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Negotiating Capabilities: A New School Design for Transition to Work

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Introduction

Young people injured by schooling and broken post-school transitions are often regarded in deficit terms as not having the skills or attitudes to succeed and to be managed into work or training. Their lifeworld experiences, their relationships, and the knowledge, and skills they draw on to navigate their circumstances are made invisible by formal education systems, with a view they need to be managed across a range of different institutions to gain an income and access to education and work. Within formal education systems, it is becoming taken for granted that school doesn't work for some students, with an increasing emphasis on developing alternatives to mainstream school. The number of new forms and conditions for alternative provision is growing, within an increasing number of independent schools and training facilities being established that have no connection to mainstream educational institutions.

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Rather than developing a comprehensive understanding of school detachment and exclusion and school reform, education and schooling systems continue as though the post-school pathways are smooth travelling and well signposted. For all young people in Australia, the transition from school to stable work and positive community participation is taking longer, is harder to negotiate, leaves them vulnerable to issues around income and housing and can affect their mental health (OECD, 2016). This can also be true for young people who have completed schooling, have a vocational qualification or are graduating from university (FYA, 2018). However, for the young people who were already vulnerable because of interrupted or unsatisfactory experiences at school, the transition can be an unfolding disaster as they face complex issues and conditions in negotiating housing, an income, mental health, relationships and—for some—substance abuse. These issues can cascade and threaten to collapse their lives (Dooley et al., 2000) and test their networks, their resilience and their resources.

In Australia, the Commonwealth Government has outsourced youth services for income support, training, employment, housing and mental health issues to a range of non-government and government providers. Young people must negotiate a baffling range of compulsions, obligations and different agencies to be eligible for a substandard income (DESE, 2019; Walsh, 2019). While some are lucky to have connections to family that help them negotiate the worst of the down times, others—through lack of options—are forced to stay in family environments that are under stress. Some young people must do it alone, others rely on friends who have gone through the same maze to help them. Many are caught up with behaviours that see them fail the mutual obligations and mandated requirements that allow them to access income, training and even food and housing (Savelsberg & Martin-Giles, 2008). No matter how they negotiate this space, they are deploying knowledge and skills that come more from experiences of adversity than from a clear well-signposted post-school pathway.

Many of these young people share common experiences of lives being disrupted at home and in the community. These disruptions have been played out in their experiences of formal schooling. Negotiating schooling was difficult as they moved or were moved from school to school, and

from mainstream schools to alternative education sites that go under a range of names depending on the state, the local or the non-government organisation that auspices their placement. Even after complex negotiations of the many and varied flexible learning options that these young people undertake, many find themselves out of school, having to make a transition into work and community life (Bills & Howard, 2017). After years of being 'done to', they are left to negotiate the world on their own.

For many young people, the promise of 'leaving school' means being free to make adult choices in the world and to have a greater degree of control over their time, work and how they spend their money. For those with broken transitions, this idea of freedom is curtailed. In exchange for income support they trade certain freedoms and are managed by others into a world of mutual obligations and petty humiliations that limit the choices they can make. The learning programmes, brokerage and training that the young people are managed into, carry a deficit view of young people, their lives and experience (Bessant, 2002). The choices offered to them are punitive, low-level, tick-the-box exercises that assume that they need to be coerced into activities.

The policy discourse that blames young people for their unpreparedness for work positions them as lacking the capabilities, competencies, soft skills and, latterly, twenty-first-century skills that they 'need' (Rainie & Anderson, 2017). Capabilities and competencies are positioned as individual attributes that can be taught and will equip young people to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century (ACARA, 2020). A more expansive rendering of capabilities is needed if we are to understand the young person in relationship to the society and circumstances within which they find themselves.

The capabilities approach of Sen (2010) and Nussbaum (2011) proposes an education whereby all young people have the freedom to choose a life that they have reason to value. Placing education in the wider context of a global society, Nussbaum contrasts the curriculum for economic enrichment via 'basic skills, literacy, and numeracy' with that of a curriculum for human development that 'will promote the enrichment of the student's own senses, imagination, thought, and practical reason'. The young person's freedom to choose a life of value derives, in part, from developing the skills and knowledge to have impact on their own lives

and those of others and being able to realise their capabilities in a society that values them and recognises their connection to each other. Nussbaum outlines three capacities for the health of democratic citizenship: critical examination of oneself and one's traditions, understanding as oneself as part of a heterogeneous community and through engagement with the arts, and a capacity for sympathy. She writes, 'Instruction in literature and the arts can cultivate sympathy through engagement with many different works of literature, music, fine art, and dance' (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 7). Developing a more expansive notion of capabilities opens a rich conversation between young people and the world. The capabilities seen in this way are not individual attributes, but the freedoms needed to choose a life of value to themselves.

The young people I spoke to in my study of young people's experiences of an alternative school all had an idea of a 'better life' that put sustainable relationships at the centre of their pursuit of work and further education. Their freedom to pursue the 'better life' was curtailed because their capacities to explore their lives and their futures had been constrained by being excluded from school. In this chapter, I will draw on this study to examine the curriculum and pedagogical challenges faced by alternative sites in engaging with the changed lifeworlds of the young people in the twenty-first century. This is urgent work. Governments and education systems are in the process of creating a separate alternative education sector that is fragmented and without a conceptual framework of education for these young people. I begin by providing an overview of the changing landscape and marketisation of alternative schooling in Australia. I then explore, by way of a case study, the tentative steps of an educational startup that I call 'StartUp Co', and how the staff at this site responded to the lives of these young people on the edge. I then outline the use of ethnographic portraiture as a tool for bringing the lives of young people to the fore in my exploration. This is followed by portraits of two of the young people from my larger study in order to begin to understand the work that needs to be done to engage young people in a more expansive view of capabilities.

The Landscape of Alternative Schooling

The landscape of alternative schooling in Australia is changing. Changes in school funding incentivise the establishment of alternatives to mainstream schooling. There is a significant shift away from state education provision to the development of more independent schools. Historically, alternative schooling had its heyday when there was a positive shift to a more humanist form of education in the early 1970s. Community schools, established by coalitions of parents and teachers, were developed as alternatives to a narrow, paternalistic, exclusionary education. These community schools were not primarily for students who failed school, but places where parents could look for an education that nurtured their child's development (Hill, 1967). By the end of the century, community schools had either disappeared or had evolved into sites for students who were not experiencing success in mainstream schooling (Short, 2011).

At the end of the twentieth century, as school-leaving ages increased and the youth labour market collapsed, schools looked to find alternative curriculum and, in some cases, alternative placements for students who were not pursuing entrance to university. Further changes in the youth labour market, the subsequent rise in school-leaving age and the pressure on schools to present a positive image, saw an expansion of alternate sites (Te Riele, 2014). In Australia, all State government jurisdictions had provision for young people under the age of compulsion to continue their education in non-mainstream sites in variously named Learning Choices or Flexible Learning Options. Ad-hoc or disparate arrangements were codified in South Australia under the umbrella of the Innovative Community Action Networks–Flexible Learning Options (ICAN–FLO) programme. The ICAN-FLO programme arose out of the new progressive government's social inclusion brief as an initiative to increase retention. After ICAN was disestablished, the FLO programme remained. Under the FLO programme, students were removed from mainstream school and were supported by a model which sought to address underlying issues through personalised case management and brokering of learning options (Bills & Howard, 2017).

In addition to public schools developing alternatives to the mainstream, there was a growth in independent schools that were established for the same cohort of students under specialised assistance schools funding. A specialised assistance school enables Federal funding for a 'non-government school in a State that has been, or is likely to be, recognised by the State Minister as a special assistance school, and primarily caters for students with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties' (Schools Assistance Act, 2008, p. 5). The Association of Independent Schools of Australia writes that specialised assistance schools 'provide alternative educational settings for students with high-level needs and cater for students with disability, as well as students who are at risk, have behavioural difficulties, or whose needs are better met by flexible learning structures that may not be available in all mainstream schools' (AIS, 2020).

More than fifty special assistance schools were established across Australia in the five years between 2015 and 2020 (https://asl.acara.edu.au/). One of these new specialised assistance schools—StartUp Co—developed from a youth employment programme, and was established as an Independent Specialised Assistance School in 2017. StartUp Co was established to cater for students who had been unsuccessful in negotiating the gap between schooling and stable employment and community life. Though aimed at young people who have been out of school for a year or more, StartUp Co is funded as a school. StartUp Co was at great pains to point out that it was a school but different. This aligns with research that finds alternative sites are usually small and community based and emphasise relationships and personalised 'hands on learning'. They can offer a range of engagement activities including Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the Australian and State-based senior school curriculum and accreditation. Most often they define themselves by what they are not, taking pains to differentiate themselves from a school (Down & Choules, 2011; McGregor et al., 2015).

StartUp Co

StartUp Co began life in 2006 as a short-term training course for the retail and hospitality industry. Supported by a philanthropic trust and designed by a social entrepreneur, its early mission was 'to provide life-changing opportunities for disadvantaged young people through a range of leadership, employment and enterprise education programs' (Kernot & McNeill, 2011, p. 231). The core of the programme was to link with business and to treat the young people as employees undergoing training, rather than regarding them in deficit terms. The programme was successful in leveraging the contacts to place young people in work, but ongoing follow-up with the young people placed in employment indicated continuing problems negotiating stable and successful transitions.

The Principal/Director of school suggested that while the course was supportive and provided mentoring, many young people continued to find the transition to work difficult. Issues around mental health, substance use and home and family instability resurfaced after a month or even six months in work, and they were unable to sustain their employment. The Principal/Director began to look for a sustainable model of long-term education and care for this cohort of young people. The idea of a school was mooted with the philanthropic board and was developed over the next eighteen months.

After considerable preparation and negotiation with both Federal and State bureaucracies, StartUp Co was able to secure funding as a specialised assistance school. The acceptance of StartUp Co as a specialised assistance school was key to its financial sustainability. StartUp Co had to satisfy the State authorities that it met all the criteria to qualify for registration as a school in the State—a premise, sustainable finance, governance, safety provision and the capacity to offer a comprehensive curriculum. In addition to the State registration, to qualify for specialised assistance funding it needed sign-off from the State Minister for Education that the school would 'primarily cater for students with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties' (Schools Assistance Act, 2008, p. 5).

Portraiture as Advocacy

Portraiture, the written portrait of the success story, figures significantly in the stories of alternative education sites. It appears as a standard trope of alternative education and is used by the sites, the media and supporters to build the programme and highlight its 'life-changing' effects. These portraits tell the story of a young person overcoming the odds by virtue of engagement in the alternative programme and are presented as an indicator of the general success of the programme rather than the story of one of the programme's successful participants. This standard trope of the young person who says—as one in my study did—'I probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for this school' shouldn't be discounted, but neither are they the stories of everyone in the group. If we are to advocate for those excluded from schooling, we must examine the lived stories of all the young people engaged in alternative sites, away from the bright light of the success story, and look at the lived reality of their relationship to education in context.

In proposing advocacy-oriented research, Smyth and McInerney (2013) write:

> If we want to understand the human impact of social exclusion and educational disadvantage, we should start with the lives and histories of young people, especially those most alienated and left behind by their experience of schooling. (p. 4)

Methodologically, they propose a critically engaged portraiture that brings to the fore the voices of those made invisible by the sterile use of retention and achievement data.

For the young people in my study, experience of school was of a place that they didn't fit in; where the choice of an education and learning was closed to them because of the choices their schools made and the choices they made. They were not innocent dupes without fault, but neither did they need to be denied an education because of those choices. I wanted to explore their lives to advocate for them and, in following the injunction for a critical ethnography of youth, I wanted to explore their past lives, their present lives and what could be done differently in

relationship to their education. The single school in my ethnography was in a continual state of coming into being. It was attempting to do things differently for those that had been treated unjustly.

I conducted my ethnographic research at StartUp Co two days a week for thirteen months. When asked, I explained my work as telling the story of StartUp Co through telling the story of the young people involved. In telling the story through the portraits of the students, I want to advocate for change by involving the voices of the usually disenfranchised in helping to reframe the issues that they face from a different perspective (Smyth, 2016; Smyth & McInerney, 2013; Willis & Trondman, 2000).

My tools were the standard kitbag of the ethnographer. I spent large amounts of time with the students, sometimes on the edge observing, other times within the groups and group works. I participated when asked, but at other times tried to remain silent. I made field notes. I took photographs inside and outside the building. I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews, interviewed some participants in pairs and held two focus groups. Throughout all this, I reflected, threw ideas up against the wall, tested them against theory and spoke openly about what I was seeing, thinking, reflecting and trying to make sense of the lives of students as they came into this new organisation that was coming into being (Willis, 2000). I was trying to find the emergent themes in the experiences of those involved. The themes emerged through developing the portraits of the young participants at StartUp Co in context and trying to derive from that an aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

I wanted the voices of the young people to be what drove, not only the representation but also the analysis, the discussion and my conclusions. The spatial context of the school, the street and the city, play a large part in the story, but that discussion is for another time. For this chapter, for the sake of brevity, I have chosen two of the portraits. The portraits are partial representations of the two students; they are unique to those students but carry echoes and sometimes rhymes of the other young people in the study.

Portrait: Lindsay

Late in an Australian November it's warm and sunny. The large windows at StartUp Co make the upper floor of the old red brick Edwardian building that houses the school light and airy. Lindsay is, in her words, a 'big personality', but that big personality masks anxiety that made her feel isolated in large schools and made her pine for the community that she felt she had in primary school:

> [Primary school] only had about 120 kids. It was lovely community school; I grew up with everyone. I know everyone's parents, if I was sick, I knew that like [a friend's] parents would come over to pick me up from school, because we all … that community was amazing … And it taught me so much and being removed from that messed me up a little bit.

The transition from a small primary school to a large super-school was traumatic for Lindsay and involved rebellious behaviours. After doing 'a lot of things I shouldn't have done', she was moved on to another school. Here, she found her way of negotiating school was to withdraw.

> I hid myself in classrooms. I wasn't supposed to be in the, like, out-of-bounds areas. I knew where there was power points that I could charge my laptop. And you know, Year 12s used to give me the, like, Wi-Fi password. So, I could go on YouTube, like nothing was restricted. And that's where I spent all my time and I wouldn't work and they said, well … there was a day I also got caught doing illicit drugs on campus.

Rather than deal with the underlying issues of her disengagement—the acting out behaviour and the drug use and withdrawal—the school decided that an alternative placement in an FLO programme would be a 'better option'.

> Um, well, I before I came here, I was in a little bit of a tough spot. I was at a FLO Community Learning Programme …CLC programme. Yeah, it was a bit of a joke. So, I was there when I was living at my parents. And when I was kicked out of my house I continued to try and work through school at the FLO programme and was not getting me anywhere.

Though she was out of home and denied choice in schooling, Lindsay lived a rich life in the city's music scene. She is a talented musician and was feted in the alternative music scene. Anxiety and relationship breakdowns interrupted that choice.

Her initial thoughts on StartUp Co were not positive:

> I actually applied for this school … I think it was a job opportunity because it was on SEEK.[1] And I thought, 'Okay, there's some kind of youth worker thing. 17-year-old to 24-year-old'. I'm like 'such a weird youth worker age range, for sure'. And I applied and they sent me an email. I thought, 'Why not—I'll give it a shot'. Like, it's another school. My school isn't doing good at all. I came into the interview, and I just thought, like, this sounds like the FLO programme.

But having decided to give it a go, Lindsay found that sense of community that she had at primary school

> Everyone has the space to be their individual character, which I feel like is a beautiful part of the community. It's character building getting to know everyone on a personal level.

Portrait: Axel

Axel is always a presence; he is not only quick to anger but also quick to express it. Tall and slim, always in movement, he has an internal energy that seems to know no peace. Though he can—and does—yell and shout, he is not seen by the others as a threat, and in his quieter moments enjoys a strong relationship and friendship with the others. He is trying to straighten himself out—he has successfully negotiated a life without drugs but that has meant some tough compromises in his life; moving back in with his parents, being careful around old acquaintances.

His anger goes back a long way into his schooling where assumptions were made about his abilities, interests and talents based on his demeanour.

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[1] An online employment marketplace.

Let's say that they put me in the wrong classes—classes that I didn't want to do I wasn't interested in. The more classes they put me in that I wasn't interested in the more it just deterred me from wanting to go to school. I was wanting to hang with my friends at Beachside High School.

…I was just going there to see my friends and then go and mess around in class. Yeah, heaps of suspensions … They were gonna send me to another school for a couple of months, it was that full on … say yeah … multiple suspensions and whatnot, right? It was not the best.

He was given a choice of exclusion or placement in an FLO programme. He would have liked support to get his driving licence, but FLO did broker an apprenticeship, but that didn't work out.

They put me on to FLO, then FLO they just didn't they didn't help me get what I wanted. They got me an apprenticeship and once again I was … it was just the wrong timing. I was too young and doing stupid shit still. So just didn't work out unfortunately. Which is annoying. But yeah. Okay.

Unable to finish his apprenticeship, he continued in employment in the hospitality industry until injury and a bad experience in the workplace. He sees StartUp Co as chance to continue the process of straightening out his life. Getting his higher school certificate would be good but that is not the major motivation

I want to change because I don't want this negative outlook on life. And, you know, I don't want to have this constant attitude and battle with myself trying to be a good person, or happier person … But yes, just on … on a change and whatnot. And that's also why I'm here because it's learning how to socialise with different people and they've got connection to the counsellors and whatnot so they can set me up with them. And they should help me sort of understand what's going on in my head and whatnot so kind of get understanding as well and what's going on my attitude and that so that's helping sort of as brought? the attitude down a bit and I first started was pretty bad. I'd just yell out of people whatever I thought yeah, that's what I mean by that is just a small step, steps. You know, hopefully, by the time I leave here, without showing me that I can't have the attitude I have.

Put in FLO

Rather than deal with the underlying issues that Lindsay and Axel presented, the schools pushed the problems and the students aside. Both of them talk of a complicated movement from school to school or being shifted within school and between programmes. For both, the end of their 'school journey' ended with them being 'put in FLO', a network of independent placements and casework under a broad Education Department alternative enrolment policy. Both Axel and Lindsay talked about engaging in behaviours that were in opposition to the good running and order of the school. They were problems that needed to be managed. Decisions on how to manage that behaviour were made in the best interest of the school. Axel and Lindsay were denied any agency or choice; what choice they were given was coercive. Neither the school nor the alternative to school offered them a place of learning or a place where they fitted in.

Lindsay and Axel had difficulty negotiating a place where they fitted and their experience echoed in portraits of other students. Fitting in is more than just having somewhere to be, it is about being accepted, and the adversity of your life and identity being accepted in that space.

Fitting In

Lindsay and Axel found out about StartUp Co through different routes: Axel through a friend who had been through the pre-employment course, Lindsay thinking it was a training course for Youth Work. But what was pivotal is that they decided to 'give it a go'—they exercised agency rather than being placed.

Axel and Lindsay were held in high regard as friends, mentors and colleagues, despite Axel's temper and Lindsay's frequent absence. They had an easy relationship with others in the group. Axel's opinions were carefully thought out and expressed, and though at times they were loud, they were valued because they were oppositional to the prevailing norm. Lindsay's big personality was valued, and she was missed when she wasn't

there. Both repaid this relationship to the rest of the group, namechecking other students they related to and paying tribute to the group. Lindsay describes the journey of finding a community:

> I can't stress enough how this place has made me have faith again in schools because the school that I've been to—such a huge school you can't get to know anyone. Everyone in it is separated and it's weird and I felt I barely knew anyone. It was just very … and then going from City Edge Voc, where I was isolating myself, and FLO where I was, I was crumbling … to a place where I have a community now. To a place where I can go knowing I have friends, like, even if you know five people, I can go to school and have a conversation with anyone.

Axel understands the difficulty faced by the others and knows that, if they are not focused, he will lose focus too:

> Students … I get along with a few of them … a fair few of them. And I think they like I can see them being potentially good friends. But still, there's a few that aren't as switched on or as focused as what they should be. Everyone's got their own problems and things going on their head, but I just wish that everyone was a bit more focused on where they want to be, where they want to go, that sort of thing. Yeah, so um, yeah,

In their present position at StartUp Co, Lindsay and Axel have found a community where they are accepted and where they accept others. They fit in, and for them now fitting in is the most important thing. StartUp Co has accepted them and brought them into a space that is modern, well set up and honours their decision to be there. The transgressions of anger and absence are still there but are issues to be worked on rather than reason to move them on.

Lindsay and Axel have re-engaged with schooling as a way to choose a better life. In their current experience, they have 'found their people'. They feel they have a place and a community where they are regarded as important. At StartUp Co, Axel and Lindsay have access to adults who are concerned for their wellbeing. They have access to counsellors who can support their mental health so they can take advantage of the opportunities available.

Axel's story of falling out of his apprenticeship, which is echoed by many of the students with experience in work training and further education, demonstrates that an emphasis on the vocational is not enough. Lindsay followed her passion into the music scene and found a place there and was feted but did not have the capabilities to sustain that, demonstrating that following her passion and being entrepreneurial won't be enough.

Engaging in Education

Fitting in and finding a place of belonging are important to both Lindsay and Axel, but they both want more out of being in a school. Both report frustration with the learning programme that is in a continual state of flux as the school seeks to respond to the lives of the young people who access the programme. The school began with a clear idea of the learning programme and what it would achieve. The StartUp Co curriculum started out as a 'job and more', moved through a period of 'enterprise with purpose' and then an emphasis on wellbeing and positive mindset— all within the framework of the senior school accrediting authority.

The rapid prototyping and creative destruction that marked it as a new educational start-up looked disorganised and chaotic to Axel and Lindsay. This continual remaking of the curriculum happened in response to the needs of the young people enrolled, but it was constrained by the institutional framework of the State's higher school certificate accrediting authority, which is outside of the control of StartUp Co. The Higher School Certificate and VET frameworks within which StartUp Co must work were designed for a different purpose, a different 'grammar of schooling' and a different cohort of students. Without a wholesale reexamination of the curriculum and pedagogical tools that alternative sites can use, we are forcing them to use inadequate tools left over from the system that young people have already rejected.

Axel and Lindsay are real people. Their lifeworlds and their desire for a better life must be brought into the curriculum in order to move them from the immediacy of finding a place where they fit in, to finding a place in a wider community where they have agency and can exercise choice.

The 'ethic of care' that is at the heart of StartUp Co has offered Lindsay and Axel a place and time to develop connection with adults, but primarily with other people in the 'same boat as them' (MacGill, 2017). What StartUp Co has struggled with is defining a curriculum and pedagogical purpose that goes beyond care (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016). Lindsay and Axel put that down to the fact that StartUp Co is new and still finding its feet, but StartUp Co is in the 'same boat' as the many alternative sites that strive to provide a place where those injured by the system can receive an education in a style and manner that suits them. What defines success in the FLO and Learning Choices programmes is hard to elicit. Beyond the individual success stories and observational reporting of improved wellbeing, what is meant by success is opaque. These small alternative sites seldom produce the Higher School Certificate or VET outcomes that their students need to make real choices towards community involvement. Destination outcomes are hard to find, and so success is measured by anecdotes of improvement and self-reporting of wellbeing.

To demand that these sites comply with the same frameworks designed for mainstream educational and training sites is to leave Axel and Lindsay vulnerable. The alternative sites such as StartUp Co are small and responsive to the needs of the young people who access them, but they are independent and fragmented, and to expect them to carry the weight of curriculum and pedagogical redesign themselves puts too much on the shoulders of small independent providers. As the demand for alternatives to mainstream education grows, the universities, curriculum authorities and the State and Federal education departments need to work with these sites to examine the curriculum and pedagogical work that needs to be done so that Lindsay and Axel are able to access an education that enables them to negotiate successful transitions.

Your Image of the Young Person: Where Teaching Begins

Lindsay and Axel have found a place where they matter, where they can gain a sense of community and where they feel they have found their tribe and are supported by caring adults. What they haven't found is a place where the things that matter to them have a place in the curriculum. Where alternative sites feel free to challenge the relational issues that push Lindsay and Axel to the edge of schooling, they have not yet fully challenged a curriculum that follows those things that matter to Lindsay and Axel, and developed the pathways to a more liberatory curriculum. Lindsay and Axel need a place where, as young people coming into the world, they are extended the full rights of the society and the right to imagine to pursue a life of value to themselves.

The Reggio Emilia project in early childhood was born out of a resistance to fascism and was consolidated in opposition to the propagandised curriculum of the communist-run early childhood centres. Writing towards the end of the twentieth century Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia project, presented a seminar on *Your image of the child: Where teaching begins* (Malaguzzi, 1994). He outlined the need for the school and the teacher to establish the environment and develop the relationships within which the child could experiment and find their own way and meaning. He saw the importance of care but that the role of the school and the teacher goes beyond care, to a more liberated future:

> What we have to do now is draw out the image of the child, draw the child out of the desperate situations that many children find themselves in. (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 4)

One way of drawing the child out of the desperate situation many children find themselves in is to allow them the full citizenship and rights in life and society which include the 'right to imagine'.

The mainstream schools had an image of Lindsay and Axel that denied them a place in the environment and relationships that made up the school—their 'desperate circumstance' defined them, and their

citizenship and rights to share in the life and society of the school was denied. Lindsay and Axel deserve a place that recognises their 'right to imagine'.

They have a right to imagine a better world and a better life for themselves and need the support and the pedagogical approach that helps them realise that world. This is a complex pedagogical and organisational challenge and one that can be out of the reach of schools like StartUp Co that are, in effect, small independent businesses. The small relational school is a necessary addition to our schooling provision to serve young people in their right to imagine, and it needs to be constructed as an integral part of the schooling system, not an afterthought where children fail into. The small relational school though, needs a curriculum that is rich in democracy and experience.

Arts-based practices are central to the realisation of the child as a competent citizen in the Reggio Emilia approach. The Atelier, the artist's studio, is a fundamental part of the Reggio experience. For Lindsay and Axel, arts-based practice will support them to imagine and realise a better world. Their Atelier is the community, the city in which they work and their arts-based practice, planned, purposeful and reflective, should become part of a curriculum and active involvement in the things that matter to them in the community that leads to a meaningful accreditation.

> [T]he humanities and the arts make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as equals, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favor of sympathetic and reasoned debate. (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 13)

The humanities and arts are essential for Lindsay and Axel to ground their learning in their experience of life and imagine something beyond that. Anything less will leave them out of full citizenship.

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