such a stance.

I experienced an earlier situation where this same need arose while in discussion with my primary academic supervisor as we reviewed my final doctoral research dissertation. I was a middle-aged individual at the time, a college professor who had studied innovation patterns for six years. During the research, I encountered a previously undocumented innovation level, which eventually became the main research topic. I believed the findings held relevance beyond the narrow context of Australian outdoor resorts. My supervisor disagreed, offering a comment, "No, I think your discoveries are only valid to the context in which they were found." Not surprisingly, just as with the college trainer providing what I thought was misleading information, I ventured out to find out if I was onto something or not. You are now reading the results.

I share the same challenge faced by much more renowned individuals including Charles Darwin and Francis Galton. Darwin grumbled to his colleagues as to how challenging it was to effectively document his

revolutionary ideas, even if they seemed unambiguous and self-evident to himself.

Francis Galton, author of the 1869 classic, *Hereditary Genius*, could also relate to the issue:

It is a serious drawback to me in writing, and still more in explaining myself, that I do not so easily think in words as otherwise. It often happens that after being hard at work, and having arrived at results that are perfectly clear and satisfactory to myself, when I try to express them in a language, I feel that I must begin by putting myself upon quite another intellectual plane. I have to translate my thoughts into a language that does not run very evenly with them. I therefore waste a vast deal of time in seeking the appropriate words and phrases, and am conscious, when required to speak on a sudden, of being often very obscure through mere verbal maladroitness, and not through want of clearness of perception.

Kudos to Darwin and Galton for ‘taking the words out of my mouth.’ It’s taken years to put these various thoughts to paper, given the topic at hand, and teaching within the problem at the same time. Now that I am no longer a professional academic, I have the freedom and the time to put these thoughts, which range from the benign to the provocative, into a format that should be of interest and help to many others. I view myself as the messenger, rather than the oracle; although it is I who asks the question: “Are the presented ideas distinctive enough to have a chance of being correct, in the matter of what clearly divides us?”

I take further inspiration from the English author George Orwell. He writes, “When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, ‘I am going to produce a work of art.’ I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.”³

I trust you will find the read provocative, interesting, and one which catches yourself noting, “Uh, I never thought of that.”

Summary Questions

Where would you position the following two professional golfers within the three-stage model – pre-liminal, liminal or post-liminal? Why? Golfer A

³ McCrum, R. 2009. The masterpiece that killed George Orwell. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/10/1984-george-orwell>

broke a tournament's previous 72-hole aggregate score by two strokes, yet did not win the tournament. Golfer B beat him by a stroke.

CHAPTER 3

AN AVAILABLE TREASURE

Have no fear, I am not mad.

In the first chapter, I suggested the commentary was informed from a wide variety of sources, including classic literature. It appears that power struggles are at the core of so many stories.

The classics were written in a different political climate, yet the nuances are so familiar. One is labelled a madman if one has the audacity to question the status quo. Those who perceive they have the power immediately volley back, questioning why we are so confrontational.

In this chapter, I primarily introduce selected comments from Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, but allow me to first pass on the following from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to explicitly deny that this commentary is the recording of a madman.

The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.

The comment's veracity holds true, both from Victor Frankenstein's perspective, and my own. We're both dealing with daemons and demons.

The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas presents a compelling story of a young man's ongoing revenge efforts directed at three people who contributed to his undeserved prison confinement. The 1840s tale, inspired by a real-life case of false imprisonment, is an interchange between suffering and retribution. It's a dark, sometimes meandering, tale that just keeps you guessing.

The story is still relevant today, over 170 years later. The actual connection, though, is secondary to the implied tool just used. Do you see it? Perhaps you were confused as to why this chapter starts by reviewing an old novel. What's that got to do with what was just discussed? It's the novel's unexpected similarity to this narrative, including commentary noted in the first chapter. Symmetry plays a large role in understanding the puzzle we're trying to address.

"Monsieur, I have to admit, I am bewildered: on my word, I have never heard of anyone speak [or write] as you do." The sentence reverberates in my mind given its resemblance to comments I often received from business students enrolled in creativity and innovation courses. In their words, they'd 'never' had a teacher who presented in the style that I did. For some, the open approach was quite uncomfortable, despite the course subject matter. They were so accustomed to being told what to do, how to do it, and to just do it.

I was fully aware that I was teaching from the edges, imploring students to think on their own and to express their own views rather than regurgitate what others have said. On occasion, an associate dean (a revolving door situation) expressed concerns that my tactics did not align with the ten-year-old syllabus. Pointing out that it was a Creativity and Innovation class, which should allow for some differentiation, held no sway.

Looking back now, I wish I was able to relate the direct tie between the course concepts and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. But yet I sell myself short, for I introduced various fictional materials (without proper authorization) to showcase the interconnectivity of various independent sources which had no apparent relationship to each other, or the course per se.

Although it's a fine line to cite external quotes too often, I found Dumas' book helped articulate the value of lifting, shifting and adapting ideas to help one's cause. It's a basic tenet within innovation. A particular scene within the novel, where the key character finds that there's a second incarcerated prisoner, was very helpful to me. He's described as being on the verge of going insane given that he's hidden a treasure elsewhere but no one is aware of its existence. He thus wants the 'new' guy to find it. It's up to you whether you want to believe me. Ditto!

A treasure exists

The word treasure originates from the old French *tresor*, meaning something of great worth. It's akin to holding a winning lottery ticket or learning of an unexpected inheritance. It could also be a goal, a valuable experience, a specific learning or a newfound freedom. However it resonates, it exists within the liminal state. Perhaps it *is* the liminal situation. After all, liminality is an unconventional, unconstrained point in time in which we are free of normal demands and routines.

Enlightenment (the Treasure)

The treasure could be interpreted as an enlightenment – a new way of thinking, which manifests different behaviour. It's akin to kicking biases, false beliefs, unverified knowledge, and wrong practices to the curb, allowing you to see the world with fresh perspective. Believe me, it's a fantastic experience!

As a psychological concept, it's the ability to acknowledge life's circumstances including:

- accepting others
- understanding the truth about life
- peace with death
- differences and negative experiences
- low anxiety and depression
- overcoming chronic problems.

It simply means being able to see reality as it is. It's getting rid of lots of baggage, other pain points, inhibitions, and biases. It frees you up!

Our prize is often found at the point where we stumble. Overcoming our worst dreaded scenarios – our fears, is possible, if that's what we want. We 'simply' have to focus our attention on overcoming the hurdle.

A poignant example was recently provided by a radio show contestant who 'won' the opportunity to address ten broad ranging questions within a 60-second period. Each correct response was worth \$10; if all ten were correctly answered, the prize jumped to \$1,000. Unfortunately, the young man messed up more often than not, so promptly excused his performance given "his unawareness of stuff that does not pertain to him." His disinterest tripped him up, but in this case, it may linger if excuses continue to be