Kristin Elaine Reimer · Mervi Kaukko · Sally Windsor · Stephen Kemmis · Kathleen Mahon *Editors*

Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All

Volume 2: Enacting Praxis for a Just and Sustainable Future

OPEN ACCESS

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Kristin Elaine Reimer · Mervi Kaukko ·
Sally Windsor · Stephen Kemmis · Kathleen Mahon
Editors

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Volume 2: Enacting Praxis for a Just and Sustainable Future

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Acknowledgments

This is the second of two volumes that seek to explore the critical question for our era: 'What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?'

The *World Worth Living In* project, across these two volumes, connects 30 individual studies—focused on praxis, wellbeing, social justice, and sustainability—conducted by thoughtful and creative researchers in six countries, all of whom are associated with the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP) network. In each study, researchers listen deeply to a range of individuals and collectives as they respond to the above question.

We wish to acknowledge with gratitude a vast range of people and communities who have allowed us to listen to—and learn from—them in this volume. We acknowledge the wisdom of:

- Aboriginal elders and knowledge holders in Australia
- Australian school-aged children
- Swedish school principals
- Young people in alternative education settings in Australia
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- Mature-aged students entering Australian university through alternative pathways
- Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early career teachers
- Primary school students from migrant backgrounds in Finland and Australia
- Australian families experiencing divorce and separation
- Norwegian teacher education students living in the Arctic
- Australian Muslim students
- Australian early career teachers entering 'hard-to-staff' schools
- University academics in Australia and Norway.

Thank you for helping us think through—and act into being—a world worth living in for all.

This work is only possible thanks to the sustained activism, commitment, and scholarship of the members of the PEP international research network and their

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You can learn more about the people and projects in the volumes through the Education for a World Worth Living In website (https://www.monash.edu/education/wwli), A World Worth Living In podcast and the World Worth Living In YouTube channel.

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Chapter 1
Foreword by Dr Uncle Stan Grant Senior

Stan Grant

Abstract From birth, I grew up on Wiradyuri Country, and I am endlessly grateful to my grandfather, *Budyaan* Wilfred Johnson, for teaching me many things, including the language of our Ancestors. He was a strong cultural leader and a strategic genius who had a long-term vision for the recovery of his people. Despite being jailed for speaking to me in Wiradyuri, he went on to teach me (and my brother Cecil) away from the settler colonial authorities who would incarcerate him and remove us from our family. Today, our language is being used to quietly heal and rebuild the lives of our people so they can once again care for Country and raise strong, healthy, vibrant families.

Keywords Wiradyuri · Wiradjuri · Yindyamarra · Country

Recovering from the impact of settler colonialism requires all kinds of ingenuity, dependability, and to always think universally, to *think in Wiradyuri* and *plan intergenerationally*, not letting the demands of the day prevent us from doing the work.

Budyaan's influence meant that, as adults, we could fall back on the principles and instructions of our Old People. We could rely on the wisdom embedded within our own Wiradyuri view of the world. More than 65,000 years of unbroken, intergenerationally transmitted knowledge and wisdom is a pretty good asset for keeping our nation's strengths, and encouraging our young people to live according to the

Readers may note that in some places in this Foreword, the word 'Wiradjuri' has been used although in most places Uncle Stan uses the spelling 'Wiradyuri.' Speaking about their own chapter in another book, Lloyd Dolan and colleagues (Dolan et al., 2020) explain: 'Wiradyuri and Wiradjuri are used interchangeably in this chapter and refer to the same nation in Central West NSW. The Gunhigal Mayiny Wiradyuri-Dyilang (Plains people of the Wiradyuri) do not pronounce "j" and instead use "y." So when the material referred to in this chapter comes from this area, "y" is used. Otherwise "j" is used.' The spelling 'Wiradjuri' has been used in this Foreword when the original sources used that spelling.

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principles and concept of *Yindyamarra*: to be good and respectful listeners, and to look for the resonances within the Elders' teachings to help the young people address the challenges of today.

A practical example of this is the film *Yindyamarra Yambuwan* (Respecting Everything). It is a creative and innovative collaboration with me and other Elders, as part of Sullivan's (2016) Doctoral research with Charles Sturt University. The film brings to life our Wiradyuri concept of *Yindyamarra*, challenging many misconceptions. Through deep respect, our Wiradyuri philosophy reminds us of our responsibilities, it teaches us how to organise relationships and most importantly how to care for and connect with country. (The video can be accessed via: https://vimeo.com/140548913.)

We are using language and cultural lifeways to rebuild the architecture of our nation to meet the demands of modern society. In 2019, my sister Flo put it like this: 'we are rebuilding our language to rebuild our people, and we are rebuilding our people to rebuild our nation, and we are rebuilding our nation to rebuild our Country'. So, what are the principles and values we use to do this rebuilding work?

Through my family I was taught how to live a good Wiradyuri life.

Luckily, my grandfather knew that the loss of our language would be bad for all people, and this would have a catastrophic impact on our Country. Somehow, he knew that if we lost our language, we would not be able to *think* in the Wiradyuri way. If we lost our language, we could lose our own way of talking, and telling our stories, and singing our songs, lose our ceremonies, and lose ourselves—because our language is our life, it teaches us how to be respectful, polite, honest and gentle, just the way our Ancestors intended us to be (See Grant & Rudder, 2010, 2014, for more on Wiradjuri language). *Yindyamarra* is a Wiradyuri concept that must be lived out through our actions, it implies a state of being that means to be properly Wiradyuri we must be respectful, be polite, be kind, and give honour, and do things slowly and thoughtfully in order to live a good and productive life, including how we relate to and connect with Country. It's as simple as: Healthy COUNTRY = healthy people!

So, obviously, if we want to transform our practices then clearly, we must transform our thinking and if our practices are made up of our sayings, doings, and relatings, as my friend and brother Stephen Kemmis (and others) tell us in this Volume, *Living well in a world worth living in for all: Volume 2: Enacting Praxis for a Just and Sustainable Future*, why do these things matter so much? From my Wiradyuri worldview, I must be able to think based on Wiradyuri concepts such as *Yindyamarra*, which is framed from a Wiradyuri Indigenous Australian cosmological perspective rather than from the perspective of a Western, settler colonial mindset.

In the free word order of my Wiradyuri language, our foundational frame is one of an unchanging (although manipulatable) network of relationships. Of all the places I've been and all the places I've travelled, Indigenous people all appear to place a very high value on relationships and identity. We think about relationships with other people, with the spiritual world, with place, and with the things in the living and natural world.

I believe Wiradyuri people belong to Country. People talk about ownership, but in the Wiradyuri world, Country owns us; it is not the other way around. We are part of it. We are deeply connected to it, and to all the life that unfolds on it. We

are part of a web of connections that encompasses all its living things. That web of connections also embraces many features in our landscapes: rivers, mountains, valleys, and pathways along which our Ancestors and our forebears travelled through the land.

I belong to Wiradyuri country; it does not belong to me. I do not 'own' it. It is the core of my being. I come from it. All Wiradyuri people come from it and belong to it.

At the heart of Wiradyuri knowledge is the idea of *Yindyamarra*. It is at the core of Wiradyuri life, and the relations of Wiradyuri people with themselves, each other, all the living and important things on our Country, and all the people who come to our Country. *Yindyamarra* is the seed that bursts into Wiradyuri life; it is the guide for Wiradyuri living, in Wiradyuri language, culture, and heritage.

When the seed of *Yindyamarra* germinates and grows, it can be seen in people acting respectfully, listening, observing, being patient, being thoughtful, and being deliberate in thought and action. Although people's actions have some consequences that are good, and some that are bad, *Yindyamarra* teaches us that we need to pursue the good and do what we can to avoid or prevent the bad. *Yindyamarra* also recognises that no one acts alone. We are always living parts of the community of life on Wiradyuri Country, among places that are bursting and brimming with significance—some made significant by the Ancestor-creators of Wiradyuri Country, and some in the many thousands of years of history since the Ancestors travelled our Country, naming the world and giving us the law by which Wiradyuri people should live.

And, Reader, you come from your own Country. Everyone's roots are in some place, somewhere. You may not be aware of the power and significance that bursts into being there, but they are there to be discovered if you open your ears and eyes and heart and mind.

These two volumes about *Living Well in a World Worth Living In* connect profoundly with themes that are part of the idea of *Yindyamarra*. They explore what it means to live well, and what kinds of worlds are worth living in, for different people and different places around the world.

The specific words 'living well in a world worth living in' express an idea that is very ancient and express part of what the Wiradyuri words *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* mean. Those words do not translate directly into English as 'living well in a world worth living in'. The phrase in English simply captures a part of the spirit of Yindyamarra.

From 2009 to 2015, I worked with Rozzie Brennan Kemmis, Stephen Kemmis, Professor Ross Chambers, Donna Murray, Deb Evans, and many others on the Charles Sturt University's (CSU) Wiradyuri Language, Culture and Heritage Program Committee. In those years, guided by the Wiradyuri Council of Elders, the university aimed to assist Wiradyuri people in their project of Wiradyuri cultural heritage recovery and development, in addition to language recovery and development—the language work and the teaching of the language that have been such a big part of my life in the last thirty years. When my sister Flo was the Chair of the Wiradyuri Council of Elders, and representatives of CSU were trying to find words that might convey part of the meaning of *Yindyamarra* in relation to CSU and its connections

to Wiradyuri country and culture, we agreed that these words seemed to capture the University's statement of its intended ethos, '*Yindyamarra Winhanganha*—The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in'. The phrase joined together the spirit of *Yindyamarra* and some English words that express the purpose of education.

It is a pleasure to write this Foreword in the knowledge that, around the world, people are trying to find ways to live well and to find ways to bring into being worlds worth living in.

That is what we have been striving for here on Wiradyuri Country for hundreds of generations. *Yindyamarra* is at the heart of the movement which is now reviving Wiradyuri language, culture, and heritage, and contributing to Wiradyuri Nation-(Re)building.

This movement stretches beyond Wiradyuri Country. In the global ecological crisis, people everywhere are finding their connections to place and to the community of life. It is a moment in which people everywhere can all reach out to each other, from our own places, to revive and renew the webs of relationships between peoples, and the global web of life.

Knowledge that we are living parts of that web is at the heart of the notion of *Yindyamarra.* Western understandings of ecology now also recognise this interconnectedness and interdependence.

These books—the *Worlds Worth Living In* volumes—are contributions to an international conversation about education for a better world. I hope that this conversation can be conducted in the spirit of *Yindyamarra*: attentively, thoughtfully, and with respect, to nurture people and the world's community of life.

At 84 years of age, I am travelling down the final journey of my life now, and I feel like I have lived a good and productive life. I can sit here in my armchair and smile, with *Yindyamarra* in my head and my heart. With *Yindyamarra* re-orientating the lives of my people, I am grateful for my life which has been of service to others. Finally, I am endlessly grateful to my beautiful wife Betty, who made it possible for me to do this work. She is the absolute embodiment of *Yindyamarra.*

I hope in some way *Yindyamarra* can live in your life too, or perhaps encourage you to look back in your own story and find your own version of *Yindyamarra* to support your personal and professional journey of living well, in a world worth living in.

Mandaang

Uncle Dr. Stan Grant (Snr, AM)

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Stan Grant Sr, AM is an elder of the Wiradyuri Nation of Indigenous from what is now the south-west inland region of the state of New South Wales, Australia. The grandson of an elder who was gaoled for speaking his own language, Uncle Stan now teaches the Wiradyuri language to students. Among many other books and resources, with Dr. John Rudder, Uncle Stan published A New Wiradjuri Dictionary (2010) and A Grammar of Wiradjuri Language (2014). Uncle Stan was named a member of the Order of Australia on June 8, 2009, 'for service to Indigenous education and the preservation and promotion of the Wiradjuri language and culture, as a teacher and author, and to youth.' In December 2013, Charles Sturt University awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Letters in recognition of his work with indigenous communities. The University's Vice-Chancellor, Andrew Vann, said '[Uncle Stan] has made an outstanding contribution to Charles Sturt University's regions, especially to Indigenous communities … As an Elder, author and teacher, he has made an outstanding intellectual contribution to our communities. His deep involvement in the introduction of the University's new Graduate Certificate in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage program in 2014 is a clear demonstration of his work.'

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Chapter 2
Introduction: Drawing the Future into the Present

Stephen Kemmis, Kristin Elaine Reimer, and Kathleen Mahon

Abstract This chapter introduces Volume Two of a two-volume series based on the double purpose of education: to help people to live well, and to help create worlds worth living in. Like Volume One, this volume presents stories that have emerged within a 'listening project', an international empirical project aimed at understanding different perspectives from various parts of the world, from children to adults, from across diverse communities, on what it means to *live well in a world worth living well for all*. The project especially pays attention to perspectives that are often marginalised, silenced, or somehow lost in the busyness and noisyness, power struggles, and preoccupations of our contemporary world. The chapter provides background information about the project and a glimpse of what the stories in the contributions in this volume reveal. It also highlights some of the important ways in which the experiences and perspectives shared in the contributions reflect a strong sense of agency, urgency, and hope, both in the face of personal, local, and/or global challenges *and* in people's everyday efforts to actually create the futures they imagine.

Keywords Double purpose of education · Living well · Worlds worth living in · Logic of hope · Agency · Praxis

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For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6gqEy8a5GSyLy721djJpkI?si=42d6cdad8abc4001

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We live in a time of tumultuous transformation. Conditions for the whole community of life on Planet Earth have been altered by climate change; we now live in the cataclysm of a climate emergency. Social and political conditions necessary to sustain human life and human rights are being ravaged by wars of aggression—including the October 7, 2023, attack on villages in Southern Israel by Hamas militants from Gaza and the devastating Israeli response it provoked, and the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022. Climate change and wars drive forced migrations of millions, bringing waves of dispossessed refugees to safe-haven countries. Social movements multiply in response to injustices everywhere, as happened, for example, in Iran with the protest movement ignited by the September 16, 2022, death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, held by Iran's morality police for improperly wearing her hijab. In the USA, social movements have flared into existence around injustices such as the shooting deaths of Black men at the hands of police and vigilantes (#BlackLivesMatter), and the sexual violence associated with #MeToo. These movements have resonated with people and communities worldwide and moved beyond national boundaries. Within nations, political polarisation is spreading, not only in formerly social democratic nations and political unions (e.g. the European Union), but also in places where politically conservative or religiously fundamentalist groups have risen to oppose the moderate conservative, liberal, and progressive regimes that seemed relatively settled at the end of the twentieth century. In some parts of Europe, far-right political groups are waging a kind of war on migrants and multiculturalism gripped by regressive illusions of national and cultural (and even racial) unity. In the USA, polarisation was amplified by the 2016–2020 Presidency of Donald J. Trump. Among its many manifestations, Trump's 'Make America Great Again' conservatism precipitated a majority-conservative Supreme Court that, in its decision in *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health* (2022), overturned the constitutional right to abortion that had previously been established by the Court in its 1973 decision in *Roe v Wade*.

Some of these kinds of upheavals may seem to be beyond the control of everyday people; nevertheless, it remains true that human beings are both drivers and victims of most of the transformations that destabilise contemporary life.

In our troubled times, some people feel trapped, claustrophobic: that the world is closing in on them. Many feel disturbed, despondent, or depressed in the face of an unsettling global reality. Where twentieth-century modernity promised peace and prosperity, the twenty-first century has instead brought uncertainty and vulnerability. We find ourselves in the jaws of history at a moment of immense *disruption*.

And yet some profoundly human resources remain vital and amplify in the face of such challenges: the power to change things—*agency*; the commitment to act—*urgency*; the recognition that things *can* be better—*hope*. In 2018, then-15-year-old schoolgirl Greta Thunberg started the Friday Climate Strikes in Sweden that soon multiplied around the world, sweeping hundreds of thousands of school activists into the streets to demand immediate action for intergenerational justice and to save the planet. This volume gives voice to a number of people who, though not as famous as Greta Thunberg, also demonstrate agency, urgency, and hope in our current times of disruption: people who *live* agency, commitment, and hope.

Harvesting New Presents from Imagined Futures

This book is Volume Two of a series about the double purpose of education: helping people to live well in worlds worth living in (described in more detail in Chapter 2 of Volume 1; Kemmis, 2023). Volume One focused on present practices; the editors' intention was that this volume would focus on future practices. It turns out, however, that contributors to Volume Two have described futures that they and those whose voices they have listened to are already bringing into being through their research and educational action.

They have not deferred possible futures by envisaging them only in terms of things to come; on the contrary, by taking thoughtful, committed practical action in the unfolding present, they are already grasping, claiming, engendering, and realising transformed futures.

The research program that has yielded these volumes on the theme of 'worlds worth living in for all', began in 2007. It is part of the work of the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP) international research network, which has initiated and conducted a 16-year research program aimed at understanding the notions of 'pedagogy', 'education', and 'praxis' as they are interpreted in the different intellectual traditions from which we come, including in Australia, the Caribbean, Colombia, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, and the UK. Participants have joined the program in order to examine the extent to which educational praxis (informed, morally committed action and history-making action; see Mahon et al., 2020b) is currently being enabled and constrained by living and working conditions within and across our participating countries *in practice*—and, in particular, in practices of teaching and learning, the professional development of teachers, leading and leadership in education, and educational research and evaluation (e.g. Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2020a). This wider research program frames the 'worlds worth living in for all' research program, of which these two volumes are products. The larger PEP research program has *descriptive*, *analytical*, *critical*, and *transformative* aims. PEP seeks to critically grasp and be active in transformatively changing the current realities of education and schooling in our countries. The 'worlds worth living in for all' volumes are intended especially to be contributions to the aspiration to *transform* education for contemporary times and circumstances.

The *World Worth Living In* project is not a unique enterprise. It is a continuation of a debate that has been in existence for thousands of years. It was evident in Greek antiquity, for example, in Aristotle's works *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Politics* from the Fourth Century BC. But it appears in other guises in other traditions also. In the Foreword to this volume, Uncle Doctor Stan Grant, Senior, Elder of the Wiradjuri Nation in Australia, briefly explains the Wiradjuri concept of *Yindyamarra*. *Yindyamarra* embraces being deeply respectful, observing carefully, deliberating wisely, acting with commitment and caution, and being aware that all things—human and non-human—are connected. His family gave permission for the use of the phrase in the statement of the ethos of Charles Sturt University in New South

Wales, Australia (largely on Wiradjuri country): '*Yindyamarra Winhanganha*—The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in'. In Chap. 1, our Foreword, Uncle Stan says

> The specific words 'living well in a world worth living in' express an idea that is very ancient, and express part of what the Wiradyuri words *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* mean. Those words do not translate directly into English as 'living well in a world worth living in'. But the phrase in English does capture a part of the spirit of *Yindyamarra.*

In our times, another advocate for ideas like 'living well in a world worth living in' can be found in Gert Biesta, for example, in his (2022) book, *World-Centred Education.* It is not a surprise, then, to observe that, around the world, systems of schooling work diligently to prepare rising generations to participate in the lives of their societies. School systems often focus especially on preparing rising generations for participation in economic life but most also aim to prepare citizens for active participation in the social and political life of their nations. Many intend, additionally, to prepare people to be environmental stewards capable of maintaining and enhancing sustainable forms of life in and with the community of life on Earth, along with the geophysical systems that sustain life.

But this intention can also be riven with tensions, contradictions, and contestation. As *institutions*, schools and other educational institutions are intended to nurture the *practice* of education. Philosopher MacIntyre (1981, p. 181) argues, however, that institutions are intended to nurture the 'internal goods' of practices (like the goods of knowing the past that only the practice of history can accomplish, or the good of health that practices of medicine aim to accomplish), but institutions can also threaten practices, since they are preoccupied with 'external goods' like money, power, and status. Similarly, Mahon et al. (2020a) suggest, contemporary school*ing* sometimes—often—fails in its aspiration to nurture the practice of education. The people who manage and administer the institutions of schooling have a surfeit of ideas about what rising generations need to know and do, at every level from preschool to tertiary education, and thus impose exacting and 'overstuffed' curricula on teachers and students. Under such circumstances, the deep, delicate human engagement necessary for education is dislodged by curricula, pedagogies, and assessments that function as surrogates for individual and collective human development and flourishing.

In an era of schooling, education risks being diminished into repertoires of instrumental strategies and techniques for accomplishing what curricula, pedagogies, and assessments control and regulate *within* the institutions of schooling (at every level), frequently to the point where they disengage from the everyday lives and circumstances of students. Under such circumstances, schoolwork becomes a form of alienated work that alienates students and the work of school learning (Lave & McDermott, 2002). And, under such corrosive circumstances, schoolwork becomes a form of *artifice*—*artificial* education—that displaces *authentic* education undertaken in the interests of individuals and societies, the biodiverse community of life on Earth, and the geophysical processes necessary to sustain life on Planet Earth.

In response to such challenges, the contributors to these volumes are intentionally re-awakening the practice of education within and beyond the institutions of schooling. In doing so, they do not offer a detached, ‘anthropological’ view of what the people involved in their respective projects think a world worth living in might be like. On the contrary, they show how they are building partnerships to transform those worlds and thus bringing new worlds into being. They collectively make those new worlds real in the everyday lives of those with whom they have built those partnerships.

The Logic of Hope

A *logic of hope* suffuses the stories of worlds worth living in captured in this book. This echoes the logic of popular culture and song that invoke different worlds: worlds of comfort and pleasure that transcend servitude and pain; worlds of beauty, belonging, and love that transcend ugliness, alienation, and hate; worlds of democratic unity and peace that transcend division, dissension, and strife; and worlds in which social participation and social movements allow people to transcend the suffering and injustices of existing social orders, the establishment, the *Ancien Régime.*

This logic of hope impels a sense of agency for the actors in the stories told in this volume: an urgent commitment to make not only enabling and fulfilling individual lives but also enabling and fulfilling shared societies. The logic of hope has alerted them to their own powers of individual and collective history-making. They sense its dangers, but they grasp and overcome them rather than settle for current distorted ways of thinking, distorted material circumstances, and distorted ways of relating to others and the world. More or less hesitantly, they are coming to understand that they can create worlds that might dislodge the distorted worlds they will otherwise inherit. Their words not only evoke but also invoke transformed worlds. Their actions hesitantly bring new worlds into being, to be lived, through changed ways of doing things in the here and now, and to realise more humane, caring, just, and democratic ways of relating to others and the world.

The same kind of logic impelled the philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer Omar Khayyam (b. 1048 AD; d. 1123 AD) of Nishapur in Persia in the time of the Seljuk Turk empire (O’Connor & Robertson, 1999), who wrote (FitzGerald, 1889/1965, p. 200):

Ah Love! Could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits – and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s desire!

We might note, in passing, that, towards the end of his life, Khayyam was regarded as suspect, perhaps heretical, by the strict conservative Sufi Islamic religious leaders of the time. Forced to retreat to his estate, he lived out his days in

seclusion (Teimourian, 2016). Today, Khayyam's Persia is part of Iran, where the conservative theocratic regime is now suppressing the thousands of contemporary Iranians who protest the death of Mahsa Amini.

The Organisation of This Book

The contributions to this volume reveal a variety of different ways in which the logic of hope is expressed, and how it is translated into reality by different groups in different places and circumstances. Like the first volume, *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All: Current Practices of Social Justice, Sustainability and Wellbeing*, this volume presents the findings of what Kaukko et al. (2023) described as a 'listening project' (p. 4). This volume also presents the findings of researchers who have deeply and actively listened to babies, young people, and adults to hear (or with the babies, infer) their views and perspectives about worlds worth living in, which improve on our current worlds in one way or another. Like Khayyam, they too envisage 'grasp[ing] this sorry scheme of things entire', 'shatter[ing] it to bits—and then, Re-mould[ing] it nearer to the Heart's Desire'.

Most chapters report research with children, young people, or adults who shared their insights into what a world worth living in is and can be. In doing the research, the researchers entered engagements with these people in which they envisaged and evoked worlds worth living in, in ways—in the human and social interactions that constitute the research—that realised in practice the forms of recognition and respect that participants regard as features of worlds worth living in. The researchers approached their task with a kind of humility; a recognition of the danger of presuming to know how other people are viewing and experiencing the world, and of presuming that an understanding of other people's stories can be complete or neutral. As you read these chapters and their stories, you will hear resonances of the three themes we mentioned earlier: the participants' power to act—their *agency*; their commitment to action—*urgency*; and their belief that they can bring better worlds into being—*hope*.

In Chap. 3, Rauno Huttunen and Hannu L. T. Heikkinen challenge us to think about wellbeing from an expansive, more-than-human perspective. A world worth living in for humans, they write, must also be a world worth living in for the rest of nature; we cannot make false separations or hierarchies between the human and the rest of nature. The chapter introduces a new interpretation of praxis as planetary wisdom: 'deliberative human action, aiming at human wellbeing which is acknowledged to be intertwined with planetary wellbeing, including the wellbeing of present humans, future humans, and non-human nature' (p. 21). Education needs to take this planetary perspective so that we can ensure there is both a present and a future.

In Chap. 4 Katina Thelin and Anette Forssten Seiser invite readers to join them in engaging with the future by exploring the notion of living well in a world worth living in for all from the perspective of school principals. The authors ask Swedish school principals, who they regard as 'important promoters of educational as well

as civic change' (p. 31), not only to consider what this expression means, but also the part they play in the realisation of a world worth living in for all in local school and pre-school settings. With the help of the theory of practice architectures and 'Theory U' (a theory of transforming the future by learning not only from the past but also the emerging future; Scharmer, 2018), the authors highlight ways in which the 16 principals participating in their project both understood their roles, and were, in varied and important ways in their ongoing and emerging practices, making the world better and enabling others to do the same. The chapter includes principal reflections on how the project itself inspired action aimed at realising the aspirations alluded to.

In Chap. 5, Fiona Longmuir explores the views of high school students at an alternative school in Melbourne, Australia. The students had 'internalised the micro-aggressions' (p. 45) they had previously experienced in mainstream schools whose structures and practices excluded them, in effect 'disenfranchising' them from education. Longmuir uses Appadurai's notion of 'capacity to aspire' to frame the way this alternative school engaged students by making sensitive, supportive, and tailored pedagogical responses to their individual circumstances and needs. Listening was central to the teachers' work: encouraging students' voices to discover ways to ignite and sustain their agency. In turn, the students reported that their voices were heard, and their needs and circumstances were taken into account. Longmuir says, 'In this alternative education setting, central tenets of relationships before rules…, student voice (even when dissenting), and agentic choice making were foundational to repairing the damage students had experienced in prior schooling settings' (p. 31). Given the school's support, these students discovered their own agency and found their own paths to learning and development.

In Chap. 6, Andi Salamon, Leanne Gibbs, and Mandy Cooke explore rights-based approaches to Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Australia. The chapter discusses three case studies: educational leadership in ECE; educators taking risks in supporting children's play; and infants' agency in the enactment of ECE pedagogy. It explores the interdependencies between practices of leading, teaching, and researching in the cases, and concludes that democratic ECE pedagogy

> fulfils an aim of educational practice to initiate learners into acting and interacting with others (and the world) in ways oriented towards the good for each person (individually) and (collectively) the good for humankind … and promotes the work to be done together to live well in a world worth living in (p. 61).

Democratic ECE pedagogy makes the logic of hope *practical*: it shows how rights-based approaches to ECE can and do bring into being more caring, sustaining, and democratic forms of life in early childhood settings.

In Chap. 7, Mervi Kaukko, Jane Wilkinson, and Nick Haswell bring us into a conversation that bridges the gap between the present and the future. The authors use video data collected by 21 primary school students in Finland and Australia who come from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The video data used is that of the children's free play in outside spaces. Their play is often about imagined, future identities and worlds; yet it is in the present, in the here and now, as the children create and negotiate

and practise, that they bring into being their there-and-then worlds worth living in. The authors remind the reader that play is integral to education, and the young people demonstrate how play can help us to live well in the present and in preparation for the future.

In Chap. 8, Nicole Brunker reports on a small project collecting creative responses from 11 children (4–14 years old) about their experiences of life in and outside school now, and about how these experiences will influence their lives in and out of school in the future. The children's responses revealed their awareness that school shaped them to be 'good students', alongside a parallel awareness that their school lives were rather different from life outside school. The students were aware of something more, something missing, something beyond the highly constrained lives they live in school: something absent in school but present and tangible in their wider lives now and into the futures they envisaged for themselves. The chapter thus highlights that while children view life in school as constrained, they still hope that school can help to prepare them for larger, fulfilling lives outside and beyond school.

In Chap. 9, Linda Mahony considers what it means to live well from the perspective of families experiencing separation and/or divorce. Through interviews, 12 Australian mothers discuss the aspirations they have for their families, as well as their experiences of communicating and collaborating with their children's teachers, schools, and early childhood centres. While each family's situation and needs were unique, families were best supported when there was a shared sense of responsibility—between families and educational institutions—for the wellbeing of the children. This collective responsibility helped families and educators focus on providing proactive support rather than reacting to crises.

In Chap. 10, Gørill Warvik Vedeler, Merete Saus, Tatiana Wara, Hilde Sollid, and Astrid Strandbu consider the experiences of young people living in a remote Arctic region of Norway. The authors facilitated dialogue café sessions with 64 first-year pre-service teachers, all under the age of 25, to learn what thriving means for young people, who are choosing to live in the Arctic. The young people discuss their sense of identity and how identity is formed through relationships to the region, the environment, and the culture. Living sustainably is central to the Arctic, and it is part of how young people enact their understandings of living well. Yet these dialogues reveal tensions that challenge the idea that there will be only one uniform way to live well and sustainably into the future.

In Chap. 11, Leila Khaled makes a case for an online Special Religious Education (SRE) class for Australian students who are Muslim. This is part of Leila's doctoral studies and sets the stage for the implementation and evaluation of such a class. Leila shows how SRE has the potential to promote student wellbeing, social cohesion, and a sense of resilience. SRE for Muslim students has a particular connection to the project of this book since, as the chapter notes, the primary purpose of education in Islam is to benefit individuals and societies and to remove them from harm—that is, to help them live well in a world worth living in for all.

In Chap. 12, Kristin Elaine Reimer shares reflections of graduates of an alternative entry university pathway program. The program, offered at Monash University, Australia, is designed for mature-aged students who have experienced disruption

to their formal education. The chapter provides a rich account of seven graduates' perspectives, gleaned through post-program learning circles facilitated by Kristin, also an educator in the program. Despite facing various challenges in their formal education journeys prior to entering the program, the graduates highlight the myriad crucial ways in which education can make a positive difference to people's lives. Their stories of the pathway program and life experiences not only illustrate some of their views on the importance of education, but also how they have capitalised on opportunities to create alternative futures. The graduates' insights, interpreted through the lens of Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence, lead Kristin to conclude that formal education can provide experiences of manageability, comprehensibility, and meaningfulness, which make it possible for people to thrive, even when faced with challenges and hardship.

In Chap. 13, Katrina Thorpe, Cathie Burgess, and Christine Grice report on an initiative introducing teacher education students (also known as Early Career Teachers, ECTs) to the *Learning from Country* project at the University of Sydney. This is a unique initiative that engages student teachers with important Indigenous ideas of *Country* while studying in a large city. The *Learning from Country* program aims to enhance the application of Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies in the daily teaching practice of ECTs. The Australian Aboriginal notion of *Country* has many layered meanings and requires us to consider all things—all living things, the water, and the land—and connects these things 'to each other and multiple spiritual and symbolic realms' as Aunty Laklak Burarrwanga explains (in Wright et al., 2012, p. 54). The teacher education students participate in *Learning from Country* with local Elders and knowledge holders who introduce them to their *Country*, on *Country*, and introduce them to some of the kinds of Aboriginal knowledges that are grounded in those places. In turn, these teacher education students try the *Learning from Country* pedagogy with some of the students the ECTs work with within schools. *Learning from Country* is a powerful opportunity for place-based education that creates spaces for sharing knowledges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. Aboriginal ECTs report the satisfaction of seeing Aboriginal knowledges respected, and non-Aboriginal ECTs report the satisfaction of learning to 'see' *Country* with new eyes, and appreciating the Aboriginal knowledge that relates to *Country* in particular places. The chapter shows the benefits of this sharing of knowledge and experiences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, across the boundaries between educational institutions and the communities around them, and across generations.

In Chap. 14, Stephanie Garoni, Jo Lampert, and Lutz Hoff present the views of four early career teachers who are graduates of LaTrobe University's Nexus program, which prepares teachers for hard-to-staff regional schools in the Australian state of Victoria. The students participated in an intensive seminar about praxis in education, immersing them in the idea of education for living well in a world worth living in. Despite difficulties, challenges, scarce resources, bureaucratic demands, and institutional resistance, their stories reveal that these new teachers did find, in their own situations, ways to live well by teaching well, and to help bring into being worlds

worth living in not only in and for their students' futures, but also in their everyday lives in classrooms.

In Chap. 15, Susanne Francisco and Ela Sjølie report on findings of their research based on interviews and journal-writing by university academics (14 academics in Australia and 16 in Norway) in the first years of the global COVID-19 pandemic. One of the principal values in the teaching and research work of these academics was to bring into being better worlds for their students and societies. Accomplishing this in their own working lives, even despite the challenges of the pandemic, also helped them to bring into being better worlds for themselves and their colleagues. Some of the key components of living well in worlds worth living in these researchers identified were: social justice and equity for all; a sustainable environment; a sense of community, and associated relationships; and ongoing professional and personal development. For them, this included 'a sense of agency associated with guiding [their] own direction deliberately and knowingly, as well as fighting/working for a just society, a sustainable future, and a professional life that is rewarding and challenging but not overwhelming' (p. 225).

Chapter 16 is the conclusion, brought together by Sally Windsor, Mervi Kaukko, and Stephen Kemmis. They point to how the chapters and projects included in this series not only explore possible futures, but actively work to make real those future worlds worth living in. Through the various *World Worth Living In* projects, education is disrupted and transformed, as educators, students and researchers see, make and fight for new forms of education. Windsor, Kaukko, and Kemmis draw upon the past and the present, to help us see the change that is already underway, creating new and different futures.

Contradictions of Education Versus Schooling and Educational Research Versus Schooling Research

Much educational research in the world today might better be described as 'schooling research'. It aims to refine and improve schooling—the life and work of educational *institutions*—so they more effectively and efficiently meet national goals of education: first, education for economic participation; then, to a slightly lesser degree, for civic political participation; and then, even less, for participation in the world's ecosystems in ways that sustain life and the geophysical processes that sustain life on Planet Earth. The contributors to and editors of this volume, as with its predecessor, aspire to unleash more *educational* forms of educational research: research into *educational practices* and their double purpose of helping people to live well and helping to bring into being worlds worth living in for all.

People become interested, animated, and inspired when we talk to them about the *World Worth Living In* project. They want to read and to participate in forms of educational research that can transform educational practices (and theory, and policy) in ways that will engage, inspire, and enable rising generations, and help to forge more

safe, sane, humane, just, and democratic futures for everyone, everywhere. Like us, though, they recognise—as do the contributors to this volume—that different people and groups, in different places and circumstances, have different views about what worlds worth living in are like, on the ground, in *their* here and now, and for *their* futures.

This volume and its predecessor are thus contributions to a global conversation about what education can and should be like in the twenty-first century, beset by the particular contemporary challenges we face, and fuelled by new hopes for the world. These volumes are thus *invitations* to join this global conversation.

Educators and educational researchers are often captured by the literature of schooling research, with its instrumental notions of school 'development', 'improvement', and 'learning outcomes'. Like Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2018), we believe that those discourses, and their research practices, can be lethal for education. They can squeeze the life out of the living practice of education, and the joy, the pleasure, the capability, and the surprise that education brings—for students and for societies (Biesta, 2013).

In *The Human Condition*, philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958) distinguished three forms of human activity: labour, work, and action. Labour is the basic mechanical activity that people must do in order to survive (e.g. eating, grocery shopping, physical care). Work makes the more-or-less permanent material objects that allow us to survive and thrive (e.g. tables, buildings, books, poems). Exploring Arendt's distinctions, philosopher Paul Voice (2014, p. 39) says, 'What work produces is an objective world that constitutes a shared human reality'. In Arendt's view, however, action is the most important form of activity for human beings: it is the social and political activity that creates the conditions under which we live together. Unlike the *viva contemplativa* which has preoccupied much of the history of philosophy, Arendt wanted to articulate and enable the *viva activa*, in which people create the conditions of their own collective social and political life. Voice (2014, p. 47) says:

> an action can be described as a moment of origination that discloses the individual actor within a plurality of others who constitute an audience and who are bound to the actor by a common world. These characteristics of action lead to the centre of Arendt's discussion of action, which is the idea of freedom. Human freedom is exemplified and perhaps constituted by actions. To be free is to act in Arendt's very specific understanding of action. Moreover, to act is to be human in the highest sense of the *vita activa*. For Arendt, the purpose of life is not to lead a "good life" in the Aristotelian sense but to be free in a sense much closer to the existentialist view of freedom. The opposite of freedom is necessity, and action, in Arendt's view, escapes both the necessitations of labour as well as the necessitations of means-end thinking that constitutes the instrumentality of work. Freedom through action thus promises the possibility of transcending the limitations of our embodied selves and the mechanical thinking of instrumentality. Freedom through action brings meaning to human lives.

The editors of this volume and stewards of the *Worlds Worth Living In for All* project believe that this is the principal task for education: to prepare people not only for the necessities produced by labour, or the material and social realities produced by work, but also for action and the *viva activa* that Arendt envisaged. And as we review the chapters that form this book, we see human beings whose activity was devoted to labour or work *and* to action in Arendt's sense: not only in pursuit of the

good for *humankind,* but also (as Huttunen and Heikkinen argue in Chap. 3) for the community of life on Earth, including by preserving the geophysical conditions that make this community of life possible. As part of the editorial team for this volume, we believe that the people whose work this book presents have acted in this kind of freedom, to bring better worlds—worlds of freedom—into being for themselves, for others, for the community of life, and for the planet.

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Chapter 3
Whose Well-Being? Deep-Ecological and Posthuman Perspectives on 'World Worth Living In'

Rauno Huttunen and Hannu L. T. Heikkinen

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to examine the question of who is meant in this book when defining its mission to pursue 'living well in a world worth living in for all.' Who, or which, are 'all' in this phrase? The authors provocatively claim that the taken-for-granted starting point for most of the authors of this book seems to be the good life of humans, excluding the well-being of the rest of the community of life. The authors take deep-ecological and more-than-human thinking as their starting point, according to which the well-being of human species is dependent on the well-being of the global web of life. Anthropocentrism is the root cause of the ecological crisis that has befallen humanity and the entire planet. Rooted in the Aristotelian and Marxian tradition of praxis, the authors propose a posthuman interpretation of 'living well,' based on a review of deep ecology and posthumanism. This new interpretation of the praxis tradition is called *praxis as planetary wisdom*, defined as human action, aimed at human well-being which is intertwined with planetary well-being, including the well-being of present humans, future humans, and non-human nature. The way to achieve this wisdom is through 'education for planetary well-being.'

Keywords Posthumanism · New materialisms · Deep ecology · Education for planetary well-being · Recognition · Praxis

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For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/25NjvXZrFfbyrXKzueWxpb?si=b397cb804593463e

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Introduction: Which 'All'? Who?

The purpose of this book is to explore the questions: 'What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?' In this chapter, we are asking who do we actually mean when we say 'all'? Do we mean only humans, or could we think from a more-than-human perspective? At first glance, elsewhere in the book, the answer looks self-evident: the focus seems to be delimited to the well-being of human individuals and societies. Nevertheless, we want to challenge this approach and take a look from a planetary perspective.

We are encouraged to take this critical perspective by picking up one sentence from Kemmis et al. (2014) that is quoted in Volume 1 of *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All*: '[…] what counts as the good life for humankind, individually and collectively, must always be determined anew for *changing times and circumstances*' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 27, Italics added). In our opinion, the most significant of the 'changing times and circumstances' against which we have to reconsider the idea of good life is the ecological crisis. This crisis is not just something waiting for us in the distant future. It is currently happening *around* us and *in* us.

The root cause of the ecological crisis is the anthropocentric way of thinking that has prevailed since the early days of Enlightenment humanism. *Homo sapiens* has treated the rest of nature as a store of raw material and energy which has resulted in a wide range of negative impacts on the environment and on humanity as a whole. These impacts include climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, resource depletion as well as social and economic inequality. The instrumental view on nature has to be changed, and education is the key to these changes. As the Finnish philosopher Veli-Matti Värri (2014, p. 89) has crystallized: '*Saving the world is both a political and a pedagogical task. Education must create opportunities to transcend the prevailing way of life and see things differently.*' To transcend the prevailing way of life and to see things differently, a more-than-human perspective to the concept of good life has to be taken. This perspective is advocated in the concept of *education for planetary well-being* (Aaltonen et al., 2023) which provides a basis for this chapter.

The modern anthropocentric mindset is the source and origin of our unsustainable practices. This way of thinking originated in Cartesian dualism; one of the triggers that started this development was Rene Descartes' observation that human beings are separate from the world; humans are conscious 'subjects' and the world is the 'object' of human thought and action. According to Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, 1–34), this formed the basis for the Enlightenment project which has led to the supremacy of instrumental rationality. Enlightenment philosophy started from the assumption that humankind is constantly developing toward the better through rational thinking. The key was to learn to use human reason to emancipate humans from coercive natural forces. In pre-modern times, man was subject to the forces of nature, but along with the modernization and rationalization of societies, the situation turned to the opposite: humans became the masters of nature.

Enlightenment and humanism assume that nature exists for humans. The basic statement of humanism was summed up by applying the ancient philosopher

Protagoras' motto '*homo mensura*': man is the measure of all things. One of the greatest achievements of the Enlightenment project is that the human species has subjugated the forces of nature to its own use with the help of human reason (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). As a consequence, nature only has had an instrumental value; the value of nature has been measured from the perspective of how it increases human wealth and well-being. The '*more-than-human-perspective*' and deep-ecological philosophy take an opposite stand: life on this planet is seen as an absolute value. Nature is not for humans. From this point of view, the concept of a good life does not only cover the life of the human species. The value of life in the entire biosphere is greater than the value of the life of one of its species.

In this chapter, we will introduce some basic ideas of deep ecology and posthumanism to lay the foundations for the concept of planetary well-being. In this way, we propose how the theory of educational praxis, which is fundamentally based on humanism, can be reconciled with perspectives from posthumanist and deep-ecological theories.

Deep Ecology and Posthumanism as the Basis for Well-Being

At a general level, posthumanism refers to the idea that we need to move from a human-centered way of thinking to a nature-centered way of thinking. The expression 'more-than-human perspective', that has sometimes been used to replace the word posthumanism, emphasizes that posthumanism is not a historical epoch coming after an earlier epoch, but a way of thinking in which people seek to expand their understanding of the world by looking at it from a wider perspective. The expression 'more-than-human perspective' emphasizes that this way of thinking offers something more; a broader perspective on being human on this planet. According to this interpretation, it does not come after humanism but can be seen as an extension or a more developed version of humanism (Hietalahti, 2022).

The starting point of posthuman thinking is the notion of human which is not determined by its contrast to non-human (Lummaa & Rojola, 2006, 14). Posthumanism wants to overcome the anthropocentrism of traditional humanism. For traditional humanism, human beings are the center of the world, and what is good for humans is the highest absolute value. Traditional humanism, represented by (for example) Pico Della Mirandola, René Descates, John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Wilhelm Humboldt, postulates that only humans have inherent value. This inherent value is linked to human capacity for rational thinking. Rationality 'hyper-separates' us from other living beings, giving us the right to use other living beings solely as objects (Pulkki et al., 2021). Given that humans are supposed to be unique and exceptional creatures, it is natural to assume that these lords of nature have the right to conquer and take advantage of the rest of nature. This can also be seen to be in line with the theory of natural selection, according to which the species at the top of the food chain takes advantage of everything that is further down the food chain. The human species has taken to the extreme its right to control and use all of nature.

An important step toward posthumanist thinking has been the idea of *deep ecology*, based on the work of the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess. The essential ideas of deep ecology are evident from the eight principles for deep ecology which Naess introduced first in 1984 (Naess, 2005, p. 68):

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Because of the foregoing points, policies must be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present and make possible a more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

The discussion about posthumanism was preceded by a discussion about theoretical (philosophical) anti-humanism. Louis Althusser introduced this concept in 1962 when criticizing the Marxist humanism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Soviet 'socialist humanism' (Althusser, 1962, 2022). It is called theoretical anti-humanism because Althusser did not want to diminish the inherent value of human life. The anti-humanism that does not value human life can be called nihilistic anti-humanism. Althusser's notion of theoretical anti-humanism was at least partly inspired by Martin Heidegger's text *Essay on 'Humanism'* (Heidegger, 1999). Also, Althusser's student Michel Foucault adopted the idea of theoretical anti-humanism. Todd May (2013) describes Althusser's and Foucault's theoretical anti-humanism as following:

> It was a reaction against the privileging of the human perspective, a privileging that placed the human at the center of experience, or gave the human a particular and elevated role to play in shaping the world, or ascribed to the human subject a transparency that allowed it to know itself and determine its future and world according to that knowledge… For Althusser, as for other structuralists, centering analysis on the human mistakenly ascribed a central role to human or perhaps conscious human control. What was required was an analysis that saw the human as product rather than author of the world's processes. For Foucault, the human was simply a passing historical category, one that, as he announced, 'would be erased, like a face drawn at the edge of the sea.'

Posthumanism has developed and expanded in many directions, and it does not form a unified school of thought. Posthumanism includes philosophical anti-humanism/metahumanism, cultural posthumanism, transhumanism, some brands of new materialisms, posthuman conditions/posthumanism as a new form of postmodernism, etc. (Ferrando, 2013).

Anti-humanism/metahumanism as a philosophical brand is based on Heidegger's aforementioned *Letter on 'Humanism'* (Heidegger, 1999). del Val and Sorgner (2011) define metahumanism in their manifesto as 'a critique of some of humanism's foundational premises such as the free will, autonomy and superiority of anthropoi due to their rationality.' This definition also describes Martin Heidegger's anti-humanism. Heidegger claims that every humanism remains within the tradition of Western metaphysics, and we need to overcome them both. Traditional humanism presupposes a universal essence for the human being which is *animal rationale.* For Heidegger, there is no such thing. Human beings are thrown into the world without a pre-given essence of any kind (Kakkori & Huttunen, 2012). Michel Foucault (Paden, 1987), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Fox & Alldred, 2013), and Gayatri Spivak (1981) are good representatives of this Heideggerian anti-humanism.

Cultural posthumanism refers to cultural studies which acknowledge the limits of previous anthropocentric and humanistic assumptions. This new brand of posthumanist cultural studies relies on post-anthropocentrism (Ferrando, 2013, p. 29). We can even speak of the non-human turn in cultural studies which means 'decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the non-human, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies' (Grusin, 2015, vii).

Transhumanism refers to humans surpassing their natural abilities with the help of technology, for example with the help of digital aids or genetic technology. An excellent example of this is the book *Homo Deus* by the historian Harari (2016), which has gained great popularity in recent years. In this book, Harari describes the accelerating development of the human species toward more and more god-like forms. Humans improve their abilities and they increasingly become kinds of cyborgs, combining biological and technological abilities. It can be seen that we have already taken steps in this direction with the smartphone technology which works more and more seamlessly with the human mind. Nowadays, a smartphone and an Internet connection seem to be a basic human need, providing a human's cognitive interface with the world even from an early age.

New materialism criticizes postmodernism and radical constructivism in which 'language matters,' 'discourse matters,' and 'culture matters' but 'matter does not matter' (Barad, 2003, p. 801). According to Francesca Ferrando (2013, p. 30), 'new materialisms philosophically arose as a reaction to the representationalist and constructivist radicalizations of late postmodernity, which somehow lost track of the material realm.' We cannot forget the material foundation of humans, animals, plants, and also societies. The well-known postmodern philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2019) speaks about the *posthuman condition* paraphrasing Jean-Paul Sartre's slogan 'human condition.' Braidotti wants to overcome the Sartrean existential humanism where the human individual and his/her 'existential angst' is the premise. For

Braidotti, the *posthuman condition* means that subjects are simultaneously more-than-human and less-than-human. 'More than human because of its multi-scalar transformations and technological advances, and less-than-human in its inhumane economic and social polarizations and irreversible environmental devastation. So the question is: who are "we"?' (Braidotti, 2019, p. 42).

The philosophical roots of posthumanism can already be seen in the deep ecology philosophy introduced in the 1970s, but posthumanism as a concept was only introduced much later around the turn of the millennium. Some of the first signposts of the posthumanist debate are Haraway's (1991) essay *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* and Hayles's (1999) book *How We Became Posthuman*, which have greatly influenced the contemporary discussion on posthumanism, especially in terms transhumanism.

Martin Heidegger's critique on technological thinking has greatly influenced posthuman thinking (Ray, 2014). In his essay *The Question Concerning Technology,* Heidegger (1977, p. 12) claims: 'Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing.' The anthropocentric traditional humanism considers technology as a neutral means to achieve predetermined ends (Ray, 2014). Heidegger calls this 'the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 5) where technology is human activity with sophisticated human-made tools. Human beings are primary here, because humans have created technological tools, humans control technology, and human beings use technology to harness nature for their own needs. Heidegger, on the contrary, claims that the essence of technology is much more than this and that a human being does not form the center of technology. Technological 'framing' of the world (*Ge-stell*) does not put humans as masters of technology (and in the center) but as a servant or part of a machinery of resources (standing reserve, *Bestand*). Thus, humans are not controlling the technology; the opposite is true: technology controls human beings (Ray, 2014; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022).

Of course, some forms of posthuman thinking (i.e. transhumanism) still use traditional instrumental definitions of technology. The advocates of transhumanism think that with the help of nanotechnology, humans can become more than humans and humans can use technology only as a neutral instrument. If this is so, then transhumanism appears to share a naive positive attitude toward technology. Heidegger says we should not be naive. We should both say yes and no to technological and calculative thinking—both heal from *Ge-stell* and at the same time continue living in the technological world (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022). According to Gavin Ray, 'Heidegger continues to influence posthumanist thinking through his critique of anthropocentrism, analysis of technology, and destruction of the binary logic underpinning metaphysics' (Ray, 2014, 52).

In many respects, Heidegger's critique of technology, posthuman thinking, and Arne Naess's deep ecology carry similar messages. Heidegger's critique of technology helps us to perceive people, nature and technology in a new posthuman way, in which humans are not 'hyper-separated' from other living beings and technology is not a neutral instrument. This is in accordance with Naess's deep ecology. Yet there are also differences. Posthuman thinking does not believe that nature has an

'inherent value' like Naess does. Posthuman thinking might consider that there are no inherent values at all. Nevertheless, Naess and posthuman thinking come to the same conclusion: non-human life forms do not just exist as tools for humans to use. Humans have the right to use 'fruits of nature' only to satisfy vital needs.

Given that humans are not the crowns of creation, as traditional humanism thought, we have to give other species space to live as well. To do this, we need to reduce the human population. Also, posthuman thinking agrees that we must stop molesting nature. What we need instead is a symbiotic relationship with nature (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022). For that, we must start an ideological and operational change. We can no longer think that humans are the center of the world and masters of nature.

It is essential to realize that in addition to material needs, humans also have immaterial needs. One of the most important immaterial needs is to be acknowledged and valued as a person; to be recognized in human communities by other humans. According to Taylor (1994), recognition is our 'vital human need.' This vital need can be fulfilled without destroying nature. To satisfy this need, we do not need all the material things we consume nowadays but we do need love without conditions, we need our rights as citizens to be recognized, and we need our work to be valued and 'we need the experience that we are loved' (Honneth, 1996). Satisfaction of all these vital needs can be done in a sustainable way, but new forms of posthuman and ecological thinking and acting are needed.

Toward Praxis as Planetary Wisdom

One of the key aims of this book is to enhance the conceptualization of well-being, social justice, and sustainability in terms of practice theory. Ideas of well-being ('living well') and sustainability ('world worth living in') are embedded in the philosophical foundation of this book, understood through a social justice lens ('for all'), and through mirroring these concepts in the classical concept of praxis. The essential question is how to enact praxis in a posthuman world; i.e. how to transform our social practices to be ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally sustainable.

In this article, we do not support nihilistic anti-humanism, and we are also wary of transhumanism, which aims to improve people with the help of technology, but we suggest that posthuman thinking should be taken into account. A world worth living in for humans is a world worth living in and also for other species in the whole biosphere. Humans are not separate beings from nature; they are products of nature, so the well-being of our species, *Homo sapiens,* is intertwined with the well-being of the rest of nature. This is what the deep-ecological ecophilosophy and the 'more-than-human perspective' are about. A deep-ecological ecophilosophical perspective implies that social justice between people also means a fair sharing of the burden of ecological reconstruction among different groups of people. We must acknowledge the tensions between the humans who occupy different parts of the planet, and live in different societies and under very different (natural and social) circumstances.

We must also recognize the tensions between present humans, future humans, and non-human nature in terms of well-being (JYU. Wisdom Community, 2021).

Existing practice theories have shortcomings related to their inherent humanistic and anthropocentric normative orientation. To address this shortcoming, we suggest that the idea of a 'world worth living in' should be broadened toward *planetary well-being,* which means '*a state where the integrity of Earth system and ecosystem processes remain unimpaired to a degree that species and populations can persist to the future and organisms have the opportunity to achieve well-being*' (JYU. Wisdom Community, 2021; Aaltonen et al., 2023). This shifts the focal point from the well-being of humans to the Earth system and ecosystem processes that underlie all well-being.

On this basis, we suggest a new interpretation for the concept of praxis. According to the Aristotelian tradition, praxis involves the morally committed and oriented action of the individual practitioners, informed by practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and by the traditions of a field (e.g. Kemmis & Smith, 2008, 4) which aims at promoting happiness (*eudaimonia)* and the good life for humankind. The Marxian interpretation of *praxis* emphasizes the 'history-making action' of social groups in societies—action that has moral, social, and political consequences; it helps to shape social formations and conditions for collectivities of people to enable active political action to create better and more just practices (e.g. Kemmis, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014, 26).

Rooted in this Aristotelian and Marxian tradition of praxis, we propose a posthuman interpretation of praxis, based on the review of the deep ecology and more-than-human perspective outlined above: *praxis as planetary wisdom* which can be enabled and promoted by *education for planetary well-being as praxis.* This is to conceptualize praxis as deliberative human action, aimed at human well-being which is intertwined with planetary well-being, including the well-being of present humans, future humans, and non-human nature.

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Chapter 4
Nurturing Eco-thinking by Leading and Learning from the Future as It Emerges

Katina Thelin and Anette Forssten Seiser

Abstract This chapter explores what it means for Swedish principals to live well in a world worth living in for all and how such a world can be realised within Swedish schools and pre-schools. In the study on which the chapter is based, we have used the theory of practice architectures, and the concept of "presencing" found in Theory U, to detect and describe what we here refer to as emerging practices. The empirical data comprise 12 semi-structured interviews with principals participating in the Swedish National School Leadership Training Programme. As a result of the study, we can provide examples of current ongoing, as well as imagined, future practices. In addition, we are able to share results of our search for signs of presencing processes: examples of activities by which principals nurture praxis and practice transitions that incorporate a shift from ego- to eco-thinking.

Keywords Emerging practices · Practice architectures · Principal · Theory U · Transitions · Presencing

Introduction

> What sets us apart as human beings is that we can connect to the emerging future. That is who we are. We can break the patterns of the past and create new patterns at scale. No other species on earth can do this. Bees, for example, may be organised by a much higher collective intelligence. Yet they have no option to change their pattern of organising. But we as humans do. (Scharmer, 2018, p. 10)

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/5nDcjx5fSrKl7hNgZFFtCM?si=f6ca4e2a6ddd47b5

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We live in a time when our planet, our societal norms, and the essence of our humanity are threatened. Global climate change, pandemics, national and international crime, spread of misinformation, terrorism, and warfare; the list of threats towards life as we know it can be long. In times like these, it is remarkable that accountability, effectiveness, and outcomes have become the key concepts around which we structure education in Sweden, similar to many other countries. Of course, there are also counter-movements questioning the egocentric mindsets and economic models that operate and steer the everyday work in our schools. This contemporary image shows how the world is, but what it can become is less clear. In response to these threats, we, as researchers and educators, have felt an urge and an obligation to engage with the future and invite others to do the same. The study reported on in this chapter is one expression of that engagement.

Since both of us authors frequently meet and work with Swedish principals, it seemed natural to start with them. However, the choice of participants is not to be seen as a matter of convenience. Rather, it is our strongest belief that principals are important promoters of educational as well as civic change. In their role as formal leaders, principals have the power to question practices that are reproducing or even creating results that nobody wants and, perhaps even more importantly, they are in a position where they can facilitate and nurture praxis in education. Therefore, by listening to the voices of principals, we can learn not just what is happening in our schools and societies today but also what may be happening there tomorrow. Moreover, by asking questions that concern all our co-existence on this planet, we may also become promoters of the movement towards a better future.

In this chapter, attention is directed towards emerging practices and practice projects aiming for positive social changes and a better future for all. A particular focus is placed on activities that include a shift in the mindset from ego-thinking (i.e., my success and well-being) to eco-thinking (i.e., the well-being and success of many). The purpose of the study reported in this chapter was to nurture praxis in education. In the study, we invited principals to engage with the project's core questions (What does it mean to live well? What is a world worth living in? What does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?). We also invited principals to reflect upon their part in the realisation of a world worth living in for all, in relation to these questions. The inquiry was transformed into two research questions:

1. What does it mean for principals in Sweden to live well in a world worth living in for all?
2. How do principals in Sweden nurture the realisation of a world worth living in for all?

Practice Architectures and the Theory U as the Framework

From a theory of practice architectures perspective, practices are seen as "dynamic, organic and open-ended, individual and collaborative […] processes" (Olin et al., 2020, p. 143). Based on our understanding, this means that practices evolve on

a continuum, extending from not at all realised (imagined future practices) to fully realised (transformed practices). On this continuum, new practices emerge alongside more established ones, creating conditions "under which the merits of the new can be assessed alongside the old" (Kemmis, 2021, p. 10), in a process referred to by Kemmis and his colleagues as "hybridisation" (Kemmis, 2021; Kemmis et al., 2014).

Common to these different types of practices is that they are site-based. What distinguishes one from the other is the degree of realisation. In order for imagined future practices to transform into fully realised practices, the sayings, doings, and relatings of a practice must change. This means that the practitioners (i.e., those who are part of a current, ongoing practice) need to change the way they think, speak, and (inter)act. These "shifts in the combinations of sayings, doings, and relatings that compose the practices involved, along with shifts in the practice architectures that make them possible" (Kemmis, 2021, p. 7) cannot happen without learning. Hence, accomplishing a transition from the current towards an imagined future practice is a matter of learning.

This way of reasoning has served as an important starting point for our work with the study reported on in this chapter. Yet, another source of inspiration was found in the work of Otto Scharmer, who claims that learning from the past is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transformational change (Scharmer, 2018, p. 10). Since the past is a limited source of information, and since previous experiences sometimes prevent rather than promote transformational change, we need to develop the capacity to learn not only from the past but also from "the emerging future" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 10).

According to Scharmer (2018), the ability to connect to, and learn not only from the past but also the emerging future is a gift, exclusive to the human species.

> We have the gift to engage with two very different qualities and streams of time. One of them is a quality of the present moment that is basically an extension of the past. The present moment is shaped by what has been. The second is a quality of the present moment that functions as a gateway to a field of future possibilities. (Scharmer, 2018, p. 10)

This particular ability to connect to and learn from the emerging future is closely related to an activity that Scharmer (2018) refers to as "presencing". In his writings, the word "blends 'sensing' with 'presence'" (p. 10) and means "to sense and actualise one's highest future potential" (p. 10). According to Scharmer (2018), the second stream of time (e.g., engaging with the emerging future) is the most important in times of disruption (or crisis), since "without that connection we tend to end up as victims rather than co-shapers of disruption" (p. 10).

In what has become known as Theory U, Scharmer (2016, 2018) describes five movements (Co-initiating, Co-sensing, Co-inspiring, Co-creating, and Co-evolving) related to presencing.[1] The five movements constitute the process of presencing, and

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[1] The process of presencing has been described in different ways, with different sets of movements or stages (Pavey, 2021). Additionally, many different activities have been offered in relation to each movement or stage. The summarisation of the presencing process presented in this chapter reflects our interpretation of the several partly overlapping and partly complementary descriptions presented by Scharmer (2016, 2018) and by Scharmer and Kaufer (2013).

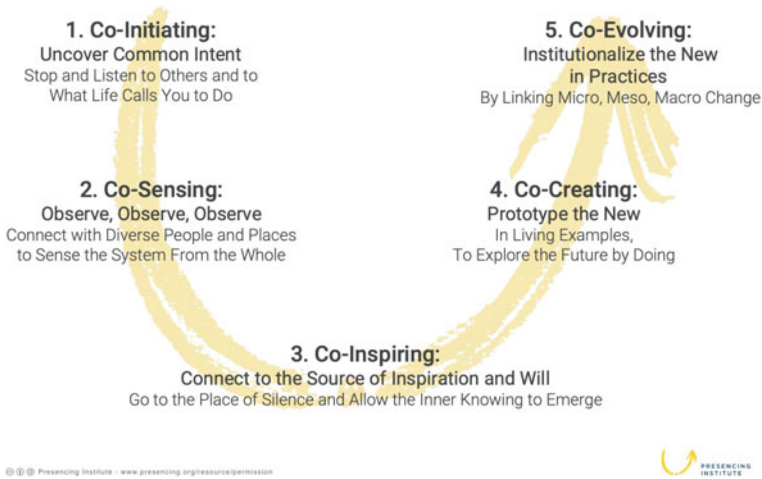

Fig. 4.1 U-Process: 1 Process, 5 Movements, by Otto Scharmer. Reproduced with permission from The Presencing Institute

they are often illustrated in a shape of the letter *U*, from which the name of the theory is drawn, i.e., Theory U. (Fig. 4.1).

According to Scharmer (2018), the first movement (*Co-initiating*) is about building a common intent. This means listening to others with the purpose of uncovering common intentions. Moving down the left side of the U-shaped arrow, we get out and connect to the world outside our own institutional (as well as social and digital) bubble to make observations and listen to others with an "open mind, open heart, and open will" (p. 34). By suspending the "voice of judgement" (p. 36) and listening to what emerges from the collective, we let go of our ego in order to connect to the greater ecosystem (*Co-sensing*). As we reach the bottom of the U-shaped arrow, others are invited to contribute to the whole, rather than act in the interest of a few (*Co-inspiring*). In this "pivot point at the bottom" (Pavey, 2021, p. 582), we connect to and make use of various sources of knowledge, including what is referred to as the inner source of inspiration, as we open up for and jointly explore various emerging possibilities. As we move up along the right side of the U-shaped arrow, we elaborate on collectively developed ideas (prototyping) and experiment with new concepts and new ways of doing things (*Co-creating*) before these are introduced to and incorporated in the system. The last movement is about embodying the new and facilitating, that is, creating conditions that enable new ways of seeing and acting (*Co-evolving*).

Our understanding of what it means to learn from the future as it emerges is, to a large extent, captured in this brief summary of the presencing process. The summary also reflects the intentions of our interaction with the principals participating in the study.

Data and Method

In our interaction with the participating principals, the process of learning from the emerging future, or presencing, started when we visited two groups participating in the Swedish National School Leadership Training Programme (*Rektorsprogrammet*),[2] to inform them about the World Worth Living In project and its core questions. As formulated, these questions hold, within themselves, an invitation to a journey in which those who choose to accompany are asked to go beyond their everyday professional practice and connect to their inner source of inspiration (i.e., open mind, open heart, open will) as well as the greater ecosystem (i.e., world of which we are all a part). Out of a total of 217 principals informed about the project, 16 signed up for further information. Twelve agreed to the terms and conditions of the project and thus gave their informed consent to participate in the study. None of the participating principals were enrolled in any of the courses in which we, the authors, were engaged. All participants were given pseudonyms.

The empirical data were produced in semi-structured interviews carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic and recorded on a platform for digital meetings. Two sets of questions guided the interviews as well as the data analysis: The first relates to principals' ideas of what it means to live well in a world worth living in for all; the second relates to principals' conceptions of their contributions to the realisation of practices promoting a world worth living in for all.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using various techniques. First, principals' answers to the question of what it means to live in a world worth living in for all were coded and structured thematically (i.e., the different ideas expressed in the interviews). Second, answers related to the realisation of such a world were analysed with a focus on practice and practice change (e.g., the transition from the current to imagined future practices). As part of this second analysis, we used the five movements conceptualised in Theory U to identify signs of what has previously been described as a presencing process.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings, starting with the principals' answers to the question of what it means to live well in a world worth living in for all. Then, we move on to realisation: practice transitions and presencing activities.

[2] In Sweden, the National School Leadership Training Programme is a state-regulated professional education programme for school and preschool principals. The programme is mandatory for newly appointed principals and is completed over the course of three years. It comprises a total of 30 higher education credits at second-cycle (Master's degree) level and consists of three courses: School legislation and exercising public authority, Management by goals and objectives, and School leadership (Skolverket, 2015).

A World Worth Living in for All

The principals' answers to the question of how to live well in a world worth living in for all may be structured around the main ideas: basic needs, access to education, and equal opportunities.

Out of the three, the first is the most salient. In fact, not one single principal provided an answer that did not somehow include the satisfaction of basic physical and social needs. "Living well [...] I think directly about these basic needs for people [...] food, roof." (Johanna). The quotations are quintessential, as is the conclusion that a world that fails to meet the basic needs of its citizens is not a world worth living in. Having stated that, some of the principals developed their answers to include other aspects of importance for human well-being. Several mentioned, for instance, the importance of having a job, and an income that allows people to live well. Some also pointed out that it is important to know that you are able to care for and provide for yourself. Yet, others dwelt on the importance of trust and relationships; of being loved and cared for; and to love and care for others in return.

Besides what was said about basic needs, most principals also stressed the importance of education. In their narratives, access to education was often expressed in terms of a right along with other human rights, such as the right to health care, freedom of expression, and the right to decide over one's own life (e.g., whom to have sex with or marry, what to do with your life, and what to wear). Several build their narratives incrementally, starting with the basic needs and rights and then adding to that, as illustrated below:

> Well, physical activity. You should be able to feel good, mentally and physically as well. It is not just a matter of avoiding diseases, and so on. But somehow it will be... That will be the next step or the next level in this. It's the kind of things that you can allow yourself if everything else is there. So, purely basic: the security, work, housing, and food on the table. That is to live well. (Lena)

Most of the principals seemed to believe it does not take much to be able to live well. However, difficulties seem to arise when we asked them to contextualise and provide examples, and when we asked them to enhance their reasoning on the meaning of a world that is worth living in for all, with emphasis put on the last word (all). Then it became clear that the world we live in today does not allow all people to live well because resources are unevenly distributed, and because there are structures that limit people's opportunities to have their needs and rights met.

> I think the world should be a place where there are opportunities for everyone to be able to live well. So this leads us to... We need to consider issues of fairness and things like that. If we look at the world, we have everything: the problem of poverty, different types of regimes that oppress and so on. [...] Imagine if you could live well wherever you lived in the world [...] One should be able to feel confident that it is possible to have a good future [...] no matter where you live in the world. Well, that's what it means [...] a world worth living in for everyone. (Lena)

Several attempts made to express what it means to live well in a world worth living for all started with or included some kind of comparison between countries or between

groups of people. When these comparisons were made, it was repeatedly pointed out that we, who live in this part of the world, and particularly in Sweden, are privileged. In comparison to people in many other parts of the world, the conditions for living well are good; most of us have our basic needs met, education is available to all, and we have the right to speak freely without fearing reprisals or punishments.

> For me, who lives in Sweden, it feels quite easy to make sure that I get an education and a job and... It feels pretty much as a matter of course. In any case, there are prerequisites to have good health. There's health care and stuff like that […] But that it's becomes more difficult when you think about the whole world. It [living well] can be harder if you live in a different type of country. (Margareta)

When speaking of differences, several principals expressed feelings of gratitude as well as responsibility. One of them, Marie, concluded:

> "We should create better conditions for all on this planet. It may actually be that we who live in this part of the world, where we are still living pretty well, will have to lower our standard a little, so that those who live in other parts of the world can live a little better".

Marie develops her reasoning by stressing her own responsibility as the principal:

> "I feel this big responsibility. […] to plant these seeds and thoughts, so that they [the students] can do… So that they understand that they have a place to fill [and a task to fulfil]: to make the world a little better".

Participation in this study was viewed by some of the principals as an opportunity to nurture praxis within their respective educational settings, and thus make a contribution to a better future for all.

Realisation of a World Worth Living in for All

As previously stated, emerging practices unfold between current and future practices. In this section, we report the results of our search for such practices (e.g., practices in transition or transformation). In doing so, we recall the participating principals' conceptions of a world worth living in and their responses to our questions on how these are realised in the local school settings.

Principals' responses to our questions on how their conceptions of a world worth living in for all are realised in the local school setting varied in scope and nature. In the interviews, several principals informed us that their participation in the study inspired them to start local school projects (e.g., workshops with students, studio work, and art exhibitions). Others shared visions for their schools and vividly sketched images of future practices. For instance, one of the principals, Anders, shared the vision of his school becoming a hub in the local area:

> I see a future where our school becomes the hub of this area. Because everyone who lives in this area has no connection to the school. It is a gigantic building with a schoolyard and football field and park area all around that is really in the middle of the area. So, if you don't have kids or friends' kids here [in this school], you walk past it all the time and you see the

> school. So, you can... Imagine if this school could become a springboard that creates some faith in the future for the area. (Anders)

In the interview, when Anders talked about the future prospects of his school, the tone of his voice changed, and there was an energy that had not been there before. It was clear that this vision inspired and guided his work towards several not-yet-realised practices (e.g., an extensive rebuild and a planned musical).

> We are in the process of rebuilding the school […] from scratch and buying new furniture, and we will rebuild the entire schoolyard when the actual construction is finished […]. I already have teachers who say: when my students are going to finish third, then we're going to have a huge musical and we're going to invite... So, they see things like that in front of them; how we're going to do open houses, and how we could do more things for the whole area. (Anders)

However, others provided examples of already ongoing (current) practices. For instance, one principal told us about a very special cupboard, named "Tage", located in the hallway where it greets everyone who enters the building. Parents borrow (or take) clothes from the cupboard and add their children's outgrown clothes into the cupboard. It is worth pointing out that Tage is not only a common male name in Sweden but also a merging of the words *ta* (take) and *ge* (give); an apt description of what is happening, thanks to this activity.

Another example was presented by a principal who works in a school for pupils with learning disabilities. According to her, they have educated their students to become "accessibility scouts" (*tillgänglighetsspanare*) within their school. As such, their task is to examine the school's physical environment and report to the teachers and the principal if they discover spots that are not accessible for all (e.g., a place where a student in a wheelchair would have difficulties).

These initiatives provide examples of practices that, according to the principals, are contributing to the world becoming a better place for all. In the subsequent section, focus is placed on activities associated with transformation: the imagination and realisation of alternative practices. In doing so, we rely on Theory U and the five movements previously referred to and conceptualised as presencing.

Presencing

Several signs of presencing were found in the data. Out of these, most were related to the first couple of movements (Co-initiating and Co-sensing) and activities associated with these movements (i.e., the left-hand side of the U-image—Fig. 4.1). For instance, many of the narratives constructed throughout the interviews provided examples of principals' involvement in, or facilitation of, listening activities. In the analysis, such findings were differentiated, categorised, and labelled as either listening to oneself or listening to others, depending on their characteristic features. In some narratives, such activities seemed to incorporate, or result in, a greater interest in and understanding of the world outside of the local school setting. Such findings were categorised

and labelled in the analysis as connecting to the wider system. Signs indicating activities associated with Co-inspiring, and with Co-creating and Co-evolving (i.e., the right-hand side of the U-image), were less frequent and/or less articulated in the data.

Co-initiating

The importance and value of asking oneself what really matters was emphasised recurrently in the interviews with the principals participating in the study. An illustrating example was found in the narrative of Anna, who argued that “it is […] important to reflect upon life’s big questions, to be able to do that […] so you don’t become like a machine; just working and working” (Anna). Despite this seemingly widespread recognition of *listening to oneself*, few seemed to be reflecting upon the world and their place in it on a daily basis. In fact, most seemed to find this particularly difficult to prioritise in their busy lives as school or preschool leaders. Instead, more focus seemed to be placed on listening to various stakeholders.

From the various examples found in the data, the activity of *listening to others* (potentially with an open mind and an open heart) seems to be well integrated in the everyday life of the participating principals’ schools and pre-schools. The activity of listening was claimed to take place in various situations and settings (e.g., spontaneous encounters with individual students and teachers, or in pre-arranged meetings where members of the staff are invited to share their concerns, ideas, and knowledge) and were often strongly connected to learning. Several principals made it clear that listening is the key to understanding, and that understanding your organisation and those involved in, or affected by its various practices, is crucial to any change process. However, it is important to make sure that *everyone’s* voice can be heard. As pointed out by one principal, Anna, this may call for specific arrangements:

> If someone speaks another language, they may need an interpreter, and if someone has a physical or intellectual disability, they may need [other] support so that they can understand and speak their mind, and take part on equal terms. (Anna)

Co-sensing

The aspect of listening, not just to a few but to “the voice of many”, is pivotal to the presencing process and a prerequisite to the shift from ego-thinking to eco-thinking. The following example is taken from the narrative of a principal, Amanda, who recalled and reflected upon her school’s encounter with the young refugees who came to Sweden during the great refugee flow during 2015 and 2016:

> It was mostly boys, but some girls as well, who had fled under terrible circumstances to a country that suddenly shut down. We have young people [in our school] that needed to hide [from the Swedish authorities], and we have young people who are still, six years later, living under the threat of deportation. They strongly believe that they will die if they are sent back, but the Migration Board does not trust their story. So, they are kind of discredited. (Amanda)

According to Amanda, the stories of these young boys and girls contributed not only to her own and her teachers' understanding of the specific needs of these students but also to a greater understanding of, and interest in, the world outside the school walls. The stories helped Amanda and her teachers to *connect to the wider system*. Moreover, they created incentives to take action on some of the challenges we, as humans, are facing on a global level, as these suddenly became present in the classroom:

> There is so very much that you know nothing about. When suddenly, you get all this information, and then you understand [...] The stories made me think that it was time to fix things. (Amanda)

Similar examples were found in the narratives of other principals participating in the study:

> I have a friend who is the manager of a home for care or housing[3] [...]. Many [of the boys who live there] come from other countries, and they carry with them experiences of war, torture, and rape. So, we have many discussions related to these issues as well. (Anders)

Again, the quotation illustrates that listening to others' experiences may open windows to the world outside and make the connection between the local educational practices and the world we live in (i.e., the wider system) less distant and elusive.

Co-inspiring, Co-creating, and Co-evolving

As previously stated, signs indicating activities associated with Co-inspiring, Co-creating, and Co-evolving (i.e., the bottom and the right-hand side of the U-image) were less frequent and or less articulated in the data. However, there were some signs indicating activities associated with these movements. Among those, one illuminating example was found in the narrative of a principal, Marie, who shared how she had involved a group of students in a dialogue that was inspired by the project questions (i.e., What does it mean to live well in...?):

> I really just started by telling them about the project and these issues and then, it [the collaborative practice] sort of just came. They [the students] had a lot of wise thoughts and reflections. (Marie)

The dialogue soon developed into a workshop, in which the students started to come up with ideas on how things could be changed for the better.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have explored what it means for Swedish principals to live well in a world worth living in for all, and how such a world can be realised within Swedish schools and pre-schools. As a result of the study drawn upon, we have been able

[3] A form of residential care for young people. In Swedish: Hem för vård eller boende ("HVB-hem").

to provide examples of emerging practices, together with signs of presencing, i.e., transitions in practices that incorporate a shift from ego- to eco-thinking. From this venture, it can be concluded that there is a strong incentive among these principals to move from practices that promote success and well-being for a few towards practices that promote success and well-being for many.

It may also be concluded that the majority of the principals doubted their possibility to have a real impact on the world, until they were asked to talk about their current (ongoing), and not-yet-realised future practices. Overall, the change in focus from a global to a local perspective counteracted the initial feeling of an otherwise insurmountable task.

The principals' interest in what has here been referred to as a shift from ego-thinking to eco-thinking became evident in the principals' answers to questions related to a world worth living in for all, and in actions taken to support future-oriented practice transitions.

However, since the aim of the study drawn upon in this chapter was not merely to report on (describe) emerging practices and activities associated with practice transitions but also to nurture praxis in education, it seems necessary to discuss our own role as interlocutors in this venture. For this purpose, we have seized on the words of Hopwood (2021) who suggests that the theory of practice architectures is to be "made dangerous again" (p. 79), indicating that researchers who use the theory are not using it in the way it is supposed to be used. In his criticism on contemporary research based on the theory, Hopwood stresses the fundamental ideas of the theory which are related to critical reflection and praxis, and above all the strive to make a contribution to the world. This is also stressed in previous publications by Kemmis (2021) and Stetsenko (2020) who claim that researchers should not just listen and report, but they should also become activists who take part in the common project of building a science that will change the world. This request of researchers becoming part of a social movement that seeks solutions to common problems and striving for a better world for all has warranted some critical (self)reflection related to this study. What was, for instance, "the danger" in this study?

Perhaps the danger was not so much to be found in the project questions or the participating principals' answers to those, but rather in our response to their answers, i.e., the follow-up question(s) in which we asked how they view their role as principals in relation to their ideas on a world worth living in, and what they as principals can do to contribute to the changes imposed by these ideas. By posing such questions, we addressed the participating principals as agents (or even activists), as we expected them to be willing to do more than just talk. When doing this, we become contributors to an altered, or different and (supposedly) better practice and hence, a better world.

Worth noting here is that this is also what some of the participating principals ask of us as researchers:

> It [transformation] takes an extremely long time and you feel quite small. You do not have much influence. But I just think that this type of research study can be one way among others. (Amanda)

As indicated in this quotation, we as researchers were also expected to make a contribution. Not only because we have the possibility but also because it is our responsibility to nurture praxis and enable a better future for all.

Although practices are claimed to be "dynamic, organic and open-ended, individual and collaborative […] processes" (Olin et al., 2020, p. 143), most empirical studies carried out by researchers using the theory of practice architectures focus mainly on what is happening in current practices, that is, the sayings, doings, and relatings, and the related arrangements, which are present in the here and now. Supposedly this is because these are the only practices that are physically accessible and thus possible to observe. However, in this study, we sought to go beyond the present. Inspired by Theory U, we turned our gaze to the future when we invited Swedish principals to share their prospects and jointly learn from the future as it emerges.

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Chapter 5
Potential of Students' Voices to Contribute to Education for a Future World Worth Living In

Fiona Longmuir

Abstract This chapter examines the positioning and potential of students to contribute to the evolution of educational practices and arrangements that better reflect their needs and interests as they learn to be and become in a world worth living in for all. Historically, students' voices are silenced through education with the imposition of schooling arrangements designed to meet the economic and social needs of the present. While students are often surrounded by messages that suggest their futures are in peril from environmental and social crises, their education remains confined to a focus on present imperatives. Although many educators are motivated to transform schooling, traditions and systemic objectives that hold conventional arrangements in place have proven to be difficult to disrupt. Bringing evidence from research that investigated the experiences of students who had disengaged from mainstream schooling in Melbourne, Australia, this chapter highlights possibilities for students to be seen as highly informed experts in their own education. I argue that along with enhancing student voice, a more explicit focus on a 'capacity to aspire' as a future-focused capability can counter limiting discourses that prevail and support students to shape a future world worth living in for all.

Keywords Student voice · Student agency · Crisis · Aspiration · Hopeful futures

Introduction

The future of our world weighs heavily on the minds of children and young people across the globe. We see their concerns and anxieties fuelling a range of both productive and destructive outcomes. Examples of spaces where young people are finding voice include: climate protests; innovative start-ups; and new ways to connect and

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/0CCpaoEl5OT7yJF5kLBQkG?si=46ad3f005e0745fa

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create through platforms such as social media sites. However, young people are also often in crisis. Mental ill-health is at epidemic levels in many countries, socially destructive behaviours such as bullying are commonly reported, and there are high levels of school disengagement.

This chapter suggests that educational practices commonly found in schools across the globe today do not support students to be oriented towards a hopeful future. Arrangements of schooling are generally constrained by traditional, conventional, and neoliberal forces that prioritise the reproduction of social and economic structures favouring market efficiency and the inequitable distribution of resources. These arrangements are premised on the conceptualisation of students as *future citizens in waiting*, who need training through the school system before they are able to act as capable contributors to their communities (Dewey, 1990; Nishiyama, 2017). This conceptualisation positions students as passive receivers of knowledge, subjects them to the control of adults, and reduces their capacity to achieve productive agency in their own lives. An implicit purpose of these prevalent arrangements is to ensure compliance with current dominant social structures and arrangements (Smyth et al., 2014). However, in the current global climate of volatility and uncertainty, the stability and suitability of these arrangements must be questioned, particularly when a future-focused lens is applied.

Appadurai's (2004, 2013) 'capacity to aspire' will be explored as a notion that may support student and educator praxis which aims to form, reform, and transform schooling to work towards positive and innovative possible futures. This approach prioritises student voice, values the contributions students can make as *current citizens*, and empowers young people to contribute to the transformation of schooling arrangements whilst also developing confidence in their capacities to navigate challenging futures. Critical times are upon us, and significant changes are needed. Schools and school systems need to stop prioritising the reproduction of the past and start prioritising transformation for the future. An important contribution to this should be the voices of students themselves as they seek to shape opportunities to live well in a world worth living in.

The Children Are Our Future

Education has long been a process for shaping societies for future prosperity and this premise underpins an implicit moral purpose for investment in schooling systems (Mandich, 2022). However, as a society, how do we reconcile this belief with the evidence that in our modern times, the future presented to children is ominous and frightening?

Conceptualisations of the future are shaped by culture and economics. An economic view is often framed by principles of investment in a cost-effective future (Sandford, 2013), while an anthropological perspective sees culture "as a matter of one or another kind of pastness" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 180). From both frames, the future is approached "from the stand point of the present through which we seek

to predict, transform and control the future for the benefit of the present" (Adam, 2007, p. 200). Such principles are embedded into our social consciousness and shape the ways that we perceive, attend to, and value anything in the future, be it monetary investment or social effort. We are programmed to prioritise our present as it is shaped by our past. The unpredictability of the future exacerbates this. The dual purpose of education, which forms the theme of this book, 'learning to live well in a world worth living in', can be questioned to illustrate this challenge. What is a world worth living in? Should we judge 'worth' as we understand it now, or as it might be in the future? We can assume, thanks to the current pace of change, that a world worth living in for the children and young people of today, will be very different to that which we are in now. If so, can the adults of today determine what children and young people will require to live well in the world worth living in of their future?

There have been attempts in our communities to prioritise the future more concretely in current times, but these moves have met resistance. An obvious example is calls to action on climate change. Despite evidence of the urgency needed to avoid a climate tipping point (e.g. Barnosky et al., 2012; Reid et al., 2021), governments and policymakers around the globe have been slow to act. They are stuck in the concrete of the present and unable to prioritise an abstract future. Intersections of power and politics are rife in such discourses. Those without a legitimatised voice can scream as loudly as possible yet fail to gain traction for change. Children and young people are prime examples of this. They have limited power in social life and therefore limited power in decisions made about their futures. In Australia, a recent federal court decision exemplified this marginalisation of the future needs of young people. Eight teenagers were unsuccessful in seeking an injunction on the ministerial approval of an expansion to a coal mine. Essentially, their legal argument was that the federal environment minister had a duty of care to protect young people from future harm that the expanded coal mine would cause, but the courts determined that this was not the case (Kerr, 2021).

In broader evidence from Australia of the voices of young people being ineffectual in influencing what would be their future, approximately 500,000 students participated in the School Strike 4 Climate events in 2018–2019 calling for governmental action on climate change (Mayes & Hartup, 2021), yet Australia continues to be ranked last out of 190 nations for positive action against four climate action metrics in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Sachs et al., 2021). Mayes and Hartup (2021) found that the Australian media coverage of students' activism on this critical issue was plagued with characterisations of the young people as "ignorant zealots, anxious pawns, [and] rebellious truants" (p. 1) with a positive characterisation as "extraordinary heroes" less often found and most often when the articles contained the students' own voices describing their engagement with the climate strikes.

Children and young people are disempowered and their efforts to raise their concerns are gaslighted by those who control their future, all while they are bombarded by the threat of catastrophic environmental and social changes. They bear the burden of the existential crisis—a potential threat to humanity—that is difficult to comprehend for those of the generations who have lived in relatively stable

times of the recent century (Mounk, 2018; Riddle, 2022; Wu et al., 2020), yet we continue to apply the paradigms of our past to their futures.

Is Education Treating Them Well?

Even if we were to accept that it is appropriate for the focus of education to be shaped by the past and geared to goals suited to the present, there is evidence that the arrangements currently do not treat significant numbers of students well. In Australia, which has a total school student population of around 4 million, approximately 70,000 students were conservatively estimated to be completely disengaged from schooling (te Riele, 2014; Watterson & O'Connell, 2019). This can be considered the 'tip of the iceberg' of the larger numbers of students whose engagement with schooling is inconsistent, disrupted, or limited (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). Further, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fragility of arrangements that keep students engaged, particularly for marginalised learners (Brown et al., 2020). A US study estimated that three million students from marginalised backgrounds disengaged from education in 2020 (Korman et al., 2020).

The entanglement of school disengagement and mental ill-health impacting children and young people is well established (Alderman & Taylor, 2013). Mental ill-health diagnoses in younger generations have increased over recent decades and have taken an even steeper growth curve due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Fray et al., 2022; UNICEF, 2020). Although schools cannot be held wholly responsible for the epidemic of youth mental ill-health (Twenge et al., 2019), schools do have the capacity to mitigate or exacerbate feelings of stress or despair (Longmuir, 2021; Riley, 2022). Research has also found that sites where children and young people feel safe and valued are more likely to support the development of socially and emotionally resilient adults (Allen, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2011).

Given the scale of these issues and the influence of schooling arrangements, it is helpful to reframe school 'disengagement' as an issue of school *disenfranchisement*. Disenfranchised young people have not had opportunities to develop connection with schools. They feel that they don't belong in the often rigid and confining walls of classrooms within schools that are usually physically separated from their communities, often by high, locked fences or even in some communities, metal detectors and security guards. Such increasingly common security measures have been shown to make young people feel less safe in their schools (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2012). In these modern learning environments, children and young people are detaching from education (voluntarily or involuntarily) due to the misalignment of their needs as learners and humans with arrangements imposed on them by schools (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021). Thinking of this as *disenfranchisement* reframes it from an individualising responsibility that sits with students and families (Alderman & Taylor, 2013) to a recognition that there are schooling arrangements held in place by systemic constraints that impose marginalisation on significant numbers of students (Longmuir, 2020; Mills & McGregor, 2014; Reimer & Longmuir, 2021).

In a case study of the relationships between students and educational leaders in an alternative setting[1] in Melbourne, Australia, I collected data through observations and interviews with students, teachers, and school leaders to examine how student voice and agency practices supported re-engagement with school. Aspire College[2] is a 'second chance' alternative education setting (Horsford & Powell, 2016; McGregor et al., 2014) catering for students who have been disenfranchised from 'mainstream' high schools. At the time of the research, there were 60 students enrolled at Aspire College, all of whom had negotiated and personalised engagement and learning plans. The students were able to make a range of choices about how they attended and the learning activities they engaged in. These were guided by education and career goals as negotiated with and supported by the teachers and school leaders. The staff-to-student ratios were low, at approximately one staff member to six students. Students and staff interacted for learning and social activities (e.g. lunch breaks), and the school's leaders (principal and assistant principal) were visible and available to students every day. There was a strong climate of equity and connection between students and staff at Aspire College, as the students described: "Everyone gets along" (Tom, student); "It's easy going and anyone can fit in here. You don't really get judged, and they help you a lot more" (Amber, student); and "it's easier to get to know everyone" (Anton, student) (see Longmuir, 2022; Reimer & Longmuir, 2021 for further details of this study).

The students from Aspire College that I spoke with described feeling unwelcome at their previous schools. They felt that it had been difficult for them to act in ways that would positively influence their daily experiences and that most of the adults in their previous schools did not care about them personally. The students explained that they felt less important than the rules in place to manage the large, unwieldy organisation of a mainstream secondary school. They referred to systemic arrangements, such as teacher-student ratios, teacher workloads, and timetable constraints, as some of the reasons that they could not access the learning and/or social support they needed. They regularly identified that teachers were busy and needed to meet curriculum delivery and assessment requirements for large numbers of students and they felt that their specific and diverse individual needs were beyond what could be accommodated. In a demonstration of how these circumstances individualise responsibility, some students in this study expressed that they had felt guilty or uncomfortable if they asked for extra attention or time from their teachers. These participants had internalised the micro-aggressions imposed on them by the systemic arrangements until they felt responsible for their inability to comply and participate (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021). For example, Amber's family situation had required her to move to several new schools. She described her experience of falling behind over the moves and eventually being unable to access learning, "I missed a lot and they never used to help me. If I asked for help in class, they kind of pointed at the

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[1] For this chapter, I use the term 'alternative setting' to refer to an educational organisation that catered for students that had been excluded from 'mainstream' education. See Longmuir (2022) for further explanation of the terms 'alternative' and 'mainstream'.

[2] Pseudonyms are used for the college name and all students' names.

board and explained again… I'd feel like I don't understand but they'd just move on". Amber shared that at one point, a student counsellor had even told her that school "wasn't for her". Eventually Amber stopped going to school and she explained "I just didn't want to go. I didn't really do any work, so I didn't see the point". For students like Amber, the social-political, cultural-discursive, and material-economic arrangements of schooling are configured in ways that increase the likelihood of students feeling disempowered and excluded. They felt small and insignificant in an organisation geared to produce students that would fit into narrow conceptions of the citizens required for the social and economic needs of the present. These disenfranchised students were unable to find a place to fit, to feel they belonged, or to learn. Their voices were not heard, and their needs as young people were unmet. The elements that contributed to *disenfranchisement* reflect similar findings from other studies interested in supporting marginalised young people to access education (see for example: Mills & McGregor, 2014; te Riele et al., 2016) and the importance of students' voice is highlighted in this literature (see for example: Smyth et al., 2014; Smyth & McInerney, 2012).

Hirschman (1970) proposed a model for understanding the way that individuals engage with organisations using the concepts of 'exit', 'voice', and 'loyalty'. These classifications capture the range of ways that one can respond to the arrangements of an organisation, particularly when there is misalignment between the organisation and an individual's own values, priorities, or interests.

Hirschman first proposed the model to explain consumer or employee behaviour when the quality of goods, or the rewards for employment, deteriorates. In these situations, Hirschman (1970) concluded that individuals might choose an 'exit' option—that is to detach from an organisation by quitting their employment or no longer purchasing goods. Another option available, according to Hirschman (1970), is 'voice'—where dissatisfaction is expressed to an authority, or through a more general protest to interested parties. With exit and voice being somewhat binary options, Hirschman (1970) conceptualises 'loyalty' as a moderating factor in individuals' behaviour, describing it as a "key concept in the battle between exit and voice" (p. 82). Feelings of loyalty determine the viability and availability of an 'exit' option as well as the likelihood of an enactment of 'voice' and even in adverse situations can hold individuals in patterns of behaviour that support the status quo.

Hirschman's (1970) model has commonly been used to theorise areas such as public policy, public management, and public service (James & John, 2021). In his work to examine the cultural connections of communities living in poverty in India, Appadurai (2013) applied the model to contend that the default cultural affiliation is usually loyalty. Voice and exit options, Appadurai (2013) suggests, require higher levels of knowledge and empowerment to enable individuals to act on a dissatisfaction with the cultural status quo. Therefore, loyalty and the associated status quo prevail for two reasons. Firstly, the dominant cultural group is most aligned with the social arrangements, benefiting from its reproduction, and therefore is most often loyal. Secondly, marginalised members of an organisation or society often have an ambivalent relationship with the dominant norms (due to disempowerment resulting from minimal access to recognition and resources), which manifests as loyalty tainted

by cynicism or uncritical compliance (Appadurai, 2013). Opportunities for transformation become more visible when all those who are dissatisfied for diverse reasons can access agentic dissenting responses, such as exiting or raising their voice to communicate their dissatisfaction and to suggest alternatives.

Diversifying the voices that have influence is crucial when the reproduction of present conditions is likely to result in an untenable future. Given the current circumstances, a positive future will require currently unimagined alternatives, unprecedented collaborations, and innovation on a scale unseen before. Kemmis (2022) considered how a change to practices (rather than just changing minds) is needed to address the climate change emergency in Australia. Kemmis (2022) explored the work of French political sociologist Alain Touraine (1981) to note that,

> changes of practices and the conditions that make them possible are frequently accomplished through social movements… *social movements* confronted the established *social orders*, bringing about transformation (not always complete and final) in the process Touraine described as "the self-production of society". (Kemmis, 2022, p. 45, original emphasis)

The transformation required to produce a society that can thrive through the challenges ahead needs new conditions for different practices. Education needs to find ways to provoke, contribute to, and support social movements inspired by dissenting voices that highlight dysfunction and are courageous enough to seek alternatives.

Letting Them Lead the Way: Student Voice and Agency

The concept of student voice has gained attention since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by most countries in the late 1980s which called for children to "say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions for them and to have their opinions taken into account" (United Nations, 1989). Despite widespread usage, the term *student voice*, which is most commonly used, is ambiguous (Graham et al., 2018; Longmuir, 2020) and has become a 'catch all' for various understandings (Charteris & Smardon, 2019). Research suggests that in practice student voice initiatives are commonly tokenistic. Arrangements in place for attending to students' voices are such that only those who align with current practices and expectations are heard (Finneran et al., 2021). These types of arrangements are biased to the reproduction of conditions and favour a 'loyalty' response both by those actively involved and by those who are marginalised as their voices are silenced.

If student voice is to be leveraged for education focused on transformation, adults need to relinquish the traditional power they have held in schools to allow higher levels of student agency to emerge. In current settings, educators need to consider how student voice is facilitated so that students may break the bounds of complicit loyalty, without resorting to exit (Longmuir, 2020; Mitra, 2018).

Current opportunities for student voice see young people as “subject to ‘adult’ discourses and regulations while at the same time carrying certain adult responsibilities and entitlements over which they have little power” (Walsh et al., 2018, p. 221). For students to influence schooling arrangements they need to follow entrenched and traditional paths and their influence is constrained by present norms and expectations. These paths of influence are usually accessible only to students who are exceptional in their capacity to navigate the current arrangements leaving many excluded and disempowered (Finneran et al., 2021). As a result, “the emotional effects of these entrenched dynamics are typically discouraging: this leads young people in turn to reject conventional institutions, processes and politic[s]” (Walsh et al., 2018, p. 229). This rejection manifests as either ambivalent loyalty or disenfranchised exit from education and reduces the likelihood of positive and productive engagement with social and political institutions beyond schooling. Yet a key responsibility that we present to students is a requirement that they be socially, politically, and economically prepared for a precarious future—a future which is regularly portrayed to them as likely to be catastrophic. By dampening the current participatory agency of young people, we reduce the range of ideas, innovations, and resources they have available to envision and manifest positive alternative futures.

Agency in social theory is often defined in terms of individual emancipation and social context. Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 135) considered theoretical developments of agency and concluded that it should be defined “as the ability to exert control over and give direction to one’s life”. They build on work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who conceptualised a three-dimensional configuration of agency as an interaction of “influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 135). They argue that agency is achieved rather than possessed by actors and that this achievement of agency is an interplay that “varies within different contexts-for-action, and which locates agency in the ability to shape our responsiveness to such contexts” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 133). They expand their attention to context, explaining that “the extent to which people have control over and give direction to their lives crucially depends upon contextual and structural factors and on the available resources within a particular ‘ecology’” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 145). In considering the potential of students to achieve agency in present times, they acknowledge the work of social researchers such as Bauman (2000) and Giddens (1990) who have suggested that the volatility and uncertainty of modernity make agency—particularly projective (or future focused) agency—both more necessary and more challenging to achieve. While acknowledging these constraints of modern social ecologies, it is important for this discussion to highlight that a key motivator of agency is its “intention to bring about a future that is different from the present and the past” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 136).

In my research with students in the alternative setting in Melbourne, Australia, agentic student voice was crucial to re-engagement with learning (Longmuir, 2022; Reimer & Longmuir, 2021). The principal at the school, Gail, described the importance of listening to the students and allowing them to have some control over their engagement with their education: “It’s the choice thing. It’s not a big force and a big

stick. It's just trying to get them to be curious and to want to learn so that it is fun and enjoyable" (Gail). The students acknowledged the importance of feeling listened to and having agency: "They respect you and what you want to do…and you feel you can say what is on your mind without being shot down. They listen to what you have to say" (Zali, student) and "they always ask us because they don't know; we do… Whatever doesn't work, we just tell her (the teacher) so she can fix it for next time" (Anton, student).

In this alternative education setting, central tenets of relationships before rules (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021), student voice (even when dissenting), and agentic choice making were foundational to repairing the damage students had experienced in prior schooling settings. In a reflection of the broader issues of engagement and well-being that were described earlier, these young people were productively connected to learning despite experiences of mental ill-health (such as depression and anxiety), as well as other diagnosed social and behavioural issues, all of which had previously contributed to their exclusion from schools. Students overcame issues that had been insurmountable in other settings due to the relational and agentic approaches that were enabled by the alternative practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) of the school. The theory of practice architectures holds that practices are enabled and constrained by particular cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements in each site (Kemmis et al., 2014). In the case of this study, these included a social-political dimension that did not focus on narrow academic achievement requiring students to compete for ranked results but rather supported students' diverse interests with a focus on positive and productive post-school pathways. As well, the symbolic authority of adults was reduced to ensure more equitable ways of relating. The material-economic arrangements were such that students could receive the support that they needed through resourcing and scheduling that prioritised connection, engagement, and well-being. The cultural-discursive dimension featured sayings that were founded on a premise of unconditional positive regard within negotiated expectations for interactions. With these types of arrangements in place, students found new opportunities for their education and new hopes for their futures. Further, the adults found that by trusting students' expertise as informed, creative, and caring young people, broader avenues for voice and authentic collaboration emerged.

These students were empowered to inform and support the arrangements of the school and the classrooms in ways that worked better for all involved. This case demonstrates the potential in 'letting them lead the way' combined with the necessary support, belief, and care from the adults around them.

From this example and the broader student voice and agency literature, the question must be asked, are educational systems and the prevalent schooling arrangements 'doing to' students, which constrains empowerment, or 'doing with' students, which scaffolds their agency and encourages their empowerment? Trends of performativity and standardisation that characterise the neoliberal educational landscape (such as standardised curricula, common assessment programmes and schoolwide instructional models) limit student and teacher agency in learning relationships (Lingard &

Sellar, 2013; Reid, 2019; Schostak, 2020). Limited agency is detrimental to present educational experiences as well as the development of future-ready capabilities.

A Capacity to Aspire

Having discussed the challenges and opportunities of education systems—particularly regarding the ways that schooling is arranged and the disempowerment of students through practices that minimise opportunity for voice and agency—I now turn to consider how more hopeful orientations to the future can be advanced through schooling. A 'capacity to aspire' has the potential to combat despondency and despair currently experienced by many young people and to open broader opportunities and resources for building a positive future.

To reiterate, the zeitgeist surrounding young people regularly suggests catastrophe and devastation. Kaukko et al. (2021, p. 1559) describe the current circumstances as a "nested crisis" where social, environmental, and health crises are entwined together. They suggest that for the post-COVID-19 world "what is needed is new practice architectures—new conditions of possibility—under which human beings can learn to live sustainably within the community of life on Earth" (p. 1559).

Riddle (2022) further describes the complexity of the challenges,

> Young people face a future of great uncertainty amid multiple, intersecting global crises, including increasing social and economic inequality, predatory globalised capitalism and neoliberal policymaking, the rise of post-truth discourses and the decay of trust, the global COVID-19 pandemic and a climate catastrophe, driving ecological collapse, mass extinction, food and water shortages and displacement. (p. 108)

With the combination of these negative prospects and minimised opportunity for voice and agency, it is no wonder that children and young people are often despondent. A critical question then is 'How can those who currently hold all the power in schooling provide environments where children and young people can thrive and face the future with hope?' Appadurai (2004, 2013) proposes this notion of a 'capacity to aspire' which explores the place of agency and voice in supporting disenfranchised groups. The 'loyal' marginalised, he contends, are disempowered, so that they often have a complicit and ambivalent relationship with the cultural norms and arrangements that reproduce their disadvantaged conditions. To understand how this cultural disempowerment might be countered, Appadurai (2004) frames voice as, "a cultural capacity, not just as a generalised and universal democratic virtue because for voice to take effect, it must engage social, political, and economic issues in terms of ideologies, doctrines, and norms which are widely shared and credible" (p. 67). This cultural capacity needs to be enacted in ways that have "local cultural force…and when they do work, as we have seen with various movements in the past, they change the terms of recognition, indeed the cultural framework itself" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67).

Appadurai (2013) found that aspiration is an important driver of voice and, ultimately, transformation. He suggests that aspirations about "the good life, about health

and happiness, exist in all societies" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67) and understanding the cultural and social structures that support individuals to achieve agency in working towards these aspirations is important. His studies found that the more privileged members of society have access to greater recognition and resourcing, which enables them to more readily apply aspiration as a "navigational capacity" in their lives.

> The more privileged in any society have used the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically... The poorer members, precisely because of their lack of opportunities to practice the use of this navigational capacity (in turn because their situations permit fewer experiments and less easy archiving of alternative futures), have a more brittle horizon of aspirations (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69).

Appadurai links this capacity to aspire to Hirschman's faculty of voice, suggesting that "each accelerates the nurture of the other" (2004, p. 70). Without the capacity to aspire—and the associated opportunity for voice—apathetic loyalty or exit can result, increasing the likelihood of reproduction of the status quo and decreasing the likelihood of transformational change. This notion of a capacity to aspire holds potential for education that seeks to transform for hopeful futures. With explicit consideration of how the future is framed, and how students are supported to develop the navigational capacities needed for robust and hopeful horizons of aspiration, the needed transformation may be more possible.

Bringing Student Voice to Praxis and Practice for the Future

The theory of practice architectures (TPA) contends that practices are shaped by interactions between individuals and the circumstances beyond each person (see Kaukko et al., 2020). Although practice architectures (composed of overlapping social-political, cultural-discursive, and material-economic arrangements) hang together within a site to prefigure particular practices, they do not predetermine them and TPA "recognises the *agency* of individuals and groups to make changes to pre-existing arrangements" (Kaukko et al., 2020, p. 5). As has been discussed above, "many of the arrangements in established, institutionalised spaces [such as schools] have a long history, and they effectively constrain practices that challenge them" (Kaukko et al., 2020, p. 5), yet transformation is possible and becomes more possible where social movements challenge the prevailing social order (Kemmis, 2022; Touraine, 1981). The imperative for social change is clear, and the potential of students to challenge the social order is evident; however, student-led transformations are usually found outside of schools. At Aspire College, students were able to reconnect with aspiration after having been disenfranchised from mainstream schools where their capacities to access hopeful futures had been diminished.

Students had choices about their learning and were listened to by the adults in ways that valued their input. The case offers a glimpse into the potential of student voice to support positive school engagement while enhancing dispositions, capacities, and resources that can be mobilised for more positive futures. The metaphorical 'map'

that provides a capacity to navigate the future (Appadurai, 2004) was shared by students and educators making a hopeful future more visible to the students.

By examining the potential of student voice and the development of an associated capacity to aspire, this chapter has argued that transformation is possible by authentically and regularly involving students in educational praxis which is "a kind of educational practice that is informed, reflective, self-consciously moral and political, and oriented towards making positive educational and societal change" (Mahon et al., 2020, p. 15). With an understanding of the potential benefits of students' voices to contribute to challenging the habitual and constrained practices that focus on reproduction for present imperatives, transformative social change that provides hope for a more positive future is more possible. Not only are children and young people insightful and informed experts on their own experiences (Beattie, 2012), but they are also inherently less constrained by the present and are highly invested in manifesting positive futures (Walsh & Gleeson, 2021). Strengthening students' capacities to aspire with purposeful, collaborative praxis will help them to counter the dominance of tradition and systemic interests so that their future world will be one worth living in.

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Chapter 6
Democratic Practices with and for Our Youngest Citizens: Early Childhood Education, Agency, and the Education Complex

Andi Salamon, Leanne Gibbs, and Mandy Cooke

Abstract Early childhood pedagogy in Australia is founded on rights-based philosophies that promote social justice, democratic communities, participation, and agency of societies' youngest citizens. There are, however, significant challenges in realising these philosophies and enacting democratic, agentic early childhood education (ECE) for birth to five-year-old children. This chapter presents three research projects, viewed together through a lens of agency and aligned with the education complex (Kemmis et al., 2012), that highlight the interdependent practices of leading, teaching, and researching in Australian ECE contexts. The first project investigated the emergence and development of effective leadership practices and the arrangements that enabled and constrained them. The second project explored educators' risk-taking practices, aligning with praxis as morally and ethically informed decision-making about what is 'best' for children and societies (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). The third project documented infants' social and emotional communication and highlighted how the research practices helped enable infants' participation and agency. Though the focus of each study was different, collectively they illuminate interdependent practices of an 'ECE complex', and how individual and collective agencies can optimise pedagogy with and for very young children to live well and help create a world worth living in (Kemmis et al., 2014).

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/17jgXTh7DsNpwdWZ2kHSMh?si=2f9e077f406b4875

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Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) worldwide has a particular history, grounded in long-held beliefs about children and the women who have classically cared for and educated them. Over time there have been shifts in some of these views, influenced partly by post-war, philanthropic, and progressive philosophies, such as the Reggio Emilia approach from northern Italy, that include the youngest children in society as citizens with agency. A significant influence has also been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989), and its near universal ratification by state parties of the United Nations (UN), which promotes fundamental developmental, protection, and participation rights for children. Most countries that belong to the UN have changed aspects of their ECE policies and practices in order to uphold the UNCRC (Kilkelly, 2017). Professional ECE literature in Australia reflects the subsequent shift from care-based developmental approaches of the early twentieth century, that saw children as more passive recipients of standardised, milestone-based practices (Fleer, 2003), to aspirational post-war images of children as competent and capable agents (Malaguzzi, 1994) with their own rights. For example, educators are guided by a Code of Ethics that place them as advocates for social justice through commitments to democratic action in relation to children, colleagues, families, the profession, the community, and society (Early Childhood Australia, 2016). Such ethical guidance underpins a rights-based ECE stance that works (ideally through committed educators in quality settings) to co-create democratic communities. In doing so, ECE pedagogy aims to promote and enact education as being for the good of each person and for the good of humankind (Kaukko et al., 2020).

The sites of ECE, however, are complex. Sites are characterised by diverse human resource arrangements, educator qualifications, and experience and the sector is highly feminised. Discourses of maternalism exist alongside (and often in opposition to) discourses of professionalism. Manifold regulatory and compliance measures co-exist with innovative pedagogical practices. The duty of care for children, families, and settings can be stressful and include the inherent challenges of respectfully, ethically, and realistically balancing protection rights with participation rights, especially for our youngest citizens (Salamon & Palaiologou, 2022). Furthermore, a marketised sector has created tensions between commercial interests and democratic practices (Press & Woodrow, 2018). Altogether, these challenges 'bump up against' a democratic ECE stance and the associated work of committed ECE professionals to enact rights-based ECE pedagogies.

The Project of This Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, we explore the important democratic underpinnings of ECE pedagogy in Australia by (briefly) outlining aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach. We consider the complexity of enacting these aspects and propose using the theory of practice architectures to help overcome contemporary challenges. Next, we adapt the idea of the interdependent practices of education in an 'education complex' (Kemmis et al., 2012) to ECE and offer a view of the enactment of democratic ECE pedagogy (and all its complexity) as an ecology of interconnected ECE practices. We then present three research projects that demonstrate the education complex in relation to rights, social justice, citizenship, and agency in ECE through their investigation of practices and conditions that enable and constrain democratic ECE pedagogy. All three projects were undertaken in Australian ECE settings. All projects were case studies that aimed towards an in-depth exploration of particular practices within purposively selected sites. Each study used multiple data collection methods, including observations, interviews, and documents. All projects used the theory of practice architectures, identifying ECE leading, teaching, and researching practices (bundles of sayings/thinkings, doings, and relatings) and the practice architectures (cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements) that enabled and constrained them. The findings illuminate practices of leading, teaching, researching, and learning that draw on emancipatory and transformational ECE philosophies, often lost in the architectures of (what are meant to be) democratic ECE practices. Implications are discussed in relation to the work to be done together to live well in a world worth living in.

Democratic Early Childhood Education Pedagogies and the Challenges of Enacting Them

There are many starting points for considering the threads of progressive and democratic contemporary ECE pedagogy. Here, we start with the Reggio Emilia approach. By choosing such an approach, we distinctly locate a rights-based philosophy within our personal and globally acknowledged ECE timelines. Loris Malaguzzi, leader of the educational project in Reggio Emilia (Italy), believed that children are equipped with '100 languages' (symbolic of multiple avenues to share ways of being and understanding) and placed them (children and their languages) at the centre of pedagogical practices (Reggio Children, 2022). Upholding each child's right to their own voice, the languages are spoken (and listened to) within respectful and reciprocal relationships and promoted in critically considered, intentionally planned environments (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). These environments, known as the third teacher, can be seen as arrangements that shape (and are shaped by) the democratic practices of capable and competent child citizens. Intentionally planned spaces enable children's agency to co-create

educational possibilities in relation to them and with educators and teachers within them.

Another concept and fundamental value in Reggio Emilia is pedagogical documentation: making children's learning processes and practices visible to children, families, and communities, and inviting the children's own reflection on those as springboards to further learning provocations. Malaguzzi saw pedagogical documentation as a commitment to democracy and participation (Reggio Emilia Australia, 2021). Similarly, Moss (2007) saw documentation as a means of fostering democratic practice in ECE by exploring and contesting different perspectives without assuming objective, external truths about the child that can be recorded and accurately represented. Pedagogical documentation thus becomes a means of resisting power and dominant discourses (Moss, 2007).

Many espoused Australian ECE principles and practices reflect the democratic provocations of the Reggio Emilia approach. Australia's guiding ECE curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), for example, is underpinned by principles of respectful and reciprocal relationships, authentic partnerships, ongoing collaborative learning, and critical reflective, intentional practice with children, families and communities (DEEWR, 2009). This supports efforts to enact ECE as emancipatory professional practice and, so, democratic pedagogy. As has been discussed, however, there are many challenges to enacting these ideals in reality. Further examples include discourses of maternalism, confusion around compliance, the regulatory nature of the sector, and inconsistent state-based legislation (with accompanying lack of common professional language) work to diminish professionalism and democratic ECE. Perhaps the biggest challenge to enacting democratic pedagogies in Australian ECE is its marketisation. The provision of ECE has changed significantly since the turn of the twentieth century from a predominantly not-for-profit, community based and philanthropic sector, to one where private for-profit providers are competing for the market (see Press & Woodrow, 2018, for further details). Instead of seeing our youngest children as learners, the younger they are, the more money that can be made from them. According to Moss (2007), establishing democracy as a central value in early childhood institutions is 'incompatible with understanding these institutions as businesses and adopting a market approach to service development' (p. 15). Altogether, the sophistication and material resourcing needed to enact democratic ECE pedagogies, to consider ECE (and teaching in ECE) as professional practice, to incorporate contemporary perspectives of leadership and leading, can be constrained by ill-aligned arrangements.

An ECE rights-based activist stance compels educators, leaders, and researchers to overcome the challenges of enacting democratic pedagogies in ECE, and act for as close to the greater good for individuals and society as we possibly can. It is possible to do this through a transformative activist stance (TAS) which posits the social world as 'constituted by and through social transformative practices enacted and carried out by individuals acting collaboratively as social subjects' (Stetsenko, 2013, p. 14). First, however, it is necessary to differentiate between the aspirational democratic project of ECE pedagogy, the actual practices that constitute it, and the arrangements (some of which have been outlined above) that enable and constrain

them. A practice theory perspective is beneficial for identifying, deconstructing, and stirring up the sedimented arrangements that prefigure possibilities for democratic ECE practices. Some of this work has been done by the authors of this chapter. For example, Gibbs (2020) has used the theory of practice architectures to identify socially just leadership practices that uphold children's rights and to understand the organisational arrangements that enabled and constrained them. Cooke and Francisco (2020) used the theory to identify arrangements for educators to take risks in their professional practice in ways that contributed towards high-quality ECE, and, so, democratic ECE pedagogy. Finally, Salamon (2017) used the theory to illuminate how educator conceptions about infant capabilities, our youngest citizens, are amongst the arrangements that constrain infants, before identifying powerful, embodied, agentic infant practices that shape the relational dynamics and practices of educators within them.

The Education Complex and Early Childhood Education

The theory of practice architectures, described above, assists with 'seeing' the practices of educators, the sites where practices are enacted, and the arrangements on those sites that make practices possible (Kemmis et al., 2014). This approach shows us how pedagogical practices are shaped and connected, specifically within an interdependent ecology of practices (Kemmis et al., 2012). In examining democratic ECE pedagogies and the complex challenges of enacting them as ecologies of practices, the outcomes of one practice depend upon the outcomes of another, and disruptions in one part of the ecological system can erode the vitality of the whole system. Inside these ecologies, educators, informed by their knowledge, skills, and practice, commit themselves, or become committed to, the project of democratic ECE. Originally, the education complex referred to the related and interconnected ecologies of practices of schooling and the arrangements that make those practices possible (Kemmis et al., 2012). It is also described as 'the interdependence of the practices of learning, teaching, professional learning, leading, and educational researching' (Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 51–52). The education complex, adapted here for the early childhood context[1] comprises educators' pedagogical practices, children's practices, initial and continuing professional learning, educational policy, administration and leadership, educational research and quality assessment, and families, communities, and societies (see Fig. 6.1).

The practices and practice architectures hang together within an (early childhood) education complex and co-exist within the complexity of ECE settings.

[1] The education complex in its original form comprises teaching, student learning, professional learning, leading, research and evaluation (Kemmis et al., 2012). Through discussion with Kemmis, the education complex was first reshaped for ECE in 2020 (Gibbs & Press, in press) and further adapted here.

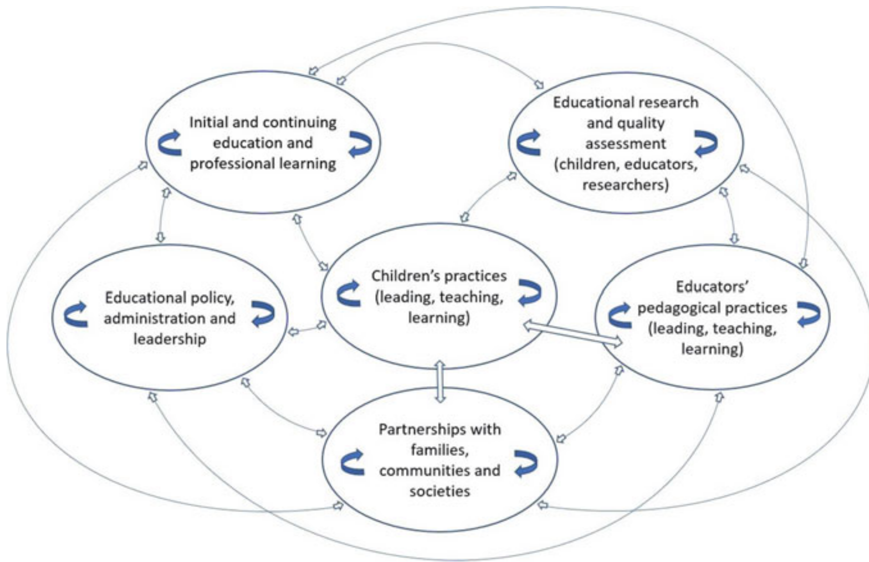

Fig. 6.1 Ecology of interconnected practices in the (early childhood) education complex. Adapted from Kemmis et al. (2012 p. 37)

Educators' Pedagogical Practices

ECE pedagogy encompasses philosophy and educational learning frameworks, for example, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), quality assessment and regulations (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2020) which drive educational programmes within ECE. Democratic ECE pedagogies are enacted through ongoing investigation, collaboration, and research between adults and children as an everyday praxis (Reggio Children, 2022) that shifts social-political arrangements and makes it possible for educators to engage in teaching, learning, and leading practices. Material-economic, social-political, and cultural-discursive arrangements that enable and constrain pedagogy and practice include (but are not limited to) ECE regulations, common professional language, material resourcing of pedagogical projects, and sharing of knowledge and physical space.

Children's Practices

The material-economic arrangement of regulation along with the social-political and cultural-discursive arrangement of children's rights and equality, enable opportunities for children to shape the practices of leading, teaching, and learning as a process. To engage children actively in learning, the EYLF encourages educators to identify and document children's strengths and interests to plan for their participation

and development through emergent learning themes, choose appropriate teaching strategies, and design the learning environment accordingly. Curriculum content is led by children and influenced by both children and adults. As co-designers of curriculum and its delivery, children can become teachers for, and with, peers and educators. Educators thus understand children as competent and having agency over their learning (DEEWR, 2009).

Initial and Continuing Education and Professional Learning

Educators are employed from a range of initial teacher and educator training settings, including Universities, Technical and Further Education settings (TAFEs), and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Most educators in ECE are Diploma and Certificate trained (Education Services Australia, 2021), with a range of depth of understanding of key pedagogical concepts gained in preservice training. This acts as a cultural-discursive arrangement that shapes possibilities for pedagogical practices. Common professional language gained through preservice training and experience within ECE sites enables collective approaches to pursue quality standards (Gibbs, 2020). Material-economic arrangements provide resources for professional development. Mentoring and coaching, as a social-political arrangement, are essential strategies for shaping the practices of educators.

Educational Policy, Administration, and Leadership

Material-economic, social-political, and cultural-discursive arrangements cultivate educator practices within education policy and administration. As educators work together to develop philosophies, they advocate for programmes that uphold child and family rights. Values and philosophy, therefore, underpin decision-making, communication, and team culture—critical characteristics of effective ECE sites (Coleman et al., 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Policy and procedure documents use professional language that is inclusive and engender a sense of responsibility. Role equality is present in staff meetings and professional development events. Through dispersed decision-making, everyone's contribution is enabled.

Educational Research and Quality Assessment

Material-economic arrangements for practitioner research enable educator practices. This form of research makes a powerful contribution to pedagogical decision-making and builds collaborative democratic practice amongst educators and with children. When educators become involved in practitioner research, they reflect on

their teaching and use empirical evidence to support change. Investigations can embolden advocacy for socially just pedagogical practice (MacNaughton et al., 2010). Within high-quality ECE settings, this research is resourced and encouraged. Cultural-discursive arrangements also enable democratic educator practice through the knowledge and implementation of the quality standards. Where educators within sites are cognisant of evidence-based standards, they invite participation in and draw on contemporary ECE research, professional knowledge, and language to support high-level achievement on quality criteria (Livingstone, 2018).

Families, Communities, and Societies

Discourses of partnerships with families and communities in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and their enactment in Quality Area 6 (Collaborative partnerships with families and communities) of the National Quality Standard (NQS) (ACECQA, 2018) act as both cultural-discursive and material-economic arrangements that shape pedagogical practices. That the EYLF 'has been designed for use by early childhood educators working in partnership with families, children's first and most influential educators' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 5) reflects social-political arrangements of ECE that enable rights-based and respectful practices with families in education. Reciprocal practices with families firmly situate ECE sites within communities. Conversely, advocating for and promoting children's contributions in ECE into the wider community helps transform and promote images of children as competent, capable citizens in society.

The three projects below describe some of the interdependent practices and arrangements within the ECE complex, identified in the research. They reveal how ECE sites (and the practitioners within them) shape and reshape democratic practices through a dynamic scaffolding and interchange of organisational arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2012) in leading, teaching, researching, and learning.

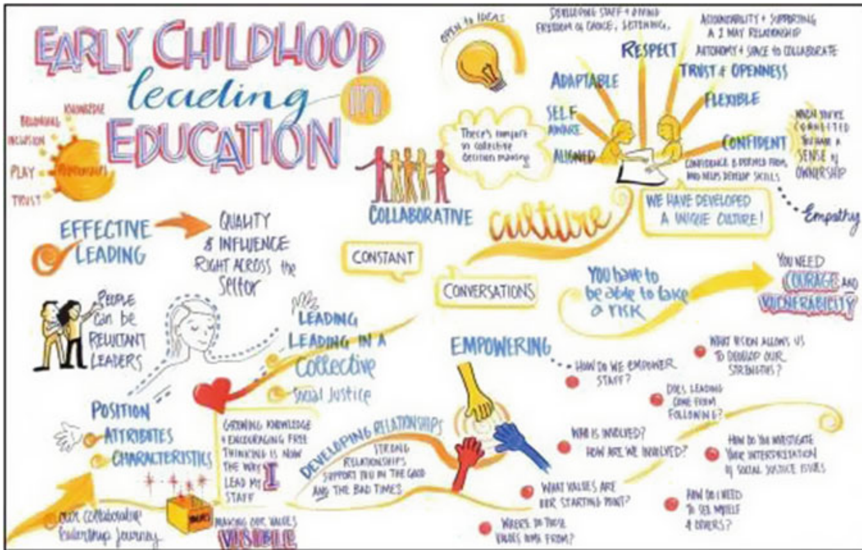

Fig. 6.2 Leading in early childhood education (Gibbs et al., 2020)

The Projects in This Chapter

Project One: The Emergence and Development of Leading and Leadership (Gibbs)

The first project described here explored the emergence and development of effective leading and leadership within exemplary[2] Australian ECE sites. Effective leadership influences the quality of early childhood practice and therefore plays a role in civil and economic society, contributing favourably to the developmental trajectories of young children (Douglass, 2019). In this context, high-quality ECE is a child's right (UNICEF, 1989). The conditions for leadership cultivation also contribute to educators' rights of agency and citizenship. These shared child and educator rights, observed and analysed within the research study, take centre stage within this component of the chapter. First, however, it is essential to describe the underpinning conceptualisation of leadership. Rather than the traditional positioning of leadership as a centralised, character-driven, heroic concept, leadership is conceptualised as a collective practice (see Fig. 6.2).

[2] 'Exemplary' indicates the participating ECE sites had achieved an 'Exceeding' rating in every rateable element of every standard within every quality area of the legislated accreditation system (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2018). Early childhood education settings rated at this level exhibit consistently high-quality practices as defined by the National Quality Standard.

This collective practice is characterised as dynamic, emergent encounters and enactments within ECE sites. More specifically, 'leading' is a socially just practice occurring as a relational activity within a collective and is not limited to formal leadership roles (Wilkinson, 2017). Such a conceptualisation creates space for the emergence and cultivation of leading practices and acts as a foundation for formal leadership roles. Therefore, as individuals engage in and organisations enable the practice of leading, a collective momentum occurs around the project of leadership, realised by each individual's agentive contribution to collective practices that are ever shifting with each active contribution (Stetsenko, 2019).

Identifying leading practices is foundational to the emergence and cultivation of leadership. The theory of practice architectures helped to 'see' leading practices in this project and worked to identify the conditions that make those practices possible (Gibbs, 2020). Data generation took the form of observations, unstructured interviews, dialogic cafés, and document gathering. All approaches aimed to be emergent, generative, and dynamic. A field observation table supported initial observations of educators. The table mapped practices of effective leaders, with complexity leadership theory and the theory of practice architectures (see Gibbs et al., 2020 for further detail). Those educators who were practising leading were revealed. Educators included formal and informal leaders. The other methods mentioned above enabled further interrogation of practices. This interrogation enabled other leading practices, exemplified in the enactment of agency and citizenship, to be seen and then for the arrangements that made those practices possible, to be identified. In line with intentional teaching and critical ECE pedagogy and practice (DEEWR, 2009), examples of educator practices of leading included advocacy for inclusion, making a case for innovative curriculum practice, and arguing for remuneration that respects the status of the ECE educator role. The skills, knowledge, and values informed such practices of educators. Educators saw themselves as powerful agents of change and transformation. The enabling cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of the ECE sites made this perspective and leading practices possible.

Inclusive practice, for example, was enabled by using common professional language to describe inclusion and approaches to ensuring a child's access to the early childhood setting. Knowledge of funding arrangements expedited such access, and a shared commitment to equality ensured full engagement in educational programmes and practice for the child. Innovative curriculum practice was enabled by an educational leader's full and robust understanding of regulatory compliance and, in some cases, a healthy argument against overt compliance. Such a thorough understanding enabled an exciting programme of excursions that broadened children's understanding of their surroundings and their role as world citizens. The third example of educator advocacy for higher remuneration was enabled by an understanding of the importance of early childhood educators that was equally shared across the ECE site. Educators felt supported in advocating for higher pay and for early childhood education. Positional leaders encouraged strike action. An important finding in this study resides in shaping democratic practices of leading by the children within the ECE sites. This previously unconsidered and surprising finding illuminated the children's

role in developing leadership. Emerging and positional leaders engaged with children as research partners and equals in learning. Curriculum content was led by the children and influenced by children and adults. For example, one ECE site explored the threatened extinction of bees. In this project, children inspired and shaped leadership through a rich intertwining of interest, activism, and pedagogical knowledge. Another example of co-created curriculum content included a project driven by the children and led in partnership with Klarissa, the early childhood teacher. The project embodied concepts of identity, colonisation, and democratic practices, reflected by Klarissa:

> The Flag Project began with the question, 'Why do we have four flag poles but only three flags?" and led to a flag-raising ceremony almost nine months later. The children wanted to make a symbol of their connection to the place where they spend their days. They insisted on ensuring that not only our school was represented but also the people who came before us, the Aboriginal people.
>
> They reflected on their relationship to the land on which we live and play and how they could develop their own symbols to represent their connection. Their respect for this place, their community and the natural world was evident throughout their work. This sense of consideration led to a long research process to understand flags, colour, symbols and meaning.
>
> To reflect on this project, I feel immense pride in seeing the 'real life' flag arrive. We did it! This flag represents so much more than our little school on the roof. The children were genuinely considerate of our world when creating this flag.

The interdependence of practices and constant shaping and reshaping in an ecology of practices within the ECE complex, brought to life with practice examples, reveals new practices of leading and the phenomena of leadership transformation for both children and educators. The emergence and development of leadership in this way shifts traditional power dynamics and promotes agency and citizenship within collective democratic and socially just communities.

Research Project Two: Educator Professional Risk-Taking to Support Children's Rights, Social Justice, and Democracy (Cooke)

Project two explored educators' perspectives and practices of educator professional risk-taking in ECE. The study took place in three Australian ECE settings, chosen because they were rated as 'exceeding' in the Australian legislated accreditation and quality rating system (ACECQA, 2020), and because they demonstrated value for children's risk-taking in their promotional material and centre documentation. The combination of high quality and the provision of opportunities for children's risk-taking invited participation by educators who were likely to provide reflective and valuable insight on risk-taking in professional practice (Cooke et al., 2020). Risk-taking was framed as beneficial risk-taking, this being thoughtful and courageous acts that take a person outside of their comfort zone, are characterised by uncertainty

and the possibility of negative consequences, and are enacted with the hope for positive outcomes and/or valuable learning (Cooke et al., 2019). Use of the theory of practice architectures helped to identify how participating educators addressed issues of upholding children's rights, social justice, and democracy by taking risks in their professional practice. In taking risks, educators carefully considered what was 'best' for children and society, thus aligning risk-taking with praxis (Cooke et al., 2020). Praxis, as viewed in the theory of practice architectures, is the enactment of morally and ethically informed decisions that contribute to the formation of individuals and societies (Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

Upholding children's rights involved moral and ethical decision-making, as children's rights were sometimes in conflict with parents' wishes. Educators took risks by enabling children's engagement in activities of their own choosing but were disapproved of by their parents. Activities included getting dirty and face painting. Educators assessed the strength of children's desires and the value of the activity, weighing this against potential repercussions from parents. One educator said, after allowing a child to have her face painted, 'the guilt I feel when [the parents] are quite angry…[but] it's [the child's] face, their skin…they never get to have autonomy over the way they look' (Sally, Teatree Children's Centre). This moral and ethical decision-making was also evident when educators addressed issues of social justice in curriculum. Educators spoke about taking children into 'risky grey spaces' by exploring 'big issues'. Australian history was a big issue viewed as risky because not all families agreed with sharing such complex and potentially divisive information with young children. Educators who engaged with issues such as this believed it was important for children to know the world they live in, so they can work to change it for the better. One educator said, '[I know] children who have done stuff, have stood up and spoken and felt very empowered by that' (Lucy, Teatree Children's Centre).

The praxis-based risk-taking that educators enacted to pursue democratic, socially just, and rights-based practices were enabled and constrained by particular arrangements (see Cooke & Francisco, 2020 for further details), similar to the ways leadership shaped emancipatory possibilities in project one. Yet it is not only arrangements and praxis that enable and constrain risk-taking, it is also agency. Active engagement with praxis *and* agency towards professional risk-taking can be viewed through Stetsenko's (2019) transformative action stance. Stetsenko identifies that while arrangements might exist that invite agency (and risk-taking), it is up to the individual to actively respond to these invitations (Stetsenko, 2019). For example, in one setting, educators shared leadership of group times with 4 and 5-year-old children to position them as equal participants in the class community. This democratic practice required educators to trust that children would behave in ways supportive of a positive class climate. Class climate is often used to judge the quality of educators' practices, thus positioning the sharing of leadership with children as risky for educators. One educator said, 'giving children a voice, an equal voice, that was quite risky and that took some time in terms of communicating with families and explaining why you do a certain thing' (Stephanie, Teatree Children's Centre). This reflects Stetsenko's view that agency is not an individual response to the world, rather a collective view of

'ourselves as agentive co-creators' (Stetsenko, 2019, p. 7) in a world that is constantly changing through our 'collectividual' (Stetsenko, 2013) transformative practices.

The interdependence of practices and constant shaping and reshaping in an ecology of practices within the ECE complex was realised in this project through educators' enactment of a transformative action stance in their teaching and professional risk-taking. The risks educators took, executed collectively through ethically and morally guided praxis, reveal deliberate and thoughtful transformational practices towards developing children as active members of society, equipped with the skills and knowledge to participate, understand, and enact rights, and contribute towards a socially just world.

Research Project Three: Participation, Play, and Agency with Infants (Salamon)

The third project aimed to document and deconstruct infants' powerful, evocative social and emotional practices. Drawing on previous work that identified infant agency as having the capacity to shape the arrangements of ECE (Salamon, 2017), this project highlighted how infants can also shape the arrangements of ECE research as agentic participants. According to the UNCRC, as all children do, infants have a right to participate in cultural life and express their own views in matters affecting them (UNICEF, 1989). In research (and pedagogy), it is necessary to consider different degrees of participation for infants when making decisions about research activities they should—or can—participate in (Bergold & Thomas, 2012) and ways they might express their views. Because babies cannot participate in the research activity of making decisions beforehand, they exercise little control in relation to those. There are, however, many research activities infants **can** participate in and decisions they **can** make in the context of the 'happening-ness' (Kemmis, 2012) of ECE research, described earlier as dynamic, emergent encounters and enactments. These democratic underpinnings of participatory research necessitate an emphasis of the unique strengths and complementary expertise of researchers and participants (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Any effort to enable participation of infants in research must thus be underpinned by the researcher's capacity to understand and relate to babies' unique strengths and complementary expertise.

A methodological attitude of ethical symmetry, acknowledging the similarities of babies to other research participants while honouring and working with their differences (Salamon, 2015), enabled space for babies to naturally participate to some degree in the enactment of the research via methods and materials designed to invite their participation. The babies were present in group meetings with educators and, following a past method for participation (see Salamon, 2015, for further details), laminated pictures of the data being shared were provided for the babies to engage with. Before the next meeting, however, the pictures were placed on the wall so they were no longer able to be used as planned. After discussion with educators,

Fig. 6.3 Infants during research meetings engaging with pedagogical resources

pedagogical resources (old business cards to be used for putting into empty tissue boxes found at the site) were included for babies to engage with during meetings instead. Over the course of the first month, infants acted with agency and 'stepped into' the space created by these enabling research arrangements, engaging with them in different ways (see Fig. 6.3).[3]

Stetsenko and Ho (2015) consider agentive actors as unique people with an irreplaceable role in co-authoring social interactions, shared practices, and the world itself. Some babies began to interact with me and, as the researcher I am, with decades-long history as an ECE professional with (and advocate for) babies, I responded to their bids. The project ethics application stated that if babies initiated interaction I would respond, because, in fact, it would be unethical not to respond. In the second month, the developing mutual and co-constructed engagement between myself and participating infants turned into play.

According to Stetsenko and Ho (2015), 'play offers unique opportunities for children to develop and exercise their agency, identity and voice' (p. 221). Infants did this by drawing on and demonstrating the social and emotional practices that were the focus of the research, extending these to cognitive practices of imitation and acting with intention through playful exchanges that included pretending to laugh and cough and blink and sneeze in humorous ways. Infant meaning-making centres around lived experiences and rather than play with objects or abstract imaginative concepts, through and within our dynamic, reciprocal, and playful interactions, the babies played with what they know about their everyday perceptual and relational world. The Sneezing Game, for example, was a seemingly simple game (adult puts mega block on head, adult pretends to build up a sneeze, adult pretends to sneeze with a dramatic 'atchoo' and brings head forward letting the block fall on the floor) that promoted cognitive, social, and emotional play around the everyday experience of sneezing. Babies would eagerly offer me the block to continue the game, with obvious reciprocal actions, and repeat the sound of the 'ahhh' in atchoo, again seemingly inviting me to continue. The game was played at the setting in the final month with

[3] Permission was gained from children's guardians and educators according to the processes of the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (protocol number H20055) to use and publish images with the faces of children and educators who participated in the study for dissemination of the project. Assent was also gained from the babies through researcher observation of holistic embodied infant responses to their presence and their equipment.

eager participation of and initiation by the infants with educators, families at home, and myself.

The interdependence of democratic practices and constant shaping and reshaping in an ecology of practices within the ECE complex were realised in this project through the enactment of educational research. In similar ways, leaders and educators enacted a TAS, shared deliberate, thoughtful, and intentional research practices with infants emancipated them as active members of society able to participate in, lead, and contribute to, matters affecting their world.

Conclusion

> Last, but certainly not least, all practices are interdependent and persist in some kind of relationship of reciprocity: while practices are always inherently unique and situated, they are also connected to social life both locally and, potentially, globally. (Nicolini, 2012, p. 48)

This chapter has worked to illuminate how democratic ECE practices exist in ecological, interdependent, reciprocal relationships that are always already situated in historical and contemporary, local and global practice landscapes. Threads of ethical activism are evident in the individual and collective transformation (through agency) of leading, teaching, and researching across the research presented, grounded in a social justice and rights-based ECE stance. As part of the project of democratic ECE, the stance is inherently unique and situated, and at the same time the stance is a pedagogical one that is connected to a broader view of professional practice and education. From this broad, zoomed-out perspective, the projects reflected how researching and theorising ECE using the theory of practice architectures, can reconnect 'practice with individual and collective praxis' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 25). Zooming in using these examples reflects the double purpose of education, that is, to help people live well in a world worth living in (Kemmis et al., 2014) as unique, ongoing, and complex within the specifics of an ECE complex. To enact the aspirational democratic individual and collective project of ECE pedagogy, all participants in the ECE complex must understand, align with, and work towards a shared vision with and for our youngest citizens. This is a big task and one that can only be achieved when constraining arrangements (including an increasingly market driven, low status, and inconsistently professional sector), are identified, understood, and overcome.

It has been striking, and heartening, to see the similarities between contemporary ECE philosophy, practice theory and broader educational and pedagogical perspectives. Malaguzzi's 100 languages of children, as discussed earlier for example, is an ethical pedagogical provocation that welcomes and honours children's unique individual voices within co-constructed communities, enacted in practice through pedagogical documentation. These philosophy and practice align with Stetsenko's (2019) TAS to see our youngest children as agents for whom things not only matter but '*who themselves matter* in history, culture and society' (p. 7). In such a view, children's voices constitute activist deeds that contribute to shared, ongoing, and ever-changing ECE practices. As this chapter has shown, the next step is listening

by intentionally creating conditions that make such socially just, democratic, participation and agency with our youngest citizens possible. This is because, as a Reggio Emilia Approach and the Australian ECE Code of Ethics (Early Childhood Australia, 2016) remind us, ECE sites in themselves can and should be democratic communities that contribute both to individuals (children, families, educators) within these sites and the societies around them. Democratic ECE pedagogy thus fulfils an aim of educational practice to initiate learners into acting and interacting with others (and the world) in ways oriented towards the good for each person (individually) and (collectively) the good for humankind (Kemmis et al., 2014) and promotes the work to be done together to live well in a world worth living in.

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Chapter 7
Exploring "Living Well" Through Children's Play

Mervi Kaukko, Nick Haswell, and Jane Wilkinson

Abstract This chapter considers how "living well in a world worth living in" is imagined, replicated and lived in children's free play. Drawing primarily on video data collected by 21 young migrant and refugee background primary school students in Finland and Australia, we consider what children's play can reveal about a just, equitable and fair world in the present and in future, and how schools can support its development by providing the needed cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements for play. Our chapter shows that as children play, they not only create, simulate, and negotiate between themselves an imagined, future-oriented world worth living in for all, but also, through the real collaboration, empathy and care they develop and practise together, they bring that world into being.

Keywords Free play · Children · Practice architectures · Video · Finland · Australia

Introduction

The word *school* derives from the Greek word scholē (σχολή), meaning "free time" and a source of knowledge and experience available as a "common good" (Masschelein & Simons, 2013). "Common good" is at the heart of the double purpose of education discussed in this book, that is, to enable learners to live well in and

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For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/0nQ10AOzLrn4SzD12RFhw6?si=03ddb6bce5ed4c33

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help create a world worth living in for all. However, the role of free time as part of this purpose is often paid little attention. This chapter considers what a world worth living in for all might look like from the point of view of young migrant and refugee background school students, and how the practices of living well in that world may be seen to emerge and be shaped by their free play at school.

Our study draws from a larger Finnish-Australian research project exploring the broad questions of what educational "success" looks like from the point of view of children from refugee backgrounds, and how schools can best support these students. Our findings from that project have indicated that the feeling of success may arise from the resourcefulness of children in diverse conditions (Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2020); that play creates important affordances for learning to work together (Kaukko et al., 2022b), and that teachers showing care and love are crucial in assisting students to settle and feel safe especially in the early stages of their settlement (Kaukko et al. 2021). Our previous findings have also highlighted the equally crucial role that educational leaders play in ensuring that the school climate is based on principles of social justice and equity and that teachers have the opportunities and support to meet the needs of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020). This is in line with other research, showing that the initial years of settlement after migration are decisive factors in refugee students' wellbeing and long-term settlement (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; McIntyre & Abrams, 2020) and that, during this time, schools are crucial sites that can help students feel safe and settled (Kohli, 2011). The crucial importance of schools is not limited to refugee students' inclusion and settlement but applies to other migrant students as well (Kaukko et al., 2022a, b). As our project grew and matured, we noticed that some parts of the study would benefit from extending the invitation to all migrant children, not only refugees. This was important especially when we focused on something that can be inclusive by nature, like play.

In this chapter, we explore how children engage in free play at school in Australia and Finland and consider the insights this play might give into the double purpose of education. In line with the future focus of this volume, we consider how analysing the imagined worlds children create in their play can help us understand how children may emerge into, and co-construct, a real-world worth living in. In addition, we consider how schools may better guide students towards living well in the present by providing children with opportunities to play. As children play, they not only create, simulate, and negotiate between themselves an imagined, future-oriented world worth living in for all, but also, through the real collaboration, empathy and care they develop and practise together, they play a part in actually bringing that world into being. This is not all that play can do, but it highlights the importance of broadening our analytical focus from formal practices of education to also encompass times when children are let be.

Two groups of school students, one in Australia (13 children between the ages 6–9) and one in Finland (eight children of 7–9 years of age), documented their school lives wearing chest-mounted action cameras and later co-analysed some of the video recordings with us. When the participating students were let be at school, that is, when they had fairly unstructured free time there, they spent much of it in nature

areas in the school premises, or around the schools when accompanied by supervising teachers. The students' activities in these outside spaces included smashing rocks, jumping around on boulders, hiding in bushes, climbing in trees, gathering natural materials for building, and playing hide and seek.

For this chapter, we analysed one episode of Finnish students' free play and one episode of Australian students' free play. In the Australian episode, a group of students was engaged in imaginary play involving the preparation of a communal meal, using leaves and other natural material. In the Finnish episode, a class of newly arrived migrant children were taken on an outing by their teacher to a lake near the school, accompanied by two of the authors of this chapter (Mervi and Nick). At the beach, the students built sand houses for plastic toy animals that the teacher had brought along, as well as for a ladybug encountered during their play. Focusing on such a small fraction of the data comes with limitations: we cannot make any generalisable arguments about how children's play unfolds. Yet on the other hand it allows us to engage with play in all its complexity and capture the "happeningness" (Kemmis et al., 2014, 29) of practices in play. Our arguments, however, are supported by our interpretation of the extensive overall body of data. While engaged in seemingly simple play activities, the children across the whole body of data had rich discussions about themes such as how to be fair to others, how to include other children in play activities, and how to get things done together. In their actions, they both simulated and enacted situations which were inclusive and sensitive to the diversity of students. In many ways, they played, and lived, a world worth living in as they imagined it.

Although there was very little direct adult interference in the documented play, these play practices did not emerge coincidentally. Enabling them required purposefully planned cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements orchestrated by educators, which, crucially, left room for children to "just be kids". In the following pages, we explore these various arrangements and how they served to enable and guide students' free play practices towards the original purpose of education, a purpose that at times lies in stark contrast with some of the recent test-driven tendencies of education in both Australia and Finland.

The Purpose of Education

Contemporary schooling, with its varying levels of standardised testing, can be seen as having the narrow purpose of equipping students with skills and temperaments to function within prevailing socio-economic systems (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). Education, on the other hand, can be seen as having a deeper moral purpose. Kemmis et al. (2014) define education as the

> process by which children, young people, and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development, and

> individual and collective self-determination and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind". (p. 26)

By this definition, education happens in practices, that is, in the present moment, but it also focuses on the future: the future good for each person, the future good for humankind and, we would like to add (see Kaukko et al., 2021), the future good for all the life on our shared planet. The moral task of education then, as described by Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018), consists of five facets: environmental, economic, social, cultural, and personal, each of which impart skills and knowledge with which to create conditions for, and to practise living well in, a world that continues to be worth living in for the next generations too.

Play can be a set of practices which invites children to imagine a better future. On the other hand, play can also sometimes be cruel, mean, racist, sexist, and reproduce the worst aspects of society. Our attempt is not to romanticise play as simply "good", but in this chapter, our focus is on what play can say about living well together. Play can have varying importance in education, depending on the school system and the age of the students. At best, play can be "an inherently enjoyable activity and an important process through which children learn about themselves, others, and the world around them" (Austin et al., 2016, p. 119). It can appear anywhere and everywhere, yet play is also informed and influenced by the material arrangements surrounding it. Both episodes selected for this chapter take place outdoors in natural or semi-natural environments. In the Finnish example, it was because the children were taken to a lakeside beach surrounded by forest. In the Australian example, children chose to play in particularly leafy parts of their school's large natural premises—an environment which had been especially crafted for the children by the school, given many of them lived in apartments with no outside space to play. Children's play studies (Ernst & Burcak, 2019; Wake & Birdsall, 2016) suggest that particular qualities of natural spaces, including their mystery and complexity, make them preferred sites of play for children. Research has highlighted extremely positive effects of children's nature-based play on whatever is measured, be it students' physical activity outcomes, cognitive behaviours, learning, mental health, or wellbeing (Dankiw et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2022; Wake & Birdsall, 2016). Ernst and Burcak (2019) argue that free play in natural settings develops skills and attitudes relevant to sustainability, such as curiosity, creative thinking and resilience. Wake and Birdsall (2016) argue that well-planned and collaboratively designed school gardens offer students opportunities to experience nature while promoting social inclusivity and healthy lifestyles.

Research on play is diverse in its quality, contexts, methods, scope, and, importantly, the extent to which it can come to convincing conclusions. Play is hard to understand from the outsider's perspective and when play can be researched, the act of exploring it may limit the extent to which the play continues unchanged and "free". Nevertheless, childhood researchers continue to call for more research on play (Parker et al., 2022), and few educators would doubt its importance. Many also agree that schools, especially those in urban and/or low socio-economic areas, should

invest more in creating opportunities for children's free play in safe and stimulating environments.

Acknowledging the important benefits and purposes of children's play as well as the challenges involved in researching it, we focus on children's play as an aspect of the original purpose of schooling, to be both a source of free time and of knowledge and experience available as a "common good". In studying episodes of children's play, we therefore approach play as a window through which to investigate how children, on their own terms yet guided by the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of schooling, come to understand, negotiate and live well in a world worth living in for all. In the following section, we discuss the contexts, participants, and methodology of our study.

Context and Participants

The data used in this chapter were collected by students who studied in public primary schools located in the outskirts of the large city of Melbourne, Australia and a city in Finland. The Australian school is a middle-sized (< 400 students), public primary school where approximately 90% of the students speak English as an additional language and about 25% of the students are from different refugee backgrounds. The Finnish school is a large (> 1500 students) public comprehensive school, including classes from early childhood education to upper secondary school. The students we observed in both countries were 6–9 years of age. They all had migrant backgrounds and some came from refugee backgrounds.

The Australian school follows the Victorian Curriculum F–10 (Foundation year to Year 10), which sets out what Australian students should learn during their first eleven years of schooling. This curriculum, incorporating the Australian Curriculum and Victorian priorities and standards, claims to outline the common set of knowledge and skills required by students for life-long learning, social development, and active and informed citizenship (VCAA, 2022). The Finnish school follows the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (EDUFI 2014), which, like the Australian curriculum, sets the standards for learning in grades 1–9, but does so in a very broad manner. The students we observed in the Finnish school were in a preparatory class for newly arrived migrant students, meaning that in addition to the Finnish National Core Curriculum, they followed a Preparatory Education Curriculum. The main focus of preparatory education in Finland is on learning Finnish language and becoming familiar with the Finnish school system, through individual education plans and more flexibility in the curriculum.

Neither the Victorian Curriculum F-10, the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education nor the Finnish Curriculum for Preparatory Education have a particular focus on play. They acknowledge play as a teaching practice (VCAA, 2022) and an inquiry method, especially for young learners (EDUFI, 2014; VCAA, 2022) but not as a priority or as a cross-curricular theme. However, there is an increasing awareness in both Australia and Finland that play promotes key skills and knowledge

that school systems should provide in better ways. This awareness was reflected in the Australian case study school's emphasis on play as a crucial form of pedagogy (Kaukko et al, 2022b).

Methods

The nature of children's play, with its imaginative dimensions and its child-exclusivity, makes it difficult to research, yet some elements of play can be comprehensible from the outside (Kaukko et al., 2022b). For our broader study, we gathered audio-visual data consisting of videos filmed by students themselves as they participated in day-to-day school activities. In each country, the schoolteacher helped us select students to participate. All the Australian students were from different migrant backgrounds, with some from refugee backgrounds, but studying in the mainstream education system. The Finnish group consisted of eight students who were studying in a preparatory class before moving into mainstream primary school classes[1]. After giving consent to participate and be filmed, and after being introduced to the aims of the study, the students wore chest-mounted action cameras for approximately 90 min per day, filming their ordinary school activities. The groups followed their normal schedules during the filming periods, meaning that students' videos captured a mix of time spent inside, outside, in structured lessons and in unstructured free time such as lunch breaks or outings. When students returned their camera after each filming session, we asked them a series of questions about their activities and experiences. The questions varied slightly depending on the group. The first question, "Did you do something that made you feel successful?", was simplified as needed, which sometimes led the students to mention any events that made them feel good at school. Follow-up questions elaborated on the role of other people, and things around them, in the chosen moments. School observations, as well as interviews with teachers and school leaders, complemented the data collected with children.

Our initial interest was in moments students identified as making them feel successful, where success was defined in the broadest sense of encompassing all kinds of academic, social, and emotional flourishing. However, as we became more familiar with the video data, we realised that much could also be found outside of the chosen moments. This led us to new lines of inquiry, including the current study described in this chapter. Analysing broader swathes of the video material, we identified the two particular play episodes described above and deconstructed the sequences of play practices within them. Both episodes were filmed simultaneously

[1] In Finland, newly arrived migrant students whose language and/or other school-related skills are considered inadequate to participate in education in regular, age-appropriate classes receive preparatory education. Most often, students study in a separate group with their own teacher, while participating in some mainstream classes, such as arts, craft and PE. In Australia, similar support is given by English Language Schools, where some of the participating students had attended previously.

by two or more children who were involved in the same play projects. We analysed these sequences through the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014), paying attention to the sayings, doings and relatings evident in the videos, as well as the broader cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of the site (for a more detailed description of our analysis methods, see (Kaukko et al., 2022b). This chapter draws mostly on the analysis of this video data. We use observational notes and interview data with children and teachers as background data, as needed.

Analysing Changing Practices of Imaginary Play

Play is simultaneously imagined and unpredictable. The same can be said about the future. The flow of play episodes, like the flow of the present world into the future, is shaped by the changing, adding or disappearing of elements within them. Play changes as new materials, activities, participants, or ideas are introduced or removed, or combined in new ways. A common way to try to understand the meaning of a practice is to focus on the practitioner's words. In play, however, and especially in a multilingual group's play, words offer only a partial understanding. The episodes we analysed were full of moments in which children applied different or contradictory meanings to their roles and actions when something was not understood in the same way by the players. We also saw the meaning of play practices affirmed and/or disputed by other children who joined the play. To analyse play, we therefore considered not only what the children did, but also how they adjusted their actions to shifting understandings of what the play required at any given moment.

For the current study, the multilinguality of the video data and our research group gave us an opportunity to be playful with our analysis method. The main language used by students and teachers in the Finnish episode was Finnish, while in the Australian video, the main language used by students was Burmese. In both episodes, some students occasionally mixed these languages with English phrases. While all three members of our research group speak English, two also speak Finnish (Mervi and Nick) and none speak Burmese. This variation in language gave us the opportunity, as a group, to analyse students' play practices firstly by focusing on what was revealed without words, i.e. what the children seemed to be doing, how they related to one another, and what they seemed to be expressing based on the tone of the voice or body language. Jane, who could not understand Finnish or Burmese, commenced this non-verbal analysis on both the Finnish and Australian episodes, followed by Mervi and Nick, who made a similar non-verbal analysis of the Australian video. After this, we obtained an English-translated transcription of the Australian episode, allowing us all to reanalyse the episode in terms of the meanings that the students' words provided. At the same time, Mervi and Nick analysed the Finnish episode with an understanding of the students' speech and compared their comprehensive analyses to Jane's non-verbal analysis.

In the next section, we give a more detailed overview of the episodes in both countries, then zoom in to the children's doings, relatings, and sayings, as well as the arrangements that held them in place. We do this while acknowledging that the changing and unpredictable nature of play makes it vulnerable to misinterpretation.

Field Trip to a Finnish Lakeside Forest

The Finnish data present a school class trip to a nearby beach in late May, just before the summer holiday. The setting is a beautiful natural lakeside environment, and the filming takes place on a pleasant sunny day. The sky is clear, but we can tell that the weather is cool, as the children are wearing jackets and woollen gloves. We can see children being led by their teacher through native forests with pine trees, untended public land and finally arriving at a natural beach site. We can see a changeroom and a rubbish bin behind the beach and apartment blocks slightly further away, indicating the beach is public and urban. There are no other people on the beach when the group arrives. Children wander freely and without rush, and there seem to be no adults dictating their movements.

In this episode, the main activity the children are engaged in is building sand houses for toy animals that the teacher brought along to the beach. Hence, the play was partially initiated by adults as they brought the toy animals, but it was up to the children to decide to integrate the toy animals into the play. We view this episode from the chest-mounted camera of a girl who shapes the damp sand into walls with her gloved hands. Nearby, we can see and hear another girl and boy building their own sand house in similar ways. Occasionally, we see them run together to a nearby patch of forest, gathering natural materials such as flowers, grass, and seeds to be brought back to the sand house. A little later in the video, a fourth important participant is brought into their activity: A ladybug that was found by one of the girls in the forest while collecting materials.

Pretend-Cooking at an Australian School Yard

The Australian play episode occurs on a school playground. The weather here is also sunny and clear. Children are wearing a mix of summer and winter uniforms with some jackets. Girls have leggings underneath their dresses so they can play physically more easily. We can see low school buildings, trees of different sizes, bushes and a variety of different natural and artificial objects lying around. There are natural materials, such as logs, that look purposefully trimmed and placed as play equipment. Other artificial play equipment includes a green metal climbing frame, some swings, and smaller objects such as shovels, pots, and pans. There is a large wooden table situated in the corner of the playground, nestled within a ring of trees and leafy bushes. The ground is covered with wood chips.

In this episode, the main play activity is the simulated preparation and cooking of a meal. We see the episode from the chest-mounted camera of a girl who carries a metal cooking pot to a group of other girls sitting and standing at the wooden table. On the table, various objects have been neatly arranged; there is a tablecloth, a cushion, a metal muffin tray, and some stacked plastic pots. Throughout the episode, we see the girls going back and forth from the table, fetching natural materials from the surrounding ground, bushes, and trees, and placing them in the cooking pot and muffin tray. When one girl cannot reach the seedpods or nuts higher up in the bushes, the other girls lift her up.

Doings Consisting of Purposeful Activities Aiming for a Shared Play

In both the Finnish and Australian play episodes, the doings of the participants seem purposeful and collaborative and targeted towards a commonly agreed aim: building sand houses in Finland and preparing a pretend-dinner in Australia. In the Finnish episode, we see the children running to the forest, collecting building materials such as flowers, twigs, and grass. We see them adding these materials as decorative or functional features of their sand houses or storing them in some of the sand rooms, and we also see them sharing materials and helping each other build. Doings in both episodes show organisation, deliberation, and precision. In the Australian episode, the children are neatly sorting and storing seeds, leaves, and branches in the muffin tray cups, as well as carefully crushing them with a rock. Similarly, in the Finnish episode, we see the children handling their gathered forest materials with care and aesthetic consideration while building and decorating their sand houses. In both cases, the children seemingly strive to make their play environments both beautiful and functional, mimicking practices that would apply to real homes as well.

Play practices have the power to transform and acquire different meanings in the middle of an activity (see Kaukko et al., 2022b). These transformations need to be negotiated between participants, so that a shared understanding and agreement of the aims and "rules" of the play remain. What happens in collaborative play opens new possibilities for interpretation, imagination, and narration for the players, which, in turn, leads to new directions for unfolding. An example of negotiation between play participants is seen in the Finnish episode when, in the middle of the house-building activity, one of the girls finds a ladybug. The girl holds it aloft on her finger, calling the other children over to help make a house for it. She handles the creature delicately as she studies it and shows it to the others, who show interest in it. While we hear them negotiate verbally about the "rules" of the play, how to build the ladybug's house and whether it likes eating certain leaves within the house, we also see them negotiate through their doings; adding and arranging their own elements to the house while accepting, adapting, or rejecting elements added by others. Through this multifaceted negotiation of practices, the collaborative play settles into a new direction of flow in

which a certain room now represents the ladybug's home, a certain leaf represents its bed, and so on.

This shift in the play's direction seems to happen easily, as the ladybug is an interesting enough element to draw the practitioners' focus away from the previous play practices. As the ladybug is a living object, the children handle it carefully and gently. The children seem to understand that the needs of the ladybug overrule the needs of the inanimate toy animals they had, up to that point, been playing with. We do not wish to make any far-fetched assumptions about why the ladybug receives such a central role in the play. It might be because of its bright colours, its small size, pleasing appearance, or the fact that it does not fly away; the video does not give us answers for that. What we do think is shown by the children's doings in the video, however, is a curiosity and a thoughtful consideration to the safety and wellbeing of this non-human play participant. In another scenario, the ladybug could have been crushed or discarded, either through ignorance of how to handle it or deliberately. Significantly, this consideration of safety and wellbeing emerges both in the simulated play that the children have co-created, for example, with the provision of a home, a bed, and food, and also in the real-world manner in which the children physically handle it.

Built, Found, and Imagined Material-Economic Arrangements of Play

In both episodes, the material-economic arrangements that support the children's play include the natural and built play equipment, as well as the time and space allowed for children to experiment, be creative, and work towards a shared aim. Some of these arrangements were deliberately constructed, enabled, or provided by adults at the schools. From our background research, we know that the adults in both schools had the power to give the children the time to play. Past decisions at the school, district, or national levels have ensured that these school children have resources such as equipment and space to accommodate different types of play. The playground in the Australian episode features a range of objects which might not be found in most school yards, such as baking trays, seat cushions, sheets, buckets, and other containers. These "cooking implements" were complemented by "ingredients" consisting of leaves, nuts, flowers, branches, and rocks available from trees and bushes growing in the playground. Such a set-up is not a coincidence. Rather, it concurs with a broader pedagogical philosophy of the school, centred on play and collaborative learning. The practice architectures that shape play in our videos are part of an ecology of practices that connect up to the teaching, leading, researching, and professional learning practices of the school and its classrooms, not only the outdoor environment. The children learn to be collaborative through how they are taught in the classroom and these practices are amplified and reinforced through the practice architectures of the outdoor environment and its naturalistic setting. In one

of the interviews we later made with the school's teaching staff, an educational leader noted that:

> Our spaces outside are not just about biodiversity and curriculum, and they're not just about sport and fixed play equipment, and they're not just about safety, they are actually and truly child centred play opportunities, and open ended as much as possible. (Assistant principal, Australia)

Another of the school's educational leaders agreed, stating that:

> [The school's play philosophy] is about the play and setting up environments that are diverse – giving children the opportunity to have space and choice in the yard and having the notion that we are not risk averse so kids can climb trees. We don't have yard duty, because yard duty implies a sergeant major is walking around saying don't do that, don't do that. The idea with play support is you go around and you say 'Oh that's interesting what you're doing. I might join in', or 'I don't feel comfortable with that'. (Principal, Australia)

The play episode captured in the Finnish video, on the other hand, took place with almost no ready-brought arrangements apart from the toy animals the teacher had brought along to the beach. The material-economic arrangements were mainly created by the children and were rather modest. With no shovels or other play tools available, the children use their hands, feet and sticks from the forest to build and shape their sand houses. In this case, we see that, in fact, the only material-economic arrangements this Finnish school needed to provide in order to enable play was free time and a safe, natural, and rich environment where children were trusted to collaborate.

Respectful and Trusting Relatings Sustaining the Play

From our observations and interviews with teachers and students in both the Finnish and Australian schools, we know that the children were not instructed to work together. Nevertheless, they do, because playing is most often a social practice. The play practices seen in both episodes include individually performed tasks, such as constructing a wall or sorting materials, yet the mutually agreed project of the play, building houses or cooking a meal, also requires collaborative practices, such as sharing, helping, advising, or praising. These same individual and collaborative requirements of play apply to what these children need to do to realise a future world worth living in. They need to practise working together, finding agreement on shared goals and ways of going about tasks that benefit not only themselves but others as well. Working together requires that the children are competent and know what to expect from one another. This means that there is a certain level of predictability in play, even if play, as a whole, can be full of surprises. Some predictability and agreement of common aims ensure that the required tasks get done and the play is purposeful. Additionally, communality and fairness in play practices sustain the flow of the play and keep the participating group committed.

The collaborative nature of play, and the children's attempts to be fair and just, are clearly illustrated in both episodes. In the Finnish video, one of the male participants comes to a girl's building site, pretending to visit her sand house. He explains that he is bringing materials and offers to help her build. The girl accepts the offer and, looking over at his own house, compliments him on how nice it looks. These kinds of polite exchanges occur throughout the video between the participants themselves, yet also between participants, their toy animals and the ladybug, whose roles the children take in the dialogues.

In the Australian video, we can see three girls collecting "cooking ingredients" from the bushes behind the playground table. One of the girls, who is shorter than the others, indicates that she wants to reach higher up the bush. One of the other girls lifts her up by the legs and keeps her balanced while the shorter girl picks seeds or nuts from the bush. The third girl helps to hoist the small girl up onto the second girl's shoulders. As they work together, they laugh and converse in Burmese. Through the girls' actions alone, we can interpret their intention as to assist the smallest child, and the later translation of their conversation confirmed this. From the translation, we also gain a sense of both the difficulty of the task as well as the care and co-ordination the girls brought to it: "Hold it carefully…. Could you please hold her legs?" Overall, the task seems pleasant, and all seem pleased at the outcome.

Social-Political Arrangements Nurturing Collaboration and Respect

The relatings we see in the play episodes illustrate the children's orientation towards fair play and being just. It is not easy to conclusively pinpoint the origins of the social-political arrangements enabling this orientation. Based on the observations and interviews at both the Finnish and Australian schools, we can assume that such relatings are made possible by a respectful and fair school climate, as well as committed teachers, leaders and other school staff. The Australian school was committed to a whole-school approach and personalised learning (Otero et al., 2011), championing respect and dialogue among students, staff, and families. One of the educational leaders we interviewed explained that respectful relationships within and beyond the school community were a non-negotiable requirement for all staff. They noted that, "We expect you to be part of that making those connections with community and families and the broader community", and that good relationships between staff, students, families, and communities fed into good relationships between the student and learning, and the school and the real world. This is what they call "personalised learning":

> [In] personalised learning you use your actual world instead of using a core curriculum which tends to be in so many cases it's all about numeracy and literacy. Well, learning isn't all about numeracy and literacy. They are absolutely crucial parts of the piece but they are not the whole piece. (Principal, Australia)

From our observations, it was clear that this was not merely rhetoric. The entire school staff knew the students' names, family situations, interests, and concerns, and they used every opportunity to link learning to the real worlds of the students. Providing opportunities for different kinds of play was part of this pedagogy.

Building arrangements that enable free, yet collaborative play is an outcome of persistent work. The teacher of the students in the Finnish episode explained that, at the beginning of the year, she could not take her student group outside of the fenced school area, as the children would run away or do something else unexpected. To reach the stage of making a successful and rewarding field trip such as the one we witnessed in the Finnish episode, it took the teacher a full year of building trust, learning to communicate with the multilingual group, and building a safe and welcoming community. These qualities were apparent to us both from the Finnish video material and in our more general observations of the class. Similar qualities were likewise seen in the Australian school, where one of the Australian teachers noted:

> You don't play if you're not feeling safe and you have to worry about your belongings, and you have to worry about where people are and you're too traumatised and sad, your play can look very, very different. So, with the evolution of play in our yard, we can actually now say that our children are feeling very safe and happy in our yard, and they trust those things will be there tomorrow. (Leading teacher, Australia)

Children's relatings indicate respect for the teacher, each other, and others' play sites; students are not breaking or stealing materials from others. We note here that this might be a limitation (or a benefit) of our methodology, given that the children's behaviour may have been influenced by their awareness of the cameras and the knowledge that their actions were recorded. However, the video filming period for each student was quite long (one week in Finland, three weeks in Australia) and both examples are from the final days of the filming. It is therefore fair to assume that the children grew used to the cameras and did not constantly think about them.

Sayings with and Without Language

Sayings consist not only of words, but also of elements such as silences, pauses, tones, and gesticulations. Some of the sayings in the Finnish and Australian play episodes can therefore be understood without understanding the children's language. In the videos, we see non-linguistic elements of sayings such as speaking with loud or soft tones, speaking rapidly or slowly, or pointing with their finger to an object. In short, the children in the play episodes are using, in addition to words, a whole range of verbal, tonal, and gestural elements from which an understanding of the children's expressions can be surmised.

In the Finnish video, the children are mostly talking about the sand house activity, narrating their actions, and offering guidance to the others. There are also many small, polite exchanges that are not directed at the play practice per se, but aimed

at connecting, supporting, and encouraging each other. In analysing the Australian episode, none of us understood the children's Burmese language, yet its translation did not reveal any great surprises; as in the Finnish episode, the children are narrating their actions, as well as giving short instructions, compliments, or requests to one another: "Put rice, pork, and water in this pot…", "Put vegetables here [in the pot] and then cook", "It's dirty".

When analysing a section of the Finnish video in which one of the girls is poking twigs and grass through a small pile of sand, Jane is not sure what they are for. She does not understand the girl's words, so her guess is that the girl is arranging sticks to light pretend fires in the home. However, with an understanding of the girl's words, Nick's and Mervi's analysis reveals that the pile is going to be a bathroom wall and that the sticks stuck through it are showers. This shows that material-economic arrangements of play, in this case the sticks and grasses, require suitable cultural-discursive arrangements to give them meaning. Only then can their purpose be agreed among the players. We saw this as well in the Australian video analysis, where none of us initially understood what was being talked about or what the exact meaning and purpose of the children's activities were. In the video, it seemed clear that the girls were busy pretend-cooking with nuts, seeds, and other nature elements in a pot. The English translation of the Burmese dialogue, however, revealed that the berries represented rice, and the discussion touched upon the use of rice in their "village". "In our village, there is no rice. We eat only vegetables", said one of the girls, as she added pretend rice in her food. The others continued: "We need to cook rice". It is difficult to say how significant this food selection is to the children's play-cooking. Maybe it refers to the scarcity of a basic food group that the children may have experienced in the past, but we have no information about this. We also cannot say how important the addition of showers is to the children building sand houses. Perhaps knowing these things would not reveal much more about children's ideas of a good life or a world worth living in. Maybe showers and rice were simply parts of their play, enabled by the suitable material-economic arrangements that happened to be available, and the cultural-discursive arrangements that made them acceptable and intelligible in the minds of other players. We do argue, however, that these kinds of nuances are difficult to grasp by observation alone. Trying to analyse these types of episodes in the way we have attempted here helps us as adults, researchers, and educators to step into the shoes of the child who does not speak the language of the other players. Combining non-verbal and verbal analytical approaches illuminated how it might have felt for many of the participants to participate in the play episodes; that is, being an observer or a participant in a social situation without fully or at all understanding the language of communication. Also, these episodes show that through play, children are not just engaged in imaginary situations, but they actively consider what it would be like to live in, and act well in, in scenarios that they might face in future.

Cultural-Discursive Arrangements Enabling Understanding of a Multilingual Group

Sayings are enabled or constrained by the cultural-discursive arrangements existing in the medium of language and in the dimension of semantic space of the play site. These arrangements are the resources that make possible—and comprehensible—the language used in and about play, that is, its sayings. On the other hand, what is being said in these play practices becomes arrangements for other children’s sayings. For example, the type of tone a child adopts, the direction of their attention or the body language they use can either invite other children into a conversation or repel them. The Finnish and Australian play episodes consist of language and communication that acknowledges and appreciates the children, their imaginations, and their human and non-human companions.

In the episodes, we analysed for this chapter, teachers and other adults are almost entirely in the background, yet the value and room they give to their students’ play is revealed in our broader observations of their classes and in our interviews with them. These types of cultural-discursive arrangements become highlighted especially in multilingual and multicultural play. In communicating with each other, the children in the play episodes used not only body language and gestures, but also languages other than their first language. Nevertheless, throughout the episodes, we see the students using the common languages of Finnish, Burmese, and English confidently and flexibly, combining them on occasion (for example, “I don’t have any *hakaneula”* [Finnish for safety pins]). The fact that the students feel confident and free to blend languages in this way suggests that the cultural-discursive arrangements surrounding the play allow them to be accepted and understood. The combining of languages also changed according to whom the speaking was directed (teacher, students who were fluent in Finnish/English, less-fluent students, or non-human participants), suggesting that the students themselves understood how their language became a cultural-discursive arrangement for others.

Discussion

We cannot say anything definitive about what the children in our research had in mind while they played, but we can say that the world they mimicked in their play showed inclusiveness and equity. Participatory analysis would have helped, and that is what we used when analysing moments which the children had selected as connected with a feeling of success. The data used for this article goes beyond those moments. However, two of the students in the Australian example chose the cooking activity as their moment of success for that day. When Mervi interviewed them, one of them noted that the group conversed in their first language because one of the girls was new to the country and could not yet speak English well. The videos confirm the efforts for inclusivity in, for example, the way the children changed their language to

Burmese and when speaking English, they did so in slow, clearer tones, using far more gestures to match the language skills of the receiver. In other words, the welcoming and inclusive nature of the children's practices could be seen in the video data, and the interviews confirmed that this indeed was their intent. The children included the newcoming child in their sayings, doings, and relatings, not by coincidence, but on purpose.

The world imagined by the students and replicated in their play was also equitable, seemingly because that was the only way to keep the play going. Some of the plays in the videos were individual, yet most were based on cooperation. Very rarely was it based on competition. Children strove for shared goals with friends, helping each other by sharing skills, materials, or strength, and also being responsible for, and taking care of others. Considering these inclusive and just elements of play, we argue that increasing the emphasis on play as part of a broader pedagogical philosophy based on building trust, collaboration, and equity in schools can foster children's collaborations in building a world worth living in in their present, partially imagined world and also allow them to develop skills to bring about, and act within, a world worth living in for the future.

We acknowledge that play cannot alone fulfil the educational needs of children or, by itself, teach them to build a world worth living in. We also understand that the purpose of schooling is more than offering children time to "be" and to engage in free play. Schools and education have, fortunately, evolved greatly since the Greek word scholē (σχολή) was originally used. Schooling as "free time" is no longer exclusively for privileged boys to be freed from physical labour; it is now the right of all children and youth. We are therefore not arguing for a reversal of schooling back to some "good old days", or for schools filled with nothing but free play time. Rather, we argue for our current schools to pay closer attention to the importance of play. Play can give experiences of succeeding for children of different abilities, languages, and backgrounds. It can make children feel safe and included. Teachers can build conditions for play, and it does not need grand transformations of our current educational practices. Children play when they are left to be, and their play can at the same time be educative, purposeful, and rewarding. The benefits of play are hard to measure and may therefore be overlooked in crowded curricula and standardised testing. Yet, as we can see in our data and in other play research, play can support a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for a better future.

The process of analysing data without understanding the words was particularly illustrative in terms of how play might appear in the eyes of an observer who would like to enter it without the possibility of understanding the language of its practitioners. Tuning our senses to the non-linguistic dimensions of play practices reminds us that people's realities are lived and shared in ways beyond words and languages. Exploring some of these dimensions through play gives us one more window to investigate living well in a world worth living in for all, as seen by children.

We can go even further and play with the idea of what "play" means. Considered broadly as an element of a good life, playing should not be limited to children. Furthermore, it should encompass more than its most common definitions: playing board games, sports, instruments, etc. Playing as part of living well can consist of

having fun with friends, engaging in social interactions, having enjoyable conversation with others, or just any practices that are conducted for the sake of being a human and enjoying life with others. Understood this way, playing is more or less the same as living well and if this playing is inclusive and welcoming to all, the world can be made a little more livable for all.

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Chapter 8
A Schooled Life: Dissonant Glimmers for Interruption Amidst the Tightly Constrained Practice of Schooling

Nicole Brunker

Abstract Beyond family, school is the next most dominant system within which children and young people live. It is pertinent then to ask what role school plays in children and young people living well in a life worth living in for all. For schooling to enable all to live well, it must be educational. Contemporary agendas have driven separation of education from schooling. Change is therefore needed in school practice to achieve the double duty required for all to live well in a world worth living in. Absence of redesign neglects the well-established problems in dominant school structures. Self-determination theory demonstrates change as essential for schools to have positive impact on the potential for all to live well. Central to such change must be the voices of children and young people to enable transformation. In this chapter, I share aspects from a small project that sought the perspectives of children and young people on what it is to live well in a world worth living in for all, and the role school does, and could, play in this lifelong endeavour. Most significantly, the perspectives shared draw attention to the space to see past the constraints of normative ways to be a school student.

Keywords Living well · Eudaimonia · Self-determination theory · School purpose · Student voice

A core focus of life for children and young people is school. As the mandatory occupation of the child (Lahelma and Gordon, 1997, in Lanas, 2019), schooling is predetermined to teach the knowledge and skills valued by generations before them (Biesta, 2006). Overwhelmingly, the experience and intentions of schooling are predetermined well ahead of any student entering the gates. Such predetermination

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For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/1PQ8cVfP3gnWdtXOLzYKkh?si=83efff7347ef4c13

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is based upon ideals of living well in a world worth living in for all conceived by those who will not live in the future adult world the school students will lead.

Schooling is a system that has its own rules and skills taught or, more often than not, required to be 'detected' for learning to be a 'good student' as soon as possible (MacLure et al., 2012). Alternatively, children risk "becoming inscribed as problematic" given the opportunity for success "is not equally available to all" (Lanas, 2019, p. 250). School for some is a place of aggression, at an individual and systemic level, where students learn they are not valued and do not belong (McGregor et al., 2017; Reimer & Longmuir, 2021). Schooling produces childhood (Lanas, 2019), where the aim is to 'flourish' (Kristjánsson, 2016), though the reality for many is failure (Clark, 2016; McGregor et al., 2017). How then do children and young people live well at school, how does school support them to live well now and into their collective future, and how may they shape the relationship between schooling and living well?

The project at the heart of this chapter is a small exploratory multi-case study that sought children and young people's perceptions of living well in the context of schooling. The project did not set out to be representative, rather initiate conversation about how to engage children and young people in taking direction for understanding the relationship between school and living well in a life worth living for all, both now and in future. An underpinning goal in initiating conversation was to explore ways to support student action in the development of schooling for living well. I have focussed on the glimmers of awareness to dissonance between schooling and life outside of school, to consider space within the 'tightly constrained practice' (Kaukko et al., 2020, p. 5) of schooling in which children and young people may take up their agency in shaping how they live well now and into the future. Through exploration of the relationship between education and schooling, and dominant school-based approaches to living well, I highlight the need for a transformative activist stance (Stetsenko, 2014) that engages children and young people in understanding the limitations of existing models of schooling to enable living well for all. My intention is to initiate a position from which students may be at the core of school transformation to enable living well in a world worth living in for all, both in their present and future.

Education and Schooling: A Hazardous Separation for Living Well

To be educational is to enable all to live well in a world worth living in for all (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). In this way, education serves a 'double duty' to individuals and society (Kemmis, 2023; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). It should not be presumed however that schooling is educational (Grootenboer et al., 2018). Assuming the institution of schooling to be educational neglects the very real possibility for schooling to be 'non-educational', even 'anti-educational' (Kemmis et al., 2014) through "irrational, ineffective and unjust" practices (Grootenboer et al., 2018, p. 5) that arise from narrow focus taking attention from the essential questions of purpose (Biesta, 2020).

Exploring questions of purpose is at the heart of praxis, for practice to be morally informed, historymaking action (Kemmis, 2023; Smith, 2008). Biesta (2020, 2009, 2013, 2020) proposed three domains of purpose for education. While the three domains of purpose: qualification, socialisation, and subjectification, are all necessary, it is the final domain that enables education (Biesta, 2020). Qualification is about developing the knowledge and skills that prepare people to 'do things' that is enter further education, training, or into employment (Biesta, 2013). Socialisation is achieved explicitly as well as implicitly through the power of the hidden curriculum (Carter, 2019), inserting children and young people into the existing social, cultural, and political order. Socialisation reproduces and maintains existing orders and traditions (Biesta, 2009, 2013). Instrumentalist goals of preparation and replication shutdown space for praxis, removing the possibility for questions of purpose to consider individuals and societal transformation.

Independent from existing traditions, subjectification supports children and young people to respond, create, and transform their world rather than only abide by the traditions established long before their existence in the world. When acting in the domain of subjectification it is the teacher's role to engage in praxis providing opportunities to encourage children and young people in the possibility to exist as a subject of their own life, rather than as the object of both the internal and external forces that come to play upon them (Biesta, 2020). Freedom arises in the agency to choose "to act or to refrain from action" (Biesta, 2020, p. 93).

Subjectification enables education as living well in a world worth living in by supporting children and young people to engage with the lifelong challenge of being in the world. Subjectification is not individualist as criticism may suggest (Carter, 2019), rather a complex balancing act of negotiating place of the self within the world, without leaning too far one way or the other that may lead to self-destruction or world-destruction. An outcome of subjectification is that we actively seek "reality checks… so as to come into a relationship with what and who is other, not simply overrule it" (Biesta, 2020, p. 97). Education reaches the purpose of subjectification by educators:

> interrupt(ing) children's development by interrupting the questions (of) which talents and abilities are going to help children and young people to live their lives well, with others, on a planet that has limited capacity for giving us what we want, and which talents and abilities are going to hinder this. (Biesta, 2022a, p. 159)

Experiencing reality is a challenging position in which children and young people must face the resulting reality checks that interrupt intentions and initiatives (Biesta, 2020). In turn children and young people are faced with being both the subject of their own initiatives as well as "how others take up and continue our beginnings" (Biesta, 2020, p. 96). Subjectification is world-centred (Biesta, 2022a), holding "the double purpose of 'collectividually' (Stetsenko, 2013, 2019) forming both persons and societies" (Kemmis, 2023, p. 23) necessary for all to live well in a world worth living in (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018).

Contemporary political agendas have separated education from schooling in focusing narrowly on learning, prioritising an instrumentalist purpose for schooling

(Biesta, 2006, 2013, 2022b; Kemmis et al., 2014). Narrow focus on learning and learners has removed questions of purpose and in turn eroded opportunities for schooling to enact a subjectification role that enables school to be educational. Qualification and socialisation, without subjectification, is training not education, fulfilling purposes to enter and thus maintain existing structures and traditions. Subjectification moves practice from the non-educational position of control for replication to taking the inherent 'risk' of education that children and young people may accept our intentions or not (Biesta, 2013, 2020).

Without the freedom and agency for subjectification, schooling becomes a predetermined, imposed experience. The obligatory requirements of schooling "alienate, confine, control and reduce 'education' to narrow pathways… (setting young people) up for failure and conflict" (McGregor et al., 2017, p. 27). Education that supports all to live well in a world worth living in, fosters "individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination… oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 26). Schooling however, may "inhibit and… prohibit engagement with the higher order skills and the depth and breadth of knowledges that underpin a personally, civically and professionally 'meaningful' education" (McGregor et al., 2017, p. 1). Educators working in schools are hampered by unquestioned structures including compulsory attendance, same-age groupings, and teacher-student hierarchies, that work against education (Pateman, 1980, in Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 32). Tension between education and schooling has increasingly posed the risk that schooling would:

> no longer be educating people to live well in a world worth living in, but training docile citizens… no longer be preparing people for lives worth living, but preparing people to 'fit in' to the social, political and economic arrangements of our era. (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 61)

As disjuncture between education and schooling grows, Biesta (2022b) suggests the need for "interruption" as the "crucial educational key-word", to take a "critical stance" against the ideologies (p. 338) driving schooling agendas. Interruption is needed to "remake schools so they serve the double educational purpose of the formation of good persons and the formation of good societies—people who can live well in a world worth living in" (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 35).

In this chapter, I explore glimmers in school students' perceptions of schooling in their own lives where interruption may grow for students to take a transformative activist stance (Stetsenko, 2014), to remake schools for education and thus living well in a world worth living in for all. First, I consider the ways schooling approaches have explicitly considered school's role in living well. I also explore how these existing approaches align with the need for remaking schools to be educational.

Schooling and Living Well

School practice for education, and thus living well, requires praxis which will open questions of purpose and enable subjectification supporting the double duty of education for individuals and society. School approaches to living well have drawn particularly from eudaimonia, with varied perspectives and resultant practice that may leave aside praxis and questions of purpose that make schooling educational. The Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia recognises living well as a lifelong pursuit of "living a complete human life, or the realization of valued human potentials" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 140). Eudaimonia is not a feeling or search for feeling, rather "a way of living… an exemplary life" characterised by "being actively engaged in excellent activity, reflectively making decisions, and behaving voluntarily toward ends that represent the realization of our highest human natures" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 143, 145). Such a life "is noble not only for the one who lives it, but also because it contributes to the good for humankind" (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 11). Eudaimonia differs from hedonism in feeling pleasure and happiness as the experience of living well, rather than the goal. Hedonism may separate living well from the experience or process of seeking goals, potentially 'living unwell' to seek pleasure and happiness, and thus cannot "reliably lead to either individual or collective well-being" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 141). Education removed from pedagogical praxis and the necessary questions of purpose, reliant on qualification and socialisation, may indirectly encourage hedonism over eudaimonia.

Two approaches dominate schooling practice for living well from the perspective of eudaimonia: flourishing (Brighouse, 2008; de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020; Kristjánsson, 2016, 2017; White, 2011; Wolbert et al., 2015); and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan et al., 2009). These approaches may have the potential to promote further separation of education from schooling or revival of schooling as educational.

Flourishing has been positioned as an overarching aim of schooling (Brighouse, 2008; de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020; Kristjánsson, 2016, 2017; Wolbert et al., 2015). Recognising the dynamic nature of living well, flourishing "refers to the actualization of human potential through worthwhile activities and relationships" (de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020, p. 2). Drawing on Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia, flourishing centres on two criteria: it is "intrinsically worthwhile" and involves "actualization of the human potential" (Wolbert et al., 2015, p. 122). While Aristotle recognised the significant role of luck in eudaimonia (de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020), neo-Aristolean views on flourishing are "about furthering assets that students already possess" building on two preconditions: external necessities, and a sense of meaning and purpose (Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 88). Flourishing in the context of preconditions means "one takes into account what people can achieve given their circumstances and abilities" (Wolbert et al., 2015, p. 89).

Conflict exists in the conceptualisation and articulation of flourishing, where flourishing may simply be a form of character education (Miller, 2016) and thus sit within the purpose of socialisation. Rather than encompassing a 'worldy' view of "existing

together-in-plurality" (Biesta, 2016, p. 188) necessary for the double duty of education for living well in a world worth living in for all, flourishing may focus on the socialising purpose of developing as a 'good person' (Henderson, 2020) absenting the fullness of "living a complete human life" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 140). Flourishing has also been suggested as an 'objective well-being theory' (de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020) leaning further to the instrumentalist nature of qualification and socialisation rather than subjectification.

Further issue in the scope for flourishing to enable the educational ideal of living well arises in the positioning within schooling. Whilst White (2011) suggested the need for curriculum redesign to enable flourishing in schooling, Kristjánsson (2017) stated: "(I)t is not meant to supplant anything (except perhaps the obsession with high-stakes testing), but rather to enhance and add new layers to already existing school practices" (p. 88). Schooling has demonstrated a "standard approach given a problem, add a course" (Noddings, 2005, p. 49), a reductionist tactic that has been unsuccessful in relation to living well, such as previous well-being programs that mirrored existing practice neglecting established, entrenched detriments of the dominant, instrumentalist model of schooling (Biesta, 2006; Cigman, 2012; Gillies, 2011). Without broad scale change for schooling to be educational, as discussed above, enhancements to existing practice will not lead to living well in a world worth living in for all. Flourishing seen as an enhancement to existing schooling practices is insufficient.

The second school approach to living well that dominates the literature is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) which builds on living well as a lifelong process, intrinsically worthwhile, and fulfilling human potential. Often ascribed as a theory of motivation, self-determination theory provides a working model for school practice that supports living well for all (Ryan et al., 2009). Self-determination theory outlines three core processes to living well: intrinsic goals; the basic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence; along with "reflective capacities, in which one considers the meaning and value of one's way of living" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 158). The core processes of self-determination theory are central to the purpose of subjectification.

Self-determination theory highlights the tension between the double duty of education in fostering living well in a world worth living in for all, and schooling. Self-determination theory determines living well by the "degree to which people's energies and interest are focussed on intrinsic values versus second- or third-order values and/or goals whose value is either derivative or unclear" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 149). Contemporary schooling requires student focus on second and third-order goals such as exam results and future careers—the purpose of qualification. Schools "are constrained by the dominant "grammar of schooling" (Tyack and Cuban, 1995) that maintain traditional structures and arrangements in classrooms and schools" (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021, p. 63) separated from questions of purpose. Driven by accountability agendas (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), the dominant practice of teachers is controlling as opposed to supporting autonomy (Reeve, 2009) and thus subjectification. Controlling practice directs focus to extrinsic goals which do not positively impact students' basic needs and therefore may have a negative impact on living well

(Ryan et al., 2009, p. 165; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). For schooling to support living well in a world worth living in for all—to be educational—change is necessary. Self-determination theory provides insight into the pedagogical praxis and subjectifcation for schooling to be educational.

Seeking Student Perceptions on Schooling for Living Well in a World Worthy of All

School is the "occupation of the pupil" (Lahelma & Gordon, 1997, in Lanas, 2019, p. 250) therefore children and young people need autonomy in putting "forward the correct understanding of the society in order to change it" (Cornell West in Stetsenko, 2014, p. 185). Existing discussion and exploration of schooling in terms of living well in a world worth living in for all is directed by, and often filtered by adults. Where student voice is considered in schooling it is used as a mechanism of socialisation to "de-fuse and gently mould 'potentially disruptive perspectives' (Fielding, 2004, p. 298)" (Mayes, 2020, p. 380). This chapter draws on a project that sought to open the conversation on living well in a world worth living in for all through hearing the perspectives of children and young people.

In seeking new knowledge, new perspectives on children and young people, living well, and schooling, I drew on arts informed and post-qualitative inquiry, creating my own path to engage differently (Lather, 2013). Central to this project was the reality that "student voice initiatives are always entangled in their discursive-material-affective conditions of articulation – the present conditions of speech, mobility, and feeling in and beyond school" (Mayes, 2020, p. 393). In seeking student perceptions of school's role in living well in a world worth living in for all I sought to engage with student voice to explore how to give space to children and young people so that they may utilise their agency within these tightly constrained sites of practice. I sought voice without voice—perspectives given in a manner determined by the participant, as much as possible, in absence of my input—using a digital platform.

The project was open to any child or young person attending school in Australia. Participants were sought through the distribution of a recruitment notice via social media, schools, and student organisations. An instruction sheet was provided to support participation independent from me, and where possible, from other adults. The book's focus on 'living well in a world worth living in for all' was modified to 'living well in a world worthy of all' to avoid making suggestions to children and young people of life not being worth living. The following request was made of the participants:

> Prepare a creative response to your experience of schooling to live well in a life worthy for all. What's a creative response? Story, song, poem, painting, sculpture, comic strip, meme, photos, short film, spoken word performance…. (Participant Instruction Sheet)

Each participant was also asked to provide an artist's statement:

> a short explanation of your creative response - consider what you want people to understand from your creative response. (Participant Instruction Sheet)

All responses were shared via a private Padlet (digital platform) to enable multimedia responses, autonomy from me, and for participants to respond to each other's contributions. Beyond the essential ethical considerations, the use of Padlet required additional consent from participating students and their carers. Eleven students participated ranging from four to 14 years. Each student chose the name they wished to use in the project and publications.

Voice cannot and should not be left unexamined, or believed to be unexamined (St Pierre, 2008). What the children and young people offered in their own "voice cannot be thought as existing separately from the milieu in which it exists" (Mazzei, 2013, p.734), which requires "(V)iewing voices and meanings as elusive, contingent, and therefore contradictory – simultaneously expressing the said and unsaid" (Jackson, 2003, p. 704). While student voice was sought in forms as free from my direction as possible, voice was interpreted through the tightly constrained practices of schooling.

The creative responses and artists' statements formed the data for the project. Unexpected constraints arose in this data that prevented the planned post-qualitative approach to analysis, leading back to the traditional qualitative path of coding. Biesta's (2020) domains of purpose for education and self-determination theory (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan et al., 2009) were utilised as the analytical strategy to explore student perceptions of schooling for living well. This deductive approach sought to explore how the children and young people's perceptions of schooling and living well reflected crucial functions for schooling to be educational and thus enable living well in a world worth living in for all. I prepared a table (Fig. 8.1) to guide directed content analysis (Hsiu-Fang Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) for the ways Biesta's (2020) domains of purpose and self-determination theory (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan et al., 2009) are seen in practice.

A step was added prior to direct content analysis to enable analysis specific to the needs of visual data. My first step was to analyse the creative works through Guillemin's (2004) questions derived from Rose's (2001) critical visual methodology framework. Rose's (2001) framework considers three aspects of site (production, image, audience), each viewed through three lenses of modality (technological, compositional, social). As the creative works were prepared independently, I focussed on Guillemin's (2004) questions regarding the image (or creative work uploaded as an image), and audience. In relation to the images, I asked questions such as "What is being shown? What are the components of the image? How are they arranged?" and "What do the different components of the image signify? What is being represented? What knowledges are being deployed?" (Guillemin, 2004, p. 284). Looking from the position of the audience I asked questions including "Where is the viewer positioned in relation to the components of the image? What relation does this produce between the image and the viewers? Is more than one interpretation of the image possible?" (Guillemin, 2004, pp. 284–285).

Analysis took three phases: visual analysis of images; separate directed content analysis of images and statements; and review of analysis across images and statements for congruence and dissonance. Unlike other forms of directed content analysis a hypothesis was not used, nor was there intent to prove or develop the theories used to guide the analytical strategy. The theories were drawn upon to explore presence in

Categories	Descriptors
Qualification	Preparation to act in the world Assessment for measurement Entry to further learning and/or employment
Socialisation	Developing children and young people's sense and direction and orientation in the world Manners Social skills Traditions
Subjectification	Freedom and agency for children and young people, to use it well Interruptions – opportunities to experience reality that may interrupt initiatives and intentions Suspension – slowing down for time to work through being in the world and who they are in relation to the world Sustenance – support children and young people to stay with the difficulty of reality/being in the world and who they are in relation to the world
Intrinsic Goals	First order goals Goals determined by internal drivers Success provides inherent satisfaction of basic needs (relatedness, competence, autonomy)
Relatedness	Opportunities for interaction between students and building friendships Opportunities for interaction with teachers Belief the teacher likes, respects, values them Sense of belonging and protection at school Teacher warmth and care
Competence	Support for skill development Feedback – mastery rather than evaluation Challenging tasks Feeling successful Tasks are understood and able to be mastered
Autonomy	Opportunities for choice Opportunities for initiate, self-direction Meaningful rationales for learning activities Minimal control and pressure Willingly devote time to study Feelings about schoolwork are acknowledged
Reflection & Reflexivity	Question the value and meaning of one's way of living
Other	Anything else about school, and life outside of school, that is not encompassed above (positively or negatively)

Fig. 8.1 Categories and descriptors for directed content analysis (adapted from Biesta, 2020; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan et al., 2009)

children and young people's perceptions of schooling. As such, the probe questions given to the participating children and young people were not aligned with Biesta's domains of purpose or self-determination theory. Limitations of directed content analysis including increased researcher bias and leading of participants (Hsiu-Fang Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) were avoided through these modifications to the method.

The following section discusses the findings in the light of the spaces for where children and young people perceived presence of subjectification and self-determination theory, along with where they raised problems with schooling being non-educational in the goal of living well.

Glimmers in Student Perceptions on Schooling for Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All: A Space for Interruption to Take a Transformative Activist Stance

Overwhelmingly the students shared visions of a traditional model of schooling with the teacher directing students who remained passive in their role. Autumn's drawing shows a classroom scene that was common amongst the student responses (Fig. 8.2). The students captured schooling as instrumentalist, seeking qualification and socialisation preparing students for the life they will enter after completing school. Dan (9 years) took this qualifying role of school to an almost dystopian view as the space to learn "what you are good at and what you enjoy" to find the path for work to "make a living" (Dan, artist's statement). Dan presented living well as the ability to make money to provide for oneself where school's role is solely instrumental in meeting the qualification and socialisation purposes of school. The glimpse into Dan's perception of school highlights the absence of subjectification and in turn schooling's departure from education.

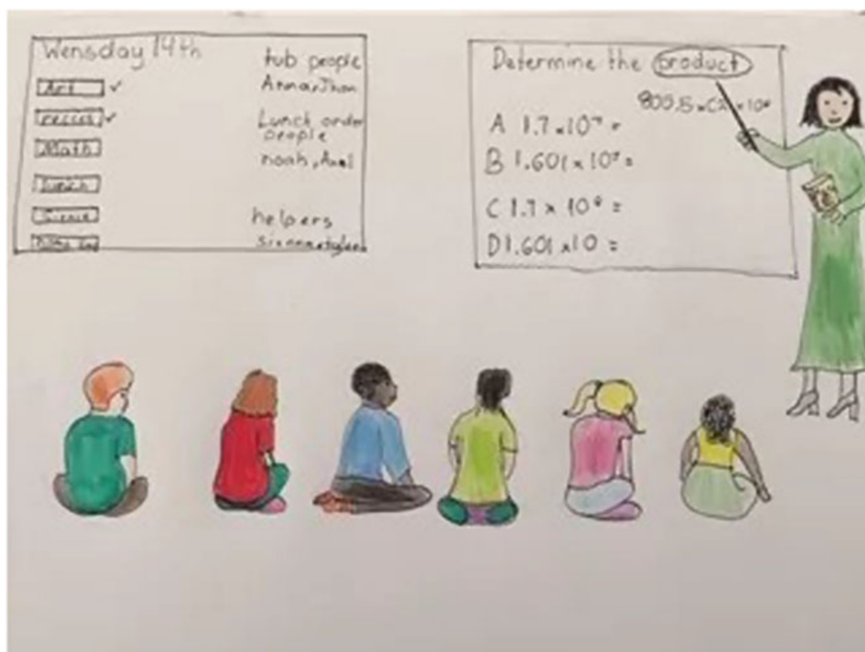

Fig. 8.2 Drawing by Autumn (9 years)

Amidst these visions of traditional schooling to form society's next generation of obedient citizens to fit into the existing order, appeared some glimmers of awareness to the absence of education with the support to live well in a world worth living in for all. Here I have focussed on just three participant perspectives to explore the space for interruption. Beauregard, one of the youngest participants at age 6, was very clear in their recognition of disjuncture between school and the world beyond school. Won Bhin, the oldest participating student (14 years) and only student attending secondary school, outlined juxtaposition between what school prepares students for, and what life outside of school requires. Autumn (9 years) hinted to the possibility that change in schooling practice might only be superficial. Each of these glimmers posed school as a challenge to living well, both now and in future, and raised space for interruption to engage in a transformative activist stance to remake schools.

Beauregard (6 years) shared their thoughts on schooling and living well through a painting and artist's statement. In painting a possum living in a tree near houses (Fig. 8.3), Beauregard directed their attention beyond the school fence to the world around them. Beauregard articulated this view in their artist's statement, positioning living well in the world with others (all living things): "to keep the balance good so all animals can stay alive" (Beauregard, artist's statement). Not only did Beauregard take a worldview for all to live well, they also recognised the ongoing pursuit of living well asserting the need for improvement so that "hopefully we will treat the world better"

Fig. 8.3 "Painting of a possum living in a tree near houses", Beauregard (6 years)

(Beauregard, artist's statement). Beauregard drew attention to a possible absence of education in his schooling given:

> doing education, rather than training or socialisation or indoctrination, for example, requires knowing whether the consequences of what we are doing are or is educational, in the sense that it sustainably serves the interests of individuals and the good for humankind. (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 153)

Without engaging students in understanding the world they live in, and how to relate with all aspects of their world, schooling will not contribute to living well in a world worth living in for all.

Beauregard presented a different view, from others in the project, to the relationship between school and students in living well, suggesting scope for student autonomy and potential to derail the overarching goals of schooling. Stating "school is trying to help me learn how to read and how to do maths so I can make the world better and get around the trickiest consequences"; Beauregard highlighted the qualifying purpose of school as preparation for life which is a point after school. School is 'trying' in their purpose suggesting Beauregard sees this goal as not necessarily being achieved—possibly proposing that school goals are dependent on students taking up their role in that arrangement. Ultimately learning—and perhaps education—is in the hands of students even when practices are tightly constrained. Beauregard suggested changes to connect learning at school to the wider world now:

> We need to learn about nature. All species need something to keep them alive; even us. We need to learn it early. We need to learn about nature's habitats. We need to learn it because it is important for all nature. We need nature to live. We need all sorts of life to live. (Beauregard, artist's statement)

In this way, Beauregard provides a glimpse to a disjuncture between school and life beyond school, and a potential juxtaposition between what preparation school seeks and what is needed in life.

Won Bhin (14 years) created a mind-map (Fig. 8.4) outlining how they see the relationship between school and life, providing a view to tensions that may arise between school and living well. Won Bhin stated that "School requires us (students) to…socialise with others; do your best, work hard; learn; spend time on work outside of school" which they contrasted with life outside of school as involving "going out with family and friends; free time: TV, art; gaming; sport; biking" (Won Bhin, mind-map). For Won Bhin, living well at school is about meeting prescribed expectations, while living well outside of school is self-directed, autonomous. Won Bhin separated the purposes of education between school (qualification and socialisation) and life outside school (subjectification), thus separating school from being educational and achieving the goal of living well in a world worth living in for all.

Won Bhin drew the mind-map showing life at school and life outside of school separated by the focal point of "Maintaining a balance between school and free time" (Won Bhin, mind-map). At school Won Bhin follows school requirements, striving to meet expectations by "putting in a great deal of effort" (Won Bhin, mind-map). There is nothing in Won Bhin's outline of school life that shows evidence of school working within the purpose of subjectification, or core processes of self-determination theory.

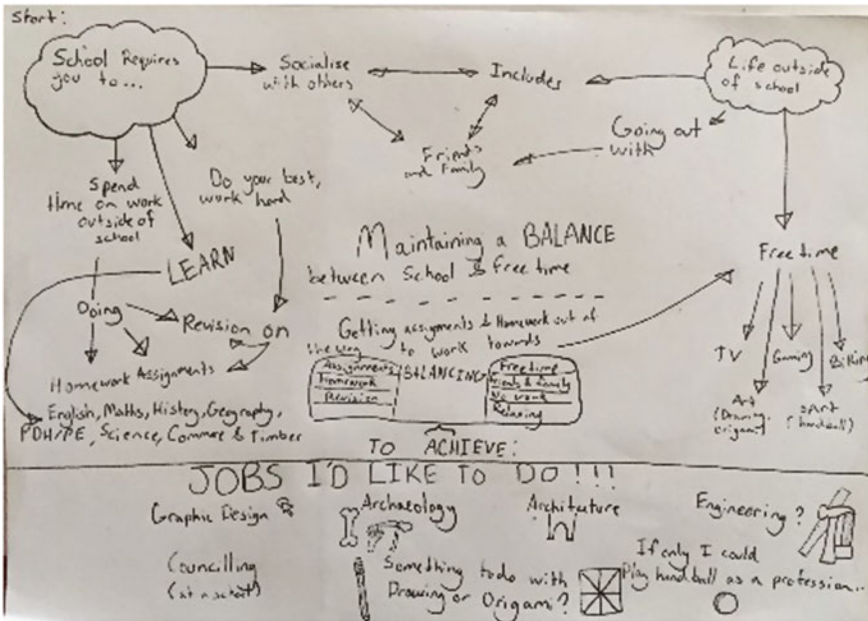

Fig. 8.4 Won Bhin's mind-map (14 years)

It is out of school where Won Bhin presents competence, relationship, and autonomy, through self-direction of "free time" to go out with family and friends and engage in activities of personal interest. Outside of school Won Bhin experiences the freedom to be the subject of his own life, although this time and thus the experiences in their "free time" are restricted by the need to meet the demands related to school's purpose of qualification: "get(ting) homework and assignments out of the way to work towards free time" (Won Bhin, mind-map). Won Bhin shows a clear picture of school requiring extrinsic goals be achieved before attaining intrinsic goals. The hard work to meet school expectations is "immediately rewarded with time off, and long-term rewards of making the most of your education so you can do jobs you are interested in and enjoy" (Won Bhin, artist's statement). Schooling is thus recognised as instrumentalist in the goal of qualification, seeking to prepare students for engagement in life after school, yet Won Bhin's mind-map shows the separation between school and life culminating in his life outside of school as the driver to his future life with no connection from school to his ambitions.

While Won Bhin views school as preparation for life after school—jobs—they have raised a question as to what in life school prepares students for. Won Bhin's mind-map depicts the tension between education and schooling, and thus tension in living well. Tension exists for Won Bhin in balancing life outside of school—life of relatedness, competence, and autonomy—with the demands of school. Tension is present through the threat of not having time for life outside of school if school demands are not met, and the greater threat of not achieving the "jobs

you are interested (in) and enjoy" (Won Bhin, mind-map). Aristotle suggested "that a focus on pleasure and pain, rewards and punishments, can lead people to biased insights, or avoidance of truths, because they bend their perceptions for hedonic purposes" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 145). Won Bhin's tension in juggling school with life outside of school may appear to be a pursuit of pleasure, though their description of school expectations shows second and third-order goals, while life outside school provides their needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy are met in pursuit of first-order, intrinsic goals. The very separation of school and "life outside of school" (Won Bhin, mind-map) shows the dominant role school plays in controlling access to living well as a first-order goal, by prioritising second and third-order goals to achieve the status of "good student" (MacLure et al., 2012) meeting the purposes of school for qualification and socialisation.

Autumn's drawing (Fig. 8.2) shows a stereotypical view of a traditional primary classroom with the teacher standing at the board and children sitting on the floor looking at the teacher. Autumn's drawing presents the active role of the teacher to instruct and the passive role of the students to listen and receive—hinting at the maintenance of social order and traditions for school's purpose of socialisation. Autumn also included the day's timetable on the class wall presenting instructions for students to follow throughout the day. Autumn portrayed a transactional relationship between school and students with students as passive agents to receive (Freire, 1970) the knowledge necessary to succeed in life, where school is separated from education.

In their drawing (Fig. 8.2) and artist's statement, Autumn presented living well as being the consequence of schooling and hinted at the passive, predetermined roles students may hold in the relationship between school and living well in future: "For example, if you like maths, you can be a mathematician and if you don't know maths - you won't be able to do things in life" (Autumn, artist's statement). In this statement, Autumn raised preconditions for living well and the possibility that school may provide what is needed only if a student is able—if they like maths they will do well, though if not they will have nothing—suggesting the need to be the 'good student" (MacLure et al., 2012) to gain what school has to offer in living well, and also the limitation to the possibility for a world worth living in for all, given the opportunity for some and not others (Lanas, 2019).

Awareness that all might not be as it seems arose in the conclusion to Autumn's artist's statement. Autumn noted: "That is how it seems anyway" suggesting their understanding of school in living well has developed from looking beyond the surface of school practices reading between the lines to the implicit purpose of schooling for qualification and socialisation. Autumn's statement also suggests an awareness of schooling practice having shifted from the traditional image portrayed, yet the underpinning goal has remained. Practices may have changed in Autumn's classroom though it may be that the practice architectures —cultural-discursive arrangements, material-economic arrangements, social-political arrangements—are constraining the practice of the teacher and/or students, so that the purpose remains unchanged. Schools are.

> obstinately stuck in the nineteenth century. They remain stuck there because people doggedly remake them as 'school' – that peculiar form of life familiar to almost everyone in the developed world, remote though it may be from the ways life is lived in other parts of contemporary societies, and in other parts of the days of schoolchildren, their teachers, their parents, their communities and the organisations in which the children will one day work. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 2)

Autumn raises the possibility that the contemporary practices of schooling which make the physical space and activity of classrooms unrecognisable to those of the nineteenth century, might not remake the purpose of schooling, and thus not serve the double duty of education.

Looking Further into the Perceptions of Children and Young People on Schooling and Living Well

Within the tightly constrained practice of schooling, students are 'trained' in 'normality' and students are active in this process (Laws & Davies, 2000). Students must take up some of the desire for order and normality to be a 'good student', and in doing so they collaborate with teachers in this training (Laws & Davies, 2000), which may prevent awareness to potential conflict between schooling and living well. The glimmers of awareness to these conflicts shared in this chapter highlight the possibility available from investigating the perceptions of children and young people through new lenses where their voices are heard.

Limitations to this project include the number of participants and breadth of experience across schooling types. In addition, Padlet supported autonomous engagement though without inclusion of a focus group or individual interviews, it was not possible to probe further and clarify meaning taken from the content and varied modes of responses offered. The glimmers to conflict between schooling and living well observed within the responses of the three students shared in this chapter may or may not be conscious within the meaning intended by these students. Further research would benefit from exploring school and life more broadly with children and young people; hearing from students who have experienced different approaches to schooling; and opening conversation amongst students across varied models of schooling to interrupt understandings of what school is and can be. Expanding to include focus groups and interviews would also increase the data providing greater scope for other interpretive approaches.

Student voice is imperative to understanding the extent of tension in schooling and the impact on children and young people to engaging in living well. Student voice is curtailed to the benefit of conformity as part of school training. Student voice in school is limited to 'good students', used disciplinarily to support ongoing control, to maintain their role as 'good students', and thus good children, good people (Mayes, 2020). Agency for other students is disregarded as irrelevant given it arises from students who are 'problems' and in need of correction (Lanas, 2019; Laws & Davies, 2000). Using Padlet in this project provided a space for children and

young people to share their voice on school and living well without influence. Future research would benefit from utilising Padlet for capturing initial responses prior to focus groups or individual interviews.

Absent from these glimmers is any hint towards their own agency to contribute to change in schooling practice. Laws and Davies (2000) claimed: "we are at the same time shaped by forces external to us, and yet through that very shaping, gain the possibility of power and of agency" (p. 206). Neglected from Laws and Davies' (2000) conclusion was that the claim was based on students who had moved from mainstream schools where they had 'failed' to become 'good students', to a school for 'behaviourally disordered and emotionally disturbed' students. The latter school responded very differently to the students' behaviour than their previous schools; responses that supported relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The students' experience of being disempowered had not given them agency, the change in school recognised their agency "making visible aspects which would otherwise remain invisible" (Lanas, 2019, p. 256). These are the 'canaries in the mine' who in their rejection of 'normality training' show us the problems that are present for all (Shalaby, 2017), they are the ones to be radical, insightful, and antagonistic in their evaluation of school and vision for new paths (Fielding, 2015). Following the UK 'School I'd Like' project, Fielding (2015) suggested "(I)t is to… (schools doing things radically differently) to which we might fruitfully turn in our quest for creative, life-enhancing ways of living and learning together" (p. x). The next step for this project will be to seek students who have experienced different approaches to schooling.

Foucault's opposition to "vision for change" rests on the limitations created "(w)hen you know in advance where you're going to end up there's a whole dimension of experience lacking" (cited in Stetsenko, 2014, p. 185). When children and young people are trapped in the predetermination of outcomes, short and long-term, in their schooling, the scope for where they get to step beyond the oppression of normative ideals and truly imagine a different path from which transformation may begin is beyond limited. The growing examples of schools having stepped off the normative path may provide the key (Brunker & Lombardo, 2021; Corry et al., 2022; MacDonald et al., 2018; McDonald & Burton, 2014; Moffatt & Riddle, 2021; Nicholson, 2020; Reimer & Longmuir, 2021; te Riele et al., 2016). Another necessary dialogue is interschool—ongoing conversations with children and young people across vastly different school contexts to disrupt the 'normality training' and truly develop a transformative action stance of radical, insightful, and antagonistic students who may then engage in robust conversations where hope for utopia may become possible—"a *future-oriented agenda*, a political instrument for activism and social change" (Stetsenko, 2014, p. 185) in schooling practice. Rather than succumb to Foucault's pessimism that "we cannot develop programs for the future because the future is unknowable" (Stetsenko, 2014, p. 186), recognise activism as fundamental to the autonomy necessary in living well, freedom to shape their lives, their collective future, stepping out of the shackles of predetermined outcomes mismatched with an unknown future.

As schools are such tightly constrained sites of practice we might reasonably ask if change, let alone Utopia, is even possible. In the foreword to 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', Shaull (1970/2005) asserted "(T)here's no such thing as a neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom" (p. 34). To live well requires freedom for "behaving voluntarily toward ends that represent the realization of our highest human natures" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 145). Without freedom in schooling children cannot live well, and a world worth living in for all remains a utopian dream. For freedom to be seen as a possibility in schooling students need imagination, and imagination needs inspiration. Transformative power "has to do with people's ability to imagine *what does not yet exist*, what they think needs and ought to be created and struggled for, through imagination and action that are challenging the present and stretching *beyond the status quo*" (Stetsenko, 2014, p. 185).

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Chapter 9
Living Well in the Aftermath of Separation and Divorce: The Role of Teachers, Schools, and Early Childhood Services

Linda Mahony

Abstract Separation and divorce have become common phenomena across the world. There has been much research reporting the stress factors of parents/carers during the process of separation and divorce and the impact this has on children. However, there is little research that investigates the intersection between families experiencing separation and divorce and teachers, schools, and early childhood services. This chapter explores parents' aspirations for their family in the aftermath of separation and divorce and their experiences of communication and collaboration with their children's teachers, schools, and early childhood services in assisting them to realise these aspirations to live well. Data for this project came from an interview study with 12 mothers who discussed their perceptions of their communication and collaboration with their children's teachers during the process of their separation and divorce. While some parents described the communication and collaboration with their children's teachers and schools as enabling their family to live well, other parents shared stories where the practices of teachers and the school or early childhood service constrained their wellbeing and adjustment to their changed family circumstances. Parents provided suggestions of practices that teachers, schools, and early childhood services could engage to support their children and family to promote wellbeing.

Keywords Separation and divorce · Young children · Teachers · Schools · Communication · Collaboration

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/7fKut8GRuKG0uXeJUyGDx9?si=945514eed3f54ba6

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Introduction

Divorce has become a common phenomenon across the world (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Gähler et al., 2009; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Statistics New Zealand, 2022; United States Census Bureau, 2022) and affects a substantial proportion of children. However, not all children's parents are formally married and not all children's parents formally divorce following separation. Hence, parental separation is also common. While some children readily adjust to their parents' separation and divorce, other children exhibit difficulty adjusting emotionally and socially and demonstrate poorer academic outcomes when compared with children with married parents (Amato, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991; Anthony et al., 2014; Eriksen et al., 2017; Fergusson et al., 2014; Schaan & Vogele, 2016; Sigle-Rushton et al., 2014; Song et al., 2012).

Separation and divorce have consequences beyond the family and those consequences may involve teachers. This chapter addresses this gap in the literature by examining the perspectives of separated and divorced parents of what living well means for them and their family in the context of their separation and divorce, and the role of teachers, schools, and early childhood services in assisting them to realise these aspirations.

While separation and divorce are not Australia-specific, this study was undertaken in the Australian context, and therefore will draw on Australian documents. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Australian Government Department of Education, 2019) from Australia outlines the vision for an education system that encourages and supports every student to be the best they can, regardless of any challenges they may face. Of relevance to children experiencing parental separation and divorce, the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration highlights a shared responsibility of parents, carers, families, and the broader community to hold high expectations for children's educational outcomes. Each State and Territory in Australia has a governmental educational body that translates these laws and national policies into state policies to guide practice. However, a review of these state policies revealed a virtual absence of policy that specifically addressed the day-to-day needs of children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce to inform practice. Rather, policies focused more generally on student wellbeing, child protection and mandatory reporting, health, inclusive education, and dealing with family law issues. Few policies specifically referred to separated and divorced families. Those that mentioned separation and divorce take a reactive stance referring to managing student behaviour or managing family law issues when they arose, rather than being proactive and acknowledging that children and families experiencing separation and divorce have unique needs for communication and collaboration with teachers, schools, and early childhood services. Furthermore, these policies are directed, generally, towards school and early childhood service leadership and administrative issues, rather than informing teachers' daily practice.

While there is much research about the emotional, social, behavioural, and academic effects of separation and divorce and diverse family composition, there

is a paucity of research focusing on the nexus with education and how teachers work with children and their families. Studies have revealed teachers valued communication and collaboration with parents experiencing separation and divorce because this enabled teachers to support their children (Cottongim, 2002; Mahony et al., 2015a). The few studies with teachers investigating their work with children and families experiencing separation and divorce showed that when teachers had knowledge of the unique family circumstances, they adjusted their practices to suit the individual needs of children and families (Lee & Walsh, 2004; Mahony et al., 2015a, 2015b; Øverland et al., 2012; Webb & Blond, 1995). Teachers see children for a greater proportion of time each day than any other adult other than children's parents. Therefore, teachers, schools, and early childhood services are in a strategic position to promote wellbeing and learning in children experiencing parental separation and divorce.

An ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provides a backcloth to this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) views the child at the centre of a nested system that has multiple levels affecting the child. The child is part of a larger system that incorporates family, teachers, school community, the wider community, political, cultural, economic, social, educational, and legal influences from wider society, and historical contexts. An ecological perspective helps to understand the social influences on children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce. A well-functioning system post separation and divorce is one that provides for the needs of children, who are at the centre of the system.

Relevant to this study is the influence teachers and families can have on children. Teachers may be able to serve the children in their care and their families if they understand them better. Teachers, schools, and early childhood services endeavour to uphold the aspirations families have for their children and their family and readily support children and families as needed. However, teachers, schools, and early childhood services need to be confident that their practices enable all children and families to flourish regardless of their family circumstances. In some instances, these practices may need adjusting to suit the needs of children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce. First, teachers, schools, and early childhood services need to develop an understanding of what children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce need and want so that they can work with them in ways that support them and promote wellbeing and learning (Mahony et al., 2015a).

The aim of this study is to understand the perspectives of separated and divorced parents in terms of what living well means for them and their family in the context of their separation and divorce, and the role of teachers, schools, and early childhood services in assisting them to realise these aspirations.

The research questions guiding this chapter are

- What are parents' aspirations for their children and themselves to live well in the aftermath of separation and divorce?
- What practices of teachers, schools, and early childhood services impact families' ability to live well during the process of separation and divorce and into the future? How do practice architectures enable and constrain these practices?

Data and Methods

Participants

Twelve parents were purposefully selected to participate in the project (Warren, 2002). It was considered that parents who were separated or divorced while their children were in the early years of education were the best participants for this study. While the call for parents to participate was open to both mothers and fathers, all parents who volunteered to participate were mothers. Mothers were recruited by advertising through Government family organisations and services dedicated to keeping families safe, well, strong, and connected (e.g. Family Relationships Australia and Family Services Australia) and by snowball sampling whereby participants referred other potential participants to the study.

Semi-structured Interviews

Parents participated in a semi-structured interview either face-to-face or by telephone. Parents were asked to reflect on the past to inform their vision of the future for themselves and their children. Parents were asked what it means for them to live well, and what they consider is a world worth living in for all. Parents were also asked a series of questions about the practices of teachers, schools, or early childhood services to explore what parents considered their children's teachers could have done to help their children and family, and what they considered teachers could have avoided that was not helpful for their children and their family at this time.

Data Analysis

The research questions created a lens for data analysis. First, data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify themes related to the first research question to understand parents' aspirations for their children and themselves to live well in the aftermath of separation and divorce. Data were analysed using two phases of coding: initial and intermediate coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During initial coding, interview transcripts were read, and all possible categories were listed. During intermediate coding, these initial categories were grouped together with similar categories to form themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These themes focused on emotional and social wellbeing.

Next, the interview data were analysed to explore the second research question, which was to identify those practices of teachers, schools, and early childhood services that enabled and constrained these families' ability to live well during the process of separation and divorce. The themes identified from the first research

question focused analysis on practices that aligned with the themes of emotional and social wellbeing. Elements of the theory of practice architectures were used to better understand those practices of teachers, schools, and early childhood services that parents considered helpful to promote wellbeing and learning and realise their aspirations for their children and family. To be specific, those practices that 'enabled' or had an adverse effect or 'constrained' wellbeing and adjustment to their changed family circumstances were identified. Corbin and Strauss (2008), like Kemmis and colleagues (2014), say the broader conditions must be brought into the analysis. For example, it was important to consider the broader conditions that may facilitate, interrupt, or prevent parents experiencing separation and divorce from communicating or collaborating with their children's teachers, school, and early childhood service to promote wellbeing and adjustment to their changed family circumstances. Considering these causal conditions helps to give broader insight into the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Kemmis and colleagues (2014) are specific in identifying the cultural-discursive arrangements, that is the language and ideas; material-economic arrangements found in or brought into a site, that is objects and spatial arrangements; and social-political arrangements found in or brought to a site (for example relationships between people, and between people and non-living things) that influence the practices of both teachers/schools and parents. It is considered that when we understand the intricacies of practices and practice architectures, we can focus on strengthening and sustaining those practices that enable wellbeing and learning, and work towards transforming those practices that constrain or pose as a barrier to children and families realising their aspirations to live well in the aftermath of parental separation and divorce. These levels of analysis enabled the researcher to listen deeply to understand mothers' perceptions of their communication and collaboration with their children's teachers and schools and their responses of what it means for them in their family context to live well in a world worth living in.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained by the university Human Research Ethics Committee before interviews commenced. Throughout the research process attention was given to treating participants with respect, prevention of harm to individuals, integrity, justice, and obtaining participants' consent (Bogdan & Knopp-Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Piper & Simons, 2005). Prior to the commencement of the interview, participants received a detailed participant sheet and completed a consent form (Piper & Simons, 2005) confirming they fully understood the purpose of the study and their role. Participation in the study was voluntary (Long, 2007), and they could withdraw at any time without comment (Creswell, 2005; Williamson, 2007). Participants' personal details remained confidential, and data gathered remained anonymous (Williamson, 2007). While children were not direct participants in this research, they were the subjects of the interviews. Care was taken to maintain the protection of identities of children (Long, 2007).

Findings: Living Well for Families Experiencing Separation and Divorce

Parents were asked what, for them, it means to live well, and what they consider to be a world worth living in for all. Separated and divorced parents talked holistically with a particular focus on the emotional and social wellbeing of their children and themselves. Lucinda (all names are pseudonyms) talked about "flourishing" and "thriving not surviving". Parents were overwhelmingly concerned with their children being happy. Mia sums it up, "the biggest thing is to me, my children doing well and they're happy. That's the biggest thing…that's actually the biggest thing. Nothing else matters after that really". For parents experiencing separation and divorce flourishing and thriving meant for themselves and their children to feel safe, happy, supported, respected and accepted, and socially connected.

Parents reported several aspects that contributed to them realising their aspirations for their children and themselves. These are now discussed in terms of the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that enabled or constrained the ability for children and families to flourish and thrive in the aftermath of parental separation and divorce.

Cultural-Discursive Arrangements

Cultural-discursive arrangements refer to the language and communication that enables and constrains how we express ourselves (Kemmis et al., 2014). Parents considered promoting and maintaining open communication between themselves and teachers, and between teachers and children to be imperative to realising optimal emotional and social wellbeing. Parents talked about the importance of maintaining open communication with their children's teachers so that teachers could understand their family circumstances and offer support when needed. Bella said

> I just wanted them [teachers] to know what the situation was, and the fact that it was a big change for my son. I guess my hope would be in case there was any sort of anxiety displayed from my son, that there would be a bit more understanding, a bit more empathy, and try to understand what the cause of that was. I think my intention was to open up the lines of communication, if they were seeing issues … they might bring it to my attention so that I would be aware of it.

Annalise spoke about their specific family circumstance that they wanted the teacher to understand so that they could provide emotional support and adjust their expectations if needed. They said if the teacher knew for example that: "Saturday was a difficult handover with Josh, he was really emotional, then she can expect him to not be completely on his game. He might need a different activity that day, or that morning, a bit more quiet time, or if he starts acting up". Annalise said that she thought that maintaining open communication with her child's teacher "helped [the teacher] to be a better teacher for Josh, and then it probably helped her to understand

where I was coming from, as well, because I was quite highly anxious at the time". Annalise felt strongly that it was important to have open communication between family and teachers so that teachers understood the family circumstance and they could be informed and interact in a way that suited their child on that particular day.

Parents relied on teachers maintaining communication with them and alerting them if they noticed any behaviours that were out of the norm for their child. This then enabled them to follow up and provide additional support for their child. Bella said: "when he was in kindergarten and [again at the] end of year 4 we were having the custody issues, the teachers were really, really good; really responsive…about getting in touch when she noticed things that were out of character. Which, for me, was really important. Had she not done that, I feel like I would have been missing out on opportunities to support him at home".

Many parents were attuned to the impact their separation and divorce may have on their children and that their children may have a period where they feel unsettled. Parents seemed to realise the important role of teachers to provide support for their children at this time. For parents, it was important to maintain communication with teachers so that teachers understood the lived experiences of their children and themselves and interacted with them accordingly.

Parents' experiences with communication and collaboration with their children's teachers and schools and early childhood services differed greatly. While some parents were satisfied that their children's teachers were attuned to their needs and "made a point of regularly checking in" with their child, other parents said that teachers could be "more proactive with communication…in our experience, that [communication] only happens if something goes wrong rather than [being] preventative". They went on to explain that they had separated and divorced when their child was in preschool. He was now in Year 5 and Ava had "never been asked…I've never had an email to say, I'm just checking in, is everything okay…is there anything happening at home that I [the teacher] need to be aware of". Olivia also commented that it would "be good if there had been…more communication just to check in, is everything okay, rather than thinking there's been no communication so everything must be okay". Lucinda too talked about their perceived lack of communication and collaboration between themselves and their child's teachers. Lucinda said that she "felt as though you were left on your own" at this time when they needed support to alleviate some of the pressure associated with their separation and divorce. She commented:

> I felt like the school didn't really have a handle on what to do or say. There didn't seem to be a clear policy. The head teacher didn't call me in and ask me if there was anything I could do, at the time. It was me being very proactive all the time…I think the school didn't really understand that complexity of emotions that were going on. It's the emotions of the parent. It's the emotions of the children. It's also the physical aspects such as the fatigue levels of not only the parent, but the children, as well. There are financial implications. I had to take on much more – many more –contracts in order to keep the house, which put me under a lot of stress and strain as a parent, because I was also juggling full-time care of the children. The school needed to have a more holistic view of all of those intricacies and pressures.

Isabella offered a suggestion for teachers to check in with parents and children "once a month" and Lucinda suggested "just once a term, [to ask] is there anything I need to know…are there any changes in your family?"

Parents wanted teachers to be proactive and check in regularly with children, even when they appeared to be okay. They found that teachers were sometimes waiting for when "something goes wrong rather than [being] preventative". Lucinda cautioned teachers not to assume that even though the child appears to be functioning well on the outside that they were okay. She said that teachers "needed to know that the children might seem okay on the outside, but that there was a huge amount going on the inside". Ava suggested that teachers could ask children something like "is there something that you would like us to share with mum or like us to share with dad".

Parents wanted their children's teachers to be proactive in their communication and collaboration so that they could develop an understanding of their unique family circumstances to inform their practices.

Material-Economic Arrangements

Material-economic arrangements are the physical space-time arrangements in the material world that enable or constrain how we do things (Kemmis et al., 2014). Parents felt that the material-economic arrangements of school sites and early childhood services had potential to create sites where families can meet, connect, share, and learn. One role of these sites would be to provide support for children and families during the process of separation and divorce. Parents acknowledged that there were numerous community support services available. However, they were particular to say that they would like support at the school or early childhood site. Mia said they would have liked access to "a counsellor that's linked in with the education system for parents to talk to if they're having issues with parenting and school".

Parents talked about the affordances for parents to network with each other at school and early childhood sites. Lucinda said, "I think the school has to be there…on some levels they have to be there as a support network". Schools and early childhood sites could provide an informal space for parents with similar experiences to talk and support each other. This parent considered school and early childhood sites to be "the hub of the community" that could provide social support and enable social connection. Lucinda explained "there are layers on layers, on layers of stress and circumstances. I have felt very much buried under those layers at times. As though there is no light above me. That's been tough, but the only way you get through that is with community. It's essential". Lucinda went on to explain how she reflected on her own experiences when she noticed a friend having marital problems and how she would have liked to have someone neutral, but who understood their perspective, to talk to. She went on to explain that "it's parents like us who've been through legal processes [who can provide insight for others in similar situations]…How do you know how to go through an amicable divorce and reduce costs and tension on the whole family? How do you know that if you've never been through a divorce?"

Lucinda considered their insights useful to share with other parents who had similar experiences to their own.

Lucinda suggested that networking with other parents on the school or early childhood site would have been helpful. She said “you don’t necessarily want to go beyond your school. You don’t necessarily want to go to a counsellor again”. Lucinda acknowledged that they had engaged with family support services but suggested that they wanted something informal where they could seek support at other times. Parents said that school and early childhood sites were familiar and safe spaces where they felt comfortable. It was important for parents to have someone familiar, yet not emotionally connected, for support. Lucinda explained:

> I relied so heavily on phone calls with my mum, which put an enormous amount of pressure on her. Yes, she was always there for me, but [she was] too emotionally connected. [School] therefore would’ve been an ideal place. It would’ve been a more objective hub that could’ve provided … a small group for separated or divorced families that wish to connect.

Parents considered schools and early childhood sites to be resources for children and families experiencing separation and divorce. They saw potential for material-economic arrangements whereby a dedicated physical space for families to meet, and where access to information and external services could be provided. Parents saw these sites as the hub of the community where parents themselves could offer support and receive support from other parents in a familiar and non-threatening environment.

Social-Political Arrangements

Social-political arrangements are those social relationships that enable and constrain how we connect with one another, and with non-living things in an ecosystem (Kemmis et al., 2014). Positive relationships were imperative to build and maintain communication and collaboration between parents, children and teachers, schools, and early childhood services.

Many parents commented about the positive relationships teachers had built with children and their parents. Olivia discussed their family circumstances with her child’s teacher and reported that their child’s teacher “responded really well...saying that she would make a point of regularly just checking in with my daughter to make sure she was okay [and] made sure that she can talk to her teacher if she needs to”.

It seemed that there were personal qualities of teachers that enabled the building of positive relationships. Parents described the personal qualities of empathy, understanding, respect that enabled children’s feelings of being safe, happy, supported, respected, and accepted. Bella said:

> We felt well-supported because I think there was just that element of empathy and understanding of the situation and understanding that each child’s going to come into the classroom with different set of needs, and different situations that are impacting them. Just that communication, the willingness to talk with the families and try to understand the circumstances,

> but also without prying too much – it's sort of like just about having just enough of the information to understand, but you don't need – they don't need to know all the details either.

Getting the balance with the amount and type of communication between parents and teachers can be challenging for teachers to promote and maintain positive relationships as every family circumstance is different. Parents said that teachers understanding the family context was important for them to be able to provide the support that they needed. Teachers understanding and having empathy for family circumstance were supportive for parents. Parents talked about the fine balance of knowing just enough about family circumstances to enable teachers to provide support without overstepping the professional boundary.

However, this was not always the case. Annalise talked about an incident where she felt the teacher stepped over the professional boundary. Annalise recalled a time when her son's teacher "had this really in-depth kind of D and M [deep and meaningful conversation] with me, and I just remember feeling like, I don't know if I want to do that again...It got a bit too personal...I was getting counselling through Lifeline as well at this time, so I didn't need someone to counsel me".

While perhaps well-meaning, on this occasion, this teacher stepped over the professional boundary. This is not surprising as previous research found that teachers were unsure of how to talk to and interact with children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce (Mahony et al., 2015b). This current study echoes the findings and recommendations of other studies that called for teachers to have professional learning to inform their daily work with children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce (Mahony et al., 2015a, 2015b). It is imperative for teachers, schools, and early childhood staff to have knowledge of the unique family circumstances so that they can support them to promote social and emotional wellbeing of their children.

Parents perceived the personal qualities of individual teachers to either be enabling or constraining positive relationships in their communication and collaboration between school and home which, in turn, could enable or constrain children's adjustment to their changed family circumstances. Bella compared her experience with different teachers throughout the process of their separation and divorce. In this instance, she was grateful that her son had particular teachers when their family situation became more intense. She said:

> Had those transitions happened in other years with other teachers, I suspect the outcome would have been much different. But those two particular teachers were really good at communicating…If this had happened in different years, I think it would have been a disaster, but I think it just depends on the individual teacher and their communication styles, and their willingness to develop those relationships with families. Because, for example, my son's year three teacher, I never even set foot in the classroom. There were no opportunities to be involved. There was no – there was just no communication whatsoever. It was very shutdown. I'm just grateful that he was more settled at that stage. Because I think it would have been really difficult for him. But luckily, the two teachers during those key points were really good.

While it is pleasing to note the positive outcome for this parent, the missed opportunities for other teachers they described to be influential in promoting wellbeing is concerning.

In terms of living well in a world worth living in, parents experiencing separation and divorce overwhelmingly talked about reducing the stigma associated with being separated and divorced, and normalising separation and divorce. Annalise refrained from communicating with their child's teacher because she "just wanted her [teacher] to think [we were a] happy family". Lucinda commented "in terms of what's a world worth living in... sensitivity and tolerance for others... I think there is still a huge amount of stigma" associated with separation and divorce. Celine wanted teachers to understand their family situation and not pass judgement. Celine talked about how her child's father was not involved in their life and the persistence of the school to communicate with both parents. She commented that having to continually explain her family situation "was kind of a re-shaming for me" suggesting that she had failed because her relationship with her child's father had failed. She said "just by the asking of those questions, let alone having the ohs, and the raised eyebrows… I felt like I was being judged". For parents, the stigma they felt from being separated and divorced posed a barrier to them realising their aspiration of social and emotional wellbeing for themselves and their children.

Reducing the stigma associated with parental separation and divorce requires normalising the phenomenon rather than considering children and families that are separated and divorced as the minority. Olivia reflected and said, "one of the things that's helped my daughter is her best friend in the classroom also comes from – her parents are separated… this is something that may help her adjust to knowing that she's not the only child". She went on to say, "even if parents aren't living together, you're still a family and that sort of thing, because separation is so common these days". Olivia pointed out that diverse family forms were in fact the norm in the modern day and that separated and divorced families were no longer the minority. However, many practices in the present day remain as they were prior to societal changes over the past 50 years such as the introduction of the no fault divorce (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Schoen & Canudas-Romo, 2006). Cohabitation is no longer considered deviant, and it is generally more widely accepted (Poole, 2005). Policies and practices in schools and early childhood services need to be transformed to truly meet the changing needs of the modern family and destigmatise separated and divorced families.

Social-political arrangements also refer to the relationships between people and non-living things in an ecosystem. In many instances the institution of school or early childhood service and the relationships that these sites enabled contributed to families reporting that children feeling safe, happy, supported, respected, and accepted. At times when family life was undergoing change, early childhood services and schools provided stability with their predictable routines and arrangements. Schools and early childhood services are predictable sites that bring together children of similar ages and their parents. Mia summed it up "school was always a bit of a safe place. They had their friends…and it always stayed the same so that was good... he had that continuity of school and his friends, and he went through school quite well". For this family,

the predictability of routines and arrangements of schools and the relationships made at school provided support for their children during the process of separation and divorce. While their home life was changing at this time, they could feel safe and secure and confident that the school environment would remain predictable. This was important for children experiencing parental separation and divorce and research has showed that structure in education settings creates an environment where children can thrive (Øverland et al., 2012).

While schools and early childhood services provided a predictable setting for children and families undergoing changes in their home lives, they also had the capacity for flexibility to meet the needs of individual children and their families. Parents commended the flexibility of many aspects of school routine such as arrangements around parent-teacher interviews for different families. Parents commented on having separate parent-teacher interviews because their relationship had deteriorated and they "just can't be in the same room as each other" whereas other parents "go to the interviews together". Olivia said that the school was "accommodating in that, if they need to do two separate interviews they will". This suggests that parents appreciated that each child and family response to separation and divorce is unique which requires different interaction from teachers and schools and early childhood services. In a previous study, teachers also talked about the need to consider the child's unique characteristics and family circumstances to personalise pedagogical practices to fit the specific need of the child and family (Mahony et al., 2015b).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study exemplified the need for enhancement of school and early childhood service culture and policy that focuses on families experiencing parental separation and divorce. Parents in this study wholeheartedly agreed that schools and early childhood services play an important role in facilitating parents to realise their aspirations for themselves and their family. To do this, policy needs to encourage and support partnerships between families, teachers, school, and early childhood service that facilitate open communication and collaboration, mutual respect, and support. Prior studies revealed that parents valued communication and collaboration with their children's teachers and schools (Cottongim, 2002); however, this current study and the previous study with teachers in this program of research (Mahony et al., 2015a) revealed that these collaborations were somewhat ad-hoc. Policy is needed that promotes regular communication with parents and teachers checking-in with each other at times when they notice behaviour that is out of the norm for the child but also at times when they appear to be adjusting well, as well as teachers checking in with children.

> A school culture and policy that enacts the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Australian Government Department of Education, 2019) and implies an attitude of shared responsibility and a willingness to collaborate in a context of mutual respect and support where all players are working towards the benefit of the children is suggested. Such policy

needs to consider children and families as having unique needs. Policy needs to have a holistic view of the child so that the emotional and social aspects of wellbeing are considered rather than only academic performance.

When a policy existed (e.g. school homework policy), parents talked about the rigidity of the policy. Parents suggested that school administrators ensured these policies and practices were followed because that has always been the way it has been done. There seemed to be little consideration of whether these policies and practices remained relevant for the current cohort of students and their families. While policies need to provide explicit guidance for practice, they also need to provide flexibility to accommodate the varying needs of individual children and families at various point-in-time.

Viewing children through an ecological lens highlights the multiple social influences affecting their social and emotional wellbeing. In the instance of parental separation and divorce the connections between children, families, teachers, schools, and early childhood services are emphasised. Children and parents have unique experiences in the home with separation and divorce, and so too do the practice architectures in each school and early childhood site differ. Therefore, the lived experiences reported in this chapter from parents are unique and have been shaped by many influences. While I have attempted to arrive at common themes, it is not to discount the lived experiences of those parents who do not share these experiences. That is not to say that they are wrong, rather their family's way of doing things and the school's and early childhood service's way of doing things are unique. What is common between all the parents in this study, however, is the desire for their children and themselves to flourish and thrive, to be safe, happy, supported, respected and accepted, and socially connected so that they can live their best lives.

The experiences of the parents in this current study are invaluable to glean those practices of teachers, schools, and early childhood services that enabled them to live well during the process of separation and divorce and what the nexus between home and family, and school and early childhood service might look like to facilitate living well in a world worth living in. For families experiencing separation and divorce this involves open communication, adjusting expectations; providing physical space to meet, connect, share, and learn, building and maintaining positive relationships, empathetic and respectful teachers, and reducing the stigma associated with separation and divorce. This chapter has illuminated how teachers and other school and early childhood staff can say things well, do things well, and relate well to children and families experiencing parental separation and divorce to promote wellbeing and learning. However, practices are like living things that morph and change to suit the unique situation. As was shown in this chapter, each family context is different, children and parents have different experiences with separation and divorce; this necessitates changing practices that match the unique family circumstances. The experiences of parents regarding their collaboration and communication with their children's teachers, schools, and early childhood service were instrumental for forming and/or transforming the practice architectures at the site. This study helps us understand

the impact of our practices and how we can transform practices to move towards creating a world worth living in for all.

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Chapter 10
Practices of Living Well Among Youth in an Arctic Region

Gørill Warvik Vedeler, Merete Saus, Tatiana Wara, Hilde Sollid, and Astrid Strandbu

Abstract Global challenges related to health, climate, the economy and political tensions have affected many, including those living in remote areas. We explore how youth live and appreciate life in the Arctic region of Norway. We facilitated four dialogue café sessions where participants talked about the everyday lives of young people. Based on these conversations in this chapter, we ask: *What future prospects are present for youth in the Arctic?* And *What transformations are needed for them to live well in this region?* This dialogic approach develops site-ontological knowledge to use when educating teachers and develop schools that promote youth's well-being and growth. We use the term '(re)orientation practices', along with Anthias' concept of translocational positionality, to expand the debate on prospect identity and belonging from a focus on culture, nation, ethnicity or place of upbringing to intersections of social positions and social divisions in complex practices. Three themes emerged through analyses: youth's reasons for choosing to live in this region; to live sustainably and well in this area; and the tension between the southern and northern parts of the country. The students' conversations revealed negotiations on translocational positionality, and how tensions are scaled by a central-periphery dichotomy, diverse reasonings and socially-biased semantics.

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/2Frt3piW7gDbP59CAGdr9M?si=9b572c33cc5b446b

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This Arctic Region and Our Questions

The importance of this book's posed questions—*What does it mean to live well?* and *What is a world worth living in for all?*—has increased due to COVID-19, climate challenges, growing economic inequalities and increased political tensions across the world. These challenges greatly affect young people. Youth across the world have at times had their daily routines, even their future prospects, interrupted. Their sense of security has also been challenged due to climate, health and political concerns, resulting in their becoming more place-bound. In this context, we draw attention to how youth live and appreciate life in the Arctic region of Norway. We do not directly address the global challenges mentioned above, but it is important to know how those challenges have intruded upon our research participants' lives. In this chapter, we explore perceptions of what it means 'to live well' for youth in this Arctic region—a sparsely populated and large area that has long, dark winter seasons and short summers with sunny nights.

Polar Norway[1] is the most populous Arctic region in the world. Thanks to the Gulf Stream, ocean currents from south run upwards along the Norwegian coast causing the climate to be milder, and the sea does not freeze compared to other regions north of this Polar Circle. Yet, Norway's Centrality Index, developed by Statistics Norway based on people's access to work and services, confirms the country's Arctic region as peripheral; most municipalities in the area are classified as low on the centrality index (Høydahl, 2020). There is a concern about the decline of the youth population in this part of Norway. Projections show a decrease in this area compared to the rest of the country, where the number of young people is expected to increase (SSB, 2022). An analysis of the United Nation's sustainable development goals reveals some regional challenges and disadvantages (Mineev et al., 2020), for example, the decline in the number of young people along with higher disease and mortality rates. On the positive side, however, and which may motivate the younger generation to settle in the area, Mineev and colleagues (2020) report economic growth, low unemployment and increased tourism in the region.

This complex picture of challenges and possibilities is also intertwined with the colonial history of the region. Olsen and Sollid (2022) describe how the state used the education system as one of the main tools to colonise the Indigenous Sámi and Kven people in the region (see also Minde, 2003). Although Norway abandoned these colonising policies after World War II, the colonial past still shapes and influences

[1] Norway is an elongated country extending from 58° N to 81° N. The Polar Circle crosses the country slightly north of the centre at 66° N. The capital is in the most populated area at 60°N, and the university conducting this research is at 70° N. (The distance apart is 1740 km.) Northern Norway contains 9% of the Norwegian population and 35% of the country's land area.

people's lives (Saus, 2019). Also relevant here is that the north is still perceived (narrated) as somewhere particular—a place different from the more central areas in the southern parts of Norway in terms of culture, history and geography.

Knowledge about young people's preferences and the assessments they make about living in this area is important for future development. Young people are not necessarily strangers to life in periphery and rural areas, especially those who grew up in them or have positive feelings about them. One study showed that choosing rural life in Norway is about having access to nature, being attached to a small, local community, being able to live in a detached house, having a secure job, living with less pressure and ensuring that children grow up in good conditions (Nordtug, 2021). For young people, a well-functioning local community that has access to work, welfare services, Internet, mobile phone coverage and public transportation is important (Myhr, 2021).

Based on our experiences teaching in the teacher education program for secondary schools, we, the authors of this chapter, believe in the importance of young people telling their own stories. As a result, we facilitated four dialogue café sessions; 64 first-year teacher-students spoke to us about the everyday lives of youth in Norway's Arctic region. This dialogic research project intends to develop site-ontological knowledge to be used when educating teachers and developing schools that promote youth's wellbeing and growth. In this chapter, we provide answers to the following questions: *What future prospects are present for youth in the Arctic?* and *What transformations are needed for them to live well in this Arctic region?* In the next section, we present the theoretical framework applied when analysing the café dialogues.

Conditions for Positioning Due to Scaling

We encouraged the participants to share their impressions, reflections and opinions about youth's prospects to live well in the Arctic region of Norway. Our purpose was to understand what effect this particular site's ontology had on young people's everyday practices by discussing conditions for youths living in this area. Youth's live-well practices are shaped by the site's historical and material conditions; they are the 'practice architectures' that keep practices in place and enable, or constrain, them such that they happen in certain ways (Kemmis et al., 2014). Kemmis et al. (2014) propose 'practice architectures' as part of an ecological perspective on practice. That is, they focus on how entangled practices develop, survive and become extinct at a site by exploring how language, history, tradition and politics prefigure a wide range of practices (Kemmis, 2022). The theory of practice architectures explores how practices unfold through the lens of conditions that influence how they are conducted; these conditions include cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political ones (Kemmis et al., 2014). We draw on this theory to explore the conditions and circumstances in which social, physical and political aspects of practices affect youth in Arctic Norway. This focus on the site helps us to understand how practices shape young people's everyday experiences as well as influence their choices, ideas and desires.

To investigate how these aspects of practices are reflected in youth's everyday experiences, we use the term '(re)orientation practices' (Wara, 2016a, p. 20) to highlight the concrete interweaving and frictions in narratives about the north by outlining the directions young people take in life. This perspective is juxtaposed with Anthias' (2008, 2013) concept of 'translocational positionality', which expands the debate on identity and belonging from focusing on culture, nation, ethnicity or place of upbringing to focusing on intersections of social positions and social divisions in complex practices. Anthias (2008) elaborates:

> The concept of translocational positionality addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions. As an intersectional frame it moves away from the idea of given 'groups' or 'categories' of gender, ethnicity, and class, which then intersect (a particular concern of some intersectionality frameworks), and instead pays much more attention to social locations and processes which are broader than those signalled by this. As such, the notion of translocational positionality attempts to address some of the difficulties found within intersectionality approaches and attempts to push the debate forward on theorising identity and belonging. (p. 5)

The term 'translocational positionality', as we use it, helps us to operationalise statements in the dialogues as social positionings, which is understood as a process that takes shape in and between concrete places as well as in social and linguistic contexts. For Anthias (2008), belonging is about not only identifications but also sharing values, networks and practices at the intersection of diverse social relationships. Translocational positionality involves social actions that take shape in and between different contexts and can thus be said to articulate aspects of a larger social, cultural or geopolitical context (Wara, 2016b). We also draw connecting lines to cultural and socialising aspects from the participants' childhoods and how understandings shaped during their early years are challenged and reassessed. An important point is to address how students from Northern Norway use familiar narratives as (re)orientations to (re)negotiate the dominant narratives about the north.

This chapter points to processes of 'scaling', here understood as comparing and measuring dimensions in social life (Carr & Lempert, 2006). When our participants talk about living well, they also say something about what is less good. The dialogues also involve dichotomous ideas of north/south, periphery/centre, past/present and younger/older. Although the concepts of 'scale' and 'scaling' are not without controversy (see Jonas, 2006; Marston et al., 2005) or problems (Carr & Lempert, 2006, pp. 4–7), we find them relevant for our purposes. We use the concepts to shed light on how different places and times become relevant and interrelated in youth's ideas of living well. As Gal (2016) argues, 'scalemaking' as a process is "a relational practice that relies on situated comparisons among events, persons and activities" (p. 91). Scaling thus refers to a process in which both space and time are crucial. This process is ideological and works as a framework of understanding, and, as Gal shows, scaling as a social practice also implies scale-makers who are positioning themselves. In some cases, scales are perceived as unquestionable, a perspectival frames for comparison and measurement. In other cases, more dynamic processes unfold. The youth's social positioning in terms of personal choice, ideological prospects and societal politics become evident in the results presented in this chapter. Before we explain and discuss the youth's social positioning further, we present our study.

The Dialogue Cafés

We recruited teacher-students at our university to participate in dialogue café sessions to converse about youth's lives in the Arctic. The purpose was twofold: first, to increase students', lecturers' and researchers' awareness and understanding of the youth population in Northern Norway, and second, to develop methodologies to increase students' awareness of how site-ontological understanding matters in the teaching profession.

In four café sessions, 64 first-year teacher-students shared stories and experiences and reflected together. The participants considered themselves as young people, based on their being in the youth[2] age group, and as future teachers for adolescents, based on the relevance of the topic for them. The participants were between 19 and 25 years (50% were either 19 or 20), and 28 were male, while 36 were female. They were currently living in the university city Tromsø but came from different parts of the country (from 54 different postcodes) and consequently brought together experiences from different places. The majority (73%) of the participants grew up in one of the three northernmost counties in Norway. The four café sessions were conducted on one day in August 2021; each was 90 min in duration, and they were conducted consecutively in the same classroom. The participants received information beforehand and signed informed consent forms. The project received ethics approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data before the data collection started.

The dialogue café as a research method involves large groups of people participating in exploratory conversations to illuminate a theme or phenomenon (Löhr et al., 2020). The method, also referred to as 'world café' (Brown, 2010), proposes that participants share, explore and discover their own and one another's insights, reflections and questions related to the topic being explored. There are seven principles for carrying out the café process: (1) clarifying the theme and context; (2) creating a hospitable and safe environment; (3) exploring questions that are relevant for the participants; (4) encouraging sharing and involvement; (5) connecting different perspectives; (6) listening together to create insight; and (7) sharing collective discoveries (Brown, 2010, p. 40). One author was the material-manager and organised the students when they arrived; another welcomed the participants, set the scene, introduced the topic and described the dialogue process (15–20 min); while two others were available during the café process (60 min). This process was repeated four times. The student body was previously divided into four regular seminar groups; therefore, the participants were already somewhat familiar with each other. In each café session, the participants were distributed randomly[3] at four café tables. At each table, a table host was chosen. The hosts stayed at the same table throughout the dialogue process to welcome new groups, to introduce the assignment, to tell what previous groups had talked about and to lead the conversation. Participants rotated

[2] The UN defines 'youth' as the age cohort of 15–24: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youthdefinition.pdf.

[3] Distributed to tables as they arrived; 3–6 were at each table.

from table to table three times and participated in a total of four 15-min conversations (see Fig. 10.1). The dialogue process went undisturbed by the facilitators/authors, but one was always present in the room, and participants could reach out. The conversations (between 50 and 65 min) were audio recorded, and all recordings were subsequently transcribed (350 pages of text).

There were four overarching themes for the dialogues, and each rotation added a new sub-theme (see Table 10.1). In this chapter, we draw particularly on the theme 'youth and living in the Arctic' (Café table 4).

This dialogic research approach facilitates individual and collective discovery, in which a democratic ethos positions the participants as participating experts in the construction of meaning (Vedeler & Reimer, 2023). The participants started the analysis process at each table, individually and collectively, and we, as researchers, continued our analysis after the dialogues were transcribed, first individually and then collectively. We began without a theoretical framework or predefined categories. The researchers explored the café sessions' dialogues in a joint analysis-seminar: each researcher had prepared by reading and preanalysing the transcriptions. In this seminar, we shared impressions and initial interpretations with each other before we processed and edited these dialogues. Parts of these analysis are presented in this chapter. We then worked on theory. Based on the empirical analysis, we all searched for and suggested theoretical perspectives before we put together the framework for this chapter. The data collection was time efficient; the data material is extensive and robust in that it involved many participants and was gathered in four separate café sessions to increase its validity. The analysis will be used when developing this

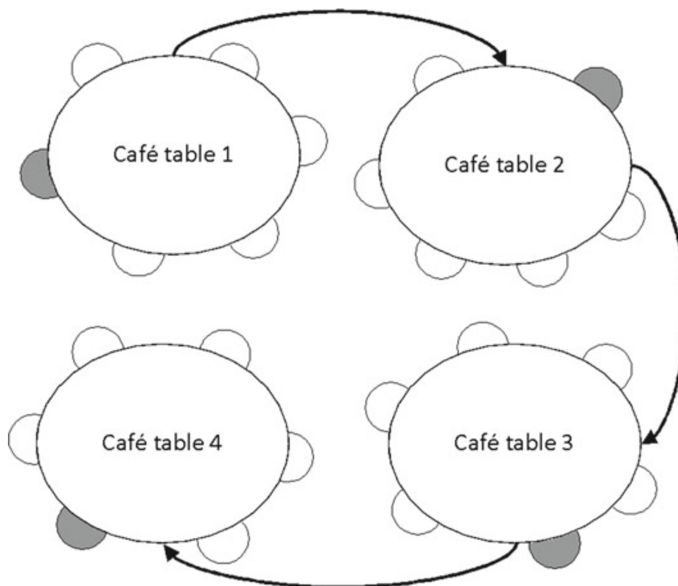

Fig. 10.1 Dialogue café process for exploratory conversations

Table 10.1 Overview of the overarching themes, sub-themes and participants' rotations

		Café table 1	Café table 2	Café table 3	Café table 4
Rotations	*Overarching themes*	Youth and social media	Youth and sustainable development	Youth and identity	Youth and living in the arctic
	Subordinate themes				
1	The good life	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
2	Oppose/ rebellion	Group 4	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
3	Generations	Group 3	Group 4	Group 1	Group 2
4	Gender and diversity	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 1

Overarching themes refers to youth and social media, youth and sustainable development, youth and identity, and, youth and living in the arctic
Subordinate themes refers to the good life, oppose/rebellion, generations, and, gender and diversity

research project further. In this chapter, quotations and concepts taken from the data are translated from Norwegian to English and marked in italics.

Conversations About 'to Live Well'

In this section, we introduce three themes that emerged from the analysis. The participants talked about the youth's prospects for living in the Arctic area, their commitment to live sustainably and well in this area and the tensions between the centre and periphery. We illuminate each theme in turn.

Living in the Arctic Area

Given that all the participants are teacher-students currently living in the north, in the city Tromsø, it was unsurprising that one of the themes they discussed was about *choosing to live* in this area; for 73% of the participants, this meant choosing to continue to live in the north, and for 27%, this meant choosing to move to the north from other parts of Norway to start their teacher education.

When the participants discussed why they chose to live in the north, the relationship between the centre and periphery was a factor. For those from the rural villages in Northern Norway, Tromsø—the biggest city in the north—still occupied a central position. At the same time, Tromsø was also referred to as a rural district when compared to the larger cities in southern parts of the country. For many of the participants, Northern Norway and the city Tromsø held a marginalised position, labelled by one of the participants as *up there*. The connotation of 'up there' is somewhere

far away, and beyond the place where many would like to be. Some participants also drew attention to the government's lack of awareness of youth's desire to live in the north by questioning the burden of government taxes, for example for motorway tolls or studded snow tyres. As one put it: *If they want people to live in Northern Norway, they have to offer them something. They cannot just collect duties and governmental dues. They must make people want to live here.* Several of those who had chosen to move north had never been in Northern Norway before. The relationship between the centre and periphery, feelings of being marginalised living in the north and the radical choice it was to move to the north are highlighted in this dialogue:

- *When I said that I would move to Tromsø, they said like; 'Are you crazy? What has happened to you?'*
- *Yes, people think that Northern Norway is kind of 'ghetto'. Yes, it is a bit like, 'Are you out of your mind?'*
- *People think we live in an igloo, kind of.*
- *Yes, but at the same time, I think the same about those from further north – that all of them are doing reindeer herding.*[4]
- *No, come on. Really now!*
- *Yes, I mean, that they do not live like us. Tromsø is one thing, but Finnmark county, that is even further north, that is really…*

One of the themes appearing in the dialogues is the participants' reasons for choosing to live in the north (when negotiating translocational positionality). Some gave pragmatic reasons, related to particular regional policies; the northernmost public university has lower entrance requirements and places set aside for a number of students from the region.

Moreover, if students choose to work in the north after studying, a part of their students' state loan will be reimbursed. Others gave leisure-based reasons, emphasising the plethora of outdoor activities to be found in Northern Norway. As one participant said: *I am engaged in almost all forms for outdoor activities, such as climbing, skiing, hiking, mountaineering, camping and fishing. That is really the reason why I am here.* Several of them emphasised the peculiar and beautiful nature as part of their reasoning, including the midnight sun,[5] the spectacular mountains, the particular bluish light, the polar nights[6] and the white winters. As one put it: *I do enjoy it when it is light all day and night. When you can go home at 11 p.m. or midnight, and it is still bright light the whole way home. That is really nice.*

We also found romantic-adventure reasons. Some people sought new opportunities and possibilities; one said that he would *challenge himself* and another said she would *experience something new.* Another contrasted the winters in Southern Norway to those in the north: *We don't have any snow during the winter at home. I*

[4] Reindeer herding is the primary agriculture industry for the Indigenous Sámi people in Norway.

[5] In the far north, in the summer, the sun does not fall under the horizon during the night; you can see the sun all night.

[6] During the winter, the sun does not rise above the horizon.

am really looking forward to the winter here. When only slush and rain during the Christmas holiday, it is tragic.[7]

Several participants also sought a calmer life, with fewer people and more space and nature. The participants emphasised rural lifestyle or comfort reasons. They wanted quiet and spacious surroundings. Additionally, they loved having nature so close to them. One participant said: *…there is so much space here. It feels more open and not so…. it is a city; however, you feel there is more room to breathe.*

Some participants moved to the north because their friends had. Others wanted to be close to families: *If I had moved far away from my mother and sister … that would have been tragic. I want to see them much more often than once or twice a year*. These are relational reasons. Thus, participants moved to the north for a variety of reasons.

In the dialogues, the disadvantages and drawbacks of living in the north were also discussed. The participants emphasised the harsh climate, including the rough winters and the dark polar nights, poor infrastructure, lack of comprehensive public transport and high house prices. In one of the dialogues, participants talked about identity challenges. Some stressed that it is difficult to be themselves in small villages. However, most felt that these problems were surmountable and were not enough to dissuade them from living in the north. In one of the dialogues, the participants talked about how hard it can be to sleep during the midnight sun period and that during the polar night period, they often feel tired and worn out. One participant spoke about the low temperatures, even during the summer, to which another replied: *The coldness has never been a hindrance for me, at all, really. We live in well insulated houses and have heaters. We have wood stoves and warm clothes. It is not a problem at all.*

Sustainable Living

The participants were concerned with the climate and nature and how this affects living in the north; and their commitment to live sustainably and well in this area. They discussed sustainability as a naturalness. The question was not if, but how, they can live in environmentally friendly ways. They debated among themselves the different ways to live a sustainable life. Not only did they question the conformity they find in customary environment protection, but they also interrogated the biases of more urban and centralised interpretation of environmental protection. They questioned the justness of these discourses:

- *Yes, I do believe it is sort of a city thing. We have always talked about sustainable development, and I am from a larger city.*
- *Yes, I do think that is relevant if you come from a rural district or from a central city in terms of sustainable development. That is because many of the cases people talk about regarding sustainable development are so irrelevant for us from the*

[7] 'Tragic' is a common expression for Norwegian youth to describe something they really dislike.

rural districts. For example, using public transport. It is easy for them to talk about that. I mean the ones living in the cities, but for us, we've got another reality.

This dialogue demonstrates how public transportation, such as taking a bus or train, is out of the question for people living in the north because there are no trains and only sparse bus services. This lack of public transportation precludes the young from pursuing a sustainable lifestyle. In other dialogues cafés, the participants had similar discussions regarding second-hand stores and vegetarian diets. In the north, there are no such stores, and the Arctic climate is not suitable for plant-based diets since it is too cold for any large-scale vegetable cultivation. They argue that a vegetarian diet actually contradicts the ambition of promoting local food to maintain a sustainable lifestyle.

Some participants questioned whether environmentalists have solutions for those living in northern regions. Do the standards for sustainable living exclude those living in the Arctic and remote places? Do the norms of how to live well, which originated from cities in the south, also apply to Arctic conditions? This scaling debate, which the participants broached, is vital to the discussion about how to live well in the Arctic. The participants felt that these norms for sustainable living were elitist and exclusionary. They did not believe that the sustainable norms of Norway's southern centres were appropriate for northern conditions. In this way, by revealing tensions between dominant discourses and Arctic realities, the participants challenged the green shift and asked for approaches to environmental change that include Arctic life conditions. We have previously labelled the participants' demand for an inclusive interpretation of sustainable life as 'a blue shift' (Saus et al., 2022), using the colour blue to reference the bluish impressions of the north's harsh weather, its clean and pure cold water and the long winter period of darkness. The participants also criticised global environmental activism, seeing 'the green shift' as less relevant for rural and Arctic conditions. In this dialogue, the participants addressed different positionalities by emphasising how social locations need to be included to transform and understand sustainable living:

- *I get upset when someone thinks people from Northern Norway are a special race. That they say, 'they are like this or act like this' and that this is something far different from the rest of the country.*
- *Yes, but I mean, I am from the south, and people tried to prepare me for the Northern Norwegian people I will meet; how they will treat me and those kinds of things. They have said it is totally different than what I am used to and have seen before, and it is different from the rest of the country.*
- *How come? In what way?*
- *That the people speak directly and straightforwardly and that they think I should feel stupid and little because I am from the south.*
- *I feel the opposite. I feel that when you are not from here, from the north, you are welcomed, and people are very accommodating, if you understand what I mean.*

This discussion seems to be about how people in the north treat newcomers from the south. However, it is rather a discussion about how the Northern Norwegian

identity is related to both the southern identity and the Norwegian identity in general. The participants challenged the power of defining others solely based on location or place. They continued by focusing on the historical repression of Northern Norway:

- *Yes, but people from Northern Norway have always been patronised and treated in a condescending manner.*
- *No, we are on our own planet. Like even if we are not, people treat us like they think so.*
- *Earlier, they just cut us from the map. […]*
- *And I feel the politicians, they do not know anything about half of the country. - But that is the thing about Norway. We have so much district-area [rural], that district policies are like … difficult. I think the district politics might anger the youth of Northern Norway because they do not know anything about half of the country.*

In this dialogue, we see how the participants understand the mutual scepticism between the north and the south as a reaction to repression and political practice that is not inclusive nor enhancing the country's diversity. The prospects the participants ask for are for development, both regarding sustainable development and rural development, adapted to northern conditions. Talking about sustainable living in the Arctic, they demonstrate, must include the Arctic world in terms of its particular social, climate and political conditions.

Tensions Between the Centre and Periphery

The participants focused on social, natural and climate factors when they spoke about the conditions for living a good life in the Arctic. Two main perspectives are represented in the dialogues. While some said these conditions provided an exciting outdoor life, others saw these conditions as too harsh and something you just need to endure or want to escape from. Together, these viewpoints create a scalar view of the north—from a 'ghetto', or 'planet', or somewhere exotic to a place of harsh conditions. Such a viewpoint in turn, positions participants in the dialogues (and beyond) on a scale between northerner and southerner and between insider and outsider. This way of scaling and contrasting the north is also found elsewhere in the data, providing a frame for seeing the north in relation to other places as periphery and a place of contrasts and tensions. In the following extract, living well in the north is connected to national policies that take regional conditions into consideration:

- *There are so many policies around living in Northern Norway. They [politicians] have introduced a lot of good policies so that people will live here. […]*
- *And the Northern Norwegian quota,*[8] *that is a positive thing.*

[8] This is a system in higher education in the north that provides youth from the region access to study programs.

- *Yes, because that is an attempt to keep [people], because it prevents people [from the south] from moving here […]*

In this, the participants connected living in the north to Norwegian policy, which is about creating structural and societal measures to create a stable settlement in the north (‘*to keep people*’). These measures are often designed to counter the power imbalance between the north and south, more specifically, with the intention to pull young people to the north. At the same time, to live a good life in the north, it is important to have access to social services as in the rest of Norway, which requires enough people and a comprehensive welfare system. One of the political measures aimed at the younger population is the previously mentioned quota system, which provides Northern Norwegian youth access to higher education study programs in the north, including medicine and law. The participants evaluated this quota as something positive because it keeps youth in the north at an important stage in life. Statistics show that students studying welfare-related programs choose a higher education institution close to their place of upbringing and they also tend to settle in the area where they come from or study. Those who do not return home often stay in more populous places and central (but still local) areas in the north. This suggests that the university cities in the north, like the city of Tromsø, are important for encouraging people to stay in the north (see Moafi, 2022).

It is of national interest that policies ensure a stable population in the north. It is a region with valuable natural resources, and it is of geopolitical interest, but the number of people living in the area is declining. District-oriented policies target people already living there, who are already well aware of the living conditions. Among our participants, some questioned this privilege, as it could be read as counter to the ideas of equal opportunities and access to higher education for all (‘*it prevents people [from the south] from moving here*’), but there is no sign of abandoning this measure for keeping people living in the north. These regional arrangements underline how living a good life in a northern welfare society is political, and it is an example of the scalar relationship between an overarching national and a more regional or even local perspective of what it takes to live a good life in the north.

Negotiations on Translocational Positionality

Our analysis draws attention to conversations related to prospects, sustainability and policy in this Arctic region and how they also acted as negotiations on translocational positionality. The participants revealed how tensions are scaled by a centre-periphery dichotomy, diverse and contradictory reasoning and socially-biased semantics. Our study shows how site-ontological interpretations of ‘to live well’ occur when people encounter each other from different subjective spaces. Our young participants contributed to negotiations on translocational positionality by repeating, adjusting or transforming layer upon layer of semantic, physical and relational spaces of practices. Ongoing discourses, negotiations and positionings proceeded based on their

past and present experiences and future expectations. Particular practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) shape practices that happen in this Arctic site. For instance, 'sayings' include marginalising rhetoric and scepticism; notable examples include the use of words like 'ghetto', 'race' and 'planet' to position the north as different, separate and outside what is perceived as normal. The stories about the 'doings', for example, how the transport system limits mobility and the geography itself hinders access to products, illustrate how youth experience a lack of options. Policy also affects encounters and peoples' self-image and relations. The dialogues represent (through the marking of gender, age, social status, life outlook and place of birth) positioning efforts among and between a multitude of discourses.

The participants infiltrate an already differentiated practice. They identify with or against places and thus also (re)construct being 'in place–out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). Some add site-specific categories to Northerners, making them completely different from Norwegians living in the south, referred to as a special race. Others described Northern Norway through exotic stories by referring to its wilderness and beauty. We have shown how stories are driven by pragmatic, leisure, nature, romantic, comfort or relational reasons to move to, or to stay, in the north (or despite these reasons). This shows how interpretations of living in Northern Norway involve negotiations along the different scales that take place among people. These encounters will always be shaped by both the particular and the general (Massey, 2005), and the participants' individual experiences and preferences are thus always intentional, that is, framed by a wide range of power relations. Young people position and (re)orient themselves towards or from different narratives that tend to marginalise Northern Norway as a place on the outside. Young people's translocational positionalities, as we use them in this chapter, include both economic, political and cultural relations as well as the entanglements and intersections of diverse relations and representations that extend across time and space. When the participants discussed the mutual scepticism between the north and the south, they were addressing the north–south as a struggle in terms of power, not the north–south dimension as primarily places or cultures. We understand that translocational positionalities, where identities are not fixed to places, give meaning based on the social practices that react against, for example, historical repression, policies and social processes that uphold negative attitudes towards the north.

Sustainable living is a central part of what it means to live well in the Artic because the northernmost part of the world will feel the effects of climate change most extensively (Smedsrud & Furevik, 2021). This creates geopolitical interest in this Arctic region, but despite economic growth in the north, there are still challenges related to creating stable employment that take into account the society and environment (Dybtsyna & Mellemvik, 2019), which has caused much consternation among the younger generation, leading to comprehensive worries and youth-driven actions and demonstrations (Sinnes, 2020; De Wever et al., 2019). The discussions in the dialogue cafés can be understood as challenging the uniform and standardised norms of what 'a green shift' might be. It is not the idea 'to live well is to live sustainably' that our participants challenged but rather the idea that there is one, uniform way to do this—this scale is already outlined by more urban and affluent people.

Our participants interpreted 'the north' and their relationship to it based not only on their own previous experiences but also on how others labelled and described the north. They were also affected by actions and activities that may or may not be adapted to the regional conditions and by tensions in the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political spaces they operate within. They expressed the need for transformation that positions the north by how national and regional policies—both social, physical and political aspects—narrate the scale-based relationship between the centre in the south and the periphery Arctic. They want future prospects that are associated with living well where they see themselves, such as in the north, in the periphery, in the present and for the young. There is a need to take the living conditions of the north into consideration in order to counter the power imbalance between north and south. Our participants' awareness of the different views of the north seems to be relevant for pointing to their future prospects of a good life for youth in the Arctic. Scale-making is found in the interplay between structure and agency and by comparing and causing kinds of friction. We have shown how individual and collective positionings amplify differentiation, whether you are with or against. It is about how young people enact what it means to live well in a world worth living in for all in Arctic surroundings. We have explored how youth construct stories in these 'bigger' stories, and we wonder if youth themselves are about to transform towards living a clearer Arctic-site-story. Youth's identity connections are nurtured by the environment, nature and culture, which are experienced by the individuals as inclusion or exclusion through the feelings of being on the 'inside' or 'outside' and of being 'in place' or 'out of place'.

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Chapter 11
New Pathway to Adolescent Wellbeing: The Case for Online Special Religious Education in Public Schools

Leila Khaled

Abstract Special Religious Education (SRE) provides an opportunity for students of faith backgrounds to foster their religious identity and spiritual health. However, many students currently have no access to weekly onsite SRE. This research plans on introducing and evaluating a weekly online SRE intervention in public high schools for a minority cohort—Muslim SRE. The theory of practice architectures (TPA) frames the study. This chapter makes a case for online SRE by presenting the study's underpinnings using relevant literature on adolescent wellbeing, religion, and education. This study intends to inform policymakers and practitioners arguing for contemporary ways to improve and widen access to SRE. Online SRE could reveal a large-scale, cost-effective, and practical educational measure for enhancing the wellbeing of adolescents of faith backgrounds in public schools, even for those considered at-risk (In this chapter, SRE is also referred to as religious education. This is not to be confused with General Religious Education—the inclusive teaching about different religions.).

Keywords Muslim youth · Spiritual health · Evidence-based education · Special Religious Education · Online learning

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6nOvbtdA24JfyU3ETgErnq?si=5a57cc41beba4c1c

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Background

Special Religious Education[1] (SRE), commonly known as 'scripture', is a faith-based religious education program delivered in New South Wales (NSW) public schools since the mid-1800s. The Department of Education and Training NSW defines SRE as "…the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion delivered by authorised representatives of that persuasion…".

The right for students to receive SRE has been embedded in NSW education legislation[2] since the Public Schools Act 1866 (NSW) s 19, which stated:

> In every public school … a portion of each day not less than one hour shall be set apart when the children of any one religious persuasion may be instructed by the clergyman or other religious teacher of such persuasion…[3]

However, between 1866 and 1990 (the current Education Act), SRE legislative requirements of making SRE available in public schools were drastically reduced from being at least one hour daily to at most one hour weekly. According to an independent review of SRE (ARTD Consultants, 2016) and my own on-the-ground experience, today in NSW public high schools, even this one-hour weekly SRE lesson is unavailable for all students of faith backgrounds. This independent review of SRE found that although most NSW government schools participate in SRE (92% primary and 81% secondary schools), within these schools, student participation was 71% in primary and 30% in secondary schools (p. xv). The review also found that most parents (84%) whose children attend SRE were satisfied or mostly satisfied with their children's SRE learning experience (p. 107); SRE teachers are primarily volunteers (p. xxvii); and managing teacher absences, timetabling, finding classroom space, and the low rate of participation in high schools are among the main challenges in facilitating onsite SRE classes (p. 79). However, participation in any subject could likely decline if student attendance was optional, and the provision was operating with limited resources, and taught after school or at lunchtime.

Unlike Australia, some Western governments fund public school programs equivalent to SRE. In Belgium, educators believe the program facilitates peaceful coexistence, encourages intra-faith and interfaith dialogue, and addresses the meaning and purpose of life (Galindo, 2019). In Germany, the program is seen as a litmus test for integration when minority faiths are represented, as it has a positive symbolic impact on these minorities (de Pommereau, 2010).

With this SRE background in mind, NSW public high schools have the scope to enhance SRE so that students of faith backgrounds have weekly access. This study plans to achieve this by introducing and evaluating an asynchronous online SRE 10-week intervention in two Sydney public high schools. A mixed-method, randomised control trial for a minority cohort—Muslim SRE—will be conducted as

[1] In other states of Australia, SRE is known as special religious instruction (SRI) and religious instruction (RI).

[2] Education Act 1990 [NSW] s 33 part 1.

[3] http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_act/psao1866n33208.pdf.

a case study. The theory of practice architectures (TPA) (Kemmis et al., 2014) will frame the design and evaluation of the intervention. The TPA framework promises to be an appropriate resource by providing the concepts, language, and structure to reflect on results and provide evidence-based, morally committed recommendations that promote a future of living well in a world worth living in for all.

The remainder of this chapter presents the relevant underpinning literature from the fields of adolescent wellbeing, religion, and education.

Adolescent Wellbeing

High school students, the main study participants, fall within the age-based definitions of 'children', 'adolescents', 'young people', and 'youth'. Sawyer et al. (2018) define adolescence as ages 10–24. The terms 'health' and 'wellbeing' are used interchangeably, as "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing…" (World Health Organisation, 2020, p. 6).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) asserts that adolescence is a pivotal period of cognitive and behavioural development, requiring the establishment of policies and programs that cater for such developmental needs and rights (World Health Organisation, 2011).

Among other considerations, policies and programs must consider that life-long consequences of adolescent wellbeing can be impacted by changes that occur during this period, and changes taking place during adolescence are influenced by characteristics of both the individual and the environment (World Health Organisation, 2014). Accordingly, improving youth wellbeing and mental health was the focus of The United Nations' latest Global Youth Survey (United Nations, 2021a). Likewise, the *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all* (World Health Organisation, 2022) urges decision-makers to increase commitment and action in approaches to mental health care. Furthermore, based on the 2023 Youth Survey Report, for Australia's general youth population, equity, discrimination and mental health were among the top concerns (McHale et al., 2023). In the latest Australian national study of mental health and wellbeing, 39.6% of youth aged 16–24 had a 12-month mental health disorder in 2020–21.

In addition to experiencing similar concerns to their peers, Muslim youth[4] face unique issues. Studies published over the past two decades since 11 September 2001 show that Muslim youths' lives, identity, and feelings of belonging have been impacted by public scrutiny, counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism policies, and excessive hostile media directed at them (Ozalp & Ćufurović, 2021). Hasan (2018) reported, "(a) quarter of all Muslim children in Australia are living in poverty, compared with 13% of all Australian children" (p. 12). At the same time, Markus (2018), in a social cohesion report, indicated that Australian Muslim youth belong

[4] In this document, if the 'Muslim youth' expression is used, it refers to Australian Muslim youth unless otherwise indicated.

to the most disliked minority group in Australia (p. 69). Furthermore, 36% of the reported Islamophobic attacks were aimed at Muslim children or in their presence (Iner, 2019, p. 33). As a result of Islamophobic attitudes, Muslim children suffer from abuse and physical harm (Iner et al., 2019, p. 14). To make matters more complex, Muslim youth have developed issues with identity and belonging (Akbarzadeh, 2016; Hosseini & Chafic, 2016), drug and alcohol addictions, crime (Amath, 2015; Kabir, 2011), and violent extremism (Hosseini & Chafic, 2016). According to a study by Grossman and Tahiri (2015), radicalisation and extremism are mainly driven by identity and belonging issues, and informed by racism, social exclusion, and marginalisation (p. 9).

Such health and societal concerns not only negatively impact individuals, their families, and the community, but they also come with an economic burden. For instance, the Australian Government expenditure on mental health-related services in 2020–21 was $11.6 billion. In total, mental illness costs Australia about $200–220 billion per year (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2020). If total costs of the other adolescent wellbeing concerns, such as drug and alcohol abuse, crimes, and violent extremism, are factored in, it becomes evident where reform efforts should be focused.

With such serious adolescent health and wellbeing concerns, it is appropriate that national education goals for the twenty-first century, as stated in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, are aimed at "promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians…" (Education Council, 2019, p. 2).

In summary, adolescence is a pivotal period in human development, and Australian adolescents face many wellbeing issues. High school educators face the challenge of implementing policies and programs to reach holistic wellbeing and education goals for all students. Online SRE is well-positioned to help achieve such goals, mainly (but not limited to) the spiritual, emotional, and moral wellbeing goals for adolescents with a faith background. This would alleviate much of the burden on individuals, families, communities, and the economy.

Religion

Religion is a worldview by which individuals, through their faith and beliefs, develop an ethical code of living (Badri, 2014). Moreover, such beliefs and thinking play a central role in wellbeing psychology, specifically cognitive therapy (Balkhi cited in Badri, 2013, p. 11), which is often used to improve mental health.

The following presents the significance of religion to society at large, adolescents in general, and Muslims in particular.

Significance of Religion in Society

Religion is an integral and relevant part of Australian society. The latest 2021 Australian census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022) showed that 93% of the population answered the question on religion—the only optional question in the census. The majority of Australians, around 55%, identified with an organised form of religion, while almost 39% indicated 'no religion', which includes spiritual and secular beliefs. Bouma (2018) pointed out that when 'no religion' is marked on the census, it does not mean the person lacks spirituality or is anti-religious; instead, it means they do not identify with a specific organised form of religion.

Moreover, Australian secularism acknowledges religion as one voice among many in the public sphere; that is, it does not endorse one voice to the exclusion of other points of view (Taylor, 2007). Such secular states are described as religiously plural. Australia is considered a secular nation based on *s 116* of the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, which prohibits laws restricting free participation in religion. The intent here is to "protect the religion (or absence of religion) of minorities, and, in particular, of unpopular minorities" (cited in Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Inc v Commonwealth (1943) HCA 12). Because Australia is a secular and pluralist nation of many religions and beliefs, programs such as SRE exist and should continue to exist.

Australia is also a signatory to international treaties protecting religious freedom in public places. Article 18 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) declares the fundamental human right of freedom of religion, where people are free to learn, practice, and teach a religion of their choice in private and public. This automatically applies to compulsory schooling hours in public schools. Also, *The Religion Declaration* (Article 4) (General Assembly resolution 36/55, 1981) and the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (United Nations Human Rights Commission [UNHRC], 1992) require that signatories and member states protect the cultures and identities of minorities as this contributes to social and political stability.

Therefore, protecting minority rights, cultures, and identities through programs such as SRE is critical in aiding national security and social cohesion, and preventing conflict.

Furthermore, religious participation offers pathways to a more socially cohesive society. Pepper et al. (2019) found that "religious participation generates social capital, leading to higher social cohesion" (p. 11). This study compared data from the *2016 National Church Life Survey* and the *2016 Australian Community Survey* to measure social cohesion among Australian churchgoers with the general population. They found that "social cohesion metrics were stronger among churchgoers than the wider population across the domains of belonging, social justice, civic participation, acceptance of others and worth" (p. 1).

In summary, these findings indicate that

- Religion is significant in terms of the number of participants.
- The Australian constitution and international treaties protect people's rights to learn, practice, and teach their religion publicly and privately.
- Religion positively impacts the social cohesion and political stability of Australian society.
- Religion enhances civic engagement, social justice, feelings of belonging and worth, and acceptance of others.

Significance of Religion to Adolescence

The benefits of religion to human health and wellbeing are established in many studies (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2012; Estrada et al., 2019; Ferris, 2002; Harris, 2016; Koenig, 2009, 2012; Myers, 2000; Weber & Pargament, 2014, to name a few). In *Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education*, Goldman (2018) asserts that there is an emotional readiness for religion noted in much research on adolescence. Over time this has remained constant; six decades earlier, Argyle (1958) similarly found that adolescence "is the age of religious awakening" (p. 43). Hence, for adolescents searching for truth to fulfil their emotional and intellectual needs, Goldman argues that schools need a "more radical change of teaching content and method" (2018, para. 9).

This is affirmed by a social epidemiological study[5] by VanderWeele (2017), highlighting the role of education and religious community on human wellbeing.

VanderWeele reviewed empirical literature from longitudinal, experimental, and quasi-experimental studies and argued that most empirical evidence concurs that human 'flourishing' or wellbeing requires, at the very least, doing or being well in five broad areas of human life. These are (i) happiness and life satisfaction, (ii) health, both mental and physical; (iii) meaning and purpose; (iv) character and virtue; and (v) close social relationships (p. 2). VanderWeele then pointed out that family, religious community, education, and work are significant and relatively common pathways that have reasonably sizeable effects on each of the five contributors to wellbeing mentioned above. Online SRE combines two major pathways, namely 'education' and 'religious community', to impact adolescent wellbeing positively.

Using the above theoretical framework, Chen and VanderWeele (2018) employed an outcome-wide analysis of longitudinal data. They found that frequent religious participation in adolescence correlated positively with a wide range of health and wellbeing outcomes, including "psychological well-being, character strengths, and lower risks of mental illness and several health behaviours" (Chen & VanderWeele, 2018, p. 7). Based on these findings, the researchers conclude that promoting religious practice and service attendance could be meaningful pathways of development and

[5] **Social epidemiology** is relevant to this study as the social construct of compulsory schooling influences the health and wellbeing of the individual and, in turn, society.

support for adolescents with a faith background (p. 1). In public high schools, the SRE program is the only meaningful pathway to promote religious participation and practice for adolescents with a faith background.

Further empirical evidence (Harris, 2016) shows a correlation between 57-character strengths and religiousness, spirituality, or other spiritual constructs. Harris demonstrated this by analysing 913 peer-reviewed articles and tabulating the number of articles reporting this correlation. For example, 45 articles reported an empirical correlation between religiousness and mental health.

In another study, Park et al. (2019) examined 22 empirical studies that measured the mental wellbeing of non-religious and religious individuals. Their results showed that religious people accrue mental health benefits that non-religious individuals, on average, do not accrue (p. 92). This concurred with a more extensive study by Koenig (2012), which examined relationships between depression and religion by reviewing data from 100 qualitative studies. This review found that positive mental wellbeing levels were significantly greater in religious people. Additionally, many other studies (Estrada et al., 2019; Ferris, 2002; Koenig, 2009; Myers, 2000; Weber & Pargament, 2014) demonstrated that religion positively impacts overall wellbeing, physical health, and happiness levels.

Further supporting evidence was found in an extensive SRE report (Gross & Rutland, 2021) that included findings from two SRE studies. These studies found that SRE in government schools is important and valuable to students and society. The first study revealed that SRE provided students with "a safe place" and "contributed to the children's sense of connectedness within the community, promoted their feeling of security and provided them with a protective safety net of identity capital and spirituality" (Gross & Rutland, 2016, p. 44). The second study analysed course content taught by different faiths in SRE on the theme of 'care and compassion' and found this promoted vital elements of values education as found in the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. Additionally, the report highlighted that SRE is a strategic pathway to enrich a multicultural society, counter religious fundamentalism and extremism, and address racism and prejudice.

In summary, religion is significant to adolescents because

- Religion helps one develop an ethical code of living.
- Beliefs and thinking play a central role in wellbeing psychology, specifically cognitive therapy.
- During adolescence, there is an emotional readiness for religion.
- Religious community and education are two major pathways to wellbeing.
- There is a correlation between religion and mental health and many character strengths.
- SRE research shows it creates a 'safe place', enhances identity capital and spirituality, and promotes values education and multiculturalism.

Significance of Religion to Muslims

As the online SRE intervention will be conducted as a multi-case study with Muslim students, this section presents the significance of religion (Islam) to Muslims.

The recent *Islam in Australia Survey* (Rane et al., 2020) surveyed a representative sample of the Australian Muslim population (*n* 1034), and it highlighted relevant identity and practice data concerning Muslims. Nearly, all respondents (96%) considered Islam either very important (80%) or important (16%) to their identity. Most respondents (87%) indicated they publicly identify as a Muslim, and 77% said they pray 'daily'. Remarkably, being 'Australian' ranked the most frequent response by participants when asked about their cultural/ethnic/national identity.

This suggests that for the majority, practising Islam does not distance them from being Australian. This concurred with the findings of Dunn et al. (2015), who pointed out that it was indicative of Muslims' resilience—a character strength that promotes wellbeing—for Muslims to support diversity and hold views on Islam's compatibility with Australian norms despite their experience of high levels of racism: "Australia's values of diversity and multiculturalism give hope to Australian Muslims, adding to the resilience needed for dealing with the pressures of Islamophobia and racism" (p. 38). Additionally, Atie et al. (2017) explain that it is not only Australia's official multiculturalism that fosters this positivity among Muslims, but it is also "tenets of Islamic thinking on toleration and moderation" (p. 1).

The *Islam in Australia Survey* also highlighted influential sources of information and knowledge for Muslims. Australian Muslims indicated that the two most influential sources for their current understanding of Islam were the Quran (82.5%) and Hadith (66.44%). In contrast, almost 30% indicated that 'school' was 'very important' or 'somewhat important'. This shows the scope for public schools to influence Islamic education for Muslim students.

For the *Islam in Australia Survey* question on 'openness to new knowledge', almost all respondents (98%) were either completely open (51%), very open (37%), or somewhat open (10%) to new knowledge. This points to the likelihood of Muslim adolescents being open to receiving new knowledge via online Islamic SRE based on sources important to them—the Quran and Hadith.

Another question in the *Islam in Australia Survey* (Rane et al., 2020) pointed to the need for religious education. A sizeable minority (15–34%) of respondents answered that they were 'unsure' of how the Quran should be interpreted, pointing to the need for increasing access to this knowledge. Muslims must clearly understand Islamic principles such as preserving life, refining character, bringing benefit, removing harm, and being truthful, patient, and just. This is especially important concerning the threat of radicalisation. Rane (2019) notes that Australian courts regularly found that religious beliefs were central in the commission of crimes committed by Muslim terrorism offenders, including adolescents (p. 2). After extensive analysis, Rane shows that the offenders' understandings of Islam were not reflected in the Quran, Hadith, or the consensus of classical Islamic scholars. On the contrary, Rane shows that these sources of Islamic knowledge promote peaceful coexistence and

advocate considerate and respectful interfaith and intercommunity relations (p. 19). Likewise, Atie et al. (2017) found that most Muslim youth who practice Islam display resilience and a more positive attitude towards Australia. For these positive aspects of Islam to be widely practised, Rane (2019) recommended teaching Islamic studies to Muslim adolescents through an evidence-based and critical-analytical approach. This concurs with the view of Lovat (2016), who stated

> In a day and age that has seen Islam captive to Islamophobia at one end and radicalisation at the other, it is incumbent on educators everywhere to inform themselves and their students about the Islamic tradition, as evidenced from the best sources and the most balanced record available to us. (p. 1)

Relevant to radicalisation but not specific to Muslims, Huesmann et al. (2011) examine data from a 40-year prospective longitudinal study to determine religiosity's role in influencing adulthood aggressiveness. They found that the religiosity of grandparents, parents, and children is a long-term protective factor against aggressive behaviour from childhood to adulthood.

These findings justify the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre's efforts to use youth education programs (2019) to counter and prevent aggression in the form of terrorism and violent extremism, promote a culture of peace and tolerance, and develop respect for human dignity, pluralism, and diversity. Given that Islam and other religions aim to promote such values, it is well within the interest of public schools to provide Muslim students with Islamic religious education delivered through the SRE program. Besides, O'Brien (2015) noted that most radicalised youth in Australia were from public schools, not religious ones. Not all Muslim adolescents are resilient to Islamophobia, racism, and other societal pressures; hence, a government-supported preventative education program would be appropriate. On this view, it might be argued that SRE could be a mass-scale, cost-effective, and practical way to achieve the intended results of such a program.

Another rationale for Muslim online SRE is based on Islamic psychology (Pasha-Zaidi, 2019), which concurs with Indigenous psychology (Kim et al., 2006). Such theories recognise that psychological mindsets are not universal and, therefore, require that culture-specific programs be designed to relate to the specific beliefs of groups. SRE programs cater to faith-orientated mindsets. To illustrate, Muslims believe the Quran and *Sunnah,*[6] which detail a comprehensive code of living, are their ultimate guides to complete success. Part of the mission of Islamic SRE aims to "… inspire and empower our youth to develop a strong Islamic identity in order for them to contribute positively to their own development, their societies, communities and the world" (Islamic Special Religious Education, 2023). In this way, Muslims aspire to live well and contribute to a world worth living in for all.

To summarise, the justifications for online Islamic SRE classes for Muslim adolescents include the following:

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[6] Sunnah refers to the sayings, doings, and tacit approvals of Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—found in authenticated Hadith.

- Practising Muslims display favourable attributes for personal and societal wellbeing.
- The few Muslims turning to violent extremism consistently misuse Islam to justify violence (Rane, 2019), which indicates authentic Islamic education is needed.
- The Quran and Hadith are Muslims' most influential sources of information on Islam.
- Public schools have the scope through SRE to facilitate authentic Islamic education.
- Most Muslims are open to learning.
- Psychological theories affirm that culture-specific content is required for education to be practical, relevant, and effective for students.

Purpose of Education—Islamic and Western

The purpose of education also underpins the Muslim online SRE study as a pathway to adolescent wellbeing for Muslims. From an Islamic perspective, seeking beneficial knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim (Hadith, Sunan Ibn Mājah 224). Islam distinguishes between beneficial and non-beneficial knowledge and righteous and unrighteous actions. The primary purpose of education in Islam for individuals and societies is to bring benefit and remove harm. Similarly, Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018), TPA theorists, view education as practices that help people 'live well in a world worth living in'.

Education is at the forefront of the allied disciplines dealing with adolescent wellbeing. From classical to modern psychologists, there is an understanding that behavioural and psychological change in individuals is better suited to education rather than medicine or therapy. This means schools are well-positioned to achieve wellbeing pursuits through the process of learning beneficial practices. For example, one can learn to replace habitual emotional overreactions with balanced and reasonable reactions (al-Balkhi, Tusk cited in Badri, 2013, pp. 14–15). Since belief and thinking are central to behavioural change, this highlights the place and importance of religious education in facilitating the learning of new positive behaviours that can positively impact wellbeing.

This transformative role of education is also deduced from its Latin derivatives—'educare' and 'educere'. Respectively, these connote 'to bring up' and 'to bring forth'. Islamic education has concepts with similar meanings—*tarbiyyah* and *ta'leem. Tarbiyyah* means 'upbringing' holistically. While *Ta'leem* refers to the teaching and learning of beneficial knowledge and actions or practices, usually through training and instruction. Ta'leem is said to 'bring one forth' from darkness into light. That is, the darkness of *wahn* (covetousness) and ignorance; into the light of *fahm* (understanding/realisation).

Ta'deeb is another Islamic education concept (Al-Attas, 1977), from the root word *adab*, which generally means etiquette (refinement, manners, appropriateness). Technically, *Ta'deeb* refers to teaching the application of knowledge in its appropriate

place (cited in Abdullah et al., 2015, p. 514). An accurate definition of Islamic education encompasses all three aspects—*tarbiyyah*, *ta'leem*, and *ta'deeb*, and its central aim is to develop the four core components of human beings—the spirit, heart, body, and intellect—in a manner aligned with their purpose (Bin Omar cited in Boyle, 2004, p. 15).

Consistent with the above concepts of Islamic education, well-rounded youth education is reclaiming its place in educational goals. The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration,* (Education Council, 2019, p. 2) states that youth education in the twenty-first century must nurture the spiritual, intellectual, moral, emotional, social, physical, and aesthetic wellbeing and development of Australian youth; support Australia's economic success and social cohesion; and develop an understanding of values, identity formation, and informed and responsible, active citizenship. Additionally, schools need to build the confidence and creativity of students so that they have a sense of self-awareness, self-worth, and personal identity to help them manage their mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing (p. 6). These wellbeing goals are also affirmed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which include 'Good Health and Wellbeing' as one of their essential goals for nations (United Nations, 2021b).

The *NSW Department of Education and Communities, Wellbeing Framework for Schools* recognises that students' wellbeing is enhanced when schools engage with and incorporate their communities' support, knowledge, and contributions. This facilitates the students' ability to "connect, succeed and thrive" (2015, p. 2). However, Diallo and Maizonniaux (2016) argue that despite inclusive policies that cater to students of diverse backgrounds, their practical application has not been fully achieved (p. 201). The challenge remains for educators to incorporate communities' knowledge in relevant, engaging, and meaningful ways that connect with students' diverse backgrounds and life beyond school (DeNobile & Hogan, 2014). To illustrate, Abdullah et al. (2015) found that the reason for establishing Muslim schools was that Muslim parents desire their children to maintain their Muslim faith (p. 509), which they must think is not possible in a public school. On the contrary, a fully supported public school SRE program could help students of faith backgrounds maintain their faith and promote social cohesion in a multicultural setting.

To address the challenge of catering for diversity in public schools, SRE is well-positioned to meet the needs of students from various faith backgrounds. SRE is a space where students' particular faith can be taught through relatable concepts, examples, and stories, thereby creating significance and meaning for students. Additionally, SRE is an opportunity for students to form those connections with their faith communities to help them succeed and thrive in a multicultural setting.

Online Learning

The online SRE intervention study will be conducted asynchronously using online modules. Studies on online learning during the pandemic confirmed the findings of previous research. These studies included both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Effective online teaching strategies backed by empirical evidence will be used to inform the design of online SRE. For example, preparing more inclusive, active, and student-centred online classes helped overcome student barriers to learning (Mogavi et al., 2021). Moreover, studies found a need for catering to students' preference for discussion and the attractiveness of educational material (Buchta et al., 2021) and for teacher training in quality pedagogical practices and student learning in new environments (McArthur, 2022). Previous studies showed that when quality pedagogical practices are applied, online learning environments may be equally effective for learners as onsite learning environments (Alexander & Boud, 2018; Driscoll et al., 2012). Student satisfaction resulted from teaching that promoted participant interaction, while knowledge outcomes resulted from quality course design and effective pedagogy (Rovai & Barnum, 2003). The above indicates that online SRE could be equally effective as onsite SRE if quality pedagogical practices are employed.

Online SRE—Equitable and Contemporary

In NSW, online education is provided only for students based on necessity or the principle of equity provision (Buckingham, 2017). This is for geographically isolated students or those restricted from education due to other approved circumstances (DETNSW, 2010, p. 17, as cited in Buckingham, 2017).[7] Considering the aforementioned wellbeing benefits, the principle of equity provision would suggest that students not receiving onsite SRE in NSW schools would be entitled to receive online SRE during school hours.

Online SRE is a contemporary pathway for adolescents to explore their beliefs and gain a sense of meaning and purpose in life. A 2019 Consensus Study Report,[8] titled *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*, highlighted that traditionally, religion was the context in which adolescents found meaning and purpose. However, because youth are becoming less likely to engage with religious-based institutions, comparable alternatives must be supported (p. 74). Online SRE could provide that alternative experience. In addition to wellbeing benefits, online SRE aligns with the Australian Curriculum's intended outcome of using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for effectively and confidently interacting with others in a knowledge-based economy.

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[7] In the Australian state of Victoria and the USA, virtual education is always available as an option to all students and not just for necessity.

[8] This Consensus Study Report presents the evidence-based consensus of experts from the three US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. It includes their findings, conclusions, and recommendations to inform public policy decisions.

Conclusion

Adolescent health and wellbeing should be prioritised by educators, parents, and society at large. Muslim youth can use and misuse religion respectively for or against their individual and societal wellbeing. The existing literature suggests that religious practice promotes health and wellbeing, builds character, contributes to social cohesion, and curbs radicalisation. As a precursor to religious understanding and practice, SRE is a promising pathway to such widespread benefits. SRE should be fully supported as an essential education program for students with faith backgrounds in public schools.

In secular Australia, people have the right to preserve their identities through teaching, learning, and practising their beliefs in private and public. NSW education legislation has commendably protected SRE. However, improving educational SRE policy and practices could maximise the return for adolescent and societal wellbeing. As Horvath and Donoghue (2015) remind us, "If we know something works to enhance student learning or wellbeing, then we should name it and do more of it" (para. 12). Online SRE would enable SRE providers to reach more students and contribute to their wellbeing in cost-effective, mass-scale, and efficient ways. If this can be achieved, then public schools would be impactfully contributing to a future of living well in a world worth living in for all.

Note: At the time of the final review of this chapter, the researcher is negotiating challenges (constrainers of practices) in conducting the research as planned. The NSW Department of Education received legal advice that although the SRE legislation is silent regarding online or in-person delivery of SRE, they 'anticipate' that SRE should be given in person. This interpretation is questionable based on the text and intent of the SRE legislation to protect SRE and ensure student access—especially in our digital age.

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Chapter 12
Education that Makes Life Manageable, Comprehensible, and Meaningful: Experiences of the Monash Access Program, a University Alternative Entry Pathway

Kristin Elaine Reimer

Abstract Although formal education is arguably a powerful force for good, the experience of schooling can feel disempowering and disheartening to some young people. This chapter listens to students who have had negative experiences of schooling and entered university through an alternative pathway. Seven students who graduated from the Monash Access Program (MAP) in four different years share their insights into formal education. MAP is an intentionally relational program, grounded in critical praxis, for mature-aged students who have experienced educational disruptions. By drawing on Antonovsky's concept of *sense of coherence* to understand the students' insights, this study shows how MAP helped students to make sense of education as manageable, comprehensible, and meaningful. These students, who have had both educational disadvantage (prior to university) and educational advantage (through MAP), offer their perspectives into education's role in helping us to live well and to create a world worth living in for all. With this study, after listening to the students, I argue that formal education can provide us with experiences of manageability, comprehensibility, and meaningfulness in order to create a world where we are able to thrive individually and collectively.

Keywords Sense of coherence · Enabling programs · Educational pathways · Alternative education · Salutogenesis · Relational pedagogies

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/1NI2MGmvSYiGCbAJQWgOFL?si=d439287dd3e44485

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Introduction

Formal education has long been argued to be a force for good. Educated individuals tend to have more secure employment, better health outcomes, and are more tolerant of differences (Green & Janmaat, 2016; Masschelein & Simons, 2013; McMahon, 2009); educated societies tend to be better off economically, make better informed policy choices, and make advances in medical and social areas (OECD, 2010; Peters et al., 2010). Indeed, the whole premise of the World Worth Living In Project (www.monash.edu/education/wwli) is that education has the potential to make a powerful impact: to help us to live well and to create a world worth living in for all. And yet, not all educational experiences are created equal. We know that school can also potentially de-humanise students (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021), strip away language, culture, and identity (Knight, 2002; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), and perpetuate injustice and inequity (O'Brien & Nygreen, 2020; Wadhwa, 2010).

This chapter is an attempt to listen to and learn from mature-aged university students who have experienced schooling in the past as alienating and disempowering. The seven students featured in this chapter all entered university study through an alternative pathway—the Monash Access Program (MAP)—designed to equip mature-aged students, who had experienced educational disruption, with the confidence and skills necessary to participate fully in university life. Going to university, for these students, was never a 'given'; for all, it was a very intentional choice and for many it ran counter to their own expectations and the expectations of those around them. As people who have given considerable thought to the role that formal education plays in their own lives and in the world, and as people who had both disempowering and empowering experiences of formal education, it is important that their voices inform our understanding of how education can help us to live better and to create a world more worth living in.

In this chapter, I bring together the theoretical concepts of educational praxis as conceived of by Kemmis and colleagues (2014) and sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979) to help articulate the fullness of the MAP student experiences and wisdom. Together, these theoretical threads provide insight into how morally informed educational action can assist people in thriving individually and collectively. Formal education, the MAP students reveal, can help us to experience life in ways that Antonovsky (1979) would call manageable, comprehensible, and meaningful.

Context: Monash Access Program

Monash University, located in Melbourne, Australia, is a high-ranking institution, a member of the Group of Eight, a coalition of Australia's top research-intensive universities. The Monash Access Program (MAP) was first offered in 2014 as an alternative entry to university for students who had experienced some form of educational

disadvantage and would otherwise not meet the standard admission requirements into a university program. Students who have experienced educational disadvantage cannot be described in any uniform way. In Australia, such students may be from low socioeconomic backgrounds; from rural and remote communities; from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds; part of Indigenous and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander communities; people with disabilities; and/or who speak languages other than English (Bradley et al., 2008; James, 2007; Larsen & James, 2022; Molla, 2021; O'Shea, 2020). Students from these backgrounds have often been underserved and underprepared by Australia's inequitable primary and secondary educational systems (Harwood et al., 2017) and thus are underrepresented in Australian universities; MAP is one of Monash University's attempts to correct this discrepancy.

MAP is a tuition-free course—thus removing one financial barrier to university admission—that introduces students to academic skills and resources needed for university study. Completing MAP does not earn students a degree or diploma, but its completion provides students with full entry into a first-year university course. The program is quite intensive, as a small group of 15–25 students study together over seven months, in three core units. Since 2016, I have been the main point of contact for these students, teaching them two of their three units: the first, an introduction to university context; the second, an overview of academic writing. MAP is designed to iteratively step the students into the culture of the university, and begins with just one unit. After one month, another unit, on mathematical reasoning, taught by a different tutor, is added to the schedule. A few months later, students then select a first-year elective unit from participating faculties (arts, education, business, or information technology). They undertake their elective unit while still meeting as our MAP group—which begins to serve as a sort of 'home room' where students can support one another and wrestle with the challenges of university study. The iterative nature of the program is intentional; in a past study, former student Josh[1] explained it this way: "They are slowly taking their hand away from us, removing one floaty[2] from us and we are learning how to tread water with one hand rather than just being thrown straight in" (Reimer & Pardy, 2019, pp. 19–20). The program creates iterative experiences of academic achievements that allow students to feel more and more prepared for study.

With its focus on academic preparation, MAP joins other Australian university enabling programs designed to upskill underprepared students so that they transition successfully into undergraduate degree programs (James, 2016; Larsen & James, 2022). But, MAP is about more than academic skill preparation and experiences of academic successes. Possessing academic skills is only the base level requirement for successful participation in higher education. As has been pointed out in other studies, university culture is not always a welcoming one and underrepresented students can feel alienated, despite having the requisite skills and abilities, and are more likely to disengage and, potentially, drop out (Larsen & James, 2022; Pedler et al., 2022;

[1] All student names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

[2] An air-filled, ring-shaped piece of plastic, that people who are learning to swim wear on their arms in water to help them float.

Rose, 2007). As an antidote to this disengagement, it is crucial that institutions and educators help to develop within students a sense that they belong to the university community (Dunwoodie et al., 2020; Harwood et al., 2017; Larsen & James, 2022) and have both the ability and right to join the academic conversation (Rose, 2005).

MAP is unique amongst most Australian higher education enabling programs, in that, it is structured to actively co-create with students experiences of academic belonging. In a previous study conducted with the 24 students who were part of the 2017 MAP cohort, students identified how MAP contributed to their academic success: through pedagogies of belonging and pedagogies of becoming (Reimer & Pardy, 2019). These pedagogies involved the positioning of students as crucial members of a learning community in which they are the co-creators of knowledge. Each class involves participation in a learning circle in which students share their own experiences and make connections to one another and to the class content. In this way, students start to feel, deep in their sense of selves, that they have significant contributions to make socially, personally, and academically. As one student, Sally, in this previous study stated, MAP "prepared us to belong" (Reimer & Pardy, 2019, p. 19).

MAP is constrained by specific accreditation requirements and higher education frameworks (such as assessment policies), the same as other enabling programs; and yet MAP is small (and low-profile) enough to allow for MAP educators to be responsive to the actual strengths and needs of the individuals involved, putting people—rather than policy requirements—first. As such, MAP intentionally represents a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994; Ikpeze, 2016), bridging formal and informal educational discourses and practices. The knowledge and strengths that MAP students bring into university are honoured, at the same time as students are introduced to the particular ways of being and acting within the Australian higher education context. Expected educational skills and discourses are explained and practiced, but also critiqued.

As a co-developer of this program (with the founder, John Pardy) and as the current main organiser and educator, I am, of course, not neutral. In fact, I'm fiercely invested in MAP and in ensuring that it is a program that continually offers a balance of support and challenge to its students. The pedagogy I engage in MAP positions each person as inherently worthy and highlights their relationships to each other and to content; this occurs with every topic—from educational inequity to academic integrity to critical reading to imposter syndrome to finding resources in the library. I am committed to living out critical educational praxis through the choices I make as the MAP organiser and educator to sustain the social-emancipatory intent of this enabling program.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Educational Praxis

According to Mahon et al. (2019), praxis "is about acting in the world in a way that contributes positively and meaningfully to society, or acting in the interests of humankind" (p. 2). My understanding of educational praxis comes from Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 26) who write that it is both "*educational* action that is morally committed and informed by traditions in a field … and … as history-making *educational* action" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 26). Thus, educational praxis involves taking deliberate actions—in and out of the classroom—that seek to foster individual and collective wellbeing, for both those within the learning community and outside of it.

As such, it is more than simply aiming naively towards pleasant purposes and hoping for the best. Praxis involves action—clear-eyed action—that moves us towards our purpose. Mahon et al. (2019) make this focus more explicit by emphasising the critical edge of praxis in what they term *critical educational praxis*: "a kind of social-justice oriented, educational practice/*praxis*, with a focus on asking critical questions and creating conditions for positive change" (p. 2). In the context of enabling programs at universities, this means asking questions of and with the cohort of students that have experienced educational disadvantage: to identify disempowering and disadvantaging aspects of schooling; and to create conditions to address those aspects.

Education Versus Schooling

Although often used interchangeably, the terms *education* and *schooling* are distinct, and this distinction is important for critical educational praxis. Kemmis et al. (2014) provide a comprehensive definition of education as follows:

> the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind. (p. 26)

This understanding of education as a complex initiation in which we develop individual and collective ways of being and acting align with Biesta's sense that education "always implies a relationship: someone educating someone else and the person educating thus having a certain sense of what the purpose of his or her activities is" (2009, p. 39).

These definitions are intentionally broad and holistic—education can be both formal and informal, occurring in classrooms, on the street, in the bush, around a kitchen table, in the sports arena, on a smart phone or in a theatre. The definitions are also profoundly transformative and aspirational. Groundwater-Smith (2023) claims

that practice is educative when it is collective participatory inquiry that embodies "new possibilities and alternative practices" (p.29).

Schooling, on the other hand, is the solidification of the practices of teaching and learning into one homogenised formal system. Schooling can be seen as an attempt to ensure that some form of education is efficient, effective and replicable for the majority. As Biesta (2009) points out, asking what makes education *effective* gets us to a very different place than asking what makes education *good*. The institutionalised system of schooling—the practices, policies, expectations, roles and relationships that we all can identify in our own particular contexts as making up 'school' occasionally do combine to create transformative experiences that orient us towards the individual and collective good. Education can be part of the schooling experience. Yet, more often, in practice, as Edwards-Groves et al. (2018) note, in a book about Stephen Kemmis' 40 years of scholarship called 'Education in an era of schooling', "schooling may instead be profoundly anti-educational" (p. 3). Anti-educational schooling, it can be argued, is even more prominent for those who do not fit neatly into mainstream systems (Reimer & Longmuir, 2021), such as students in enabling programs.

The MAP students in this chapter have had both anti-educational and educational experiences within the formal system.

Sense of Coherence

As we focus on ensuring students experience 'education in an era of schooling', Biesta (2009) implores that we "keep the question of purpose—the question of what constitutes good education—central in our educational discussions" (p. 46). Understanding *good* education is the mandate of the World Worth Living In project; as an infinitely dense concept, using varied theories will loosen different parts for us to understand it more holistically.

In this chapter, I turn to Aaron Antonovsky for assistance in exploring the idea of good education. Antonovsky was an Israeli-American sociologist who was interested in the question of why some people, in the midst of stress, remain healthy. He studied groups of people with profound levels of ongoing stress, such as Holocaust survivors and those living in poverty, and radically, for the 1970s, moved the conversation away from what makes us ill towards what makes us healthy. He began studying the origins of health, salutogenesis.

Antonovsky's work has been foundational for more current approaches to well-being such as relational wellness (Haswell et al., 2023; Powell et al., 2018; White, 2017) and "being well in the world" (Barrow, 2019, p. 31).

In his studies of health, Antonovsky (1979) found that people were able to thrive when they had what he termed a 'sense of coherence', defined as follows:

> a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable

> and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected. (p. 10, italics in original)

Thus, it is our ability, individually and collectively, to make sense of our lives, rather than our levels of stress, that determine our ability to thrive.

Later, Antonovsky would identify three important components of this sense of coherence: manageability, comprehensibility and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987, 1993). For life to be manageable, we need to have access to resources to meet demands that are asked of us. For life to be comprehensible, the complexity of life must align with our general worldview. For life to be meaningful, we need to feel we can participate in life in valued ways. Having a strong sense of coherence means that all three of these components need to be experienced and developed.

Schools—and other institutions such as universities—can be powerful sites where this sense of coherence is developed (Reimer, 2020). As Antonovsky (1979) writes: "The real issue is whether the societies in which our children grow up and in which we live our daily lives facilitate or impede the development and maintenance of a strong sense of coherence" (p. 226). Thus, the onus is on our institutions and societies—not purely on the shoulders of individuals—to help to develop this sense of coherence.

Antonovsky's sense of coherence provides insight into what makes for individual and collective thriving: seeing life as manageable, comprehensible, and meaningful. Applying this lens to formal educational experiences also helps to mobilise critical educational praxis. We can ask questions of if, why, and how schooling is impeding the development of a sense of coherence and move to create the conditions needed to develop a strong sense of coherence. MAP, in taking the non-deficit view that students are inherently worthy and enter university with strengths to draw upon, aligns with Antonovsky's salutogenic perspective. Those of us involved in the leadership of MAP must therefore take responsibility to create conditions in which MAP students are able to co-develop a strong sense of coherence.

Methodology

This study fits with the tradition of practice-close research (Baumbusch, 2010; Lykkeslet & Gjengedal, 2007) in which the researcher is acknowledged as someone who interacts closely with the participants, rather than as an impartial observer. Used frequently in health science research, practice-close research is a qualitative methodology that focuses in on the experiences of those the researcher works closely with—and recognises the importance of focusing on practices to understand their experiences (Baumbusch, 2010; Lykkeslet & Gjengedal, 2007). In education, the British Educational Research Association (Wyse et al., 2018) called this 'close-to-practice' research, research exploring educational practices, so as to better understand or improve them.

As the main educator in MAP, I have worked closely with all the participants in past MAP classes. As an insider researcher, there are ethical factors and limitations

to consider (Mercer, 2007), such as the sense of obligation students might feel to respond favourably to my questions; these factors were somewhat diminished since the participants were no longer current students of mine and questions were not focused solely on MAP but the role of education in general. There are also methodological benefits to fulfilling an insider role; the relational trust built in MAP was likely an important element in students responding to my call for participants for this study. I recruited through a MAP Facebook group that all MAP students have been invited to (since the 2018 cohort) and via email addresses that students had provided me with over the years. With some contact information no longer valid, the call went out to 50 of the potential 90 students who had gone through MAP between 2017 and 2021. Fifteen students indicated an interest in being part of the study; once we worked out logistics, seven students were able to make the suggested times.

The seven students—five male and two female—all completed MAP and have either graduated from their university program or are in the midst of their university studies. Thus, their experiences may not be representative of all MAP students, particularly the 26% of students who did not finish the program in the same years. See Table 12.1, for more information about participants. Their majors are not listed so as not to identify individuals, but majors include the following: philosophy, Japanese language, accounting, marketing, sociology, and communications.

As part of this study, the students were invited to participate in a learning circle.

Learning circles (Reimer & McLean, 2015; Vedeler & Reimer, 2023) are a type of focus group and a practice that the students would be very familiar with from their MAP experience. In MAP, students participated in weekly learning circle discussions in which students were positioned as the experts of their own experiences and took on the responsibility of co-creating knowledge with their peers (Reimer & Pardy, 2019). Learning circles allow "access to relational knowledge and lived experience" (Vedeler & Reimer, 2023, p. 78) but also bring an immediacy to the conversation as participants both engage in and discuss a familiar educative practice.

Two learning circles were facilitated in the study—one in-person circle of four participants and one online circle of three participants. I served as the circle keeper

Table 12.1 Participant information

Participant pseudonym (male/female)	Year in MAP	University studies
Hector (M)	2017	Graduated with Bachelor of Business
Raj (M)	2017	Graduated with Bachelor of Business; currently studying Law
Min (F)	2019	Currently studying Bachelor of Arts
Alex (M)	2019	Currently studying Bachelor of Arts
Adrian (M)	2020	Currently studying Bachelor of Education
Ryan (M)	2021	Currently studying Bachelor of Arts
Maria (F)	2021	Currently studying Bachelor of Education

or facilitator. In this role, I introduced the guidelines of the circle (maintaining a safe and respectful space in which one person speaks at a time while we all listen and make connections). I also opened rounds of conversation where I posed a question and space was passed from person to person to answer the question. At the end of each round, participants could speak more informally with one another, asking questions or adding to their own response.

Both circle conversations were audio recorded, transcribed, and then later analysed.

Transcripts were shared with participants. An initial thematic analysis took place where transcripts were coded inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, those codes were brought together deductively to align with the theoretical frameworks of living well in a world worth living in for all (Kemmis et al., 2014; Reimer et al., 2023) and Antonovsky's (1979) sense of coherence.

Findings

Experience of MAP

As mentioned, students enrolling in MAP had to have experienced some form of formal education disruption and/or disadvantage in their lives—something that made them ineligible for the usual entry into university study. The reasons are diverse: some did not finish high school for personal, family, or health reasons; others did not complete required classes or failed to get the grades needed for university admission; Raj, as a unique example, came from overseas and did not have his schooling credentials recognised. In the learning circles, most of the students shared stories of not seeing much value in schooling when they were younger. Min dropped out of high school when she was 14; Maria saw "education as a burden; it was not where I wanted to be and it was just something I was made to do"; and Adrian "never valued education during primary school and definitely not during high school" sharing that "there wasn't really a teacher that I really did connect with nor did I give the teacher an opportunity to really connect with me." Adrian's comment is representative of many of the comments in that a shared responsibility for the lack of engagement in school is put forth—the students themselves disengaged but there was also usually little done to initially engage or to re-engage them by the schools.

The decision to attend university was a major one for all the students in this study. As Alex noted, "to apply to university and just walking up to class with a bunch of 18-year-olds is a bit of a yikes spot." Entering MAP, most of the students felt underprepared. For Maria, it had been 20 years since high school; for Hector, it was more recent, but he left high school "not knowing how to study" and, for Ryan, "the last essay that I had written would have been with crayon". MAP was seen as a program that could provide access to university, but more importantly, could also nurture the skills and confidence needed for university study.

As students talked about their MAP experience, they also discussed the role that they saw education—formal and informal—having in the creation of a good life. It is important to note that although I spent time disentangling the two terms—education and schooling—earlier in this chapter, MAP participants often used one term, 'education', to mean both experiences of schooling and experiences of education. It is clear, however, when they speak, that some experiences were anti-educational and some were profoundly educational.

Participants shared ideas about how transformative experiences of education help people to survive and to thrive. They also named how MAP, specifically, helped make their experience—at university and beyond—manageable, how it made it comprehensible, and how it made it meaningful.

Manageability

For life to be manageable, people need to feel that they are mostly able to meet challenges, either by themselves or with assistance. This sense of manageability is built, Antonovsky (1979, 1991) found, when there is a balance between an individual's available resources and what is demanded of them. Life will have challenges and frustrations, but people need to have confidence that things are not constantly out of their control (Reimer, 2020).

How Education Makes Life Manageable

Students named education's very practical role in helping people meet their basic needs and develop basic skills. Raj identified that people with formal education have access to higher paying employment and thus more material wealth; this is important because, as Raj said, "it allows you to look after health better, to go to a better doctor, to go to a dietician if you need, to be able to travel well, to be able to live in a comfortable spot." Alex and Adrian both saw education as providing necessary communication and social skills needed to engage in life; Alex identified this development in his own life.

MAP: Experiences of Making Life Manageable

But in order to personally access the benefits of formal education, MAP students shared how university itself needed to become a manageable experience for them. Participants stated that they needed to be supported to access their own capabilities and to access resources within the institution in order to meet the demands being asked of them. MAP helped make university manageable, students noted, by teaching them necessary skills, nurturing their confidence, and easing them into university demands through an iterative process.

When discussing what MAP provided them with, students named very practical aspects: using reading notes templates, navigating the library and online resources, essay writing skills, and academic referencing. Those skills are ones that Adrian felt he was still using in his current (post-MAP) classes and were skills "I'll absolutely use for the rest of when I'm at uni[3] and probably life as well, to be honest." Learning academic skills was crucial for surviving university, but possessing those skills also opened other doors for the students: "Being taught how to write has fundamentally influenced my entire life" (Ryan). Hector said not only did he learn how to study through MAP but "I learnt how to learn."

Many students noted that had they been able to go straight into a university degree, and without MAP, they would have probably dropped out. Maria named the building of her confidence as crucial to her continued success. Adrian discussed it this way: "it gives you that confidence that you belong, because I just felt like I probably wouldn't have belonged because I didn't get that high ATAR[4] … so it gave me the skills to be comfortable and not stress too much through uni." Students mentioned that the confidence built in MAP sustained them in later years of study. As Raj explained, "one of the best things about MAP was when difficulty arrived in a subject in any form, it never occurred to me that maybe *higher education* wasn't for me. What occurred was, okay, maybe this *subject* isn't for me." Through achieving in MAP, students knew they were able to manage the demands of university.

Also key to making university manageable for students was how, in MAP, students were not expected to meet all the demands, all at once. Hector appreciated that students were eased into "the whole learning rhythm" and called it a "soft entry into university". Min described the process as being "integrated into" higher education. Raj, too, named flexibility as integral to study being manageable since MAP staff were mindful that "these are not average students, they're people who are in different circumstances, they're mature students, they have other things going on." Interestingly, Raj had attempted two other enabling courses before MAP but withdrew due to their unmanageability: they were fast paced and "not designed for people like us who have been away from proper education for a while."

Meeting basic needs, fulfilling demands and making university manageable is one aspect, but students also named ways that education makes life comprehensible and how MAP allowed them to access that comprehensibility.

Comprehensibility

For life to be comprehensible, the experience needs to have a form and structure that fits with how students understand the world. The experience needs to be somewhat

[3] Many Australians use the short-form 'uni' to mean 'university'.

[4] Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank. This is a number that indicates a student's position relative to all students in their age group. Australian universities decide the minimum ATAR number needed for admission to various programs—for example, 70 or above.

predictable; otherwise, as Antonovsky (1979) wrote, "if one never knows what is coming, one never knows how to organise one's behaviour" (p. 140). Predictability does not mean *simple* but rather that life's *complexity* fits with our general worldview.

How Education Makes Life Comprehensible

Students named education's role in helping to form their worldview, analyse the world around them, and engage in socially satisfying ways. A few students mentioned education's role in "opening minds". Min focused on the role education plays in helping to "connect the dots to your own life." For Maria, education has "opened up a whole new world, and to be open and critical is the best part of education. That you know you don't know everything." While being open to other views, students discussed how education provided them with the ability to "critically evaluate" perspectives (Adrian) and not "just take the first thing you hear or read as gospel" (Maria). Thus, the skills and values education instilled impacted on how students made sense of the world around them. Adrian discussed his experience working with children with special needs in schools. He saw an evolution in the children he worked with and felt that "education is obviously imperative to why they can express themselves and have different personalities and have their own thoughts and opinions and social aspect with each other."

MAP: Experiences of Making Life Comprehensible

As a real-life example, participants shared how MAP helped them make sense of higher education. MAP provided them with consistent, safe experiences and respectful relationships in which people with shared goals engaged with one another and with study.

Students stated that they needed to know that university had the potential to become a safely familiar space. For Ryan, having consistency provided him with that feeling: "You engage with the same people and you can build relationships in a way that is very foreign to first-year subjects. So, for me, having those consistent connections is really important and really, like, sustaining." This consistency helped to create what Alex called a "safe space for mature students".

Safety was created through consistency, but also through the quality of the relationships built within that space. Respectful, mutually supportive relationships were built intentionally; Raj noted that I and the other teaching staff worked to create an environment in which there was an expectation of students "respecting others, respecting the diversity". Ryan found it to be "so engaging, with other people who are so dedicated from students to teaching staff it was just like the whole eco system was just very conducive to making you want to keep going." Ryan comprehending his university experience as an 'eco system' is significant; these were not, in his mind, isolated experiences that did not make sense.

Those relationships were also built through a focus on shared goals. Adrian recognised that while people were "from different walks of life … in the end we're all in the same room together all striving for the same thing". Maria put it this way:

> We all felt like a fish out of water so we were all in the same boat, wanting the same goal and none of us judged each other. We weren't critical. When we had to do the reading and just share it around, we'd make mistakes but no one cared. We were just all supportive of each other and that built our confidence so that when our degrees started we were, oh yeah, we can do this.

Beyond confidence in their skills, students felt they had created a learning community; one which they could rely on and start to understand the role that education played in their lives.

Meaningfulness

For an experience to help build a sense of coherence, it needs to be more than simply manageable and comprehensible; it also has to be meaningful. For something to be meaningful, Antonovsky (1991) suggested that people must feel they can contribute to and participate in valued ways in their worlds.

How Education Makes Life Meaningful

Students named education's aspirational role in helping to make meaning, provide joy, and transform people. Hector identified the shared experience of learning—the act of engaging in education—as helping make life meaningful and joyful:

> The fact that you get to do it with so many other people, you get to sort of bounce ideas off of them; they think in a different way; you speak about it and you have never thought about it before, and that helps you learn more and so I like the learning aspect of learning, but also the social aspect of learning where it's like a collective group of people who you know you can all help each other out.

But, joy was also found in how their education set these students up for lifelong learning. Adrian talked about discovering at university that education is a "never-ending reflecting cycle that you just continuously reflect and learn more and continue to try and learn. So you never stop learning." For many MAP students, embracing lifelong learning signified a significant transformation in their lives, an "opportunity to change" (Alex) since many students did not previously identify themselves as learners. Raj named education as allowing "us to redefine our frame of reference" and to "redefine what success is".

Interestingly, Raj suggested that education was necessary to even ask the questions that allowed them to make meaning in the world:

> What is living well? I think one needs some form of formal or informal education to ask that question. If you go through history, be it Buddha or Aristotle or anyone who has even

> merely pondered that question… Whereas that's the question we as humans collectively still haven't been able to answer, we're still working on it. So I think education tells us how to ask that question … So education allows you to take a step back and ask that question, what is the purpose, why I'm here and am I living well?

MAP: Experiences of Making Life Meaningful

To experience university as meaningful, students shared that they needed to be able to participate actively in ways that were valued by others. For the MAP students, this meant having experiences of transformation, belonging, and joy.

Raj described MAP as a "life changing experience" for which he "will always be grateful". The teaching and learning that happened in MAP reached Raj on what he called "a more profound level". Hector, Ryan and Adrian all used the word "fun" to describe their learning experience. As Hector noted: "It was just fun. You know coming in and chatting with a bunch of people from all different backgrounds and all different ages as well. It was sort of like, yes, you are learning, but yes, you are having fun while doing it." And Ryan noted the collective experience as part of the joy of learning: "So to have other people who are really like I'm here, I want to be here, it's really fun, it's so easy to just like pull on that energy when you are feeling like discouraged or overwhelmed." The social aspect of MAP added to its meaningfulness for students.

The learning circles are the practice in which many students felt invited to most actively participate and contribute in MAP (Reimer & Pardy, 2019). It was not a practice that students were familiar with prior to MAP—being invited to sit in circle, to be present with one another, to share aloud connections they were making between their own lives and the class content—and it was not a practice most were comfortable with. Alex's views were quite representative: "the learning circles. Like, it was really daunting at the start, but eventually you can start to be yourself and eventually yeah it became a very comfortable area." Maria connected becoming comfortable in the circle with her own rising level of security in higher education: "But the fact that it was in MAP where you built our confidence was amazing. I remember the start of MAP and we would do a circle and we would have to introduce ourselves and I thought oh my god I hate doing this. I don't want to talk about myself, I don't want to talk in public." For many students, it was in the circle that students started to feel part of the university community—and for that to "be fun and to have it be so engaging" (Ryan). Participating in the circle, for Min, "made us feel that we were just as important as people who had finished school or we had just as much ability to do this". Far from learning detached and isolated academic skills, MAP—particularly through learning circles—provided students with experiences of feeling valued and making meaning.

Discussion: Education's Role in Individual and Collective Thriving

MAP students' ideas of what living well means might not be that qualitatively different from other students or from other people in their age and cohort. What was remarkable, however, given their prior negative and/or indifferent experiences of schooling, was that MAP students saw education as having a crucial role in helping people to live well.

Education, in the eyes of these MAP students, provided the means to meet basic needs (make life manageable), analyse the world around them (make life comprehensible) and engage in the world in profound ways (make life meaningful).

The experience of these students as part of MAP showed that formal education has the potential to develop within individuals a sense of coherence. Education can facilitate within people experiences of manageability—where we learn that we can meet demands by drawing on our own internal resources and external support; comprehensibility—where we learn that although life is complex we can work to understand it, particularly within trustworthy relationships; and of meaningfulness—where we learn that life is rewarding and engaging and we can make valued contributions to its meaning. Through these experiences, education starts to develop within individuals and within societies a sense of coherence. For Antonovsky (1979), a sense of coherence was not seen as a good in and of itself. Sense of coherence was only a good in that it was salutogenic, it moved us towards health and wellbeing. Thus education, in developing a sense of coherence, moves us towards a world where we thrive individually and collectively.

MAP students named the impact of education as occurring at a level of individual thriving—meeting basic needs and opening people's minds—which then flowed into collective thriving—solving communal problems and equalising societies. For example, in further conversation about how to create a world worth living in, Adrian felt that education could provide children with different global perspectives so that they could develop a "more balanced view of how they deal with the world." Hector discussed the importance of an informed electorate who understood policies before voting for a party so that a government focused on the greater good could move "the society as a whole towards a better future, whether it be climate change or just even mental health." Min focused on gender divides and research that has shown how women with a formal education are able to "make a change to their family and gain independence. So when you give people education you are able to achieve a sense of equality." Education was seen to provide the tools, the knowledge, the collective energy and the boldness needed to bring a world where everyone can thrive into being.

Returning to the idea of critical educational praxis, I am not arguing that every experience of formal education—in this case, higher education—will move us towards individual and collective thriving. Higher education, particularly given the neoliberal agendas driving many decisions in formal institutions, has the equal potential to focus students in on aspects that move us towards either maintaining the

status quo or towards negative change—greed, competition, exclusiveness, division (Mahon et al., 2019; Mintz, 2021)—and to create experiences of incoherence for students. There is much that is anti-educational (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018) in higher education.

Instead, through the MAP student experience, I am pointing to the potential—when designed intentionally and deliberately as critical educational praxis (Mahon et al., 2019)—for formal higher education to strengthen our individual and collective sense of coherence. I recognise that MAP sits in a privileged space, as part of a formal educational institution but operating with enough autonomy so as to push back against the tendency to view the needs of institutions "as more important than the needs of the people they were meant to serve" (Elliott, 2011, p. 169) and, I would add, the world they were meant to serve (Kaukko et al., 2021). No matter how constraining and anti-educational formal education might be, we need to continually find the spaces where we can ask critical questions and create conditions for individual and collective thriving (Mahon et al., 2019; Reimer, 2020).

Conclusion

For students who had experienced educational disadvantage prior to their university experience, it is profound how centrally these MAP students view education in their current lives and in the creation of a future, better world. Education, for these students, is seen as integral in helping people to live well and in helping us to create a world where we can all thrive individually and collectively.

The intent of MAP—to be an educational approach that initiated students into ways of understanding, acting, and relating (Kemmis et al., 2014) that fostered individual and collective emancipation—seems to have been, at least partially, realised. Of course, there is no way of knowing how students would have thrived—in and out of university—without MAP; and there is no way of knowing how students might have discussed education's role in living well in a world worth living in for all, without MAP. What is clear, however, is that MAP provided students with a way to develop a sense of coherence about their university experience. And that now, in discussions with these same students, they also saw education as playing a role in making life more generally manageable, comprehensible, and meaningful.

Near the end of our learning circles, MAP students offered a few ideas for changes to universities—in order to humanise and diversify university education. Alex felt that the "formality of university can be a detriment" and suggested that academic staff "present themselves as more human". Hector and Ryan both felt that more diverse pathways would make university more accessible which would be "awesome; it got me to where I am today, and it would be great for more people to have that opportunity" (Ryan). And Min connected diversifying university with building a world worth living in: "The more that we can include different groups of people in demographics into education the more we can get different groups of people into a

more equal society and then that ramps it up and then we see more equality happening in the world."

I would agree. There is great wisdom offered by MAP students—these and others—about the power of education for individuals and for societies. These students understand how disempowering anti-educational schooling can be, as well as how freeing actual education is.

The final word on the power of education, according to MAP students, goes to Raj:

> I think education can and does transport people … People often think education gives money. Yes, it does. It gives you a better lifestyle. Yes, it does. But mental health, the peace, the comfort, that which comes from education, that's a lot more important because it gives you happiness.

Actual transformative education helps to make life manageable, comprehensible, and meaningful. It helps us nurture the origins of health, so that we can live well and create a world worth living in for all.

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Chapter 13
Aboriginal Curriculum Enactment: Stirring Teachers into the Practices of Learning from Country in the City

Katrina Thorpe, Cathie Burgess, and Christine Grice

Abstract In this chapter, the theory of practice architectures is used to identify and analyse the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social–political arrangements that enable and/or constrain early career teachers in applying Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies to their daily teaching practice. These teachers completed Aboriginal community-led 'Learning from Country' (LFC) electives at university, and so this chapter details the extent to which they were able to enact this learning when they began teaching in schools. Key findings highlight the critical role of school sites in supporting or dismissing teachers' efforts. A lack of material resources and time to fully implement LFC was a key concern. Nevertheless, teachers focused on strengths-based learning approaches and developing relationships with Aboriginal communities, creating solidarity between local Aboriginal communities and the teachers. Through enacting LFC, a sense of belonging and connection to place was developed and teachers were empowered through experiencing Aboriginal Knowledges as 'real' and valuable. Despite often oppressive, ignorant, and dismissive system-wide practices, teachers demonstrated passion, commitment, and courage through centring Aboriginal voices, Country, and Knowledges in the educational practices of their site. We suggest LFC facilitates *Yindyamara Winhanga-nha*'—'*the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in*'.

Keywords Learning from Country · Aboriginal curriculum · Theory of practice architectures · Early career teachers · Teacher education

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/1X5zy3ypVhDM6wT3HGI16P?si=f3382f51c8ce46ee

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Introduction

Australian teachers continue to struggle to implement authentic and rigorous Aboriginal content in their curriculum and employ culturally responsive teaching practices to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student learning. This chapter considers how the theory of practice architectures identifies and makes visible early career teachers' practices in implementing Aboriginal[1] curriculum and pedagogy in their classrooms. These teachers completed Aboriginal education electives which included Aboriginal-led, place-based experiences in their final year of university. These electives are the focus of the *Learning from Country in the City* teaching and research project (henceforth referred to as LFC). LFC is designed to build a deep understanding of Aboriginal local histories, cultures, and narratives of Country, by *listening to* and *walking with* local Aboriginal community-based educators, cultural knowledge holders, and Elders[2] (Thorpe et al., 2021). Aunty Laklak Burarrwanga, a Datiwuy and Rirratjingu Elder, explains that Country has many layers and meanings including,

> people, animals, plants, water, and land. But Country is more than just people and things, it is also what connects them to each other and to multiple spiritual and symbolic realms. It relates to laws, custom, movement, song, knowledges, relationships, histories, presents, futures and spirit beings… So you see knowledge about Country is important because it's about how and where you fit within the world and how you connect to others and to place. (Wright et al., 2012, p. 54)

Centring Country as "knowledge, cultural norms, values, stories and resources within that particular area—that particular Indigenous place" (Fredericks, 2013, p. 6) in curriculum and pedagogies provides a unique opportunity to harness Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing through direct participation in existing life. This ontology of relationality nurtures a world worth living in by focussing on relationships between and within Country. These relationships are illuminated by Aboriginal community members and supported by teachers through the interweaving of Aboriginal narratives of place into their curriculum as they learn to relate to Country and to their students on Country. The focus on local Country provides the impetus upon which to build a relational connection to Aboriginal peoples and histories and

[1] The term 'Aboriginal' will be used and respectfully includes Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Policy: Turning Policy into Action document (2023, p. 3).

While this paper is constructed on Aboriginal land—Gadigal land—it is also the preferred term of this Aboriginal community. When names of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander scholars or international Indigenous scholars are included in the main text, the Country or cultural affiliation has been included where this information is available. The term 'Indigenous' is used when referring to Indigenous peoples internationally or where an author or a participant has purposefully used the term 'Indigenous' in their work/Yarning session.

[2] Aboriginal community-based members, cultural knowledge holders and Elders are all terms used to describe Aboriginal expertise and are used differently in different contexts. We have included all three to acknowledge the various uses of this terminology.

their lived experiences, as well as to honour the significance of local ecologies to Aboriginal people.

We argue that local place-based learning with Aboriginal people and Country facilitates *Yindyamara Winhanga-nha*'. In the Wiradjuri language of central New South Wales *Yindyamara Winhanga-nha*' translates to 'the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in' (Charles Sturt University, 2023).

A consideration of *Yindyamara Winhanga-nha* is not just a provocation for this book but an ethos that resonates with LFC as a significant opportunity to facilitate genuine and respectful relationships between teachers, students, Country, and Aboriginal people and communities. Western education systems and schooling have silenced and marginalised Aboriginal pedagogies with consequent devastating impacts on Country and Aboriginal people. By contrast, Aboriginal Country-centred learning is an ecocentric way of knowing, being, and doing that Aboriginal people have sustained for social and ecological wellness for thousands of years (Country et al., 2020, p. 41). Like Country et al., we believe that through LFC, "students can learn how to live as effective local citizenry before considering how to do it regionally, nationally and globally" (2020. p. 41).

This chapter is informed by a three-phase research project which analyses the experiences in, and responses to, LFC by preservice teachers, Aboriginal community-based educators, and early career teachers. LFC provides the foundational principles for three Aboriginal education electives available to teacher education students at an urban university in Sydney, Australia. This much needed pedagogical strategy aims to overcome the known lack of knowledge, preparedness, and confidence of many teachers in delivering effective teaching and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in Australian schools (Salter & Maxwell, 2016). Lowe and Yunkaporta's (2013) research highlight the low level of cognitive, cultural, and social–political rigour in the current Australian curriculum that leaves teachers struggling to identify and embed an authentic and coherent Aboriginal narrative in their daily practices. To counter this, LFC experiences occur alongside classroom-based theoretical learning which is structured in ways to develop deep listening, critical reflection, and cultural humility needed to move beyond stereotypical and surface level practice and build relationships with local Aboriginal families and communities. We hope that preservice teachers are then inspired to implement these principles in any location when they become teachers, whether it be urban, rural, or remote.

In this chapter we consider the significance of LFC experiences in preservice teacher education to 'stir' teachers into the practices of embedding Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogy in their classrooms. Here, we use the term 'stir' to provide an account of 'learning' that foregrounds the "process, activity and sociality of learning as a practice" (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 46) when encountering a new practice. Therefore, this 'stirring in' can be used to describe the teachers' experiences of Learning from Country as well as their attempts to implement LFC in their classrooms. In this sense, the early career teachers are 'stirred in' and 'stir in' their students through the relationships that emerge between teachers, students, Aboriginal people, Country, and the resultant co-produced knowledges.

These practice landscapes reveal themselves through the teachers sayings, doings, and relatings and illuminate the complex, heterogeneous, and shifting cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social–political arrangements that enable and/or constrain their practices. Here, we analyse the extent to which teachers have been 'stirred into' (Kemmis et al., 2017) practice.

Why the Theory of Practice Architectures?

The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) enables us to better understand how different kinds of arrangements enable and constrain the efforts and ambitions of those attempting to embed Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies through developing an understanding of and relationship with Country. This chapter uses the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) to explore how the different kinds of arrangements found in school and university sites, which together form practice architectures, shape the practices of early career teachers. A practice perspective helps us to make sense of social interactions in a school between early career teachers and students, community members, and other teachers and school leaders in order to understand what practices have been made possible through their understandings of Country. Centring Country changes the arrangements that enable and constrain practices, and has the potential to transform practices. When Country is positioned as foundational for all Australian school students, a new appreciation of Aboriginal peoples' knowledge of Country and the significance of this to local ecologies and well-being for all is nurtured. As Awabakal, Gumaroi, and Yuin scholar Anthony McKnight (2016) notes, "a collaborative partnership between academics [teachers], Aboriginal people and Country is imperative to embed Aboriginal perspectives" (p. 14). Knowing how to develop a relational connection with Country in order to create a world worth living in is potentially transformative for teachers and students alike.

This approach, which foregrounds Country, recognises that (like other practices) teaching is fundamentally a social endeavour (Green, 2009) that is influenced by far more than just levels of teachers' disciplinary knowledge and understanding of their subject area. Here, we take a 'practice turn' (Schatzki et al., 2001) in the way we frame our understanding of and research on the work of teachers—drawing on the tradition of practice theory that has emerged from Schatzki's understanding of education as a fundamentally social and integrative practice. Building on Schatzki's works, Kemmis et al. (2014) note that practice is as follows:

> A form of socially established human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when people and objects are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings, and relatings 'hangs together' in a distinctive project. (p. 31)

Reframing our understanding of teacher practice in this way has significant implications for how we understand the influence of LFC on teachers' experiences and

practices because it allows a deeper consideration of how Country, culture, identity, and social relationships inform and create practice. LFC is recognised as situated, embodied, and enacted (McKnight., 2016) in the intersubjective spaces between teachers and students in which they encounter one another (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). The theory of practice architectures argues for a deep view of practice that is relational, dialectical, and recognises the symbiosis between practice and local context. This opens up a range of possibilities for researching teacher practice, reframing it from something teachers 'deliver' in lessons, to a reciprocal, dynamic, and situated experience in which teachers, working collaboratively with colleagues, Aboriginal community educators, and students, co-construct practice through the lived experience of being on Country.

Building on this approach, we can gain an even more nuanced and powerful understanding of teachers' work by looking at the wider structural, political, and cultural conditions of the learning environment within and beyond the classroom. The theory of practice architectures is also a methodological tool for analysis that recognises the complexity of practice and the range of personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural influences at play when professionals engage in practice (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, pp. 136–139). People's *sayings* provide an insight into the cultural-discursive arrangements that not only include what is said but also highlight what is not said, which is critical when working with Aboriginal Knowledges that are typically rendered silent and invisible in the curriculum. Their *doings* reveal the material-economic arrangements that are available (or not) when planning activities for students, particularly beyond the classroom on Country, and their *relatings* indicate the social–political arrangements that enable or constrain social interactions and relationships with people and Country.

Approaching an understanding of teacher practice this way pivots our research interest away from the individual teacher and specific 'attributes' necessary to be a 'good' teacher, to understanding teachers' work in the context of educational 'practices' focuses our attention on how the 'sayings', 'doings', and 'relatings' of particular practices 'hang together' in ways that enable and/or constrain certain educational possibilities. Further, the theory brings hope as teachers can be stirred into and create changes in these arrangements within the contexts in which they work.

The theory of practice architectures is a particularly powerful tool for analysing and understanding the work of teachers because it begins with the premise that the work of teaching is fundamentally entwined with issues of the arrangements of politics and identity—that teaching is driven by a purpose, and that purpose is formed personally and collectively through relationships, and politically through the teachers' experiences of Aboriginal cultures, identities, history, Country, and indeed Western education itself.

Methodology

A critical Indigenous methodological stance shapes this research study to push back against past trends of harmful and disrespectful research *on* Indigenous peoples rather than *with* Indigenous peoples (Rigney, 1999). As Wagiman scholar Marnee Shay (2016) notes, Western research does not necessarily account for the socio-cultural context within which Aboriginal peoples and communities operate, and pays little attention to the essential protocols and accountabilities in Aboriginal communities for appropriate knowledge sharing. This often results in the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Indigenous Knowledges in research, and also impacts the curriculum content taught in schools and universities. To push back against this trend, the LFC project positions Aboriginal voices front and centre in the teaching and research through our collaboration with Aboriginal community-based educators who lead the LFC experiences for the preservice teachers and provide ongoing critical feedback for the duration of the research project.

This qualitative study engages Yarning as a method. The informal, non-linear, and relational way of conversing and deep listening embedded in this method provided a pathway for the teachers to articulate their experiences of the LFC and how this has influenced their teaching. As Barlo et al. (2021) note:

> Yarning is a powerful methodology from the vantage point of a relationship journey because the process engages the researcher in a web of relationships which includes research participants, the knowledges and stories themselves, Ancestors and Country, and histories and futures as they live in the telling and hearing of stories. (p. 46)

As well as being a more inclusive way to engage with participants, Yarning also reflects Aboriginal protocols and accountabilities and so continues to reinforce and build culturally responsive ways of working in Aboriginal contexts.

Individual Yarns were conducted in person and via Zoom over two years due to participant location and the COVID pandemic. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect privacy and meet confidentiality protocols as required by the university's ethics process. We analysed the Yarns with seven early career teachers, two of whom are Aboriginal, five are female, and five are non-Aboriginal teachers:

Fiona is an Aboriginal teacher in a large regional primary school in a low socio-economic area with a substantial Aboriginal population. Kylie is an Aboriginal secondary English teacher in a large urban, multicultural, low socio-economic status school with very few Aboriginal students and a large new arrival immigrant population. Rosie is a non-Aboriginal secondary History and Aboriginal Studies teacher in a large urban college with very few Aboriginal students and a mix of Anglo-Australian and second-generation migrant students. Evie is a non-Aboriginal primary teacher working in a large inner-city Kindergarten to Year 12 community school with a significant Aboriginal population and a mix of low and middle-income families. Tessa is a non-Aboriginal secondary English, History teacher in an urban, largely Anglo-Australian, middle-income school with a very small number of Aboriginal students.

Oscar is a non-Aboriginal secondary History, Geography teacher in a remote Aboriginal community school with very few non-Aboriginal students and a very low socio-economic status community. Ken is a non-Aboriginal secondary Aboriginal Studies, History teacher working in a wealthy non-government school with a largely Anglo-Australian student population. These teachers and their school sites provide rich and diverse contexts to explore the enablers and contraints visible when introducing an LFC approach to their teaching and learning.

The theory of practice architectures was used as a methodological tool for analysis using the table of invention for analysing practices (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 39). Each individual transcript was analysed within the frame of sayings, doings, relatings, and concurrently cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social–political arrangements that enabled and/or constrained the teacher's efforts and practices in centring LFC in their everyday teaching as well as more broadly across the school-community. Sayings, doings, relatings, and their associated arrangements cannot be separated from each other, as they form the practices that exist together in a site. A site can also be understood by analysing the cultural-discursive, social–political, and material-economic arrangements whilst acknowledging that they build towards a complete picture of practices. Mapping the elements of practices for each participant as a 'Project' enabled us to better understand the practice landscape, illuminating practices, the dispositions of our participants and of people in the site of the social, as well as the practice traditions to understand what changes had taken place. An example of part of this mapping process for Oscar is represented in Table 13.1.

Following individual analyses, we aggregated these to identify common and nuanced practices that the teachers employed as well as highlight the critical role of context in impacting these practices. Consequently, the table of invention provided the means by which to better understand the practices employed by the teachers to bring LFC into their classrooms in response to their specific location.

Understanding LFC Through Practice

Sayings and the Cultural-Discursive Arrangements

The cultural-discursive dimension represented in the table of invention of practices uncovers the semantic space through what and how people express themselves through sayings (Kemmis et al., 2014). This shapes who speaks, when, where, and how, and the extent to which education sites enable and constrain the implementation of an authentic Aboriginal curriculum through cultural-discursive arrangements. In this way, the theory of practice architectures makes visible the individual and cultural-discursive arrangements found in or brought to the site (Kemmis et al., 2014), including the thoughts of the early career teachers, represented in their sayings, doings, and relatings. Teachers embraced new ways of relating to and mobilising Aboriginal histories, cultures, and experiences in their classrooms through their

Table 13.1 Sample from table of invention for analysing practices: Learning from Country in the City

Elements of practices	Practice architectures in the site
Project *(telos/what are you doing?)* Understanding and capturing practices Using interviews to discover their 'their wow moment' for LFC Non-Aboriginal secondary English/Human Society and its Environment teacher *[I] really keep like learning from Country like it's like half of my I would say, half of my practice* *University struggles to fully prepare us for the world of 'real teaching'… Despite this, my Aboriginal education courses and my Aboriginal cultural courses prepared me the most for the reality of regional education. They almost bridged that gap of learning for me and this teaching context*	***Practice landscape*** *(interactions/activity time space, roles, objects)* Remote K-12 School, 98% Aboriginal students. Predominately non-Aboriginal teaching staff and Aboriginal support staff Strong identity, culture and community connections *NESA*[3] *seems to provide no support for LFC whatsoever. Nor is it encouraged as professional learning and development in a meaningful way* *There is no structural method or pedagogy deployed by the school from LFC and this leads to a lack of direct support*
Sayings (communication) Community voice *Our school recently built a Yarning circle … here he [Aboriginal Knowledge holders] can talk about his experiences…we can just do that sort of informal listening …then the next day we'll come in and we'll talk about it and we'll scaffold it into a writing or a speaking activity on what was being spoken about* *I can see the emergence of youth activism and anger and directing that passion into written and structured responses*	***Cultural-discursive arrangements*** Impact of Sorry Business,[4] Strong AECG[5] networks *If they hadn't been seeing non-Aboriginal Whitefellas knowing Country' going out, using that language, of caring for it.. want[ing] them to be safe and happy in the classroom and [they] just couldn't quite conceptualise that a non-Aboriginal person would care for them* *Parents and community are incredibly supportive of non-Aboriginal teachers engaging more deeply with Country itself – they're always happy to spin a Yarn about their relationship with Country and how they would like to see their kids learn from it*
Doings *My awareness of the curriculum as a first-year teacher is naturally limited in comparison to my colleagues, but my skillset in communication has lead me to network with colleagues beyond my school in wider networks*	***Material-economic arrangements*** Aboriginal Educator Officers in most classes *The induction process at this school was fickle and non-structured. Connection to Country and community is the prerogative of the teacher, not of the school*

(continued)

[3] The New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) sets and monitors school standards across NSW government and non-government schools and early childhood from Kinder to Year 12. NESA also promotes quality teaching, learning and assessment.

[4] Sorry Business is a time of mourning in Aboriginal communities. Sorry Business may include cultural responsibilities and obligations to attend funerals and participate in events, activities, or ceremonies.

[5] The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) is a not for profit Aboriginal organisation that provides advice to the NSW government and local schools on all matters relevant to education and training. It promotes collaborative school and community partnerships to achieve self determination and education equity for Aboriginal students.

Table 13.1 (continued)

Elements of practices	Practice architectures in the site
Relatings *You are learning from a people, and the students. As I build relationships behaviour gets better* *With Koori kids, I think, you know there's always that kind of tension, when you first start… you've got the most loyal students you'll ever teach…. There was a remarkable difference between my first year, and my second year… and then I came back day one [the following year] and the students saw that I was there… that was really rooting for them*	***Social–political arrangements*** *There's no structure that really delivers the [Aboriginal education] strategy. I do it in my own capacity* *What I learned from Learning from Country was that all knowledge needs to come from Knowledge Holders and there are staff at the school that have the role and responsibility to like bridge those networks to build those networks* *You go from struggling against the system to occasionally having a 'win' with the students – a revolutionary moment of learning*
Dispositions (habitus) *[There was] that content -theory drive to move away from capitalist constructions of land and resource use towards a reciprocal understanding of Country for Aboriginal people* *I feel incredibly prepared to teach. Where I feel there are slight gaps in my knowledge, equally I know I have been equipped with the skillset and knowledges to effectively engage with community and bridge that gap*	***Practice traditions*** *Learning from Country influences students because we're not required to do it* *Since arriving (in my short three months) I have not heard a mention about LFC, and when I bring it up, staff don't seem overly impressed by the notion of my knowing about it. Not enough pressure from above.* *Professional learning in previous years spent two days on LFC, but I can only see it implicitly in place, and certainly not officially*

engagement with local Aboriginal communities and the Country on which they teach. Through reflection to further develop their critical consciousness, teachers gained confidence to implement Aboriginal content in their classes and connect with the local Aboriginal community in their area.

As settler colonial societies around the world grapple with the extent of the impact of past conquest and continuing injustice faced by Indigenous peoples, defensiveness, guilt, and denial continue to be the response to Aboriginal truth-telling processes. Maddison (2012) has argued that Australia's 'collective guilt' about historical acts has become part of the national identity creating a narrow and defensive form of nationalism that hinders reconciliation. Through their own experiences of LFC and by listening to Aboriginal voices, teachers gained confidence to challenge the dismissive and dominant narratives positioning Aboriginal history as guilt-driven (Clark, 2008) and instead perceive the positive, reaffirming value of this learning. For example, Rosie notes that "*There's a lot of resistance to doing Aboriginal history. There's a lot of kids that say things like, 'Why do we have to do this? Why do we do this in every subject?*'" Through her knowledge sharing and incorporation of local histories she was able to "*shift away from that guilt narrative … (where students say) … this is nothing to do with me*" and "*people see Aboriginal history as maybe the bludge or easy subject*" to a cultural-discursive space where students start to value what they are learning and think "*Wow, Aboriginal Studies is really cool and something we want*

to do as it's relevant and linked to universities". Rosie notes that this shift occurred after she invited Aboriginal survivors of the Stolen Generations[6] to talk to history classes and suggests that this changed the way in which students perceived Aboriginal histories, "*having (survivors) come out to the school and actually talk to the students, made such a difference because immediately all of that stops and they get it, and they start to draw those parallels between other histories and survivor stories*". This truth-telling challenged the assumptions and misconceptions of students, building new knowledge, and understanding through *sayings*.

With an understanding of the power of strength-based language, Oscar builds relationships with his largely Aboriginal student group and their families. "*I'm very explicit about the language I use, I want them to be safe and happy in the classroom and … [they]… just couldn't quite conceptualise that a non-Indigenous person would care for them*". He also notes that as "*lots of my students have families who are Knowledge Holders … they bring knowledge into my classroom*", he can then use LFC as a scaffold to lift their engagement in their learning. Being aware of Country and explicitly using LFC discourse has assisted teachers in demonstrating their desire to centre local Aboriginal voices and knowledges. Oscar explained the significance of speaking about and respecting Country—not something that has been a common practice in this school, as he indicates, "*they haven't been seeing non-Indigenous whitefellas knowing Country, going out, using that language of caring … and moving and being [explicit about Country]*".

For these teachers, the key to implementing Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies is to make explicit connections between local people, places, and events in those 'teachable moments' when it may not necessarily be part of the formal curriculum but nevertheless adds interest and relevance to classroom learning. As Kylie notes, "*when you can contextualise it so locally, and so specifically they are much more engaged because they're like, 'Oh, that person is from that place that I know … [and] … now I know the history of it*'". Clark's (2008) research found that learning Aboriginal history was considered boring and uninspiring because it was "taught to death, but not *in depth*" (p. 67, emphasis in original). Teaching through an LFC lens counteracts this as Rosie suggests, "*how it … [the local area] … is different from an area just down the road or a suburb just down the road or somewhere that you're from … makes it a much richer history and much richer culture to be learning about*".

The cultural-discursive arrangements emerging from the teacher narratives illuminate how structures expressed in particular ways impact on what is said and by whom. For instance, where an early career teacher works at a school site that is supportive of their LFC approach, they articulate positive experiences with their students and community. Oscar notes that "*LFC has been a pathway for me to engage with community members directly … It streamlined my ability to spin a Yarn with Aboriginal educators, especially when they can see I am well intended [and] have common ground*." By enabling Aboriginal voice and leadership, opportunities to directly challenge deficit discourses arise.

[6] The term Stolen Generations describes generations of Aboriginal children removed from their families in the 19th and 20th centuries through government policies.

While school leadership may indicate support for Aboriginal initiatives, if this is not supported by staff, this can constrain efforts to implement a locally based curriculum that respects the cultural assets within Aboriginal communities (Rigney, 2020). This is Fiona's experience who notes that "*leadership are very supportive, but I have found that staff as a collective … don't see the value in Learning from Country and letting those kids have that connection. Instead, they find it a bit more of a burden* per se" which she attributed to their own stereotypes and misconceptions. Oscar articulates a similar phenomenon in his school when he says "*I am already beginning to see a culture of education within my classroom … (not necessarily the entire school itself) … around Aboriginal Knowledges and experiences*". Even so, he was confident to implement LFC in his classroom despite the cultural-discursive arrangements of the school which undermined the whole school curriculum change.

Where cultural-discursive arrangements promote dialogue that resists binaries of Aboriginal/Australian history, student engagement has increased. As Kylie suggests, "*If students see themselves as part of that shared history, then they're more likely to engage in that and be more generous and understanding in their interpretations … we want to spark that curiosity … by engaging locally in a way that they can all relate to and understand*". The idea that students will be more generous and understanding is an interesting one, suggesting that local place-based histories prompt an open heart and mind (McKnight, 2016) through intellectual, social, and emotional responses that result in collaborative knowledge sharing that builds belonging.

Adopting LFC as integral to curriculum in specific school sites was enabled and constrained by the cultural-discursive arrangements in school sites. For example, Oscar, Evie, and Kylie had the opportunity to build Country-centred relationships and create the cultural-discursive arrangements in their schools through strength-based language discourses. Rosie found that there was a lack of support from schools and colleagues to engage with community, and that negative language and discourses pervaded throughout the school, such as '*anti-Aboriginal Studies*' talk from students and teachers, undermining new curriculum efforts. Where school leaders played 'lip service' to LFC curriculum, early career teachers such as Fiona were constrained in implementing LFC and noted the burden of convincing staff of the value of this approach.

Doings and the Material-Economic Arrangements

Here we consider the material-economic arrangements in physical space–time that enable and constrain the implementation of LFC pedagogies in the teachers' unique school settings. These arrangements identify the physical and material resources needed to activate practice and how this plays out in the interaction between human and non-human resources (Smith et al., 2010, p. 6).

As a consequence of experiencing LFC at university, teachers were keen to create opportunities to take their students out of their classrooms to learn from Country and Aboriginal community members. LFC necessitates a change in the physical space

from a classroom to the outdoors. Oscar notes that "s*tudents often struggle to differentiate between* '*learning outside*' *…something fun, new, different, exploitable… to* '*Learning from Country*' *…something meaningful, deep, connecting, powerful*". Part of the process of assisting their students to see learning from Country as "*meaningful, deep, connecting, and powerful*" (Oscar) was to consider the activities that support LFC before and after it occurs. Teachers began to not only realise the potential of LFC, but also the way that pedagogical processes embedded in LFC can be enacted in the physical space of the classroom. As Evie notes, "*My understanding of Learning from Country is this idea of learning through practice, it's not so much about being in the classroom and reading textbooks, it's about being out in the land and on Country*". The process of being on Country with Aboriginal people and understanding the pedagogical principles behind these experiences enables teachers to understand Aboriginal pedagogical processes that could enhance their classroom practices through the lens of Country, as Oscar notes:

> I think the final stage in LFC for me was taking the knowledge that I learned and applying it in the classroom so moving beyond that teacher-centric experience to student focused … how can students learn as Country on Country from Country…. learning from Country gave me the pedagogy… Even if we haven't left the classroom, I would try to embed LFC pedagogy in the classroom.

Classroom teachers often struggle with knowing what resources to use when teaching Aboriginal content (Salter & Maxwell, 2016). As stereotyped representations of Aboriginal people often pervade texts, teachers either grapple to identify appropriate resources or are not sure how to counteract these representations (Chalmers, 2005). For the Aboriginal teachers, connecting and learning from Aboriginal Elders and community members enabled them to engage with the cultures and histories of the places where they work to embrace authentic local knowledges. Fiona moved away from home so she needed to build connections and relationships in a new place. She explains, "*I have had to learn local stories and that kind of thing as I've moved. But again, I did feel like I had the processes to be able to learn those or the processes to know who to ask and when to ask and that kind of thing*". This highlights the power of LFC as a conceptual framework with principles and processes that can guide teachers in a range of geographical locations and school sites (Burgess et al., 2022).

The teachers identified a number of material-economic arrangements that constrained LFC in their schools, primarily lack of time, financial resources, and core curriculum requirements that were not perceived as inclusive of place-based learning. Oscar notes, "*I feel like all the issues and schools are explained by like our lack of time, shortage of teachers and teaching staff and just like really heavy syllabus requirements*". The school where Ken worked had moved to a compressed curriculum model so 'excursions' outside of the school had been reduced, "*it means it's probably less time as well for that Aboriginal part of the unit, which is a bit of a shame*". This reflects the largely optional nature of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP) in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, n.d) which gives schools and teachers an 'excuse' for limiting

Aboriginal content knowledge in their teaching (Salter & Maxwell, 2016). Ken notes that for him, building LFC into the school depended on the goodwill of the school executive and, fortunately, the school prioritised funding for Aboriginal community partnerships.
Even so, seeking real change involved "*wearing them down*".

Kylie also articulates a lack of understanding of the material and social arrangements required to support LFC and Aboriginal community engagement, "*They just don't quite necessarily know how to support you. And if you are confident in telling them what you need and how we're going to do this and you're happy to be that leader, then it can do really great things for the school*". As an Aboriginal teacher, Kylie identified the leadership opportunities available to her but noted that this can be burdensome in the early years of teaching if non-Aboriginal staff rely on Aboriginal staff to shoulder the responsibility of Aboriginal education.

The material-economic arrangements both enabled and constrained curriculum change. Teachers had clear opportunities to implement LFC in their schools, but these were also constrained by financial and/or human resources. For example, Oscar found that Aboriginal Education staff were a supportive human resource in his work but still felt time, resource, and curriculum constraints on his ability to fully implement LFC. Others such as Ken and Fiona found that a general lack of awareness and support from colleagues hindered their efforts, despite claims of support from school leadership.

Relatings and the Social–Political Arrangements

The third dimension in Kemmis et al's (2014) practice architectures is that of social–political arrangements at a particular site, seen in 'relatings'. This concerns the social connections and relationships that work to frame and construct the conditions for practice (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 32). Social–political arrangements and spaces shape how people relate to each other and the power relationships that can include or exclude curriculum decision-making practices (Kemmis, et al., 2014, p. 6), characterised by power and solidarity.

Examining the way in which the teachers relate to the non-human world that is Country, their students, and their teaching and learning, helps us understand the social and affective space that enables or constrains their practices and makes visible the connection between people and non-human objects (Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 31–32). As interrelationships and holistic connections between the human and non-human are at the foundation of LFC, the *relatings* and the social–political arrangements that exist in practice sites significantly impact the extent to which teachers can implement LFC.

Oscar shows that he understands how to utilise a LFC approach to meet the challenges of the social–political arrangements in a practice site when he says "*it's about relationships on Country [and] as I build relationships, behaviour gets better*". Practices such as building relationships, forming connections, and networking shape the social–political arrangements that facilitate opportunities to develop empowerment

through solidarity with one another. Kylie notes that this develops over time and is important because "*it's an opportunity to see places and things that you think you know inside out from a new perspective. And it's important to be able to take on that new perspective*".

Tessa believes that encouraging Country-centred relationships in her teaching plays a critical role in connecting her largely non-Aboriginal student classes to their own sense of identity: "*I think it's really important because I can remind our students that just by being Australian, we have a connection to the land and when we then look at Aboriginal connections to the land, this enriches our own connection*". The affective and social benefits of a shared connection to Country support learner identity by creating a sense of belonging to this place, Australia, and to each other in the classroom. Kylie engages with truth-telling to create a sense of belonging for her students as well as to highlight the holistic interconnection in Aboriginal families and communities. Through her family's story she reaffirms students' identities, cultures, and histories, noting that, "*Aboriginal students benefit from you having this understanding of who they are, and who their family is, and where they're from and all of the cultural and historical factors that feature in that*". She also relates to her largely immigrant student population through notions of place and belonging and the experience of shared storytelling:

> There was this moment of genuine intercultural understanding where because I'd been able to share my story of my [Aboriginal] family, suddenly he [student] felt comfortable sharing his story and he just had more empathy and more understanding through that. [We both] learnt the value of shared experiences and shared stories, and that we can learn so much from other people's experiences.

Fiona also utilises her Aboriginal background to build relationships with Aboriginal community members to enact LFC in her work. She notes that the 'relatings' necessary to do this include "*learning the correct protocols and measures to begin relationships but also maintain those relationships and ensure they're balanced*". These relationships also build a connection and sense of belonging between the community and school as well as between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engaged in LFC.

Through participating in LFC experiences at university, teachers became aware of the significance of social connections and relationships in forming an authentic and empowering foundation for learning. Subsequently, in their own teaching on Country, they can see the manifestation of this for their students. As Oscar notes, "*when they do know Country, and they can talk about Country, and they can see that it is valued, then those kids feel successful, they feel achievement … I cannot understate how important that is for their wellbeing and engagement*". For these early career teachers, this is the essence of their motivation and commitment to implementing LFC in their classrooms; to make a difference for their students through subverting a Western education system that has largely excluded Aboriginal children and marginalised Aboriginal Knowledges. Oscar further notes that, "*what I learned from LFC was that all knowledge needs to come from knowledge holders*" and that this is significant for his students as "*it shifts power dynamics that the kids probably can't articulate in*

that way, but they get a sense that it's giving a bit of power back to the community and into their own knowledge". Critically, teachers, Knowledge Holders, community members, and students work together to decolonise the social political arrangements that have historically determined whose knowledge is important and how/when it should be transmitted. LFC therefore provides an inclusive context to facilitate this learning and build solidarity and agency for Aboriginal community-based educators, teachers, and learners alike.

This demonstrates how LFC is critical to addressing power issues and building inclusivity for Aboriginal people within curriculum and schooling. Oscar noted the transformative effect of LFC on Aboriginal students as they realise their cultural knowledge is 'real learning'. Moreover, through leading by example, teachers enabled the slow stirring in of students, teachers, and communities.

Changing Dispositions

The table of invention of practices (Kemmis et al., 2014) also provides space for reflection upon disposition and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) of the specific aspect of the 'project' being analysed, which in our project is each participant's narrative of change. Teachers come to their teaching roles with passion, commitment, and a desire to make a difference in schools. The analysis of practices from participant interview responses demonstrates how LFC has changed their habitus. Evie demonstrates confidence in this response: "*I feel incredibly prepared to teach. Where I feel there are slight gaps in my knowledge, equally I know I have been equipped with the skillset and knowledges to effectively engage with community and bridge that gap*".

Similarly, Tessa shares how she has adopted a passionate disposition for contextualising Aboriginal perspectives in English: "*it really has made me feel so passionate about how I can adapt and manipulate the content that I'm teaching to offer Aboriginal perspectives and to get students thinking about the context of Australia and the texts that we read*". She does this through a relational disposition of listening: "*I definitely try to engage in this idea of listening and relationships because it's just such an engaging way to teach. I think, no matter what you're teaching*". This comes from a disposition of authenticity, as Kylie explains: "*It means that what I'm doing is reaching more students. And yeah, it's really nice to be able to say and draw on these experiences in a more authentic way*". To Evie, Kylie, and Tessa, curriculum enactment is about relationships with students.

Oscar expressed a habitus of learning, listening, valuing, and respecting Country and community-centred relationships, not just in theory, but also in practice, as he explained during the Yarn:

> LFC provided me with foundational knowledge around the importance of Country itself. [There was] that content-theory drive to move away from capitalist constructions of land and resource use towards a reciprocal understanding of Country for Aboriginal people. As a non-Indigenous person, it's very important for me to step outside of my conceptual understandings of land. LFC was the first major time that I've had to do that. I sort of I saw

> it as an understanding of a universal Aboriginal appreciation of Country [and] relationship with Country—universal to most Aboriginal people of the nation and that provided the foundational understanding of spirituality and connection to place. LFC then taught me how to localise and contextualise Country, so acknowledge that Country is different all across Australia.

As non-Aboriginal teachers were stirred into LFC practices, their new understandings impacted new pedagogies and ways of approaching curriculum that demonstrate a change in habitus, as Oscar notes: "*Pedagogy is always building and evolving—I have the skillset to stay on top of emerging pedagogies. I would always encourage and embrace further tactile and tangible pedagogies, especially as a non-Indigenous educator*". This change in habitus is emphasised by Tessa whose conscientisation is demonstrated in this comment; "*it's very present in my consciousness about this is what's happened on the land that I live in. This has happened to these people to this day. It's such a contemporary issue. I think the impact of that is super shocking and … a really important conversation to have with kids just as I've found it really important*". Developing a critical cultural consciousness is key to developing a lived curriculum that centres Country and Aboriginal voices.

Changes in habitus involved rejecting deficit discourses, and instead deliberately focussing on relationships that are the essence of lived curriculum, as these teachers were stirred into the community in their schools. Fiona explains: "*Often when you walk into schools and you're talking about Aboriginal kids and families, they've got that deficit kind of mindset, but one thing that the course did really well was reinforce this idea of high expectations and building relationships*".

LFC raised awareness of issues such as inequality and racism, and changes in disposition in teachers was reflected in their responses that would be enacted in curriculum and classrooms, as Tessa demonstrates, "*it's definitely about raising your awareness of what's happened to Aboriginal people and being able to celebrate the beauty of this culture, but then being able to have the skills to understand that this is a global issue*".

Changes to habitus and disposition are about changes to the heart. LFC enables teachers to transform curriculum in the sites in which they work, and to understand how it is an issue in every site, not just sites with Aboriginal students, but in every educational space to create a world worth living in for all.

System-Wide Practice Traditions Experienced in Schools

Practice traditions potentially change over time, and history plays a role in the ways that practices are modelled and remodelled over time (Kemmis et al., 2014). LFC enabled teachers to be stirred into new practices that we hope will, over time, become new practice traditions in their schools and throughout the school system.

Teachers describe the oppressive system-wide practice traditions they struggled with as they enacted LFC despite numerous obstacles, including shifting the blame to students and away from curriculum priorities, as Oscar notes, "*LFC is difficult to*

translate into something 'real' because we're working against an oppressive system that discourages teachers from structuring alternative ideas of education. Students themselves are conditioned in this system and struggle to break free of it".

Others experienced ignorance and dismissiveness towards implementing LFC amongst experienced teachers, even with professional learning programs, as Oscar explains, "*since arriving, I have not heard a mention about LFC, and when I bring it up, staff don't seem overly impressed by the notion of my knowing about it*". Tessa described a pervading tendency for students to misunderstand not only the history, but also the current experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia that are rarely accounted for in the curriculum and where practice traditions of ignorance pervade:

> It is so important to remind the kids that this is not what's happened with Aboriginal people in ancient history. This is in our current history. It's still happening to this day and it's these up-and-coming generations that are going to be the ones that can change and help to repair what's happened between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Changing the curriculum practice traditions enables safe spaces to be created that respect.

Aboriginal Knowledges and peoples. Teachers realise that given the process of colonisation, this is complex and involves listening and building relationships with Aboriginal people on Country.

As implementing LFC curriculum and pedagogy is site-based, a system-wide understanding of its significance to education is necessary alongside a site-based learning approach given the Western and Aboriginal practice landscapes that this curriculum and pedagogy sits within. As the teachers demonstrate, these practices reflect the lived complexity of adopting LFC practices in their sites through the arrangements they have uncovered.

Concluding Remarks

The findings demonstrate how LFC experiences have a profound effect on teacher confidence and capacity for building relationships with Aboriginal students, parents, and community to implement effective and authentic Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies within their schools. These experiences enabled participants to develop a critical cultural consciousness, which supported the development of their personal and professional teacher identity. In response to this, the early career teachers practised activism and sought to normalise LFC in their curriculum work. Understanding and living new practices, particularly for non-Aboriginal teachers, grows over time through willingness and commitment to implement a rigorous Aboriginal-informed curriculum for their teaching. In this way, teachers are stirred into new practices through their participation in a non-compulsory education unit, which brings forth a willingness and openness to change. As they are stirred into new understandings, they also stir in curriculum change, they stir in their community, and they stir in schools through their practices. In this way, teachers make real the Uluru Statement

from the Heart (https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/). Stirring is not neat—it is slow, and it looks different in each site. The role of the teacher is to work out how LFC curriculum and pedagogical practices can be lived in each school site.

The teachers who generously gave of their time for this research have provided insights into the practice arrangements for LFC through sayings, doings, and relatings which include firstly the development of a critical cultural consciousness through a change in disposition, closely followed by an adeptness to adapt curriculum with local knowledge. This occurs alongside the practices of building relationships with students, staff, and Aboriginal communities, through listening and advocating through curriculum opportunities and daily practices. This project will always be an interim project as the project of teaching the teachers LFC is an ongoing project of curriculum change. All these practices connect with "*the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in*" (Charles Sturt University, 2023) through the centring of Aboriginal voices and Knowledges, and the stirring in of students and teachers to living respectfully and reciprocally with and on Country.

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Chapter 14
‘Living Well and Teaching Well’: Exploring How Beginning Teachers Enact Good Pedagogical Praxis in Their Everyday Practices in Historically Hard-to-Staff Schools

Stephanie Garoni, Jo Lampert, and Lutz Hoff

Abstract The notion of pedagogical praxis underpins the work of La Trobe University’s Nexus program: a social justice oriented, alternative pathway into secondary teaching for historically hard-to-staff secondary schools in Victoria, Australia. This chapter maps the experiences of beginning teachers in the Nexus program as they live and work in a time of complexity and rapid change. It explores the meaning of ‘living well’ and its relationship to ‘teaching well’ through a practice lens, arguing that sometimes the enactment of ‘good pedagogical praxis’ can be difficult amidst the pressures associated with early career teaching. We use the theory of practice architectures to discuss these challenges as beginning teachers balance their commitment to creating socially just and equitable spaces for learning with the realities of contemporary schooling. We draw on stories from four Nexus teachers to examine the site-based arrangements that enable and constrain their ability to ‘teach well’. Ways in which they can enact morally and ethically informed practices while negotiating the changing conditions of their school environment are identified. This leads to a discussion of beginning teachers and a praxis-oriented view of pedagogy.

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/0iTo5BbCBDBbXtSkJGvCbv?si=b80ba556d5e3491d

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Keywords Pedagogical praxis · Beginning teachers · Theory of practice architectures · Social justice · Teacher practice

Introduction

The question of how beginning teachers 'do good' in their everyday practice in hard-to-staff schools is at the forefront of the La Trobe University Nexus Program. Nexus is an employment-based pathway into secondary teaching designed to recruit, prepare, support, and graduate high-achieving teachers into socio-culturally diverse and low socioeconomic schools in Victoria, Australia. Nexus teachers have clear ideas about how they "should live in the world, and about the kind of world they should aim to establish" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 27). In this chapter, we ask four Nexus teachers in their first year of teaching to think about: What is the 'good life' they want their students to achieve, and what is the 'world worth living in' they hope to mirror in their teaching? By considering stories of everyday teaching practices, we draw conclusions about how a personal orientation to 'living well' influences our teachers' capacity to 'teach well' amidst the realities of schooling in contemporary times. The chapter is informed by research carried out at the end of school term one in 2022, 12 weeks into the Nexus teachers' new careers. We start the chapter by briefly discussing the Nexus Program and the context of the research project. In the second part of the chapter, we draw on Nexus teachers' discussions and case stories of living well and teaching well to provide an insight into pedagogical praxis-in-action. In the third part of the chapter, we use the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017) to explore the arrangements of the classroom and the school that enable and constrain the Nexus teachers' abilities to teach well. In the end, in the light of these conditions, we discuss how beginning teachers recognise and find hope in teaching for a world worth living in.

The Nexus Program: A Pathway to Teaching

Nexus is a federally funded and state supported employment-based pathway into secondary teaching working with low socioeconomic schools across Victoria, Australia.[1] Under the La Trobe University School of Education banner, we recruit and mentor high-achieving candidates from professions other than teaching who have a strong commitment to social justice principles and want to work in hard-to-staff schools. We specifically target potential teachers from diverse or historically 'disadvantaged' backgrounds (Indigenous, low socioeconomic, culturally, or linguistically

[1] Nexus is delivered as part of the High Achieving Teachers' Program with the support of the Australian Government Department of Education. La Trobe University also acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

diverse) and highly sought-after teaching areas (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Languages). While completing their Master of Teaching studies, Nexus teachers are based in schools during their candidature as Education Support Class Employees (teacher aides) for one day a week in school term two, and two days a week in school terms three and four. Their salary is paid for by the Victorian Department of Education. At the end of the first year, we apply for their Permission to Teach[2] to take over their own classroom from term one through to term four in the following year as paraprofessionals. The salary for this year is provided by the school.

Context of the Research Project

In February 2022, four beginning teachers from the Nexus Program were invited to engage in virtual reading circle conversations to discuss the paper *What is educational praxis?* (Mahon et al., 2020). Opportunities were then provided over the following months to explore links between living well and teaching well in their classroom practice during three informal get togethers. These sessions involved the researchers and the Nexus teachers engaging in reflective conversations where reactions, feelings, and thoughts about everyday experiences (and what influenced these) were shared. In May 2022, the teachers engaged in semi-structured interviews to further unpack their stories. These conversations were guided by the key questions:

- What does living well mean for you as a beginning teacher?
- How has this notion of living well influenced how you teach?
- Can you share some stories from this past term of teaching well in action?
- What conditions in your school have constrained this way of teaching?
- What conditions in your school have enabled this way of teaching?

Education for Living Well

A praxis approach to education advocates for teachers to take a critically reflective approach to practice which "takes a view about how people should live in the world, and about the kind of world they should aim to establish" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 27). Our view of praxis draws upon an understanding of both a neo-Aristotelian view (what is the right thing to do in the here-and-now based on practical wisdom) and a Marxian view (what are consequences for my students and how does this change history) (Mahon et al., 2020). For Nexus teachers, praxis involves morally informed and committed actions in their everyday teaching practice; and secondly, it helps to shape the social formations and conditions that make their collective

[2] Permission to Teach (PTT) is an alternative authorisation to teach that exists primarily to address a workforce shortage within Victorian schools.

work historically significant (both for the profession and for the low socioeconomic communities they serve) (Kemmis, 2010).

Below, the four teachers explore what it means to live well.

For Nexus teacher **Michael**,[3] living well is "about being well; finding your place in the world; those intangible psychological attributes that you call upon to be in the world in a way that you feel like where you are is in a harmonious relationship with the world." Before joining the Nexus Program, Michael was living in Canada and studying a Doctor of Philosophy in Geography. **Claire** has a background in the Arts, spending the 10 years before Nexus working in communication roles in Melbourne, London, and San Francisco. She adds that "living well exists in the quality of your relationships; reciprocity, caring, loving, giving, receiving; having relationships in your community, feeling a sense of belonging, and being able to add value and give back." **Ben** views it as knowing "what it is to be human; not just being a tool in an economic machine…it's about critical thinking, understanding other people, where actually being human is important." His life before teaching involved working in refugee camps in the Middle East, interning with an Australian Member of Parliament, and delivering emergency assistance after natural disasters. And **Tim**, with a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, explains it as "about being happy, independent, productive. It's about having options so you can do whatever it is you want to do in the world." Together, these ideas of living well support the double purpose of education, a view that orients towards both the good for each person (the individual) and the good for humankind (the collective) (Kemmis et al., 2014). This praxis-oriented view of education frames the teacher's task as:

> [o]n the one hand, it aims to form and develop individuals with the knowledge, capabilities and character to live good lives – that is, lives committed to the good for humankind. On the other hand, education aims to form and develop good societies, in which the good for humankind is the principal value. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 2)

Thinking about living well challenges beginning teachers to turn a mirror back onto themselves as educational practitioners; providing licence for them to explore beyond the intentionality of their work (what their immediate goals are) to the justness of their own practices (where all students succeed because inequities in classroom opportunities have been redressed). In this way, beliefs about education are formed for these new teachers not only as a philosophical undertaking, but also in the moment-by-moment unfolding of their work in the enactment of pedagogical praxis (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018). As praxis-oriented teachers, they look beyond acting as 'technicians of practices' to responding to the circumstances and the particular needs of their students for the good of the individual and the collective (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015). Their descriptions of teaching well are summarised below.

Michael explains that his role in the classroom is to "help kids live well by finding their relationship with the world in a way that works for them. In my teaching, I hope to build student capacity to see through their initial impressions of the world; to see

[3] Pseudonyms are used for the four participating teachers. This research was conducted with ethical approval HEC19381.

what's going on under the surface in their communities; to go beyond the surface and question taken-for-granted assumptions." In his lessons, **Tim** aims to make space for "students to be whoever they are; get them to think critically about their learning. Does this make sense? Why do we think that? What does that mean outside of this classroom? Where could this be used?" **Ben** spends "a lot of energy trying to build aspiration in my students; building cultural capital as a pathway to building aspiration; trying to give them a broader perspective on life in general." And **Claire** views teaching well as anchored "in the relationships I have with the students; being a role model, being a consistent adult in their lives who shows up."

From a Nexus beginning teacher's perspective, teaching well is far more than a technical or instructional matter; rather it has moral, social, and political dimensions that are embedded in decisions around what is 'good' for their students based on the student's relationships with others. For them, success as a teacher is not merely measured by high stakes testing results, standardisation, or normalisation. Instead, it emerges from an understanding of praxis that makes a difference to the life trajectories of the students they teach and the worlds they live in.

Case Stories of Teaching Well

The following case stories contain statements from semi-structured interviews and have been written in collaboration with the four Nexus teachers. **Michael** teaches regionally in a hard-to-staff secondary school where he prioritises classroom practices that encourage students to scrutinise their work by continually challenging and connecting the value of classroom tasks to learning; **Claire** also teaches in a regional senior college where she aligns her teaching with role modelling and fostering a growth mindset in her English students; **Ben** talks about a new way of teaching English he has adopted in response to his students' low levels of literacy at a regional middle years college; and **Tim** works in a small rural school and actively seeks to understand what motivates his students so he can identify drivers to pull them through difficult senior curriculum content. In a time of constant change, they each consider what constitutes teaching well in their everyday pedagogical practices. The purpose here is to explore the everyday accounts of teaching well through a praxis lens to highlight the significance of this taken-for-granted aspect of pedagogical decision-making for beginning teachers. We build on the work of Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2015) in English education to provide accounts of praxis-in-action that make visible how Nexus teachers act for the good of their students and the good of their futures. Here are their stories.

Michael's Story: Feedback

I would characterise my school as having a focus on inclusion and wellbeing. It has a lower socioeconomic profile and can be a challenging place to work. The school places a huge emphasis on finding pathways for students out of school, often non-academic pathways. I see my role as that of helping kids find their relationship to the world in a way that works for them. I value a sense of curiosity. I find myself defending what we learn on the basis of it just being really interesting. And I'd like that disposition to be taken up by my students: a love of learning for its own sake.

One thing I try to do in my classroom is support students by building their capacity to be masters of their own learning. I've tried this term to give them extra feedback; giving my own responses to their work and then providing space for them to write about their strengths, what they need to work on, and what they are going to do next. It's about cultivating the idea that they are actually in a relationship with their work and the teacher, that they need to think about their habitual patterns of thinking. For many students without a lot of educational capital, these are completely unfamiliar challenges, arbitrary burdens rather than skills for life. Quite often my students will say: I don't even want to look at this work. Or, I hate it. Or, what's the point of this, I'm never going to use this in my life. That's the type of thinking I want to defeat. I don't want students to feel like they are just going through the motions. It is intrinsically valuable.

Beyond instrumentalised learning, what gets in the way of this is the incredible administrative bloat that overcomes teaching, like constantly filling out minor bureaucratic requirements and the whole compliance structure. It is a shock, and it really has been dispiriting. Then there's the constant changes to the school schedule when the tempo of the day is thrown off by unplanned things; some of them important, some of them random or unexplained. Everything in and of itself seems important, but they're all things that don't directly serve classroom preparation. You become so overburdened that you end up not doing anything well.

Another thing is the team-teaching element. I actually think it's meant that I don't have as much freedom to respond to students' interests and what they need. The whole mantra seems to be, let's see how we can make this as easy as we can for ourselves: follow the rule book and get through the exercises. As a beginning teacher, I'm not going to criticise their team programming. But to teach rigorous thinking, do critical reading, you have to be a teacher who will prioritise unfolding student needs over the pre-planned needs of the organisation. They might mean sometimes not working in a team to simply economise on work.

I've found in my school that there's a focus on a productivist approach to learning in other areas too. For one, the emphasis is mostly on getting students to produce work rather than get them to understand and make meaning. A lot of the scaffolding that teachers provide is about facilitating work in this way: here's the formula for doing this type of task. It's a mechanistic conception of teaching and learning. Today, we are working on this cog, which will make that other cog turn. And it ends up fetishising the material stuff that you want them to produce. We become forces in a machine

that moves cogs around and makes a product. It doesn't matter if it's meaningful or understood. It's easy to get caught up in this when everyone else is doing it and also when the tempo is high. So, it becomes difficult as a beginning teacher to trial a new way of providing feedback because good feedback focuses on understanding.

Sometimes, though, it's easy to forget there are some fundamental ingredients to good teaching. Some are so obvious I can easily overlook them. One is that, at my school, I'm always encouraged to think of the groups of students under my supervision as my class. At the start of the term, I was worried that I would do the wrong thing and wouldn't have any freedom. There might be someone watching over my shoulder. But there is a degree of autonomy. And in some subjects, I'm encouraged to connect with the world outside of the school, which gives me confidence to try things out myself. This has helped me situate the school in the world in some lessons. It has reassured me that I can change the program to cultivate curiosity. And one of the things I really love about the students at our school is that they're often quite precocious and socially competent; they're highly verbal and speak their minds and push back. I enjoy the students who make me explain why we need to do something. I find this motivating because it tests me out. Every day I have to ask myself, why am I teaching this? Why do I think this topic is important? This is critical thinking, and I want to reward this type of brashness in my students.

Claire's Story: Growth Mindset

My school is in regional Victoria. It's a really large school with over 1000 students and is hard-to-staff. My wish for my students is for them to connect deeply with their lived experience; having relationships with their community, feeling that sense of belonging, and being able to add value and give back. I first and foremost want all my students to feel safe in the classroom. If I have a good relationship with my students, then I can show them what being a responsible, consistent adult in their life is like. I want to be a stable role model who shows up without judgement. I think that's important for them to see.

I found in Term 1 that my students were giving up easily. They had this very strong negative self-talk. Most were showing fixed mindset traits; stuck in this very closed, narrow-minded way of feeling about themselves and the work they produce. So, I decided to research growth mindset and introduce my students to mindsets. It made me rethink how I'm teaching them in the classroom; my pedagogy. It made me reflect on how I ask questions; how I give feedback; how I interact with them. I am probably fixed in a lot of the ways I am doing things because I'm a brand-new teacher; I'm not flexible yet. I don't have the reference points. If something happens, I don't know how to manage it for the first time. I'm just sort of putting on a bandaid while trying to solve it in the moment. I'm limited; I'm fixed by my vocabulary, my experience. In the moment, I'm thinking: What's the right thing to do? In this interaction, I'm thinking: What can I do to help you? As I get better at reflecting on my practice, can I turn to the class and make it about everyone? Can I give a response that is virtuous

and helps everyone? What if I could say the right thing? I know as I get better at teaching, I'm going to have so many better examples. It's become also about my own mindset and how that manifests. I think I have to reflect after each class and ask: How can I adopt more of a growth mindset myself?

The habits of the bell ringing, the structure of the school day, looking at the board means that some students have given up before they've even walked into my classroom. Even if it's going to be a really interesting class, nothing turns on for them because they're already in this mindset where they think it's going to be boring. They think, I'm not going to enjoy it, and as soon as the bell goes, I can get out and actually be free and enjoy myself. They have these preconceived ideas; this baggage. They get it from years of going through school and getting that same timetable, the same setting of the classroom. They've had it day in and day out for so many years, and they associate it with it being boring. And it's very hard to change that. If I have them in period three or four, they're on the edge of their seats. The periods are 75 min, so are very long. They can't concentrate for very long. I often have to chunk things, have multiple activities, have a faster flow to avoid disaster classes.

I try to ask lots of open-ended questions and when I respond to their answers, I try to be open, not judging of what they say. My tone and inflection and delivery can't be demanding. It has to be conversational; always conversational and curious. I'm genuinely interested in what you think. When a student responds with: I don't know, I've learnt to wait for five seconds. I just pause and then I wait, and they think, she's not going to talk. So, I'm giving them time to process it. I also never say their answer is wrong. I'll say that's a different perspective and try and open the floor. What's another way of looking at it? I try to get them to keep thinking about it and ask: What else? Keep trying. I don't say: That's not it or that's wrong. They're so affected by their social standing and what their peers think of them, so that's why shaming never works. The fact that some of these students just come into my classroom is a win. I try to model to them what living well looks like; being in the same good mood, smiling at them, trying to include them, praising them when they contribute and do work. That might be the biggest thing I can offer on that day.

Ben's Story: Low Literacy Levels

I teach English and Humanities in a harder-to-staff college in regional Victoria. There's a lot going on in my school around trauma and wellbeing. In our community, there's higher rates of divorce, lower rates of secondary education, and higher rates of poverty when compared to the Australian average. So, I spend a lot of energy trying to build aspiration in my students. They have such low cultural capital. I'm really trying to get them to see different kinds of role models to understand different pathways in life and build aspiration; striving for a meaningful and purposeful life that is fulfilling and enjoyable and one they're glad they're living.

My school has invested a huge amount of time, energy, and class time into English because literacy levels are so low here. While English has more time dedicated to it

than any other subject area, there still doesn't seem to be any actual literacy focus to it; just more year level English content that doesn't help to bridge that gap. At first, I thought there must be some plan here, and I just don't understand it yet because I'm new. It felt like I was going a bit crazy because I could see the problem, yet the plan we were given was not addressing it. It was really frustrating. Nobody's going to fix this if I don't.

So, I've gone a bit rogue and started implementing a whole lot of literacy focused teaching in my English classes. I went off and studied a bit so I knew how to do it. Now I do a word of the week in the first lesson of every week; synonyms, antonyms, write sentences, do a morphology with that word so they get better with prefixes and suffixes. I also do the different sounds in the word and different kinds of endings. I've even requested another whiteboard, so it stays there all week as a visual reminder.

After seeing some great results, I shared this with the Head of English and the Head of Literacy. I suggested we try this approach with other English classes. They said: No. Some teachers will see this as you telling them what to do. They didn't want to rock the boat. They work to a model that's about position and rank. And there's no collaborative working groups or project-based activities where a teacher can take charge of doing something regardless of where they are on the hierarchy. It goes down the line from the principal; and graduates just go and get the coffees. I think they are driven by an institutionalised way of doing things.

I think ego and pride in middle management prevents them from looking at other opportunities to improve and succeed. They don't want to see the existing program as a failure because they created it. There's no room for innovation or creativity. The middle leaders making these types of decisions are still traditional-type teachers who value a level of passivity from other teachers, treating them in the same kind of way as they do their students. It's a very authoritarian model for leading. They don't have the management skills I've seen from working in other professions. A middle leader's job is very different from a classroom teacher's. Once you're managing people, you're actually working for them. Your success is measured by how well your team does, not you. Your job is to remove obstacles for them, not reinforce them. That's why stuff is so stagnant. It's not a lack of momentum; it's actually a huge amount of inertia. I feel like I'm having to deliberately hold myself back. You don't want to get yourself isolated; schools can be political places; there's a lot of power in the hands of a few.

I have a good peer network though that is not based in the school. All my good ideas come from having conversations with other like-minded peers. And my classroom is still my classroom. So, as long as I abide by the formative and summative assessment schedule, the rest is up to my own due diligence and professional approach. Because I know I am doing good things for my students and I am carefully assessing whether they're working or not, I don't think I am putting them at risk by deviating from the status quo. I'm not inventing stuff; I'm taking best practice and using it in my classroom.

Tim's Story: One-on-One Discussions

I'm teaching in a rural school of about 350 students, so a lot of my kids will end up back on the farm. At the moment, I teach Year 10, 11, and 12 Science, Physics, and Maths. I want my students to feel comfortable being whoever they are. Particularly in Science, I want them to be able to think about the information they're taking in and ask questions about its relevance. Not everyone is going to use every bit of the advanced Year 12 Maths that I teach, but some of them might use a little bit, and it's good that they know they've got those tools if they need them. If they don't want to go to uni and want to get an apprenticeship, I encourage them to keep going, keep the commitment, and finish what they set out to start. They might not get the best marks, but they can come along and enjoy and try and give it a go. And that's what I ask of them.

There's a fair bit of conflict that goes on in my practice. Three quarters of my teaching load is VCE,[4] *where the VCE study score at the end of Year 12 is the be-all and end-all. There's a heavy focus on content and that becomes the primary focus of my teaching; what you've got to teach, what the rules are for the SACs,*[5] *how many lab hours I've got available. It's the volume of the content. And after a couple of years of COVID, kids are coming in and their fundamentals are not strong, so you can't rush bits you might have previously been able to. This makes it harder to provide opportunities for them to be able to explore and think for themselves; when they just need to know the thing that's on the exam. And we can't stop for anything.*

There's a few students in my Year 11 Physics class who are really behind already. We're less than a term into the year, and we're already behind. So, I'm giving them a lot more independent practice time, for everyone. It allows me the time to get around and give those who really need it more individual support. I can have those one-on-one discussions and find out what their motivation is for being in the class; what's their reason for being here. I tap into the drive that pulls them through so I can help them when things get hard. I have to keep them interested and help them to see the relevance of what they're learning; getting enough impetus so they can get through the times when they can't see it as clearly. I build that relationship.

Resourcing issues are a problem for us. Fortunately, over COVID, we were able to benefit from the virtual labs for free. I've been able to get access to a radiation prac for my Year 11 Physics class that we'd never get to run. You can't do radiation pracs in schools.

This is great because we can just book them and be done, and not worry about the funding. But other equipment like electronics kits are broken and look like they pre-date me. Last week, I spent one of my free periods pulling apart and repairing a bit of equipment rather than sending it somewhere to be fixed because of the expense.

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[4] The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is the certificate that the majority of students in Victoria receive on satisfactory completion of their secondary education.

[5] Depending on the study, these may be school-based assessments and/or external assessments. School-based assessments are set by the teacher and include school-assessed coursework (SAC) that is completed at school.

And the cost of waste disposal for a chem prac; they charge such a lot of money just to pick up a small container because it's out of their way. And it's the only option we have. The school's budget has to pay for that, so we have to be careful in terms of the waste we produce, which limits what pracs we can do.

But my school has really supportive, positive staff. They're willing to share their expertise. Because we're a smaller school, everyone's in the one staffroom, which really helps. There's a feeling that we're all in this together. And because we're a small school, the largest class I've got at the moment is 15 students. When you've got a class of 10–15, you can spend an extra five minutes with every student in a way that you just couldn't if you had a bigger class. I can really take the time to extend them and get them thinking beyond what they're expecting of themselves.

Teaching Well and the Practice Architectures of Schooling

In the four case stories of teaching well above, we now investigate how pedagogical praxis is situated in the everyday practices of the Nexus teachers as they make decisions in the moment about what to say, what to do, and how to relate to their students and others. In this chapter, practice is defined as:

> a form of human action in history, in which particular activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of particular ideas and talk (sayings), and when the people involved are distributed in particular kinds of relationships (relatings), and when this combination of sayings, doings and relatings 'hangs together' in the project of the practice (the ends and purposes that motivate the practice). (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31)

Practice, Kemmis et al. assert, is constituted in the sayings, doings, and relatings which shape, and are shaped by, what they describe as *practice architectures* (Kemmis et al., 2014). Practice architectures enable and constrain practices and hang together in three dimensions peculiar to different sites: cultural-discursive (language shaping people's 'sayings' and thinking), material-economic (work shaping people's 'doings'), and social–political (power shaping people's 'relatings' to one another) (Kemmis et al., 2014). Like Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2015), we argue that the theory of practice architectures provides a mechanism for developing a more holistic view about how beginning teachers navigate praxis-oriented pedagogical practice; a view that accounts for local sites and circumstances. In the discussion that follows, we investigate how the practice architectures, the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social–political arrangements within particular sites of schooling, enable and constrain these practices for beginning teachers. We explore how the everyday practices of Nexus teachers get caught up in existing discourses and ways of thinking about things (Kemmis, 2022) in existing patterns of what it means to teach well within the established hierarchies and patterns of relationships in their schools.

Teaching Well in Semantic Space: Cultural-Discursive Arrangements

The cultural-discursive arrangements in schools prefigure all teaching practices including what is said by Nexus teachers in and about their practices (sayings). The language they use, the issues they discuss, and the big ideas they think about are distinctive to the educative spaces of their school. Some cultural-discursive arrangements are organised to constrain Nexus teachers' ability to connect with their colleagues. One example is when Ben discusses his lack of voice as a beginning teacher. He describes how suggestions he made to other teachers about improving literacy in English lessons were rejected based on his lack of experience in the classroom. Shaped by the hierarchical circumstances of the workplace, where the opinions of more experienced colleagues are valued over those of graduates, opportunities for him to lead and contribute to changing teaching practices have been scarce.

As a beginning teacher, the limitations of her own talk when providing instruction in the classroom impacts how Claire responds to her students. Her lack of confidence affects her ability to "say the right thing". She acknowledges that she is still building a repertoire of vocabulary to use when answering students' spontaneous questions during lessons. Another arrangement that constrains 'teaching well' for both Claire and Michael occurs in the toing-and-froing of classroom talk. Claire's students display "very strong negative self-talk…stuck in this very closed, narrow-minded way of feeling about themselves and the work they produce". When asked a question, her students regularly respond, "I don't know". Michael's students quite often say, "I don't even want to look at this work. Or, I hate it. Or, what's the point of this, I'm never going to use this in my life". In response to such student talk that diminishes the value of their work, both Claire and Michael are working to transform existing cultural-discursive arrangements in their classrooms by trialling new ways "of providing feedback; asking lots of open-ended questions"; giving wait time to process answers; and by responding to their students "with genuine interest" and without judgement.

There is also evidence of Nexus teachers demonstrating agency in their site of practice to make changes to long-standing semantic conditions (Kaukko et al., 2020). Ben looks for "conversations with other like-minded peers" outside his school environment to get good ideas. Tim uses one-on-one discussions with his students to "find out what their motivation is for being in the class". He generates the time needed for this new practice by giving everyone more independent practice time to free up "the time to get around and give those who really need it more individual support". The intentional changes that Nexus teachers make to their everyday work are guided by their commitment to 'doing the right thing'.

Teaching Well in Physical Space: Material-Economic Arrangements

The material-economic arrangements within schools impact the work of all four Nexus teachers. Their stories show how the physical conditions of the classroom, school, and the wider system prefigure what is done in their practice (doings). They each talk about the structural arrangements in schools and how these constrain their teaching. Michael describes "the incredible administrative bloat that overcomes teaching" and explains that the constant stream of bureaucratic and compliance tasks steal time away from quality teaching and learning. Such tasks include exam preparation and marking, writing detailed student behavioural notes, data tracking, and his involvement in extracurricular activities. Habits of the school day such as bells ringing, the physical layout of the classroom, and timetabling also restrict students' engagement in Claire's lessons. She reports that, after years of routines within the institutions of schooling, many of her students have given up on the drudgery they associate with them and carry negative emotions about their school day into her classroom. Tim identifies the VCE curriculum and the volume of content he must get through as a conflict. It "makes it harder to provide opportunities for them to be able to explore and think for themselves; when they just need to know the thing that's on the exam. And we can't stop for anything".

While the practice architectures in a site foreshadow particular practices and actions, they do not predetermine them (Kaukko et al., 2020). As an example, Tim finds a lack of resourcing in his small rural school an ongoing problem when teaching science practical sessions, but he's also recognised it as an opportunity to think outside the box and use virtual laboratories as a replacement for inaccessible hands-on equipment. Another consequence of rurality for Tim is smaller class sizes. This allows him to find extra one-on-one time with every student so they can receive individualised instruction and support from him.

Furthermore, Michael acknowledges the "degree of autonomy" he has within the curriculum to "change the program to cultivate curiosity". And Ben celebrates the fact that "my classroom is still my classroom". In the pre-constructed work of a being a teacher, Tim, Michael, and Ben have shown how to use the objects and set-ups of the material-economic arrangements of their classrooms to mediate their lived practices, understand their agency as professionals and create changes for themselves and their students.

Teaching Well in Social Space: Social–Political Arrangements

The social–political arrangements of a site prefigure how people relate to one another. This social space is realised in relation to issues of power and solidarity. Schools are often seen as hierarchical organisations; marked by the exercise of role-related power (Kaukko et al., 2020). In some schools where Nexus teachers work, there is

contestation between Nexus teachers and school middle management around how to interpret teaching well. Michael acknowledges the tension he experiences with his school's productivist approach to student outcomes, which sits in opposition to his own beliefs around learning as meaning making. Ben also recognises the political nature of schooling and how the decisions that are made by the school's executive hold the rest of the staff on a particular course. They've both found that working as a team sometimes means economising on output rather than working together to achieve real outcomes for students. As beginning teachers, they feel like they don't have the self-confidence to hold the 'old timers' to account and are often left feeling disempowered by the traditions that reproduce the social practices in their schools.

How students relate with each other can both constrain and enable the teaching practices of Nexus teachers. Claire describes how her students are "so affected by their social standing and what their peers think of them", they are worried to speak up in class. She is working to re-shape the social space of her classroom by role modelling "what living well looks like for her students; being in the same good mood, smiling at them, trying to include them". She tries to be open and non-judgmental. In the moment, she finds herself thinking: "What's the right thing to do? What can I do to help you?" Likewise, Tim looks for ways to "encourage" his students "to keep going, keep the commitment, and finish what they set out to start". On the other hand, Michaels' students are "quite precocious and socially competent; they're highly verbal and speak their minds". He finds these interactions "motivating because it tests me out. Every day I have to ask myself: Why I am teaching this? Why do I think this topic is important?" These deliberate determinations about what to do now or next (Kemmis et al., 2014) under the circumstances at that time (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018) are examples of where dispositions of prudence, ethics, and morality enter the day-to-day interactions between Nexus teachers and their students. Acting with this realisation is the work of praxis-oriented educators.

Conclusion

This chapter provides empirical illustrations of how four beginning teachers' ideas about living well unfold in their everyday practices as teaching well. Such pedagogical practices have been explored as sayings, doings, and relatings, guided and glued together by the representation of "the best possible way to act in their current situation amidst the arrangements and circumstances that they encounter" (Kaukko et al., 2020, p. 6). Through a praxis lens, we have shown how the practices of four beginning teachers not only respond to their own moral compass, but also to the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social–political arrangements in schools and classrooms. It is not just that practices hold everyday ways of living and working in their course; it is also those established discourses and ways of thinking that justify how we do things now, established material arrangements (the layout of a classroom, for example), and established patterns of relationships (for example, between teachers and the principal, between teachers, and between teachers and students). The

studying of these teachers' practices in response to the arrangements can help us to understand what new teachers desire for their students (the world worth living in) and what they find possible (the world in which they find themselves). Guided by these discussions, we can support new teachers, reminding them to stay true to their beliefs and to stay committed in their daily practice to co-create with their students a world worth living in.

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Chapter 15
Learning Through Change: What the Pandemic Has Taught Us About Living Well in a World Worth Living In

Susanne Francisco and Ela Sjølie

Abstract The experiences of academics during the pandemic influenced their actions in relation to the changes they were experiencing and also influenced their understanding of what is important going forward. For many academics, the COVID-19 pandemic involved working from home, changed ways of interacting with students and colleagues, and changed relationships with students, colleagues, family, and community. This chapter asks the questions: how can we make the most of the changes that occurred because of the pandemic, and what other changes might we create going forward? Based on interviews with, and journal entries by, 30 academics (16 Norway; 14 Australia), this chapter identifies key global, community, and personal aspects to participants' understanding of living well in a world worth living in. Informed by the theory of practice architectures, we also discuss the practice architectures that might support the changes (and in some cases the sustaining and further development of transformations already taking place) that these academics envisaged, with a focus on changed technology use, work flexibility, stable employment with good working conditions, and social justice.

Keywords Academics' learning · Pandemic · Change · Theory of practice architectures

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6ht9LWrWPwFT1owtjd2jLI?si=f66503c8bcd34c26

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic led to dramatic and rapid changes in the world: in education, the economy, and society more generally. Changes that might otherwise have taken years (such as a complete move to online learning) took place within weeks. The COVID pandemic created conditions for the possibility of a "bold and brave mindset shift" (Sahlberg, 2020, p. 359). The rapid and extensive changes brought about through the global pandemic have highlighted for many that whole systems can be changed through collective action. As we move past the pandemic, it is time to consider how we might make the most of the changes that have already happened, and to work towards the changes that we might create going forward.

We invited a total of 30 academics living in Norway and Australia to reflect on their experiences during the pandemic, and what they now thought living well in a world worth living in might look like. For these academics, the COVID-19 pandemic involved working from home, changed ways of interacting with students and colleagues, and changed relationships with students, colleagues, family, and community (Sjølie et al, 2020; Variyan & Reimer, 2021; Windsor & Kitooke, 2023). In this chapter, we outline how these changed conditions influenced them in relation to their understandings of living well in a world worth living in. We also discuss the practice architectures that might support the world that these academics envisaged. But first we turn briefly to other studies that explored the experiences of academics during this time in these two countries.

At a broad level, all academics were impacted in some way due to the sudden and unexpected changes that the pandemic brought. Variyan and Reimer (2021) note that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was not experienced equally: "For some, the shift was welcome, creating more space for reflection, agency and work/life balance within their practices; for others, the shift represented a loss of space and agency, as home became work" (p. 322). Some studies report on academics who experienced social isolation (e.g., Leal Filho et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021), while others found that working from home provided more flexibility and more time to concentrate on their work (e.g., Sjølie & Moe, 2021). The personal and situational context of each academic influenced their experiences. For instance, those with permanent employment, a comfortable home to work from, and limited caring responsibilities had a different experience from those in precarious employment, with responsibilities for supporting the learning from home of school age children, or with limited workspace opportunities in their living arrangements (Variyan & Reimer, 2021). Broader country-level responses to the pandemic also influenced the experiences of people living there.

The experiences of academics during the pandemic influenced their actions in relation to the changes and also influenced their understanding of what is important going forward. One of the important changes for academics in Australia was an increase in workload combined with a decrease in employment security. McGaughey et al. (2021) found that a high level of health and well-being problems were experienced by academics and by students. Of the 370 academics participating in their study, 78% identified increased work-related stress, 76.5% feared losing their current job, and 80.7% predicted increased casualisation. They note that most respondents talked

of long work hours, fatigue, and exhaustion. While the Australian Federal Government made available the JobKeeper wage subsidy for businesses and organisations, universities were explicitly denied this support (Spies-Butcher, 2020). McGaughey et al. (2021) found that respondents felt "the government appeared to abandon the sector and university leadership were seen to use the pandemic as an opportunity to cut costs" (p. 2241). They go on to say that the predictions made by respondents of university restructures, redundancies, pay cuts, and course cancellations were quickly borne out. Such outcomes necessarily impact academics' lives.

In Norway, academics experienced an increased workload, although job security was not of concern. In a study that surveyed 4000 academics (with 36 in-depth interviews), Solberg et al. (2021) found that the increased workload was largely associated with planning and conducting teaching, which in turn resulted in decreased time available for research-related activities. They also found that the academics reported high satisfaction with the flexibility and freedom that was provided by the institutions, and that academics valued being able to work from home, although working from home was quite common before the pandemic as well. Overall, the study reported on academics' experiences as having moved from shock and hard work (March–July 2020) to uncertainty and constant change (August–December 2020), to a phase of increasing wear and tear and concern for the long-term impacts on academic work life.

The Study

Findings in this chapter are drawn from a broader research project that explored the learning of academics during the COVID-19 pandemic. This broader project involved data gathered in four countries: Norway, Sweden, Australia, and Finland. The findings in this chapter, based on the Norwegian and Australian research, are derived from journals and two rounds of interviews as outlined in Table 15.1. The second interview included specific questions about participants' thoughts on living well in a world worth living in. In the Australian project, the specific question asked was "As you know, one of the things we have been considering is the concept of living well in a world worth living in. After the year that we have all just had, what does that mean for you?" In the Norwegian project, the questions were "What is your main motivation as an academic?" and "As you know, our university's vision is *Knowledge for a better world*. What does that mean to you, what is a better world?" While there were differences in the actual questions asked, the responses gave rich insights into living well in a world worth living in from the perspective of the participants after they had been through almost one year of the pandemic.

The 16 participants in the Norwegian study were academics from one university, from different stages of their career, and a range of discipline areas: 10 from engineering, two from science, one from mathematics, one from interdisciplinary studies, one from applied linguistics, and one from education. 11 were men and five were women.

Table 15.1 Data collection

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Participant journals
Norway	Undertaken June 2020 16 participants	Undertaken December 2020–January 2021 14 participants	Completed December 2020–January 2021 10 participant journals
Australia	Undertaken June 2020 14 participants	Undertaken December 2020–January 2021 12 participants	Completed April 2020–December 2020 14 participant journals

The 14 Australian participants were academics from six different universities, from different stages of their career, and all in the same discipline area: education. Twelve were women and two were men. Two lived and worked in Queensland, seven in New South Wales, and five in Victoria. In Australia, each State was responsible for health decisions including those related to lockdowns and border closures, so people in each of the States had varying experiences of the pandemic.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participant journals provided details of the experiences of the participants. They also informed the development of questions for the second interviews.

Guided by the question of *What has the pandemic taught us about living well in a world worth living in?* we undertook analysis in stages and began with a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of the data from each country. Next, we considered themes from each country in relation to the other country's themes. All participant names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

Findings

The findings revealed that there were global, community, and personal aspects to participants' understanding of living well in a world worth living in. The global category identifies broader issues that were not necessarily closely related to new learning, or new areas of focus, during the pandemic. However, they were key global matters that were raised as important by many participants.

Although there were similarities, the findings differed between the two countries. There are some areas where a strong theme emerged in one of the countries but was not evident or was much less prominent in the other country. We also note the gender differences in the cohorts for each country (primarily men in Norway, and primarily women in Australia) as well as the differences in discipline areas represented (education only in Australia, and a range of disciplines in Norway). In the findings and discussion, we do not explicitly address these differences because the study was not designed to do so: however, where appropriate we do touch on these issues where we have the relevant supporting data. The national location of each participant mentioned is shown by a bracketed initial after their name: (N) and (A).

Global

Social Justice and Equality

Social justice and equality emerged strongly as important components of a world worth living in. For participants in the Norwegian study this was talked about in the sense of working towards a more equal distribution of resources in the world, but also that all people have the same worth. Knowledge and education were seen as

ways to achieve equality and social justice, with several participants talking about the importance of educating people so that they can understand inequities and challenges in the world, and then work towards addressing them and creating a more just world. Alex (N), Gina (N), Robert (N), and Simon (N) all noted that their main motivation for being a university teacher was to empower students to use their knowledge to solve pressing sustainability challenges, to discover "fake news" and to make informed decisions. Adrian (N) stated that "only knowledge can make the world a better place", while Simon highlighted the need for free education as a prerequisite for social justice. Some of the participants also emphasised the essential role of the welfare state in the Scandinavian model. In their view, this model takes care of everyone and not only some, regardless of position or financial abilities. Other words and phrases that participants used which related to the topic of equality and social justice were "fairness", "global citizenship", "to feel safe in the world", and "a more righteous world".

Similarly, supporting the most vulnerable people in society was identified by many of the Australian participants as a crucial part of living well in a world worth living in. Key groups identified were older people, those in precarious employment, people with mental illness, and those living in poverty. Participants noted that people in these groups were most heavily impacted by changes that happened due to the pandemic and the associated lockdowns. Some people noted their hope that the massive changes wrought by our response to the pandemic could be built upon to increase protections and support for these groups. Olivia (A) raised her concern that once life "returned to normal we won't really have learned anything". Others identified the strong support for the Black Lives Matter and climate change protests during this time as important indications of some possible positive outcomes of the pandemic. Jocelyn (A) noted:

> I think that those things have been enabled because of the increased use of technology that's been brought about by also having developed online. And so that has made more people more aware of what we can do to work together to achieve a goal such as strong climate change policies, or making sure that Black Lives Matter is not just a passing movement, that it needs to end up with significant social and cultural change and legal change.

This hope that the experiences endured during the pandemic might result in some positive change in the world was referred to by a number of participants.

Related to inclusion, Petra (N) explained how the pandemic had made her more aware of the needs of her students, and as a result her teaching had become more inclusive during the pandemic. She was able to more deliberately include students who struggled to attend physical teaching activities on campus:

> … in the past, I would assume that students didn't turn up for several reasons. They didn't like getting up in the morning, they think they can speak English [Petra teaches an English course], or they're not interested in the class, or they're working. So, they're kind of making different priorities. But with Covid …[..]… it could be students who would really like to be there but they have health issues that mean it would be dangerous for them to come to campus. …[..]… It means that before, I was possibly stereotyping students a little bit, …[..]… So, I started to think about, in addition to health reasons related to Covid, there could be other ones. Anxiety disorders, in classes where you maybe have to talk another language and talk to other people and this kind of thing. I've always been aware of inclusivity, but I think it just brought it out a lot more …

This learning as a result of her experiences during the pandemic is likely to continue to inform Petra's practice into the future. Similarly, many Australian participants noted that they worked deliberately to support isolated students during the pandemic. A large majority of participants gave many hours of their time over and above their usual workload to ensure this support, and some reflected on their increased understanding of the vulnerability of some students, especially those who did not have family living in Australia.

During the time of the second interview, the Trump re-election campaign in the USA, and the associated fallout when he failed to secure re-election, had been foregrounded in the media for many months. As many were confined to their homes during the lockdown, and the news outlets had little to report on, both Australian and Norwegian news reports were saturated with stories related to Trump and his supporters. For some participants this further added to the negative atmosphere created by the pandemic and the associated lockdowns. As Olivia (A) noted, "All that Trump stuff has not really helped my depression at all". A world worth living in did not include a right-wing president of the USA. Some of the Norwegian participants used examples from the USA to illustrate the opposite of a world worth living in. They said that the pandemic highlighted the need for thinking about the common good, rather than nurturing a society where everyone is made responsible for themselves. The polarised debate in the election campaign also highlighted the importance of education (as described above).

Sustainability and Climate Change

The theme of sustainability as one of the requirements of a world worth living in was identified by many participants. In Australia, the COVID pandemic was preceded by devastating bushfires (understood by most as a direct result of climate change) that resulted not only in the loss of thousands of homes, but also in the death of hundreds of people and hundreds of thousands of animals. Identification of the present climate emergency that needs to be addressed, together with the importance of climate support actions that are more than tokenistic, was noted as critical. Most of the Norwegian participants had research interests related to sustainable development. It is therefore not surprising that when asked the question of what a world worth living in is, their answer was: a sustainable world where we do not destroy the globe for future generations. Peter (N) was concerned about the need to reduce consumption and better understand the consequences of our choices, for the environment and for other people, while Kirsten (N) was concerned with the human aspect, such as data privacy policy, empowerment, and agency in a technology driven world. Robert (N) talked about sustainability in the broad definition of the word, as not just climate and environment, but also fairness, stable democratic international relations between countries, and using technology to improve quality of life.

Community

Being part of a larger community, and contributing to that community, emerged as important for a world worth living in for many participants. Various communities became apparent: the local community in the neighbourhood where people lived, the community of colleagues that participants worked with (sometimes made up of various sub-communities), and the broader community of like-minded people and associated movements such as Black Lives Matter, Workers Unions, and sustainability amid climate change. The focus on community was often based on the notion of people contributing to something larger than themselves.

Local community was a particular focus for many of the Australian participants. Because of the move to working from home, most people were now more based in their own neighbourhoods throughout the week as well as on the weekends. As a result, many participants were interacting with their neighbours more than previously. Those who already had a relationship with others in their neighbourhood often ensured that the more vulnerable of these neighbours were cared for. For instance, Sophie (A) provided a lot of support for others during the pandemic. She did this through "doing whatever I can to help those who need any kind of support, whether it's emotional, physical, doing our best to help fellow human beings. Because we are a social group of people, a world worth living in is not just about me, it's about others as well, and it's about coexistence". This experience of having more to do with the local community than prior to the pandemic resulted in a number of the participants identifying the nurturing of ongoing relationships in the local community as being important for a world worth living in. Instead of the local neighbourhood, several of the Norwegian participants talked about how close colleagues and family became the most important community and also how they had more quality time with their partner when both were working from home. Sara (N), for example, talked about how her husband had become a colleague as well as her partner. Most of the Norwegian participants expressed gratitude for having access to family and close colleagues themselves, but concern about, and becoming more aware of, those who did not.

More "work-based" communities were the community of colleagues (for the Australian participants) and being of importance to students (the Norwegian participants). The Australian study highlighted the value that participants put on collegiality, and positive relationships with selected colleagues. Ava's (A) comment "Thank God for good work colleagues" was repeated in various ways by most participants. Several of the Norwegian participants talked about the need to be of importance to others, and to contribute to others having a good, or better, life. For these participants the focus was contributing as a teacher or through their academic work. Gina (N), for example, expressed this as "to live and let live".

The broader communities that people connected with philosophically came up in the Australian study and included two key areas: working with the Workers Union and the Black Lives Matter movement. We begin with Workers' Unions. Several participants increased their active involvement in the Union. There were a number of reasons for this. One important reason was the increased precarity of

university employment. This involved large-scale redundancies across the university sector, some sessionally employed staff losing their jobs entirely, and academics in some universities being coerced to take a pay decrease. The arrangements associated with the redundancies, and whether they would all be "voluntary" or forced, took a long time to be finalised leading to a long period of anxiety and vulnerability for many academics. These redundancies, loss of work, and agreements to decrease salaries, were due to decreased income for universities linked directly to a decline in student numbers (especially international student enrolments), as well as universities taking the opportunity to restructure. It was not helped by the Federal Government explicitly excluding universities from the Job Keeper allowance that was available to other organisations to keep staff connected to their employers. Sessionally employed academics were particularly vulnerable. Two of the Australian participants were employed on a sessional basis. Juliette (A) lost her work entirely (as did her husband) and found that they were struggling financially. Emily (A) kept her position, but was expected to do considerably more hours than she was paid for. In Norway, the financial situation of the universities was very different from the one in Australia. Not being dependent on student payments for income, the reduced activity during the pandemic led in many ways to an improved financial situation. The concern of the Norwegian participants was therefore not related to their own situation but rather a concern for people in socially vulnerable situations, such as international students and employees being far away from their families and Ph.D. students who had no close collaboration with colleagues. They also expressed gratitude for being in a privileged situation compared to people in other professions/occupations.

Maria (A) identified another reason for being more active in the Union. She noted that "…there's been more women engaged in participation in Unions because it's via Zoom and they don't have to physically be there". She went on to argue that online meetings allowed for greater access to those with caring and other responsibilities, and that she also felt less intimidated in these meetings when they are online. Maria hopes that the Union will continue to hold meetings online to enable a broader range of people to be actively engaged. Active Union involvement emerged as one avenue that the Australian participants accessed to fight against these unjust arrangements, as well as contribute to their community.

Jocelyn (A) identified the pandemic as influential in helping herself and others gain a greater understanding of the importance of 'community', large and small. She argued that the pandemic has "made very clear the importance of connections with other people and the importance of looking after and being looked after by friends and family and colleagues". She extends this further, noting that it has influenced people into "really taking the opportunity to get motivated… a whole lot of things that were going on this year, like Black Lives Matter and climate change protests". These connections seem to have been enabled by the changed use of technology during the pandemic. Like Maria, Jocelyn identified easier access to activist groups as one of the benefits of these changed arrangements.

Personal

In this section, we focus on the personal, however for many participants the personal was often closely linked with the global, and with community.

Self-realisation, Reflection, and Development

Some participants found the pandemic to be a time of self-realisation and development. What this meant varied between participants. Working from home, and the associated physical separation from the university, decreased some people's sense of attachment to the organisation that they worked for.

At the same time, it increased their expectation of more deliberately guiding their own direction. Piper (A) saw this as a positive outcome, noting, "I can think through my path a bit more autonomously…[without] the institution driving what I think I need to do or what I should be doing". Piper was positive about regaining this sense of driving her own direction (which she had previously experienced in her work in another organisation). She noted the importance of continuing to create both the time and the mental space to reflect on what is important, and to chart your own direction. For Sophie (A), the ways that others responded to the pandemic and associated changes supported her to develop greater insight. She noted that, due to the changes,

> … we learn about challenges that other people experience and those challenges may not be a challenge to us, but it helps us to realise that different people have different levels of bearing or levels of tolerance or levels of understanding and so on. We need to be very open in our minds to say, OK, we need to accept people for what they are.

This changed understanding enabled Sophie to be more patient with her students and with her colleagues.

The topic of self-realisation and development is closely connected to having a sense of purpose in life. Several participants in both countries explicitly identified the need for a sense of purpose as a requirement for living well. Some of the Norwegian participants talked about the need to be of importance to others, and to contribute to other people's well-being: either as a teacher or through their academic work. Kirsten (N) was motivated through her work of creating new technology, not for profit but for creating a better life for people, while Sam (N) found his main motivation in helping other people "grow", blossom, and build self-confidence. A good life for him is to be able to contribute to his students' development, on a personal level and an academic level. For some of the Australian participants, a sense of purpose related to undertaking research that matters, and teaching that makes a difference.

Work/Life Balance

For most participants in our studies, the pandemic led to change in work/life balance. The direction of this change varied between participants, although almost all participants identified an increase in their workload. For some, and in some instances, work dominated more. Some struggled with the lack of clear delineation between work time and leisure time, with the effect that work took over more of their leisure time than before. They had learned that they need the office to structure their day and keep motivation up for both work and exercise. Others found that because they did not go into the office every day, they were able to step back from work a bit. For instance, Alicia (A) noted “It’s not the centre of my world”. Similarly, Olivia (A) noted that she was able to reflect that “your work is not the most important thing in your life… and that’s partly because you’re working from home. You’ve had to delineate work time and home time and workspace”.

Many participants valued the flexibility that working from home enabled. This included easier family logistics and being able to undertake minor household tasks throughout the day. Gina (N) enjoyed the possibility to make use of daylight (which during wintertime is limited to the time people are in the office) or good weather to go hiking and get some exercise. Robert (N) talked about how the time working from home had taught him to take control of his workload rather than letting the workload control him, and also that he had learned about self-care. For example, he used the new flexibility of the home office to exercise during the day rather than in the evening, to make use of the daylight during the “dark season”. The tendency was, however, to work longer hours than before the pandemic when work was largely office/campus based. On the one hand, the workload increased because they had to do things in new ways and there were more planned meetings. However, the number of ad-hoc tasks (and interruptions) decreased because the in-between meetings in the corridor, lunchroom, and offices (Francisco & Boud, 2021) were no longer happening. Some participants found they were able to develop a work/life balance by not envisaging it as an either/or arrangement. Alicia (N) noted “It’s not about ‘how do I fit my life in around work?’ it’s that ‘this is all part of one tapestry of a life and which bits am I focusing on right now?’”.

In Australia, people were confined to their homes for lengthy periods: especially those living in Melbourne. All participants experienced some time of lockdown, and most mentioned the lack of access to family and friends during this time as helping them to realise how important these relationships are. For instance, Juliette (A) noted, “living well for me at the moment is just having my family and friends around me and actually being able to connect, not just over Zoom …or not just remotely… it’s about connecting with family, connecting with friends, connecting with work colleagues”. Similarly, Olivia (A) had been reminded “that your family and friends are the most important thing, that cliched kind of stuff, but when things get hard, that’s what you fall back on”. Conrad (A) highlighted the critical importance of longer-term friendships “that are built on the foundation of the embodied being together”. He also noted “hugging really matters professionally as well as personally and shaking hands, and I think those things are really important going forward”.

Emily (A) began a new job with a different university during the pandemic (and during this research project) and was working with some people that she had only met via zoom. She found it difficult to develop relationships with these people, noting "those relationships are just on pause… The ones that I've worked with before, … it kind of magnifies those relationships …when you see people all the time you kind of can smooth out the rough edges". Embodied meetings were an important part of a world worth living in for many of the participants.

Discussion

Beliefs that emerged from this study in relation to 'living well in a world worth living in' cannot be said to be ground-breaking. However, as noted by Kaukko et al. (2023), for words or phrases to maintain a rich meaning, we need to "intentionally pause and ask, what does it mean now, in this time, and in this context" (p. 2)? For the participants in this study, the disruption caused by the pandemic made space and time for such a reflection, to stop and ponder about what matters. All participants had some sense of what a world worth living in would look like, and what we might do to move towards such a world, at a global, local, and personal level. Participants' understandings of the components of a world worth living in were impacted by their experiences of the pandemic. Some of the things highlighted by participants were those that they had previously taken-for-granted and lost during the pandemic. There are doubtless other, equally important things that were not explicitly mentioned, and perhaps not even noticed because they had not been lost.

Now we return to the initial questions from the beginning of this chapter: how can we make the most of the changes that occurred because of the pandemic, and what other changes might we create going forward? We are informed by the theory of practice architectures in our discussion of these questions. The theory of practice architectures enables the exploration of arrangements that enable and constrain practices (Kemmis et al., 2014) and is valuable in considering the changes that might support the development of a world worth living in (Francisco et al., 2017). The theory holds that making change requires action in the social, semantic, and space/time dimensions. In the semantic dimension, the cultural-discursive arrangements enable and constrain what is said and thought about in the practice: the sayings. In the space/time dimension, the material-economic arrangements enable and constrain the doings of the practice. And in the social dimension, the social-political arrangements enable and constrain the relatings of the practice (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Our exploration is necessarily bounded, and we focus just on four key issues that emerged in our research: changed technology use; work flexibility; stable employment with good working conditions; and social justice.

The change in how technologies are used was a widespread outcome brought about by the pandemic, which can be seen as a catalyst for further transformations longer term. This transformation has already had implications for practice in higher education: for teaching, for how we engage with our colleagues, where we engage

from, and even who we engage with (Rapanta et al., 2021). Thus, the new developments in technology provide material-economic arrangements that enable further options for increased flexibility for teachers and for students. The changed use of technology has also had a broader impact for the participants in this study. It enabled people to engage in protest movements more easily, as noted by Jocelyn (A) and union movements as noted by Maria (A) and Conrad (A).

Flexibility regarding where, when, and how to work were identified by participants as important in a world worth living in. Due to the transformative changes during the pandemic, maintaining a more flexible approach to “workplace” and “work time” is possible now more than ever (Lizier et al., 2023). The material-economic arrangements of working from home, such as having appropriate equipment and home office furniture, have been established for most academics: if not prior to the pandemic, then certainly during periods of lockdown. Today, when the restrictions caused by the pandemic have been lifted, working from home is likely to be here to stay for many (Smite et al., 2023); as an expectation and as a ‘right’ that workers are entitled to access. While many material-economic arrangements to support working from home (such as rearranging a ‘spare’ room; purchasing a more suitable office chair) were often established rapidly during lockdowns, for many, the practice architectures for more flexible working as a norm are still being negotiated. These include arrangements associated with ensuring regular embodied interactions with colleagues (highlighted by some of our participants as crucial). It is important that these changes really are ‘flexible’ and consider the needs of more vulnerable colleagues, and those for whom working from home is not a positive experience.

Stable employment and good working conditions for self and others were identified by participants as important aspects of a world worth living in. University level policies associated with casual employment arrangements are a crucial element of the practice architectures that enable stable employment. Present policies in Australia support precarity of employment for casually employed academics, and high levels of unpaid work undertaken to become more employable for future work contracts (Smithers et al., 2022). Many of the Australian participants foregrounded these issues in their responses and were prepared to fight for more stable and equitable working conditions for all academics.

The participants in this study were particularly concerned with issues related to social justice, as the pandemic had very different consequences for different people and in different countries. Most of them identified a focus on human well-being and the social-political arrangements related to how relationships were enabled and constrained within the new conditions during the pandemic. At a more personal level this includes practice architectures that enable interactions with a core community of colleagues, family, and friends. At a broader level, it includes cultural-discursive, social-political, and material-economic arrangements that support equity and social justice. In the Norwegian study, for example, several of the participants found purpose and motivation in their work as academics, because they identified education and knowledge as the main ingredients to achieve equality and social justice in the world. They also described aspects of the Scandinavian welfare system that nurtured the

common good rather than a society where everyone is made responsible for themselves. This kind of social safety net can be seen as a type of arrangement that allows people to relate to each other in ways that support a world worth living in *for all.*

In conclusion, the participants in our research identified a range of arrangements associated with living well in a world worth living in. In this chapter, we have collected these into three separate categories: global, local, and personal. However, these categories do not have clear borders and flow into each other. Key components of living well in a world worth living in include social justice and equity for all; a sustainable environment; a sense of community, and associated relationships; and ongoing professional and personal development. Importantly, this includes a sense of agency associated with guiding one's own direction deliberately and knowingly, as well as fighting/working for a just society, a sustainable future, and a professional life that is rewarding and challenging but not overwhelming.

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Chapter 16
Conclusion: Forging Future Worlds Worth Living in for All

Sally Windsor, Mervi Kaukko, and Stephen Kemmis

Abstract This chapter concludes the volume, the series and the *World Worth Living in for All* project. It discusses how the contributors in this book have actively sought to change their worlds in order to make them better for all. The discussion highlights how authors and those they have engaged with over time recognise that education needs disrupting and transforming, and for its boundaries to be expanded. We see in these chapters that people can, and do, actively explore possible futures in their daily lives. In this summary of varied projects engaged in actively making future worlds worth living in, this chapter looks to the past for some wisdom. What began as a listening project, has in itself expanded to one that has documented a range of activist educators who will continue to strive to make a world more worth living in for all.

Keywords Praxis · Disruption · Transformation · Future worlds · Educator activists

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For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/5uFmPaD4sjmdhAVbHUjB04?si=dc0bf3bb6e104b1e

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Introduction

Although this chapter signals the end of this volume, this book series and the project, the work of finding and creating 'Worlds Worth Living in for All' will never be finished. Just as education is never finished. Education is always expanding, disrupting, exploring, activating, visualising, and making, as these chapters attest. This book meets us in the process—of becoming, of grappling, of transforming, and of holding our present forms of education in front of us. We see educators starting to shape education and the world into what we need as we step, together, into our future.

At the beginning of this project, we anticipated that this volume would be looking to the future, because "futurity is embedded at the heart of the educational process… and our desires and fears for that future are latent in our increasingly urgent search for educational alternatives" (Facer, 2016, p. 64). Reading through the chapters now, however, it occurs to us that this future focus may not always be clear to the reader. This is because, we believe, none of the chapters are interested in a predetermined future; that is, they do not forecast what or *how* the future might be. Instead, they are interested in actively engaging in practices to make the future one where it is possible for everyone and everything to live well. In any case, we know that the past, present, and future are always intertwined. What is evident throughout the two volumes of the *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All* series is that various types of hopeful action are under way, in the present, to create a future that is worth living in. They exemplify the 'logic of hope' that Kemmis, Reimer, and Mahon noted in Chap. 2 in this volume. And the authors of all chapters show a commitment to "*praxis*; history-making action" (Kemmis, 2023, p. 15, italics in original), albeit in a world where the future is looking increasingly precarious.

When writing the concluding chapter to volume 1 of this series in November 2021, Stephen Kemmis and Kathleen Mahon discussed the urgency of the ecological crisis and the failure of the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26) on Climate Change to limit global warming to 1.5 °C by the end of the century. As we write this chapter in November 2023, the urgency of the climate crisis has not diminished. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) AR6 synthesis report released in March 2023 repeats the same message: actions to combat climate change are urgently needed. And since that last book, the world has continued to present us with one global catastrophe after another (Pedersen et al., 2022) including Russia's illegal invasion of the Ukraine and the life-shattering conflict in Gaza between the militant group Hamas and the Israeli Defence Forces. Even though the climate crisis and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza are in many ways quite different, they are both rooted in accumulated errors in human practice, have grave consequences for the quality of life of humans, non-human animals, and the planet at large, and will continue to cause suffering until they are resolved.

Reflecting on these pressing and very-much-in-the-present 'nested crises' (Kaukko et al., 2021), we see that practices have histories and so, for this concluding chapter of the series, we draw upon some of this history (Gordon, 2016). We draw

upon this history while keeping in mind that educational practices are always future-focused. This volume's contributors and editors have in numerous and varied constellations remained mindful of John Dewey's (1938) caution about being so preoccupied with preparing for a supposed future that the "temporality at play within the present goes unseen" (Ek & Macintyre Latta, 2013, p. 88). As Dewey reminds us, "the present affects the future anyway" (1938, p. 50).

The contributions to this book are examples of disrupting an existing future and bringing into being another future. Like Dewey, Norwegian sociologist and peace theorist Galtung (1974) promoted education as a tool for building peace and democracy because, he argued, critical thinking and a deep understanding of the root causes of crises, conflict, and violence are the only ways to find creative and peaceful solutions. This aligns with Biesta's (2022) more recent claim that what we do in education is first and foremost an existential question. It raises questions about how we, as human beings, exist 'in' and 'with' the natural and social world, and importantly in education, how we can equip, encourage, and give hope for the next generation to exist 'in' and 'with' the world in their own right. Biesta argues that existing in one's own right does not mean that people can just do what they want. Instead, and returning to education, we need to bear in mind that in order to exist 'in' and 'with' the world we need to be humble to the limits of the natural and social world. This brings questions of democracy and ecology into education (Biesta, 2022). While we recognise that education alone cannot solve world-wide problems of this scale, their magnitude does not mean that they are beyond our reach. And although the sense of urgency is increasing, the world does not have to be changed completely or all at once. As the chapters of the book suggest, the momentum to act is already here. Change is not something to be imagined in the potential future; it is already happening in this present moment.

Expanding the Boundaries of Education

The drive to expand the boundaries of what education is, means, and should do is clearly articulated in Chap. 3 of this volume by Rauno Huttunen and Hannu Heikkinen. They urge us to act with the knowledge that human wellbeing can never be uncoupled from planetary wellbeing, and we continue to consider and value human life over and above the more-than-human world at our peril. As many scholars of feminist and post/decolonial traditions argue (see, for example, Andreotti, 2016, 2021; Andreotti et al., 2018; Fraser, 2012; Stein et al., 2022), tackling human-induced catastrophes requires coming up with new ways to draw upon the wisdom of Indigenous peoples who have lived on this planet in sustainable and relatively harmonious ways for millennia. We can even see attempts in that direction have been made in the most recent IPCC report, in which the authors specifically attempted to incorporate 'ways of knowing' from Indigenous peoples (Mustonen, 2023). In Chap. 13, Katrina Thorpe, Cathie Burgess, and Christine Grice show how pushing cultural, geographical, and educational boundaries in teacher education is possible. They describe a

unique initiative that engages student teachers with important Indigenous ideas of *Country* while studying in a large city. The *Learning from Country* program, which aims to enhance the application of Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies in the daily teaching practice of early career teachers, draws on an ontology of relationality. The Australian Aboriginal notion of *Country* has many layered meanings and requires us to consider all things—all living things, the water, and the land—and connects these things "to each other and multiple spiritual and symbolic realms" as Aunty Laklak Burarrwanga explains (in Wright et al., 2012, p. 54). That a program such as *Learning from Country* is so novel shows us that the present and persistent effects of colonisation on current education practices have reduced the boundaries of what education is, yet, at the same time, the chapter offers hope that these boundaries can once again be expanded.

Disrupting and Transforming Education

In many of these chapters, we see educators taking risks, as Biesta (2013) encourages us to do in his book *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. They are disrupting established patterns and practices in education that have by now become stale or brittle, and, from the points of view of these teachers and students, unsuited to twenty-first century problems, issues, crises, and tastes. These contributors are exploring new ways for education to reproduce and transform established cultures, material realities, and social and political circumstances. In Chap. 12, for example, Kristin Reimer describes an alternative university entry pathway, and recounts the experiences of a cohort of students who have previously experienced educational disruption, or as she puts it, have "had educational disadvantage" (p. 169). Reimer shows us how the intentionally relational *Monash Access Program* has given the mature age students of the program an "educational advantage" and a space to reflect on education's role in helping us to live well in a world worth living. Leila Khaled in Chap. 11 also outlines a form of disruption to established patterns and practices in education when she argues for the importance of online Special Religious Education (SRE). Khaled notes that students have had the right to receive religious education "by a clergyman or other religious teacher" (p. 151) in the Australian state of New South Wales since 1866 and that many schools offer some form of SRE. However, she shows that the participation rate among students is low and probably dropping. In making the case for online Muslim SRE, Khaled argues that because "Muslim youth's lives, identity and feelings of belonging have been impacted by public scrutiny, counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism policies, and excessive hostile media directed at them" (p. 151), measures are needed to enhance the wellbeing of this group in particular. Khaled explains that religion has traditionally been the context to which young people have turned to find meaning, so finding alternative ways to provide SRE is crucial.

Exploring Possible Futures in Education

Some of the chapters explore how it might be possible to nurture new possible futures or ways of being for people individually, and, at the same time, new forms of culture, economies, environments, and social life for us all collectively. In Chap. 7, Mervi Kaukko, Nick Haswell, and Jane Wilkinson in their research of migrant and refugee children in Australia and Finland show how play in educational settings allows children to imagine their future lives, especially for this group who are experiencing new ways of being in the present. Play, they argue, is not just important for children, but it should be considered "broadly as an element of [a] good life… playing is more or less the same as living well and if playing is inclusive and welcoming to all, the world can be made a little more liveable for all" (p. 79). Nicole Brunker, in Chap. 8, spoke to eleven children between the ages of 4 and 14 about their experiences in and out of school and asked them how they expected that these experiences would shape their lives in the future. While the children recognised that their school lives and their out-of-school lives were different, they showed an awareness of how school had shaped them in terms of becoming 'good students' and hoped that it would help prepare them for more fulfilling lives in their futures. In Chap. 10, Gørill Warvik Vedeler, Merete Saus, Tatiana Wara, Hilde Sollid, and Astrid Strandbu considered how a group of pre-service teachers who choose to live and study in areas north of the Arctic Circle in Norway are able to do so well. In conversations with the researchers, these young people, all under 25 years of age, described their negotiation of 'translocational' positionalities and identities. They often referred to the tensions and power imbalance between the North and the South of Norway, yet ultimately their sense of belonging and identity was developed by fostering their relationships with "the environment, nature and culture" (p. 133), which strengthened connections to place. Linda Mahony, in Chap. 9, reports on what it means for families to live well in the aftermath of separation and divorce in an interview study of 12 mothers in Australia. As Mahony describes, when parents of children separate, the lives of many others, not least of all their children, are affected. Her study concludes that when families and schools have a shared sense of responsibility which involves providing proactive support rather than merely reacting, the wellbeing of children is enhanced.

Educators as Activists

What we see in this volume is the understanding that transformation is not something that is in the future, it is already happening. The contributions in this book highlight that issues can be addressed by changing people's practices. Mahon and colleagues (2019, p. 464) define critical educational praxis, "as a kind of social-justice oriented, educational practice/praxis, with a focus on asking critical questions and creating conditions for positive change". In other words, the chapters are examples of critical scholarship that is transformative and activist (Stetsenko, 2015), involving educators

working towards a better world, and recognising their responsibility to support urgent action for change. Katina Thelin and Anette Forssten Seiser, in Chap. 4, recount their exploration of Swedish school principals' perspectives on living well in a world with living in for all. The school principals understand their role as one to actively make the world a better place and to encourage and support others to make positive changes. They argue that the role of a school principal is not just important in educational settings but is important for civic change as well. In Chap. 6, Andi Salamon, Leanne Gibbs, and Mandy Cooke compare three case studies in an exploration of right-based approaches in early childhood education (ECE). The case studies focused on different groups within ECE: leaders, educators, and children, but, when explored in connection with each other, highlight how and when ECE educators and leaders can 'fulfil' the responsibility of initiating young children into a world where they can act and interact, and be "oriented towards the good for each person… and… the good for humankind" (p. 61). In Chap. 14, Stephanie Garoni, Jo Lampert, and Lutz Hoff show us how four early career teachers who recently graduated from the 'Nexus' teacher education program responded to the idea of living well in a world worth living in. The Nexus program is designed to place graduates in schools considered hard-to-staff in the state of Victoria, Australia. These new teachers entered Nexus with the desire to make change in schools and showed how it is possible to bring the notion of a life worth living into their classrooms despite those classrooms being in schools considered to have multiple challenges.

Each chapter in this book has sought to understand how different aspects of education in the present might change lives in the future. In Chap. 5, Fiona Longmuir highlights that common school practices do little to orient school students, many of whom are disengaged from schooling, towards a hopeful future. She argues that when youth voice and participation are constrained, we reduce the capacity of these young people to engage in their own futures. Longmuir cites Biesta and Tedder (2007) who posit that fostering agency be done with the "intention to bring about a future that is different from the present and the past" (p. 136). In Chap. 15, Susanne Francisco and Ela Sjølie describe research conducted in Australia and Norway where 30 academics (14 in Australia and 16 in Norway) kept journals and were interviewed on two occasions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second interviews, which took place in December 2020 and January 2021, participants were asked to explicitly reflect on what a world worth living in was to them. The academics in both countries felt that living through the pandemic reinforced their desire to work towards (and, if needed, *fight* for) "a just society [and] a sustainable future" (p. 225). The participants in Francisco and Sjølie's research believed that in their work they held great responsibility to bring better worlds into being for the students they teach and the societies in which they live.

Making and Seeing 'The World' Worth Living in

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958/1998) distinguishes 'the earth' from 'the world'. The earth, she explains, is all which is given by nature (natural givens), and which humans consume in order to survive. The world is not natural but rather "the artificial product of human work and the site of human actions" (Ephraim, 2017, p. 34). Arendt (1954) only wrote a little that focused explicitly on education, yet she believed that education and schools in particular play a key role in reforming 'the world' (or society). Arendt believed education provided ubiquitous sites where children should gradually be introduced to the existing and conventional world by adults. Yet paradoxically, she acknowledged that without fresh perspectives the world becomes ritualistic and stale; it "is the new generation itself, which has the power to envision a future very different not only from the present but also from the present's hopes for the future" (Higgins, 2010, p. 378). Arendt (1954) outlined an argument that the crisis in education can be seen "first and foremost as refusal of adults to take responsibility for the world" (Biesta, 2010, p. 564). Throughout the chapters in this series, we see adults taking responsibility for world building, walking the fine line between introducing new generations to the world, yet listening to and collaborating with the young to ensure their developing perspectives can shape a future world worth living in.

We end this chapter, this volume, and this project by reaching even further into the past to the writings of Charles Darwin. In the last paragraph of the first edition of Darwin's (1859/2006) *On the Origin of Species,* he evocatively describes 'an entangled bank', full of all kinds of life forms that have evolved in relation to one another. He writes:

> It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the direct and indirect action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection entailing Divergence of Character and Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into several life forms, or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (1859/2006, p. 388)

Perhaps we can see something like this 'entangled bank' when we look back on the chapters of this second volume of *Living Well in Worlds Worth Living in for All*. In these pages, we see ordinary people in schools and other everyday educational settings trying new things, in a Deweyan spirit of experimentation, to help others live well in worlds worth living in for all. Before our eyes, established institutional forms of education are being varied, and they are mutating and evolving into new forms.

We see educational practices evolving, pushing around and beyond the confines of their present niches to colonise new habitats and to extend the boundaries of what education is and means in our present and future here in the twenty-first century. The contributors to this volume have listened to the voices of some of the pioneers who have ventured bravely into new ways of living and doing education, and, through these pages, they tell their travellers' tales. As Kaukko et al. (2023) wrote in Volume 1, the contributors are those who "spend time seeking a world worth living in, [in order] to understand what more [can be done] and what else is a world worth living in" (p. 3). The authors and those they have collaborated and engaged with in the course of their research studies, show sustained efforts, over many years, to be an active part of education's double purpose: to foster a "good life for each person,… conducted in ways that model and foster the good life for humankind—what it means to live well in a world worth living in" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 40). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) asked, how we can collectively and deliberately attend to and act in the present in ways that "bequeath to the next generation a world that will be worth inheriting?" (p. 2534). The contributors whose chapters appear in these two volumes of *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All* have offered answers—perhaps hesitant, cautious, and incomplete—to that question, and in doing so, have ventured beyond the forms of education that currently reproduce the problems that deform and distort our world, our cultures, our economies, our environments, and the forms of our social and political life.

Within these reproductive tendencies, new life is stirring. Old forms are being contested. New forms are being tried. People are grappling towards new ways of being that respond to the nested crises that humanity currently confronts, and that all other species and the world's geophysical systems also face, thanks to the ingenuity of human beings and our ignorance of the ramifying consequences of so many of our actions. Perhaps the chrysalis is shattering, and rising generations of students and teachers are beginning to occupy new niches in the world's ecosystems in ways that will ameliorate at least some of the damage that their predecessors have done. It is a source of inspiration and hope to consider that, like the web of life that evolved into Darwin's imagined 'entangled bank', new forms of education are also emerging, helping rising generations to find their ways towards more reasonable forms of culture, more productive and sustainable economies and environments, and more just and democratic forms of social life. But these new forms will not come by themselves. To achieve them, there is much to overcome, and not just complacency, conservatism, and the power of self-interests. As Susanne Francisco and Ela Sjølie indicated in Chap. 15 of this volume, new forms of life, in new worlds, will be the ones that rising generations and their allies fight for. And win.

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