

Episode 6: Humans Rising with Tomis Parker, Self-Directed Education Pioneer

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Caprice: Welcome to Humans Rising. We have conversations that shift your mindset and raise your awareness, your wellbeing, and your happiness. I'm so excited today to be speaking with Tomis Parker who has been involved in the Self-Directed Education Movement for over a decade, who was one of the founders of the Agile Learning Center network, and is involved in a lot of interesting projects. So thank you so much Tomis for joining me today.

Tomis: No problem, glad to be here.

Caprice: I've known Tomis for several years because I was considering doing an Agile Learning Center when I lived in Austin but life had different plans for me. But I still love the whole Agile Learning Center model. I was listening to an interview that you did a couple years ago and one thing that you were describing along your journey, that seemed to me to be a pivotal moment for you, was when you were getting out of college and you realized a sense of despair and not wanting to have to contort yourself you would fit into the world that you were seeing. Is that an accurate view of what might be a pivotal moment in your journey?

Tomis: Yeah. Totally. It was true, that's what I think my motivation for doing work in self directed education. With our community here at ALC Mosaic Charlotte has evolved and kind of emerged in different ways. But, from the get go, in terms of getting me into this work to begin with, and I would say it's probably not completely gone away in terms of a motivation. Has you know, in a way for me, it is a bit of a survival thing. Obviously, I think that self directed education; living, in partnership with you know people of all ages; and building trust-based relationships; and figuring out how to live a life that's authentic. All that stuff that comes with that is a context for being able to thrive. But for me it was really just like a necessary step in order to survive because I felt. Yeah I just couldn't see myself doing work that I didn't care about or doing things that just didn't make sense to me or felt like they are just kind of repeating nonsense in the world. At least the nonsense that I didn't have any interest in. Everyone has their own. I have interesting things that aren't necessarily amazingly deep or whatever, but in terms of how I was going to actually spend my life. That was definitely a motivation. I was trying to figure out how to survive in a world that felt extremely disingenuous.

Caprice: And that a decade or more ago.

Tomis: Yeah. So graduated college in 2008. So 12 years.

Caprice: Looking at the world of 2020, does the world look any less disingenuous to you?

Tomis: Oh Man. That's a great question. I am, I think on some level, an optimist. You have to kind of have to at some degree. I do think that slowly the arc is bending towards the possibility

for more genuineness more authenticity. And you know it kind of depends on what lens you're looking through. Like what how high up is your level. Your View. I definitely have experiences of kind of coming out of my bubble (I live on the campus that ALC Mosaic operates on.) And we try to travel a bit but I have experiences of kind of remembering and realizing like "Oh yeah. A lot of the world is in school and what that's like in the world.

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Tomis: You know, there's plenty of opportunities to realize the world hasn't changed that much. And there's a lot of the same stuff out there and no matter what I've been creating or experiencing, our collectively building with other people in my world, that doesn't necessarily mean things are changing. You know for everyone else in kind of big picture way, but I do think that they are, that we're on a slow track in the right direction. I guess you could say, despite feeling like there's a lot of things that just kind of continue to repeat themselves, that are not useful or helpful.

Caprice: I think that's one of the main reasons I started this podcast. I do feel like we're at an inflection point now. I don't see us ever going back to what was. But, most people don't want to. Because as you saw a lot of dysfunction in the way it used to be. And what I've seen in the ALC Mosaic, because you're a little bit more mature than some of the other centers, is you have been able to create this community that many people are just starving for. I think they just feel really isolated, disconnected and where is the community? So that's one of the foundational parts of the Agile Learning Centers is that is that right?

Tomis: The community aspect? Yeah. I mean I think so. Just in that self directed education is kind of an umbrella term to include lots of different other terms that people use to kind of talk about the same philosophy. And we often refer to ourselves as a community of unschoolers or a self directed education community. So yeah, when you're kind of coming together with other families and participating in the schooling process to gather some sort of like collective, then there's community. Whether it's like a major part of the organizational structure or whether it's just kind of happening organically through relationships that are being formed. So yeah and figuring out you know what that looks like. We're still doing that here at ALC mosaic. That's been the biggest part of the work. You know are we a school? Are we a community or both? What's the difference you know? Who is this for? Who should be making decisions about what? You know people relate to it in lots of different ways.

Tomis: But I do think at the end of the day, we at least are more providing a space where kids can be themselves, where adults can be themselves, people don't have to wear different hats and kind of pretend that you know now I'm the teacher, now I'm the parent, now I can kind of play these roles. I'm just going to show up and be themselves and from that you know lots of really great relationships have emerged and community has been formed. Whether or not it's something that you're kind of baking into the participation requirements of the community.

Caprice: One thing that I see goes through the work that you've done when you started at the Manhattan Free School and then creating ALC Mosaic in Charlotte is, I think, it resonates strongly with me because it's the essence of the coaching work that I do with adults. It's waking people up to the fact that they create their world moment by moment. And it's not that they are just dealing with this external world that they have no effect on.

Tomis: I didn't start the Manhattan Free School but I joined. That school started without me and I was a staff member and then it's kind of in the ashes the ALC model was kind of born. So I can't can't take credit for that at all. In fact. I've actually never started a school myself. Manhattan Free School a lovely woman Werner started it I collaborated with Arthur Bracken and many others to start the first ALC from the shell of the Manhattan Free School.

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Tomis: My wife Nancy started the Mosaic School which became ALC Mosaic. So I'm a serial bonder in a sense to early projects. I think what you're talking about is, at the heart of it. The light bulb for me was when I read the book *Summerhill*. The biggest takeaway for me was just like there's a different philosophy or perspective on the world that adults almost unanimously, unfortunately, have of the world as kind of a fixed thing that exists. And like obviously it's changing here and there. But there's parts about how the world works that are the same and you know a lot of its dysfunctional, but that's just kind of the way it is. Like that's just the way it is. And so I think that's how education is set up in the world today and has been for a long time. To kind of prepare people to be educated into the world. So it's like pulling kids into a world that already exists.

Tomis: Whereas, I think self directed education is saying children, young people in general, have the innate ability to understand what their needs are and to learn the things that are important for them to navigate the world on their own terms. Not only do they have that need, but from a human thriveability, human rights, human whatever your perspective, it should be imperative that people have the opportunity for that level of sovereignty. And so when you kind of flip the script, then it's like, "How can we support children? How can we support people to actually create their own lives and create collectively a world that we want?" Rather than just be beholden to the one that exists.

Tomis: Maybe it's not as completely black and white or like it's either this perspective that perspective across the board. But I think it still rings fairly profound in terms of how different that perspective informs how you would go about two different things as an individual and especially as a parent or an educator. And how pervasive that perspective is everywhere. And ultimately how limiting it is for humanity to continue to operate from that perspective.

Tomis: I did realize that schooling is really maintaining the status quo. As people talk about social change, within it I don't see much of that happening. And we get programmed to think that

we don't have personal power.

Caprice: So one thing I love about the Agile Learning Centers is you're really pro actively trying to preserve children's curiosity and imagination.

Tomis: It's kind of a fundamental aspect to unschooling and self directed education philosophy that children are born curious and born with the ability to learn the things they need in order to be. In order to be powerful in their environment. That's what's the tragedy of education today, of that kind of perspective. Of you need to be trained out of who you naturally are. So you can be trained into this world, in to work for this world. And I think that one of the layers of complication. One of the reasons that perspective continues to be prevalent. I mean there's a lot of reasons. But one of the reasons it's really hard for people to kind of fully come to terms with that is.

Tomis: You start asking the questions like, "Why is it that we need to train humans out of who they naturally are into something that can work for this world? So they aren't too disruptive for this society?" You start kind of peeling back the layers of Why is that? What is this world? What is this world and who does it work for? And why do we need people to be standardized and go to college and have their knowledge of who they are taken away from them? And they're being in touch with themselves and their gifts and their strengths and their bodies taken away from them so that they can then serve a different function in society that they may not be willing to serve? In self directed education, a lot people have lots of different angles from which they come into it in which they become interested in it

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Tomis: For a lot of people, they have children and their child doesn't do well in school so they're looking for alternatives. For people whose entry point is that, sometimes it stops there. And sometimes the rabbit hole continues. But it really is a rabbit hole of just realising all the different ways in which things are just set up backwards. All the different layers of intentional suppression and oppression that exists in the world. And unfortunately schooling is really the indoctrination station for accepting all of that about ourselves about society. I find it so frustrating, and I guess curious would be the nice way of putting it, frustrating most days. How people, who I would otherwise see eye to eye with, on political or social issues, cannot just come to terms with fact that having an entire education system that's based on not nonconsensual activity is the source of a lot of the social issues that the same people are trying to disrupt and change.

Tomis: And so that's one of the main reasons I got into this work. That frustration continues to be reinforced today. That's one of the ways in which I may feel like things haven't changed as much as I want them.

Caprice: I share that same sense of frustration and also wonder because, for me, once I saw the school system for what it was, I couldn't unsee it. You know once you see it you can't unsee it. And then you wonder, okay why doesn't everybody else see this? It's so obvious. I want to go

to a point you made: Why do we need to train humans out of who they naturally are? Perhaps for me, that's the real root of the problem. It has nothing to do with standards, content, standardized testing. Who do we think humans are? And you've really been in a position to see a lot of diverse humans who aren't going through this standardization process which is soul crushing. So who do you think humans really are?

Tomis: That's a pretty Open ended question.

Caprice: Who are they naturally designed to be? When I see schooling, even though they say, "Oh, we're not filling these empty vessels. You know that's so nine twentieth century or something." My witnessing has been that schooling is information processing and behavior control. As if humans are just these meat sacks carrying around these computerized brains.

Tomis: I think people have experiences, little glimpses in their lives of what it might look like if they had, if not only them, but the whole world was kind of doing self directed education or had this different perspective of you know...

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Tomis: Children are born fully equipped and perfectly whole and have a wide range of different needs. But they know best in terms of how to navigate life and how to get those needs met. I think that people have experiences that may indicate what life would be like and that should be the norm. But so much of our lives are just about kind of struggling to survive in this world where you know you're hustling to just make it work. I think that humans would be a lot more productive.

Tomis: The irony is that the whole capitalist economy is based around economic production and growth. The irony is that if we had a world where children were trusted, it probably be a much more productive society in so many different ways. But there's reasons why things are organized the way they are and continue to be organized the way they are. I'm not exactly sure how to answer your question or where they where to go with it in terms of like how philosophical to get on the question.

Caprice: Keeping it more practical. I see so many kids struggling with school and starting to hate learning because they think schooling is learning and what I've seen from Agile Learning Centers is learning is fun and playful. It doesn't have to be hard.

Tomis: Yeah. Totally. Yeah. That's kind of what I mean in terms of people have experiences. Little experiences of, maybe it's a hobby you have or maybe it's like discovering doing some sort of home improvement project on the weekend or whatever where you just realize - I really enjoyed doing that tonight. I created something and I was like you really focused when I was doing it and I was really into it and the time flew by and I feel really good about the result of it.

And you know that could be the norm. Obviously there's always responsibilities and things that maybe I don't always want to do at one particular time. But the vast majority of life could be lived and experienced that way. I think that's to me the ultimate.

Tomis: One of the main goals for raising a child in a self directed education kind of context is that we get forty, fifty, eight, hundred years. Why not be happy and why not feel like you are doing something that matters to you with your time on the planet? So I think that. Yeah, like learning is easy and natural if we allow it to be. Creating and being productive is also easy and natural if we allow it to be. We just don't. We just don't have the imagination for how that would look at scale because we've been sold into this belief that there are all these things that no one would want to do if they weren't forced to do them. And the world would fall apart if there wasn't a larger mechanism of control and domination and indoctrination that took place from the very beginning.

Caprice: And built into that, as you said, is this fundamental distrust of kids and humans. That they don't have what they need. You have to train them so that they will survive.

Tomis: Right. You know just because you realized your kid doesn't need a curriculum or you choose self directed education or whatever is a Better Plan and you're doing that now, doesn't mean that those beliefs magically go out the window.

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Tomis: I'm sure as my son gets older, I will be confronted with the ways in which I still hold some of those beliefs myself and have to work through them without thinking that he should do or learn this or that. We see it all the time when you're creating a community that's a school that's based on those concepts. You have parents that are in very different places in the spectrum of how much trust have in their children. Trying to figure out a community - how broad is our tent around this? How do we hold the center that truly believes in trusting kids and is holding that space while also making it inclusive enough for families who are needing to have certain boundaries or agreements with their kids; are needing to hire a tutor on the side because you know Dad's freaking out or grandma's chatting up too much about you know the hell far behind someone is in reading or something like that right? The norm is still out there in the world and pervasive. So it kind of keeps people in check in terms of being able to fully embrace SDE.

Tomis: We have some in our community who are reimagining what it looks like to trust their children to grow up on their own terms. And there's some really beautiful examples of people who've grown up in that context. But it's hard to get down to that point when there's so many forces that are kind of pushing you in the other direction.

Caprice: One thing that I noticed and I'd like to see if you agree with me is that one reason, a big reason I think, that the K-12 schooling model is frozen in place is because of entrance requirements for college and the standardized tests. I feel like that kind of trickles all the way

back into K-12. Well, if you know Harvard's going to require algebra 1, geometry, and algebra 2 then all high school students have to take them. And you have to be able to write the five paragraph essay by the time you're in sixth grade and it just kind of all trickles down. So I've suspected that if college admissions became a far more holistic process, then that would affect the K-12 system. Do you agree or am I being kind of idealistic here?

Tomis: Actually, I haven't thought about it that way too much. I think it's probably that the forces are working from both ends. I think the problem I have with saying that that's the real issue is that would assume that, in general, people are having children and viewing them as fully perfect and capable and you know ready to be trusted. But we have to do this whole twelve years of schooling so that you can be ready for the SAT. And you know it sounds crazy but that actually is the way a lot of people relate to it. I mean in terms of how the types of things people are looking for in kindergarten or in elementary school. They're thinking about their children as economic utilities that far in advance. So I do think that that would probably alleviate some of the pressure in the pressure cooker. There's a really strong marriage between business and colleges. The Pearson Corporation, the SAT and how all that works. I guess as that continues to shift in terms of college's relinquishing standards on admissions it might free up some space to be thinking differently about how high school time is spent.

But I do think that something you said before about school is for information transfer and control. I think that is fairly true. The control part is a broader cultural issue that has to be really examined and disrupted for that to change.

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Tomis: You could get rid of standardized tests and even grades and you still have control. I mean there's wildly progressive schools that are still all about control. There's some really great things about Waldorf education. But at the end of the day, these are just liberal arts parents who love nature art, and theater, and so that's what we're going to make our kids do. Though, you can kind of change the content without changing the control. So I'm not sure. I think maybe it's definitely a contributing factor for sure but I don't know that it's the whole problem.

Caprice: That's an excellent point and then I think, well, why would you feel you needed to control something? You need to control what you fear.

Tomis: Yeah that's the rabbit hole. Private colleges are shedding those requirements faster. There's a lot of state colleges and universities - it might be kind of my cynical side - would struggle to see those institutions moving in that direction. That's kind of a continuation of the schooling system. Why would we get rid of standardized testing here if that's what our whole public education system is based on? That's what the large corporations that are controlling legislation are benefiting from Etcetera. Etcetera. So you can have your, you know kind of elite private institutions that realize like, oh, the the most intellectually you know robust 18 year old

what's important is not their standardized tests blah blah blah.

Tomis: That's also kind of where there's a split in perspective on education. You can see self directed education as a way for your children to get a leg up on everyone else in a hyper competitive world 'cause it actually would probably provide that. But to me, that's a really shallow kind of an experience. For me, it's about liberation for all people. I think that that's kind of what's happening in the private college world. Elon Musk is saying we don't care about this or that when we hire at Tesla and Google saying that, and so then Harvard saying that but that's just kind of like you know still about grooming the cream of the crop from the economic competitive perspective about what education is for. Is education for growing up to become skilled at a particular thing so you can get a really good job? You can either get famous or rich or both because that's pretty much what most people think education is for and I think that that's the cultural issue.

Tomis: It's much deeper like that. That is one of kind of control versus partnership. You can have a Waldorf school that can still be very much about control. And then you can have a self directed education and I'm not going to name names, but they're definitely school models out there that are borderline self directed education but it's really just about like you being better, getting you know getting a leg up. Doing the same rat race for what education is for. Like the economic success story. It's still framed as that, but it's just a better way of doing that and so I think that you know to me, that's wholly uninspiring and not really the point.

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Caprice: My youngest daughter went to (and I won't name names either even though it's tempting) but in Austin, she tried a new school focused on self-directed education. She lasted one day and two hours before she called me crying and begging me to come pick her up. Because they didn't know what to do with a kid that was already self directed. Because they already had this system of control that they were going to put everyone through to get them to be self directed. And she got bullied by kids who had just come out of the school system. It was exactly what you were saying. It was just a really sneaky kind of control using a lot of buzzwords. Which is unfortunate.

Caprice: I have been a leadership coach for twenty years and I've had so many executives come to me at the top of their game, making a ton of money. They've got the title. They've got the stuff and they look at me and say, "Come on Caprice, isn't there more to this game of life? I mean I still feel so empty inside. You know I played by the rules. I succeeded." But we know and so I think nobody's telling kids -- First of all school is preparing you for jobs that don't exist and even if you do succeed on that track, that's no path to happiness right?

Tomis: Exactly. It's like we're just asking all their own questions. It's another one of those things that I am either scratching or banging my head against the wall. You know the way in which people who I share the majority of political values with don't understand the basic idea of

sovereignty for children. You know at the same time, it's like across the entire education landscape people don't seem to get that. The point of life is to enjoy it and to be happy and to make meaning. The meaning of life is to make your own meaning. And if you don't have agency and sovereignty and time and space, then you don't actually have the opportunity to make meaning and make it meaningful for you. You're just playing someone else's game. You know you're just like that CEO who said you're following all the rules that were given to you and then you realize like. Oh. This is an empty lot. I don't even want to be playing this game anymore and now you're 40, 50 years into it. So yeah. Yeah a tragic story that we're kind of all playing out there.

Caprice; It makes me wonder if parents do not recognize or honor the sovereignty of their children because they don't see it in themselves. They don't see that they have the power to create their own world and their own stories and create meaning.

Tomis: There's a well-known John Holt quote to that effect I think. About, trust is tough if you weren't trusted then you don't know how to trust. If you weren't trusted as a child, then you're not going to know how to trust your own child. Because, basically the story you grew up with was "you don't know what's best for you; we know what's best for you". And so that's how you're going to view your children. Unless you discover that's what's been going on and do a lot of work. That's totally the thing. So I think that's one thing that gives me hope is knowing that there has to be at some point a tipping point where enough people are undoing that story. And then creating a different experience for their children. Then those children grow up to be parents and step into that trust and partnership perspective becomes even stronger for their children. Eventually we hopefully get to a point where that isn't the problem. Where it's like you can't do this because you don't have the muscle memory to know it looks like. Then there could potentially be a kind of cascade of change. I hope I live to see it.

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Caprice: I see my daughters getting ready to enter the world and they are self directed, but they feel kind of like alien beings. There aren't that many awake self-directed people. Which doesn't mean that everybody doesn't have that capacity. They just have to discover it for themselves.

Tomis: Yeah and there's so many other factors too. I mean it's like you really can't separate the reason why school is the way it is from the way our economics work in our country and in the world. It's all connected. To talk about education reform -- It's just not an isolated concept. What families really need are resources so that they can raise their children themselves. It's not an isolated conversation.

Caprie: That's true. They do need the resources and it's increasingly difficult for anybody. When people are educated in a way that they're always looking outside of themselves for permission. They're looking outside of themselves for validation and how does this all work versus looking

inside where all of their power is, then I think it leads to our society of just overconsumption.

Tomis: Totally. Another way that it's all it's all interconnected. I mean not only are you more willing to do a job that brings you no joy, makes no meaning in your life for thirty or forty years. Because it's just what the options are; how the story played out. But you're also than more willing to just look for ways to fill that void with stuff and things that actually aren't sustainable for your body and your soul or the planet. The way we do it, the way we view kids, and the way we raise and educate them to me -- it's just undeniable that it sets the stage for continuing all of the other unsustainable things that we're doing as a species on the planet that we inhabit.

Tomis: What I mean when I talk about the rabbit hole and peeling back the layers in terms of the start to see the way in which schooling and education and the prevailing parenting is just so connected to all the other things that people are kind of continuously spinning their wheels trying to change but at the same time, we're celebrating them and completely engrossed in them at the same time. So it's a weird world.

Caprice: Well it is and I think, as you said, human imagination has been so curtailed. Because I've seen in my own kids who spent the first eighteen years of their lives having the time and space to get to know who they are, what their gifts and talents are, what their interests are and to learn to really enjoy life and become self-reliant and trust themselves -- then they're not going to settle for a meaningless joyless job, right?

Tomis: Right. Exactly, yeah. They won't and they also wouldn't be what people would define as lazy either. They'd be the opposite of that. The thing is that the irony of productivity that we're talking about is people are just doing, for the most part, the bare amount that they have to. To survive in life. We just don't even know what's possible for humanity. If that was the norm. If the norm was like, "Hey, like don't worry about it. The adults have got it. You know we're actually taking responsibility for ourselves, for the world out here. And for the first twenty years of your life, you can just learn to be, learn to live in joy, so that you can carry that into this next phase of your life. Where you're going to then be the one holding the space and in holding down the fort for the next generation, people would be so much more productive. It's just we can't imagine it.

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Caprice: We can't imagine it. I also see so many teenagers who want to be adding value to society but there's no place for them to do it, right?

Tomis: Yeah. Unless of course you're willing to cut off all the parts of yourself and suppress all the parts of yourself that you've come to learn are important to you.

Caprice: I'm hoping that parents are able to witness firsthand what a school day looks like. Our school district is completely virtual and someone shared on Facebook the schedule for the Middle School for all eleven to thirteen year olds. Basically they have 20 minutes of social

emotional learning followed by four 45-minute blocks of zoom classes, a break for lunch, and two more zoom classes. I'm thinking to myself - look I have worked remotely and been self employed since 1999 and I could not sustain that schedule without my brain imploding, right?

Tomis: Yeah. That's incredible what we ask children to do that we would never as adults be willing to do. At that point, it's undeniable that even beyond school being this thing that you're doing to kids in order to get them ready for the world. It's like a hazing process for humanity. It's like you have to go through who wants to be in the fraternity or sorority of life into adulthood. You have to do all these ridiculous things that make no sense. We had to do it, and now you have to do it. You're seeing these things with the zoom school about kids not being allowed to wear pajamas and getting virtually suspended and all this kind of stuff. So you know it's about control. You take away the illusion of it being anything other than that. You know when you're in a school building, you could say, "all right, well, you know we have to have certain dress codes or whatever because we don't want you to know there's so many kids we have to deal with like the social implications or come up with reasons why kids can't express themselves with clothing". But now everyone's in their own home and there's still some sort of dress code.

Tomis: When things start to change in a way in which you'd think like this will really allow more freedom and space, the energy of control and domination of that existing paradigm sinks its teeth in. It's almost like it fights back a little bit harder because it feels the fact that is losing its grip. I think we're going to see that. It's going to be really interesting because we're going to see that with this kind of virtual school stuff like "How are our teachers and administrators going to keep the control when they don't even have the children in their own classrooms?" They're going to find new ways to do it. I can only hope that this forced control and domination is taking its last gasp.

Caprice: I was talking to my younger daughter about that and I asked her, "did you hear that school districts aren't allowing kids to do virtual school in their pajamas?" and she scoffed and was like, well, what are they going to do? Knock on your door and make you get dressed?

Tomis: I don't know, it sounds like what they're going to do is suspend you and then that's the whole thing. Maybe your theory has a little more merit because that's where it comes down to - they're hanging the fear over you like well, you'll get suspended, you'll lose a grade, you'll fall behind. You'll fail and you won't get good grades and because of that you won't get into college, you won't graduate and you'll be a failure and you won't succeed in life. It's literally the thing that they're supposed to be helping you accomplish is just being used as blackmail to control you the entire time.

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Caprice: Yeah. That is true. It's almost like with humans it's not the fear of it happening. It's a fear that it *might* happen that seems to be even more powerful.

Tomis: Yeah. Really I don't talk about schooling that much really anymore. Going there again, it is just crazy. The way people are contorting themselves to continue to make that whole thing exist.

Caprice: which makes me ever more grateful that you have ALC Mosaic in Charlotte and that's for ages 2 to 18. Is that correct?

Tomis: Yeah. We have two year olds who can come with a caregiver. Three and four year olds can come for three or four hours a day. Five and up can come for full days. And then we have a 16, soon to be 17 year old who will be graduating this year, but really won't even be on campus. She's doing dual enrollment at the Community College here and also doing some pre-veterinarian school training. So other than that we've actually had some attrition in the Upper Ages. So I think our oldest student after that student will be 14 and then a handful of 12 year olds. But yet, it's an all ages situation and with our co-working space opening up in a few weeks we will be having parents co-working on campus which will kind of solidify our movement towards trying to become more of just an all ages learning community. We operate a legal school for practical reasons but to kind of move even further away from that dynamic of like just being a place where you drop your kids off so they can get self-directed education.

Caprice: I'm glad that the families in Charlotte have that and you've worked very hard. That's one thing I love about the Agile Learning Network. And so if any parents are listening in and they're interested in starting an ALC - is that you give away so much for free. You're so generous. I mean you just have to give your email and you get the whole kit on how you would start your own agile learning center -- from the nuts and bolts of attracting families, to the legal, to the facilities. So you've been extremely generous with giving so much away.

Tomis: Yeah. Actually we put that together back in 2016. Some other folks updated and wrote a facilitation guide that we added a few years ago. The starter kit probably could definitely use a refresh soon because there's just so much new Learning and evolution that's gone on inside of the ALC Network as well. There's a bunch of fundamental things in there that are still very relevant to the process of getting started and certainly the foundation of our model. Practical things around building a school community that can work. That was the goal. Never to turn the educational model into some sort of product that would make careers for people in and of itself. So it's yeah the goal is just to give people the opportunity to start something. We don't have a super fancy operation. Download the starter kit. And then if you want to, become a member for you know fifty or a hundred bucks a year. At that point, it's just get on our Slack and talk to other facilitators that are doing the work and share resources in joint support calls that folks are hosting. So it's still a distributed organic network of people that are connecting over the shared experience and learning from each other. Which was the intention from the start. It's been really cool to see it happening especially without much involvement for me at all in the past few years.

00:55:02 - 01:00:08

There are so many amazing people that are doing great organizing work with the ALC network.

Caprice: I didn't mean to take you down the rabbit hole of schooling, but I just feel like so many people associate education with schooling. That if they could make the distinction between schooling and learning and see what's going on at the Agile Learning Centers that looks so different that it would maybe shift their mindset a little bit.

Tomis: Yeah I think that always possible for people to have their mind set shifted. I do think that there's a lot of different entry points like I said into seeing self directed education as a viable alternative. To realizing -- Oh, this is just the way it should be. And then once you're in it, then it can really expand in terms of going down that rabbit hole of seeing all the ways in which schooling protects and enforces the brokenness of our society and the human condition.

Tomis: I think however someone might take that first step into curiosity about it is. That's it is just a first step. I mean it's really like an ongoing process of de-schooling to understand the ways in which as an adult, as a parent, or even just an adult who's going to relate to children, whether their own or not. We're either providing people and experience in an environment that supports their liberation or we are continuing to reinforce their oppression. And I think that's obviously happening all the time in lots of little ways and it's nuanced. You can be broken down into that category and into those categories in a lot of ways. So always it's been a fruitful and expansive process of understanding that what that means for me as an individual and for our community here and more broadly in self directed education.

Caprice; I have a lot of insights into schooling, but you're describing it as a hazing experience is definitely going to stick with me after this conversation. Tomis, if people want to connect with you, what is the best way to do that?

Tomis: Oh Man. I mean I never really did the whole personal brand thing in the Internet world. I mean they can email me. I usually go to typical social media places when I need to kind of blow off steam. I'm a very sarcastic person and it's kind of how I cope with these aspects of the world that are insane. So I don't know that you're going to see my best self and in some of those spaces. I'm working on a Junto project as well. So yeah, email me

Caprice: I will get that from you to put it in the show notes. I think that also shows how you're such a creator in the world. Looking at Facebook, Twitter and just the toxicity of those cultures. So creating Junto is now in Alpha phase and I will put that link into the show notes. When will you be expanding to allow more people into this, as you said, healthier place for people to connect right? That's not about hooking attention and advertising.

Tomis: Yeah Yeah. Junto also I didn't start it -- another situation where I've linked in real early. Junto is a social media platform that's intended to be human centered in all the ways.

Junto.foundation is the website, and you can actually sign up to get on our waiting list to be added to our Alpha from from the website.

01:00:09 - 01:01:23

Tomis: We're likely going to be able to do that now to get you on Junto in the next six weeks. And then we're probably going to be doing another crowdfunding campaign in the coming months and using that as a segue into Beta which would allow more open access for people to join. Right now, we're just onboarding about 100 people a week to kind of slowly scale up as we continue building out some kind of basic features that need to be finished.

Caprice: Okay well, great. I do think we need a human centered social media platform. So thank you for being part of that initiative. It was wonderful talking with you today. I will put some links on the Agile Learning Center Mosaic and the Network and Junto for people to connect. I want to thank everybody for listening to this episode and if you did like it, please subscribe to let me know. People find me on iTunes when you leave reviews, so if you're so inclined, please do that. Thank you.