Evaluating youth empowerment in neighbourhood settings: applying the Capabilities 3C model to evidence and extend the social justice outcomes of youth work in Scotland

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Abstract

This paper examines how collective capabilities at a neighbourhood level can support youth voice and empowerment. By applying Ibrahim's 3C collective capabilities model in a new context with young people, we propose that it offers an innovative and useful framework to demonstrate the existing value of youth work practice and to extend its social justice potential.

Our findings aim to address the concern that the majority of youth work in Scotland supports personal transformation but does not lead to wider community action and change. They offer a framework to analyse the development of collective capabilities amongst young people from high-poverty neighbourhoods, and offer the potential to hold policy makers to account for recent commitments to youth decision-making via Scotland's incorporation of the UNCRC Rights of the Child, Article 12.

The 3C model conceptualises three key processes in the development of collective agency as *consciencisation, conciliation* and *collaboration*. The model recognises the personal and group processes of engagement that lead to grassroots action, but also prompts analysis of power relations between grassroots actors and the institutions that govern public decision-making. Drawing on a case study example, we highlight the ways in which youth work practice might extend its social justice potential, highlighting the need for collaboration and power sharing with policy institutions in order to support meaningful youth empowerment.

Keywords: *capabilities, voice, youth work, empowerment, neighbourhoods*

1. Introduction

The right for young people to participate in decisions that affect their lives is now widely accepted in Scotland, the United Kingdom, and internationally (Lundy, 2018). In Scotland the National Youth Work Strategy 2014-2019[1] promises to 'put young people at the heart of policy' (8). Similar sentiments are expressed in both the UK Government's Youth Policy which is 'committed to giving young people a voice in formulating youth policy'[2] and in the European Union where the aim is to develop the 'meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people'[3]. The right to participate and be heard is also enshrined in legislation such as the Children Act (2004) and the Children (Scotland) Act 2020, both of which place an obligation on the state to involve young people in decisions concerning their lives. Despite the consensus around the need to include youth voices in addressing public policy challenges, young people's participation is limited, both in Scotland (Gadda et al 2019;402) and internationally (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020). The extent to which youth rights can generate a shift in power relations is yet to be realised (Coburn and Gormally, 2019a: 24). While youth participation policies can be considered instruments of governmental power in themselves (Anderson, 2010), they can potentially provide a means through which grassroots youth organisations can hold government to account by supporting authentic and plural representations of excluded youth to build new knowledges.

The failure to see changes in policy implementation has led to a call for the development of new conceptual and practical approaches that enable meaningful youth participation (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020). Similarly, Gadda et al (2019) have proposed a clearly articulated theory of change to allow those involved in promoting youth rights to plan, implement and monitor activities. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the potential of Sen's (1992) capability approach to provide such a framework. We do this by drawing on evidence from a case study of an organisation working with young people in an area of high poverty in Scotland. In our analysis we employ Ibrahim's (2017) adaptation of Sen's approach, the 3C

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[1] National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19. https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/youth-work-strategy-181214.pdf. Accessed 200120.
[2] https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/united-kingdom-england/14-youth-policy-decision-making
[3] https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/engage_en

model, to unpack the development of 'collective capabilities' with grassroots organisations. Ibrahim highlights the processes of conscientization, conciliation and collaboration which are integral to promoting and sustaining grassroots collective agency. In this study, we explore the application of this model to youth work by examining the resonance of the 3C in a grassroots youth organization, with the aim of extending analysis of the critical contextual factors which enable or hinder young people to create knowledges based on their lived experiences. In doing so, we consider the unique approach that grassroots organisations can offer by exploring the processes at neighbourhood level which directly enable and support youth agency and voice.

Despite a strong radical tradition of youth work based on Freirian critical pedagogy and collective transformation (Coburn 2010), research suggests that the current emphasis in youth work in Scotland is focused on individual transformation (Fyfe et al., 2018:36). A focus on individual responsibility, choice, independence and achievement creates an 'epistemological fallacy' by ignoring the social structures that constrain and shape an individual's life chances and opportunities (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). This resonates with a neoliberal model of agency that defines the self as a commodity (Gershon, 2011). The wider demonisation of marginalised youth (Giroux, 2012) and framing of the 'youth participation deficit' (Bečević and Dahlstedt, 2022) call for processes of collective agency building as a form of resistance that revalue social interaction, dialogue and the critique of institutional power relationships. Ibrahim's model, we argue, offers a framework for youth collective agency that responds to the above concerns.

Our aims in this paper are two-fold: to explore the use of the 3C framework as a means of evidencing and extending the value of youth work in high-poverty communities to promote voice and empowerment; and to present considerations on connecting youth work activity with the policy arena. The paper opens with an outline of the capability approach and Ibrahim's Capabilities 3C model before describing our methods for data collection. It then moves to consider what the evidence from our case study tells us about the contribution of youth activity to empowerment, and how its social justice potential might be extended by considering its contribution to the wider policy arena.

2. **A Capabilities Approach in youth work**

Key concepts of the Capabilities Approach include the centrality of dialogue in setting goals to address inequalities (Sen, 1992) and the need for durable empowerment, which is contingent on the transfer of power, development of agency, and the achievement of structural wellbeing goals (Drydyk, 2013). These conceptualisations resonate with Freirian critical pedagogy and the principles of participative youth work practice (Davies, 2005; Ledwith, 2020; Popple, 2015). Place-based youth work has the scope to support young people to interrogate and challenge their circumstances while building collective solidarity towards social change (Mackie, 2019) in a context of supportive social relationships and discursive reflection.

Nussbaum (2011) has identified young people's rights as 'the fourth frontier of human justice,' arguing that they are not adequately conceptualised due to the power differentials at play. The CA seeks to value young people as 'competent social agents (with) an active social world beyond audible and visible scrutiny … but (also) as actors with limited and unequal access to action' (Buhler-Niedenberger and Konig, 2011). The capabilities literature emphasises the importance of locating youth voices at the centre of any strategy for understanding the dimensions of their wellbeing (Biggeri, 2007). A focus on deliberation helps to foreground the dialogical process of youth work, at a time when marginalised young people are framed as 'a liability' (Giroux in Pollard, 2014), and the value of this practice is under threat from demands for outcomes and shrinking resources (Davies, 2019: 7).

In response to critiques that the Capabilities Approach is unable to account for the wider social determinants that impact on a community (Stewart and Deneulin 2002), capabilities scholars have turned their attention to the development of collective capabilities (Ibrahim, 2006; Pelenc et al., 2015; Leßmann, 2020). This paper now turns to a discussion of one such approach, developed by Ibrahim (2017).

2.1 The rationale for using the 3C approach to evaluate neighbourhood-based youth work practice

The 3C Capabilities model was developed as a means of conceptualising the critical processes of collective agency in grassroots-led development with adult activists, defined as 'people acting as initiators and agents of change' (Ibrahim, 2017: 198). It shifts the analysis from the individual to the community and examines the role such activities play in generating 'new collective capabilities from which all community members can benefit' (202). Evidence

suggests that most youth work practice in Scotland supports the development of individual agency with young people from high-poverty neighbourhoods (Fyfe et al, 2018) but fails to link barriers to their socio-economic causes and support collective action for change. Further, grassroots youth work organisations are rarely invited into the policy arena, so their creative approaches to enable youth voice fail to be included in policy approaches. By framing practice in a critical pedagogy context and analysing the steps towards potential collaboration with policy institutions, we explore how youth voice legislation could be used as a lever to enable meaningful action for young people in high-poverty neighbourhoods. In the following section we examine the resonance of the 3Cs of *conscientization, conciliation* and *collaboration*, to the principles of youth work practice.

2.2 Adapting the 3C model to the context of working with youth work practice

Power is central to the 3C processes: *power within* at the individual level of consciencisation, *power with* generated by collective conciliation, and *power over/to* at the institutional level of collaboration (Ibrahim, 2017:204). Taking the 3C concepts in turn, the paper now briefly considers what these processes mean in the context of critical pedagogy with children and young people.

Consciencisation is located at the individual level of change (ibid, 205) and reflects the development of critical consciousness through a 'reflection - perception – action' cycle, leading to engagement with the causes of inequality. Freire's 'problem-posing' approach allows learners to reflect on the status quo, generating questions about why inequalities exist and how they might be challenged, from the viewpoint of being experts within their own field of experience (Coburn and Gormally, 2019b: 7).. Through a process of dialogue and questioning, they engage with the causes of their circumstances and identify social action for change. A primary aim of youth work is to support young people to be 'outward looking, critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them' (Davies, 2005:7). The ability to describe and measure this process is fundamental to understanding the unique value of community-based youth work.

The practice of engaging in dialogue towards a common goal is described by Ibrahim as ***conciliation***. By building understanding through collective deliberation, individual goals are reconciled in favour of the 'common good' (2017: 208), with the aim of generating

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communal responsibility for action. This dialectical approach is central to youth work theory, not only to create consensus but in the co-construction of knowledge itself (Crowther and Martin, 2018: 11). Consensus is not necessarily the primary goal, given that 'problem posing' and disagreement allow the representation of difference and pluralism. Freire explores dialogue as the site in which human relationships are co-created, thereby collapsing the I/you dichotomy through 'horizontal' communication (1972: 125). Dialogue is not only an epistemological exchange, but an ontological one, linking the struggle for social injustice to one for 'cognitive justice' (De Sousa Santos, 2007: 45-89).

The final stage in Ibrahim's process is that of ***collaboration****,* defined as challenging the unequal power relations which cause inequalities by promoting institutional reform (2017: 210). Although youth work 'practice (is) proactively seeking to tip balances of power in young people's favour' (Davies, 2007: 7), current evidence suggests that youth work in Scotland falls short of 'wider community action and change led by young people' (Fyfe et al, 2018: 36). Whilst structural change is difficult to achieve, this paper proposes drawing attention to the necessary institutional work to support engagement in policy development on young people's terms. The need for facilitation and support in the challenge of relational power is well recognised within the Scottish context, both in the need to promote equality in community engagement (Lightbody, 2017), and the role of advocacy as key to equal collaboration (Weakley and Escobar, 2018).

2.3 Analysing conversion factors

The agency to achieve capabilities goals is impacted by social, political and economic conditions (Buzzelli, 2015). The translation of the valued freedoms (capabilities) into the achievement of these states (functionings) requires resources, on a personal, social or structural level (Brunner and Watson, 2015). These resources are referred to as *conversion factors.* Personal factors are the resources held by an individual, such as income, education or social relationships; social factors include public sector or voluntary organisations; while structural factors include large-scale influences such as globalisation or capitalism, cultural stereotypes and caring responsibilities. Collective conversion factors can be compared to personal factors, in that collective capabilities require collective resources (Leßmann, 2020). The analysis of the positive or negative influence of conversion factors is a helpful means of evaluating context and gaining understanding of the factors that may prevent people from achieving their chosen capabilities.

3. Methodology

This paper draws on research from a single, exploratory case study (Yin, 2009), identified through ethnographic research as a grassroots youth organisation working to empower children and young people in a neighbourhood setting. The study was undertaken by researchers already based in the case-study neighbourhood and engaged in a wider programme of research into youth voice in local decision-making, funded by Scottish Government (Ward et al., 2019; Ward, Bynner and Bianchi, 2021). The deep, qualitative analysis of a single case study allowed us to explore the utility of Ibrahim's model in the analysing the development of youth collective agency. Our research question focused on *what processes at neighbourhood level can support collective agency and voice with children and young people?*

The case study was a grassroots, third-sector organization with extensive experience in working in high-poverty neighbourhoods, offering safe spaces where young people can build supportive relationships and explore the social issues that affect their lives through dialogue and creative practice. This offered a favourable environment in which to explore the scope for a 3Cs approach in wider community action on youth inequalities. The youth drama programme offered weekly workshops for young people living in the east area of the city, which includes several high-poverty neighbourhoods within high-ranking SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) deciles. The programme uses forum theatre (Boal, 2005) to support participants to devise and perform issue-based drama projects, based on their own interest and experience. Participants had been involved in the programme for varying amounts of time: for some, this was a first experience, while for others, it was their fourth devised play, undertaken in addition to a range of other activities within the project.

Fieldwork was conducted from November 2018 to June 2019 and included two phases of work. Phase one included desk-based and site research to identify a suitable programme for observation within the case-study organisation, and initial ethnographic observations of the programme. Researchers contacted the youth drama worker and made two initial observation sessions during the devising and rehearsal of the play with a group of fifteen young people aged between 12 and 19 years of age, of which three identified as male and twelve as female. They later reviewed a copy of the devised play script and attended the theatre performance in March 2019, amounting to three sessions of programme observation. The researcher role was

one of observer as participant (Gold, 1958), with the purpose of developing 'a holistic understanding' (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002: 96) of the programme under study, following a relationship-building protocol to build trust and promote authenticity (Oswald et al., 2014). Phase two involved research with young people to reflect on the processes and experiences of the programme. Two focus groups were held with five and twelve participants respectively (fifteen participants attended in total as three attended both groups). The first was a group dialogue; the second, a zine-making workshop (selected by participants) and reflective discussion on the zines produced[4]. Both focus groups took a semi-structured approach to discussion and explored the 3C topics of critical awareness, working as a group, and opportunities and action for change. Zine-making offered a youth-led, DIY, collaborative and dialogic form of creative reflection, used to recognise and challenge power structures (Desyllas and Sinclair, 2014: 299) and to 'privilege and explore the agency and actions of the non-elite' (Chidgey, 2006:4). During the session, participants were invited to use words, images and collage materials to represent their feelings about participating in a devised theatre work. They then reflected on the play's theme (what it meant to live in their neighbourhood), how and what they learned, and how they approached devising and structuring a play for performance. The individual zines were combined into one collective zine which was printed and copies were offered to all contributors.

Data collected for analysis comprised fieldwork notes and focus group transcripts. Thematic analysis followed the six stages defined by Braun and Clark (2006) including reviewing all data, generating initial codes, building themes, and reviewing and aligning themes with the 3Cs framework; a methodological appendix is submitted alongside this paper for reference. Since the two researchers were deeply embedded in context and had worked closely on all aspects of ethnographic fieldwork preceding the workshops, a formal inter-researcher agreement was not considered appropriate (McDonald et al, 2019); however, a pilot sample transcript was independently coded by hand and demonstrated a strong coding correlation. Triangulation across the 'thick description' of field notes and the dialogue of focus group transcripts promoted research validity (Yin, 2013) and trustworthiness (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2014: 133), allowing researchers to consider competing explanations, examine their

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[4] The zine workshop was carried out by a PhD co-researcher, Amanda Ptolomey. For further details, please contact Amanda.Ptolomey@glasgow.ac.uk.

own roles and understandings through reflexivity (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), and to assess the data in relation to the collective capabilities framework. Although the 3C framework itself was not discussed directly with the group, participants were asked what they enjoyed about the participation process, how it encouraged them to think about their neighbourhood, and about the effects of working collectively and creatively as a group of young people. We also explored what effect participants hoped that sharing their views would have on the audience.

4. Exploring the neighbourhood processes that support collective youth agency for social change using the 3C capabilities conceptual framework

The following section presents data drawn from interviews and informed by field notes, analysed according to Ibrhaim's collective capabilities. The first section explores the experiences of young people according to the three process of consciencisation, conciliation and collaboration while the second considers the conversion factors required at personal, social and structural levels, to enable the 3C processes to take place effectively for youth participants in the case study organisation.

4.1 Youth experiences of the 3C processes of consciencisation, conciliation and collaboration

Conscienzation

Many participants talked about how taking part in drama affected them as individuals, changing the way they felt about themselves and their community. They expressed a range of views around individual development, particularly concerning the confidence to have a voice:

> Katie: I didn't have any confidence at all, never spoke … because I was too scared to, and when I came to youth theatre ... they kind of developed a way of getting me to act, but not speaking. And now obviously I don't shut up, because of [case study organisation], I just don't shut up, because they've given me all the confidence I need.

Being able to participate in a manner of their own choosing, on their own terms, made participants feel comfortable. They felt they were accepted 'as they were': their views, sense

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of self, and sense of identity were not challenged, and they did not have to change the way they acted to please others. In Katie's case, this meant being given the space to develop on her own terms. By participating in ways other than speaking, she was able, over time, to gain the confidence to speak and to make her voice heard. During project visits, staff described their work with young people as a gradual process, taking time to build trust: a process that was not understood by funders, who were perceived as seeking concrete outcomes in unrealistic timescales. The organisation's ethos of long-term, pastoral care allowed for a supportive balance between meeting personal needs and supporting new skills and confidence, but was often in tension with finance pressures.

Creating an environment conducive to effective participation was also articulated by young people who spoke about their experiences of 'writing their own story' in the form of devised theatre. By selecting a topic for the theatre piece on which young participants were 'experts', participants' lived experience was privileged. Participants discussed their own neighbourhood perceptions as contrasted with those of the media:

> Maya: When you come to (this group) you get the option to pick what you actually want to base the work on … I've always done topics that I felt passionate about … we never do something similar to anybody else, we always do it our way and how we see things.

> James: We realised there were pros and cons to living in the East End of Glasgow and we wanted to show people what the East End is about ... like how we see it as young people.

> Katie: Some people say stuff about Glasgow, but then they see the real side of it.

> James: We … worked on how the media sees the East End of Glasgow, and basically it is not a good place sometimes. We wanted to show it is a good place and there's good people in it.

Focus group discussion revealed that young people engaged critically with media perceptions of their neighbourhood, and questioned negative portrayals. Participants challenged outsider views of their community but also demonstrated critical reflection on their own preconceptions. An example of this was a scene exploring youth perceptions of a homeless men's hostel in the community: at first depicting the hostel in negative terms, but moving on

to reflect on the causes of homelessness and to imagine the life conditions of those living there. This demonstrated a movement in consciousness, from an acceptance of demonising media portrayals to engagement with the imagined stories of hostel residents, leading to a critical awareness of the socio-economic inequalities that caused homelessness.

Conciliation

The process of devising content and developing the play required the sharing and refining of ideas between group members. Focus group participants spoke about the importance of feeling comfortable with disagreement, articulating the concept of dialectics as fundamental to the creative process:

> Emma: We just disagree and then we kind of mix it together and then it becomes something …
>
> David: Even if you can't mix it together we would sit and speak … right this is how I feel about this and then Emma would speak and say, this is what I feel about this and then maybe my ideas and my explanation has changed Emma's mind a bit and then we can collaborate and decide on that idea.

Creating a forum in which disagreement and difference was encouraged was a vital factor in building young people's confidence, but also in enabling young people to compromise and work together on creating a collaborative work. This required a friendly and supportive environment in which diverse ideas were welcomed and respected, but also debated openly on their merits within the final devised piece. Several young people spoke about feeling valued by other group members, regardless of differences in age and experience.

The case study organisation demonstrated a 'border learning' approach where marginalised young people were supported to explore their own knowledge from a position of expertise. Research participants commented not only on the value of using their own, known content in boosting their confidence and ensuring that the play topic was relevant to them, but also in the form in which content was to be presented. For example, the group decided to explore concepts, places and emotions associated with their neighbourhood which were then embodied by performers, rather than the traditional drama approach of character names.

James: The way we came up with it was, we sat and we had time to think of different words and different places that described the East End and decided that we didn't want characters so we wouldn't go and name characters. It was more feelings and places in the East End that we wanted to play.

Emma: It has a lot of emotions and it can help people get through like tough times and stuff like that.

Taking collective control of form as well as content was a key point of empowerment, where group processes of articulation and negotiation fed back into increased individual confidence and critical awareness, in a cyclical manner.

Collaboration

Young people were able to articulate differences in power relations between the case study drama group context and more traditional theatre group settings (for example, at school), both in the way the drama group was led, and in their emerging understanding of their scope to challenge audience expectations. The style of group facilitation was highly valued by most participants, and this was returned to several times within the focus group discussion:

James: No-one's in charge. Rachel (drama worker) does lead the session but it's us that put the work together and there's not exactly anyone leading the group.

Emma: At school … the teachers are definitely in charge or somebody else is in charge and you're just sitting there and they tell you to do everything.

One young person commented on feeling uncomfortable with school drama due to its adherence to set texts and traditional modes of teaching and learning, explaining that he had dropped out of school classes, despite theatre being an interest and passion. The perceived relevance of the devised project at the case study organisation and continued participant willingness to engage and learn demonstrates that empowering, group-led ways of working are not only valuable but essential. This resonates with Mackie's observation that young people from high-poverty neighbourhoods seek security from trusting relationships developed in a 'safe,' local environment (2019: 57). A reluctance to engage with formal education structures does not necessarily denote poverty of aspiration, but rather the inability of educational institutions to offer a curriculum that is meaningful to marginalised learners.

A critical moment for the group was explored in the focus group discussion on audience perceptions of homelessness. The group reflected on the way in which they posed a problem for the audience, by showing the complex social and economic factors that had led to one character's homelessness:

> James: (The homeless scene) was a really powerful scene within the show, to show you don't know where somebody's come from and what their background is. For all we know, the homeless guy could have had a family and could have had a great job and he just kind of lost it all and didn't know where to go. The message was don't snigger at them, don't look at them like they're stupid. Like go and help them… just buy a wee tea for them, buy a wee bag of chips or anything, just like any spare change or anything ... make sure they feel that they should be just a normal person.

> Katie: There was actually a woman who after seeing (the show) went and bought … was it chips for a homeless woman?

> Maya: She said that's something she would never normally do, so it was good to know that. It made me … a lot of people … feel very good.

The group's 'problem posing' to the audience mirrored their own examination of preconceptions of homelessness. Their exploration avoided the replacement of sensationalist media representations of place with new absolutist 'truths', presenting instead an investigation of the social and economic narrative behind one person's experience of homelessness. By offering an exploratory story, participants were able to challenge the traditional power relationship between a theatre group of young people and an audience of (predominately) adults. The group expressed surprise and pleasure at being listened to, including their discovery that an audience member had acted upon her reflections through the act of buying food for a homeless person on the way home. This demonstrated a full cycle of praxis, wherein young people had developed critical consciousness of the homeless issue during the devising of the script and were then able to present the scene as a dialectical issue from which the audience could engage and learn.

Whilst the evaluation of *collaboration* was able to draw out the success of young people in challenging power relations with their audiences, it also highlighted that there is a need to widen and diversify the types of audiences with whom groups such as this are able to engage. Neighbourhood work with children and young people could make a much more significant

impact on the institutional power structures that inhibit young people's wellbeing, however the opportunities for the young people in this study to engage or collaborate with other actors, such as the state, were limited. The case study's drama programme – and their wider work – is currently viewed as creative activity, rather than as a mode of consultation, participation or formulation of policy. The play's reflections on place and perceptions of neighbourhood hold relevance for a policy audience, both at a city and national level, but they are not currently on the radar as a source of evidence for policy planning. In terms of who is invited to contribute and to voice concerns, and in what format, this is tipped heavily in favour of existing bureaucratic frameworks of engagement. There is a clear need for policymakers to be willing to engage with 'boundary learning', to move beyond traditional participation structures, and work with children and young people in spaces that they already occupy.

Further, the skills and knowledge offered by the case study through frontline staff are informed by expertise in the creative industries – and, indeed, for the use of forum drama as a tool for participation in a range of community empowerment contexts – to support the articulation of marginalised young people's voices at a policy level. James' case - where he was able to pursue a career in drama following his experience with a local youth drama programme but was unable to progress with a drama qualification at school - demonstrates the potential for local, informal learning opportunities based on dialogical education methods to make learning meaningful to young people from high-poverty neighbourhoods.

4.2 The conversion factors that support effective youth engagement in the 3C processes

Alongside the 3C model, the capabilities approach offers an analytical framework of contextual factors – the personal, social and global resources within and beyond neighbourhoods that impact on the achievement of capabilities - and on the processes that facilitate their achievement.

Personal conversion factors

At the micro level, a key issue identified within the group was trust in relation to a neighbourhood-based, local organisation that encouraged family engagement with their services. For many participants, siblings and family members were known to staff, and young people were encouraged to drop in on a regular basis, even when they were not attending the drama group. Many participants were involved in other activities beyond drama, including sports, comic art and graffiti workshops. Participants were usually engaged in activity across

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a number of years: for example, new group members had participated in the case study organisation's younger group activities, and participants aged 15 and over had been attending over a number of years.

Several participants expressed difficulties with confidence and discussed how these had improved over time within the group. One group member who had recently joined commented that although the drama group itself was free of charge, one perceived barrier to participation at the individual level was financial, in that the group was required to raise funds to attend a summer theatre festival at which they had been invited to perform.

Social conversion factors

The social or 'meso' resource level invites consideration of the neighbourhood resources, such as services, local organisations and networks, which enable or prevent young people's empowerment. Our findings suggested that the case study organisation, as a grassroots, neighbourhood-based organisation, offered a vital resource for the conversion of a number of capabilities goals for children and young people, including participation and voice, education, social networks and creative expression. In this way, grassroots organisations can support the 'fertile functionings' (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2013) of a number of goals concurrently. Highly skilled facilitators, an inclusive ethos and the independence and autonomy of the voluntary sector further supported this perception. On the negative side, barriers to the sustainability of small grassroots organisations such as the case study organisation included funding precarity that resulted in the precarity of sessional staff who delivered programmes, and the difficulty in securing programme funds.

Structural conversion factors

The macro-level factors that supported youth participation and voice, and the processes that led to this, include a favourable Scottish policy environment that is seeking ways in which to foster and support youth empowerment in decision-making processes. Further, the use of drama to create and claim a bespoke space in which to present young people's voices and challenge power relations offers a dynamic and exciting site for youth empowerment. Despite these positive factors, youth participation is often subsumed into bureaucratic and traditional frameworks of engagement, favouring modes of engagement more suited to policymakers than young people themselves, limiting the disruption or realignment of power relations. This highlights the need for policy makers to be willing to engage with boundary learning,

allowing young people to explore issues in modes determined by them. Examples could include inviting young people to express their values and priorities through creative methods such as drama, zine-making and storytelling, that can be presented publicly to stimulate further dialogue.

The difficulties of addressing the structural causes of inequality are well documented. Despite this, this paper contends that increased youth awareness of the causes of poverty and locally-voiced solutions for change are both key to policy planning, an environment that has been acknowledged to need new approaches to address past failures (Christie, 2011: vi).

5. Discussion and implications of the study

This paper set out to examine how use of the 3C framework can evidence and extend the value of youth work in high-poverty communities to make explicit its potential contribution to Scottish policy requirements on youth voice, as well as to youth activism more broadly. Grassroots 'first responder' organisations offer creative approaches to collective agency building and activism that are often not considered 'political' or in defence of democracy in its broadest sense. The 3C model can help to analyse and understand the nuanced processes of collective agency development, and the unique role of neighbourhood-based youth work organisations to enable voice and decision-making. This was a small, in-depth case study based in one neighbourhood in Glasgow, with socioeconomic participant data limited to age and gender, so findings are necessarily limited. Further research into the experiences of young people of 3C processes, both in grassroots organisations and in other high-poverty neighbourhoods, would be helpful.

Despite these limitations, our study suggests that the 3C model offers a workable means for youth work organisations to evidence complex processes of collective capability development whilst recognising the resources required to link the articulation of young people's goals with outcomes (Kintrea et al., 2015). The model strengthens the case for the work of grassroots neighbourhood organisations and highlights the need for policy institutions to invite youth participation on its own terms and modes of engagement, to make the practices of democracy meaningful to the most excluded. Youth ownership of the creative process and presentation material avoids the risk of state coercion by supporting young people to make their own

challenges and desires apparent. This offers a potential site on which to engage with policy makers on their own terms.

We highlight three levels - individual, neighbourhood and wider policy level - at which neighbourhood-based youth work organisations can play a unique role in supporting youth decision-making. The evaluation highlighted the individual processes of critical thinking that are features of youth work. These approaches promote cognitive justice (De Sousa Santos, 2007) by regarding young people as experts on local issues that concern them (Coburn and Gormally, 2019b), supporting an environment of dialogue and dialectical exchange and actively promoting the reversal of teacher/student roles in the learning process (Davies, 2005). Early evidence gathered during our study suggested that adults in the same neighbourhood often did not have the skills or experience to participate effectively in public engagement and consultation. A neighbourhood-based facility in which dialogical skills are valued is therefore a useful, protected space in which young people can hone such skills before adulthood. Further, the fostering of peer support across age groups offers self-sustaining support well beyond the location and duration of the programme, and generates solidarity focused on a shared goal. The 3Cs framework ensures that the concept of empowerment is defined according to specific goals of critical thinking, collectivism and structural change, all vital to the development and sustainability of youth voice and empowerment.

Analysis of conversion factors revealed barriers to individual engagement including: financial constraints, exemplified by the need to fundraise to participate in certain activities – although these were perceived as achievable with the support of project staff; and low levels of confidence that might prevent young people from joining the programme. A reliance on the availability of parent and guardian capabilities in order that young people could achieve their own goals was offset in part by the provision of a family environment at the project, wherein young people could benefit from the capabilities of trusted staff to help them achieve their goals.

At the neighbourhood level, this study showed that grassroots organisations offer a unique, safe space in which young people are offered emotional and practical support alongside programmes for creative and cognitive development. Via this holistic approach, they can

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engage in dialogue about wider social change, and gain confidence to take action as part of a collective group, enabling the development of several capabilities concurrently (described as 'fertile functioning', Wolff and De Shalit, 2007). Concerns about the need for social, economic and cultural resources to allow youth aspirations to achieve desired outcomes (Kintrea et al., 2015) suggest a vital role for grassroots organisations in the successful transition from youth to adulthood, no longer adequately supported by school, work and family (Mackie, 2019).

Reflection on the conversion factors underpinning the 3C processes at neighbourhood level revealed the vulnerability of grassroots organisations to annual funding cycles. By necessity, staff were employed on precarious contracts, which meant that expertise and trust built in the field could be lost. Longer-term evaluation work was difficult to plan due to short-term funding cycles, and while grassroots youth workers were aware of the value of their work to young people, did not necessarily view themselves as having a central role in the conception and practice of democracy in its widest sense.

The study demonstrated the unique approach that grassroots youth organisations offer in supporting voice and decision-making with young people from high-poverty neighbourhoods. Evidence on challenges to institutional power (*collaboration*) was limited, confined in the main to the young people's relationships with their drama group leaders and audiences. The relative isolation of neighbourhood-based youth work organisations from policy arenas means that the potential for young people's voices to be heard in locally generated modes go untapped. The 3C model highlights the opportunity for organisations to seek out more diverse platforms for their work, including lobbying the policy institutions that have been established to encourage youth voices to be heard in decisions that concern them (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020; Lundy, 2018). Efforts by policy institutions such as Local and National Government, Children's Parliament, Community Planning structures, and national youth work organisations to create and extend grassroots spaces for youth decision-making and to consider meaningful power sharing, might allow for the wider, youth-led social action and change that is markedly absent in community-based youth work in Scotland (Fyfe et al, 2018).

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