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Informal arts engagement programs in disadvantaged schools: student aspirations and creative limits

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ABSTRACT

It is widely argued that the arts have a range of cultural, economic, and educational benefits. However, under state austerity arts curricula are devalued in favour of industry skills. To address this gap in arts education, a new type of student focussed informal arts engagement program has emerged. This article draws on a qualitative study of disadvantaged Australian secondary students' experience of an arts engagement program and explores their experiences through Bourdieusian concepts. We observe how students' homologous position allowed an immediate appreciation of the arts and note how their habitus frame the arts as 'work' and as a technical accomplishment. An illusion in the arts as career emerged from these understandings. We suggest informal arts programs act as a collective gift within a weak cycle of reciprocity, but without expanded in-school opportunities fall short in offering students new ways of understanding the place and value of the arts.

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Introduction

Under recent state austerity policies arts education has been subject to a new round of material and symbolic devaluing in favour of 'industry focused' curricula (Carter, 2017; Gough, 2015). To bridge the recent gaps in arts education, access and participation, externally funded arts-engagement programs have emerged. These informal programs tend to involve community outreach provided by core Creative and Cultural industry (CCI) institutions – museums, galleries, theatres, and theatre companies – and rely on teachers acting as brokers to sustain the arts connection to the curriculum. This outreach offers young people, typically those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, the opportunity to attend performances and workshops and meet with arts creators. How, then, does this cohort respond to such arts encounters and how do they understand the possibilities of the

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arts? What are the possibilities of extra-curricular arts opportunities in the lives of young people in socio-economically disadvantaged schools? Drawing on qualitative accounts from high school students attending under-resourced public secondary schools in the outer suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia (UNICEF, 2019), this article analyses student experiences of one such program *Arts Access* (a pseudonym).

Arts education is a diverse subfield within the sociology of education. Policy scholars have outlined the arts shifting, and politicised, position in neo-liberalised secondary school curricula (Ball, 2012; Jones, 2013). Inside the official curriculum, arts education is understood to carry risks in terms of assessment and student engagement (Adams, 2010), while making unique demands on art teachers who undertake negotiations between the curriculum and student needs (Paek, 2015). In terms of student engagement with the arts, research indicates the influence of social class upon student dispositions towards specialised arts education, suggest differing socialised values, cultural repertoires, and motivations for pursuing the arts (Gripsrud et al., 2011), with young people's artistic interests often supported by families who see the arts as morally good (Saifer & Gaztambide Fernández, 2017). Alternatively, for critical theorists, the art curriculum is a site of contest over the representation of culture and the development of culturally inclusive pedagogies (Acuff, 2018). Despite these durable sociological themes, the limited literature on young people's participation in the arts stresses the instrumental value of the arts, with positivist education scholars indicating a range of affirmative effects across academic, health, and social dimensions (Epstein, 2001; Gligorović & Buha-Đurović, 2010; McCarthy et al., 2001; Schleien et al., 1995). Another purported benefit of arts education is the potential to strengthen students' sense of ownership and control over learning, increasing school attendance and lowering the risks of early leaving for difficult to engage young people (Cain & Nislev, 2018). The arts may also develop students' technical skills, creativity, problem solving abilities, and academic outcomes beyond specific arts subjects (Martin et al., 2013). In general, arts education becomes valued in terms of the measurable impact on disadvantaged students in terms of learning, engagement, and career outcomes, which are the core concerns of funders and policy audiences.

While not denying or devaluing the beneficial aspects of the arts, our primary interest is in how disadvantaged students understood *Arts Access*, the arts, and their arts related aspirations more generally following participation. We argue that such extra-curricular arts programs, although providing important non-instrumental exposure to culture that their more privileged peers might experience, remain tendential to a changed understanding of the arts and the possibilities of engagement in CCIs. Although outreach programs elicited artistic ideas, interests, and imagined future selves, their realisation requires schools to create time and spaces for the

conversion of this interest into embodied skills and the cultural competencies for creative work.

Theoretical framework

Our entry point to theorising student responses and developing this argument follows other sociologists of education by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). We use habitus, the *illusio*, and *homology* as key explanatory concepts. Habitus is a signature concept in Bourdieu's (2005, p. 211) 'structuralist constructivism' and indicates a 'socialised subjectivity': how the social world is embedded in the body and the mind, and how this mind and body act in the social world (Reay, 2004). As Bourdieusian scholars stress, all subjective 'dispositions are generated through the internalisation of (social) structures, (their) institutions, and overlapping fields' to form habituated cognitive schemas, tastes, and embodied dispositions towards the objective world (Bourdieu, 1984; Stahl, 2016, p. 1093). Following this conceptualisation, Atkinson (2016) draws on phenomenology to argue an actors' habitus 'comprises horizons of experience, fringing all present perceptions with a sense of potentialities' so that 'practice in relation to one field *necessarily has in its horizons the present and potential state of play in other fields* and thus what may occur in them as a result' (p. 20, emphasis in original). In the context of participation in the *Arts Access* program, students' historicised cultural backgrounds and subsequent habituated frames of perception and apprehension of will shape their understanding of the arts. If habitus is the social embedded in the self, *illusio* is an actors' interest or investment in a field (such as art) – a 'collective belief and participation' (Griffiths, 2018, p. 43) – which is to understand the stakes of the field as worthwhile and the efforts and competitive forces necessary to be involved offer affective and symbolic rewards (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Homology refers to the enduring 'structural affinity' or alignment between social class position and lifestyle (Atkinson, 2022; Wang, 2016, p. 395). Like an actors' habitus, homologies are also embodied dispositions shared amongst actors in similar social positions and become 'practical taxonomies' (Wang, 2016, p. 388). This durable pattern of meaning and recognition is transposed between different social fields, with the consequence that 'homologous positions likely generate the same perceptions and aspirations' (Wang, 2016, p. 395).

The analytical advantage of habitus, *illusio* and homology are to elucidate how embodied social positions inform the interpretation of informal arts engagement programs, even though these concepts carry the threat of the research being mis-interpreted as 'deterministic' (or not deterministic enough) (Threadgold, 2017). However, student responses suggest *Arts Access* immediate experiential dimension produced pleasurable affects and

encouraged reflection about future cultural participation. The program also elicited an emerging illusion as an arts practitioner, while the homological affinities between family, education and (potential) occupations saw students' habitus frame their interpretation of the arts in the present, and in their aspired to futures. Importantly, students acknowledged the arts as culturally legitimate industries where careers can be developed.

Arts Access also illuminates the homologically induced tensions between disadvantaged student aspirations and seemingly benign informal education. Although students expressed an interest in exploring arts careers and creativity more generally, informal arts engagement programs are likely to struggle to bridge the gap between imagined and actual, sustained, participation in the arts. They offer exposure, but not the time necessary to explore creativity and the embodiment of cultural capital within formal curricula – time that is required to translate imagined futures into skills and longer-term engagement with the arts. To explore these programmatic paradoxes, we draw on Bourdieu's sociology of gift exchange to theorise arts engagement programs as collective gifts providing access and exposure but within a weak cycle of reciprocity; there are no formal assessments and school resourcing circumscribes sustained creative practice, rendering the purported benefits of arts education provisional (Bourdieu, 1998).

This research augments existing Bourdieusian research on social stratification and arts consumption (DiMaggio & Useem, 1978), how disadvantaged students' experience of informal exposure to the fine arts and museums encourages pursuing cultural and scientific interests (Archer & DeWitt, 2016; Kisida et al., 2014), and the role of informal arts education in youth empowerment and skill development (Ferrer et al., 2022). It is also situated within the continued interest in Bourdieusian analyses of the role of the habitus (e.g. Nash, 2003; O'Donoghue, 2015; Romito, 2022) and culture in the reproduction of social inequalities via secondary schooling systems (Feldman & Wallace, 2021; Hultqvist & Lidegran, 2021; Yu & Song, 2022). In addition, we contribute to the growing Bourdieusian scholarship on informal education by outlining a critical analysis of the formal-informal hybridisation of arts curricula (e.g. Burke, 2020; Ollis et al., 2018; Wright, 2020). The article develops as follows. The next section describes the methods and the *Arts Access* program. The subsequent sections interpret students' reception to the arts. The final section considers the *Arts Access* program as a gift relationship and the implications for disadvantaged students' longer term creative development within current curriculum arrangements.

Methods

We re-analyse data generated in 2017 and 2018 through evaluation research of a philanthropically funded arts-engagement program offered to eight

government-funded high schools in low socio-economic areas of Adelaide, South Australia. Beyond an initial general arts education for younger cohorts, most schools offered a combination of credentialed curriculum areas: visual (design and art), performing (drama and dance), and music (instruments, bands, orchestras, and production). Teachers also worked to enrich students' experiences within and outside the classroom with few resources. These constraints often truncated the form and complexity of formal arts curriculum education, although teachers also described creative and sophisticated responses to resource limitations. In such contexts, the broad aim of *Arts Access* was to facilitate lifelong engagement and learning, and to develop new insights into the social world through the arts. Importantly, *Arts Access* was not embedded within a formal in-school curriculum and was only offered to students who showed an interest or talent in the arts, allowing them to experience performances and creative activities that might not otherwise be available to them. The program offered excursions to performances, post-performance discussions with artists and technicians, and school-based workshops. The performances were as follows: a big budget multiple award winning ensemble musical; an acrobatic dance piece set to classical music; a small ensemble abstract dance performance incorporating physical objects; a multi-media story of a boy adventuring in mystical lands set to live original instrumental music; a small ensemble play of a popular culture horror story; a Parkour inspired dance whose main characters were recent migrants to Australia; and a school-based play whose narrative worked across friendship tensions.

The research was conducted with institutional ethics approval (Flinders University Social and Behavioural Ethics Committee Project Number 7960; Department for Education and Child Development Reference Number 2018–0029). This paper draws heavily on focus groups with 20 students across four schools and interviews with drama and creative arts teachers in those schools, conducted in 2018. The approximately one hour-long focus group discussions were guided by a series of prompts addressing the experiences, benefits and challenges of the program and its place in students' schooling and lives. Interviews with teachers covered similar issues. Focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were subject to thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns. In this study, focus groups were used to offer participants an opportunity to share their experiences with others in a similar position and to develop synergistic responses. Although social actors may develop new understandings through these conversations, this paper does not centre the negotiation and creation of knowledge (Morgan, 2010). Instead, like most focus group research, we emphasise the group unit of analysis to assess students' consensus and ultimate understanding of *Arts Access* (Cyr, 2016).

This focus group data was supplemented by a post-performance experience survey comprising written responses and quantitative experiential

questions answered by 303 students across the high schools participating in the program. The qualitative data from the survey is drawn from two questions: *How do you describe this performance? Has this performance encouraged you to think about future arts activities?* These answers were coded and subject to thematic analysis. The descriptive statistics provide additional context.

While the implications of arts-engagement programs are linked to social class homologies and the habitus, students in this study were not asked to provide socio-economic data about their families given the likelihood that they would not have the knowledge to answer accurately. In the schools in which focus groups were conducted and across all schools participating in *Arts Access*, approximately 85% of students lived in families positioned in the two lowest income quartiles in Australia. Australian data suggest that attending a school in high socio-economic communities increases the likelihood that a young person will express an interest the arts and an arts career (Gore et al., 2017). This context suggests two Bourdieusian entry points: first, students' habitus will frame how arts engagement and the wider arts field is perceived; second, homologies in lifeworld situations will inform the how students strategically interpret and categorise their arts experience. In the following section, we outline these possibilities under the themes of recognition of arts inequality, cultural goodwill, art as technical achievement, and creativity as career.

Student responses and aspirations towards the arts

Arts inequality

Time and space structure inequality (Atkinson, 2016). Differential access to consecrated theatres, arts hubs and performance venues reflects the core-periphery relations of urban space (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 365). *Arts Access* brought students to these cultural citadels. This movement through urban space is significant as students participating in *Arts Access* had limited arts experiences. Attending live performances was uncommon: over half (56.5%) had never seen a live performance until participating in the program; 40% had been to a performance 'only once or twice' outside of school. Students were also asked about their attendance and contributions to arts activities more broadly defined. A little under half (47.5%) of students had attended some form of arts activity solely in the context of their schooling and 10% had not previously attended any activities. Thus, almost 60% of students relied on school activities to facilitate their participation in arts activities. Students also estimated how often in the past 12 months they had contributed to arts activities as a maker, a performer or organiser: 36% had not contributed in any way and 41% of students had contributed only in the context of school activities. These figures reflected

teachers' understandings of the impacts of social class and urban geography on students' awareness of the arts.

... I suppose it's for kids particularly in the [...] suburbs and who are – the school's low on the totem pole, they just don't get much exposure outside of their own community. You've got kids that have come from overseas and things like that but kids that are born here, they might go to the movies every now and then, but they don't actually get to get out of their area and see the different worlds, I guess.
[Teacher 6]

In the focus groups, students were open about their limited participation in arts activities and described the constraints on accessing performances in the city centre. In doing so, they articulated experiences that are part cultural distancing from 'arts for arts' sake and part awareness of centres of cultural production (students appeared unaware of the vibrant local arts community or local government funded creative opportunities in the area):

S1: Yeah. We wouldn't even know ...

S2: No, but other than *Matilda* [musical theatre], I don't think any of us knew that we had all those other plays and stuff happening.

S1: Yeah, because I didn't know plays were happening.

S3: And I didn't know that they had another theatre. I just thought it was the one theatre.

S1: Yeah. And I didn't know they had so many plays on all the time. [High School 2]

Students were also aware that their parents often rejected the aesthetic and figurative pretensions of the performing arts, expressed in Bourdieu's (1984, p. 376) terms of denying what is denied: 'Just, my mum's not really a theatre person' (Student 15, High School 3); [my parents] 'shared a different view on what those performances were' (Students 3, High School 4); 'My dad is a [tradesperson] and he is tired when he gets home and he's doing stuff on the weekend so it's not really something my family does, it's not something we have the time to do. Or maybe the interest, too' (Student 19, High School 3). Spatial distance underscores social distance with the effort and cost involved in visiting cultural centres deemed too great.

In every focus group, students were clear that their limited knowledge and opportunities to attend performances did not equate to a lack of interest in doing so. Although the study did not collect data on cultural pretension and pretensions for social mobility, students who were part of *Arts Access* described their experiences of the arts in a 'avid but anxious ... way' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 327). In High School

4, this articulated disposition was readily situated within the structural limitations of arts education funding.

S1: We are in the [...] suburbs and we go to a public [government funded] school and we're like, looked down upon and we don't get given the resources to do anything about it. As where, I could go to a school in the city, a very rich school, and I could pursue musical arts, all because they have the resources.

S4: We appreciate the opportunity.

S2: Yeah, like me; you know, how often do we get given the opportunity to go watch-

S1: *Matilda*. It's like hundreds of dollars for a ticket and we just got it given to us, so of course we're going to appreciate that a lot.

S2: And then the experience and learning which is a different part of life . . . we don't get to experience. [High School 4]

Students were aware of the spatial, economic, and cultural gap between the accessibility of the arts in their own lives and the cultural opportunities that might be available to others. Here, the gift of *Arts Access* created new opportunities for students to experience and learn about the diversity and quality of live performances beyond their school and family context. In doing so they were disposed to articulate a cultural goodwill to the arts.

Cultural goodwill

Although debates on post-modern cultural ominousness and the globalisation of culture have questioned Bourdieusian accounts of culture, empirical studies find durable hierarchies and homologues in cultural taste in Western societies (Atkinson, 2022). Here, Bourdieu's (1984) arguments on the habituated judgement of taste indicate that groups less endowed with elite cultural capital will express a cultural goodwill to art. *Distinction* argues this occurs principally within the petit bourgeoisie, but this tendency was also found in the focus groups. That is, while not articulating 'sophisticated' or detached interpretations of symbolic texts, students expressed appreciation of the art experience. *Arts Access* included avant-garde genres that were unfamiliar or not immediately interesting to students and examples of middle brow art: 'immediate accessibility and [with] outward signs of cultural legitimacy' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 323). All students were clear that the *Arts Access* broadened their world horizons, extending new ways of understanding, and appreciating the arts.

S1: And even the different types of ones, like they're obviously very different, *Amphibian* [a play] was serious and you actually learn stuff, whereas *Rumpelstiltskin* [a play] was a bit more funny; so it was good to see a different variety.

S2: I think it was good because a lot of people had never been to those sorts of shows before, so it was something new and you didn't know what to expect when you went there and then it was good, yeah.

S1: Yeah, they wouldn't have been my choice outside of school, but getting kind of pushed to go there and realising you actually like it when you wouldn't usually do it. [High School 4]

S2: It gives us more insight of things that we're not learning and seeing in everyday life – it's something that we don't get to see. [High School 2]

As well as developing an understanding and appreciation of different genres, *Arts Access* allowed students to experience the effervescent atmospheres of performances and the theatre space. Students described in detail how visually spectacular the performances were and the emotions they elicited. Reflecting on the musical *Matilda*, students commented:

S1: It was very engaging, just the way they were acting and how they were performing was very like, WOW.

Q: What do you mean by 'wow'?

S1: It was just really good, I don't know, it was just-

S2: Captivating.

S4: Impressive. [High School 4]

Such comments suggest that live performances offer an immediacy that students found enjoyable and exciting. The opportunity to see live performances has an intrinsic value, regardless of other outcomes, offering new forms of emotional experience brought through the tension and release of narrative structure and the possibility for students to reflect on their own relationships and social circumstance. Students' cultural goodwill indicates an appreciation of art for its most visual and affective factors, factors carefully calibrated in design and production to produce the intended effects of awe and immersion (Bourdieu, 1993). Lacking the cultural capital to discuss the performances beyond the perception of 'impacts' and 'emotions' - already familiar experiences through exposure to mass cultural industries and the blockbuster narrative arc - the relevance of arts engagement was further interpreted through the habitus. This habituated appreciation was evident when students understood arts production – and particularly the theatre – as

a technical accomplishment, evincing a homology between family and education position when interpreting the place of the arts in their futures.

Homological appreciation: art as practical activity

Attending performances encouraged students' understanding and admiration of artistic production skills. The workshops offered further insight into technical processes, inspiring students to imagine new ideas that might be pursued in their creative lives or at school. According to the teachers interviewed, this was particularly useful given students' lack of experience with the performing arts:

It's been really good for them to see what a professional show looks like, because a lot of them wouldn't have necessarily have ever been to a show before and it's part of our performing arts curriculum here that they perform and they put on live performances for audiences in the community. So, for them to be able to go and see performances and see what a professional performance looks like and how it's run and just to see the standard, I guess it's good for them to apply that to their own performances.
[Teacher 2]

In the post-performance surveys, students described a growing recognition and appreciation of the techniques and skills available to express abstract concepts and evoke emotional responses in the audience. Echoing Bourdieu's (1984) studies on the classed habituation of cultural taste and the appreciation of art, these responses suggested a homological admiration of the practicalities and technological inventiveness in the production of an aesthetic experience: 'The lighting design was a particular thing that I really loved about it. It added dramatic tension in all the right places'; 'the way they expressed emotion through objects'; 'different technology that was used to create sound and techniques used to intrigue audience'. In every focus group, young people spoke unprompted and in detail about their recently developed insights into production and design techniques. Their gaze was directed to the production of the performing arts through the combinations of technique and stagecraft:

Q: What did you like about the show?

S1: How they moved the stage to make different scenes.

Q: So that kind of technical aspect of it?

S2: Yeah, it was really good – it was a good idea and for space-wise.

Q: So, was that something you had seen before?

S1: It really showed what you can do with such a small area.

S3: But it had the moving thing.

S2: Like the whole stage turned-

S3: Apparently, it's an old technique. I asked, I was like, 'How long has that been going for?' And they were like, 'It's actually an old technique'. [High School 1]

Similarly, a spectacular musical performance-built students' understanding of the techniques of costume design. Costumes enabled multiple effects – as a character and as part of physical performance – which seemed to appeal to a habituated sense of functional application and practical 'know how' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 387). This design function occurred through materials students were familiar with:

S1: Fashion based [knowledge] was mainly in *Matilda* because you could look at the clothing that they would wear, how they were modified to do something. So, how – and fashion could be makeup as well – so, we would be looking at all the costumes and how they had to be modified to do something that is different – I can't say it – when the kids were being thrown around, there's attachment from the costume to that. We had to figure out how that was modified to do that.

Q: And did you say it was inspirational?

S2: Yeah. Just for future things if we were to make as a theatre costumer, something like that . . . just be like giving you inspiration and ideas for later on. [High School 2]

When students spoke to those creating the works, these technical achievements were underscored:

S3: Because if you just go and watch a play, they're not actually telling you how it's done, they're just reading a script. But if they were to have a Q and A and they can tell you all these things and – when we saw (a musical), we had a Q and A with them and we went backstage and we saw all the props and the clothing and all the makeup.

S2: And how the makeup was done, and an actor came out and-

S4: And all the controls and lighting and all that.

S2: The director and everything – and the makeup artist came out and everything.

S3: And we learnt with the makeup, it's not actually makeup. . . . [High School 3]

Students described these performances as contributing to their creative, intellectual, and emotional engagement with ideas and perspectives that extended beyond the immediate experience of the performance. This exposure stimulated their imaginative capacities to make connections between technique, emotion and narrative and they discussed how from concrete performances such ‘creative’ thinking could inform their creative expression. Simultaneously, students were intrigued by the practical roles and applications. This habituated draw to the technical, applicable, and practical aspects presented through arts engagement was reiterated when the arts were imagined as a career.

Creative careers: imagining working

A sense of creative possibility and the possibility of creating a new sense of self was evident in the evaluation surveys. These responses illustrate the elicitation of an emerging *illusio* in arts creation and the arts as career. Students were asked to describe what they would like to do following the performance. Although there might be a proximity effect in these responses students most commonly nominated creative practices: ‘It made me think on how you could make songs about the world’; ‘Study the art of acrobatics/ the ins and outs of what creates a play like this’; ‘Make stories as entertaining as the performance’; ‘Monologue around a social issue’; ‘A style of dance inspired by this performance’; ‘I would like to create a performance about my life and explain the situation that I have been through’; and ‘work backstage on more plays’. Such responses suggest a creative self was now imagined and new realisations made of how personal experiences could be communicated through art.

In this context, students notably described new understandings of the arts as a ‘career pathway’.

Like, the first time that I did this stuff I wasn’t sure that I actually liked musicals or anything and then I saw *Matilda* and I was like, ‘Oh hey this is pretty cool, maybe I will start getting into doing this and acting’ and then I started doing musical. It sort of changed me as a person a lot. [High School 1]

Teachers too were aware the program encouraged students to consider a creative career that might otherwise be unimaginable to them. However, the arts were understood in the longer term as a pathway – i.e. as a set of technical skills – rather than as a Weberian calling to ‘be creative’. Being creative was inflected by habituated understandings of work as paid practical work, which reprises Bourdieu’s (1984) arguments on how the working-class places cultural value on practical, useful activity, while potentially misrecognising flexible working practices and precarity within the CCIs (McRobbie, 2016; Scott, 2012). In teachers’ reflections, *Arts Access* was

also valued through the omnipresent discourse of employment, perhaps echoing the field logics of public education shaping teachers' professional life:

I feel like a lot more of them were considering the arts as a career opportunity now as well, because they can see what kind of jobs or employment you can undertake within the arts. So, it's been good to expose them to that, because that's not something they would ever have gotten otherwise. . . . Because our school, we have a lot of working-class families and it's not necessarily, the arts is not necessarily an area where people would consider going into employment. [Teacher 2]

A lot of kids don't see careers in the arts either, so it's pathways, it's building confidence, it's seeing other young people perform in youth theatre and going oh my gosh, maybe I'd like to do that. Because as I said, we don't offer drama here, so it's completely new to them. I can't push more how important I think these days are. [Teacher 4]

The teachers' understanding of the career-oriented value of the program was supported in every focus group discussion, where students described how the program offered insights into careers that were not promoted in their employment focussed schools, or in their families and communities. Furthermore, using the discourse of career choices may be useful a strategy to nullify the calling to account for social choices that are outside peer and family group norms (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 381):

S1: It's given me a second pathway, so like when I leave school, so because I am more into engineering and that sort of stuff, but if that doesn't work out for me, I would hands down go to acting. [High School 1]

S1: Art in the school is one of the most-

S2: Underrated-

S3: [People say] 'There's no career in any of it' – and all this. And, 'You don't want to do that' and then try and change our minds from doing what we want.

S1: Well, thinking about it now it's very, you can say that the curriculum's very ignorant to the creative side of people's lifestyles . . . People have jobs singing and they have jobs doing art and they have jobs – and that's still as important as someone who's a scientist and someone who is a mathematician or a maths teacher at school, they're so equally the same. [High School 1]

S4: I feel like seeing it as well will mean that – make us look – realise that there are careers in it as well, not just getting told that there's not careers,

just find something else. There are careers in it, you've just got to work hard for it. . .

S2: Well, I could relate to people there because I play a lot of instruments and I could see that I could go on with that thing, have a future with that. . . . if we were at school and just in music and drama it would still be fun but it wouldn't push me to pursue a career in music or drama whereas if you go out and see what actually happens and how they get a career out of it, and how good it looks, it's, it's more inspiring to, to do it.

The Bourdieusian sensitising concepts of habitus, illusio, and homology support a recognition of the nuances of students' responses to *Arts Access*. The immediate enjoyment and cultural goodwill evident in their accounts of arts engagement experiences were 'fringed' by homological affinities in their schemas of perception. Students responded not only with goodwill to *Arts Access* but cultural goodwill to the arts. Students appreciated the opportunity to experience the arts and their awareness of social barriers seemingly overcome was palpable. They also described how new aspirations could be imagined and how these could be aligned with avenues for their realisation (Bourdieu & Whiteside, 1990, p. 159). Once exposed to the arts students were drawn to the practical and technical aspects of live performance leading to a recognition of the CCIs as a site for establishing future careers. With most lacking the cultural repertoires (we ponder here what a comparative study with *haute bourgeoisie* students might reveal) of reflection identified by Bourdieusian studies of art appreciation and social class (Codd, 1988; Mason & McCarthy, 2006; Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012), students tended to narrate the arts in experiential or pragmatic terms. In the extended discussions in the focus groups, the affective elements of an arts experience often became referenced to the practicalities of students' own creative projects and recounted as a technical rather than figurative or narrative achievements.

As students were acutely aware of future life chances, employment focussed curricula, and the compulsions to find a career or a job, the habitus informed the homology between technical feats and support roles, as well as principal performers, to understand the arts as work. This is a narrative framing that can legitimate an interest in the arts to peers and adults who might challenge the seemingly frivolous, abstract or non-rational creative futures. However, the growing literature on creative labour re-affirms the differential access to employment opportunities based on the articulation of educational institutions, and the family habitus and capitals (Atkinson, 2011; Reeves, 2015). Entry to creative fields is informally structured through access to cultural and social capital; for example, most professional actors are drawn from elite schools (Friedman et al., 2017). In contrast, access to technical jobs is driven by a churn of project and contract work. Sustaining

freelance labour requires deploying social capital, fringed by displaying cultural capital in compulsory socialisation, and thus requires the material means (such as family support) to sustain social networks over a long period of time to build a creative portfolio (McRobbie, 2016). In this context, further longitudinal research investigating students' changing dispositions, CCI career development in Bourdieu's (1984) terms of 'social trajectory', and habitually informed subjective experiences of creative processes would offer a richer understanding of the outcomes of informal arts engagement in disadvantaged schools.

Creative limits? Between cultural goodwill and the gift of culture

Our final analytical point is to question the relations of informal arts outreach programs to in-school arts opportunities and the embodiment of creative capacities. As noted by teachers above, not every school had defined, school-wide and multi-disciplinary performing arts curricula or activities such as plays or musicals. In addition, finding time and space for the arts is circumscribed by the pressures brought by curriculum expansion, overload and imbalance during school hours (Voogt et al., 2017). Although *Arts Access* demonstrated positive outcomes for students in terms of new understandings, perspectives, and knowledge outside curricula criteria (Livingstone, 2006), informal programs cannot provide a vital component in engaging with art and the pursuing the benefits of creativity: time. As the sociologist of art Howard Becker (2008) argues: 'making art takes time, and making equipment and materials takes time, too' (p. 3). 'Training, skill and judgement' and the interactive processes of collective judgements in creative production cannot be rushed (Becker, 2008, p. 3). In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, the investment in embodied cultural capital takes time. This is not a critique of 'resources' or 'access' but rather querying the possibilities of creating time and spaces within formal curricula for extended experiments in artistic creativity. Supporting students' *illusio* in the arts demands the organisational resources to undergird the time intensive, and interdisciplinary potential, of curricular and extra-curricular creative activities – particularly so in the context of different family dispositions. It requires temporalities and pedagogies that facilitate an appreciation for the immediate emotional experiences of the arts, experiments in present and future selves and the development of skills that facilitate creative expression as an experience and as work. Here we point to increasing the scope for such practices within disadvantaged schools; an initial step to developing the documented benefits of the arts for students, and the deeper embodiment of the tacit skills necessary for careers that students can now imagine.

We suggest that understanding and advocating for the integration of informal, formal and extra-curricular opportunities also requires

recognising the potentially ambiguous relations informal programs have with curricula. Here, Bourdieu's debt to Mauss' theories of gift exchange and the temporal obligations of future orientated reciprocity between actors allows art engagement programs to be understood as a collective gift to disadvantaged students. For Bourdieu (1998, pp. 96–97), a key feature of the gift exchange is the terms and conditions of exchange are left implicit. By being removed from means of formal calculation, gifts are ambiguous 'double truths' that impose repayment in kind but not the terms. From this perspective informal arts programs are a collective gift and part of an economy of symbolic exchanges – there are no grades or credentials at stake – which is one way of not making explicit the kinds of exchanges that maintain symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 96). They do not place a direct obligation on individual student outcomes and as such do not lay out the conditions for successful reciprocity. There are only weak and subjectively decided exchange obligations on the students to consider the activities of the arts. In such gift exchanges 'what is required is not that one do absolutely everything one should, but rather that one at least give indications of trying to do so' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 89). There was widespread appreciation of the opportunities and exposure to the arts removed from students' everyday life worlds, but we remain unsure if students' recognition of *Arts Access* as a gift tacitly framed the focus group responses. Drawing on wider educational discourses regarding careers, did the students seek to convey what they imagined the program's desired outcomes to be?

Conclusion

Using Bourdieusian sociological concepts and student voices, this research highlights how students from low socio-economic status government schools interpreted their experiences of an informal arts engagement program: *Arts Access*. We want to underscore how *Arts Access* was a valued and exciting element of students' lives, the experience of sacred culture in what can be an all too profane world. For many students, it sparked excitement, joy, and intellectual and emotional engagement. The experiences were aesthetically and affectively enriching for the young people who attended them. The students – and their teachers – understood these performances and the program within which they were offered as enlarging them emotionally and cognitively, and encouraging students to imagine different, arts referenced futures.

Our analysis suggests that within habituated schemas of perception, the program offered immediate and affective experiences and built students' understandings and judgements of art. Students also imagined potential creative practices and identities as people who belong to and contribute to arts communities and communities more generally. This

illusio of participation in CCIs was primarily referenced to the possibilities of employment, an engagement that is built on embodied and tacit skills. We suggest that for students with an emerging illusio in the arts additional curricular or philanthropic offerings are unlikely in themselves to shift habituated understandings of the possibilities of the arts. Instead, further educational development requires forming immersive creative opportunities, which demand time to build the embodied cultural capital and social competencies required by arts careers. In a crowded and often under-funded school curriculum, focused heavily on 'useful' knowledge, building scope for creativity is the creation of time for creation (which, as the avant-garde composer John Cage noted, is different from analysis). Therefore, although informal arts engagement programs are significant in inspiring students, there remains the possibility for expanded, follow-up, in-school activities to practice and nurture these emerging creative interests. For disadvantaged students, this temporal aim of creating new times and spaces for creative practice within schools would enable the development of the diverse, and well documented, benefits of artistic creation.

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