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Chapter 5. Pedagogies of the Peripheries: City as Classroom

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Context

This chapter explores the principles that underpin the pedagogical approach to developing a 'living curriculum' alongside young people in Dharavi. This approach to researching creative pedagogy emphasises the practice of being 'inside the research event', alongside young people (Hay and Paris 2019). Compound 13 Lab provides an opportunity to engage young people in imagining alternative futures to build their hopes and aspirations. The Lab sets out to establish a creative, shared space for experimental design, exploration and dialogue, drawing on the resources of the recycling industry, re-thinking plastic waste and creating a space for young people to explore issues of sustainability and ecological design as part of a broader set of learning activities that draw on the resources and materials of the neighbourhood. The Lab invites innovative, entrepreneurial solutions led by Dharavi's young people to the challenges that they face, and to build creative skills, both in their lives now and for their future livelihoods, which are likely to be uncertain, with haphazard and interrupted opportunities for earning and learning. This chapter reflects on the creative and relational pedagogies and processes that respond directly to issues of social, cognitive and environmental injustice and inequality and offer 'pedagogies of hope' for young people in Dharavi. In collaboration with ACORN India, young people in Compound 13 Lab worked alongside a team of academics, artists and activists drawn from India and the UK.

Compound 13 Lab shares a building with ACORN Foundation India's Dharavi Project, which provides opportunities for learning and support for families and children living in and around the 13th Compound. ACORN's most famous project is the percussion collective Dharavi Rocks! (see Chapter 10) which has established a reputation as one of India's leading youth arts projects, performing all over the country and occasionally internationally.

The pedagogical approach is built from various traditions in youth and community arts (Jeffery, 2008), with a focus on dialogical and experimental methods. Parallels can also be drawn with the creative approaches to learning developed by the education charity House of Imagination UK (formerly *5x5x5=creativity,* Bancroft *et al* 2008)). The charity's signature project, *School Without Walls*, poses the question 'What is school, and how can we do school differently? For example, *School Without Walls* projects begin by taking up residency with whole classes of children and inserting the creative learning space into a chosen cultural setting in which the conventions and frameworks associated with the 'classroom' begin to disappear. Children are placed at the centre of their own learning, so that the themes, programmes and content of learning is largely directed by the children, facilitated through a method of co-enquiry. Adults (including artists, educators and mentors) work alongside the young people 'as companions in learning' to facilitate meaningful, creative enquiries in real life contexts. Arts, media and design education – using creative methods and creative pedagogies – includes hands on learning with new and digital technologies. This process develops a repertoire of 'learning to learn' skills and competencies and has shown increased motivation, purposeful engagement, authentic learning and social empowerment (Hay and Paris 2019).

In Dharavi, any approaches to learning need to take account of the complex issues around knowledge politics (see Ch. 2), the qualities of informality, conditions of marginality and specific local context,

including language differences, gender inequalities and the very limited access to technologies and resources faced by most children and families. The Lab explores and tests out a creative, inclusive and innovative pedagogy that is learner-centred and participatory, to develop a sense of creative agency (Jeffery 2005; Hay and Paris 2019). This space of enquiry sets out to value local knowledges and practices that can be communicated within and beyond Dharavi, whilst remaining mindful of the risks and power relationships involved in rhetorics of 'empowerment', agency and creativity (Banaji, 2017; Banaji, Burn and Buckingham, 2010; Denmead, 2019). The guidance of ACORN's experienced team of facilitators and youth workers, many of whom are drawn from Dharavi and have 'come up through the ranks' of ACORN's work, has been essential in developing approaches which take into account the very complex circumstances and challenges faced by the young people who attend. A residency in collaboration with India-wide arts education charity and research organisation Art 1st [1] acted as an important stimulus and catalyst for the first phase of this work, which in turn built on scoping work/pilot projects undertaken by industrial designer Rajat Gajjar and artist Mrugen Rathod (both graduates of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda) with Jeffery, Joag and Parry between 2017 and 2019.

Art 1st, led by social entrepreneur Ritu Khoda, and advised by Sharmila Samant, develops curriculum materials and pilots approaches to arts education pedagogy across a range of education settings in India. It is one of the leading organizations campaigning to introduce a more systematic and sustained approach to visual arts education and creative learning within the Indian education system as a whole. Underpinning this programme of work is a comprehensive initiative to develop better training and support for artist-educators in India who want to work in school and community settings, an important source of employment and opportunity for arts graduates.

A key factor underpinning the collaboration is the broader web of partnerships that support the emergent pedagogic discourses described in this chapter: the co-construction of a research environment that draws on the existing pedagogic approach of ACORN India (see Chapter 8), the approaches to arts education and social practice developed by the MFA programme founded in 2013 by Tushar Joag and Sharmila Samant at Shiv Nadar University, and the aims and objectives of the UK-based research projects led by Parry, Jeffery and Hay funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which explicitly link to the UN SDGs, and the longstanding relationships built up over the last decade that underpin the methodological approach set out in this book, drawing on the networks and expertise of the research team as a whole. This learning assemblage (McFarlane 2011), built on the principles of partnership and action research (Jeffery 2005) establishes a knowledge ecology which provides a framework for action and reflection. It has also begun to establish an archive of methods and approaches which offer frameworks for knowledges that have been uncovered to be placed into

[1] Art 1st (www.art1st.co.in) describes its work as follows: Art1st was established in 2009 with a vision to create and develop learning environments that nurture and strengthen imagination, visual literacy, creative skills and cultural awareness in children and educators. Drawing inspiration from the abundant traditions of Indian visual art, be it folk or fine art, photography or performance. Our endeavour is to highlight the significant contribution that these arts have played in India's aesthetic, socio-cultural and political history. We collaborate and invite as mentors contemporary artists, authors, designers, filmmakers, educators and historians towards engaging with art, a powerful medium, through which we can understand ourselves and transform the world around us. Our work focuses on:

– Supporting schools and educators to implement a strong visual arts curriculum that we have developed

– Publishing children's books on Indian art and artists

– Producing films that celebrate the journeys and perspectives of India's contemporary artists

– Establishing studio workshops for children to learn first-hand from India's established and emerging artists

– Organising public seminars and discussion forums on Indian visual art and artists

circulation locally, as well as for different knowledges, perspectives, experiences and aspirations to be brought into dialogue with each other (see also Chapter 2).

Many of the families of these children and young people earn their living from the informal recycling sector and they generally have limited access to formal education. Formal education provision in Dharavi consists of a variety of primary schools sponsored by the state, local NGOs and religious foundations, and a much more limited range of options at secondary level (Khan, 2013) typically have 100 – 120 children per class and, in common with much educational provision in India outside of the most expensive private schools, learning is based on an instruction-focussed curriculum with basic and limited learning resources available. For many children living in Dharavi, attendance at school is likely to be haphazard and as Balagopalan (2014) points out in a study of working class and marginalized children's experiences of schooling in Calcutta, the questionable qualities of the formal education that they receive is unlikely to fit well with the more immediately applicable knowledge-forms and skills that they acquire through everyday routines, experiences and labour within peer, neighbourhood and family networks, expeditious for survival in a hazardous and unpredictable urban landscape. The implementation of a design and innovation lab supports ACORN's wider programme of informal creative learning through the arts and music, and sets out to use the principles of co-design with communities. The Lab facilitates creative learning and knowledge exchange through the residency programme by combining open-ended artistic projects, with the Lab as space of making and experimentation. With the 13th Compound as a hub in the complex network of actors, processes and sites of informal waste recovery and plastic recycling economy, the residency programme explores the interdependence between the formal/informal economy, the socially included and socially excluded through the stories of waste.

Working alongside artists

In this context art is conceived as a method and a platform for learning and knowledge generation - art as artfulness, and art conceived in a broad, inclusive sense as a 'mode of making' and agency (Jeffery, 2005). The research team enabled situated approaches of co-production with live research and set out to co-construct learning with young people, reinventing the use of waste and taking this learning forward into real life solutions. Together we explored residency as method (see Introduction), with arts based, participatory pedagogies opening up the spaces of possibility in the arts through a series of curated encounters. Making these creative processes visible was a vital element of the research, with a focus on young people primarily as producers of art as a means of exploration and investigation of the world around them.

Art is about making meaning and the imagination. As a research team we recognize the value of long-term involvement and engagement, the artist as a lender of tools and processes, working alongside, valuing co-creation - inviting and empowering rather than prescribing (Hay and Paris 2019). Creative artistic practice lives with that uncertainty and trust in the process. The artists bring a way of working - questioning, open-mindedness, enabling - building a safe space for young people to be open in the co-creation of meaning that can be understood and shared through art making.

The 'signature pedagogies' explored by Thomson *et al* (2012) demonstrate that artists model various roles and approaches that young people can observe and imitate. Working with artists in an educational context offers potential to bring new perspectives to the teaching and learning experience. Pringle (2011) discusses how artists engage with learners through discussion and by exchanging ideas and experiences. In the residency processes described below, there is evidence of co-constructed, collaborative learning taking place, whereby knowledge is generated and shared. In this model, the artist functions as co-learner, rather than as an infallible expert transmitting knowledge to the participants, opening up conversations for enquiry-based learning (Aprill 2003).

Working alongside artists and designers in residence and ACORN Foundation, young people explore issues of waste, work, education, survival and sustainability in Dharavi. Music and the arts open up spaces of possibility and inform ongoing community development. Young people are invited to make small acts of reclamation, given space, time and attention, and working with the haptic and sonic materials and tools that are to hand, experimenting with technologies – photography and digital media, audiovisual tools, solar power, new processes, re-manufacturing, cultures of repair, adaptation and re-use. This 'maker culture' is open source, horizontal and shared, prioritising holistic and kinaesthetic approaches to learning, and engaging with the wider neighbourhood with learning in motion, in and through the spaces of the city.

Learning precariousness

The everyday lives of young people growing up in Dharavi are subject to all sorts of interruptions and vulnerabilities: unexpected illness, bereavement, eviction, violence, hunger, fire and flood. Learning precariousness might involve all kinds of small aggravations: being accustomed to not being able to wash, wearing the same clothes day after day, having nowhere to urinate in privacy, a shortage of food, sudden expulsion from shelter – all these conditions, and many more, are unsettling 'facts of life.'

Therefore researchers and visitors need to set out by questioning their own assumptions, as numerous ethnographic and journalistic studies of the livelihoods of families in such conditions attest (Boo, 2012; Campana, 2013, Balagopan, 2014; Banaji, 2017). As Shakuntala Banaji (2017) points out, there are many constructions of 'childhood' to be considered, from the varied national and international legislative and policy frameworks that define young peoples' entitlements to care and schooling, to the discourses, restrictions and routines that shape parental expectations and aspirations 'for' children – within which children learn to perform and act out their social roles. Normative or idealised versions of 'childhood' are thus unhelpful. Young people, especially those working class Indians from the Muslim minority, or growing up within the restrictions of lower caste position, or arriving as migrants from far-away places, are economically and socially disenfranchised in multiple ways, including being subject to the moralizing gaze of NGOs and government, which tend to label working class youth either as 'vulnerable children' or as 'uninteresting or homogenous masses with no right to representation or communication power' (Banaji, 2017, p. 187) .

Many different forms of labour are woven into the fabric of young people's lives in Dharavi. It would be an oversimplification to consider 'child labour' in terms of Victorian images of children forced to work in factories, but as they grow older children are drawn into all kinds of work, often to do with helping the family unit (Banaji 2017, p.195). The burden of reproductive labour within the family is significant, with young women in particular expected to take on a significant share of household responsibilities - cleaning, cooking, washing, and looking after relatives. These invisible, un-remunerated labours of care work and the increasing demands to contribute economically to the family unit as they transition into adulthood highlight the difficulties for many young people of maintaining their access to education – more immediate economic imperatives get in the way. The costs of continuing in education, particularly beyond primary school level, are a significant barrier (Khan, 2013). Forms of family labour are gendered. Everywhere in Dharavi one will see young people running errands, and sometimes helping with family business, whether that might be a tea stall, a repair shop or simply fetching and carrying or assisting parents and relatives. These are not the middle-class routines of 'protected childhood' where a comfortable home offers clearly demarcated opportunities, and where there is sufficient capital and resources to imagine a future of independent self-reliance or clear-cut career paths.

Many of Dharavi's families live in circumstances where it is necessary to queue for several hours a day to collect water, or simply to wait in lengthy lines to wash or use the toilet (Manecksha, 2013). These simple facts of marginalization and scarcity ensure that children learn about what it means to be exposed to everyday dangers – hazardous environmental conditions, poor sanitation, and, for many, multiple forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Banaji 2017). For these young people, the 'education system' as a totality could be considered to be their whole environment: the spaces of the neighbourhood, peers, family relations, and multiple forms of apprenticeship and learning through everyday work and labour. Routines and habits are important in the formation of identities, learned and cut through with both overt and hidden sets of assumptions and discourses, expectations forged in class, religion, or media – examples of which are chronicled in careful detail in Banaji's outstanding ethnographic work on children, media and growing up in India (2017). Thus, it is important to give attention to the routines, rhythms and everyday habits which constitute young peoples' formative experiences, and which shape and mark the everyday textures of life growing up in Dharavi.

Colin Ward's work, *The Child in the City* (1978) is salient here in its attention to the social and spatial aspects of growing up in urban settings. Beyond the spaces of formal schooling, Ward points to the ways in which the child's interaction with the streets and other open spaces of the neighbourhood are formative, especially when 'home' is cramped and crowded, there might be no private garden, there is very little privacy and no expectation of having 'a room of one's own'. This is where spaces like ACORN's Dharavi project can provide some sense of security and possibility, simply by being available as a social space where trusting relationships and friendships can be formed, as a place rich in learning resources and open to the possibility of play, pleasure and new encounters (cf. discussion on *Dharavi Rocks* in Chapter 8). The social ties and bonds built through projects like *Dharavi Rocks* also open up the possibility for testing out and experimenting with new forms of livelihood – through forms of peer mentoring and vertical learning (Jeffery 2005) where older young people take responsibility for looking after and teaching their younger peers, opening up learning pathways and skills sharing that can extend the horizon of possibility, enabling young people to move through the city with a greater sense of confidence and purpose. Ward sought to understand and analyse the impact of the built environment on peoples' lives and saw that the urban environment generated forms of spatial and social pedagogy; McFarlane (2011) builds on a similar 'object-oriented' approach to develop a theory of urban learning rooted in the self-regulated assemblages of the neighbourhood: the tactics, tools and routines of everyday inhabitation. For young people on the margins, as McFarlane points out in a discussion of children living in and around Mumbai's Central Terminus, 'shelter and livelihood are always temporary, never settled.' (2011, p.46).

> 'It is their ability to learn this kind of worldliness – a particular kind of dwelling as education of attention - that dramatizes and addresses the marginality of these children. These forms of learning are not dependent on knowing the city as if it were a field of infomatics, but on learning the city through the senses in relation to fear, hope, fantasy, fun, wonder and so on: through a haptic incremental immersion rather than simply a cognitive or optical view, as well as through the shifting power relations or gestures of group dynamics.' (McFarlane 2011, p. 47)

Both McFarlane and Ward point towards forms of social and spatial pedagogy that recognise and acknowledge the crucial role of 'coming to know' through lived experience, in the intersubjectivity of people and environment, and in the assemblages of encounters, objects, materials and ideas that make up everyday lives. The neighbourhood is a force-field shot through with power relations. Experiences of gender, religion, language, caste and occupation all play a role in framing and shaping young peoples' knowledges and expectations, and to return to the question of the 'right to the city', how young people come to know – and potentially challenge and subvert - their place in the city.

Artists' Pedagogies | What is the role of the artist with young people?

This section is built on conversations with three young artists central to the co-design of the creative pedagogical approach. Each of the 'emerging professional artists' featured here were invited to work at the Lab in order to refine and develop their pedagogical practice and also to reflect on their own position as artist-educators in the context of a highly stratified society, as part of the wider AHRC-funded framework of collaboration between the UK partners, Shiv Nadar University. Art 1st and ACORN India. In this context, reflection and dialogue is essential in order to 'un-make' and untangle assumptions and preconceptions. The Lab provides an experimental space for interdisciplinary learning conversations that would be unlikely to happen in more formal or discipline-specific institutional settings.

Vrishali Purandare is a postgraduate from the Department of Art and Performing Arts, Shiv Nadar University and a graduate in sculpture from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. She also undertook a course in Hydrogeology in order to support explorations and experiments with water ecologies. Her practice aims to draw interstitial and experimental solutions that stem from the interrelationships between community-based art making, ecology and pedagogy. Her methodology involves generating a dialogue that culminates into a site-specific display of the work done along with the members of a community. Currently she works as an artist mentor at Art1st, where she has been engaging with children, teachers and artists to explore possibilities of research and innovation through visual arts.

Art as Inquiry - Where do ideas come from?

In order to make the learning process for children participatory and relevant, there was a need to develop an understanding of the community that the young people belong to. Vrishali responded to this by designing activities that required children to respond, express and take a lead on conversations. Children's responses illuminated details of the socio-cultural context of the community they are a part of. This became one of the ways of identifying and working around subjects that concerned children's everyday life.

Vrishali says "For instance - in the introductory class, after I finished introducing myself, one of the children asked "*Aapka ghar kahan hain*?" (meaning: where is your house?). To answer, I made a quick map to show where my house was. The student's question steered our class as we turned introductions into an interactive session where each child drew the route to their homes. The session had to be such that one, one really gets to know more than just the names of the students ... trying to understand where they are coming from, and who they are." This provided Vrishali with insights into their lives, challenges and friendships.

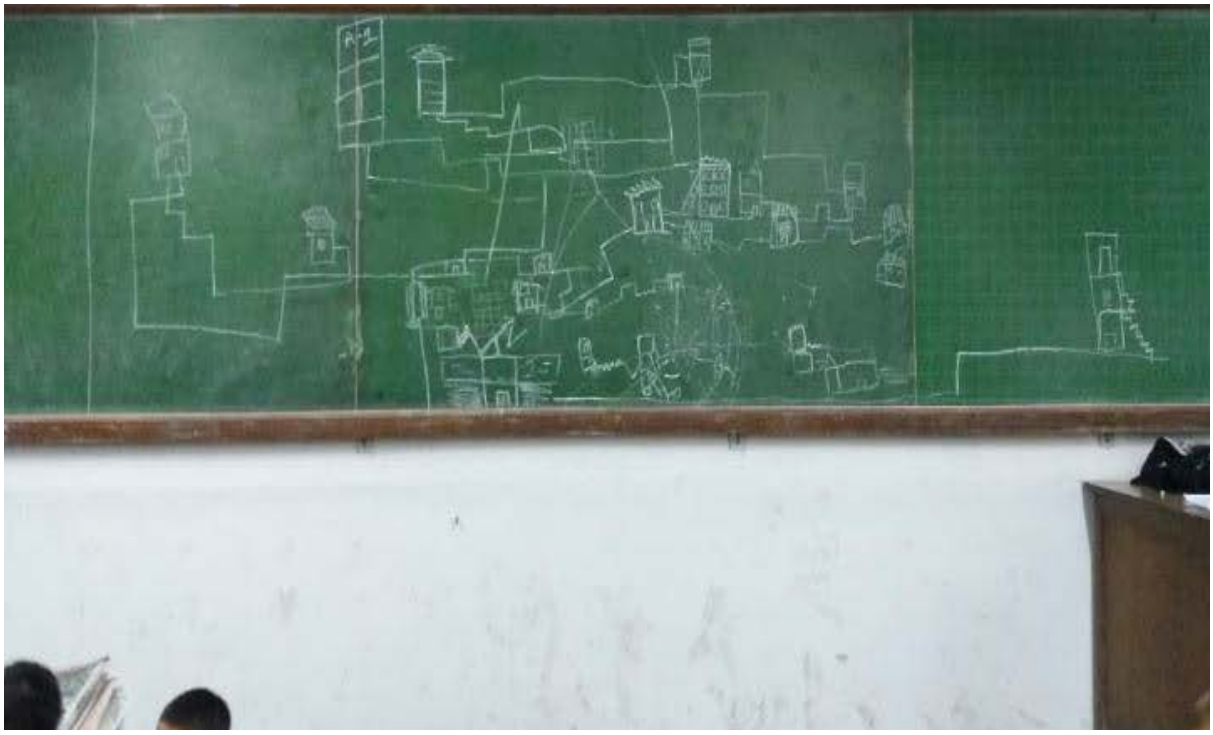

Fig 1. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019) Collective neighbourhood map on blackboard

Fig 2. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Childrens' paintings of Dharavi homes

She continues “This was extended into an exercise that took off from the concept of mapping and required children to reflect and become conscious of their own explorations of space and 3 dimensionality.”

Another method used to encourage participation was identifying sites and times of gathering within the locality that would stimulate discussions leading into a meaningful engagement or intervention, to develop dialogue between the young people and the community in the public realm. In the current political climate of India, populist politics are reframing existing human rights laws towards ethno-religious nationalism, in a process of careful and strategic erosion. Efforts towards amending and editing out words like ‘secularism’ from the Preamble of the Indian Constitution were underway (Mohanty, 2020). Having worked as a facilitator, Vrishali knew that the Preamble is published at the beginning of all children’s textbooks and was available for each child to read from. Thus, the connection was made, and this was identified as a time of gathering to read the Preamble in four languages: Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and English, and children’s interpretations of the text were discussed.

Fig 3. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Drawing the neighbourhood

Fig 4. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). ‘Moving Mountains’

Vrishali focused on supporting the children and young people’s ideas in response to their immediate environment. On Children’s Day, ACORN had organised a trip for children to the nearby Maharashtra Nature Park where day long educational programmes on performance arts and environment had been planned. This opportunity was utilised to further the discussion on environment and ecology with children. The children engaged with material available in the park to create an on-site installation. This opened up a dialogue on several fronts:
a) is the installation thus made, art or not?
b) based on things children had collected informed a discussion on food chains

Vrishali comments, “They collected twigs and found remains of skeletons of animals and leaves - so then because children were picking these things up, I thought let's just use this material and make

something, and so we went around the campus looking for yellow and red leaves of all different hues.”

Fig 5. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Found object at Maharashtra Nature Park

Fig 6. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Making a leaf *mandala* together at Maharashtra Nature Park

With the mixed age groups Vrishali highlighted the issues of c*hoice, agency, ownership and freedom* (Craft 2015). Eliciting the children's ideas was vital to the sense of agency of the group, allowing them to feed their ideas into the ongoing development of individual and collective artwork. Providing opportunities to be responsive to ideas in a dynamic learning environment was central to the process of learning. In another session, children and young people were invited to explore the local neighbourhood in self chosen small groups alongside adults. The areas they wanted to document were shortlisted by children themselves. Children had made their own sketchbooks and the adults also documented their creative learning processes. This 'documentation walk' provided opportunities for children to make decisions and take ownership of their learning. Exploring locally available material allowed for exploration and developing an awareness of the local crafts or occupations and a wide variety of materials in the area.

Ward's (1978) seminal work on 'The Child in the City' makes the city more legible to children through play. We can learn from the way children navigate and experience the city; how they play and learn through their everyday environments.

> "Visually, the urban slum and its overcrowded apartments offer the child a minimal range of stimuli. There are usually few if any pictures on the wall, and the objects in the household, be they toys, furniture, or utensils, tend to sparse, repetitious, and lacking in form and colour variations. The sparsity of objects and lack of diversity of home artefacts which are

available and meaningful to the child, in addition to the unavailability of individualised training, gives the child few opportunities to manipulate and organise the visual properties of his environment and thus perceptually to organise and discriminate the nuances of that environment … It is true, as has been pointed out frequently, that the pioneer child didn´t have many playthings either. But he had a more active responsibility towards the environment and a great variety of growing plants and other natural resources as well as a stable family that assumed a primary role for the education and training of the child."

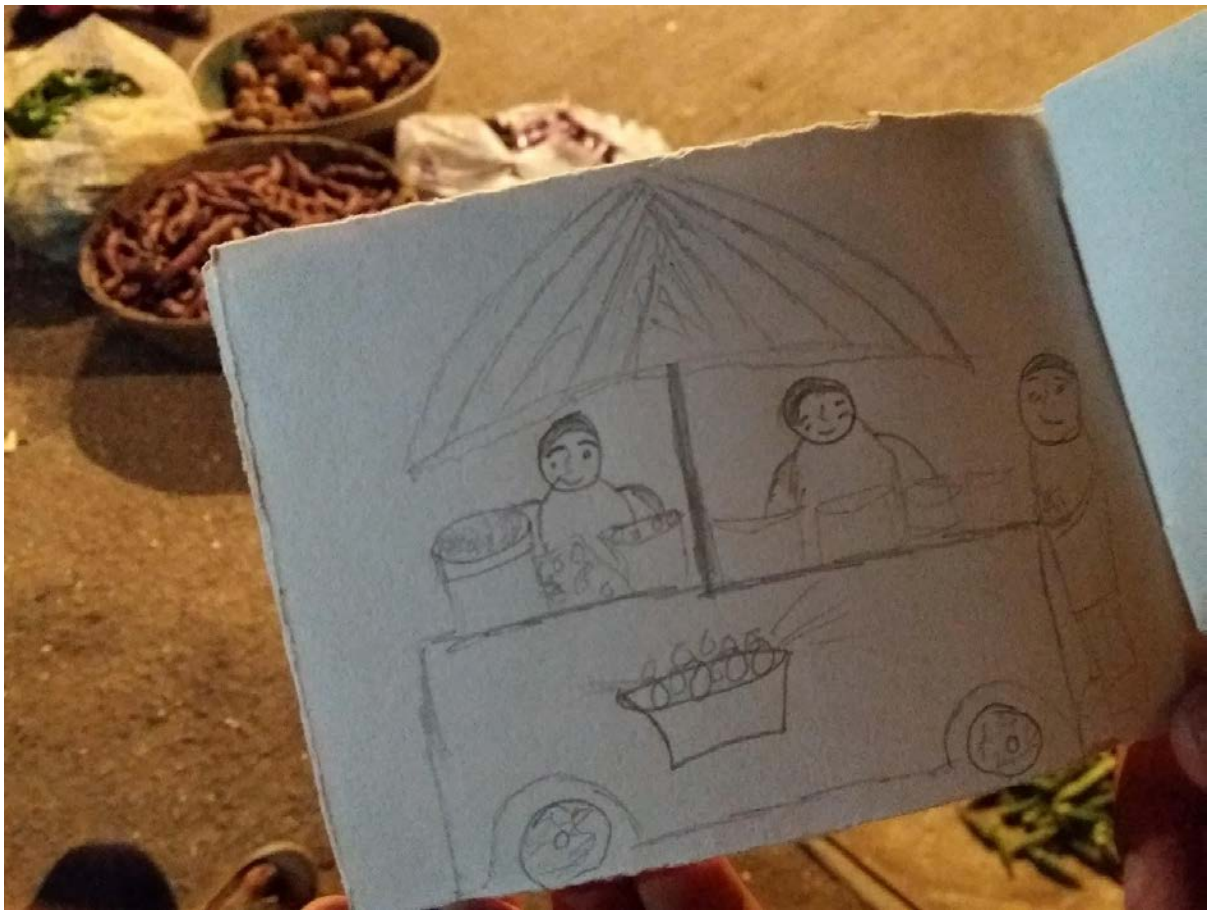

Fig 7. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Drawing food carts in the neighbourhood

Vrishali said, "The children also picked up certain menu cards, so that became the material. They were having fun comparing the prices for chicken tikka and paneer tikka. Children were making airplanes using menu cards, so it was just very interesting to see how children are responding to material in an uninhibited and non-compartmentalised manner, they are not afraid to experiment with material at all. What made the whole exercise even more meaningful was the kind of reflections they came up with right at the end, which helped in consolidating their observations." This 'pedagogy of the everyday' draws on the artefacts and materials of the neighbourhood as the starting point for enquiry and discussion.

Place Based Learning

Fig 8. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Drawing alongside vegetable sellers

Fig 9. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Exploring the neighbourhood (1)

Fig 10. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Exploring the neighbourhood (2)

Fig 11. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Exploring the neighbourhood (3)

Learning and observing from everyday practices in the children and young people's surroundings, including their family, friends, local businesses and crafts was an important element in developing a place based, living curriculum. Building an understanding of key concepts of art, ecology, re-imagining waste, work and identity were central to the process alongside young people. Vrishali encouraged participants to engage with their surroundings, through walks that enable observation and exploration, identifying spaces and times of gatherings, so as not to restrict art making to conventional methods like drawing and painting, but also exploring performance, gatherings and meetings (either in a historic/political moment or in a historic or relevant site with a specific context) where relevant discussions could be conducted as places of learning and growing. These gatherings would occur as incidents with or without a produced product or object of art. The documentation process was vital in this respect, to share the development of ideas. It was also important to find a facilitator who was local from within the community, able to identify local crafts that could be explored and integrated into the experience in the Lab.

She continues “I thought it would be relevant to tell children also about Greta Thunberg, we discussed what she did at length. Children said humbly that they will also not go to school, and will do what Greta did. So, I had already discussed Thunberg with them, and to some extent ecology and how pollution had caused distress. And then I said the river that flows, right across Dharavi, the Mithi River ... that discussion sort of got some spots triggered in their heads, and children were like, no, this has to be cleaned! It was interesting that the girls said yes, definitely we must clean the river. And the boys, the boys, they were saying, but you know, everyone around is polluting it, everyone around is creating so much of waste, and they throw garbage in the river. They also throw chemicals in the river; how can we stop them alone?” Vrishali was able to bring the children to the discussion where they were questioning things and coming out with a more critical stance, their ideas developing and importantly generating ideas together.

Fig 12. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Discussing Gretha Thunberg and *Fridays for Future*

Vrishali was very sensitive to gender, caste and class dynamics within the group as well as interpersonal dynamics. Consciously observing the manner in which children were forming groups to work on collaborative projects, provided the logic based on which they re-grouped themselves. The logic behind friendships seemed to be rooted in differences like caste and class, religion and spoken language, whether Tamil, Marathi, Muslim or Hindu. Vrishali was conscious of the class and caste dynamics that she brought into the class as a facilitator. She comments “At the same time, I was expanding my own understanding of ways in which caste and class manifest itself in community based artistic projects - in order to try to avoid formation of any hierarchical structures or impositions within the classroom”.

Vrishali invited a discussion about the children and young people's aspirations, what they want to become when they are older, breaking away from gendered roles, notions of beauty and body image. This critical dialogue opens up a space for discussion so that children could see how they could challenge and debate ideas, and come up with some shared solutions.

Fig 13. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). 'Portraits of me in the future'

Fig 13. Photo: Vrishali Purandare (2019). Self-portraits

Vrishali noticed, “especially the girls, how they look after their younger siblings ... the girls also have to do a lot of household work, because both the parents are working. And so, a lot of the times more girls were not able to attend the class over the boys, because they were doing the household work.” Also, the kind of spaces inhabited by the young people impact in a variety of ways on their sense of possibility and agency: “a lot of the spaces are just make do/ makeshift basis. So, one knows how to utilize low tech materials and ‘jugaad’ (‘frugal innovation’), everyday creativity.

It was important to understand the roles, behaviours and dispositions of children in order to create and curate these spaces of artistic intervention. This involved releasing preconceived notions of approaches to children’s art making, and rejecting the notion of an instruction-focused curriculum – **prioritising possibilities not prescriptions**. This approach stands in direct contrast to more formal art education that the children may have experienced. In this sense the artist was a mentor alongside children and young people, with the artist modelling the process of inquiry (Jeffery 2005, Hay and Paris 2019) through careful questioning and eliciting of young people’s ideas. Circle time (Mosley 1998) – a process of sharing the students’ views without judgment - also offered a safe space to dive into ideas, sharing emotional journeys and interpersonal dynamics.

Vrishali comments about “the way children engage with what they are seeing, and the way they're responding opens out so many possibilities, even for me, I know for a fact that I couldn't have gone prepared with one objective, and stuck to that .. one can integrate those aspects and take them forward in a more fun manner yet, not in a step of conventions. Oh, it's nice then that you're a companion in the children's learning.”

Vrishali had regular mentoring sessions with the research team, with a focus on integrating professional development for the artists, and an opportunity to reflect on the observations and documentation of the ongoing learning experiences in the Lab.

Challenges around the digital divide

There were some challenges around the digital divide in documentation and setting up the digital lab, a space to connect young people during the pandemic. Few young people had readily available resources or devices for online learning. Most of the children did not have access to devices like cell phones on a regular basis, often needing to share devices with other family members if they were available. The physical exploration of resources and the engagement with the digital space was often thwarted by this lack of access and provision. Instead the exploration of locally made gadgets and introducing these at the Lab allowed for the integration of ideas from the physical to the digital Lab. Young people kept voice diaries of their experiences of art and how they felt, particularly about the Covid – 19 pandemic.

The role of young people

The Lab provides a space for dialogue, appropriate questioning and careful listening to children and young people, eliciting their ideas and developing activities that helped children and young people explore their own interests and concerns. Children's views and feedback were sought regularly on workshops and activities. Children's agency and control, ownership and choice were foregrounded.

The young people's investment in the process highlighted the importance of building an intrinsic motivation for learning. They showed persistence and presence, with genuine interest in developing ideas and learning alongside artists as role models (Benn *et al* 2020). The informality of the learning context was vital. The reality is their lives now, facing many complex challenges and issues. Vrishali comments that "people are so busy with their lives and sort of trying to figure out how to sustain themselves that expecting one to learn about ecological conditions in the old conventional and preachy manner becomes counterproductive. More such relevant ways of engaging with ecology for children and young people need to be innovated and introduced."

Much attention has already been given to the success stories of *Dharavi Rocks*, giving young people the hope that there is always something they can aspire to that breaks the preconceptions of families living in challenging circumstances. Vrishali comments "An important learning from the success of Dharavi Rocks was that art was conceived as a series of activities (e.g. lyrics-drumming-hanging out) that can make a larger whole. This becomes a fluid and dynamic process that accommodates the needs and constraints (of young people). Such processes and collectives create a space of innovation, interest and inspiration for, with and by the children and young people."

Fig 14. Photo: Ajmal Shifaz (2019). Selfie with ACORN young people

Ajmal Shifaz

Ajmal was also a graduate from the MFA programme of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Shiv Nadar University (SNU). Ajmal came to the Lab with a pedagogic approach that he had first developed and refined as part of his MFA project in the township of Dadri, close to the SNU campus on the periphery of the vast conurbation of Noida. Dadri is located in Western Uttar Pradesh, about an hour away from Noida and the NCR region. It is situated on a major highway through which lots of industrial goods pass, and is close to many industries. The area of Dadri has a dense residential and market area but is bordered by many agricultural fields. Ajmal identified Dadri as a highly interstitial place – at the intersection of rural/urban, agricultural/industrial and other such binaries. In this sense, Dadri could be considered as a marginal space. With collaborators, Ajmal had set up an open studio in this space, as a place to explore art practice with members of the local community.

Ajmal said **"…** it was a place where they can explore themselves without the parents or teachers .. There were no rules, it was an open space to explore their own thoughts and their own creations or interventions **…** a lot like DIY ideas and such things. And so making music, playing with them, cooking with them. So they sort of created some connection in which they are also interested in .. which they also enjoy. So, we started having conversation walks throughout Dadri's narrow roads and going to the shops ... we slowly developed a space where we can work together because yeah, interests with music, sound music and how we can develop our own music ... We are having a radio station, that's something which is huge."

Ajmal said "…Producing music/sound, creating toys, inventing games, and even cooking and eating together was in the spirit of play. This whole engagement allowed us to develop a shared attitude between us, which broke from fixed, automatic movements, pushing us and the kids into a zone of curiosity and interest. This space grew slowly and organically, with conversations, stories and walks through Dadri's narrow roads and markets, encounters with many interesting people that opened up very interesting paths for us. This project was explored much deeper because yeah, within this time we had figured our collective areas of interest, broadly in music, sound, games, story, toys, tech-crafts and other DIY/creative ideas to develop an actively working studio... Once we created a recording studio, but a few weeks later it was hijacked by the kids who transformed it into a kids' radio station. This expanded our studio practices and showed us a possibility of creating a wider platform of collective desire."

A long tradition of frugality, repair, mending and *jugaad* inform the creative encounters. Ajmal comments, "all people are connected with these kids' soldier ... these people work according to the season. So they don't have a certain proper job, where they will go every day and do something. So when they are free they play with the kids who are nearby, they make small games .. toys etc. So those things are made in connection .. It's all just because of that trust."

"The Junkyard is the main source of play-material in *Dadri, and the children's ingenious little inventions made from discarded materials and found parts ..*"

Fig 15. Photo: Ajmal Shifaz (2018). Images from residency with young people in Dadri, UP.

Ajmal writes, "When I worked with the kids there, they had a deep interest in making their toys from the junk. They experimented in *jugaad* ways. The transformation of these materials into toys and playing with them, was a performance, a performance that attracted the attention and interest of other kids also. This aspect of performativity in making jugaad toys from junk material and playing with them was something that interested me deeply. Our studio space in Dadri was an extension of this practice, a different site for them to try out their jugaad experiments. The workshops exposed them to a different set of materials such as clay drawn from their environment, and a different set of

techniques, to which they responded with enthusiasm and creativity." This focus on a 'pedagogy of play' (Project Zero 2001) as a systematic approach to the practice of playful learning and teaching (Project Zero 2016), highlights the importance of allowing children to 'follow their fascinations' (Bancroft et al 2008) and pursue their own lines of inquiry through play.

Fig 16. Photo: Ajmal Shifaz (2019). Boys building with bamboo in Dadri

Reflecting on the difference, Ajmal commented "In Dharavi, the kids I was working with, were travelling, moving here and there, going for the workshops and to the schools ... but in Dadri, it's totally different. A few kids will have some pocket money, so they will go to the shop, and get some ice creams or something. I had seen both, but the material is the same, that's the thing - they are all engaged with the same materials of the locality."

Shakuntala Banaji (2017) describes these grounded and habitual knowledges of making do and inventing from scrap materials as a form of 'resourceful conservation'. Interviewing 8 and 12 year siblings from a wastepicking family, she describes an older brother collecting and playing with disaggregated objects, or inventing new things to do with them as objects for the younger child: "we can live because they [the rich] throw things away. Everything can be used somehow; you just have to work it out" -- 'the creative conversation of stuff which is intrinsic to Dherraj and Mansi's everyday life can be seen as inseparable from claims made about that stuff.' (Banaji, p. 176). She explains how for these children 'disaggregation and disassembly play as central role as assemblages and his ability to disassemble, to figure out how to use stuff, works as an aspect of his agency' (ibid., p.176).

Ajmal writes "In Dharavi, I started the workshop with an idea to collaborate with the kids in the area. In the workshop, we tried to collect objects from junk yards which they found interesting. By letting

them collect objects they were attracted to, it was a way of aggregating their collective desires rather than me as an outsider, imposing materials on them, which is what happens in a school-like setting. We tried lots of activities with those objects and created a collage on a piece of canvas fitted with lights." The title and form of the piece – *Mahim Fair* – was both a visual and symbolic representation of the imaginative worlds of the children, acting as a kind of mental map of the chaos, density and intensity of the city as they encountered it around them.

Fig 17. Photo: Ajmal Shifaz (2019). Inventions made with junk by children

Fig 18. Photo: Ajmal Shifaz (2019). *Mahim Fair*: a collectively made painting/3D assemblage

Fig 19. Photos: Ajmal Shifaz (2019). 'Imbibition Period/Dharavi', and 'Germination in C13 Lab'

Ajmal reflects "With the collaborative process, an organic growth happens, and from the workshops we built wearable accessories for each child who would perform in a street music show while wearing these attractive costumes, collected and made by their own hands. This idea derived from the experience in Dadri, particularly, the performative potential of things and jugaad techniques deployed collaboratively. By wearing the material, displaying it and highlighting it with the lights, the idea was to not hide the junk, but to show the potential that lies hidden in them, to call forth the performative potential of things thought as waste and create a show out of it, to not just see Dharavi as a slum but to see that space as a powerful space with an immense potential for creativity. Both the kids from Dadri and Dharavi stand on a shared ground of a marginal space, and they also share a relationship to material considered as junk and waste by others, which allows them to invest in, play with and tap into the potential in such materials and in their space. In my eyes, this is the line that extends from Dadri to Dharavi: deeper than the proposed industrial corridor which is to connect these two distant spaces for the transport of economically productive goods, a line of pure potential connects the creative practices of the children in these areas that tap into the hidden powers of unproductive junk."

Materials are reimagined with creativity, deepening the connectedness of art with the world, drawing on everything that can be found in and around where young people live and work. Importantly nothing is wasted, everything is reused. Young people were given the opportunity, space and time to generate ideas using materials and tools from their everyday lives. These informal, often peer-led processes emphasise the close relationship between art as a way of being in the world, informing their 'everyday aesthetic' and using art and design to explore the world around, so the 'city as classroom'.

Dharavi Rocks (see Chapter 8) were a great example of using the 'treasure' found in the locality and re-imagining possibilities, using discarded oil drums to make musical instruments. Based on these ideas, Ajmal invited the young people to make stories from objects around them, to explore the everydayness of art and life being connected.

Fig 20. Photo: Ajmal Shifaz (2019). *Dharavi Rocks* (Band)- Crossing the road, with colourful drums and costumes

Nisha Vaghani

Nisha, also a graduate of the MFA programme at SNU, came to work with C13 Lab as part of an internship at the Art 1st Foundation. In her undergraduate studies she specialised in painting, but over the last few years her work has moved more into performance and socially engaged art practices. She reflects 'My artistic practice in the last two years have been around how I look at myself and the place where I come from, my experiences of being who I am, with the kind of family and cultural background and upbringing I've been having."

Nisha ran eleven sessions over one and a half months. "The first day when I met the children, I was much interested to know about them and what they are interested in. I was doing these workshops with an Art 1st mentor and we both were looking into how we could introduce different art materials - charcoal, acrylic colours, poster colours, pencil colours...But we were also interested not only to look into exploring that materials, but we wanted them to think of think of what they are doing or whether it could be about themselves or what they like, what they dislike, what they want to do in the future, what activities they are really involved in, and how conscious they are about the surroundings they live in and things like that, and what they aspire to be…

Nisha noticed the materials on offer "… there was a little machine which they had was for recycling, crumbs of plastics. So when I entered there were these boxes of different colours of these big pieces of plastics ..." which inspired her to invite the children to use the materials to make paintbrushes and mark making tools. Sharmila Samant, artist mentor, reflected that "there are certain slangs which are used within a particular group, which is a kind of a language of vocabulary, which is built within them. So we wanted to use them, those kinds of languages, those texts in a certain way, and ask them to create certain kinds of visuals or certain kinds of thoughts which they aspire to or which

they want to change". In this space, the pedagogy evolved as a dialogical process a method of enquiry as 'a process of self-awareness through collective self-enquiry and reflection' (Freire 1972). The emphasis in the Lab is on different ways of knowing and thinking about art and life: intuitive, practical, expressive and intellectual.

Nisha also commented on her relationship with the children and how she wanted to democratize the space for dialogue. "This kind of relationship needs to be lateral, and in a certain way dissolved … this bunch of kids were very, very open, they would speak their heart and mind."

Nisha described one of the first sessions: "they were given a situation in which they had to imagine themselves being trapped for a minimum 10 hours and were invited to respond to the given situation with the use of charcoal". The young people could relate this theme of confinement and restriction to the kinds of spaces and labyrinthine urban neighbourhoods that they inhabit.

Nisha explains, "the choice for this topic was very much a product of the exercise which was being planned with charcoal and keeping in mind the quality and possibility it holds. Also while thinking about their responses in relation to the ideas of confinement and restriction within their immediate neighbourhood, all the situations they came up with where quite from their experiences and places they knew of, like classroom, bathroom, living room, car deck, lift, train and places they imagined, or they have heard of like a maze and a jail. I personally think there is a thick line between reality and imagination and with the children they cross over the space in ease and not confining to the merely correct ways of thinking and being. Though their situations were much realistic they had a rather playful approach."

Fig. 21 Photo: Nisha Vaghani. Group Discussion

Nisha writes, "After thinking for a few minutes they started narrating their situation turn by turn. They had to first express what intensity of darkness does their situation have and then show that on paper. Everyone had their own peculiar doubts as per their situation. Some directly started with really dark darkness (due to closed atmosphere in their situation) and some were showing really mild darkness (due to daytime light). Once done they had to think of a source of light pouring in the darkness. What kind of source is it? Is the light to harsh or light? What time of night or early morning is it? If the light comes in, what all things would be visible? Erasers were given to all of them. Erasers as a tool has always been looked at with a sole purpose to remove mistakes from any drawings. Instead, here we were making the children look at the erasers as a drawing tool. The exercise

worked because it was devised in a way to not create a visual by the usual and gradual application of a medium but rather the reverse process, the process of removal, erasing which was certainly quite different for them to wonder."

Fig. 22 Photos: Nisha Vaghani. Drawing session

Nisha reflects on two students' work,

"Shreyas : A situation where he is trapped in a room and the source of light is the window. He kept on changing his situation in minor ways in the whole process. From being trapped in the bathroom to room. But as he started to erase, he already had a thought that how the light would enter the room through a window. He even added a bit more detail by showing the shadow of the window as per his understanding.

Fig. 23 Photo: Nisha Vaghani. Drawing by Shreyas

Ramzan: He is in-between the maze in an open area under the sky and he gets stuck.
Initially he started with drawing the maze through lines and started rubbing charcoal on paper. When the source of light had to be thought about, in conversation he came up with the presence of moonlight in the dark and erased a circular form to depict moon but still the rest of the paper was

dark black. He tried quite a lot to make the maze with his fingers, but it was hardly visible. Later he managed to bring out the lines representing the maze.

Fig. 24 Photo: Nisha Vaghani. Drawing by Ramzan

Here, the notion of the 'hundred languages of children' (Edwards *et al* 1998) is a useful concept that highlights the processes of meaning-making that engage multiple forms of thinking. This invites thinking about other ways of learning but also about other ways of expressing ideas – in a hundred languages of expression, through multiple symbolic languages. Finding and giving opportunities to share imagination and feelings in different modalities. Working with artists allows a space for exploration, creating a space within which unexpected things can happen in a process of co-creation and meaning making that is shared, expanding the space for possibility.

Conclusion

These examples all demonstrate different ways in which, through the construction of a dialogical space, the young artists can develop pedagogies, share perspectives and explore ideas with participants. All of the projects reviewed here contained creative processes that open up spaces for conversation and reflection, with the artists modelling and sharing skills rather than directing and instructing.

The significance of ACORN India's building as an open space full of amenities and resources should also be considered. From its beginnings as a cluttered shelter on the Mahim-Sion link road, ACORN's Dharavi project now occupies two floors of a brand new building near Dharavi T-Junction, complete with plumbed toilet, filtered running water, and, through the collaborations and partnerships described in this book, alongside musical instruments, books and art materials, access to increasingly sophisticated learning technologies – high speed internet, computers, cameras, flat screen televisions, tools, 3D printing and other technologies for making and design. More importantly than any of the equipment, ACORN offers a space, free of charge and open to all, where there is food, there is security, there are opportunities to learn and there is a space for positive interaction with others – allowing young people to encounter a sense of enthusiasm, energy and possibility. This openness to collaboration and willingness to experiment and test out ideas is a hallmark of the ACORN India approach and without it the work described in this book would not exist. The role of ACORN staff, drawn from surrounding communities is also significant - they act as mediators, caregivers and support a framework of regular contact, routine and timetable of activities. Each week, a team of facilitators and come to the space to run classes and workshops and rehearse with Dharavi Rocks. In this way a learning architecture is established, a patterned and regular framework

for conversation, including constant encounters with artists, musicians, designers etc from beyond the life worlds of Dharavi. These encounters, as Ian Dawson describes in Chapter 9, could be considered as 'learning assemblages' in which a dialogical framework and a flexible and open-ended approach allows learning to occur at multiple levels simultaneously – for participants, for the facilitators, for ACORN staff and for the research team.

There is a vast untapped potential of Dharavi's young people. 65% of the population of India is aged under 35, raising huge issues of human potential, and the kinds of pedagogies needed to unlock this. The COVID-19 pandemic brought pre-existing inequalities into even sharper focus. Young people in Dharavi are curious and driven to learn. As Banaji (2017) points out, the so-called 'digital divide' is fundamentally a socio-economic divide, and enthusiasm for the supposed emancipatory potential of digital and media technologies needs to be tempered with an understanding of how they are actually deployed and used in peoples' lives. Whilst the connective potential of technologies, whether that be a reliable water tap, electricity supply, a bicycle (cf. Banaji's powerful story about 'Ashok' and how a bicycle would transform his mobility and ability to help and gain and access to the city – 2017) or a smartphone is not disputed, the bigger issue is how to find meaningful, affordable and genuinely useful applications of technology that can develop autonomy and agency for their users. By integrating old and new technologies in the context of a neighbourhood culture of manufacturing, recycling and repair the Lab provides mechanisms for young people to explore creative ways of working with materials and to reflect on the uses of technologies in their own lives. At the heart of the approach in the Lab is the image of young people as creative and competent, valuing relationships and giving time, space and attention to supporting interdisciplinary learning in a collaborative context.

The media coverage of India's battle against Covid-19 highlights the struggle of resident communities to disseminate their realities to the outside world. As opportunities to work diminished during the lockdowns of 2020, access to food, water, and basic survival became prominent themes (see Chapter 13). This elevated the role of citizen journalism and social media in telling stories from the front line (where journalists have either had very limited access or none at all). During this period despite some hostile and highly misrepresentive coverage, Dharavi's dense networks of mutual aid, loosely coordinated through civil society, political parties, religious organizations and NGOs provided rations to an out-of-work population and successfully arrested the spread of the virus.

Youth and community arts practitioners often fall into the trap of making unfounded claims about the transformative potential of the activities that they undertake for the young people that participate in them. Given the overwhelming obstacles and difficulties faced by those living on the margins and peripheries, it is easy to frame learning activities with 'deprived' communities in terms of deficit models in which learning is required to fill gaps or meet perceived deficiencies, positioning people as passive recipients of education as a form of welfare provision, akin to Freire's 'banking' model of education (1972), and where, as a result of 'intervention' life changing events occur (see Wakeford *et al*, 2014). However, life courses and circumstances are much more complex and challenging than that and whilst we would not want to underplay the value and significance of the projects described in this book, it would be highly premature to describe them as transformational. Instead, as Banaji (2017) argues, far more attention needs to be paid to the particular ways and means through which young people acquire agency; these are not unidirectional or fixed. Acquiring agency operates through processes of negotiation and contingency in a constantly shifting social landscape.

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