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"You need to have a break":
Exploring young people's experiences of
wellbeing, leisure and creativity in the
school holidays.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor
of Philosophy (PhD)

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Abstract

Previous research on school holidays has focused predominantly on quantitatively measuring education and health outcomes, drawing conclusions that school holidays lead to ‘learning loss’ or negatively impact on health. However, there are significant limitations of this existing research and a lack of research engaging directly with young people or employing a qualitative approach. This research has therefore sought to qualitatively explore how young people experience these periods, how this affects their wellbeing, and how engagement in creative activities interacts with these experiences. By employing a theoretical framework combining Childhood Studies and the Capabilities Approach, it examined the substantive freedoms young people have to achieve what they value, and the role that school holidays play in them doing so.

Data were generated with young people aged 10-16 in Greater Glasgow through ‘enhanced’ interviews (artefact-elicitation and creative tasks), focus groups with young people engaged in community arts organisations and interviews with staff in these organisations. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis of the findings presented in this thesis argues that school holidays can benefit young people’s wellbeing primarily through the enhancement of their agency, and the subsequent choices young people can make to achieve the things they value both in the present, and for their futures. The findings highlight the importance of free, self-directed time, and balanced facilitation from adults who acknowledge and support young people’s agency. This research demonstrates the value of studying school holidays as a distinct period, rather than a comparator to school term, but also highlights some of the challenges young people face at school, and from which they value a break. Future school holidays research should aim to expand understanding of young people’s lived experiences in different social and geographical contexts and consider their impact not only in terms of future outcomes but on young people’s experience of the present. Similarly, provision of care during school holidays should seek to be informed more directly by the perspectives of young people and give consideration to what is of value to young people in the present, as well as for their future. Community arts organisations, and similar youth-centred organisations, are highlighted in this research as a valuable asset to supporting young people’s wellbeing in school holidays, and beyond.

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Susan Smillie

Signature:

Chapter 1 Introduction

As I am sure is the case for many doctoral students, throughout my studies, and particularly in the final stages of ‘total immersion’, I have begun to see my work reflected back at me wherever I turn. In the last few months of writing, while I tried to protect valuable time with my children away from this thesis, I read them my favourite book that I first read when I was around their age. Although I tried to put my thesis aside for that time, the book seemed to be taunting me back into thinking about it and in particular I turned the corner down on two pages to return to later:

“The remainder of my schooldays were no more auspicious than the first. Indeed, they were an endless Project that slowly evolved into a Unit, in which miles of construction paper and wax crayon were expended by the State of Alabama in its well-meaning but fruitless efforts to teach me Group Dynamics.”

Scout Finch on School in 1936 (Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* 1960)

“Summer was on the way; Jem and I awaited it with impatience. Summer was our best season: it was sleeping on the back screened porch in cots, or trying to sleep in the tree house; summer was everything good to eat; it was a thousand colors in a parched landscape; but most of all, summer was Dill.”

Scout Finch on School Holidays in 1936 (Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* 1960)

Aside from the 1930s (via 1960s) language, these could have been quotes from participants in this research study. The description of the machinations of school life, devoid of perceived value in Scout’s eyes, versus the anticipation of everything she values when school is done: agency to sleep where she wants, enjoyment in the material experiences of summer, connection with the people she cares about.

While the initial ideas for this study were developed in a supervisor-led research proposal before I became involved as the research student, I was drawn to the proposal because of my existing experience and interests. Having spent the previous decade as a researcher in a social and public health sciences research unit, I had experience in researching young people’s wellbeing, and an interest in developing my academic work further in this respect. I also had a strong personal interest in the role of creativity and creative practice in wellbeing,

having spent a large part of my life as a mostly amateur, occasionally professional, musician. I had hoped to be able to find an opportunity at some stage to bring these interests together in research. The research proposal as it was, to explore young people's experiences of school holidays using a Childhood Studies approach, not only fitted with my experience and interest in young people's wellbeing but was broad enough that it offered the opportunity to further hone and shape the study. As I began to examine the literature related to the impact of school holidays on young people, I found that not only was it overwhelmingly quantitative in approach but that there were two distinct areas on which the vast majority of previous work had focused: impact of school holidays on educational attainment, and impact of school holidays on health and wellbeing. The research on education impact had focused almost entirely on so-called 'academic' subjects (i.e. literacy and numeracy), which prompted me to consider how my own work might be able to contribute insight into how young people experience other types of learning and engagement in 'non-academic' areas and settings, for example in creative subjects and pursuits. The existing research on health and wellbeing related to school holidays has, for the most part, been focused on physical health measures and lacked any more holistic approaches to considering wellbeing. These were not only gaps that I identified in the existing literature but areas that I felt personally motivated to address in developing aims for my own research. In tandem, as I began to explore sociological approaches to childhood, and was introduced to the Capabilities Approach, I began to be able to develop a research strategy informed by these theoretical approaches that would help me to meet the aims of the research in addressing these gaps. This process has not been a linear one and has involved constantly revisiting what fits and what is feasible, not only in terms of theoretical and epistemological stance, but within the place and time that I have conducted this research, particularly the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is not my intention with this thesis to portray school holidays as a universally utopian time for young people, but it is my intention to reflect through my analysis the ways in which school holidays can create opportunities for agency, enjoyment and social connection for young people in ways that are aligned with what they value as unique individuals. Additionally, through the comparisons

that participants made with their school experiences, I seek to draw attention to some of the shortcomings of school in supporting young people's freedoms to achieve the life they value. Rather than suggesting that one environment is superior to the other, I hope that the findings of this thesis can contribute to understanding the broader features of these environments that impact on young people's wellbeing, and in turn how in-school and school holiday provision can be better shaped to align with young people's modern needs and values.

1.1 Aims of the research

There is a lack of research examining the lived experience of young people during school holidays and how this relates to their wellbeing during (and after) these periods. The aim of this study is therefore to enrich understanding of the ways in which school holidays impact on young people. To do this I set out to address the following research questions:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do young people experience school holidays?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways does being on holiday from school affect young people's wellbeing?
- Research Question 3 (RQ3): How does engagement in creative activities affect young people's experiences of school holiday time?

The vast majority of previous research on school holidays has adopted a quantitative methodology, and as such I sought to address this methodological gap by answering these research questions using qualitative methods directly with young people living in Scotland.

1.2 Thesis Overview

The first part of this thesis (Chapters 2 and 3) aims to frame this research study within both the context of previous relevant empirical research and theoretical perspectives on the sociological study of childhood. As such, Chapter 2 outlines the former of these and opens by outlining the landscape of research on school holidays, highlighting the limitations of previous research in this area. In particular, it draws attention to the absence of a research focus on the

constituent activities and experiences of young people's school holidays, particularly from a qualitative perspective. With this background, the literature review chapter then turns to examine research on young people's leisure more generally, since school holidays provide young people with increased leisure time compared to school term. In preparation for addressing RQ3, focused on creative activities in school holidays, the final section of this chapter provides an overview of relevant literature related to young people's wellbeing and engagement in arts and creative activities.

In Chapter 3 I introduce the dual theoretical perspectives that I have incorporated into my analysis, exploring what these can bring to the study of school holiday wellbeing. Beginning with Childhood Studies, I trace the historical background to social studies of childhood that led to the emergence of the Childhood Studies paradigm and the critiques and reconceptualisations of the original paradigm on which I build my theoretical perspective in this thesis. I then turn to the Capabilities Approach (the CA) to explore how this framework can support a holistic analysis of young people's wellbeing by focusing on the freedom young people have to achieve what they value. Lastly, I discuss how Childhood Studies and the CA complement each other and offer a robust theoretical framework for the study of young people's wellbeing in school holidays.

Chapter 4 presents the ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives on which I base my methodological approach. I detail the various considerations involved in planning and designing the study, the fundamental aspects of how the research was conducted and the approach to analysis that I adopted.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 are the empirical findings chapters and begin with a short section introducing these chapters. Young people participating in the study tended to offer a dual framing of their school holiday experiences and Chapters 5 and 6 reflect these alternative perspectives. Chapter 5 presents the analysis through the framing of school holidays experienced as time spent *away* from school, reflecting on how school experiences shape young people's experiences of their holidays. Chapter 6 focusses on the alternative way participants framed their school holidays experiences: as leisure time. Chapter 7 explores more

closely one particular element of how young people used their school holiday leisure time: in being creative and engaging with community arts organisations.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a discussion of the key empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions of this research, with reflections on the process and recommendations for future directions.

Chapter 2 Review of existing research

2.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the existing literature that has informed the direction of this thesis. It will examine where research has contributed to understanding issues around school holiday experiences and young people's wellbeing during these periods, and where there are gaps in the evidence base that this study has aimed to contribute to addressing.

The chapter opens by reviewing the most clearly relevant research, that which is specifically focused on school holidays (section 2.2). This will chart the emergence of academic interest in school holidays identifying the different ways that scholars have sought to examine, and address, the impact of school holidays on young people's lives. School holidays are time away from the 'work' of school, and as such present an opportunity for young people to experience leisure time. Therefore, in the second section (2.3) I examine literature related to leisure, particularly children¹ and young people's leisure and the relationship between leisure and wellbeing. One aim of this study has been to concentrate on the impact of one specific use of school holiday leisure time: engaging in creative experiences and activities. Therefore in the final section of this chapter (2.4) I examine research on the relationship between creativity and wellbeing, particularly in relation to young people and out-of-school time.

2.2 Research on School Holidays

Research on the impact of school holidays on young people has tended to focus on one of two general areas: learning and health. Since impact on learning was the first of these areas to gain traction, and one which has been particularly influential in moulding subsequent research and policy, I first explore the literature with this focus. I then turn to that focused on the health and wellbeing impacts of school holidays. I move on to explore the literature that, to date, comes closest to examining the substance of school holidays, what

¹ I use 'children' throughout Chapters 2-4 to reflect the language in the existing literature I am referring to. I use 'YP' or 'young people' elsewhere to refer to participants in this study or children and young people more generally.

activities young people do/not engage in during this time, including evaluations of programmes and interventions designed to address perceived negative impact of school holidays. To conclude this section, I will summarise the limitations of the existing research in this area, as it is these limitations that have been particularly influential in informing the aims and research questions of this study.

2.2.1 School holiday impact on learning

Since the mid-1970s there has been a growing body of research around the subject of ‘seasonal learning’, in particular the impact of holiday periods on pupils’ learning. A meta-analysis in 1996 (Cooper, 1996) brought together this work and has been particularly influential in propagating interest in this area ever since. Cooper et al (1996) examined studies across the 20th century and included 12 studies (approximately 48,000 pupils) published after 1975 in their analysis. These studies were all North American and focused solely on literacy and numeracy skills in primarily young people of primary school age. Their meta-analysis included some studies that have continued to be particularly influential in this area, and which demonstrated what has since become known as ‘Summer Learning Loss’ (SLL), ‘summer learning gap’, ‘summer setback’ or ‘summer slide’. Firstly Heys’ (1978) study of school pupils’ literacy in Atlanta demonstrated that learning growth rate slowed over summer and, additionally, that this effect widened existing learning gaps between pupils of different socioeconomic groups and ethnicities. Secondly, the meta-analysis included findings from the longitudinal Beginning School Study in Baltimore that began in the 1980s and examined literacy and numeracy differences between spring term and autumn term (Entwistle and Alexander, 1992; 1994). These studies replicated Heys’ findings, additionally demonstrating both a cumulative effect over consecutive summer holiday periods, and supporting the hypothesis that learning gaps between different socioeconomic groups and ethnicities were largely attributable to the summer holiday effect. Overall, the meta-analysis conducted by Cooper et al (1996) concluded that the evidence of the included studies suggest a decline in pupil test scores over summer holidays, particularly in maths. Subsequent research with the Beginning School Study found these differences in summer learning to be predictive of later educational outcomes (Alexander et al., 2007). These early studies, and the subsequent meta-analysis,

helped to spark growing interest in examining SLL that has continued to the present day, and fuelled more recent concerns over learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent reviews that have focused on summer holiday impacts (Eglitis et al., 2024a), or considering SLL literature through the lens of pandemic-related learning loss (Gierczyk and Hornby, 2023), agree that research continues to support the conclusion that, when measured predominantly in terms of literacy and numeracy skills, young people's academic outcomes decline over summer.

However, despite the body of research developed in the last thirty years, there is still considerable inconsistency in findings, including uncertainty around the extent to which school holidays impact learning, and the relationship that existing inequalities play in this. Moreover, this research has predominantly centred on the North American context where school holidays are some of the longest in the world, making their results difficult to translate to other geographic settings. As such there has been emerging debate in the literature over the extent and impact of SLL (both in and outwith the US), and the methodological approach that should be taken to investigate it.

One such issue has been around the impact of SLL on marginalised groups. Early studies (Entwistle and Alexander, 1992; 1994) suggested that learning gaps between different socioeconomic and ethnic groups may be exacerbated by school holidays and improved by being in school. This became a focus of subsequent research. Initially, studies using data from a large-scale USA-based longitudinal study suggested that schools were a 'great equalizer' (Downey et al., 2004; Fryer and Levitt, 2004), helping to counteract existing inequalities affecting marginalised groups. However, more recent critique has highlighted how measurement artefacts affected these results (von Hippel and Hamrock, 2019). There is in fact evidence of an opposite trend, with gaps in learning between Black and White pupils growing *during* school years (Quinn et al., 2016; von Hippel et al., 2018; von Hippel and Hamrock, 2019; Kuhfeld et al., 2021). This inconsistency in findings was emphasised by Atteberry and McEachin (2021) who described the extent of variability in evidence on this issue, highlighting that von Hippel et al (2018) found only 4% of the variance in summer learning rate could be attributed to socioeconomic or ethnic factors. While these authors replicated SLL in their findings, they emphasised the considerable variance in

this at the individual level. They also highlighted a lack of current data to assist in answering the question of why SLL happens. They concluded that *understanding young people's experiences and activities during summer* is key to answering this question, and to addressing how to counteract SLL (Atteberry and McEachin, 2021). Notably, very little of the existing literature examining SLL inequalities has considered the impact on disabled young people (Gierczyk and Hornby, 2023). However, a recent longitudinal study (Johnson and Barker, 2023) found that disabled pupils consistently exhibited more learning loss over each summer holiday than non-disabled pupils.

Some of the leading researchers in this area (Von Hippel, 2019; Workman et al., 2023) have been forthcoming about their concerns around replicability and generalisability of results from SLL studies. They point to issues with data sets and outcome measurement, not least the issue of using decades old results to generalise about modern education. Dumont and Ready (2020) outlined how contrasting findings in seasonal learning and school effects can be reached as a result of the methodological choices made by researchers in adopting different modelling approaches dependent on their academic perspectives on seasonal learning. Kuhfeld and Soland (2021) urged caution in making assumptions that patterns of growth in learning are linear throughout the year, suggesting these assumptions can impact estimates of summer learning loss and achievement gaps. Shinwell and Defeyter (2017) offer an example of such variation in learning growth in the UK context: despite a replication of SLL in their results, this loss in learning was regained and exceeded within seven weeks of return to school. Aside from within-year changes in learning rate, Atteberry and McEachin (2021) found evidence that learning gains vary year on year, with earlier school year groups seeing higher growth rates than subsequent years. Given that a considerable volume of the literature on SLL has focused on some of the earliest years, this has important consequences for the generalisability of results to older groups.

School holiday lengths and timing vary globally, in Scotland pupils have ~14 weeks per year with the longest of these, in summer, lasting ~7 weeks. Since summer holidays in the USA have tended to be particularly long in comparison (approximately three months in some states) it is understandable that there has continued to be policy and research interest in this area over the last 30 years.

However, as a result the majority of the research in this field continues to be in this geographical context, and it is unclear to what extent findings have relevance outwith this. Limited research has emerged in other Minority World settings (e.g. Netherlands (Broekman et al., 2021), Belgium (Verachtert et al., 2009), Germany (Meyer et al., 2017), New Zealand (Meyer et al., 2020), Australia (Vale et al., 2013) and UK (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2017)), and even less in Majority World settings (e.g. Taiwan (Lin et al., 2015)). Researchers outside North America have advised caution in applying findings to other contexts and suggested alternative modelling approaches may be needed (Helbling et al., 2021).

Research on the impact of school holidays on learning has considerable limitations. The evidence base is almost entirely quantitative in approach with ongoing debate over the robustness of methodological approaches used, largely developed in the context of the USA, focused on early years cohorts, and some of the more influential studies use data collected in the 1970s-90s. While there have been more recent efforts to build on this work, and replication of results in some cases, the vast majority of this work continues to use standardised tests within the school year with a narrow focus in terms of academic subject. ‘Learning’ is defined in most of the research as achievement in standardised literacy and numeracy tests, with very little consideration of other subject areas or measures of knowledge and understanding. Despite its limitations, SLL-focused research has influenced the development of academic interest in other ‘non-learning’ impacts of school holidays, and this is explored in the next section.

2.2.2 *The impacts of school holidays on wellbeing*

In the last twenty years, research into the impact of school holidays has broadened to include health and social effects of school holidays and out-of-school time. While many of these have adopted a fairly narrow focus on specific areas of health and health behaviours, some have explored how school holidays interact with broader social determinants of health.

2.2.2.1 Physical health and health behaviours in school holidays

A substantial portion of the literature on school holiday wellbeing is focused on physical health and health behaviours, in particular related to weight gain and potential contributing factors to weight change during school holidays e.g. changes in diet, sleep, screen time, physical activity and sedentary behaviour (Franckle et al., 2014; von Hippel and Workman, 2016; Brazendale et al., 2018; Tanskey et al., 2018; Olds et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 2019; Zosel et al., 2022). A recent scoping review (Eglitis et al., 2024a) examining the impact of summer holidays on young people's health, wellbeing and academic outcomes gives an indication of the extent of the health-related literature in comparison to that focused on learning. Of the 76 studies included, 35% (n=27) were concerned with measuring health-related outcomes and 20% (n=15) with health behaviours, compared to 55% (n=42) focused on summer learning loss. This review (Eglitis et al., 2024a) assessed there to be 'strong evidence' of increased weight and increased sedentary behaviour and screen time in school holidays, with 'moderate evidence' for a decline in physical activity and cardiovascular fitness. All of the included studies measuring health-related outcomes focused specifically on evaluating physical health in terms of 'fitness and fatness', with no studies examining young people's physical health in any other terms. Within the literature on physical health over summer holidays, a substantial focus is on weight change as measured by the body mass index (BMI). However, there is growing critique of the use of BMI (Franzosi, 2006; Agbaje, 2024), particularly when applied to children (Wright et al., 2022; Kent, 2023) and across different ethnic groups (Wang et al., 2024). There is a pattern in this literature that echoes that of the SLL literature, with increasing numbers of studies adopting a particularly narrow focus to examine school holidays, using almost exclusively quantitative measures and with the absence of young people's qualitative accounts of how they spend school holidays and how these impact upon them.

2.2.2.2 Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Very few studies have considered young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health in relation to school holidays. In the scoping review (Eglitis et al., 2024a) described in the previous section only 5% (n=4) of the 76 included studies examined the relationship between school holidays and what the authors classed

as “social, emotional or mental wellbeing”. Although small in number, the recency of these perhaps signals a change of focus in this regard. Morgan et al (2019b) examined the relationship between young people’s self-reported mental wellbeing and their school holiday experiences, concluding that both hunger and loneliness experiences during school holidays were significant in exacerbating existing inequalities in mental health across socioeconomic groups. Similarly, Kromydas et al (2022) found some evidence of worsening mental health and mental health inequalities across school summer holidays. However, both these studies used quantitative measures from pupils (and their parents/carers) surveyed *during* school term, rather than during school holiday time. So, although the measures used asked respondents to consider preceding months, it is possible that return to school itself affected young people’s mental wellbeing and their (or their teachers’) subsequent responses. Although there is some engagement here directly with young people via surveys, there is an absence of qualitative data on the mental wellbeing impacts of school holidays.

While being away from school for long periods can place some young people in environments that are riskier for their emotional health (as described above), some pupils experience school environments themselves as harmful, for example through experience of schoolwork/homework-related stress (Moè et al., 2020; Höglberg and Horn, 2022), bullying (The Scottish Government, 2023a; Office for National Statistics, 2024), loneliness (Goodfellow et al., 2023), challenging teacher-pupil relationships (Davis, 2003; Looker et al., 2023), alienation and marginalisation (McPherson et al., 2023). For these pupils, being away from school during holiday periods could offer respite from these experiences, and the associated harms. School holidays have been shown to have an associated reduction in youth suicide (Chandler et al., 2022) and hospital admissions for stress-related presentations (Blackburn et al., 2021) with *return* to school identified as a key time when preventive strategies should be targeted to mitigate against a rise of self-harm and suicidal behaviour (Chandler et al., 2022).

It is clear that understanding the context in which young people spend their school holidays, and the relative context of their experience in school, is important in being able to examine the potential impacts school holidays have.

2.2.2.3 Social determinants of health in the school holidays

Some of the research on school holidays has examined the role that social determinants of health (the broad social and economic circumstances that shape health throughout life) play in how young people are impacted by school holidays. An area of particular interest has been around food insecurity and so-called 'holiday hunger' (Evans, 2020). There has been increased attention to this issue in the wake of pandemic-related school closures (Sinha et al., 2020). In the UK, an estimated 11.3 million adults (or their households) are affected by food insecurity, with families with children being particularly at risk (Bull et al., 2023). Schools can play an important role in ensuring pupils have adequate nutrition (Spence et al., 2013), therefore school holidays present a time when food access may be reduced, for example in contexts where free school meals are provided, and financial strains on families can lead to reduced ability to provide food (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2021). Shinwell and Defeyter (2021) found that parents/carers experienced food insecurity throughout the year but that this increased in the lead up to, and during, school holidays with parents employing mitigation strategies in advance (e.g. stockpiling) and during holidays (e.g. sacrificing their own food intake in favour of feeding their young people). Coping with the impact of, or attempting to mitigate, holiday hunger has been shown to negatively impact on parent/carer mental wellbeing (Stretesky et al., 2020a).

Some researchers have focused on the cost that school holidays incur for families, and the potential impacts this might have on what opportunities and resources are, and are not, available for young people and their families during this time (Butcher, 2015; Campbell et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2018). In reviewing the existing literature, Campbell et al (2015) and Stewart et al (2018) emphasised the practical difficulties and emotional stress that school holidays can cause low-income families as they navigate trying to access childcare and provide their young people with nourishing food and enriching activities.

As with research on SLL, some of the studies on the impact of school holidays on wellbeing have demonstrated variation in the impact of school holidays across different demographic groups, and considered how these differences might contribute to widening existing health inequalities. Research on weight gain and

physical fitness appears to have addressed the impact on marginalised groups less so than research on summer learning loss. However, a recent review concluded that findings follow a similar trajectory, specifically that young people in lower socioeconomic groups are disproportionately negatively affected (Eglitis et al., 2024a). In research on mental wellbeing, Morgan et al (2019b) found that lower socioeconomic status was associated with poorer mental wellbeing during school holidays and examined how school holiday experiences and activities contribute to impacting on mental wellbeing through, for example, loneliness, seeing friends, hunger and physical activities. Kromydas et al (2022) reported inequalities in young people's mental health and cognitive ability according to maternal education level but, similar to research on inequalities in summer learning loss, found some evidence to be mixed and inconsistent across age groups. Others have examined more directly the impact of school holidays for groups of young people who are already marginalised e.g. disabled young people (Knight et al., 2009). Knight et al (2009), in one of few studies examining the impact of school holidays on disabled people, found that disabled young people and their families experience social isolation during school holidays and exclusion from leisure environments/activities that were not accessible or inclusive in their design. As with research on low-income families, families of disabled young people have also been found to experience a lack of suitable childcare provision and associated parental stress (Petrie et al., 2007).

A few studies have examined the risk of harm during school holidays, drawing attention to the environments in which young people spend this time and how these shape this risk. Some have focused on accidental injury during school holidays (Barr, 2014; Peden et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2021), highlighting reduction in adult supervision as a potential contributing factor. While others have focused on the risk of young people experiencing violence, abuse and exploitation, or witnessing or engaging in anti-social behaviour and crime at home or in their communities during school holidays (Light et al., 2014; The Childhood Trust, 2018; The Childhood Trust, 2019; Edwards, 2023).

The research examining social and economic aspects in relation to school holidays highlights the importance of understanding what it is that young people are able to do and be in school holidays, and the factors that prevent or enable them to do so across different contexts.

2.2.3 School Holiday Interventions

In response to some of the issues raised in research on school holidays, there has been a concurrent interest in research around the development and evaluation of interventions to address these issues. Such interventions or policy recommendations tend to fall into one of two categories: changes to school calendars or provision of school holiday programmes.

2.2.3.1 Changes to school calendar

A popular narrative in the literature, and in media and political discourse, on school holidays frames the history of school holidays, in Europe and North America at least, as emerging to enable children's participation in seasonal agricultural practices. This is often used as an argument for school calendar reform, with the implication current school calendars are outdated and not fit for modern purpose (Adams and Shepherd, 2013). However, this has been challenged by historians (Weiss and Brown, 2003; Bloom, 2009) who argue that while agriculture may have had influence in some rural communities (e.g. October holidays to align with potato harvest in some areas of rural Scotland (Carson, 2016)), a range of other factors were more likely involved in shaping the school calendar. These include accommodating holidays from work for school staff, holidays for families (that followed the popularisation, feasibility and affordability of travel to more distant locations), as well as allowing children to have a break from schoolwork (Weiss and Brown, 2003; Silva, 2007; Bloom, 2009). These reasons remain important to consider in modern school calendars.

Alternative school calendars (e.g. a four day week, longer school days or holiday periods spread more evenly throughout the year in smaller chunks) have been suggested, and tried, for example in some states of the USA (Marcus, 2024). There may be some limited evidence that points toward a 'year-round' (shorter summer holiday and redistributed throughout the year) school calendar improving educational outcomes but there is a distinct lack of high quality research on this, or other potential impacts (Cooper et al., 2003; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick and Burns, 2019). Despite this lack of evidence, and some researchers in this field drawing attention to inaccurate assumptions about the benefits (von Hippel and Graves, 2023), there have been recent calls to reform

school calendars in the UK toward a year-round model (Morris, 2023; Adams, 2024). The Welsh Government recently held a public consultation on this (Welsh Government, 2024), however while parents were broadly in favour of the proposed calendar reform, educators and their unions opposed it and the Welsh Government have since paused these plans to implement the changes (Lewis, 2024). It is notable that no young people contributed to this consultation. Interest in school calendar reform may have been sparked in response to pandemic-related school closures and resulting research on the impact of these on young people. In a report for the Nuffield Foundation on the impact of the pandemic on education, Major et al (2024) propose school calendar reform to address school holiday impact and improve teacher wellbeing, suggesting trials of such an approach could generate new data on this.

2.2.3.2 School holiday programmes and interventions

The vast majority of research on school holiday impact has, as described above, focused on learning (SLL) or physical health (weight gain and physical fitness). Hence, intervention development and evaluation has also tended to focus on affecting these outcomes, and has similarly been situated in the North American context. Reviewing this literature reveals a wide range of different programme interventions and participant groups that make drawing conclusions from these particularly challenging. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have found that there is some evidence, albeit fairly limited, that programmes positively impact on the learning outcomes they measure (Cooper et al., 2000; Kim and Quinn, 2013; Dujardin et al., 2022; Lynch et al., 2023; Muir et al., 2024). However, there is not a clear picture that emerges from these with only some outcomes showing a positive impact, and a lack of strong effect sizes in these. In programmes directed at health behaviour change (the vast majority focused on weight and physical activity/fitness) there is similarly mixed evidence. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis (Eglitis et al., 2024c) found that in the included studies some small-moderate effects were significant (reducing sedentary behaviour, increasing physical activity and reducing adiposity), others were not (cardiorespiratory fitness, energy intake or diet quality) and found no difference between sociodemographic groups. BMI was used as a measure in most of the included studies but as mentioned previously there is increasing critique of this as a measure, in part because it fails to measure body

composition. The aim of these summer holiday programmes tends to be to reduce current or later risk of obesity using a short-term (school holiday) intervention. However in the general population short-term weight reduction strategies are often ineffective (Bacon and Aphramor, 2011; O'Hara and Taylor, 2018) and fail to address broader social determinants of health and inequalities therein (Griffin et al., 2021). 'Obesity' (as defined by BMI) has complex causes and relationships with health with multiple proposed models (Ulijaszek, 2017) and short-term summer holiday programmes may be limited in their scope to consider and address these. Additionally there is concern over the negative consequences on young people's health and wellbeing of weight-centrism in public health discourse (Evans and Colls, 2009; O'Hara and Taylor, 2018; Gillborn et al., 2020; Kent, 2023) and weight-reduction strategies targeted at young people may perpetuate weight stigma.

Some school holiday programmes have specifically aimed to improve mental health and wellbeing during school holidays. Eglitis et al (2024b) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on such programmes and found no statistically significant effects but reported consistency in small effect sizes that showed improvements in measures of mental health and socio-emotional wellbeing. However, it could be argued that sustaining mental health over school holidays (rather than improving it) is a reasonable goal of such interventions. As with previous reviews on learning or physical health interventions, a consistent message is the need for robust design and evaluation of programmes in future research.

In the UK, research has been more focused on the impact of existing inequalities, particularly poverty, on young people during school holidays. As a result the development of interventions has been more centred on summer activity programmes, holiday clubs and food provision initiatives with a view to reducing the cost of school holidays and providing food, activities and social opportunities for young people and their families. Researchers at Northumbria University's Healthy Living Lab² have contributed substantially to this work, taking a variety of approaches to examine the landscape of holiday club provision in areas of the UK, and evaluating the implementation and impact of

² <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/takeontomorrow/it-is-time/healthy-living-lab/>

holiday clubs. This work has noted that while households that are food insecure are most likely to benefit from holiday clubs (Long et al., 2018), the distribution of holiday clubs can be unequal in terms of serving those from different communities (Mann et al., 2018b) or being accessible for those who would stand to benefit the most (Mann et al., 2018a). While holiday clubs may be able to improve dietary behaviours for young people who are likely to have reduced access to food during school holidays (Crilley et al., 2021), there is evidence that these clubs provide significantly more in the way of opportunities for enrichment than just access to food. Such additional benefits include learning opportunities (traditional and non-traditional), opportunities to socialise and build connection to the community (for young people and their parent/carers), a safe environment, opportunities to build responsibility and confidence, and access to advice and other resources/community services (Defeyter et al., 2018; Stretesky et al., 2020b; Long et al., 2021a; Long et al., 2021b; Shinwell et al., 2021).

The UK government and the devolved Scottish and Welsh governments have directed funding toward school holiday clubs with food provision (Welsh Government, 2021; The Scottish Government, 2022; UK Government, 2022; Defeyter et al., 2024) and to holiday food grants (The Scottish Government, 2024). Evaluating one such programme in Wales, Morgan et al (2019a) reported attendees were more physically active, ate less sugary snacks and drinks and more fruit and vegetables compared to non-club days. However, most evaluations of these programmes have tended to take more of a process evaluation approach, using mixed or primarily qualitative methods to explore the facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of these programmes and inform future delivery, rather than to evaluate on a larger scale the outcomes for young people's wellbeing (Morgan et al., 2019a; Welsh Local Government Association, 2020; Defeyter et al., 2022; Stringer et al., 2022; Eunson et al., 2023; Vitale et al., 2023; Round et al., 2024).

2.2.4 School Holiday activities and experiences

Outwith the setting of organised holiday clubs or examining young people's activities for the physical activity or exertion level, there is a dearth of literature on how young people actually spend their school holidays. Research is limited on the activities young people engage in, the places they frequent, the

people they spend time with and how these might impact on their wellbeing. In response to the literature on SLL, a small number of studies in the USA have sought to examine in more detail the nature of school holiday experiences, how these might vary, and how these might contribute to SLL or other reported impacts of school holidays on young people. Chin and Phillips' (2004) study used an ethnographic approach (one of very few in school holidays research studies to do so) and with direct participation of young people, rather than their teachers or parents/carers as proxies. Using observations in homes and other summer holiday locations, and interviews with young people and their parents/carers, their findings suggest that differences in the quality and quantity of school holiday activities vary between social class not because of differences in parental values or desires to support their young people's development, but because of differences in financial, social, cultural and human capital that limit resources or opportunities. They also explored young people's own forms of capital, and how these might interact with those of their parents to compensate for, or impede, how their summer activities and experiences came to be. Other studies have similarly sought to investigate causal explanations for SLL and particularly the disparities in learning gaps that have been reported to widen between pupils of different socioeconomic statuses or ethnicities. Using time-use survey data, Hastings et al (2023) similarly found a widening of the gap in parental investments of time and money between low and higher socioeconomic groups during summer. They found that higher income households are able to 'turn up' their investment during summer to compensate for the 'turning down' of public investment (via school) in ways that lower income families cannot. Nomaguchi et al (2022) used national (USA) data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and found that Black pupils spent more time studying outside school (including enrolled in summer camps) but highlighted how this is in conflict to some proposed explanations of Black-White differences in SLL research.

While research on activities and experiences of school holidays is limited, looking toward the literature on extra-curricular time and youth leisure research more broadly might offer relevant insight into school holidays, as a time for leisure. This will be explored in section 2.3.

2.2.5 Summarising the *limitations of School Holiday research*

The literature on school holidays and their impact has particular areas of limitation:

- The majority of studies have been conducted in the USA with limited in other Minority World settings and very few in Majority World populations. Given the variation in length of school holiday periods around the world, and other cultural factors, the relevance of effects such as summer learning loss, or changes in health behaviours, may not be generalisable to populations outside the USA.
- ‘Learning’ in learning loss studies has been limited to academic (specifically mainly numeracy and literacy) skills as measured by standardised tests with little or no focus on other academic areas, arts and creative practice, soft skills or other ways of understanding learning.
- Theorisation around causal mechanisms for learning loss focusses almost entirely on what happens (or does not happen) *during* summer and not on what learning loss might tell us about how learning, and teaching, happens during school time.
- Where the focus has been on health and wellbeing, physical health outcomes have dominated, specifically related to weight, with few considering mental health effects of school holidays or broader aspects of wellbeing. Where wellbeing is considered this is usually defined as social and emotional wellbeing.
- Quantitative studies dominate the literature with a dearth of qualitative work in the area, and even fewer where this qualitative research is conducted directly with young people.
- Little attention is paid to what young people spend their time doing in school holidays and how they feel impacted by this, even less so within a qualitative paradigm.

- The impact of school holidays on young people's wellbeing has been considered from educational and public health perspectives, but there is an absence of a more sociological approach in the literature, particularly from a Childhood Studies perspective.

2.3 Young people, leisure and wellbeing

As described in section 2.2, a substantial portion of research on school holidays has focused on measuring outcomes pre- and post- holiday rather than examining the content of that period. Leisure time is often defined from an adult perspective as time spent in non-work activities. However, for young people, who are primarily in formal education rather than work, this could instead be considered as time spent in non-school activities. School holidays therefore constitute a period of potential leisure time for young people and existing research on youth leisure may offer insight into informing the study of school holidays.

Where the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) enshrines the right to leisure for everyone, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the World Leisure Organisation's Charter for Leisure (2020), are explicit in including *children's* right to leisure, and acknowledging the role leisure can play in facilitating the realisation of other rights, such as to personal expression, or health and wellbeing.

This section focuses firstly on research that has examined the relationship between leisure and young people's wellbeing. Similar to research on school holidays, much of the literature in this area has taken a public health or education approach, particularly focusing on future-orientated outcomes for young people. In the second half of this section I turn to more sociological approaches to leisure that might inform the study of school holiday wellbeing.

2.3.1 Leisure and wellbeing research, and the parallels with the study of school holidays

The relationship between leisure and health/wellbeing has a long and varied history in research and policy, perhaps due to the breadth of aspects that each encompass and the difficulties in defining each (Peel et al., 2021). They are “conjoined and contested concepts” (Peel et al., 2021, p295) subject to similar social and economic factors, and with similar patterns of inequality therein.

The literature on leisure and health is dominated by public health approaches and tends to theorise the link between these two in terms of increase or decrease in risk to health (usually conceived of in terms of physical and mental conditions) through health-promoting or health-damaging behaviours and practices (Mansfield, 2021). Similarly, leisure activities are often instrumentalised within programmes or initiatives, for example in health improvement interventions (Mansfield, 2021). In research on youth leisure there are similar dominant orientations toward seeking to identify (and instrumentalise) how leisure can produce favourable future outcomes in young people, particularly those valued by adults (be it parents/carers or the state), for example responsible citizenship or positive impacts on learning and health (Bradford and McNamara, 2016).

Leisure, although tending to be associated with positive benefits for those engaged in it, has been shown to have both positive and negative effects on mental and physical health (Stebbins, 2021). There is considerable variation in findings connecting youth leisure and health, and this is somewhat understandable given the huge variation in what could constitute ‘leisure’ for different young people. Perhaps for this reason, a great deal of literature on youth leisure and health/wellbeing has focused on attempting to identify different dimensions or types of leisure, particularly around a spectrum of how ‘structured’ an activity is deemed to be or the level to which it is organised and/or supervised by adults. Although definitions of structured/unstructured vary considerably there is evidence that the extent to which a leisure activity is (un)structured might impact on different outcomes for young people. The majority of research in this area is focused on structured leisure, with positive impacts found in several areas, for example on academic performance

(Fredricks, 2012; Connelly et al., 2024), and mental and physical health (Zambon et al., 2010; Badura et al., 2015; Oberle et al., 2019; Badura et al., 2021).

Where examples of studies on unstructured leisure are found, these often adopt a deductive approach seeking to examine particular health behaviours associated with unstructured (usually considered to be less adult-supervised) leisure, for example smoking and drinking (Badura et al., 2018) or screen use (Oberle et al., 2020). Others, however, point to possible positive impacts depending on the nature of the unstructured activity, for example on elements of executive functioning in young children (Barker et al., 2014; Stucke et al., 2022), and identity reflection, goal setting and problem solving in teenagers (Abbott and Barber, 2007).

Structured and organised leisure opportunities for young people are often referred to as 'extracurricular activities', in some way delineating them from leisure and aligning them more with education. As with school holiday activities, there is unequal access to extracurricular activities (Heath et al., 2022) and as with school holidays research (Chin and Phillips, 2004), evidence similarly suggests that parental means, rather than what parents value, is the driving factor in young people from lower income households accessing these activities (Bennett et al., 2012; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). A further similarity with research on school holidays is the extent to which messages about what is presumed to be 'best' for young people have pervaded the research on youth leisure, with rest or less structured leisure problematised (Cartmel et al., 2024) despite the limited research illuminating this complex area.

While research itself may be particularly focused on future outcomes, there is also evidence that choices young people, and their parents/carers, make around leisure are similarly motivated by future-orientated considerations. Parents appear to value activities that are more structured (Ooi et al., 2020), and that impart some functional benefit on their child rather than seeing leisure as a time for simply enjoying experiences (Shannon, 2006). As such parents/carers can engage in what Lareau describes as 'concerted cultivation' (2011, p2), whereby they seek to control and organise young people's out-of-school activities in an effort to equip them with a skillset that they deem to be of particular value for achieving longer term outcomes. Similar motivations may be at play for young people themselves. Batchelor et al's (2020) research with marginalised young

people (aged 15-24) highlighted the pressure young people feel to use their time in ways that are deemed productive, particularly driven by career or life goals within a precarious and competitive labour market, and with casual or unstructured leisure activities viewed as a “waste of time” (p13).

There are distinct parallels between the school holidays research and the dominant strands of academic focus in examining the relationship between youth leisure and health/wellbeing. Both are strongly focused on future outcomes, particularly those borne out in adulthood. As such they are dominated by adult-centric views on what is deemed to be important, or of value for young people, and often seek to control young people’s activities as a site of potential betterment (or risk aversion). Similarly too, the wider contextual factors that are involved in shaping wellbeing are often overlooked, with a narrow and overly simplified conceptualisation of cause and effect imposed. Young people’s own perspectives on leisure, as with school holidays, are often overlooked or absent in the literature.

2.3.2 Sociological approaches to youth leisure

The tendency of public health approaches to focus on risk management has been criticised by leisure studies scholars for the lack of examination of the impact of wider social determinants of health (Peel et al., 2021). In a critical commentary on the academic trajectories of leisure and health, Mansfield (2021) highlighted the role Leisure Studies was positioned to play in expanding understanding in this area. While Leisure Studies can offer a more sociologically grounded perspective with which to examine the relationship between leisure and wellbeing, Mukherjee (2020; 2023) has criticised the adult-centric nature of existing research on youth leisure within the field, calling for increased engagement with concepts from Childhood Studies. Based on existing research in this area, Mukherjee (2020) proposed a categorisation of children’s leisure as a framework for future cross-discipline work in order to improve understanding of children’s leisure experiences: structured/organised leisure (likely to be adult-organised, paid-for, structured activities), family leisure (activities where children participate together with family members) and casual leisure (likely short-lived, spontaneous and immediately rewarding). Such a categorisation may be of value in examining the ways that young people use school holiday time and

understanding in more depth how different aspects of leisure can impact on young people's wellbeing within these periods of time.

Play is important to consider within young people's school holiday leisure, but there has been limited collaboration between the fields of leisure studies and the study of play (Stebbins, 2015). This is perhaps in part due to some of the aforementioned adult-centric tendencies in the study of leisure (Mukherjee, 2020) and the dominance of future-focused, outcomes-orientated research that has sought to utilise leisure as a means to an end in health improvement. Play is often classified as unstructured or casual leisure (Stebbins, 2015) therefore its inclusion in leisure and health literature is limited, even that focused on young people's leisure.

Although the dominant definitions of leisure centre on subjective activities taken up, an alternative view considers the subjective experience, centring on individual choice, motivation and enjoyment (Peel et al., 2021). Through this lens young people's perspectives are more central since such a conceptualisation of leisure relies on the subjective experience of it. This perspective also highlights the importance of agency as a constituent feature of young people's leisure. In a recent qualitative study with young people aged 16-19, Persson Osowski et al (2024) found that autonomy in making decisions about their own leisure time was particularly important to participants. Similarly, Fattore et al (2017) found that young people (aged 8-15) connected their own wellbeing with participation in leisure activities that invoked a sense of their own autonomy and competence, emphasising the ways young people in the study valued leisure as "a sphere of freedom" (p176) from adult-determined activities and expectations, but also allowed them space to prove themselves as capable. This experience of leisure presents a stark contrast to the parent-prescribed, adult-organised and supervised nature of structured leisure. It perhaps also speaks to the experience of limited autonomy in school settings, from which young person-directed leisure offers respite. Participants in the study by Persson Osowski et al (2024) spoke about the importance of balance between school and leisure, that leisure offered a chance to rest and recharge, develop skills and social relationships away from formal education environment.

Although what ‘counts’ as leisure encompasses a vast array of different activities, sports/physical activity and arts are usually included in these descriptions (Mansfield, 2021). The next section will focus specifically on arts and creativity as experiences that overlap with both young people’s leisure and wellbeing, and are of particular relevance to the focus of this study.

2.4 Young people, creativity and wellbeing

Creativity, as with leisure, can encompass a wide spectrum of both structured and unstructured activities and experiences. As with the terms leisure and wellbeing, creativity can be challenging to define and conceptualise and as such research in this area can be broad and difficult to draw clear conclusions from. This section begins by briefly outlining approaches to defining creativity, and the perspective that I adopt in this study. I then explore some of the aspects of research on young people’s creativity that are particularly relevant to this study, specifically the evidence for a relationship between creativity and young people’s wellbeing. Lastly, in order to provide a contextual understanding of the landscape in which participants of this study inhabit, I map the key areas of policy that have implications for young people’s arts access and participation in Scotland both in, and out of, school.

2.4.1 Defining Creativity

Attempts to define creativity most commonly tend to refer to themes of “novelty, originality, productivity, action, expression, usefulness and appropriateness” (Gillam, 2018, p18) but the ways these are viewed vary considerably. The terms ‘Big-C creativity’ and ‘little-c creativity’ are used extensively within creativity research to refer to concepts of creativity as either a state of significant talent (Big-C) or an everyday practice (little-c) (Glaveanu, 2010). Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) highlight the value in being able to use this distinction to categorise research in this area but explore how such a dichotomy can be unhelpful in understanding the nuances of what creativity is in reality. Both Glăveanu (2016) and Sawyer (2012) explore different historical conceptualisations and explanations of creativity and propose that there has tended to be two broad approaches to this within the last century: the individualist approach mainly conceived within psychology, and more recently a

sociocultural approach. Both propose that a combined approach to understanding and defining creativity is of most value, one which Glăveanu (2016) refers to as the “We-paradigm”. One such combined approach is the Systems Model of Creativity proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1988; 2014) which proposes a dynamic interaction between the individual, the cultural set of rules or ‘domain’ that they inhabit, and the ‘field’ (“part of society that acts as a gatekeeper to the domain” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p540). As such the notion of ‘creativity’ is socially constructed, combining not only the innate abilities of the individual but the interaction with the environment in which that innate ability can be nurtured (or not), expressed (or not) and the ‘products’ of such creativity can be accepted (or not). Creativity within this conceptualisation is then situated not simply within an individual producing an output, but in interaction with others, including those who are engaging with or consuming a creative ‘product’. This is a useful perspective on defining young people’s creativity in school holidays, as it encompasses a variety of different ways of being and doing, individually and in interaction with others.

2.4.2 Relationship between creativity and wellbeing

From early reviews linking arts participation and engagement to social, emotional and educational benefits (Matarasso, 1997), as well as to more clinical health outcomes (Staricoff, 2004), the past few decades has seen a growing body of evidence on the impact of creativity and arts participation on areas related to learning and health. As with research on young people’s leisure more generally, this research is vastly wide ranging, likely in part to the broad definitions that can be applied to ‘health’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘learning’, ‘creativity’ and ‘arts’ and the variety of individual aspects that these definitions can include.

In terms of young people’s learning, evidence suggests that arts participation can improve academic attainment, literacy skills, cognitive abilities and transferable skills (Newman et al., 2010). Young people’s engagement in arts activities has also been linked to improvements in social and emotional wellbeing e.g. resilience, self-confidence, self-esteem, relationship building and sense of belonging (Zarobe and Bungay, 2017). A scoping review for the World Health Organisation in 2019 that drew on over 3000 studies (across the life course) found evidence to support the role that arts can play in health

promotion, prevention of ill-health, and management and treatment of illness (Fancourt and Finn, 2019). However, evaluation of arts impact is extremely challenging (Clift et al., 2016; Daykin, 2019) and there have been calls to improve methodological approaches to help strengthen the evidence base (Clift et al., 2016; Clift et al., 2021).

Despite the clear potential for arts engagement and participation to impact positively upon wellbeing, access to arts is unequal (Fancourt et al., 2023). A review by Blood et al (2016) for the Arts Council England reported on disparities of arts access and uptake not just across socioeconomic lines but also gender, age, disability, ethnicity and religion, although the extent to which this is the case varies across artforms. In Scotland, analysis of the Scottish Household Survey data has shown that childhood encouragement to attend and take part in cultural activities leads to more likely participation and attendance as an adult, and that the link is stronger for those who actively participate, not just attend (Hupert, 2010). It follows then that encouraging young people's participation in arts, especially marginalised young people, could have implications for participation in later life, and the potential wellbeing benefits that accompany this.

Community-based programmes can offer an alternative route to accessing creative opportunities, but can also provide additional benefits beyond this provision, for example for social and emotional wellbeing (Ennis and Tonkin, 2018). Programmes such as Big Noise (Sistema Scotland) go some way to addressing inequality of access and engagement in arts and show the potential for wider impact from arts programmes on not only participant wellbeing but families and surrounding communities as well (Harkins and Moore, 2019). In contrast, smaller scale community-based projects may offer more chance to be flexible and collaborative with what they offer to participants, allowing participants to engage in ways that are more driven by their creative interests (Millar et al., 2020). However, smaller scale programmes may be shorter term and unable to offer a stability and relative permanence in the community that would be valued (Millar et al., 2020). Rhodes and Schechter (2014) used the case of The Artists Collective in Connecticut, USA to explore how the physical space itself and the “safe haven” provided there can contribute to improved wellbeing in addition to the arts activities on offer. This same sense is echoed in recent

research in a Scottish setting (Nugent and Deacon, 2022) where participants who had actively engaged in arts projects described using those spaces to “get away”, physically and mentally, in accessing arts opportunities that were otherwise unavailable. This research also highlighted the importance of skilled practitioners, with sensitivity and understanding of the issues facing marginalised young people, being able to build trusting and supportive environments (Nugent and Deacon, 2022). Supportive and collaborative adult-child relationships in these kind of arts settings can promote opportunities for social and emotional learning and identity development, in addition to the creative activities they provide access to (Chapin et al., 2022).

2.4.3 The landscape of creativity and arts for young people in, and out of, school in Scotland

In Scotland in the last ten to fifteen years there has been increased attention at a policy level on both recognising the link between arts and cultural engagement and wellbeing, and on improving young people’s arts engagement. Scotland’s ‘Creative Learning Plan’ was first published in 2013 (Creative Scotland and Education Scotland, 2013) laying out aims and targets for the ensuing decade to embed creativity in education. The result of collaboration between creative organisations and education bodies, it aimed to improve how creativity was valued in Scottish education as well as supporting teaching practices and policy development. As part of this work, Education Scotland and Creative Scotland now support local authorities to develop and sustain Creative Learning Networks. The Creative Learning Plan has been updated and renewed since its inception, most recently in 2021, reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with outcomes including “Learners’ mental health and wellbeing is improved through creativity and arts experiences” and with an allocated ‘Creative Wellbeing Fund’ to offer grants to projects taking creative approaches to improving wellbeing. Additionally Education Scotland and Creative Scotland have responsibilities within the Scottish Government’s ‘A Culture Strategy for Scotland’ (The Scottish Government, 2021) to improve cultural experiences for young people in education.

2.4.3.1 In-school

In addition to these arts, creativity and culture strategies and policies, for most young people school will also present opportunities to engage in arts. A curriculum review and redesign was undertaken in Scotland in 2002. This led to the implementation of ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ (CforE) in Scottish schools and early years education (ages 3-18) in 2010-11 with a core aim of enabling Scotland’s young people to become ‘successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors’ (The Scottish Government, 2010). The CforE structured the curriculum into eight areas, including ‘Health and Wellbeing’ and ‘Expressive Arts’, alongside the more traditional areas of education: languages, mathematics, science, technology, social studies and religious and moral education. In addition to placing these areas in equal standing, CforE included ‘health and wellbeing’ as a cross-curriculum theme and makes regular reference to valuing and nurturing creativity throughout the curriculum areas. *How Good Is Our School*, Education Scotland’s framework for school’s self-evaluation, now includes explicit reference to valuing, supporting and nurturing creativity and creative skills including a section on increasing creativity (Education Scotland, 2015).

Cultural and creative experiences in young people’s education and leisure therefore appear to be given value in Scotland, at least in terms of government policy. However, in practice there are barriers in implementing arts within CforE, especially at primary school level where teachers do not have subject-specific specialties (Kyritsi and Davis, 2021; Jaap et al., 2024). Robb (2024) found that while Scottish primary school teachers valued arts education, they lacked confidence in incorporating arts subjects into their lessons, feeling unprepared and lacking in professional development opportunities. At a secondary school level, Shapira and Priestley (2020) found ‘curriculum narrowing’ (declines in access and uptake of social subjects, expressive arts, modern languages and classical subjects) in Scottish schools, and reported on qualitative findings that showed a subject hierarchy underpinned by differing perceived values of subjects. This narrowing was found to disproportionately affect certain schools, particularly in more deprived areas, in schools with larger numbers of students from lower socioeconomic groups, higher proportion of pupils with additional learning support needs, and poorer staff-student ratios

(Shapira and Priestley, 2020). These findings are echoed in England where a recent report found that school pupils are choosing a narrower range of subjects at A level (qualifications at approximately age 16 and above) following changes to the structuring of these qualifications, and a considerable decline in pupils studying arts and humanities subjects over the last 20 years (Scott et al., 2024). Similarly this was found to disproportionately affect schools with higher rates of deprivation (Cairns, 2013). In addition to subject narrowing, cuts to local authority funding have led to budgetary measures affecting arts provision that vary across different local authorities in Scotland, for example the introduction of music tuition fees and/or reduced instrumental instruction provision (Wilson et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, it is interesting to note that survey respondents to the Young Scot national survey in 2018 were asked “What one thing could your school do that would make a difference to your cultural life?” to which the top two rated responses were: “Provide more creative course options” and “View arts and culture as of equal importance to other subjects/activity” (National Youth Arts Advisory Group, 2019). There is therefore evidence of a tension between what young people in Scotland *want*, what they think (or are being told) they *need*, and what opportunities they are provided with when it comes to creative arts in schools.

2.4.3.2 Out-of-school

If young people in Scotland have reduced access to arts education and participation during school time, then opportunities in out-of-school time (including school holidays) become all the more important. In 2013, Creative Scotland (the Scottish government’s development body for the arts and creative industries) published Scotland’s first Youth Arts Strategy focused on three themes: participation, progression, and provision (Creative Scotland, 2013). As a result of this strategy a National Youth Arts Advisory Group was established and published recommendations in 2019 based on the Young Scot national survey (National Youth Arts Advisory Group, 2019). This report highlighted the scale and breadth of young people’s creative practices and engagement with arts outwith school, the valuable role community arts centres and programmes play in providing creative opportunities and the importance of addressing barriers to accessing these. There are important implications for the role that community organisations can play in providing opportunities for young people during school

holidays, and the potential benefits for young people in taking these up. Many community arts centres and programmes provide opportunities for young people on a year-round basis, including over school holidays but many face precarity in terms of funding (Campaign for the Arts, 2025; Ward et al., 2024). In the wake of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on young people, as well as on community arts organisations and the broader creative industries, there have been calls to explore more widely the role that engagement in community arts can play in expanding opportunities for young people beyond simply creative experiences, activities and practice, for example in developing responsibilities and leadership (Children in Scotland, 2020; Wolf and Poulin, 2021).

2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have drawn together the various threads of existing research that have informed the direction of this thesis. I began with research on school holidays, charting how the initial focus on education, and SLL, expanded into an interest in the health impacts of school holidays, on examination of social and economic impact of school holidays, and on the development of interventions and school holiday programmes aiming to address some of the perceived impacts. In the second half of the chapter, I introduced two additional key areas that, although separate from school holiday research, and to some extent from each other, have particular significance for this study: leisure and creativity. In particular I focused on their relationship to young people's wellbeing. I highlighted some of the key issues and limitations in each of these areas, some of which this study has aimed to address.

The research journey is not linear, it is a conversation, an interaction, a “dance” (Ptolomey, 2024, p75) and my conversation with the existing literature has continued throughout the journey. However, in the early stages as I explored the different literature related to my broad thesis aim and research questions, I began to see the spaces in the various conversations that I hoped to contribute to with this study. As such I developed a secondary set of objectives, the touchpoints that I hoped to incorporate along this journey, and the context of which I have laid out in this chapter. These are summarised below:

1. To explore young people's school holiday wellbeing using qualitative methods
2. To focus on the substance of these school holidays: the beings, doings, experiences and the factors that affect these from the perspective of young people
3. To conceptualise wellbeing within a more holistic framework, rather than limited to the domains of physical and mental health
4. To explore young people's leisure experiences within school holidays, particularly to include those casual or unstructured leisure experiences that are somewhat overlooked in broader youth leisure research
5. To focus on creative experiences, not simply the structured leisure or educational arts components but within a broader conceptualisation of creativity: as a socially constructed product of dynamic interaction between an individual and their internal and external contexts. In doing so to develop an understanding of how creativity in young people's lives, particularly in school holidays, affects their wellbeing.

The next chapter will focus on the theoretical perspectives that I have drawn on, and how these supplemented my 'secondary objectives', contributing to the development of my theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 Theoretical perspectives on childhood: Childhood Studies and The Capabilities Approach

3.1 Introduction

Having surveyed the landscape of existing research related to my central aim and research questions in the previous chapter, I now turn to laying the theoretical foundations of this work: in Childhood Studies and the Capabilities Approach (CA). In the first half of the chapter, I provide some contextual background to the emergence of Childhood Studies, elaborate on the key features of this paradigm, including critique and new directions, and highlight what this paradigm can bring to a study of school holiday wellbeing. The second half of the chapter focusses on the CA, the fundamental principles of it and areas for potential growth, particularly though a sociological lens. I close the chapter by bringing these two perspectives together to show where there is potential for these to be connected and combined in the theoretical framework on which I have based my research.

3.2 Social Studies of Childhood

A trend towards the improved inclusion of children and childhood in sociology in the 1970s/80s increased in the 1990s with work from several key figures carving out a distinct area that would later come to be known more broadly as Childhood Studies or the New Social Studies of Childhood. This approach drew on, and included academics from, across the social sciences, expanding into practice and policy. A key text, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, first published in 1990 (James and Prout, 2015), solidified what the authors' proclaimed as a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood.

This section explores the historical and academic context within which this new paradigm emerged, tracing the main tenets, critiques, and new directions that scholars have begun to move in that are particularly relevant for the research on which this thesis is based.

3.2.1 Early study of childhood

How ‘children’ have been defined and viewed sociologically and culturally has changed over time and led to some scholars proposing that ‘childhood’, as it is currently understood, is a modern concept (Ariès, 1962; Hendrick, 2015).

Changes in the average lifespan (and therefore what is considered ‘young’) as well as social, cultural and economic changes over time may go some way to explaining why interest in studying children (as separate from adults) within the social, and even biological sciences, may have been slow to develop. Around the late 19th and early 20th centuries interest in studying children and childhood began to emerge. Hendrick (2015) points to shifts in thinking within the British context that began within the preceding century with shifting social norms and economic practice. Many children, having previously been seen as wage earners, were increasingly seen as in need of education and protection from labour exploitation. The introduction of compulsory schooling and legislative acts that aimed to improve the treatment of children in society were accompanied by the rise of the Child Study movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bringing children into focus within the social sciences (Hendrick, 2015). Aside from social reform, a second important shift in thinking around a similar period can be attributed to Darwin’s ‘Origin of the Species’ (Darwin, 1859 in (Woodhead, 2005)). Darwin’s work sparked, arguably for the first time, an interest in the prolonged stage of immaturity that is relatively unique to humans (compared with other species) and an interest in understanding why such a phenomenon would have evolved.

Despite this new interest in studying and understanding childhood within the social sciences, prior to the 1990s research on children was almost entirely focused on the ‘socialisation’ of children, the process by which children learn or adapt to adult-constructed society. The term ‘socialisation’ implies not only a hierarchy between adults and children but a normative assumption that children are not an integral part of society, that they exist outside this and should be moulded to fit into it. Scholars of psychology and sociology took differing approaches to conceptualising socialisation (explored in section 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 respectively) but for the most part these were based on adult views of what childhood is, rarely seeking to understand this from the perspective of children. Within both disciplines, there was little consideration of the experiences of

children as worthy of study in and of themselves. Instead these experiences were examined only by way of evaluating what outcomes they led to in adulthood.

3.2.2 Dominance of developmental thinking

In the 20th century, biological and developmental psychological approaches dominated research on childhood. The aim of these approaches was to identify and explain innate (and widely regarded as universal) processes and milestones in child development, as well as to understand the impact of experience and learning on these processes (Woodhead, 2009). Key figures in this area Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978) incorporated elements of both in their constructivist theories of child development. They considered cognitive development as an innate and predictable process of acquisition of knowledge that involved internal construction of mental representations of the world as it was experienced. While Piaget's work tended to be more focused on the individual and the interaction between them and their external experiences and internal cognitive processes, Vygotsky emphasised the role of social interaction and collaborative construction of knowledge. While both acknowledged children's active role in this process, their theoretical perspectives were still imbued with the view of childhood as an interim, underdeveloped phase *en route* to adulthood. Although the constructivist model continues to exert influence today it has not gone uncritiqued. Piaget's work has been criticised for the lack of ecological validity that his experimental 'lab'-based settings held (Donaldson, 1978) and for ignoring diversity of context in individual experience, extrapolating generalisations about all childhood and child development from his observations (Burman, 2016). James (2009) noted that it may be the critique of Piaget's work by Donaldson that contributed to a later turn in social studies of childhood toward the 'new paradigm' of Childhood Studies. More generally it seems to have been developmental psychology's tendency to view childhood as universally experienced, and children as primarily 'becoming' adults, that later Childhood studies scholars wished to oppose.

3.2.3 Children in sociology

Prior to the development of theory that later came to form the basis of the ‘new paradigm for the sociology of childhood’ in the 1990s, mainstream sociological theory for the most part did not address or include children/childhood (Ambert, 1986 in (Qvortrup, J., 2009)). While Johnson (2001) found some evidence of sociologists taking up theoretical concepts throughout the 20th century that share similarities with those coming to prominence in the 1990s and beyond, for the most part sociological theory viewed children “predominantly as representatives of a category whose significance lay, primarily, in what they revealed about adult life” (James, 2009, p35).

Prior to the 1990s, sociological approaches to children and childhood, as with those in developmental psychology, tended to centre on models of socialisation (Corsaro, 2017). These models were primarily deterministic, with children viewed as being appropriated by society through a process. For some social theorists such as those influenced by Talcott Parsons’ Functionalist perspective (Parsons and Bales, 1956) - this process was seen to involve training to learn, internalise and then follow social norms. For other theorists with a perspective of social reproduction, for example Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), this process of socialisation was seen as part of the social control that reproduced and maintained class inequalities. Although a social reproduction model of socialisation does afford children a more active role in the process of social reproduction and acknowledges the impact of social inequality on young people, the extent to which children *contribute* to this reproduction was for the most part overlooked.

3.2.4 The emergence of ‘Childhood Studies’

In the 1970s and 80s new perspectives on childhood (Alanen, 1988; Jenks, 1982; Qvortrup, 1985; Thorne, 1987) began to emerge in response to the relative absence of childhood in sociological theory, as a critique of existing socialisation models, and/or in resistance to the dominance of developmental psychology. These perspectives were brought together by James and Prout (1990 (2015)) in what they proclaimed as a ‘new paradigm for the sociology of childhood’. The

key features, outlined therein are summarised below (James and Prout, 2015, p7):

1. “Childhood is understood as a social construction.”
2. “Childhood is a variable of social analysis.”
3. “Children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right.”
4. “Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the society in which they live.”
5. “Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood.”
6. “Proclaiming a new paradigm of childhood is also part of reconstructing childhood in society”

Central to this paradigm is the conceptualisation of ‘childhood’ as a social construct. Unlike the universality of biological immaturity, how childhood is understood is variable across different contexts dependent on the social and cultural conditions in which it is constructed. In addition, the paradigm emphatically positions children as ‘beings’ in the temporal context of their childhood, rather than in a state of progress toward adulthood, and stipulates that children’s cultures and social relationships should be examined through that lens (Qvortrup, 1994; James and Prout, 2015). As such, children are considered to be active participants in the social construction of their own childhoods, and whose views and experiences of their own childhood are taken seriously.

On reflecting on the different influences that led to the development of this paradigm, one of its main proponents Allison James (2009) suggests a number of possible factors in the preceding decades. She points to increased exposure to children’s rights issues and an international focus on children’s rights (e.g. United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child (UN, 1989)) as well as counter-

culture movements such as feminism and anti-colonialism potentially playing a part in shifting attitudes more generally (James, 2009). Within sociology, however, James highlights the emergence of interpretive and interactionist approaches (in contrast to the structural functionalist), and to the influence of Giddens' structuration theory (1984), that places a focus on *both* agency and structure and the interaction between these. As such, the original main proponents of this new paradigm brought with them the desire to address concepts of structure and agency within their theory. They argued that it was essential to consider both, and the relationship between the two, when examining childhood. Therefore, the 'new' paradigm places importance on understanding childhood itself as a social institution as well as framing children as competent social agents, as active participants rather than passive subjects. This focus on children, their views and experiences, as worthy of study in and of themselves, rather than as of interest to understanding adulthood, is encapsulated in the paradigm's terminology framing children as 'human beings' as opposed to 'human becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994). The valuing of children's views and experiences follows through into methodology, with emphasis placed on participatory research methods and ways of incorporating children, and their 'voices', throughout the research process (Christensen and James, 2000). From the 1990s onwards this perspective has drawn interest and contributions from disciplines outside of sociology, for example geography, psychology, history, social anthropology, economic studies, philosophy, public health, race and ethnicity studies, gender studies and educational studies (Tisdall et al, 2023). As such the labels of "new sociology of childhood" and "new social studies of childhood" have gradually been replaced with 'Childhood Studies' to reflect the multi-and cross-disciplinary nature of the field.

3.2.5 Critique and new directions for Childhood Studies

As Childhood Studies has become more influential, criticisms have been levelled at the approach and alternatives proposed for the future of the discipline. Tisdall and Punch (2012) highlight several of the key issues and conclude that "greater emphasis is needed on the intricacies, complexities, tensions, ambiguities and ambivalences of children and young people's lives" (p259). Tisdall et al (2023) have reiterated and elaborated these critiques more recently and engaged with new perspectives in detail. They highlight five key areas of

debate that have led to these new perspectives within Childhood Studies: false dichotomies (e.g. developmental ‘becoming’ vs constructionist ‘being’ perspectives); engagement with materialist approaches; young people’s agency; generational ordering; and decolonisation. Two of these (‘being vs becoming’ and young people’s agency) are discussed in more detail below as they have key significance to this thesis. In general the authors (Tisdall et al., 2023) call for scholars of Childhood Studies to reflect on their own positionality. They argue that doing so will result in more critical engagement with the systemic forms of privilege and oppression that they, and those they seek to study, are affected by, and thus contribute to social justice.

3.2.5.1 ‘Being’ vs ‘Becoming’ dichotomy

Prout (2005) suggests that in early work on Childhood Studies the dichotomising of ‘being’ vs ‘becoming’ was perhaps a necessary tool with which to draw a clear distinction between this and the more established thinking of developmental psychology. There is recognition here, and in the preface to the 2015 edition of ‘Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood’ (James and Prout, 2015), that as Childhood Studies has become more established there is a need to “move beyond the opposition of nature and culture” (Prout, 2005, p3) and towards a more interdisciplinary and less dualistic approach.

Woodhead (2009) describes how the absolute distinction ‘beings’ vs ‘becomings’ has been called into question in part because children’s narratives have reiterated a sense of ‘becoming’, and because there is a need to account for biological development within an understanding of the experience of childhood. Lee (2001) has also challenged this distinction, suggesting that adults too are in a constant state of change and development, that the ‘stability’ implied by the state of ‘being’ is not a feature of adulthood any more than it is of childhood, and that both are ‘becoming’ in some way. This rigid language, similar to that rejecting developmental psychology, might be seen as symptomatic of a desire to draw attention to what the early proponents of childhood studies saw as a key issue (i.e. childhood as worthy of study independent of adulthood, and children as active agents in the construction of their childhood). Uprichard (2008) proposes instead that children should be theorised as *both* ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’ and that this does not necessarily diminish children’s agency but

rather places them as agents within the temporal context that all humans exist, acting based on motivations that are past, present and future-located.

3.2.6 (Re)Conceptualising children's 'agency' in Childhood Studies

Historically in social theory, emphasis on either social structure or agency were representative of opposing traditions. Theorists such as Durkheim took a holist view, seeing social structures as the imperative features of society, while others such as Weber took a more individualist approach, centring the importance of agency (Baert and Silva, 2010). Later theorists, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, began to attempt to reconcile this dichotomy, for example Bourdieu (1977), Archer (1982), and Giddens (1984).

Giddens' structuration theory was particularly influential on the development of the 'new paradigm' of Childhood Studies and, as such, focused both on 'childhood' as a socially constructed structure, and children as agents, acting within this and participating in constructing their childhood. Similar to structuration theory, Childhood Studies has tended to conceptualise agency as a quality or possession of an individual, emphasising the individual actor's reflexivity, rationality and capacity to make choices as part of this agency. This has underpinned a more political aspect of Childhood Studies, helping to emphasise the importance of listening to 'children's voices' and viewing children as bearers of human rights. However, this focus on agency as an individual capacity or quality of children has been criticised for the assumption of universality it makes about the capacity of different children, at different ages, in different social contexts (Oswell, 2013; Spyrou, 2018; Abebe, 2019). Abebe (2019) highlights how views of agency as "exercise of free will against the constraints of social structures" (p4) derive from individualist values and ideals that are particularly embedded in the Minority World. Additionally, there is a normativity that underlies the framing of agency in this way, an assumption that agency is always positive and will always be used for positive outcomes (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012; Spyrou, 2018). Often linked to this is the notion that agency is acquired in a developmental trajectory, over time and with experience, in direct contradiction to the attempts of Childhood Studies to reject a 'developmental' mindset.

Several scholars have suggested that Childhood Studies would benefit from theorising agency in alternative ways (valentine³, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Wyness, 2015; Esser et al., 2016; Oswell, 2016). Tisdall and Punch (2012), in their paper highlighting theoretical challenges in Childhood Studies, call for a move away from an individualist approach to agency, towards a focus on relationships, as in Jamieson and Milne (2012). Relational sociological theories posit that the unit of analysis in the study of social life should be the interactions and relationships between elements within society, as opposed to the substance of those elements (Emirbayer, 1997; Crossley, 2010; Dépelteau, 2018). In terms of agency, a relational ontology reframes agents as interdependent interactants, and agency as emerging from these interactions (Burkitt, 2016). Scholars in this area, particularly those responding to this need to expand on theories of agency in Childhood Studies, have illuminated several key, somewhat interrelated, issues that are worth considering when theorising children's agency from a relational perspective. These issues are explored in the following sections.

3.2.6.1 Temporality

For Emirbayer and Mische (1998) defining and accounting for agency requires consideration of the temporal context. They define agency as “a temporally embedded process of social engagement” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p962) informed by the past as well as orientated toward the future and present. In a Childhood Studies context, this can be applied to the conceptualisation of children as agents within their present context (‘being’), their future projected selves (‘becoming’) and additionally as *both* ‘being and becoming’ using past experience to evaluate, act and plan. Considering temporality from a less individualist perspective, the work of Mayall and Alanen on generational order (Alanen and Mayall, 2001; Mayall and Zeiher, 2003; Alanen, 2009; Mayall, 2020) has been influential to other scholars pursuing accounts of children's agency from a relational perspective. For example Punch (2016), Abebe (2019) and Leonard (2020) focus on both inter-generational and intra-generational relationships and the interdependencies between agents (not just unidirectional

³ Name intentionally spelt in lower case

dependencies of children on adults) to understand how agency can be constituted, constrained and negotiated in these relationships.

3.2.6.2 Dependency and vulnerability

The ‘gaining of agency’ is regularly framed as a normative outcome of a developmental process as children grow to adults. Within this framing there is a lack of acknowledgement that not all young people will experience agency in the same way or at the same rate, with the same outcomes. In addition, this view fails to acknowledge risks and vulnerabilities that are inherent to biological immaturity, or the dependencies that children might necessarily have on adults to provide and protect. Valentine (2011) has drawn particular focus to this lack of acknowledgement of children’s vulnerability in accounts of agency. She explores how the complex relationships children experience with each other, the adults in their lives and the world around them, are imbued with their specific needs and vulnerabilities which should not be ignored or diminished by framing agency only as an attribute to be achieved. She re-examines the analysis adopted by James et al (2008) to draw attention to where children themselves demonstrated reflexive awareness of risk, and their own vulnerabilities to it (valentine, 2011).

3.2.6.3 Complexity and nuance

As prominent voices in Childhood Studies have advocated for shifting away from dualities (e.g. being and becoming) that were evident in early work in the field (Prout, 2005), there have been efforts to focus on the complexity of children’s agency. Some have tried to ascribe value to different ‘types’ of agency emerging in these complex relationships in order to differentiate between the experiences different children have in different contexts (and how these relate to adult agency) e.g. ‘thick’ or ‘thin’ agency (Klocker, 2007), agency as a spectrum (Esser, 2016) or continuum (Abebe, 2019). Others have focused more on the constituent parts of these complex networks, to consider how agency emerges in relationships not only between human actors but also in relation to embodied and material aspects of children’s lives (Prout, 2005; Oswell, 2016; Spyrou, 2018). In an example of empirical work that is particularly relevant to the focus of this thesis, Rimmer (2017) examined the complex ‘interactional-relational’

nature of children's agency within their music-related practice, highlighting the importance of interactions not only with other children and adults, but also with material elements such as technological devices. In addition, this work considered "chains of interaction" (Rimmer, 2017, p569), previous interactions informing subsequent ones, exemplifying the temporal nature of agency that emerges within these interactions.

3.2.6.4 'Differently equal'

Valentine (2011) argues for a 'social model of agency' that acknowledges differences between children, and between children and adults, drawing on difference-centred theories such as feminist, queer, disability and anti-racist theories that allow "difference, as well as equality" (p347). This approach echoes that of Moosa-Mitha (2005) who, in adopting a difference-centred approach to children's citizenship rights, challenged the dominant perspective of "equality as same", advocating instead that children should be considered as "differently equal" members of society (p369). Since Childhood Studies is permeated with analyses of inequalities, power relations and agency, it is no surprise that scholars have also begun to draw on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as a framework for understanding childhood. In their study of nursery school children in Glasgow, Konstantoni and Emejulu (2017) highlight how putting "age in an embodied and relational context with other categories of difference" through an intersectional approach can be useful to examine children's understandings of themselves and their worlds. However, they heed and amplify the warnings of Cho et al (2013) that in adopting an intersectional perspective in Childhood Studies the origins of this work (in the labour of Black women) must be adequately acknowledged and its positions on race, class and gender be embedded within.

In summary, the debate around how agency is theorised within Childhood Studies has been particularly fruitful in the last decade. A relational perspective on agency ultimately presents agency as dynamic, in constant variation subject to complex contexts in which it is expressed and experienced. As I will go on to detail in the second half of this chapter, the Capabilities Approach places agency at the centre of its conceptualisation of wellbeing. As such it offers a framework

through which the contextual factors and interactions that affect young people's agency (and wellbeing) in school holidays can be examined.

3.2.7 What Childhood Studies can bring to the study of wellbeing in school holidays

As I described in Chapter 2, in the existing literature examining the impact of school holidays on young people there is an almost total absence of the direct perspectives of young people. Childhood Studies offers a theoretical framework where the primary objective is the centring of young people's perspectives. As an established field, there is also a strong foundation of multidisciplinary empirical and theoretical work to draw on in informing the direction of this research. As I described in the first half of this chapter, there has been a rich exchange between scholars who have sought to progress the paradigm, and as such there is also opportunity here to contribute to this conversation and engage with some of these newer theoretical concepts: specifically around theorising young people's agency, and the construction of childhood as a time for both 'being' and 'becoming' in the context of school holidays.

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to the Capabilities Approach, and the ways in which it offers a framework that can complement and supplement the Childhood Studies paradigm, particularly in the study of young people's wellbeing.

3.3 The Capabilities Approach

The inclusion of 'wellbeing' within the World Health Organisation's definition of health (International Health Conference, 1946) helped to expand understandings of health beyond simply the "absence of disease". However, defining 'wellbeing' is challenging (Dodge et al., 2012), particularly in the study of children where notions of childhood and wellbeing are constructed primarily from an adult perspective (Morrow and Mayall, 2010). Research on wellbeing is hugely varied as a result of different definitions and theoretical perspectives. A substantial portion of the literature is concerned with subjective wellbeing (Deci and Ryan, 2008) and on measuring this using individuals' self-reported ratings of happiness or life satisfaction (Fisher, 2019). Although this approach can have value in understanding how subjective wellbeing varies depending on different factors, it

is inherently individualistic and does not easily illuminate the causal mechanisms at play.

At a primarily adult population level, wellbeing has tended to be measured using economic approaches to gauge the development or ‘success’ of a country or population. Measures such as GDP (gross domestic product) have become standard and while they may demonstrate economic ‘health’ of a country as a whole, they fail to give an adequate representation of how that wealth is distributed or the extent to which that population are affected by inequalities beyond economic ones. The World Health Organisation’s ‘Geneva Charter for Well-being’ (2021) emphasises the need to consider “New indicators of success, beyond gross domestic product, that take account of human and planetary wellbeing and lead to new priorities for public spending” (p2).

Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen developed the Capability Approach (the CA) in the late 1970s/early 1980s (Sen, 1985) to offer an alternative to the use of GDP in this way. His intention with this was to expand the way in which we consider the wellbeing of a population by focusing on the ends as opposed to the means, specifically on the substantive freedoms of individuals to choose a life that they value, rather than the subjective wellbeing they report. Sen has continued this work over decades, influencing the development of the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2025), and research across a variety of disciplines. The inherent flexibility of the approach has meant that others have built on and expanded it, moulding it for use in different areas and to different ends, notably his collaborator, philosopher Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Nussbaum, 2011).

In this half of the chapter I: examine the key features of the CA, including a detailed look at the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum; explore where sociological theory can enrich the CA; and discuss how the approach has been applied in research with children. As such I set out my theoretical framework using a CA perspective on wellbeing nested within the Childhood Studies paradigm.

3.3.1 Key features of the CA

3.3.1.1 Capabilities and Functionings

At its most basic the CA considers wellbeing in terms of the freedoms available to individuals to be, and do, what they value. Sen refers to these freedoms as ‘*capabilities*’ and uses the term ‘*functionings*’ to refer to the ‘*beings*’ and ‘*doings*’ that result from these (Sen, 1993).

“if the achieved functionings constitute a person's well-being, then the capability to achieve functionings (i.e. all the alternative combinations of functionings a person can choose to have) will constitute the person's freedom - the real opportunities - to have well-being.” (Sen, 1992)

Essentially wellbeing within the CA is not only defined by the functionings that are achieved (the beings and doings) but also by the freedom with which individuals choose these functionings. Agency, then, is strongly embedded within the paradigm in the form of the individual values, choices and freedoms that result in functionings, or not. However, choice is not the only constraining feature accounted for in evaluating how functionings come to be: ‘conversion factors’ in the CA are factors that limit or enable the ability of an individual to convert their available resources into these functionings (should they choose to). These features will be discussed in more detail in the sections below. Figure 3-1 shows how these basic features of the CA relate to one another.

Relating this to a basic example relevant to this thesis, to achieve the functioning of being physically active during school holidays requires the availability of resources and the ability to convert those resources into this functioning, as well as the freedom to choose to do so.

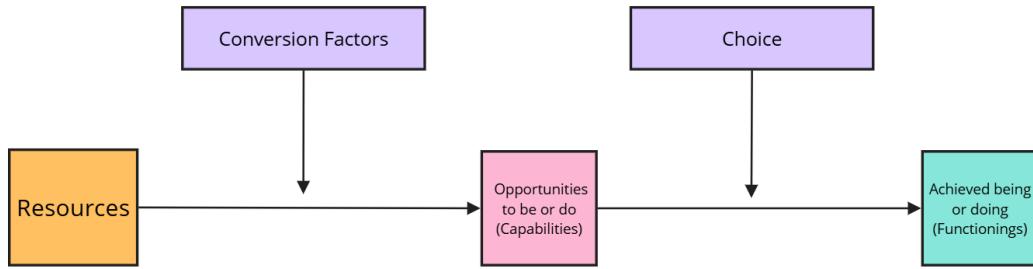


Figure 3-1 Basic features of the CA

3.3.1.2 Basic/ Essential capabilities

The CA is a normative framework, in that it prescribes that the freedom to choose a life according to what one values is central to being and living well (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). It is pluralist about value, acknowledging that different individuals in different circumstances will have different reason to value, and choose, different functionings (Nussbaum, 2011). Sen has tended to frame the CA as an evaluative space for comparing quality of life, highlighting certain capabilities such as being nourished, healthy, or educated. His work has refrained from categorising or defining basic capabilities in any more detail, a lack of specification which has led to criticism (Robeyns, 2006; Qizilbash, 2011). Sen maintains that, as a framework for thought and evaluation, the CA should not be prescriptive about this, and instead that individual populations should be able to democratically decide upon these within their own context (Robeyns, 2006).

While Sen's work provides a foundation for the CA, the work of his one-time collaborator, philosopher Martha Nussbaum, develops the approach as a means to construct a basic theory of social justice (Nussbaum, 2011). Following Sen in using the CA as a framework for evaluation, Nussbaum is instead focused on what institutional arrangements restrict or enable individuals' freedom to choose, and therefore underly social injustice or inequality (Nussbaum, 2011). Unlike Sen, Nussbaum has laid out what she calls the 'central capabilities' that she deems essential that societies ensure their citizens have, as a minimum, in order to live with dignity (Nussbaum, 2011). Nussbaum draws a terminological

distinction between her version of the CA and Sen's by using 'capabilities' as opposed to 'capability' approach, to emphasise the plurality and multiplicity of an individual's combined capability set. Given Nussbaum's convincing presentation of this multiplicity, I use the same plural form in this thesis.

Viewing wellbeing in terms of the freedoms to achieve what one values allows the complexity of human experience to be acknowledged without losing focus on shared features that can be shaped to improve those experiences. Nussbaum proposes that a political system must preserve or make available at least these ten central capabilities for its citizens: Life; Bodily Health; Bodily Integrity; Senses, Imagination and thought; Emotions; Practical reason; Affiliation; Other species; Play; and Control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2011). With respect to the focus of this thesis and the scholarship on which it is based, it is worth noting that Nussbaum includes 'Play' in this list. She notes that some might argue against the inclusion of this as 'essential', but highlights that these central capabilities are not basic in the sense of basic survival needs, but are minimal requirements for living well, for well-being, and that play and leisure are essential components of this.

"What play and the free expansion of the imaginative capacities contribute to a human life is not merely instrumental but partly constitutive of a worthwhile human life." (Nussbaum, 2011, P36)

Other scholars have developed similar lists or adapted and added new domains to Nussbaum's list, for example Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) include four further categories based on their research: doing good to others; living in a law-abiding fashion; understanding the law; and complete independence. In research with children and young people, Domínguez-Serrano et al (2019) surveyed young people about the importance of different capabilities to them, and their opinions about which capabilities are valued by adults. Similarly, and relevant to the specific context of my research, recent work by Ward et al (2020) in the Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland programme took a participatory approach with Scottish young people to develop a set of twelve central capabilities based on Nussbaum's original ten but tailored to, and informed by, the young people involved (Ward et al., 2019). I will return to this young person-informed list in Chapter 4.

Nussbaum frames an individual's complex set of opportunities, or freedoms, as 'combined capabilities'. She considers 'internal capabilities' to be a part of this set ("trained or developed traits and abilities" (Nussbaum, 2011, p21)) alongside opportunities made available within the social/political/economic environment. That is to say that the environment exerts impact on both the development of personal skills or abilities as well as on whether or not these can then be used in practice. These concepts are similar to those of 'conversion factors' explored further in section 3.3.2.1.

3.3.1.3 Fertile and Secure Functionings

Building on Nussbaum's insights, how different capabilities and functionings relate to, and impact upon, one another is explored in depth by Wolff and De-Shalit (2007; 2013). In their empirical and theoretical work on disadvantage, they describe "secure functionings", (those functionings that persist over time) and "fertile functionings" (those functionings that themselves open up new capabilities, and therefore new functionings). These concepts of secure and fertile functionings are illustrated in Figure 3-2.

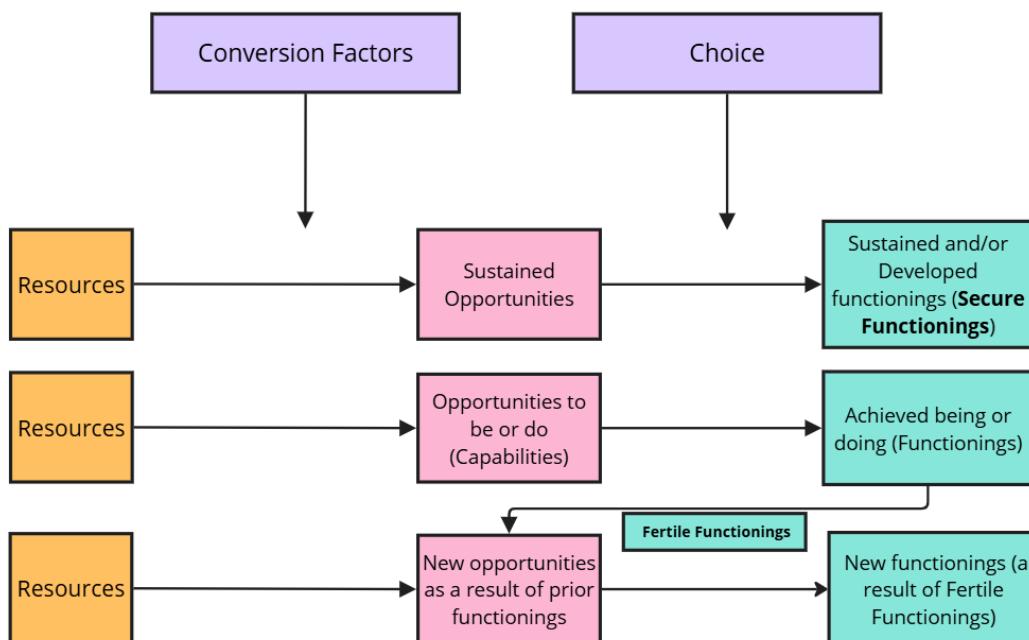


Figure 3-2 Secure and Fertile Functionings

Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) also consider the converse of this, whereby lack of opportunities to achieve functionings leads to deepening or "corrosive"

disadvantage (p10). As discussed within the context of Childhood Studies (section 3.2.5.1), young people's current experiences of wellbeing (the 'being' perspective) need to be considered as of value in the present time and not just as a means to a valued outcome in adulthood (the 'becoming' perspective), but so too should the security of their capabilities and functionings over time. The concepts of secure and fertile functioning have implications for programmes and interventions designed to improve wellbeing of young people and emphasises the importance of considering security of opportunities provided when designing and evaluating such programmes. To again use an illustrative example relevant to this thesis, free access to participation in an orchestra for young people outside school time is not a 'genuine opportunity' (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007) for those who have not been previously given the opportunity to learn an instrument (an 'internal capability'). Likewise, free school meals during term time but not during holidays might be considered as an 'insecure' opportunity to achieve a functioning of eating healthily, when that opportunity lacks permanence throughout the year.

3.3.2 Agency and Structure in the CA

To return briefly to the origins of the CA, Sen essentially frames capability as freedom, the freedom to choose combinations of functionings. As such Sen's CA embeds agency but stops short of theoretical explanations. In his early work Sen made a distinction between what he called 'wellbeing freedom' and 'agency freedom' (1993). Nussbaum has called into question the usefulness of such a distinction, arguing that agency is implicit in the CA and its definition of wellbeing (Nussbaum, 2011). Although these concepts are absent from Sen's more recent work, the attempts to address agency in a more explicit way within the framework does acknowledge a need to better understand how individuals come to both value and choose their capability sets. Similarly, the CA seems to implicitly acknowledge the structural features in which individuals achieve functionings within its conceptualisation of conversion factors, without explicitly engaging a sociological perspective on this. Perhaps due to an historical lack of common ground between the fields of sociology and economics (Holmwood, 2013), and despite the strongly interdisciplinary nature of the CA, there has been a lack of engagement by sociologists with the concepts of the CA until

relatively recently (Smith and Seward, 2009; Holmwood, 2013; Gangas, 2016; Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018; Owens et al., 2022).

The following two subsections will explore in more detail how Conversion Factors and Choice (See Figure 3-2) are framed within the CA and how these concepts have been expanded from a sociological perspective, contributing to a deeper theoretical understanding of the relationships between agency and structure within the CA.

3.3.2.1 Conversion Factors

As an economist, Sen also pays close attention to resources that individuals have available to them, and the extent to which their resources can be converted into functionings. In ‘Development as Freedom’ (2001) Sen lays out what will later be known in the CA as ‘conversion factors’. He describes how the use that can be made of an individual’s commodities depends on different features affecting that individual. He describes personal, social and environmental factors, later developed further by Robeyns (2005), but also describes the importance of considering these resources relative to those around the individual, and to the distribution of resources, specifically income, within a family unit. This last point is of particular relevance in thinking about how conversion factors affect children’s conversion ‘process’ differently to adults, and how the two might interact. Robeyns (2005; 2017), building on Sen’s work defines these as “the factors which determine the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning” (2017, p45) and she categorises these into personal, social and environmental. Much of the literature on the CA adopts a similar categorisation but while categorising the nature of these might be useful for identifying particular impacts on individuals’ functionings, it is limited in terms of how much it reveals about how this impact actually occurs.

Terminology and accounts of ‘conversion factors’ can vary and are for the most part under-theorised, particularly from a sociological perspective (Holmwood, 2013; Brunner, 2015; Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018). Brunner and Watson (2015) adopt a slightly different, and more sociological, approach by focusing on the level at which these conversion factors operate in relation to the individual. They draw a distinction between social and structural, describing personal or

micro (individually located e.g. literacy, physical condition), social or meso (acting locally directly with the individual e.g. public services or third sector organisations) and structural or macro (impacting on the individual without their direct interaction e.g. capitalism, cultural norms) factors. Across the CA literature, conversion factors are considered as having impact either positively or negatively to enhance or constrain the ability of individuals to achieve different functionings, and therefore how likely an individual or community is to experience social justice.

In response to a movement within sociology to a relational ontology (see section 3.2.6) some scholars have pursued attempts to theorise agency and structure within the CA in a more relational way than has thus far been evident. These have tended to focus on enriching the conceptualisation of conversion factors, particularly focusing on the process of conversion rather than the factors themselves, and incorporating the dynamic relationship between agency and structure across time (Smith and Seward, 2009; Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018; Owens et al., 2022; Bazzani, 2023).

Hart's work (2013; 2016; 2019) incorporating Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1986) into the CA framework offers an alternative sociologically grounded perspective, and one that is of particular interest in the study of children's capabilities. Hart draws parallels between Bourdieu's forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital) and the commodities/resources identified by Sen in the CA (Hart, 2013). With reference to her specific area of specialism (education) she explores how these might be converted to other forms of capital, transferred inter-generationally, and converted into functionings. This relates particularly well to understanding how the CA might be applied to children, specifically to expand the concept of commodities to include forms of capital that are not simply economic. In addition, Hart addresses conversion factors through this lens and proposes that instead of making the personal, social and environmental distinctions Robeyns (2005) proposes, that conversion factors would be more richly conceptualised by drawing on Bourdieu's theories of habitus and social fields (Hart, 2013; Hart, 2019). Crucially she highlights how capital, habitus and field exert impact in the CA model not only at the level of converting commodities to functionings but

also impacting on an individual's values and choices made in selecting capability sets. I will explore this further in the next section.

3.3.2.2 Choice

What much of the theory around conversion factors fails to address is the role of different factors in shaping how choices are made. As described in the previous section, relational sociological approaches to the CA have begun to offer alternative analysis of conversion factors. This has also included expanding theory around where these conversion factors operate within the CA model, drawing attention to the influence of structure and agency dynamics on choice, as well as the ability to convert resources (Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018; Bazzani, 2023).

Austin (2018) proposes a change in terminology that would create a distinction highlighting the role that choice (and the factors affecting that) plays in the achievement of functionings. They propose that practical reasoning, in its centrality to how individuals make choices, should be considered an “activation factor” (p29) that mediates between a set of “objective capabilities” (or “potential functionings”) (p29) and the activation of these into achieved functionings. This perspective begins to consider the relational nature of how individuals’ values are formed (and choices made), through internal processes of reasoning in interaction with a multitude of personal, social and environmental factors. As touched upon in the previous section, Hart (2013; 2019) explores a similar framing by incorporating the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. In relation to choice, she proposes that Bourdieu’s theory of ‘habitus’ (1977) might enrich understanding of how individuals own values, preferences and tastes form, and therefore impact on the choices they make in selecting capability sets. Bourdieu describes habitus as a system of “internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception and action” (1977, p86) formed in response to a complex and unique set of experiences (from birth onwards) within social fields. The ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 2010) in this perspective is a social space composed of interaction and transaction between participants, resulting in particular preferences and dispositions that form ‘habitus’. From a capabilities perspective this habitus emerging from a particular social field, or combination of fields, will influence not only the individual’s resources (different forms of capital) and the

conversion of this into functionings but will also affect the preferences and values of that individual, and therefore the choices they make to pursue (or not) certain functionings.

The perspectives of Austin and Hart offer a deeper theoretical framing of ‘choice’ that is both relational, forming internally in interaction with a social field, and temporal in that it is affected by past, present and future considerations. Similarly, a Bourdieusian perspective on social reproduction (1990) might also align well with Wolff and De-Shalit’s conceptualisation of fertile functionings and corrosive disadvantage (2007). While Wolff and De-Shalit concern themselves more with individual cycles of deepening disadvantage or widening advantage through the relationship between past functionings on future capabilities, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) consider a similar model from the broader intergenerational cycles of reproduction of advantage or disadvantage. Particularly in considering young people, it would be useful then to adopt a similar ‘Sen-Bourdieu’ (Hart, 2019) perspective to better understand the intergenerational interaction of capabilities and functionings.

3.3.3 *Childhood Studies and the CA*

Despite the large body of work that has emerged around the CA, and Sen and Nussbaum both including children within some of their work, relatively little has directed focus solely on children (Biggeri et al., 2011). As such, Biggeri et al (2011) present both theoretical and empirical evidence specifically addressing this gap in their 2011 book. Within this, Ballet et al (2011) propose a conceptual framework that is influenced by Childhood Studies and considers children “not simply as recipients of freedoms, but as active social actors and agents in their communities with their own priorities, strategies and aspirations” (p22). The authors suggest that one of the primary reasons that children and children’s issues have not been addressed in CA research is due to the difficulty in clearly identifying how children meet the ‘self-determination’ requirement for making autonomous choices to achieve functionings within the CA model. To address this, they propose the use of a concept of ‘evolving capabilities’, whereby children are seen to develop self-determination and autonomy over time and therefore at any given time in their childhood sit somewhere on the spectrum of this development. In keeping with a Childhood Studies approach, they propose

that these evolving capabilities should be evaluated from children's own point of view rather than through the same lens as, or in comparison to, those of adults.

In the years since Biggeri et al (2011) published their book there has been a significant increase in literature on the application of the CA in research with children (Gladstone et al., 2021; Domínguez-Serrano and del Moral-Espín, 2022). Two recent reviews of literature found that the majority of empirical research taking a CA perspective on childhood/children is focused on education (Gladstone et al., 2021; Domínguez-Serrano and del Moral-Espín, 2022). Gladstone et al (2021) highlighted a particular gap in children's health research, particularly mental health. Their review also appeared to find very few studies exploring children's experiences of time outside education (e.g. leisure, school holidays) but this was not highlighted by the authors. Additionally only a small proportion of the included studies appear to have taken a Childhood Studies perspective.

3.3.4 What the Capabilities Approach can bring to the study of wellbeing in school holidays

The CA provides a holistic framework for examining wellbeing, not limited to the domains of physical and mental health but also not excluding these. As such it is well-placed to support an analysis that contributes to answering the research questions and to achieving the secondary objectives outlined at the end of Chapter 2. In using this framework there is a clear requirement to focus not only on the substantive experiences and activities of school holidays (the beings and doings) but also the real freedoms young people have to achieve these, accounting for the factors which constrain and enable these freedoms and shape the choices that young people make.

3.4 Connecting and combining the CA and Childhood Studies

Having set out the respective theoretical perspectives from Childhood Studies and the CA, I now turn to considering how these complement and supplement one another to underpin my thesis. In the first half of this chapter, I highlighted particular areas where Childhood Studies has been critiqued, and where more recent progress has been made in responding to and addressing these critiques,

drawing particular attention to debates around young people's agency. In exploring the debates around agency within Childhood Studies, I highlighted the value in adopting a relational perspective on agency, and of recognising the complexities involved in understanding young people's agency. In the CA agency is implicit in wellbeing where capabilities and functionings rely on what individuals are able to, and choose to, achieve based on what they value. As such, it offers a framework through which the contextual factors and interactions that affect young people's agency (and wellbeing) in school holidays can be examined.

The diagram below (Figure 3-3) illustrates the key concepts, which I combine in my theoretical framework. In my study of the CA, I have found some diagrams helpful in understanding the concepts, others have struck me as overly complex or difficult to interpret. I developed the following diagram to support my own analysis based on the basic elements of Sen's CA (1993) and drawing on the work of some of the scholars described in this chapter. I include it here as a means of supporting a reader, but it is intended only as this, a basic support rather than an explanation. I will go on to explain the features of this and my reasoning for their inclusion.

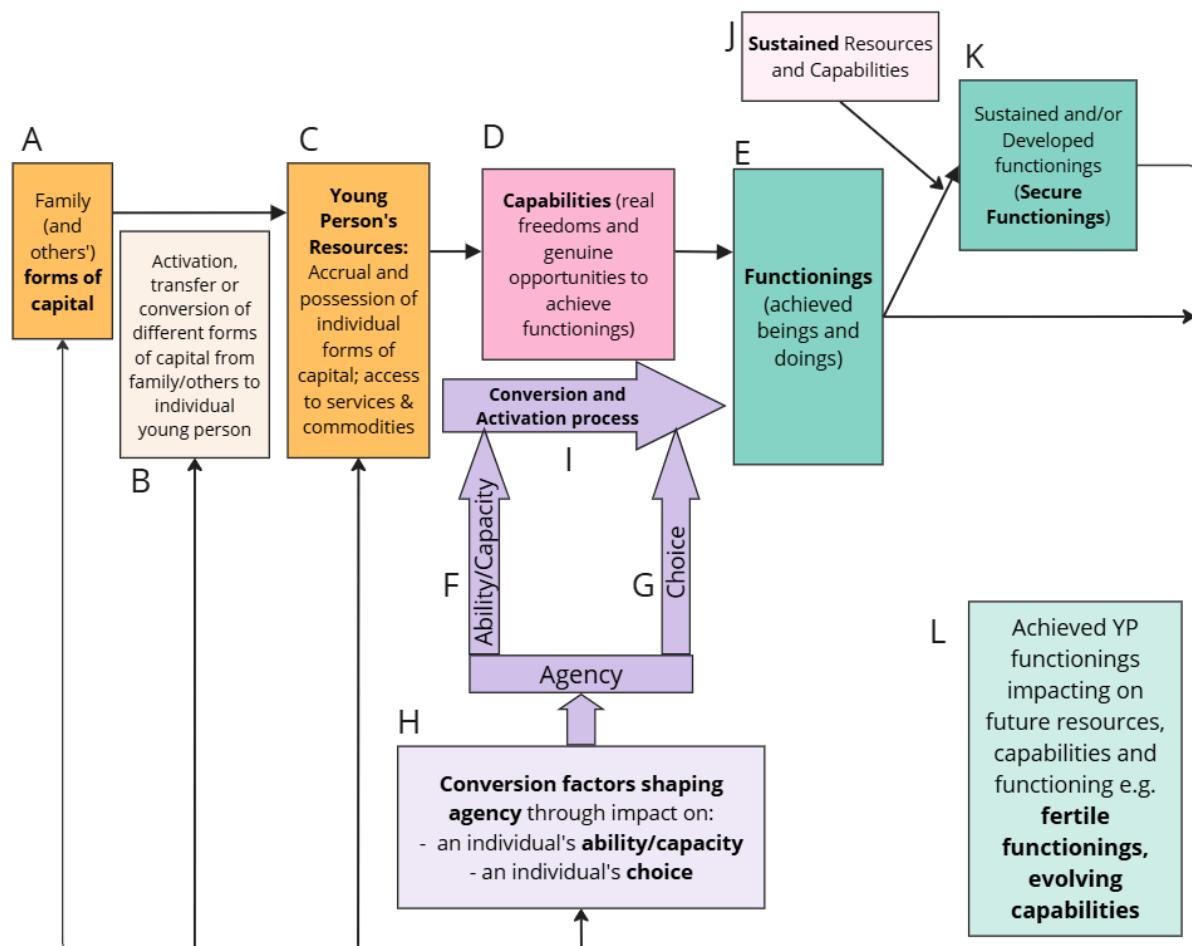


Figure 3-3 CA model

From Hart's model (outlined in section 3.3.2.1) (Hart, 2013; Hart, 2019), I include family and others' (e.g. schools, school holiday clubs) forms of capital ('A'), which must be activated, transferred or converted ('B') in order to become resources, access or opportunities available to young people ('C'). This is particularly useful when identifying how differing available resources affect young people's school holiday experiences, and importantly includes other forms of capital beyond economic, for example social or cultural capital.

While I include conversion factors in this model ('H'), as Hart's Sen-Bourdieu analysis highlighted (Hart, 2013; Hart, 2019), it is important to consider how these conversion factors operate to impact not only on the ability of an individual but also on the choices they make. Therefore I illustrate a distinction between an individual's *ability* or *capacity* ('F') to achieve a particular functioning ('E') and an individual's *choice* ('G') to do so. Both of these

elements (ability and choice) can be considered as constituting agency, agency which is ‘situated’ (Bazzani, 2023) in a young person’s own context and subject to conversion factors therein. Influenced by the work of scholars who have sought to emphasise the dynamic and relational conversion process (Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018; Bazzani, 2023) I include a specific feature (‘I’) to illustrate this. Additionally, while I do not fully adopt Austin’s (2018) use of ‘activation factors’ I do include the term activation alongside conversion in describing the process. This is primarily because I am not convinced of the benefit to my analysis of labelling these factors differently, especially since they are likely to overlap and interact. I do however, as previously mentioned, see the value in emphasising choice as distinct from ability and as a process influenced by conversion factors leading to ‘activation’ of a capability. The use of ‘conversion and activation process’ (‘I’) therefore highlights the interactional nature of multiple factors acting across different temporal contexts and affecting a young person’s agency. This is useful within a Childhood Studies perspective, particularly one which seeks to conceptualise agency as relational.

Lastly I include a further aspect that emphasises the interaction between capabilities and functionings across time by drawing on the work of Wolff and De-Shallit (2007) to include their concepts of ‘secure functionings’ (‘K’) and ‘fertile functionings’ (‘L’). These are particularly useful for examining how young people’s capabilities and functionings during school holidays are influenced by their past functionings and might influence their future ones, as well as the factors that affect the permanency with which young people experience these.

In sum, this thesis will consider how school holidays affect young people’s wellbeing by examining the resources available to young people during this time (‘C’), how conversion factors (‘H’) enable or constrain young people’s agency to achieve functionings that they have reason to value (‘E’ and ‘K’), and how these functionings feed into future conversion and activation processes (‘L’).

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have detailed the key features, critiques and various angles that scholars have contributed within the two theoretical perspectives on which I

base my work: Childhood Studies and the CA. At the end of Chapter 2 I outlined some secondary objectives that have helped me to navigate the research journey. I now elaborate two of these in light of the theoretical framework I have laid out in this chapter (changes/additions are underlined, see section 2.5 for original list):

2. To focus on the substance of school holidays using a Childhood Studies/CA framework to examine young people's capabilities and functionings during school holidays, and the conversion factors that affect these
3. To conceptualise wellbeing through the lens of the CA: as the substantive freedoms of individuals to choose a life that they value

The next chapter will focus on how this theoretical framework was operationalised, and the various perspectives that informed my methodological choices.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail my methodological approach. The following section (4.2) presents the ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives that I adopt in this thesis. I then explore the various considerations involved in the design and planning of the study (4.3) including the selection of methods, ethical considerations, and recruitment strategy. In 4.4 I detail how the research was conducted: in pre- and post-holiday ‘enhanced’ interviews with young people, focus groups with young people volunteering in community arts organisations and interviews with staff in these organisations. Lastly I describe my use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis in analysing the data (4.5).

4.2 Developing a research strategy

4.2.1 Ontological, epistemological and theoretical stance of this thesis

When faced with the overlapping, inconsistently defined, confusingly organised “maze” (Crotty, 1998, p1) of methodological and theoretical choices, seeing my own “bewilderment” (Crotty, 1998, p1) reflected in methods textbooks (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2004; Gray, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2022) has been somewhat reassuring. Given the complexity of different ways that the relationships between theory and practice are described and defined in the literature I will use this section to summarise my own understanding of the theoretical concepts on which I based my decision-making when conducting this research, and the reasons for these choices.

In Chapter 2 I described the existing literature base on school holidays, identifying that the overwhelming majority of this work is quantitative in nature. This has allowed a broad understanding to develop around the potential impact of school holidays, particularly where this is exacerbated by existing inequalities. However, the omission of qualitative work in this area means that the experiences and opinions of young people, on whom school holidays primarily affect, are not included in our understandings of how this period might affect them. Not only does this result in an academic picture that is skewed, but

also policy and practice directly influenced by this picture. As such, one of the aims of this study is to address the relative absence of qualitative work in this area.

Although this is not without exception, a quantitative methodology most often tends to signify a positivist theoretical standpoint and a qualitative methodology an interpretivist one (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, the relative absence of qualitative work in this area not only highlights a gap in terms of choice of methods but likely also a theoretical one in terms of the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions of the research. Positivism and interpretivism offer contrasting viewpoints on how we might understand our social worlds. These viewpoints represent contrasting ontologies (philosophical viewpoints on the nature of social reality - 'what can be known') and epistemologies (theories of how we come to gain knowledge of this reality) (Bryman, 2004; Ritchie, 2013; Gray, 2021). Positivism adopts the view that facts of social reality can be observed, as akin to scientific facts of the natural world and should be studied as such, within a scientific model. In contrast, interpretivist perspectives take the epistemological stance that the social world cannot be studied in this way and that social science needs different theoretical and methodological frameworks to those in the natural sciences. I adopt this latter epistemological stance.

One such interpretivist perspective, Childhood Studies, was explored in Chapter 3. This paradigm is constructionist in its ontological position, adopting the view that concepts of childhood are socially constructed and re-constructed within society, including by children themselves (James and Prout, 2015). In Chapter 3 I also outlined the areas of critique, and potential new directions that scholars have proposed that the paradigm of Childhood Studies be driven, particularly focusing on a relational conceptualisation of agency (valentine, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Wyness, 2015; Esser et al., 2016; Oswell, 2016). As such, my ontological position within this work is constructionist, in line with Childhood Studies, that the nature of social reality is constructed, i.e. that it is generated through our interactions and meaning making and shared understandings that emerge from that (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). However, I have sought to pay particular attention to the critiques of Childhood Studies, and in doing so incorporate a relational ontology, focusing on relationships and interactions as

objects of study within the construction of young people's agency and wellbeing. Interpretivist and constructionist traditions emphasise the construction of knowledge and focus on understanding how individuals interpret and make sense of their worlds from their own unique perspectives. Given the need to centre the perspectives of children and young people and how they make sense of their own worlds, interpretivism and constructionism are well-suited to such an approach. As such, qualitative methods that seek to explore and illuminate connections between the social, cultural and historical aspects of individuals' lives are often the investigative tools of choice. However, qualitative research methods are a "broad church" (Ritchie, 2013, p3) and not all would be best suited to generating data that would help to answer my research questions. In addition, research with young people requires careful consideration of what is ethical, feasible and appropriate when selecting methods (Brady and Graham, 2019). In the sections that follow I will highlight some of the key factors that informed my decision-making around methods.

4.2.2 Adopting a perspective on children and adults

As described in Chapter 3, the development of Childhood Studies has significantly altered the way in which children are considered within social research, centring the importance of studying children's social relationships and cultures. One of the key ways in which Childhood Studies began to change the landscape of research with children was in challenging theoretical perspectives that viewed children as biologically incomplete and therefore incompetent (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Children's viewpoints had been seen as not worthy of study because children lacked the capacity to express perspectives that could be deemed reliable. Emphasis was placed on the views of parents and professionals with the views of children ignored, but this began to change with the 'new' paradigm. One of the original main tenets of the paradigm put forward by James and Prout in 1990 (2015) was that ethnography should be the methodology of choice as it "allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data" (James and Prout, 2015, p7). However, this view has significantly expanded since the original publication (which the authors acknowledge in the 2015 edition) with a variety of innovative methods being used in research with children and young people beyond a traditional ethnographic approach (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). As Childhood

Studies research has begun to move away from an ethnographic approach, interview-based methods have become more prominent, influenced by a perspective rooted in phenomenology that language ‘brings to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience wherein it takes form’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 126 in Burkitt, 2003).

The Childhood Studies paradigm has emphasised the need for childhood (or age) to be viewed as a variable of social analysis and more recently scholars have sought to examine this variable from a critical studies perspective, positioning children as a marginalised group (Wall, 2022), and emphasising the importance of understanding childhood intersectionally (Alanen, 2016; Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017; Tisdall et al., 2023) and intergenerationally (Alanen and Mayall, 2001; Alanen, 2009; Mayall, 2020). Accounting for the various social variables of childhood, including age, has implications not only for the analysis and interpretation of data, but also for ethical considerations in conducting research and the selection of appropriate methods. In other words, it is important for scholars (as adults) to consider how we come to know about the experiences of children and also to recognise the various power dynamics that exist between ourselves and child participants.

Mayall (2000) and Punch (2002) highlight ways in which adult researcher perspectives affect methods choices in research with children, and the importance of acknowledging and confronting the positionality of researchers as adults. Punch (2002) considers adult-researcher views on research with children to fall into three categories: those that treat children and adults in the same way (but may fail to address the power imbalance between adult researcher and child participant); those that treat children as very different to adults (and tend to adopt an ethnographic approach); and those that occupy a middle ground viewing children as similar to adults but with different competencies. She notes that the latter of these viewpoints have led to a variety of methods being developed specifically to engage those competencies, particularly practical, participatory and creative methods (Punch, 2002). Similarly, Mayall (2000) considers researchers’ views on generational differences to be on a spectrum between those who assume a level of adult superiority (e.g. in detached observation) and those who minimise these differences in attempting to access children’s worlds (e.g. ‘least adult role’ (Mandell, 1988)). In critiquing the two

ends of this spectrum she positions herself in the middle, seeking to acknowledge the power differential between adults and children without reproducing it in her interactions with them: “I am asking children, directly, to help me, an adult, to understand childhood” (Mayall, 2000, p122).

My own perspective in conducting this research has been to view children as a marginalised group, and as such to consider how participants might also be experiencing multiple, intersectional marginalisation. My approach to positioning myself in relation to children has been to consider them as “differently equal” (Yuval-Davis, 1999 in Moosa-Mitha, 2005) to adults and to position myself as Mayall (2000) does, as an adult asking young people for insight. In doing so I have been able to consider how our interactions and the data we generate together are affected by the different perspectives we might have because of our different positions, and the power dynamics that exist between us as a result of the way society constructs our relative privileges. As such my methodological choices, and my overall approach to interactions with young people, reflects a desire to better understand their lived experiences. One such choice is the incorporation of the CA into my analytical framework. As described in Chapter 3 in its conceptualisation of ‘conversion factors’, the CA centres the importance of understanding how interrelated features of individuals’ contexts influence their agency to achieve valued functionings. The next section will explore what the CA brings to an understanding of “wellbeing” in the context of the lives of young people.

4.2.3 Adopting a perspective on wellbeing and operationalising the Capabilities Approach

As described in Chapter 2, much of the existing research on young people’s wellbeing in school holidays has taken a public health approach focusing on longer term health outcomes as measured by specific indicators of health or disease. As such these approaches have focused on childhood as an ingredient of adulthood, rather than considering what constitutes their wellbeing in the present. What the CA offers is a broad framework to consider wellbeing in a more holistic way, beyond the narrower boundaries of ‘health’. In addition, and particularly relevant to a Childhood Studies perspective, it can also be operationalised to embed temporal and interconnected elements within this

framework, allowing space to consider both the ‘being’ of childhood, and the ‘becoming’ journey of the life course, as well as the complexity of factors that influence what individuals are able, and choose, to achieve.

One of the key strengths of the CA is the flexibility with which it can be applied, and as such it has been operationalised in a variety of ways including in combination with other theoretical perspectives (Robeyns, 2017). Gladstone et al (2021) reviewed the applications of the CA in research specifically with children identifying that most studies were located in education research, with few in health. The authors found that studies used the CA within three approaches, with some overlap: 1. to re/conceptualise a topic or field of study; 2. to compare the CA with other theories/concepts; and 3. to generate and analyse data (Gladstone et al., 2021). In this study I sought to primarily use the CA to analyse data, in combination with Childhood Studies, with the aim of deepening understanding of, and to some extent reconceptualising, young people’s wellbeing in school holidays. Additionally, as I will go on to describe in the next section, I used concepts from the CA (capabilities domains) as discussion prompts within focus groups because they provided clear, concise and accessible concepts with which to frame discussions of wellbeing with young people in a specific context (community arts centres).

4.3 Planning the study

This study used a multi-method qualitative approach to data generation with semi-structured interviews with twenty-two young people aged 10-15 (interviewed before and after a school holiday), focus groups with a total of fifteen young people aged 12-16 who were actively engaged in one of two community arts organisations, and additional semi-structured interviews with four members of staff at these organisations. Section 4.4 will further detail the participant group and data generation but in this section (4.3) I will focus on the different considerations I made in planning the study, and how the methods and strategy I eventually employed were shaped by these considerations.

4.3.1 Selecting and developing appropriate methods

4.3.1.1 Childhood studies and ethnography

In section 4.2.2 I highlighted that an ethnographic approach is no longer considered the primary method in Childhood Studies research and does not necessarily offer the best insight into children's social worlds (Punch, 2002). The broad area of focus in this research was on school holidays and on exploring the varying experiences of young people during this time. An ethnographic approach would therefore have required either narrowing that focus to specific elements within that time (e.g. holiday club experiences), or spending time with young people in their various activities across the time period. The former of these would not have been able to answer the research questions adequately around broader school holiday activities, and the latter would have been potentially unethical in the invasiveness it would require into young people's lives during school holiday time. Additionally, the planning of this research occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and an ethnographic approach would not have been practically possible with restrictions on being indoors and mixing households (see section 4.3.4).

4.3.1.2 'Enhanced' interviews

Interviews are particularly well suited to "experience" related research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013), generating insights into participants' lives, including their understandings and perspectives of the contexts in which they live (Gibson et al., 2018). For research with children, the flexibility of semi-structured qualitative interviewing is particularly useful, allowing an individualised approach and a level of participation in the generation of knowledge between interviewer and interviewee that can be empowering and accessible for children (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Gibson et al., 2018). In research with children, particularly in Childhood Studies, this flexibility has been extended to include a variety of creative methods of data gathering or generation (Lomax, 2012) in what Kara calls 'enhanced' interviews (Kara, 2015, p82-83) e.g. incorporating photo or object elicitation, diaries, creative tasks. This kind of enhanced interview can allow participants to express themselves and help to reduce the power imbalance between adult-researcher and child-participant, encouraging participants to feel part of the research, relaxed and

more engaged in it, potentially even enjoying the experience (Brady and Graham, 2019). However, there can be practical issues with implementing this (Brady and Graham, 2019) and not all children will be able to engage, be interested in, or relaxed by these kinds of ‘enhancements’. Punch (2002) advocates for employing a range of different methods and techniques in order to account for the diversity of different children’s competencies and experiences. She proposes that combining traditional ‘adult’ research methods (e.g. interviews) avoids patronising children, invoking a sense of being treated equally to adults, but that offering creative techniques in addition allows alternative ways to interact that can help children feel more comfortable in this context (Punch, 2002).

It is for the above reasons that I opted to choose an enhanced interview approach, incorporating multiple options for engaging in creative tasks, should participants wish to do so. Given that the focus of the research was on experiences in a particular time frame, certain creative methods seemed particularly appropriate to encouraging capture, and recall, of these experiences. In particular these were diarising (e.g. written, photo, video, drawn) and elicitation methods and I was interested in combining these in a similar way to ‘draw, write and tell’ (Angell et al., 2015) or ‘write, draw, show and tell’ (Noonan et al., 2016). Additionally, I wanted to incorporate a task that required no preparation from the participant to ensure that those who had forgotten about the ‘show and tell’, did not want to or could not bring any items, could still engage in a creative task should they wish to. I was influenced by Brady and Graham’s use of mapping exercises (e.g. “river of life”) to capture longitudinal experiences of participants (Brady and Graham, 2019, p131). Based on the existing research using these methods I felt that this combination of options might encourage participants to feel like they were playing an active part in the research process as well as offering a focused task that could alleviate any discomfort from the unfamiliar experience of being interviewed by an adult relative stranger. Similarly, but from a data generation perspective, I felt that employing these particular methods would help participants recall the activities and events of their holiday period (contributing to RQ1), and how they felt these affected their wellbeing (RQ2). In addition to this, given that one of my research questions was centred on creative experiences in school holidays

(RQ3), I hoped that the inclusions of these opportunities to be creative *in* the research, would signal to participants the value that I was placing on hearing about those creative experiences in their accounts. I therefore planned to offer a choice to young people participants of two methods, which they could also flexibly adapt to suit their own interests and preferences (they could choose to do neither and the interview would follow a more traditional semi-structured format):

1. “Show and Tell” artefact elicitation interviews - where participants would be asked to collect, record, photograph, create item(s) from their school holiday time, bring these to interview and we would discuss them.
2. “Memory path” timelines - where participants could use pens, paper and stickers (or digital whiteboard) to draw a timeline of their school holidays during the interview and we would discuss the different events and activities as they remembered them/drew them.

Given that one of the aims of the study was to capture the qualitative content of young people’s school holiday experiences (RQ1), and that I was planning to introduce these methods options to the young people, I felt that it was important that I introduce these ideas to them at the beginning, or near the start of their school holiday period, before later interviewing them. In addition, for reasons already discussed I was conscious that building rapport with participants may take a little longer with young people who are unfamiliar with what to expect, and who are also being asked to trust an adult stranger with their thoughts and feelings. Therefore I decided to conduct two interviews with each participant. The first of these would be at the beginning of the school holidays and would follow more of a traditional semi-structured interview format where we could get to know each other, explore something of the young person’s life and interests, and I could ‘plant the seed’ that I would return after the holidays to discuss how this time had been for them. The second would focus more specifically on the experiences of the school holiday that had just occurred and would offer the opportunity for participants to engage in the ‘show and tell’ or ‘memory path’ activities, if they chose to. Further detail is given in section 4.4.

4.3.1.3 Focus groups

Although I present it here in a chronological fashion, the process of developing a research strategy was not always linear. While I had developed the ideas around these particular methods, it was in conversations with the arts organisations I later partnered with (section 4.3.3.3), that this developed into the inclusion of focus groups with their young people, and additional interviews with their staff to help contextualise the nature of the work they do. Focus groups can offer particular insight into experiences that are shared by participants and are sometimes regarded as being able to provide more ‘naturalistic’ accounts through replicating more everyday conversational format between participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Focus groups can also reveal aspects of social interaction between participants, their language and conceptualisations, in collective sense-making (Wilkinson, 1998). Additionally the influence of the researcher is reduced (Ritchie, 2013), which may be particularly beneficial in addressing the power imbalance between adult-researcher/child-participant. Some of the barriers to the success of this, particularly with young people, include building trust and rapport within the group. However, this was likely to be less of an issue since the arts organisations had young people who were actively involved as a pre-existing group, and who had experience of feeding back to the staff in a similar way. I therefore decided to use focus groups with this select group of young people, to not only provide additional insight into general school holiday experience, but to generate data on how young people interact with organisations providing out-of-school activities, and with each other within that setting (RQ1 and RQ2). Using community arts organisations specifically meant that issues around creative practice and learning in school holidays could be explored (RQ3). While initially I had planned to ‘enhance’ these focus groups with similar techniques to those I planned in the interviews, I was influenced by the work of Ward et al (2020) who co-created a set of twelve capabilities domains with young people, for young people, based on Nussbaum’s Central Capabilities (2011). Since these domains had been co-produced with young people in a similar geographical and social location I felt these might offer contextually appropriate language that young people might be able to relate to and understand. I therefore decided to use these capabilities as discussion prompts within the focus groups. Taking this capabilities-informed approach to the focus groups would also allow me to explore different ways in which

interacting with the organisations impacted on young peoples' capabilities and functionings, as well as wider school holiday experiences. Further detail is given in section 4.4.

4.3.2 Ethics

Although many of the same ethical considerations apply to research with children as they do to research with adults, some aspects are more pronounced when working with children because of the likelihood of relative vulnerability and lack of experience or familiarity with what research is and how it is conducted (Brady and Graham, 2019). These relative vulnerabilities should not preclude children from taking part in research, but it does require careful consideration of methods used, ways children are included and more generally the research practice that supports the study (Water, 2018). Research with children therefore requires striking a balance between the opportunities for children to have their experiences and perspectives investigated and understood (in this case on wellbeing in the school holidays) and ensuring that potential harm is minimised or avoided (Brady and Graham, 2019). In addition, as a student I have responsibilities in line with the University of Glasgow's policies and codes of practice. In this section I will detail the ethical considerations I made in developing and conducting this study, and how these were informed.

4.3.2.1 Young people's level of participation/involvement

Participatory research seeks to involve those who are the focus of the research in levels of the research process that they are not traditionally included e.g. data construction, analysis and dissemination (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018). Engaging 'participants' as 'co-researchers' can go some way to addressing the power imbalance between researcher and participant and is often used as a collaborative way of working to produce change (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018). Participatory methods align well with the pursuit of Childhood Studies to recognise and support young people's agency and have been employed extensively in studies with children in recent decades (Jacquez et al., 2013; Shamrova and Cummings, 2017). However, fully participatory research requires considerable time, resources and training for co-researchers and can raise ethical issues around anonymity and confidentiality (Water, 2018). Limiting

participation to specific parts of the research process can appear tokenistic, however in certain circumstances different levels of involvement can be appropriate (Water, 2018).

In considering a participatory approach, and the different levels of young people's involvement that I could feasibly build into the design, I reflected on the balancing of harm and benefit. Although I was committed to designing a study that centred young people's perspectives and experiences, I was also acutely aware of the limitations of a PhD research study in terms of time, resources and support. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (see section 4.3.4) these limitations were even more pronounced. Additionally the level of commitment that a fully participatory approach would require of young people would need to be balanced in terms of how they stood to benefit from taking part. Although it is arguable that they might enjoy the experience, or learn from it, I was realistic about the capacity for change that a PhD study can have. That is not to downplay my contribution to school holidays research, but it was outwith the scope of this level of project to feasibly bring about meaningful change to participants' school holiday, or school experiences in a way that could be recognised, or felt by those young people involved in the study. Therefore it felt to me to be disingenuous to engage young people in a process that required large investment from them (during a school holiday and a pandemic) without the balance of perceived benefit. To then consider what I stood to benefit out of their involvement, in achieving a doctoral degree, added further to my discomfort with such an approach. Therefore, rather than a fully participatory approach, I aimed instead to ensure that the methods I selected offered a level of participation or cooperation and that young people's active involvement was centred in this process.

4.3.2.2 Consent

Informed consent is fundamental to all social research and involves ensuring that potential participants are given adequate information about the purpose of the research and what involvement in it would entail, in order to make a decision about whether or not to take part (Ritchie, 2013). In research with children this giving of information respects particular rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989), namely "rights to information

(UNCRC Articles 13 and 17) and freedom of thought and conscience (Article 14) by enabling them to form their own views (Article 12)" (Alderson and Morrow, 2011, p85). Young person and adult youth organisation staff participants in this study were given Participant Information Sheets (Appendix 1) written in plain language, with a clear layout, detailing the nature of the study, what participants were being asked to do, and emphasising the rights of participants. Alternative formats were offered (e.g. large print, audio recorded, alternate language) but none was requested. When completing the participant Consent Form (Appendix 1) I did so with the participant, reading out the items to them rather than relying on them having previously read this. Information sheets and consent forms were sent to participants at least 2 weeks prior to our first meeting, and reiterated at follow-up meetings.

It is standard practice in social research to seek consent from parent/carers of children under 16 for their participation (Brady and Graham, 2019). As such, parent/carers in this study were sent similar information sheets and consent forms to those of the young people and offered the same level of support in terms of alternative formats, or further clarification/information where required. However, despite their parent/carers having given permission for them to take part I was clear with young people that they could still opt not to take part even if their parent/carer had agreed to it. To emphasise this agency, I tended to refer to parent/carer '*permission*' and young person '*consent*' when speaking to young people participants - taking part had to be *their choice*.

However, consent is "not a single event, but a process" (Ritchie, 2013, p88), ongoing throughout the research process and as such the interactions between myself and the participants were imbued with reiterating informed consent and their rights as participants from their first contact with me to their last. In email and phone communications, informal chats before and after the interviews, as well as the interviews themselves, I regularly checked participants' understandings and reminded them of their rights within the research. Although this was sometimes providing more information or clarification in response to specific questions, I also responded to more implicit signals from participants that they were not fully understanding or comfortable with something. Participants had my study mobile phone number and email address should they

wish to contact me, and I regularly reminded them they could get in touch with me to ask questions.

4.3.2.3 Incentivising

Incentivising participation can put pressure on individuals to participate but can also appropriately compensate, and show gratitude for, the use of individuals' time and engagement (Ritchie, 2013). As discussed previously, there is an ethical issue around what research participants, particularly young people, stand to gain from research participation in comparison to what the researcher stands to gain. In balancing this and determining a reasonable course of action I sought guidance from my supervisors and from exemplars in existing literature (Afkinich and Blachman-Demner, 2020). I offered interview participants a £10 shopping voucher (Love To Shop) after each interview (£20 total) to thank them for their time and covered any travel expenses required. In addition I consulted with staff at the arts organisations I partnered with and offered focus group participants £10 for their participation regardless of the number of groups they took part in.

4.3.2.4 Safeguarding

Participant safeguarding and support

There are two main risks to consider in safeguarding young people involved in research: where the researcher poses a risk to young people, and where the participant discloses harm (or potential harm) to themselves or others (Brady and Graham, 2019).

In regard to the first of these, I obtained PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) Scheme membership through Disclosure Scotland before beginning the research. Young people and their parents/carers were given contact details of my supervisors and the Ethics Officer for the College of Social Sciences should they wish to raise any concerns.

While the topic of this research was not inherently sensitive, there was a risk that some participants might find it emotionally demanding to discuss certain issues around their lives or school holiday experiences. In order to mitigate

participant distress, and ensure support where needed, I put several strategies in place during interviews/focus groups:

- Ensuring participants had an awareness of the general topic of the study and had clear information of what to expect in participating in the participant information packs (Appendix 1) and by having the opportunity to ask questions about the research in advance.
- Being alert to possible distress in participants' verbal and non-verbal cues throughout our contacts
- Reminding participants they could take breaks, skip questions or withdraw from the interview or research.
- Providing participants with debrief sheets signposting them to further support if they needed it (Appendix 2)
- Preparing a list of signposting resources in advance of fieldwork for ease of reference if a young person required further specific support.

In terms of the second risk, I included a safeguarding escalation plan in my application for ethical approval although no occasion arose which necessitated its use. In addition, I informed all participants, in writing within their participant information sheets (Appendix 1) and verbally at the start of each meeting, of the responsibilities I had and that confidentiality could not be guaranteed if there was concern that a participant, or others, were at risk of harm.

Researcher safety and wellbeing

In terms of my physical safety during fieldwork I took measures to ensure my safety when lone working. Researchers are at risk of being emotionally affected by the research they conduct, and mitigation strategies are an important part of planning and conducting research (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018). In addition to my reflexive research journal, I used a number of personal self-care strategies and

drew on the support of the Emotionally Demanding Research Network (Scotland)⁴ throughout.

4.3.2.5 Data processing and management

All participants and, where relevant, their parents/carers were provided with a Privacy Notice in advance of participation (Appendix 1). For the majority of potential participants making contact, the data they provided were recorded via Microsoft Forms directly to secure university OneDrive. Those who did not make contact in this way did so via email, phone, WhatsApp or text message and once participants contact details given in this way had been recorded on a Microsoft Excel database (saved on OneDrive) any texts or WhatsApp messages containing personal data were deleted. Electronic devices (laptop and iPhone) used were encrypted and password protected.

Participant ID numbers and pseudonyms were used in place of names throughout the research. Participants had the choice to pick their own pseudonym, but some of these had to be changed because they were already names of existing participants, or did not sufficiently de-identify the participant (e.g. a nickname). One password protected file held a key to this containing participant ID number and name, and this file was saved in a separate folder to research data or files containing more substantial personal data. Research data and personal data were stored separately both in electronic folders, and in separate locked locations for physical copies of data. Once physical copies had been inputted electronically (scanned or inputted onto electronic files) these were destroyed.

All interviews and focus groups were recorded using encrypted recording devices and transcribed either by me or a University-approved transcription service, with files transferred to this service using secure cloud storage. The transcripts were checked for accuracy and de-identified. With individual young people's permission, photographs were taken of artefacts that young people brought to their second interviews and timelines or drawings they made during this interview. These were de-identified at the time of photographing where possible

⁴ <https://emotionalresearch.wordpress.com/>

(e.g. covering faces in photos) or later using photo editing software. Sticky notes and written contributions during focus groups were photographed and de-identified where necessary. Original transcripts, and photographs containing identifying features were deleted and only de-identified copies retained. Additional permission was sought from young people and their parents/carers to approve proposed images for inclusion in the final thesis. Similarly since partner community arts organisations had only a small core of staff and could therefore be more easily identifiable, staff participants were asked to approve any quotes before their inclusion in the thesis.

4.3.3 Designing a recruitment strategy

4.3.3.1 Participant selection and timing

Non-probability methods of participant selection are usually used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004). A purposive (criteria-based) approach is frequently used in studies of this nature and has two aims: to ensure that participants meet the criteria that are relevant to the subject of the research (e.g. experience of school holidays), and that sufficient diversity is included in the participant group so that the subject in question can be explored (e.g. different experiences of the impact of school holidays on wellbeing) (Bryman, 2004). With young people, there was a careful balance to be sought in setting an age range as a recruitment criterion to ensure diversity in experience without such large variation that analysis would be impossible (i.e. a 5-year-old and 18-year-old will have very different experiences of school holidays and ways of communicating that). I looked at age ranges in other qualitative studies of young people (e.g. Soffer and Ben-Arieh (2014)) and was guided by my supervisors in setting an age range. The following factors were important in considering what this age range should be:

- Young people included had to have experience of school holidays therefore had to be school-age and school-attending (not home-educated). In addition it felt prudent to have an age group that had some experience of school holidays and were old enough to have experienced this sufficiently to be able to reflect on past periods. Therefore I ruled out those in the very early years of primary school where they were new

to this experience, and where school closures and absences because of COVID-19 would have been a prominent part of this experience.

- A sample that reflected experiences across primary and secondary education
- Limiting large variation but with room for diversity of experience

With these in mind I opted for an age range of 10-15yrs for the interviews. The community arts organisations advised me that their volunteer groups had a broader age range and so eligibility for this was expanded to 10-18yrs to ensure that any of the volunteers in these organisations might take part should they want to.

Setting participant selection criteria around geographic location of participants was limited mainly by practical factors, and in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. Ideally I would have looked to include participants from across Scotland, all sharing the same timing and length of school holidays, with similar experiences of school life, but allowing for diversity across the population. However at the time of designing the study there continued to be restrictions on local and national travel. While remote interviewing was an option, I was keen to prioritise potentially being in person with participants (e.g. in order to build rapport and engagement in creative tasks of the enhanced interviews). The likelihood of being able to meet in person, despite any future pandemic-related restrictions, was increased if I limited the study sample to the immediate geographical area. In an attempt to cover an area that was not as uniformly urban as Glasgow city itself I widened this to the Greater Glasgow⁵ area which incorporates rural areas within the neighbouring local authorities.

The longest school holiday period in Scottish schools is the summer break from late June to early August (approximately 7 weeks) but there are three further main holiday breaks of either 1 or 2 weeks depending on local authority in October, December and March/April. Given the timing of my studentship

⁵ Greater Glasgow is defined as City of Glasgow and bordering local authorities North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde

(beginning January 2021) I was aiming to conduct the study in 2022 and to collect data within, or near to, a holiday period. I first considered aiming to collect data across different holiday breaks but was concerned about retention of participants across a longer period of time and asking for a commitment of time from them at each holiday period. I expected this to prove especially difficult to schedule during the shorter breaks and over the December (Christmas and New Year) break. Since most of the previous research in this area has focused on the longest school holiday period I opted to do the same. Additionally, focusing entirely on the summer holiday break offered a sufficient time period for scheduling interviews with all participants, and since it is by far the longest period of break from school was also likely to be the most fruitful in terms of young people's experiences.

4.3.3.2 Considering different routes of recruitment

The main routes of recruitment I considered were through school communities, local organisations running youth programmes, across social media and through snowballing. I tended toward planning for ways I could recruit remotely, for example through social media or email/phone contact with organisations, because of the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (see section 4.3.4). While recruiting in schools can have many advantages, there are numerous logistical challenges (Bartlett et al., 2017). Having had previous experience recruiting through schools in a much larger study (Blair et al., 2024) I was also aware of the additional difficulties, even in larger projects, of recruiting across many schools in different local authority areas. In addition, I was keen to ensure a clear distinction between the study and school in order to avoid discouraging those young people who did not have a particularly positive relationship with school. I opted for a combination of contacting local organisations, using social media and encouraging snowballing, this is outlined in section 4.4.

4.3.3.3 Engaging Arts Organisations

In shaping the research design, I wanted to seek guidance at an early stage from those working with young people during school holidays, in particular those working in community arts and arts education. Having been involved in various capacities in the music and live events industry in Scotland for over 20 years I

have a wide-reaching network of past colleagues and peers working in community arts and arts education. In June 2021 I began to reach out to contacts in my personal network working in, or with, community arts organisations and arts education that might deliver school holiday activities for young people. I did this through personal social media as well as making contact directly with selected individuals, and some of the responses to this led me to further introductions to others working in this area.

Following this process, three individuals from three different organisations said they were willing to support in one or both ways and, of these, two organisations (pseudonymised throughout as ArtsOrg1 and ArtsOrg2) were interested in working in a more involved way with the study. The third organisation had agreed, subject to ethical approval, to support recruitment by distributing information about the study to their summer programme participants but in reality they were not able to secure approval from management before the time-limited recruitment commenced. Over the course of several meetings with representatives from these two community arts organisations (based in two local authority areas in Greater Glasgow), and in response to their feedback and guidance, I was able to further shape the research design ahead of finalising an application for ethical approval submitted in January 2022. The organisations were enthusiastic in their interest in taking part beyond simply supporting recruitment so, after consulting with them, I was able to plan for two separate strands of the study. This included the strand of pre- and post- summer holiday interviews that I had initially planned for, alongside an additional strand specifically focused on the two organisations themselves, their staff and young people. Since both organisations had existing groups of young people who were particularly engaged in the running of and decision-making processes of the organisations, volunteering their time to varying degrees, we agreed that focus groups with these individuals would be a useful way to gain young person-centred insight into the organisations. In addition, the organisations were happy for me to include interviews with staff to help understand how the organisation functions, and the role young people play in that.

4.3.4 Planning and conducting research in a global pandemic

The backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic has coloured almost every aspect of this research from the choices in planning, to its explicit presence in the data collected. The planning stages of this study took place throughout 2021, beginning approximately one year after the start of the pandemic and 9 months after the initial introduction of restrictions in Scotland in March 2020. When I began my research in early 2021 mainland Scotland was under a ‘lockdown’ (stay-at-home order) with schools closed between January and March, and vaccine rollout had only just begun. Throughout the year restrictions would remain in place to varying degrees on local, national and international travel, meeting in groups, meeting indoors, use of public spaces and workplaces (including community arts centres and university premises). Even when organisations were able to host in-person events these were subject to restrictions, including number of attendees. Rules around self-isolation meant that there was a high chance of plans having to change at the last minute in response to symptoms/positive test result or contact with someone testing positive for COVID-19. In addition, levels of health risk changed throughout this time in response to vaccine rollout and community levels of infection.

Having experienced the waves of changing restrictions and levels of risk throughout 2020/21 I felt it was crucial to attempt to make my plans as ‘COVID-proof’ as possible in the event of changes to local or national restrictions throughout the expected fieldwork period (2022). I had the benefit of being able to learn from colleagues who had had to alter research plans they had made before the pandemic in response to the ever-changing landscape in 2020/21 but the uncertainty of what 2022 might hold affected many decisions around developing a research plan, and to some extent limited options that I might have considered in other times.

The lifting of remaining restrictions and legal requirements for face coverings came in Scotland in March 2022, with testing and contact tracing ending in April. Therefore, by the time I came to start the bulk of my fieldwork in summer 2022 much had changed in terms of people’s comfort levels with in-person meetings and the level of risk that people perceived with these. Although I planned to be able to conduct this study under conditions that had been experienced in 2020

and 2021, this change in landscape made for a data collection period relatively unhampered by the pandemic. In terms of methods, I believe it resembled one that I might have had pre-2020. One difference, however, is perhaps the relative ease with which participants engaged in video call interviews and the digital literacy they showed with using these, having spent large periods of the previous two years engaging with teachers, family and friends in this way. As it would turn out, while 2020 and 2021 could not have been considered to be ‘normal’ school holiday periods for any of the young people taking part in the study, 2022 offered as close a return to normality as any had experienced in over 2 years.

4.4 Conducting the study

4.4.1 Study Overview

Two strands of data generation took place between February 2022 and May 2023, summarised in Figure 4-1 below.

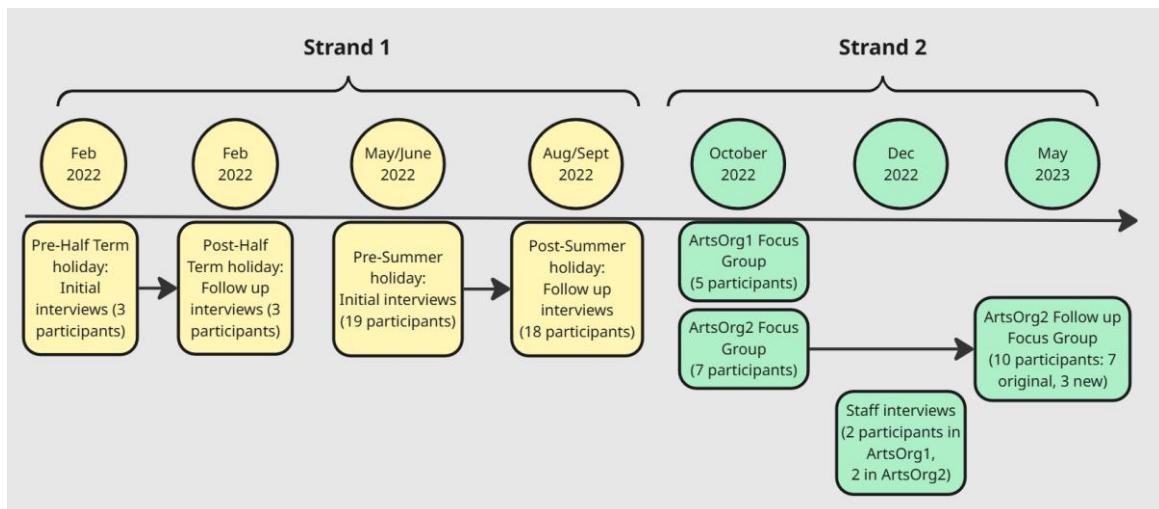


Figure 4-1 Overview of Data Generation across Strand 1 and 2

The College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow granted initial approval for the study on 03/02/2022, with a further amendment approved on 25/04/2022 (Application 400210128).

4.4.1.1 Overview of Strand 1

Twenty-two young people aged 10-15 and living in Greater Glasgow⁶ took part in semi-structured ‘enhanced’ interviews before and after a school holiday period. Of these, three took part at a pilot stage over February half-term break 2022 and nineteen took part over their summer holiday (May/June - August/September 2022). One summer holiday participant took part only for the first (pre-holiday) interview. Participants were interviewed online or in-person at a mutually agreed location. Some chose to be interviewed, for one or both interviews, with a parent/carer present, or alongside friends or siblings who were also participating. A summary of data generation in Strand 1 is shown in Table 4-1 below.

Participants were recruited mainly through the dissemination of digital adverts via social media, youth-oriented organisations in Greater Glasgow and via snowballing. Five of the summer holiday participants were recruited through direct engagement with a community youth project (‘Youth Project A’, see section 4.4.2.2). Young people were eligible to take part if they were aged 10-15, lived in Greater Glasgow and were currently attending school.

⁶ City of Glasgow and bordering local authorities North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde

Table 4-1: Strand 1 data generation summary

| Interview details | | Strand 1 Pre-holiday interviews with young people | Strand 1 Post-holiday interviews with young people |
|---|---|---|--|
| No. of participants | | 22 | 21 |
| Interview time | Average Interview length (mins) | 44 | 53 |
| | Range of interview length (mins) | 16-92 | 18-108 |
| | Total recorded interview time | 16hrs 12min | 18hrs 40min |
| No of participants interviewed jointly with peers | | 7 (in 3 interviews) | 7 (in 3 interviews) |
| No of participants accompanied by parent/carer | | 3 (and 1 accompanied for part of interview) | 3 (and 1 accompanied for part of interview) |
| Interview location | Online (YP at home) | 7 | 4 |
| | In Person | At YP home | 7 |
| | | At Youth Project A | 5 |
| | | At University | 0 |
| | In café | 3 | 3 |
| Creative task engagement in YP Interview 2 | YP brought 'Show and Tell' artefacts or sent data during/after holidays | n/a | 13 |
| | YP engaged in timeline or other drawing task during session | n/a | 11 |
| | YP did neither show/tell nor timeline tasks | n/a | 5 |

4.4.1.2 Overview of Strand 2

Strand 2 data generation was centred around participants and staff within two community arts organisations, ArtsOrg1 and ArtsOrg2. Fifteen young people aged 12-16 who regularly attended, and took on additional volunteer responsibilities at ArtsOrg1 and ArtsOrg2 took part in focus groups held at their respective organisations. Two of these focus groups, one in each organisation, were conducted in October 2022 with five participants in ArtsOrg1 group and seven in ArtsOrg2 group. A third focus group was conducted in May 2023 with the original seven participants from ArtsOrg2 alongside three new participants from the

same organisation (total of ten young people). Additional in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with four members of staff at these organisations (two in each centre) in December 2022.

4.4.1.3 Contextualising the young people participating in the study

As described in section 4.3 planning a research strategy for this study was limited by certain external factors, particularly the time constraints of both a PhD studentship and a pre-determined school calendar, and the context within an ongoing pandemic. As such, the participant group was limited to a smaller geographical area than might otherwise have been possible with a recruitment strategy that was primarily through online channels and via existing groups engaged with young people. Although geographically localised to Glasgow and the surrounding area (a largely urban area), the resultant participant group still represented a broad range of young people across some key demographic factors, outwith geographical ones. These are summarised in Table 4-2 below.

Table 4-2 Participant demographic summary

| Demographic | | Number of participants | Percentage of total participants |
|--|--|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| SIMD Decile of participant's home postcode | 1 | 8 | 21.6% |
| | 2 | 3 | 8.1% |
| | 3 | 3 | 8.1% |
| | 4 | 2 | 5.4% |
| | 5 | 10 | 27.0% |
| | 6 | 2 | 5.4% |
| | 7 | 1 | 2.7% |
| | 8 | 1 | 2.7% |
| | 9 | 4 | 10.8% |
| | 10 | 3 | 8.1% |
| Geographic Area | Glasgow city | 21 | 56.8% |
| | Neighbouring local authority (Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire) | 16 | 43.2% |
| Ethnicity (self described in free text and matched to existing UK census broad categories) | Asian or Asian British | 6 | 16.2% |
| | Black, Black British, Caribbean or African | 1 | 2.7% |
| | Mixed or multiple ethnic groups | 1 | 2.7% |
| | White | 24 | 64.9% |
| | Wrote only nationality or did not answer | 5 | 13.5% |
| Gender Identity (self described in free text) | Female descriptor | 18 | 48.6% |
| | Other gender identity | 3 | 8.1% |
| | Male descriptor | 15 | 40.5% |
| | Not given | 1 | 2.7% |
| Age (at first interview/focus group) | 10 | 7 | 18.9% |
| | 11 | 4 | 10.8% |
| | 12 | 3 | 8.1% |
| | 13 | 3 | 8.1% |
| | 14 | 5 | 13.5% |
| | 15 | 12 | 32.4% |
| | 16 | 3 | 8.1% |

4.4.2 Strand 1

4.4.2.1 Piloting

Piloting qualitative interviews is often advised in research guidance in order to check the feasibility of the different elements, receive feedback and refine aspects of the research plan before this is employed more broadly (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2017). In this study I was also particularly interested in seeing if the proposed 'enhancements' of the interviews would be practical, and how these would be received by participants.

I conducted six pilot interviews with three young people aged 10-15. I recruited these participants by approaching people in my personal network who I knew had children within this age group. In order to avoid recruiting the children of close personal friends or close friends of my own children, I only approached people who I did not have close, frequent contact with and whose children knew of me but did not have a close existing relationship with me. The interviews were conducted before and after the February half-term holiday 2022. In addition to the main focus of the interviews, I asked these participants and their parents/carers for feedback on the interview experience and associated documents, and for any suggestions they might have for improving this. The participants and their parent/carers felt that the interview process was acceptable to them and offered positive feedback about the experience. Some of the young people offered minor suggestions for improvement around the wording of the young person's consent form which they found to be confusing, and this led to an application for an amendment to the approved application for ethical approval. There were no other adjustments made to the topic guide, methods or research plan. Since no major changes were made between piloting and main study interviews the data from these interviews were included in the analysis.

4.4.2.2 Recruitment

I adopted a shortened study title "Wellbeing in the School Holidays Study" and set up a study website, dedicated phone number and social media accounts, and created digital and printed flyers that signposted to the website (see Appendix 3). I followed relevant social media accounts (e.g. local youth and community

arts organisations) and posted information and copies of the flyer. Physical versions of the flyers were given to the two partner community arts organisations involved in Strand 2 and staff distributed these to young people and parents/carers, and left some in public areas of the centres. In addition, I contacted 20 local youth centres and youth arts projects asking them to distribute the flyer to their service users (and offering to deliver printed versions and/or posters).

The study website contained further information about participation, including eligibility criteria, and linked to a Microsoft Forms contact form that could be completed to note interest in taking part, capturing the person's name and contact information. I let potential participants know the study phone number after their first contact and gave it to the partner community arts organisations to pass along if they had enquiries from parents, carers or young people.

Forty-nine people (young people, or their parent/carers) made contact with me directly from 9th March until the end of June 2022. There was an initial rush of contacts which led me to take a staggered approach to inviting participants to take part in case I over-recruited but all of these forty nine individuals were invited to take part and sent a recruitment pack (Cover letter, participant and parent/carer information sheets, consent forms and privacy notice - see example in Appendix 1). Of these, fourteen young people agreed to take part in the interviews and received parent/carer permission to do so.

Additional recruitment through Youth Project A (YPA)

One of the youth centres that I contacted with the digital flyer, Youth Project A, asked me to come and meet with them to discuss how they could support the study. YPA was an established non-profit organisation in the city of Glasgow serving young people aged 2-25 in an area of high deprivation, as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (The Scottish Government, 2020). Within this area an estimated 34.6% children were living in poverty in 2022, higher than both the Scottish average of 23% (The Scottish Government, 2025) and the Glasgow average of 32% (Glasgow Indicators Project, 2023). During school term YPA hosted drop-in sessions throughout the week where young people could come and spend time after school or at weekends, they organised activities and trips and engaged in outreach including street-work and local

education. At the time of data generation, their summer programme ran every weekday during regular school hours providing activities for young people in the area free of charge.

Having met with me, YPA were happy to support study recruitment beyond distributing the flyer, and offered me a chance to speak directly with some of their young people at one of their centre drop-in sessions. Additionally, they offered to support communications with parent/carers and facilitate any interviews with their young people by providing a space for these to take place during their regular drop-in time. Five young people from YPA agreed to take part in the study and were interviewed individually or in groups of 2 or 3, before and after their school holiday. During the summer of data generation, these young people took on extra responsibilities in YPA's summer programme and the data that were generated in their interviews focused particularly on this experience. As such, a short case study is presented in Chapter 6 (section 6.5) based on these data but more general data generated in these interviews were included in the overall analysis.

4.4.2.3 Data generation: Pre- and Post-holiday interviews with young people

Participants were interviewed as close as possible to the start and end of their 2022 summer holiday break (~7 weeks from end of June until mid-August). Nineteen (19) participants took part in the pre-holiday interview, and eighteen (18) at post-holiday. One participant did not attend for second interview and efforts to reschedule were unsuccessful. An overview of participant data generation and participant demographics are shown in Tables 4-1 and 4-2.

Participants were offered interviews by video call, phone, or in person at their home, a university building, a youth centre they attended or a local public space. Some participants who were friends or siblings asked to be interviewed together, and this was accommodated. Where possible I made efforts to engage directly with, and/or include, young people in making the arrangements for interview but in almost all cases it was parents/carers or youth centre staff who facilitated this.

Pre-holiday interviews:

These followed a semi-structured interview format using a topic guide (Appendix 4). The main aims of this interview were to establish a relationship with the participant and learn a little about their lives. The interview focused on exploring their general interests and activities, especially those outwith school, and their views of, and experiences of school holidays in general, including what they foresaw in the upcoming school break. At the end of the interview, I reminded participants that the format of the follow-up interview would be slightly different and that, if they wanted to, they could collect and bring items (e.g. photos, videos, playlists, objects, things they had made) to the next interview, or send them in advance of it. I framed this within an explanation of 'collecting data', explaining again how my own research works and how I help myself remember what is said in our interviews by making recordings and notes. I explained that in the same way it might help them to remember their school holiday experiences if they collected and brought things that might prompt their memory or help them explain to me how certain experiences had been for them. I explained that we would discuss these and how they related to how they spent their summer school break, and I likened this to 'show and tell', which the young people seemed to understand, despite this being more of a classroom staple in the USA. I made it clear that this was voluntary and there was no pressure to bring anything along unless they wanted to and that the aim was simply to help them to remember their holiday experiences when they came to be interviewed a second time.

Post-holiday interviews: Participants were interviewed as close to the start of the school holidays as possible. As outlined in section 4.3.1.2, in these interviews I used an artefact elicitation approach with a topic guide (Appendix 4). The choice of 'artefact' was led by the young person, depending on what they had brought to discuss. In addition, I asked participants to engage in a focused activity constructing a 'memory path' with me where they were encouraged to write or draw different activities and events of the school break. I explained that this was completely optional but might help them remember some things they had forgotten, include some more detail of the more day-to-day things they might have experienced and help me get a clearer idea of the different experiences they had, and when these happened. I suggested to

participants that they might want to use something linear like a path, a ladder, a river, or just a line on the page to represent the start and end of the break, but I was not prescriptive about this and if they wanted to draw in a more abstract way, I did not question that or ask them to change it. The participants were encouraged to style, decorate and embellish their work however they chose, and I brought paper of varying sizes, depending on the location of interview, and a selection of coloured markers, sticky notes and coloured stickers. I asked participants to mark different activities, events or experiences they remembered on their work by writing, drawing or sticking stickers. For those who had drawn a linear figure we discussed where on the path/timeline to place these relative to the start and end of the holiday period. As participants drew pictures and marked on different experiences or activities we would discuss these and in addition we would go through any items, photos or other media they had brought to discuss and mark what they related to on the timeline. We worked through different objects or items participants had brought one at a time in an order chosen by the participant and I asked questions about the experience that they represented. If participants ran out of objects to show me, or could not remember any further events, we then used the existing events to try and remind them about events that took place or activities they remember doing around these e.g. ‘do you remember how you spent your time during the week before you went to the beach?’. I was clear with participants that I was interested in hearing about events and activities that were less positive or less exciting than the ‘highlights’ that might stick out in their minds and I encouraged them to share with me some of the more day to day activities that happened around the events we marked on their work. Table 4-1 shows the level of engagement with the different creative tasks.

4.4.3 Strand 2

4.4.3.1 Context of ArtsOrg1 and ArtsOrg2

The organisations involved in Strand 2 had no connection to each other and were based in separate local authorities within Greater Glasgow (one within Glasgow city and one in a neighbouring local authority). ArtsOrg 1 had a base location in an area categorised as decile 2 by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (The Scottish Government, 2020) and ArtsOrg 2 had a base location in an

area categorised as SIMD decile 5. Both were charities with their own community-based premises that exist to provide opportunities for arts engagement to the local community. They offered free and low cost (or by donation) access to creative activities, including music lessons, arts workshops, skills building and events. They both began as youth-focused arts organisations but had expanded to include provision for all ages, and to some extent beyond solely arts activities. Some of the young people who attend these organisations take on additional responsibilities as volunteers playing an active role in the activities and direction of the organisations. In both organisations their activities continued throughout school holidays. ArtsOrg1 ran an established school holiday programme, while ArtsOrg2 were, at the time of data generation, running some provision in school holidays and considering how they could expand provision in future.

4.4.3.2 Recruitment

As described in section 4.3.3.3, ArtsOrg1 and ArtsOrg2 helped to shape the research plan and had identified at an early stage that there were groups of young people who were particularly engaged with the organisations, volunteering in the running of, and decision-making processes of both.

Young People: Young people aged 10-18 and engaged in one of the participating community arts organisations as volunteers were eligible to participate. Between March 2022 and October 2022 I visited both organisations two or three times each to meet with the staff and young people who were involved as volunteers. This allowed us to get to know each other and for me to be able to familiarise myself with the space the organisations use. At these visits I was able to introduce the study to them, and in September 2022 hand out information packs to the young people (as with Strand 1 these included information sheets, privacy notices, cover letters and consent forms for young people and parents/carers - see Appendix 1). The main contacts at ArtsOrg1 and ArtsOrg2 then helped to follow these up, reminding young people when they were in the centre to return these if they wanted to take part, and sending reminders to parents/carers about these. Some young people expressed to me or the staff that they did not want to take part and so these young people and their parents/carers were not followed up with reminders.

Staff: I emailed recruitment packs to the main staff contacts at the organisations inviting them to take part and asking them to pass these on to anyone they felt would be able to speak about the organisation and their role in providing opportunities for young people.

4.4.3.3 Data Generation: Focus groups (with young people volunteers in Community Arts Organisations)

Focus groups with young people

In October 2022 I conducted two focus groups, one in each of the community arts organisations with their young people volunteers. As described in section 4.3.1.3 I used twelve ‘Capabilities Domains’ developed by the Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland team (Ward et al., 2020) as prompts. At the beginning of each group I read the participants some information about these capabilities and the purpose of the focus group (Appendix 4). I had printed cards with each of the capabilities domains and spread these across a central table for all participants to see. I read each of these out as I placed them down and then asked the participants to select ones that they thought applied to the kind of opportunities available to them through the community arts organisations they attend. I then asked follow-up questions around these selections for each card and made notes on a large sheet of paper on the table in front of us, recording different contributions. Participants were encouraged to add their own written contributions to this if they preferred to share their thoughts this way instead of speaking in the group.

In the original research plan a third focus group was to be held with both groups from the two community arts organisations coming together to review summaries of the previous organisation-specific groups, discuss similarities and differences between their two organisations and come up with priorities for staff and organisations planning school holiday programmes of events and activities for young people. However I suffered a close family bereavement on the scheduled date and had to cancel the plan for that day. For one of the organisations rescheduling the session was not possible because of other constraints they had, and they opted not to continue. The remaining organisation was keen to continue with a follow-up focus group and asked to include new volunteers who

had joined in the last few months. Recruitment packs were distributed to these young people and their parents/carers, and three new participants joined the group. I was unable to go ahead with some of the collaborative tasks that had been planned for the joint focus group but retained some elements. As planned, I presented the group with a written summary of the issues they had discussed in relation to the capabilities domains in the first group and prepared a slideshow showing these. Since it had been nearly six months between the groups, and with the addition of three new participants this prompted fresh discussion on each of the capabilities domains and as had been the original plan I additionally asked participants to reflect on what they thought other organisations planning summer holiday programmes should consider in their design.

Interviews with Community Arts Organisation staff

In December 2022 I conducted in-person semi-structured interviews with four staff members from the partner community arts organisations, two from each organisation (topic guide in Appendix 4). These included two staff members whose roles were more focused on coordinating and supporting the youth programme, and two staff members with a more managerial role across the organisation but who still had regular contact with, and involvement in, the youth programme.

4.5 Approach to analysis

4.5.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis offers a robust and established method of developing, analysing and interpreting patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). There are a variety of approaches to thematic analysis but Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2006; 2019; 2022) is particularly suited to this study for several reasons:

- Theoretical flexibility (but not atheoretical) placing importance on theory without dictating which, allowing for the incorporation of one or more theoretical frameworks, in this case both Childhood Studies and the Capabilities Approach.

- Flexibility in the analytical approach allowing both inductive and deductive coding and theme development, and exploration of meaning at the semantic and latent levels. This level of flexibility was particularly helpful in addressing the research questions because it created space for young people's experiential reports (e.g. what young people spend their school holiday time doing) and the interpretation of these through the lens of Childhood Studies and the Capabilities Approach.
- Reflexivity is central to the approach, not only acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher but actively framing this subjectivity as a strength, central to the construction of meaning through interpretation. This aligns well with the epistemological stance of Childhood Studies (see section 4.2).
- Clear guidelines allowing a robust process but with the expectation of researcher creativity in employing this, and where a single coder is considered "normal - and good - practice" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p55) making it particularly suitable for a doctoral research study conducted by a solo researcher.
- Substantial existing literature on the use of reflexive thematic analysis in a variety of contexts, including research with young people from a Childhood Studies perspective (e.g. Tisdall et al (2024))

4.5.2 Process of analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis involves six phases: data familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing up. Although there is some element of progression throughout toward the ultimate goal of write up, there is an iterative non-linearity about these phases, with researchers encouraged to revisit and reflect throughout the different phases, returning to them as required (Braun and Clarke, 2022). As such, although I present a summary of my approach within these phases it should be noted that in reality my practice reflected this to-and-fro movement within and between the phases.

I transcribed 33 of the 47 interviews and 3 focus groups (10 interviews were transcribed by a university-approved service) and this allowed an initial stage of data familiarisation. I reviewed the transcripts at least twice, once while listening to the audio and following along on the written transcript and once while listening and making notes on a digital whiteboard (initially Mural, later Miro). For some transcripts, especially longer or more dense transcripts, or those I had not transcribed myself, I read and listened to these more than twice. I used the notes I made during this data familiarisation, and my field notes to write short pen portraits of each participant to draw together some aspects of the young person's personal context, with some of the key points they had chosen to focus on in their interviews. I wanted to be able to have these to refer back to, and wanted to do so before becoming immersed in the process of coding, where I might lose elements of the 'whole' participant.

I used NVivo (versions 13 and 14) software to code the transcripts. I began coding without a predetermined idea or list of codes, constructing these as the "building blocks for analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p69). I systematically worked my way through the transcripts in two initial rounds as I developed these codes, keeping note of this progress in a spreadsheet, and in each round starting from a different end of the transcript list. In the initial stages I had both a deductive and inductive orientation to coding, and codes themselves were a mix of semantic and latent. However as I progressed through several rounds of coding and theme development (and returning to and from these phases) my coding developed toward the more deductive and latent ends of these spectra, being driven by the theoretical perspectives of Childhood Studies and the Capability Approach and my increasing immersion in the data and meaning making process.

I used a digital whiteboard (Miro) from initial theme generation onwards, mapping candidate themes, codes and examples of data and gradually adding to these with central organising concepts, theme descriptions and relating these to particular research questions as I developed, reviewed and began to name the themes. In tandem, I used branching in NVivo to cluster codes under particular themes. Using the Miro board to map these out was particularly helpful because it allowed me to easily move, colour code and connect the different elements in ways that helped me build a visual representation of the overall analysis as well

as adding finer details. Figures 4-2 and 4-3 show how this looked by the write up phase with a higher-level view in 4-2 and magnified section in 4-3.

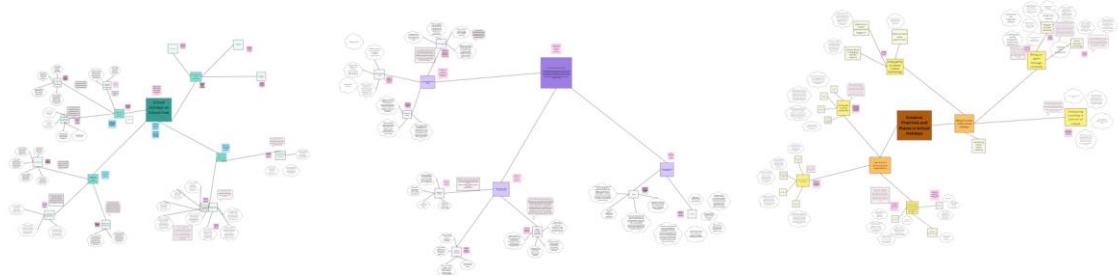


Figure 4-2 Screenshot of Miro

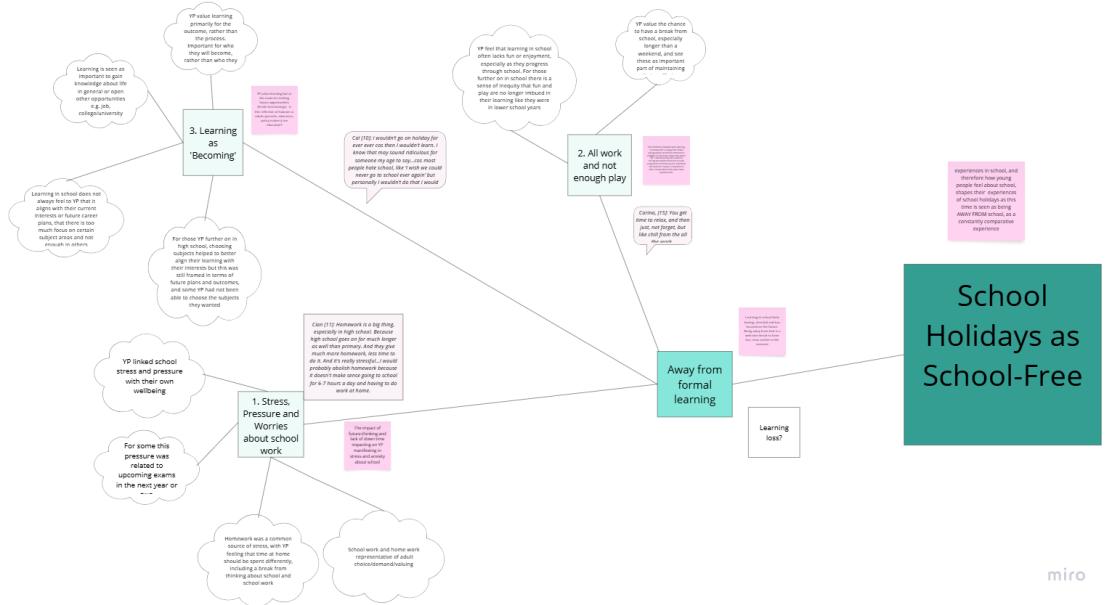


Figure 4-3 Screenshot of Miro (magnified)

Although the bulk of the analysis was conducted across the dataset it was necessary to separate out partial datasets for separate analysis, specifically the data that related to either the community arts organisations (focus groups and interviews with staff) or the interviews with young people attending a specific youth centre (see section 6.5 case study). Additionally it was necessary to code the dataset at a very early stage to separate data that related to school holidays from that which related to school or term-time home life. This was necessary so

that it would be clear at all stages of the analysis which data related to school holidays, and which did not.

As the name suggests reflexivity is a central component of reflexive thematic analysis. I kept a reflexive journal, mostly written but sometimes in the form of audio notes. I supplemented this with notes on my Miro board during analysis where I added questions or thoughts I had about where my role as researcher might have impacted or influenced the data generation, or where it was (is) influencing the analysis.

4.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have outlined my epistemological and ontological position in taking an interpretivist and constructionist stance aligned with Childhood Studies but incorporating a relational ontology within this. Having introduced in Chapter 3 my theoretical framework bringing together Childhood Studies and the Capabilities Approach, I have explored in this chapter what these two approaches bring from a methodological perspective.

I detailed the manner in which I conducted this study, tracing the various considerations I made in designing my approach, and the theoretical and empirical evidence I used to inform this process. I closed the chapter by discussing my use of reflexive thematic analysis, underpinned by a framework of childhood studies and the capabilities approach, and the specific process of analysis that I undertook. The following chapters present the findings from this analysis.

Chapter 5 School Holidays as ‘School-Free’ Time

5.1 Introduction to findings chapters

The following three chapters present the findings of this research. In their accounts of school holidays, young people participating in this study tended to frame school holiday time in one of two ways: as time spent ‘away from’ school, and as time spent primarily engaged in leisure. As such, Chapter 5 (‘School Holidays as School-Free Time’) and 6 (‘School Holidays as Leisure Time’) reflect this dual framing. While there are findings throughout the three chapters that are relevant to answering RQ1 (‘How do young people experience school holidays?’) and RQ2 (‘In what ways does being on holiday from school affect young people’s wellbeing?’), Chapter 7 focuses more specifically on addressing RQ3 (‘How does engagement in creative activities affect young people’s experiences of school holiday time?’) and explores young people’s experiences of being creative, and engaging in community arts organisations during school holiday time (‘Creative Practices and Places in School Holidays’).

A Capabilities Approach (CA) perspective on wellbeing in the school holidays

RQ2 focuses specifically on how wellbeing is affected by school holidays. In Chapter 3 I introduced the CA as part of my theoretical framework and explored how this perspective frames ‘wellbeing’: as constituted of the substantive freedoms (*capabilities*) to achieve the beings and doings (*functionings*) that an individual has reason to value. As such, not only the ‘beings and doings’ of school holidays are of interest in this analysis but also the path to which these are realised. Therefore, what young people value and the factors affecting their ability, and choice, to achieve particular functionings is given key attention throughout.

Throughout the findings chapters I use the language of the CA to explore young people’s wellbeing within this framework and refer to the diagram below, which I introduced in Chapter 3 and reproduce here (Figure 5-1) alongside the key terms. In addition I also use the term ‘subjective wellbeing’ to capture young people’s own references to wellbeing as they conceptualise it, rather than as framed within the CA.

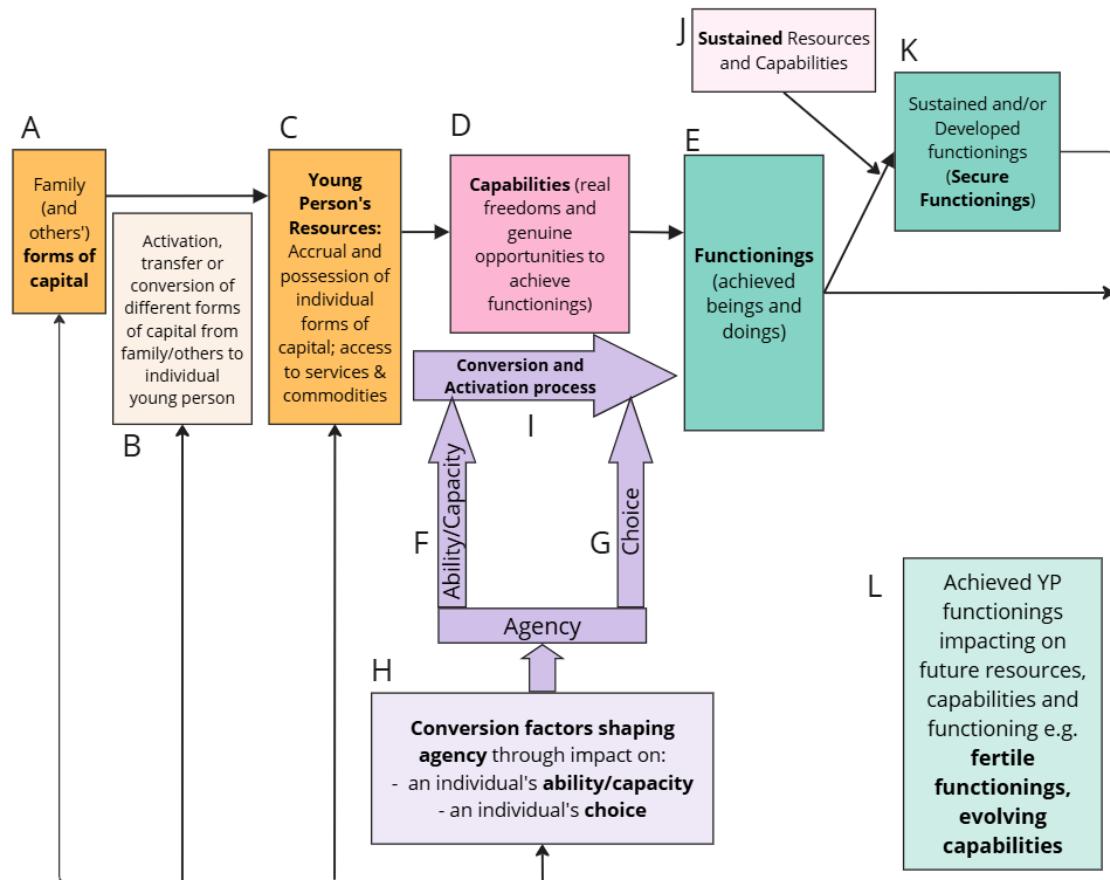


Figure 5-1 CA model (replicated version from Figure 3-3 for reference)

- Functioning (E) - achieved being or doing
- Capability (D) - the real freedom that an individual has to achieve a particular functioning that they have reason to value
- Agency - constituted of both:
 - Ability (or capacity) (F) to convert available resources into achieved functionings
 - Choice (G) to activate a particular capability, to achieve the functioning
- Conversion factors (H) - factors that shape an individual's agency by impacting on the ability/capacity to convert resources into functionings, and/or the choice to do so

5.2 Overview of Chapter 5

In this first of three findings chapters I will outline the ways in which young people experience school holidays as ‘school-free’ time. While the focus of this study is on the experience of time spent *during* school holidays, a universal feature of this time is the absence of school. Young people in the study tended to frame much of their description of school holiday time in a comparative way, exploring what they get to be or do differently, in and out of school. In analysing these data it became clear how experiences in, and opinions about, school were inextricably linked to how young people experienced time away from this environment during school holidays.

All participants valued having school holidays, even those who enjoyed being at school. Participants’ initial responses to questions around school holidays tended to be focused on the chance these holidays offered to have a ‘break’ from school. Further explorations would lead to discussion of other factors that affected their experiences during this time, but almost all participants gave this initial framing and emphasised their belief that the opportunity to have this break was important to young people in general.

For some participants, even although they welcomed the break, they also recognised there were some aspects of their school lives which they missed during holidays and were pleased to return to. Across these young people’s accounts, there is a clear tension between in-the-moment experiences of pleasure and enjoyment (from a childhood studies perspective, the ‘being’) and a future-focused sense of investment for future gain (‘becoming’). Broadly speaking, it was the future-focused narrative that was dominant when these young people spoke about what they valued from their school-based learning, in comparison to the valuing of in-the-moment experiences during their school holiday time.

Based on data drawn from pre- and post-holiday interviews with young people, and focus groups in community arts centres, I constructed three themes that encapsulated the ways in which young people referenced their school experience when considering school holidays: **Away from Formal Learning, Away from School-based Social Relationships and Away from the Social Structure of**

School. The central aim of this chapter is to explore how being away from these facets of school life impacted on young people's wellbeing during school holidays, and what this can tell us about how young people experienced school itself, contributing to answering both RQ1 and RQ2. Specifically approaching wellbeing from a CA perspective, it will examine how young people's capabilities and functionings varied between these environments, and the conversion factors that appeared to influence this.

5.3 Away from Formal Learning

The accounts young people shared around their learning tended towards being critical of the overall experience of learning in school, and therefore positive about being away from this. The aim of this section is to demonstrate why this was the case. It will present the analysis that school is inherently perceived by young people as a place to 'become', to learn primarily for what this might provide them in the future, sometimes to the detriment of their present enjoyment, agency and wellbeing.

This section explores, within three subthemes, how participants framed their school learning experiences when talking about how it feels to be 'away from' formal learning. The first two subthemes focus on two of the key criticisms that young people had about how they experienced learning in school: as stressful (5.3.1), and boring (5.3.2). Despite negative experiences, young people did have positive experiences of learning and were able to reflect on these in a comparative way, further highlighting what they felt was negative at other times. In addition, participants clearly valued learning opportunities they had through school, but the value that participants placed on this learning was almost entirely centred on a future-orientated perception of its importance. The language young people used in this way seems to echo the social construction of childhood as primarily a state of development (James and Prout, 2015), perceiving themselves as 'becomings' more so than 'beings' (Qvortrup, 1994). The third subtheme in this section (5.3.3) therefore deals with the ways in which young people spoke about their learning as part of 'becoming', with learning seen as important primarily for its outcome in the adult self. There was a sense throughout the data that young people expected to endure negative in-the-moment learning experiences in order to reap the benefits of this in later life,

and that school holidays offered a respite from both the in-school experience and the prioritisation of future functionings over ones in the present.

5.3.1 Stress, Pressure and Worries about schoolwork

In this study the terms “stress”, “pressure” and “worry” were used by participants across the age range to describe their feelings about school. Although there were several different stressors that young people experienced, one area that was given particular attention was schoolwork and homework. As such, young people valued school holidays as a time to be away from this stress. Although some participants related this stress to the experience of doing the schoolwork itself, others related it to future-orientated concerns, particularly impending exams or a perception that their current work was crucial to later opportunities in education or life. Future considerations permeated young people’s accounts of school learning more generally, and these are explored later in 5.3.3. For Nicole (below), and others who were returning to a school year with upcoming exams, this was particularly evident.

Researcher: How are you feeling about it [returning to school]?

Nicole (15): [makes face]

Researcher: I'm trying to think how to describe that face...

Nicole: Torture. ‘cause I'm going into fifth year I have exams for every subject now because I'm doing all NAT5s this year.

Nicole spoke later about future study and career aspirations, giving context to the importance these exams hold for her being able to achieve future goals. At the point of interview, these exams were many months away, but the experience of stress was current as she returned to school. Pupil experiences of schoolwork stress, particularly high-stakes school assessment and examination, have similarly been shown to relate to concerns over future prospects (Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2009; Banks and Smyth, 2015; Höglberg and Horn, 2022), and found to increase with advancing school years (Inchley et al, 2020). However, this feeling of stress over schoolwork was relayed by participants who were not currently experiencing high-stakes assessment, or due to for several years, for example in Rosa’s case (below).

Rosa (10-11): I think it [school] affects young people's wellbeing because people can get very stressed, and they don't get used to it, so they will harm, kind of slightly, harm like your brain, because you're holding in too much things at one time.

Although some participants linked this to their own subjective wellbeing, Rosa frames this in more objective terms as "harm" she perceives to be caused to young people in general. She positions herself and other young people as vulnerable to the experience of stress, showing a level of risk assessment in her concern over the impact of this. Young people experiencing stress from schoolwork have limited capacity for altering their environment in a way that would alleviate this stress, so she is perhaps signalling a need for adult-driven change. Where Rosa spoke more generally about how she perceived young people to be affected, Aurora linked the lack of school and homework directly to her own sense of happiness, which she experienced during summer holidays.

Aurora (10-11): "I feel more happy in the summer holidays since I don't need to deal with homework and all the other stuff. The work and writing more stuff."

Aurora raises the issue of homework, which others also felt was a source of stress during term time, and its absence another positive feature of being away from school over longer holiday breaks. Homework is used in education to enhance children's wellbeing by supporting learning, and in doing so expanding capabilities to achieve related functionings, but has also been associated with stress for both parents and young people (Moè et al., 2020). In this current study young people reflected on the absence of homework in terms of the positive impact it has on both their subjective wellbeing and their capabilities to achieve other (preferred) functionings during out of school time. Cian, who was about to transition from P7 to S1⁷, anticipated homework to increase in secondary school. His feelings about what young people should be doing during out of school time, and how this was impacted by being given homework, was echoed across the participant group.

Researcher: What do you think could be done differently in school to stop it being such a stressful experience?

Cian (11): Homework is a big thing, especially in high school. Because high school [day] goes on for much longer as well than primary. And

⁷ P (primary) or S (secondary) preceding number denotes school year

they give much more homework, less time to do it. And it's really stressful...I would probably abolish homework because it doesn't make sense going to school for 6-7 hours a day and having to do work at home.

Researcher: How do you think young people should be able to spend their time when they're not in school?

Cian: Well, they should be doing clubs and enjoying themselves. Not being sat at their desk writing out lines.

Cian was particularly focused on the time taken up by schoolwork, limiting time to do other things. He offered suggestions about what he thought young people “should” be doing instead, emphasising their enjoyment of this time away from school. There is a sense of dichotomy between formal learning (school) and enjoyment (away from school), with homework seen as an invasion of this precious space, which constrains enjoyment and choice to do other valued things. Like Rosa above, Cian framed his opinions as speaking on behalf of young people more generally rather than from only his own experience, and this may reflect a discourse between him and others that has led to his anticipatory anxiety that high school homework will be harder and more stressful. In describing his feelings about this, specifically about what should or should not happen in young people’s lives, he implied a (adult) power that he wanted to resist, but simultaneously an acknowledgment that young people’s power to choose to do things differently was limited.

Very few participants spoke about any expectation or pressure to study or maintain school learning during the summer, either from school or parents. Some said they had experienced this during shorter breaks, for example, teachers setting tests for return after long weekends. Some participants remembered this as a feature in previous summer holidays but recognised that this was likely an effect of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions⁸. Leia, while describing this (below), highlights how this affected her enjoyment of the holiday time. She links this to pressure from her father, implying a lack of choice or control in how she was able to spend this time.

Leia (11): The biggest thing - I don't actually have this anymore, it was during the home schooling and lockdown, was that normally in

⁸ 2020 summer holiday immediately followed school closures in Scotland, therefore pupils were off school from mid-March until mid-August

summer holidays, my dad would track me down and make me do maths during the summer holidays, so that wasn't fun.

In the absence of school Leia experienced reduced freedom to choose but noted the specific circumstances (lockdown) that accompanied this. In this case her agency was situated in a particular context and highlights how young people's sense of control, and actual capacity for action can vary across different contexts or in response to external factors. In Leia's case her father's reaction to the external situation was to exert more control over her learning choices. This variation in different young people's agency was highlighted by Islay (below) who was aware of experiences her friends had with parental pressure to study during holidays, unlike her own experiences, and reflected other participants' opinions that school holidays *should* offer a chance to break from school study.

Islay (15): Oh another thing for negatives. If, like not me in particular, but I know a couple of my friends have parents that are really like 'you have to study all the time, otherwise you're going to do terrible in school when you go back'. And I get studying a bit, especially if you're in my kind of year group, where it's important, but not like every day, you need to have a break, this is what like the holiday's about.

Islay is obviously aware of people (adults) holding the belief that having a break will lead to poorer academic achievement. However, she takes a more balanced stance that some extra study can be useful in certain situations but that that does not diminish the importance of having a break. Similarly to Cian, above, she speaks more generally about what she feels should be happening, and in doing so implies this lack of power to resist adult-centred views of how young people's time is spent.

Young people generally reflected on school holidays as a valuable time to be away from the stress and pressure of schoolwork. From a capabilities perspective we can see that some of the conversion factors that affect young people's motivations to choose to engage in schoolwork and homework are particularly located around aspirations for the future, and expectations or pressure from others. Achieving these initial functionings of doing home/schoolwork are seen as essential to the achievement of future functionings (in some cases years in the future) rather than being motivated by desires or needs located in the

present. School holidays provide an alternative space in which future-orientated considerations are less centred, and the resulting stress or pressure is relieved.

5.3.2 All Work and Not Enough Play

Distinct but related to this view of schoolwork as stressful, was the view that learning in school lacked fun, and that this contrasted with time outside of school. Strong evidence exists for the value of play in, and out of, learning contexts (Parker et al., 2022) and there is clear policy support for imbuing learning with play in Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2013). Yet participants in this study, across the age range, spoke about experiencing learning as boring and lacking fun. Where opportunities for fun in learning did exist, participants linked these to their enjoyment and engagement with what was being taught.

Researcher: So my study is looking at whether the school holidays have a good effect on your well-being or a bad effect or no effect

Lily (11): Good. Good, because no school

Researcher: So tell me, why is that good?

Lily: Because then your wee brain doesn't get sizzled every day.

Researcher: How does your brain get sizzled, Lily?

Lily: Maths. Maths and English and everything like that. But on Tuesdays, I love Tuesdays. Because on a Tuesday morning we get [TEACHER], who's our science and maths teacher, we get her in, and she does science with us

Researcher: So why is that different from the brain sizzling?

Lily: Because it's, we do fun stuff. Like she usually prefers we do little mental maths activities in the morning and then she'll do like, we did this murder mystery one and had to find out who was the criminal.

Researcher: So do you think there's not enough fun that happens in school?

Lily: Probably because we're P7 were getting so ready for high school. Like at the start of the year, it was really fun because we were doing active maths and all kinds of maths but now that we're getting into high school it's just done, sorted, away.

Lily gave examples of approaches that teachers have taken that she found to be fun: 'active' maths and engaging the class in a mystery to solve. These approaches appear interactive in a way that more passive rote learning is not. This example shows how different conversion factors can affect young people's functionings by influencing agency. This is not only through developing capacity to achieve the functioning e.g. teachers teaching the fundamentals of the academic subject ('F. Ability/Capacity', Figure 5-1) but also doing so in a way

that is attractive to young people, ensuring they make a choice to engage e.g. through fun, involved activities ('G. Choice', Figure 5-1). Aside from simply experiencing the activity as fun, it may be that this style of engagement allows young people to feel more power within this space, feeling listened to and included in how the learning takes place. In other words, the outcome is not only the achieved functioning of learning but also a subjective *feeling* of agency within doing so. This interaction between adult teacher and young learner is explored further in section 5.4.3.

Although Lily described engaging and practical activities that she found fun, she also implied that these are seen by teachers as only having a place for younger individuals, or at particular times of year, suggesting they lack importance or value in the broader adult view of education. Other participants also highlighted this sense of difference across time, with older participants reflecting on how their younger years had been experienced, and younger participants sharing expectations about how their future years of education might be. For some there was a sense of inequity about how much 'fun' was imbued in their learning or allowed at different stages.

Corina (15): I feel like making the lessons a bit more funner would also help me relax. For example, maths is usually just like notes, teaching and then work. Basically a whole 1 hour and 40 minutes just all the way through like that so I feel like that...

Rosa (10) But we do games, maths games.

Corina (15): That would be primary school, secondary school's a bit more work

[Corina and Rosa are sisters who chose to be interviewed together]

Like Lily, Corina described a more passive learning approach that she has experienced, and feels that lessons being more fun, or enjoyable, would affect her level of relaxation. In the interaction with her sister she echoed the sense from other participants that fun and enjoyment are seen by adults as of value only to younger people, and that these are not prioritised in later childhood when learning becomes "work". This again centres the implication that what adults value dictates how young people should learn, without consultation with young people themselves. Accounts like these seem counter to the centring of active learning in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence but support findings that suggest teachers struggle to balance these pedagogical values with pressures

related to the academic attainment of their pupils, leading to the use of instructional teaching methods instead (Shapira et al., 2023).

Essentially most participants saw school as boring in comparison to their holidays with limited opportunities for experiencing fun and play while learning. In experiencing more passive ways of learning, especially with increasing age, there was a sense that adults with power over how teaching was structured did not recognise this desire, or need, for fun and active participation, nor the potential value in it for learning. As such, breaks from school were seen as valued opportunities to engage in activities that were considered fun, through which more agency could be exercised, even while learning (activities that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6).

5.3.3 *Formal Learning for 'Becoming'*

Despite feeling this need for a break from school, most participants were clear that they valued what they felt school could offer them. This value was usually centred around functionings like accumulating knowledge or gaining qualifications and was depicted in terms of the value it would bring in the longer term, be it in future years of education or longer term into adulthood.

Researcher: So would you stay on summer holidays forever if I could wave a magic wand?

Ariana (12-13): No way

Alena (10): No. Because I want to learn how life works.

Ariana: To learn and get knowledge and become smart and a genius

Alena: To have an intelligent brain

[Alena and Ariana are sisters and chose to be interviewed together for their second interview]

For these sisters the value in education was somewhat abstract, but the implication is clear that knowledge, even broader 'life skills' knowledge, is important and that it can be gained through school. To the sisters, academic performance is not centred, but the functioning of 'being intelligent' is, and school (and not school holidays) is key to them achieving this. For Corina (below) who was a bit older, this value was more specifically related to academic achievement and her perception that this would grant more choice to her in future. This is reflective of the concept of 'fertile functionings' (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), that achieving this initial functioning will influence future

conversion processes and expand future capabilities and functionings (see 'K' in Figure 5-1).

Corina (15): I probably just want to get good grades, so I can choose what I can do, because I have no idea what to do right now.

Corina centres choice, and therefore her future agency, in how she views these potential future functionings. Given how she has previously described school learning as stressful and lacking in fun (section 5.3.2) it seems that there is a different categorisation of choice between her current and future freedom to choose. In the present her choice seems narrow - engage in learning, despite how she finds it, or do not - but in the future the choice she makes will be based on what she values because the options available to her will be broad, so long as she achieves "good grades". This highlights the complex and temporal nature of what determines what young people value and choose; that future considerations influence current agency.

Like Ariana, Alena, and Corina, participants who had previously described school as a source of stress and boredom, lacking in fun, similarly resigned themselves to acknowledging a value in it regardless. As highlighted in 5.3.1 it is possible that the future-focused narratives that young people are absorbing and reproducing additionally contribute to the stress they feel about schoolwork, feeling a pressure that their future is at stake. School was regularly framed as being an experience to be endured, for a longer-term gain. Examples such as this highlight the embeddedness of a constructed idea of childhood as a state of 'becoming' rather than 'being' (James and Prout, 2015), and how young people themselves are actively participating in this construction. This illustrates how a relationship with future-self affects how adults orient what they value for young people, how they enact that through opportunities they make available (or constrain) for young people, and what, in turn, young people value for themselves in the choices they make within these constraints.

One such constraint that young people alluded to was in choices around subject selection or area of learning. Some participants felt that the things they were learning in school did not align with their current interests, or hoped-for future

career paths, and some struggled to understand what certain knowledge might be useful for.

Cian (11): Some schools don't teach history and geography as much, and they are my two favourite subjects. And a lot of schools don't teach science as much as high schools do. But that might be because they've not got as much resources as high school, so I get the reason why sometimes they don't teach as much subjects as high school. And I know high school's more advanced, because it's much bigger and it's just much more huge than normal schools and it's got more resources so. But sometimes some subjects don't need resources like that.

Researcher: So do you mean there is too much focus on certain things so there's not enough time and resources for other subjects?

Cian: Yeah, there's too much focus on I'd say maths and literacy. Whereas high school does 50-minute intervals, or an hour intervals, so you just get an hour of every lesson.

Researcher: Are there other things missing from school that you wish you were able to learn?

Cian: Yeah, I would like to learn more languages because the only language learning at school is French. And I'd say Spanish or Italian or German would be a bit better to learn than French.

Cian is one of several participants who hinted at a perceived hierarchy between different subjects, specifically with Maths and English as such central components of teaching throughout schooling⁹. The resulting marginalisation of other subjects can imply to young people a lack of importance in learning these, reproducing a perceived lack of value in the careers and experiences in these areas, compared to other subject areas (Ashton et al., 2023). Likewise the construction of some school subjects as the 'important' ones may add to the existing pressure and stress felt by pupils in studying these subjects. Societal perceptions of the value of different subject areas can act as a conversion factor impacting not only at an adult level in terms of what opportunities adults choose to make available to young people (e.g. curriculum narrowing (Shapira et al., 2023)), but also at the level of the young person in influencing what they value and the ensuing choices they make in selecting those subjects. Therefore young people may avoid taking up subjects that are deemed less important for future employment or 'less academic' regardless of their interest, enjoyment, or aptitude, in these areas. As I will go on to discuss in Chapter 6, school holidays

⁹ Maths and English are compulsory in Scottish secondary education even after pupils are given choices about what subjects they would like to study

can present a time when young people choose to engage in activities or learning aligned with their interests, and that are not necessarily available or prioritised in school. Participants who had been able to exercise some choice over school subjects (from S3 onwards) were positive about this. For some, like Oscar who was transitioning to S3 this choice was a factor in how he felt about returning to school after the holidays.

Oscar (13-14): Well, I was obviously not wanting to go back. But it wasn't that bad 'cause I knew I was going into S3 that year, and I've got, like, all my subjects picked. I wasn't too bothered about it 'cause I knew I was doing stuff that I would enjoy, so going back wasn't that bad...I was looking forward to not having to do stuff that I didn't want to do.

This sense of having been able to choose, and for those choices to be more aligned to his strengths and interests, meant Oscar felt better about returning than he might otherwise have.

Participants in this study tended to frame their learning experiences in school as of value primarily for their future selves, even if their current selves experienced this as negative. For those in senior years of education being able to choose subjects provided a chance to take up functionings that were personally valued. For some this meant value in-the-moment, being engaged in studying something that was of current interest, but despite this there endured a sense that these choices were driven primarily by the potential these offered for future functionings. This reflects a socially constructed image of young people as 'in development' or 'becomings', and school as the primary vehicle with which to achieve functionings that will support this.

5.3.4 Summary

Young people in the study described their school holidays through the lens of being away from school. A substantial part of this comparison was around experiencing a break from formal learning, which they often experienced as stressful and/or boring, with agency constrained and learning-related functionings valued predominantly for their future worth. For most, there was the sense that the value school learning offered came at some level of cost, whether it be in managing increased stress, having less time or sidelining

interests. It is this 'cost' that young people appear to hope to counterbalance in school holidays when time and choice appear more plentiful, and when their motivations for choosing are less centred on the future.

5.4 Away from School-based Relationships

The aim of this section is to explore the different and sometimes conflicting ways in which school-based social relationships with peers and adults, contributed to how young people felt about being away from school during school holidays, and how being away from these affected their capabilities and functionings.

The relationships that young people have in school, with themselves, peers and adults, have been found to be central to their understandings of their own wellbeing (Powell et al., 2018). Young people in this study similarly focused on relationships with self and others across school, and school holiday, experiences. As might be expected, how young people experienced being away from in-school social relationships during school holidays was dependent on how positive those relationships were. This section will explore how young people described these social relationships, and the impact of being away from them during holidays, in terms of friendships (5.4.1), experiences of bullying and marginalisation (5.4.2), and relationships with teachers (5.4.3).

5.4.1 School can scaffold friendships, friendships can improve school

Friendships were frequently discussed by participants as a positive aspect of being at school, and the absence of regular contact with friends a potential challenge during holiday time. For those who spoke positively about school friendships, being at school offered an environment that was valued because of what it meant for contact with friends.

Leia (11): Well, I like seeing my friends every day, which is one of the good things about school, and I like going to my clubs, and can't really think of anything else.

Leia was responding to a question asking her to identify what she enjoyed about school. She went on to describe seeing friends during holidays but as the only

young person living in her home the regularity with which she saw friends at school was a particularly positive feature of being there.

Friendship experiences at school were usually mentioned within descriptions of shared interests and fun activities, for example in the way Ace described them in the following quote.

Ace (11): Well in school I sometimes play with my friends, sometimes play football we also play with a ball and do catching games.

Friendships might offer opportunities for more immediate enjoyment and fulfilment in the school environment that young people find lacking in school-based learning (section 5.3.2), perhaps even enhancing the learning experience itself.

Some participants, like Sian and Oscar (below) found that keeping up friendships can be easier during term time when schools can provide routine and structure for those relationships to form and be maintained, as well as providing a physical environment to spend time together. In this way, school was seen as providing scaffolding for the development and maintenance of friendships.

Sian (16): I would say it's sometimes easier in school though, because like you don't have to actually reach out to your friend to like ask, like they're there with you, so you can just sort of mention it if you need to.

Researcher: You don't have to organise anything?

Sian: Yeah

Oscar (13-14): I was quite looking forward to it [returning to school] 'cause I don't really like going out with my friends all the time. So going back to school is quite good 'cause I can get to talk to them and that, but I don't have to go out. 'Cause I like staying in sort of doing my own thing.

Both Sian and Oscar allude to a pressure or expectation they feel during school holidays to organise and participate in activities with their friends. For Sian it is the 'reaching out' she feels more burdensome, and for Oscar the actual activity of going out with friends. Both demonstrate how school holiday choices can be constrained by factors relating to social expectation within their friendship group, and how the provision of a space (school) to be together with friends alleviates a pressure by removing this choice. This challenges notions of

increased agency being universally positive and shows how for some young people there can be hidden constraints of agency in the expectations and pressures that are formed within their relationships, even when there is a perception of them having 'more choice'.

School, for some young people, seems to act as a conversion factor, expanding capabilities around making and maintaining friendships by providing certain enabling features such as a place to be together or regularity and frequency of seeing each other. In out of school time, these enabling, or scaffolding, features need to be maintained through other means and will likely require resources to do so. For those without the resources or capabilities to engage in social contact with friends during holidays, positive features of these relationships may be lost, or reduced, until school returns.

Although there is evidence that loneliness is a feature of many young people's school holiday experience (Morgan et al., 2019), loneliness or social isolation during holidays was not something that participants in this study expressed in terms of personal experience. All participants reported being actively engaged in leisure activities with their friends and families throughout the holiday, and/or attending summer clubs and programmes. These experiences themselves are explored in more detail in Chapter 6 but it is worth noting that holiday clubs or parental involvement in enabling social interaction may take the place of the role that school seems to play during term time in facilitating friendship functionings and reduce the chance of social isolation in holidays. Several participants spoke about social isolation from a hypothetical point of view. These included Islay who later expanded on her own experiences during COVID-19 lockdowns. She was the only participant to live in a more rural location and was unable to access public transport without a parent driving her.

Researcher: What sort of things do you think affect young people negatively during school holidays?

Islay (15): Um I think, I think loneliness is a pretty bad thing, like if you don't get the chance to meet up with your friends for a while it does, you're not used to it, it feels kind of sad. I'm not, I mean that's pretty much all I can think of off the top of my head just loneliness.

Researcher: Do you think that needs to be in person that contact?

Islay: Um I think calling is fine to like an extent, like if you haven't met up with any friends in like a week or two like you can call them instead but it doesn't feel quite the same as meeting and seeing them

in person. I think if you were to spend like the entire holiday not seeing anyone that would, that would make me really upset.

Islay emphasises the importance of physical contact with friends, something that she feels cannot be substituted for by speaking on phone or video calls. This perhaps links back to Sian's discomfort (above) with the pressure of reaching out during holidays. For some young people social interaction in person might be more comfortable when enabled by a neutral environment where they both share space rather than having to create that space or time together. This kind of neutral environment is something that school can offer and school holidays may lack, if not enabled in other ways, for example through school holiday programmes, or youth centres (explored in Chapter 6).

Friendships were features of school that some participants in the study valued. These tended to be associated with moments of enjoyment or fun that were usually felt to be lacking in school learning itself, perhaps also representing times where young people felt more agency over activities or where decisions were more easily negotiated between peers. Schools enabled a conversion process for some young people, supporting the founding and maintenance of friendships through the provision of a neutral space for regular interaction. For those who valued these school-based relationships, being away from school meant these were sometimes harder to maintain or required additional support.

5.4.2 Relief from bullying and marginalisation

Difficulties with peers meant that some young people welcomed a break from school. The break provided space from these interactions and time away from sharing spaces with people who they do not get on with, or who they felt were a threat to their wellbeing, including personal safety.

Some of these more negative experiences created a sense of needing to 'keep your head down' to avoid becoming a target for bullying during school time.

Elliot (14): Like in school, there's like neds¹⁰ who will like, if you say one thing wrong, that is what they'll know you for the rest of the year.

¹⁰ Scots slang, and often derogatory, term referring to young people who are perceived as disruptive or a threat

Amy (15): In school you just keep to yourself and get on with it all just because you don't want to be a subject of bullying and stuff.

Both Elliot and Amy described experiencing a threat of aggression from peers without sharing experience of being on the receiving end of direct bullying. 'Keeping your head down' was framed as a decision taken in order to protect oneself. These experiences show how internal assumptions, perhaps built in interaction with peers over time, observing or experiencing bullying, might lead to choices not to take up opportunities when they are available e.g. not speaking out in class/school in case you 'say one thing wrong'. As I will explore further in Chapter 7, this was in direct contrast to the peer experiences both these young people had in community arts centres.

Others had issues with specific peers whose behaviour they found challenging or upsetting. These were not always described as bullying but showed how navigating relationships with peers can be emotionally demanding, and where 'a break from' this was appreciated.

Lucy (10): Also, it was a break from being pestered by someone in my class who I'm not going to name. As she is always pestering me like she takes a break and then she comes back and she finds something to argue about and it's really annoying.

As with the use of 'break' in term of schoolwork-related stress, this implies that Lucy experienced the behaviour of this person as a stressor, from which she had relief during the holidays. Stressors like this were also experienced within friendship groups, with people that participants identified as friends rather than class/school mates. Arguments and tensions within these groups were responsible for some young people feeling that school holidays offered a valuable time away from even those they called friends, allowing time for issues within the groups to pass.

Oscar (13-14): Yeah I think it [school holidays] can [affect well-being] because I think if you maybe had, if you've had a bad year, and then you go to summer and you don't have to see any of the people that you don't like, because either they're on holiday or you're on holiday, I think you can just get away from everyone. And so it definitely does 'cause I had, not a bad year last year, but I did want to get away from a lot of people. And then I came back the next year and I was fine, and nobody even remembered.

Some young people had experienced more direct bullying and harassment. For Taylor this had included homophobia and for Nicole, racism. Schools' responses to this and support offered were not felt to be adequate (discussed further in section 5.5.2) which meant these were unresolved, or potentially recurring, issues that school holidays provided relief from being concerned about.

Taylor (14): I don't get changed in like the main changing rooms because people are so weird. Oh, my God I've had people like casually being like "Ohh Taylor was looking at my dick". I was like, yeah. Why would I do that?... I used to get stuff thrown at me daily and once it was like 2 different times an orange hit my head.

Nicole (15): There was this girl, she posted on her stories 'Black lives matter' and then she was being racist to me and my friends.

For Taylor and Nicole, the prejudice they experienced in their school environment went relatively unchallenged and was described to me in a way that suggested they knew these behaviours were wrong but were resigned to this happening. This sense of resignation might signal a feeling of lacking control over this environment, perhaps related to the sense of having to 'keep your head down' described by others, anticipating longer term negative consequences of speaking out or challenging intimidation or prejudice. Both of these young people also attended year-round youth organisations and were able to compare their school experiences with the more inclusive and supportive environments they experienced in these organisations.

For those young people experiencing negative relationships with peers, school can be an unpleasant, and even unsafe, environment to be in. School holidays can therefore provide an escape, to some extent, from this environment and the stress that goes along with experiencing this.

5.4.3 Reflecting on relationships with teachers: comparative experiences of young person-adult interactions

The relationships that young people had with individual school staff, particularly teachers, impacted on how they felt about themselves, school, and in turn how this impacted on their perceptions of school holidays. This was particularly notable in the accounts of those young people who appeared to have positive

relationships with non-family adults during school holidays (e.g. at youth organisations and holiday clubs, explored further in Chapter 6 and 7), and perhaps emphasised to them the contrast with relationships with adults at school. Being away from school and being able to contrast these experiences away from teachers, with or without other adults, allowed young people to reflect on how their relationships with teachers impact on how they feel about school, and school holidays.

Participants perceived a strong hierarchy and power imbalance between young people and adults within school. This was experienced particularly strongly in the ways that teachers spoke to young people.

Taylor (14): Some of the teachers sometimes speak really condescending. It's like they speak down to you.

Daisy (14): At school like you get treated, like... certainly it depends on the teacher, some teachers are really sound, you get teachers who'll just have a chat with you but a lot of teachers are like they know their age, they see you as less than them, they see you downgraded from them. They feel like they've got power over you...because they do, they're teachers. And some teachers just be like "what are you talking about you're a student I'm a teacher, I'm more than you, I know better, I'm an adult I've been through my exams, I've passed my exams, it's my job to teach you it's your job to pass"

Daisy, Taylor and other participants spoke about feeling belittled by some teachers. Daisy suggests that some of this behaviour is due to teachers equating age and experience with wisdom or superiority, highlighting again an underlying sense that adulthood is a state of outcome, or 'being', in contrast to the work in progress, or 'becoming', of childhood. The experience of a power imbalance, or of feeling belittled were particularly evident in discussions with young people involved in youth groups outside of school who were able to compare their relationships with adults in those environments (explored in Chapter 6 and 7).

Researcher: Why do you think teachers aren't like that [like youth workers]?

Sam (15): I think it's just the education system and schools, but do you know there are some teachers that are like that because they know that that's just a better way and like your students will respect you.

Fraser (14): Yeah, that's why it's so good when you find a teacher like that. Because, like, you'll respect them because they respect you.

A sense of feeling respected was thought by Fraser to lead to respecting teachers in return. This sense of mutuality suggests a balance in the relationship while still being able to acknowledge differences between each other. Teachers who demonstrated this kind of respect or friendliness, who were more relaxed in their approach to young people, perhaps in a way more akin to the youth workers that some young people were around, were seen as hard to find but very much appreciated.

As discussed in section 5.3.2, fun was seen by participants as particularly important in their school experience and so teachers who imbued their lessons with fun and prioritised young people's enjoyment were seen as the 'best' teachers. As Lily exemplified in 5.3.2, participants spoke about these kinds of lessons in a way that implied engagement with the learning, compared with the ones that lacked this fun element. Some participants appreciated when teachers shared something of themselves e.g. their own interests, helping them feel more connected as individuals. For Elliot (below) this led to relaxed conversations about music and echoes the sentiments of participants who felt engaged in learning by teachers who made lessons meaningful, fun or interesting to young people.

Elliot (14): Because in S2 like I would see my PE teacher like absolutely everywhere like he'd be in the maths department and I just was like 'oh, how you doing?' and we would like talk about bands and stuff. It would be really nice.

This engagement with young people on issues that made them feel included in a conversation as equal participants, worth stopping to chat to, may help to adjust a power imbalance between teachers and pupils that participants experienced so negatively. While it would be unreasonable to expect teachers to share unfiltered information about their personal lives with students as a rule, Elliot's example of a teacher expressing a cultural interest was very positively received and required minimal disclosure. Close relationships cultivated with pupils have been found to reduce pupil alienation (Looker et al., 2023) and improve engagement and motivation (Davis, 2003; Thornberg et al., 2022).

Much as with broader school ethos and culture, the quality of teacher-pupil relationships seems to affect the conversion process in young people's ability

and choice to achieve particular functionings in school. Respect, encouragement and a sense of fun from teachers were highly valued by the young people who shared their experiences in the study. These qualities seem to reduce the power imbalance by engaging young people in interactions that feel more equally balanced, where they are recognised and treated as active agents within that relationship. In contrast, young people's sense of agency was diminished when they were treated as inferior by adults and led to negative experiences from which they were grateful to be away during holidays. For those young people who experienced positive and supportive relationships with non-family adults in youth organisations, this contrast in agency between in, and out of, school was all the more pronounced.

5.4.4 Summary

School-based relationships and interactions are a key feature that is changed for young people during holidays and whether or not these relationships are positive impacts on how they feel to be away from them during holidays. School can act as a conversion factor, impacting on the ways in which young people achieve functionings in social relationships e.g. enabling or impeding how these are founded and maintained. In turn, these resulting relationships themselves affect further functionings such as play and having fun (section 5.4.1), feeling/being safe from harm (section 5.4.2), and having a sense of equality and agency (section 5.4.3). Being away from school may alter the impact these relationships have (either positively or negatively depending on the nature of the relationship) but in some cases it may be that the impact of these pervades school holiday experiences as well. I will explore further in chapter 6 and 7 how a starkly contrasting experience in school holidays, particularly around relationships with adults, can further highlight to young people the detrimental impact that in-school relationships have on their wellbeing.

5.5 Away from the social structure of school

Although learning experiences and relationships were important features of school that young people reflected on in comparison to holidays, there were also features of being 'away from' school that related to the social structure of school itself.

The aim of this section is to explore the ways in which the institutional practices, rules and norms of school shaped what young people felt they were able to do and be, and how this was altered for them during school holidays. The first half of this section (5.5.1) focuses on young people's experiences of being restricted by school structure, while the second half (5.5.2) explores ways in which school support was compared to that of other organisations that participants were engaged with, highlighting areas where young people felt unsupported in school.

5.5.1 Restrictions and lack of control in school

Being able to make choices in school holiday time around how they spent their time, when and where they did the activities they wanted to do and how they presented themselves to the world was important to young people in the study. A sense of being 'free' from restrictions of school permeated their accounts of holiday time, even when they also fully appreciated that they were subject to societal and parental restrictions on them during holiday time.

Participants spoke frequently about the physical environment of school and the lack of agency they had over this, contrasting this with agency they had during holidays to change their environment, even when this was fairly limited. As I will explore more in Chapter 6, young people's descriptions of school holiday activities often centred on being outdoors and were regularly contrasted with a need to be mainly indoors during school time. As with previous research in this area (Thornberg, 2008), some restrictions in terms of school rules were understood to have their place but participants also described rules that they felt were particularly unfair, with unsound reasoning, or where the repercussions for breaking them seemed disproportionate.

Corina (15): For our school we're not allowed to wear our jackets [indoors], even though it's cold... We get kind of yelled at if we put our jackets on inside of school... We're also not allowed to go to the toilet unless it's break or lunch. Or if you have a special pass.

Researcher: Do you think that balance is right in school?

Corina: It depends on what they choose for you, to be honest. Because adults do know the best for you, but sometimes they overdo it, you could say.

Researcher: What would you change?

Corina: Allow us to go to the toilet. Not all the time, like every few seconds or something, but allow us to go to the toilet. And if it's cold, 'cause like the heaters don't actually work properly in the school [let us wear jackets].

Corina implies a sense of trust in the guidance of adults around her (who “know best”) but expresses a frustration around the lack of control afforded to young people within this. Issues around being able to go to the toilet were raised by a few different participants, and it is worth noting that this had been in recent local news (Stewart, 2021). Jay described a feeling that these kind of rules had a sense of collective punishment about them, linking to feelings of inferiority discussed in 5.4.3.

Jay (13): All the teachers basically just took that as nobody was allowed to go to the toilet. Because there was like one or two, you know, there's like graffiti and stuff in the toilet. They just say ‘well, if someone's doing it, then that means everybody can't go to the toilet’ to stop it.

Sam had experienced teachers bending these rules in support of young people, emphasising even further to her a sense of unfairness, that even teachers did not want to uphold them.

Sam (15): There was a while I remember, they would like just have the toilets locked so you could only go like before class or on a break or at lunch, but it just meant that people would just like go to the disabled bathrooms and teachers would say like ‘if you really need to just go use that one’. But you're also not meant to use them, so they've got a big staff only sign on them now

These discussions around toilet access rules demonstrate a sense of injustice that young people felt, that these rules had been imposed upon them rather than made in consultation with them, and with no justification made clear to them. As I will discuss in Chapter 6 and 7, participants who attended youth organisations outwith school time were able to compare and contrast the way they were treated by adults in these spaces and how rules in those spaces were often mutually agreed and the rationale for them understood.

For many participants, a sense of restriction was felt to be imposed on them within school in other areas, reinforcing a power imbalance experienced within their interpersonal interactions with staff (section 5.4.3). As with toilet access

rules, restrictions around uniform were raised by several participants, in particular around physical comfort, and expression of identity.

Cian (11): And maybe sometimes not being able to wear your own clothes as well [is stressful]. ‘Cause sometimes the uniforms can get irritating...I’d make more comfortable uniforms.

Walter (16): School doesn’t really allow you to express yourself in ways, like they’re trying to ban shoes, you’re not allowed to wear converse now. You have to wear certain shoes and this and that.

Comfort, choice and self-expression in relation to school uniform were similarly found to be themes in a recent analysis of Scottish Government consultation responses on school uniform (which included engagement with young people via the Children’s Parliament) (The Scottish Government, 2023b).

Strict timetabling within school creates unavoidable routine in young people’s lives. In school holidays, although the routine of the school week was absent, participants still described routines as part of their school holiday time, albeit with more flexibility and perceived choice. For many participants, there were activities that they engaged in throughout the holidays that required them to be at certain places at certain times e.g. holiday camps or youth group volunteering. However, being away from the strict temporalities of school seemed to be of value to young people. This was particularly the case around being in control of their sleep and waking times and something they looked forward to in school holidays. Most young people experienced some increased leeway in parental rules, and therefore increased personal control around staying up later and sleeping in during holiday periods even when they had holiday club commitments like Sean (below).

Sean (15-16): Well yeah ‘cause during the week you’re getting up to be at [YOUTH CLUB] for 10 but at the weekends you can get a long lie you can get up whatever time you want to be honest

Some, like Sean (above) highlighted the increased agency that accompanied this, in choosing to get up whenever he wanted. Others focused on how more sleep improved how they felt.

Ace (11): It kind of makes me feel better because I’ve had more sleep, my full sleep

For Chris (below), it was the absence of early mornings required for school that he most looked forward to.

Chris (15): I think it's good to get in a sleeping schedule, but it's annoying to get up at early times. Cause I'm used to getting up later [during holidays]... I'd rather school days start at lunchtime

Researcher: Even if it meant spending your evening in school?

Chris: Aye

The importance of adequate sleep in adolescent health is widely acknowledged (Shochat et al., 2014) but evidence also suggests that time away from school (in both school holidays, weekends and COVID-19 related school closures) can lead to improved sleep, and resultant improved mood and daytime functioning (Warner et al., 2008; Santos and Louzada, 2022). In the above quote Chris felt that a school day with different hours would work better for him, and that he would choose this if it were an option available to him.

Although some routines still existed in holidays, these seem to have been more flexible. Control over sleep seemed to be central to young people's changes to their term time routine, and for some this included recognising a positive impact on subjective wellbeing as a result of this. As with previous aspects of increased agency in school holidays, it may be that this perceived positive impact is two-fold: that achieving the functioning (more sleep) is important, but it may also be accompanied by the feeling of being in control, *experiencing* agency, in achieving such a functioning. In contrast, routines in school may feel imposed on young people, rather than as a result of their own choice, and therefore may be a contributing factor in the desire for 'a break' that so many young people expressed when describing the benefit of school holidays.

5.5.2 Comparative experiences of institutional support

In section 5.4.2 I introduced how participants reflected on a lack of support in addressing negative peer interactions in school. This lack of adult support was perceived at a whole school level and even referred to as the broader institution 'the school', rather than related to individual adults. Similarly, as with the individual relationships participants had with staff, the support they perceived they had from school as an institution was often compared with the support they experienced from youth organisations they attended in out of school time. These

out-of-school organisations represented an alternative environment where they also experienced structure, rules, learning and relationships with adults, and as such they made repeated comparisons when explaining the frustrations they had with school, and why they valued school holiday time to be away.

Trust and confidentiality were raised in focus groups at two different arts organisations, with participants in both groups (and attending several different schools) agreeing that they did not feel that schools treated young people's personal issues with the confidentiality they should.

Daisy (14): School isn't confidential. If you have a health concern, like if you came to school like you were self-harming the school WOULD tell your parents and if your school got you a counsellor, if there was something worrying them they would tell the school and the school would phone home, they wouldn't ask you if it was ok.

Taylor (13): Aye, the school's main thing from like what I've known is so many people have, like, went up to them with their really deep problems they've had, they've just purposefully tried to, like create a false environment of safety and then just go behind your back and like tell your mum and get this involved and get that involved.

All participants involved in these groups were very clear with me that they understood the need for processes around breaking confidentiality, and were appreciative of adult support, but that they did not feel that school processes worked in ways that supported their agency. In particular, there was a sense from these discussions that it was the lack of involvement and consultation with the young people themselves, and a lack of taking their wishes into consideration that was frustrating, rather than the breaking of confidentiality itself. They implied a need for balance in the relationship with adults that would mean young people are treated as active agents, in addition to (and not instead of) being cared for.

Beyond the handling of individual personal issues, some participants felt that the schools they attended did not sufficiently address broader issues of discrimination and marginalisation, and that people responsible for delivering education around these issues were not adequately informed.

Sam (15): If there was like an issue, like homophobia or something here [youth organisation] it would get dealt with a lot better than at school. Because at school it's just sort of ignored quite a lot.

Nicole (15): My mum had this meeting with my school because we done nothing for like Black History Month. They just have this big wall of like Black heroes and that was it we never really talked about it. In other places as well, we hardly talked about it and stuff.

Again this was something that both participants had experienced more positively in the out-of-school organisations they attended. Some participants spoke about how their schools address additional support needs of their young people.

Walter, who has a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, had experienced teachers being unwilling to have flexibility in rules to better meet his needs and improve his learning experience.

Walter (16): They're not very good at meeting requirements. Like I've had this big debate with especially my maths teacher. I'm not very good like when things are louder or there's a lot going on at once. Like you know, there's a lot of stuff I use for paying attention. I use my headphones in and I was having the lowest volume because I respect the teachers, and that's just to help me focus and the teacher always says "out now" and I'll try explaining and they'll say "don't talk back". It's the way of like, it's not, I'm not talking back I'm trying to explain why I do this on a basic level, but they just don't seem to really bother about any requirements or if I need help with stuff. They seem to just sort of not really care.

Supportive and inclusive school culture, with engagement from students and positive teacher-pupil relationships have been repeatedly associated with positive impacts on young people's wellbeing (Moore et al., 2017). Similarly the accounts of participants in this study highlighted some of the negative experiences of school that can impact on young people's subjective wellbeing, and from a capabilities perspective limit agency to achieve valued functionings.

5.5.3 Summary

School as an institutional structure can provide resources and opportunities as well as being a conversion factor enabling young people to achieve functionings through these opportunities and with these resources. However, young people's perceptions of themselves as active agents in this conversion process may significantly alter how much they value these functionings. When describing

rules, school policies, routines and support they experienced in school, participants were able to reflect on the potential benefits of these but at the same time articulated how these were imposed on them rather than formed in communication or collaboration with them. This resultant lack of agency within the institution affected how they felt about being there, and therefore how they felt to be away from it.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the ways in which young people framed their school holidays experienced in terms of how it felt to be *away from* school. In this Scottish education setting, one of the key features of Curriculum for Excellence is the emphasis on ‘Experiences and Outcomes’ (The Scottish Government, 2010), that pupils should be experiencing their learning in a way that enriches their in-the-moment learning (‘being’) en route to achieving outcomes (‘becoming’). Yet, the participants in this study have demonstrated ways in which their in-the-moment experiences of learning appear sidelined. Their experiences of learning were often described as stressful and boring, with future achievements seen as the main, or only, goal. Friendships and positive relationships with peers and teachers appeared to alleviate some of the more negative experiences for these young people, and bring enjoyment and fun to learning and time spent in school. However, negative social experiences, from peer group tensions to bigotry and bullying, were also features of some participants’ experiences. Schools rely on rules and routines to maintain order in their social system, but some of these processes appeared to young people as illogical and unfair, unnecessarily controlling them and imposed without input from those who are subjected to them. As a result, young people reported experiencing a lack of agency within school, and a sense of being unheard and overlooked, unable to enact meaningful change in an environment where adults hold the power. School holidays, as experienced by the participants in this study, offered these young people a chance for respite from the negative aspects of school that they experienced, and they viewed this time as a valued opportunity to reset and recharge before returning to the challenges of school.

Chapter 6 School Holidays as Leisure Time

6.1 Overview of Chapter 6

In contrast to Chapter 5, this chapter focuses on the alternative framing that young people used when describing their school holiday experiences: as that of leisure time. As I explored in Chapter 2, school holiday research to date has not paid significant attention to the activities and experiences of young people in school holidays, and as such there has been limited examination of school holidays as a time for leisure in young people's lives. Therefore this chapter aims to explore how young people's school holiday leisure experiences impact on their wellbeing by examining the capabilities and functionings within these leisure experiences and the conversion factors that appeared to influence this. I will discuss these within three themes, constructed from data drawn from pre- and post-holiday interviews with young people, and focus groups in community arts organisations. The first two of these offer temporally juxtaposed perspectives: 'Being' on holiday - Experiencing School Holiday Leisure in the Present (6.2), 'Becoming' on holiday: Developing for the future through School Holiday Leisure (6.3). The third theme focusses on the social interactions that imbued these experiences: Making and maintaining social connections through School Holiday leisure (6.4). A final section (6.5) presents a case study focused on the experiences of five participants who attended the same school holiday programme in a year-round youth project. By relating these data to the broader themes of the chapter, this case study will highlight the ways in which school holiday programmes have the potential to enhance the capabilities of the young people who attend them.

6.2 'Being' on holiday - Experiencing School Holiday Leisure in the Present

Young people's descriptions of how they spent their time in school holidays were often focused on how it felt to *be* in those moments. This section explores ways in which this 'being' was experienced and facilitated by the use of time and space in ways that differed compared with term-time. Section 6.2.1 focuses on young people's descriptions of being 'in the moment' and what these experiences highlight about the value young people derive in the 'being' of

childhood. Section 6.2.2 explores one of the reasons why young people might value the in the moment experiences: the increased control they have over how they spend their time. Linked to the experiences of being ‘in the moment’ and making choices to do what they want to do with their time, section 6.2.3 explores participants’ accounts of using different spaces, or using spaces differently, during their holiday time.

6.2.1 *Being in the moment*

During fieldwork, I noticed a distinct way in which participants would tend to describe certain experiences of events, particularly those that they found enjoyable or meaningful from their summer holidays: the ‘highlights’ they would draw out to tell me about, show me objects/photos from, or that they would add first to the timelines they drew. These instances were described with a level of enthusiasm that might be expected of ‘highlights’ but there was also a tangible difference in the time taken describing them, compared to descriptions of school experiences or experiences that were not seen as ‘highlights’. When it came to analysis, I also noticed that the language participants used to report these was often notably more detailed and descriptive than that used to describe school time. Although this might be due to them being aware of the focus of the study, or the nature of recalling their recent memories with prompts (artefacts/objects), this language evoked a sense of being ‘in the moment’, tending to focus on the details of the experience and its immediate impact rather than any perceived value to a later version of themselves.

Lucy (10-11): [describing an activity camp she attended] Zip wire, canoeing was the first afternoon, that was three hours, vertical challenge, Highland games, burn walk, trapeze...not trapeze, it was like you climbed up on a harness and you had a platform, and there was this...you know like a buoy... and you had to like tap it, and because I was scared of heights, I kind of just sat down and I was like, oh, I really can’t do this, I really can’t do this. There was no easy way of getting down, and then quite by chance, I slipped off of it. It was so much fun.

Lucy was listing activities that she took part in but slipped into a deeper description of one particular moment in her holiday, including the elements of what was involved, how she felt and the things she was saying to herself. It felt to me, the listener, as if she was trying to put me in that moment in time with

her, drawing me in to the description to help me understand the value she placed on it.

Participants recounted a broad range of different experiences and activities they enjoyed and were able to clearly recall and describe the details of. Within these descriptions there were thematically similar types of details across the participant group that rooted these descriptions 'in the moment'. These included describing details such as the weather, the physical environment and scenery, who they were with as well as the details of the activity or event itself. A particularly frequent example of this was in describing details that included food and eating. Usually details like this were as part of the broader description of the in-the-moment experience, such as with Cal's description below.

Cal (10): [describing the cruise ship he had been on while showing photos] There was a disco floor. Oh, and a pizzeria. I liked that. New York City pizza, Towel animals... So that was when we got into the cabin...Here's a doughnut, a doughnut for breakfast. There's a pastry plate. And he asked me, do you want a donut for breakfast? And I'm like, I think you already know the answer to that question.

In other accounts the descriptions of the food itself and the eating of it were more central, perhaps implying the pleasure or enjoyment in this moment came more directly from eating the food itself, such as Will's description below.

Will (10): On the way home I went to Costa and got a Gimme S'mores cake.

Researcher: What is a Gimme S'mores cake?

Will: It's got about 75 ingredients.

Researcher: Is it like a rocky road?

Will: Kind of. It's a light sponge cake and it's got very nice icing on the top and then it has slightly melted marshmallows. Not to the point where they're gooey, but to the point where they're gooey on the inside. And I didn't get a piece with the marshmallow on it though.

Aside from the level of detail that young people included in their descriptions, the language they used often portrayed a sense of hedonistic happiness, or in-the-moment pleasure that they experienced. The use of these kind of descriptions also had a temporal quality to them, as if the time taken to describe this matched how mindful and attentive they had been to those details in the moment, and therefore how memorable the experience of the event then was to them. It is possible that the level of enjoyment, and the relative novelty

compared to the ‘normality’ of term time routines, meant that young people remembered these experiences more vividly.

When describing what they had been doing, participants often used words like “fun” or “good” to describe the activity itself rather than saying directly how this made them feel, although the sense of pleasure seemed implicit, as with Aurora’s description below.

Aurora (10-11): Uh-huh yeah and we went in Hamley’s as well, we spent a LONG time in Hamley’s. It was really fun. And after that my dad’s cousin, she also came over and we got dinner. And then the last day, my dad’s cousin and her daughter and my mum and dad and stuff, we all went to Camden again, so we went to Camden twice. It was really good.

Although there was a tendency to focus on describing the activity rather than the emotional or physical response they felt, when asked direct questions about what makes them happy or what they enjoy, participants could easily list activities, experiences or situations.

The attention to detail, as well as more explicit references to the pleasure gained from these experiences in the moment contributed to the overall sense in these descriptions that participant’s focus was on being present. Harmon and Duffy (2021) explore how leisure research has tended to conceptualise ‘time’ as a commodity, focusing less on individuals’ existential experiences of that time. They draw attention to Lefebvre’s work on ‘moments’, which he described as “the modality of presence” (Lefebvre in Merrifield, 2006, p28). Merrifield describes Lefebvre’s views on this ‘presence’ as “a fullness, alive and connected” and contrasts this with the “absence” of alienation (Merrifield, 2006, p29). This sense of *presence* appears strongly in participant’s accounts in this study but perhaps signifies, rather than a contrast to alienation, a contrast to the future-focused mindset that permeates their school-time experiences (detailed in Chapter 5). Any sense of development, learning, accumulating, growing or ‘becoming’ was either absent or pushed to the periphery in both the experience itself and the value they felt these experiences had when describing them later. This is in contrast to descriptions of school-based activities where the focus was more on value derived from longer-term outcomes, how that activity might benefit them in the future rather than in the present (See Chapter

5). From a CA perspective there is contrast in the temporality of where the valued functioning exists and the length of conversion process required to achieve it. In these school holiday 'moments' young people are able to exercise agency to convert available resources to the functionings they value virtually instantaneously, whereas the valued functionings of school life are located in the distant future. School holidays might therefore offer more opportunities for young people to have experiences where they can embody a sense of 'being' rather than 'becoming', enjoying the momentary experience rather than looking to what future benefit might be attained from it.

6.2.2 Time for agency

Without the daily school schedule, all young people in the study, even those attending school holiday programmes, highlighted 'more time' or 'free time' as a key feature of school holidays. In discussing what they did during this time participants often described self-directed time, in which they could exercise control over their leisure activities, even when at times their choices had to be negotiated with others or were limited by other factors. This sense of expanded agency in comparison to non-holiday time seemed to be of value in and of itself, as well as the actual outcomes of being able to choose (i.e. doing the activities they wanted to do). This was particularly so, though not limited to, descriptions of 'casual leisure' (Mukherjee, 2020) during school holidays, .

Throughout participant accounts there were both explicit descriptions of, and implicit allusions to, having more agency during school holidays. Lucy, below, describes this agency in an explicit way as an ability to 'pick' for herself.

Researcher: What do you think is the best thing about holidays?

Lucy (10-11): Doing whatever you want...like getting to pick what you do instead of like school, they get...things get picked for you... because in term time there's only really the weekends and they're not long enough.

At other times participants described their leisure activities in a way that implied their autonomous choice in these activities without being explicit about 'being able to choose':

Leia (11): Sometimes I'll watch a TV show on the computer in bed. And then get up, have a bit of breakfast, and then it sort of depends on the weather, so if it's quite sunny I might text one of my friends and ask if they want to do something, or if it's raining, just stay in and watch more TV.

Here Leia talks hypothetically about what might happen on a typical school holiday day where no prior plans have been made. She describes this in a way that implies this time is self-directed and that she would have the authority to choose where she is, and what she is doing. She mentions one possible constraint on these choices (weather) but maintains this portrayal of herself as the one who will weigh up limiting factors and make decisions about her activities within these constraints, rather than this decision-making being undertaken by others (adults). This focus on independent choices was echoed in responses from other participants and suggests a sense of autonomy that these young people experience when making decisions in 'free time', even in the presence of constraints that need to be considered. For young people, feeling like an 'active agent' may be more about involvement in, or leading, the decision-making (including considering and weighing up constraints and options) rather than simply a sense of being able to do whatever they want.

In exercising this agency, some participants described valuing not just what they chose to do but where and with whom, as well as being able to make decisions in the moment according to their own feelings and needs.

Islay (15): I do like to like come downstairs and I normally when I first wake up, I kind of stay up in my room for a bit and like just have a bit of kind of space to kind of get myself ready and then I normally come downstairs and hang out with my parents and watch TV for a bit. And then I'll probably go back upstairs every now and then, just for like a bit of space and like talk to my friends or watch YouTube or whatever.

Islay suggests a sense of responsiveness not only to the possible constraints of her environment but also to her own needs and desires in the moment. In particular she focuses on the importance of managing her 'space', having the autonomy to move in and out of spending time with parents, and friends as she feels she needs to. This links to themes of agency and space which will be explored further in the next section. Where interaction with others could lead to a sense of agency through participation in decision making, an interaction with

self in time alone for thought and reflection might lead to similar feelings of agency. For example, here Islay demonstrates self-awareness and reflection, and being able to respond to personal feelings with actions that feel aligned with this.

School holiday time acts as a conversion factor, enabling young people to achieve certain functionings. However, despite the increased opportunities to make choices, young people also described the barriers they experienced during school holidays, the additional conversion factors that altered or impeded choices around how they spent their time. As might be expected, one of the key factors that young people spoke about was parents. These barriers were often framed by participants as parental decisions or choices. These 'choices' however may be formed in response to a multitude of conversion factors constraining or enabling parents own ability to achieve functionings. Ace (below) felt his parents filled a lot of his school holiday time and he was irritated by being taken along on chores e.g. shopping. The family moved less than a year ago from abroad, so some of these outings seem to have been motivated by getting to know Glasgow and the surrounding area. For Ace, who enjoys playing computer games and learning to code, this did not align with how he wanted to spend this time.

Researcher: Is there anything negative about the school holidays?

Ace (11): Well, my parents take me out a lot...About every single day, and when my leg is really paining me, they don't care we're still going out...sometimes it's a shop which I hate. I hate shopping sprees.

Sometimes it's the arcade, sometimes it's [another city], sometimes it's the buffet, sometimes they don't tell us.

Ace spoke in a particularly disgruntled way when listing these activities, despite some of them being activities he later described enjoying (e.g. visiting an arcade). It is possible that his level of frustration with being taken places was less to do with the activity itself and more to do with the lack of agency he experienced around making these choices. He specifically noted this lack of involvement in directing his time by saying that sometimes his parents do not tell him where they are taking him.

A lack of involvement in decision making was echoed by other participants but sometimes there was more of an interplay between parents/carers and young people in these decisions. Lily described an example of where her agency was

negotiated with her mother and the boundaries of particular rules could be malleable, with the decision-making more of a mutual compromise.

Researcher: So she'll let you go walking distance, maybe around here but not over to the main shopping centre?

Lily (11-12): Well, if I'm going to the main shopping centre, she'll drop me off. It's just like she doesn't want to give me too much because she doesn't like... see usually if I'm doing the shopping centre. She'll be like 'awright if you're going for two hours, let me know after an hour that you're still alive' or something.

This kind of interaction between adults and young people, negotiating boundaries of young people's agency is further explored in section 6.3.3.

Although ultimately young people might not get to do things exactly as they had wanted to, the negotiation involved in this with compromise on both sides could lead to a sense of agency due to the participation in the decision-making, if not the sole responsibility for it.

For the young people in this study, having school holiday periods, particularly longer ones, increased the time they had that was unstructured and free of pre-planned activities and routines in comparison to term time. These periods enabled them to self-direct their own time. Although there were often structural limitations on what young people could choose, or where negotiation with others was required, the act of participating in decision-making around how this 'free time' was spent seems to have been of importance in enhancing a sense of agency felt by these young people during this time. It is possible that the sense of enjoyment in activities they have chosen results not only from the activity itself, but from the feeling of being an active agent involved in the decisions that led to the activity. Within the activities that young people engaged in, even those that they made active decisions to take part in, agency was situated differently across different school holidays spaces. The next section will consider how different spaces impacted on agency, and how young people created spaces for themselves.

6.2.3 Spaces for agency

Young people described inhabiting spaces in different ways during holiday time vs school time. For many this meant more time spent at home or in their local

environment, and for some it also meant going to new places or places that they did not regularly visit, with new people or people they usually see less regularly. In describing their holiday time, participants demonstrated that certain spaces allowed them more opportunities for agency, and that they had the power to create exclusive spaces for themselves and their peers during this time.

As described in 6.2.2, having more self-directed time meant that young people could exercise agency over activities. For some young people this agency extended to choosing to spend time in a more private space, managing or changing that space or creating new spaces for themselves. Lily (below) spent time with her mother moving her bedroom to another room.

Lily (11-12): Well, we cleared out the attic, and moved my bedroom... and I have a double bed...I'm very happy.

Similarly, Will used the attic to create a private space where he could build a den.

Will (10): I really like it up there [in the attic].

Researcher: So, what do you use to make your den?

Will: So, we have two big stands that you're supposed to hang clothes on. I've removed the clothes hangers and I used some tape to attach an old curtain and then I've just put a wee, another old, wee curtain across the front. Just kind of then, inside I've got a wee desk, a wee TV, a chair and some paper and pens and some stationery.

He described taking time over making this space, choosing and designing it in a reflective way to meet his needs and interests, hanging curtains to separate the space and make it private, filling it with the kind of things he would need for particular activities he knew he liked to do e.g. watching tv, writing, drawing or reading.

As Islay and Leia described in section 6.2.2, Alena (below) spoke about choosing spaces where she knew she could have time on her own.

Alena (10): I use an app to time myself [doing the puzzle]. I grab my Rubik's cube. I'll go upstairs to be quiet or so no one can hear me and I'll go upstairs and do it.

Like Alena, other participants chose areas of their homes (usually their bedrooms) to have space and time to themselves. These areas of their home perhaps represent sites where they could have more control over the

environment, for example being around things they considered their own possessions, limiting distractions from others or being able to do things that they could not elsewhere. Fattore et al (2017) highlight how young people's wellbeing can benefit from private and personal space not only to exercise agency but also to reflect on their everyday experiences. While personal spaces in the home are likely a constant feature for young people throughout the year, school holiday time might present an increased need for this kind of spatial autonomy when more time is spent at home. As with the use of self-directed time, being able to choose where they want to be might represent an important self-reflective interaction for young people, reacting to current needs and responding in an agentic way to improve how they feel.

For young people who did not have access to private space in their own home they may not have had opportunities to exercise agency to the same extent during their holiday free time, instead seeking out spaces elsewhere where they could feel more control. Outdoor spaces may offer an alternative. Such spaces might also be seen as adult-free spaces rather than entirely private, particularly in areas like playparks where spaces are explicitly intended for children.

Lily (11-12): And we just sometimes play out the back, on his [Friend's] climbing frame. And we sometimes sit inside.

Lily (above) identified a particular space that she and her friend repurpose inside a climbing frame to sit together. By its nature, as part of children's play equipment and likely sized accordingly, it would seem to be a space that would be exclusively for their use, and not for adults.

Most participants described using outdoor spaces more regularly during their school holidays and being outside during this time was highlighted by several participants as one of the key benefits they felt school holidays offered. Outdoor activities made up the majority of photos and list items that participants brought to interview and young people spoke about using a range of outdoor spaces for leisure e.g. socialising, playing sport and being active, eating and barbecuing, walking their dogs, being around nature, playing and having fun. Although many of these kinds of activities were accompanied by parents/carers, young people also had opportunities to be outside without close adult supervision. These opportunities appeared very much age dependent and varied

from being in their own or neighbours' gardens, playing in the street or going to local parks or outdoor spaces with friends. It is possible that being outdoors, especially when adult supervision was reduced or absent, allowed young people an important site for exercising agency, especially in conjunction with peers. Those who were able to go out unaccompanied spoke about using local spaces with their friends e.g. parks, sports fields, shops or areas to sit, play or walk together (see 6.4.2), sometimes for long stretches.

Chris (15): Just go up and play football.

Researcher: So how long would you roughly spend if you were going to do that?

Chris: Four hours or something. Four and a half.

Researcher: And not playing football for the full four hours?

Chris: No.

Researcher: So what do you do in between times?

Chris: Sit about.

Researcher: So do you then come home for your dinner?

Chris: Sometimes, sometimes have dinner later but usually.

Chris alludes to a flexibility in this regular holiday activity that may signal the level of control he has over how he spends this time. Whether or not he makes it home for dinner with his family, and how he and his friends spend this time appears to be up to him. Chris is also vague about describing this activity and it is worth noting that his mother was present during the interview, and that he was speaking to an adult researcher. His reluctance to describe more detail may have been a signal of my intrusion into this adult-free space.

Most young people described being outdoors in a very positive way. Although some of this positivity was more focused on the activities or social connections available in outdoor spaces (e.g. playing football in the park with friends), some expressed that 'being outside' was an explicit desire in itself and valued in its own right.

Lucy (10-11): I like being outside. I think the most important things to young people are having outdoor space and space to do the things that they love.

Lucy (above) spoke about her priorities for young people during school holidays and highlighted the value she places on young people being able to be outside during this time. She also suggested that the environment or space young people are in is closely linked to the freedom they have to choose activities aligned

with their interests and enjoyment. It is possible that, for some, the appreciation for being outside during holiday time was related to the contrast that an outdoors environment provided in comparison to being in school, where it was felt that opportunities for outdoor time were more limited.

Will (10): Especially in school, you don't always get out every day if it's a wet play and a wet lunch. That's happened twice quite recently and then you don't get out for a whole six hours. You are probably guaranteed to get out on a [holiday day]...even if we're stuck in the house for some reason, you can go out and play in your garden and stuff, but you just can't do that in school if it's a wet play and a wet lunch.

Will compares the two environments within the constraint of poor weather, explaining that even in poor weather he has the freedom to go outside when he is at home. This contrast perhaps also extends to the feelings of having limited agency more generally within a school environment. Being outdoors in holidays might feel symbolic of increased freedom to choose during holidays in general, rather than actually representing a real difference in comparison to indoor time.

6.2.4 Summary

Participants described their school holiday functionings, particularly those that were highly valued, in ways that emphasised presence and immersion in the moment. These descriptions not only allude to the pleasure experienced but may also relate to the feeling of agency in achieving these functionings. Increased free time in holidays was an important factor in expanding this agency, allowing young people to self-direct their activities, choosing how they spent this time. Occupying and using spaces differently was both an outcome of this increased agency, and a contributing factor to it with young people being able to create and manage their own spaces differently during this time. Participants described different conversion factors that might alter their ability to use this time and space to achieve what they wanted to (e.g. weather) but none were more prominent than those centred on parents/carers. Despite the impact of parent/carer decisions or directions, school holidays still appeared to represent a period where, compared to school time, agency was expanded. Additionally, activities and experiences were felt to bring immediate value to wellbeing, in contrast to the future-focused value of in-school activities. Although the 'being' experience was clearly expressed in participants' holiday accounts, there was

also a clear sense of ‘becoming’ during this time, and this will be explored in the next section of the chapter.

6.3 ‘Becoming’ on holiday: Developing for the future through School Holiday Leisure

This section aims to explore how young people’s accounts of their school holidays demonstrated, explicitly or otherwise, that school holidays provided a time when they experienced personal growth, learning and development. Opportunities for being and doing that differed from those available in term time led to gaining new knowledge or skills, experiencing environments and ways of being that were new (or rarely encountered) and that had the potential to impact on future capabilities and functionings. Unlike the experiences of ‘becoming’ in school, those school holiday experiences that had the potential to offer future benefit to young people were often felt to also offer in-the-moment enjoyment and were usually the result of young people making agentic decisions to engage in them. Section 6.3.1 explores the learning opportunities young people took up during holiday time. 6.3.2 focuses on more subtle forms of development through exposure to experiences that were new, rarely encountered or different from those during non-holiday time. 6.3.3 explores how using school holiday time to practice new ways of being, negotiating agency with caregivers and testing boundaries between childhood and adulthood responsibilities allowed young people to expand and develop their functionings.

6.3.1 Non-school learning

Young people described explicit examples of learning during holidays. Although some of these learning experiences occurred in structured leisure activities that continued throughout the year (e.g. swimming lessons), many seemed to occur in casual leisure (e.g. playing an instrument for enjoyment) in ways that were markedly increased during school holidays (relative to term time). As discussed in section 6.2 this may be as a result of more self-directed time and agency to choose to take up learning opportunities aligned with young people’s own personal interests.

Some of these were new interests but most appeared to be existing areas of interest in regular out of school (or sometimes in-school) time during term but that continued on during holidays, albeit sometimes in a different way or in different amounts than during term.

Riley (15): Over the summer I normally learn like a song or two and it makes it easier because there's no deadline for it.

Some young people's learning interests were focused on technology:

Will (10): I also love doing editing. I've made many Newsround videos. So, like, we have an app where I can make my phone into a TV and I just make a wee PowerPoint. I've got about three videos on my phone actually. And I just flick through news and I really love doing that sort of thing. And making up games. Also making up Scratches [beginner's computer programming language], I go to coding lessons.

Others used technology to support their learning:

Leia (11): And on Duolingo I'm learning Russian, so I do that as well.

Elliot (14): In the summer or in a break you can just sit with a guitar or whatever and you can just like watch a video or you can like look up the tabs and you don't have to have a teacher.

Young people's motivations for doing these kinds of activities seemed to centre on enjoyment, but some did reflect on what future benefit might be gained from this. Lucy (below) described spending time on school holidays going to visit a pony that she sponsored and linked this to knowledge that might help her reach future goals to be what she wants to be in adulthood:

Lucy (10-11): Because when I grow up, I'd like to be a farmer, like I said. And I think I'd really like to have some horses on the farm and knowing what to do with them and how to control them and how to look after them is really important. And I want to learn that while I'm young and whilst I can do things like that, instead of doing all of it at college and having to have it a certain way and all that.

Lucy shows how she has considered a plan to work toward a future functioning that includes not only taking up formal education opportunities but also informal additional learning opportunities that she feels will aid her in achieving this outcome. For her, school holidays act as a conversion factor, opening up more opportunities for these less formal learning experiences that will help her be

what she wants to be in the future, while still aligning with her personal interests and enjoyment in the present.

Some of the older young people like Sian and Walter (below) spoke in a more abstract way about learning opportunities in school holidays and how learning ‘about yourself’ can occur during this time, alluding more to notions of identity development than knowledge acquisition.

Sian (16): You can also like learn a bit more about yourself because you’ve actually got time to do stuff that you want to do instead of just school.

Walter (16): It's good like during holidays I'll learn a lot more about stuff that I enjoy and I find interesting or stuff and that's even helpful compared to in school, and it's not like a stressful thing

Once again having more agency over how and where they spend their time seemed to be key features of this experience and of the process of better understanding themselves, opening up opportunities for thinking about personal wants and needs and reacting to these, trying out different ways of being or doing without being directed by others.

Aside from explicit learning examples, young people also described activities or play that could be seen as more broadly supportive of learning (in school and out of school). For example, reading, visiting places or making a play shop. Ace describes family leisure (Mukherjee, 2020) time spent sightseeing near Glasgow:

Ace (11): Yes we've gone to see Bannockburn

Researcher: Yeah the battleground?

Ace: Yes. And then it was something that my teacher started teaching us about the topic, and about how the English invaded Scotland.

For some young people their more formal ‘out of school’ learning continued through all, or some, of the school holidays e.g. music lessons, swimming lessons, football coaching. These represent examples of structured leisure: usually paid for classes or activities attended on a regular ‘extra-curricular’ basis. These tended to feature less in young people’s accounts as highlights, being discussed more often in response to direct questioning about whether these continued over summer or not. The fact that these were not often brought up in interviews as ‘highlights’ might be in part due to the lack of holiday

novelty (see section 6.3.2) they offered, as activities that continued throughout the year. However, it may also be because these activities did not offer sites for young people's agency in the way that other activities in self-directed time did. Some were encouraged or enforced by parents/carers, or were structured more as 'lessons', and therefore had less opportunity for agency within the activity itself.

Several participants experienced learning opportunities in school holiday programmes e.g. specialist 'camps' or learning activities in school holiday care. While these could also be considered structured leisure these appeared to be more highly valued by young people than activities that took place year-round, perhaps relating to both the novelty of this experience and these being more aligned with young people's interests. It is this sense of novelty that I will turn to in the next section, where new, or unusual, events, activities and experiences seemed to be valued for their novelty, and which also seemed to offer opportunities to learn or grow in more subtle ways than explicit 'learning' in leisure experiences.

6.3.2 Valuing new experiences

Young people in the study seemed to prioritise reporting activities and events that were 'out of the ordinary'. There have been previous examples in this chapter so far where this sense of novelty may have led to participants enjoying an experience more, being more attentive to it in the moment, or remembering it more vividly. In this section I will explore more specifically how being exposed to new, or rare, experiences appeared to be a highly valued part of school holidays to young people, and how this seemed to contribute to a sense of growth, development or learning in more subtle ways than their more formal learning experiences.

New or rare experiences (including environments, activities, or material things) were often marked down first on timelines that young people created, or were raised first when asked about highlights. While this may be an artefact of the method of data generation, with the most memorable experiences being identified first, the novelty of the experience itself seemed to be valued in its own right, alongside other components of that experience. This was particularly

evident when considering the enthusiasm with which young people spoke about experiences regardless of the material cost or parental labour that likely went into them. For example, after deciding to put down her holiday 'highlights' first on her timeline, Ariana read what she had drawn and written (Figure 6-1):

Ariana (12-13): Highlights ok. So we've got the camper van holiday, school summer session, [UK city] holiday, beach day, swim camp, weekend holiday. And the university which is today.

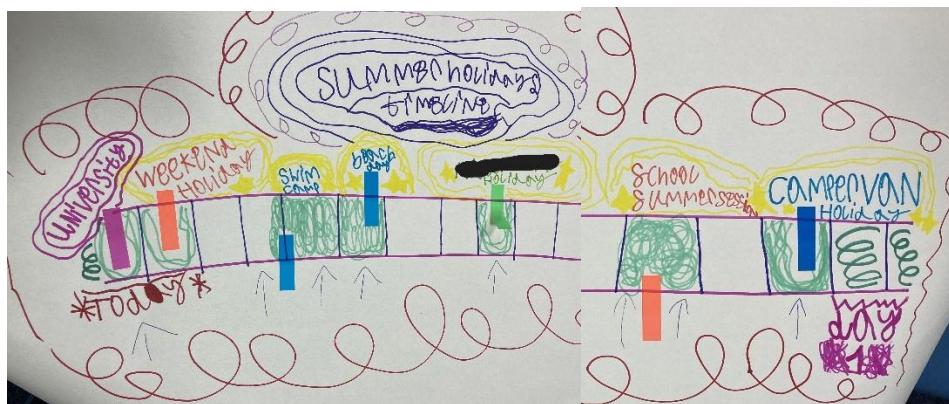


Figure 6-1 Participant timeline drawing

Ariana chose a range of different activities that she felt had been highlights and these varied greatly in terms of the cost they had been to her family, or the level of organisation and parental engagement they had required (from free activities to trips away from home overnight and even being interviewed for the study). All of these represented activities that do not normally happen for her during term time or happened for the first time over the holiday period.

The majority of young people went on some kind of trip away from home whether that was day trips to places in Scotland, breaks to stay with family within the UK, camping and caravan trips, or longer holidays in the UK and abroad. Some of these trips were with youth groups and holiday programmes that the young people took part in, others were with family and/or to visit extended family. Trips to different places seemed to offer additional opportunities to try new things or experience different ways of being contributing to building knowledge or understanding of different aspects of their own, or other people's worlds. These included trying new foods (which links to similar descriptions in 6.2.1):

Cian (11): In [HOLIDAY DESTINATION] I tried a couple of new foods. I tried...I think it was a lobster roll that we tried. I liked it, and I also tried a couple more...tried...what's it called, scallops. And crab. Crab was my favourite probably.

Buying new things as souvenirs:

Maisie (10): I got this necklace there...Me and [COUSIN] got matching ones...there was this big town place, and then on like the last day we were there they had these stalls up. And then I got it from one of them.

Seeing wildlife:

Lucy (10-11): I can't remember the place, but it was from a harbour, there was a big bridge there, and we went and saw seals, and it was the right time of year, so we saw seal pups as well.

Trying new activities:

Cal (10): So basically there's a big tube and it's filled with air and you get to, it's a mimic of skydiving.

What different young people described as new and exciting varied greatly. Some young people demonstrated within the same account how novelty could come from very different experiences. Lily, below, highlighted seeing particular famous tourist attractions but in descriptions of the same trip also spoke with huge enthusiasm about the towel animals that staff made on the cruise she went on.

Lily (11-12): Probably my favourite bit was the Colosseum, because that's the one thing I really wanted to see. [Figure 6-2]



Figure 6-2 Participant photo (colosseum)

Lily (11-12): oh I'll show you a really good photo [Figure 6-3]. So, we had a really nice cabin steward called, [NAME], and she did loads of different animals for us. So, these are all different towel animals. Yeah, and then, I've got them, I might have them in order. So, that was day one, day two, day three, four, five...



Figure 6-3 Participant photo (towel animals)

As with Ariana, above, there was no discernible difference in how exciting these two things appeared to have been for Lily, as if she appreciated the experience of seeing something new regardless of whether this was a 2000-year-old historical landmark, or a towel folded in a new way.

This appreciation for 'new' was similarly reflected in other participants' accounts of activities they did at home either in doing new things in local environments, or visiting more rarely experienced places e.g. cinema, bowling, arcades, activity parks etc. In addition to new experiences, young people spoke

about buying or being given new material things during the summer holidays, in particular in preparation for the return to school. The photo below (Figure 6-4) was included by Aurora in a photo collage she made of school holiday highlights for her second interview. This shows a new experience, in preparation for her return to school. She focused on the novelty of this, both in the photo caption, and the interview.



Figure 6-4 Participant photo (manicure)

Aurora (10-11): "It was more for going back to school. Because my mum won a competition. It was my cousin that did them. My mum won the competition for free acrylics, they're usually a lot of money. Well, not a lot, but expensive for this"

Aurora described this as a 'first' experience, implying that more of these experiences will happen in future. This sense of trying something for the first time, with the intention of future similar experiences, was reflected in others' accounts.

Going new places, getting new things or trying new activities did not tend to be explicitly discussed as part of any kind of development or growth, rather these descriptions often reflected the 'being' described in 6.2. However, there was also an implication that these new experiences represented a process of accumulating of new knowledge of the world (e.g. trying new food, seeing new

places). In prioritising these as ‘highlights’ and speaking with particular enthusiasm about these there is an implicit suggestion that accumulating new experiences matters to young people. These new experiences may expand their own understandings of themselves through discovering new likes (or dislikes), understanding what they value or not, and ‘becoming’ on their own terms in response to these. Some new experiences (e.g. acrylic nails) seem to be ones that might be more connected with an image of ‘adulthood’, where in trying these out young people were also trying out new ways of ‘being’ as part of their journey to becoming adult. Some more explicit examples of this sense of growth or development are discussed in the next section.

6.3.3 Testing boundaries, expanding responsibilities

The school summer holidays in Scotland, as with many across the world, demarcate the end of one school year and the start of another. For some, this also includes transitioning to secondary school from primary school, and transitions within these schools e.g. lower school to upper school, or starting new stages of qualifications. Related to the sense of novelty described above, young people spoke about new ways of being that they began to experience during school holidays, using the time to test the boundaries of parental or societal restrictions, or practice new future-focused responsibilities and behaviours. In simple terms, young people described experiences that could be considered aspects of ‘growing up’ during their summer holidays.

For some, moving to a new school year allowed for certain new responsibilities or allowances. Maisie who was transitioning from P5 to P6 had been practising walking to school on her own towards the end of term before the summer holidays and when interviewed 2 weeks after her return to school had been doing this every day of the new term:

Maisie (10): Like walking home, I’ve been doing that like, towards the end of last year I’ve been walking home with a friend or on my own if a friend can’t. And then this year I’ve been doing that like every day as well.

Researcher: You kind of practise that, like ease into it?

Maisie: Yes. Like it started with an adult like behind to make sure. And then we just started on our own.

The move to P6 seemed to signal this change for Maisie and the preparation before the end of term seemed to be designed to gradually ease her into this new way of being.

The school holiday time itself allowed other young people opportunities to test out new levels of responsibility.

Cal (10): I got to walk, see the park near [friend]'s house, I got to walk there by myself

Researcher: Ok so that's new, would that have happened if you weren't on holidays?

Cal: Na 'cause they'd have said no you've got school in the morning you're gonna be exhausted

Researcher: Ok, were you on your own or with [friend]?

Cal: Me and [friend], just the two of us

For Cal, the extra time offered by school holidays enabled this practising of new activities. Similarly, Will tested out going on the bus by himself, doing a short local loop while his mother was nearby. He spoke about the issues he encountered that he had to navigate and the rules that were agreed with his mother in advance.

Will (10): I wanted to do it. So, I went along to the [library]. I took the bus from there all the way round to the [cafe], on my own and then I came back...walked back.

Researcher: Is that the first time you've ever been on, like a bus or a train on your own?

Will: Yes. And I used my bus pass. And like, one of the buses was just forgotten about. It said that there would be a bus every ten minutes. So, I got there at 58 and it said there would be one at 02. I'm like perfect. The 02 one never came. But luckily there was another one in ten minutes.

Researcher: Were there rules about how you had to do that?

Will: I had to take my phone, so they could phone me. And my mum's got this app where she can track me. So, she tracked me and she said, if you're back...if you're not back in an hour I'll phone you and stuff. And she said, make sure you don't leave your phone behind. And it was like don't sit on the top floor because if you hurt yourself the driver won't see and stuff. And it was just like, don't talk to anyone. But that's like on everything. Unless I know them.

The preparedness that Will describes, understanding different possible eventualities that could occur, suggests a mutually negotiated plan between himself and his mother. It also suggests that his mother had involved him in her

reasoning behind certain boundaries she had set, allowing him to understand the broader context e.g. of using a location tracker. As discussed in 6.2.2 this involvement in decision-making may have enhanced a sense of agency that Will experienced in preparing for, and carrying out, these 'practice runs' on his own. This exemplifies where particular functionings for young people are the result of an incremental process of capabilities being gradually expanded, sometimes under the control of adults, but also where that expansion of capabilities can be done in gradual negotiation of boundaries between young people and their significant adults.

Young people spoke about a variety of changes to boundaries or rules that happened during summer, for some these might end up as more permanent changes to levels of responsibility (like those above). Others, for example later bedtimes/curfews or more screen time, might change again once school was back. Later bedtimes were experienced by most of the young people during school holidays and for those who were allowed out alone this also meant curfews being later or looser than in term time. As with Will above, several spoke about their parents either requiring them to keep in touch by phone, or having location-sharing enabled on smart devices and phones. None of the young people who spoke about digital location-sharing or being asked to keep in touch with parents by text/phone reported having any particular issue with their parents asking for this. Some spoke about it being a positive safety measure or seemed to consider it as a key part of them building trust and being able to have more independence on a more ongoing basis. John and Kyle were interviewed together. Both attended a local youth centre on a regular basis and spoke about building trust with parents to 'earn' more independence.

John (15): Recently my mum's become a lot more trusting of me because she knows I don't drink and she trusts me not to drink so she's kind of like, it used to be about 7, 6 or 7, I was allowed out to but now she's allowing me out to 7 'til 8, 8 'til 9 and that 'cause she trusts me now

Researcher: Yeah, so does that change in the holidays then? Do you get a bit later or is it just..

John: Yeah probably about 10ish. 'Cause it's light [in the evening] as well like I think it makes a difference. And obviously I've got a tracker, my mum's got a tracker on me now

Researcher: Are you fine with that?

John: Totally fine 'cause I know I'm not up to anything stupid anyway for her to give me into trouble

Researcher: So do you think that in some way builds her trust in you because you're kind of like proving yourself?

John: Yeah uh-huh just trying to be more of an adult more obviously turning 15 and that so it's just showing that bit more responsibility and respect towards her

Researcher: What about you Kyle, Have you got like similar boundaries?

Kyle (14): Aye like a school night or something probably come in about 9ish...it depends, my mum doesn't mind what time I come in at as long as it's not like late and she's trying to get to her bed same with my step dad and they two are working early in the morning but em they don't really mind. And in a holiday and that they don't mind if I come in that late like 10 or something 'cause they know it's my friends that are out and they don't want me to come in early while everybody's still out but I'm the same as John I've got a tracker on my phone which I don't mind 'cause my mum knows mostly that I'm here [youth centre] or getting something to eat with John and [another friend] and our other friends but aye I don't really mind...she said she thinks I'm like responsible enough to do my own thing down here with [youth centre] and that.

Similar to Will's description above, John and Kyle have experienced this expansion of capabilities and functionings. In their case they focus on the building of trust as being key to working toward a particular functioning, rather than the practising of practical elements of it. The incremental building of that trust seems to also offer them leverage in negotiating their own agency with their parents, allowing them new opportunities based on the previous functionings 'proving' their trustworthiness.

Both also spoke about the use of a location tracker. Where this kind of technology might be seen as an impediment to agency (Davis et al., 2024), instead these young people seem to see it as an opportunity to shape how they are seen by their parents, and in doing so enhance that agency. In figure 5-1 (CA model p101) fertile functionings are shown to impact not only on the conversion process but also the activation, transfer or conversion of different forms of capital from parents/carers to young people. In the case of trust-building we can see how by 'proving' themselves through particular functionings, these functionings alter conversion factors ('H' in Figure 5-1), in this case parent/carer attitudes, to expand the agency that young people have to choose how they spend their time. It is also possible that changes in parent/carer attitudes might impact on young people's resources ('C' in Figure 5-1) where parents might alter provision of resources e.g. money, access or other resources

needed to achieve functionings as a result. Previous examples of fertile functionings in Chapter 5 focused on young people's perceptions of formal learning as a means to future opportunities, and here young people instead reflect on other ways of developing, or growing toward future opportunities.

In other examples of fertile functionings, some young people focused on developing personal familiarity with, and confidence in doing, more independent activities. In these examples it was the incremental testing of *personal* boundaries, rather than *parental* ones, to build confidence or familiarity. School holiday time for some young people opened up more opportunities to be away from their parents overnight. Sometimes this was clearly part of a childcare strategy employed by parents e.g. grandparents taking young people for a number of days at a time. Sleepovers with friends featured regularly in young people's accounts, and opportunities for this seemed more related to 'more free time' than this being used as a childcare strategy by parents. Being away from parents seemed to open up more opportunities for broader independence for some young people. Corina (15) had gone with her family to visit extended family in Manchester. The rest of her family then left to return home, and she was allowed to stay longer and spend time with her older cousin (18), with a plan to later return home by train to Glasgow alone.

Corina (15): I've not been on the train by myself before.

Researcher: You went up from Manchester?

Corina: Uh yeah, Manchester to Scotland

Researcher: How did you feel about doing that on your own?

Corina: Scared at first, because I might get lost other than that, it was kind of fun. I plan to go to London to visit my cousin in October by myself.

Corina's older cousin had taken her to different places during the time after she had been left by her parents and they had spent time doing activities and shopping together. This may have allowed her a chance to more gradually develop a readiness for making the journey alone, giving her independence in the absence of her parents while still retaining some of the supervision of her extended family. She describes the emotional experience of taking this step as 'scary at first' but later 'fun' and reflects how achieving this functioning (getting the train by herself) has bolstered her to make another, longer, journey in future. Building confidence in this way might come from accruing practical

knowledge (e.g. knowing where to buy tickets) but it also appears to be related to the way in which individuals can reflect back on this as 'an achievement'. In other words, knowing you have previously achieved this functioning affects the ability/capacity ('F' in Figure 5-1) to do so in future similar situations but also the likelihood of choosing to do so ('G' in Figure 5-1) because you know how it felt to achieve it in the past. Lucy (below), who attended a week-long activity holiday camp without her parents, was explicit about how these opportunities for more independence seemed to lead to more confidence in trying new things.

Lucy (10-11): I think [ACTIVITY CAMP] has really helped that [independence], because like I just said, I didn't think that I would have done any of that stuff if you'd just said 'what do you want to do today?'. I wouldn't have said, let's go and do that.

Chris visited a friend in Perthshire, staying with his family for a week. During this time he tried new things, introduced to them by the family he was staying with but also had the opportunity to work with his friend's father.

Chris (15): Yeah, it was good...I worked with him and his dad...Joinery, So I earned money there...Yeah so I done that, and he's got a hot tub so went in the hot tub and the rest of the time just sat about. We played golf twice so we did...I haven't done it here [at home]. I've only been to the driving range here but we played on a course up there...it was good.

Rather than a more implicit sense of growing in confidence or independence there was a sense from Chris' account of his trip that he considered the opportunity to learn joinery as more explicitly related to his development in a practical sense, trying out potential options for a future career. However, having the chance to be away from his family perhaps allowed him to step away from the role of 'child' and model behaviours that might be associated with an adult identity.

Although the focus groups in the study consisted of young people actively involved in youth arts organisations, several of the young people interviewed separately were involved in similar youth organisations, including arts-focused ones. For these young people, school holidays opened up more opportunities to be involved with these organisations and to develop more responsibilities with them. Nicole (15) has been part of an orchestra for several years and during her summer holiday took on a volunteer tutoring role with the younger children

involved. Similarly John, Kyle, George, Sean and Owen took on volunteer roles at the summer programme for the youth organisation they attend regularly throughout term time (discussed further in section 6.5). In ways similar to those discussed already in this section (building trust with parents/carers, and building confidence by pushing personal boundaries) the young people involved in these organisations spent their term-time engaged in achieving a variety of functionings facilitated by the organisations, building the trust of the staff and their own confidence in their abilities. As a result, they were offered, and took up opportunities to develop new roles over the summer, helping run the school holiday programmes.

6.3.4 Summary

Young people's learning and development continued in a variety of ways over school holidays. More structured or formal learning continued to some degree, with participants seeking out opportunities, driving their own learning or continuing to engage in learning through structured leisure. New experiences were particularly valued by participants both for the excitement or 'novelty value' itself but also for the ways that this led to new knowledge about themselves and the world around them. School holidays, through a variety of different contexts also opened up space for developing new ways of 'being', seen in incremental changes as part of a development toward adulthood as participants tested personal boundaries, and those negotiated with adults, to expand their sense of agency and responsibility.

6.4 Making and maintaining social connections through School Holiday leisure

Although young people's descriptions of their school holiday experiences were often centred on the activity or experience itself, they were also saturated with references to *who* they did these activities with. Social connection was experienced differently for many young people compared to term time, including out-of-school time during term. The aim of this section is therefore to explore the ways in which school holidays (not just being out of school) acted as a conversion factor for young people's social functionings. Family (section 6.4.1) and friends (section 6.4.2) were two key groups that young people spoke about

connecting with during school holidays, and in some cases school holidays created a disconnection from those that are normally close contacts during term.

6.4.1 Connecting differently with family

The presence of family members and family pets featured regularly in young people's accounts of their school holidays. There seemed to be two ways in which this would present, often crossing over between both: using holiday time to engage in leisure activities with family members present ('family leisure' - (Mukherjee, 2020)) and a subtly different type of account where young people spoke about using holiday time *for* social connection with their family (close and extended).

Young people often used the plural pronouns 'we' or 'our' in their descriptions of their school holiday activities but in many of these it is difficult to know the extent to which these leisure experiences were experienced as leisure by the other family members, particularly adults. Young people did give some examples where the level of active participation that adult family members played in activities was implied or explicit but even where participation was clear, it is impossible to know without speaking to them directly whether this was experienced as leisure by those family members or if their engagement in the activity was as facilitation of the young person's leisure experience.

Often when using plural pronouns to describe their holiday activities and experiences, young people tended to focus more on the activity itself and their personal experience of it rather than how they felt about being there with family. For example:

Maisie (10): [speaking about a holiday to England with her family] We did not forget about TV. There was still lots of TV. But that was more like at night time and then we did loads of like, we went to the beach and did all the activities during the day and then relaxing at night.

However, some young people were more explicit about the shared nature of the experience with their family, including details of the family members' participation and/or highlighting the value they saw in the 'who' they were with as well as the 'what' they were doing.

Nicole (15): Me and my mum went to this like water obstacle course. It was so much effort to get back on. My mum had to, we had these big life jackets, my mum had to drag me back up... And we were on a zip line as well in the water. And we done paddleboarding. It was good though. I got to spend time with my mum. I'm really close with my mum. I tell my mum everything.

Shared personal interests were highlighted by some young people in describing leisure time spent with family e.g. playing sports or computer games, implying a certain level of adult participation.

Some young people described the importance to them of having the focused attention of a parent/carer in family leisure time, without other family members present.

Aurora (10-11): I didn't put the girls' day that we had down [yet].

Researcher: What did you do on your girls' day?

Aurora: We went shopping and stuff. In the town.

Researcher: What was good about that?

Aurora: I got to spend time with my mum without my dad and brothers. Because that doesn't happen all that often.

Aurora implied here that spending time together with her mum was the main purpose, rather than the activity itself. When young people were asked directly about how they felt that school holidays impacted on their wellbeing, or what they enjoyed about school holidays several gave answers around spending time with family.

Ariana (12-13): Staying off school during the summer holidays has a positive effect and spending time with my family during the summer holidays.

Again there is an implication here that it is the time together that is valued, regardless of the task. Longer school holidays can present a practical challenge to families where parents/carers work (Campbell et al., 2015). In this study, most interview participants reported that their parents looked after them most of the time. Some young people had parents who only worked in term time, some reported their parents shared care between them (living together or in separate households), some worked from home with the young people present or were able to take them to workplaces, and some used additional support of grandparents, friends and holiday clubs/programmes. Depending on their age some of the young people were left alone for short periods, or went out

unaccompanied with friends. Some young people described the kind of management that their parents had to employ to ensure they were looked after during the holidays.

Lucy (10): Mum and dad [look after me]. But because, so mum stays at home some, and does clinics some mornings. And she works enough time so this weekend she's doing nights so she, like, makes sure it fits around us and dad and that and she would never do anything that, that made plans turn at really short notice. So I think we're supposed to go seven days to holiday club thing, which is a day care, but just where we go for after school and that. And then there's also tennis camp, so we'll go five days to that as well.

Parents/carers may be more inclined to take time off work over summer, partly to avoid potential child care costs, but also to make the most of improved weather or to go on a holiday, as such these holiday periods might also represent increased leisure time for parents/carers, and therefore opportunities for shared leisure with their children in ways that differ from term time. School holidays for some young people and their families offered an opportunity to visit family who live further away and several young people described trips to see family both within the UK and abroad. For those young people whose parents were first generation immigrants to the UK, and whose grandparents lived a considerable distance away, longer school holiday periods were the only feasible chance to be able to visit without young people being out of school.

Corina (15): At Easter, we usually go to China to visit my grandparents and all that. About the whole of the Easter holidays. So around two to three weeks. It depends how long the school holidays decide to be...we do split our time between them. Moving from my mum's side to my dad's side.

However, even for young people whose extended family lived much closer, school holidays also offered an opportunity to spend more time with them.

Aurora (10-11): I'm looking forward to staying at my grandparents' house over in [area in Glasgow] ...We go for a week, basically a week. It's really fun.

Some young people mentioned the impact COVID-19 had had on keeping even these closer connections with family in the preceding two years. For Oscar, below, this had meant a reduction in seeing his grandmother over the last two years.

Oscar (13-14): Me and my dad went to my grandma's for my birthday, and that was only for four days. She's in England. She lives in Yorkshire. We usually see her, like, a couple times a year, but 'cause of COVID and stuff it's been a lot harder. So she's come here most recently, but we went down there during the summer.

Several young people interviewed spent time visiting other parts of the UK, often combining this with seeing extended family. Given the previous two years of restrictions on even local travel, and ongoing concerns about COVID-19 even after restrictions lifted in the summer of 2022, it is possible that staying in the UK for holidays, and spending as much time seeing extended family in this way might not be representative of these young people's experiences before the pandemic, although no participants explicitly said this had changed and some may even have been too young to remember a 'regular' holiday before the pandemic.

Although some social experiences with family were unaffected by being on school holidays, many instances in participants' accounts showed how an extended break from school can enable new or different functionings to be achieved, particularly around social connection with family. Much as 'free time' expands young people's individual capabilities (see section 6.2), having young people out of school enables families to use this time more flexibly to engage in activities that school term would normally constrain e.g. visiting family abroad, going trips together. Beyond experiencing extended time together, participants also reflected on the increased opportunities that school holiday offered for more focused and meaningful connections within family units and for maintaining connections with extended family.

6.4.2 *Being and Becoming with Friends*

Friends featured regularly in how young people described their school holiday experiences. For the most part this consisted of the company young people might keep, in person and digitally, while engaged in leisure activities during the school holidays but some spoke more about the importance of these friendships, and what they valued (or missed) during school holiday time, and how they kept connected during this time.

There was a broad range of different activities that young people said they would do with friends but time spent with friends was often spoken about in a more general and vague sense rather than naming or describing particular activities. The age range of participants (10-16) meant that there were some differences in the language young people used to name this general time with friends. The younger participants tended to use the word “playing” and older participants instead seemed to favour words like “hanging about” to describe the more momentary, ‘being’, experiences they had with friends.

Lily (11-12): And like I've got a friend I like playing with, who lives just up there. He's seven, and even though there's such a wide age range, we don't really mind...And we'll just probably play over the summer. I usually go out playing and stuff.

Nicole (15): Normally like I even just hang about near my house cause there's a park there. There's a little bit called [nickname]...it's this bit where you can walk about...There's a lot of parks near my house so we go there a lot.

When young people spoke more specifically about particular activities or events they experienced with friends, most of these activities could be typified as casual leisure. Within that there were distinctions between those activities that young people would do individually in parallel while in each other's company (e.g. some computer gaming, watching tv) and activities they would do where they were more actively engaged with each other (e.g. playing football, going for food). Playing sport (particularly football) and being outdoors (in gardens, parks and streets) featured strongly in young people's accounts of time spent during the holidays with friends, as did eating together or going places for food.

The value young people placed in keeping connected with friends during holidays seemed to mainly centre on in-the-moment enjoyment and fun.

Maisie (10): Loads of just play dates and meeting each other at our houses. And I'm going on a walk with [FRIEND] today... It makes them feel happy and it makes me feel happy.

Aurora (10-11): Well, I think I just have lots of fun with my friends...I see them a lot in school but I feel like it's funner when it's not in school.

Others spoke about being able to share mutual interests with friends, sometimes in ways that differed from how these could be shared with family.

Islay (15): I mean like I kind of like I organize very different things with my friends than I do my family and like I tend to kind of talk about different stuff with my friends and my family, because with my friends it's more like the common interests we have, but my family doesn't want to hear about [computer game] for an hour.

Some young people connected the in-the-moment enjoyment with friends with longer term value like nurturing good mental health and strengthening existing friendships.

Kyle (14): If you were like feeling crap or anything like that then if you're out with your pals all day then you're not gonna be thinking about it, helps people get their mind off it.

Taylor (14): It's like you get to learn a lot about your friends because for me I spend like way more time with my friends normally in the summer holidays. It was like me and one of my friends, we were spending essentially every day together so it was like because of that now we're like close as anything.

Young people highlighted activities that they got to do with friends that either only happened during holidays, or were considerably more likely when school was not on e.g. trips away together. Of these, sleepovers was one of the more prominent activities mentioned.

Islay (15): We have quite big sleepovers with that smaller group of friends I was talking about, like about six of us, and sometimes we'll do it over like two nights and I always really look forward to them.

The presence of friends may also have enabled some activities, providing more safety or bolstering young people's confidence, as with the descriptions of testing boundaries alongside friends in 6.3.3.

Friendships that young people discussed were not limited to those with friends from school, and holidays were also seen as a time to connect with friends who attended different schools and family friends. Some participants also spoke about making new friends, locally or while on holiday, and some through holiday clubs/programmes that they attended. These were particularly important for those participants who found it challenging to maintain contact with school friends over holidays, or who did not have strong friendships at school.

Descriptions of casual leisure activities, like those of Kyle and Sean below, often seemed less detailed, perhaps reflecting the impromptu choices young people make in those moments, mutually agreeing how to spend that time.

Kyle (14): Aye you'd wake up, go to [youth club], go to a game, go to this, go home.

Sean (15-16): We'd probably go out after it [youth club].

Kyle: We'd go to the park after it and we'd stay there 'til about half ten just kicking the ball about and then we'd go home and that's probably when we'd sit on a call and play the PlayStation for like an hour or something and we'd just sit on the phone.

As with the way Chris spoke about similar experiences in 6.2.3, these vague descriptions may also signify young people creating a boundary in terms of what they share with me, an adult, about this adult-free time and space spent together.

As discussed in Chapter 5, seeing friends was often framed as a positive feature of school, and being able to spend time with friends over school holidays could be a challenge for some young people, especially when they or their friends were going away from home, or already lived quite far apart.

Leia (11): Well I think it's quite important that you have access to...I don't know, just some sort of technology that allows you to communicate with your friends and stuff so that you don't have to just go all round to their houses just to talk to them, so that that you can stay in touch.

Aurora (10-11): Yeah I would contact my friends to see if they're like, then can like either call or play a game or something...I would mostly want to go out with my friends somewhere but like sometimes I can't because like one of my parents isn't in, like one's working, the other's watching us.

Leia and Aurora, above, reflect the experiences of several young people who spoke about the resources and conversion factors required in enabling young people to maintain contact with school friends during holidays. These factors tended to centre on parents/carers, for example being allowed to go out without adult supervision, being given a means of digital communication, or parental facilitation for meeting up with friends.

As with their descriptions of school friendships, young people centred the importance of friendships in their school holidays. These social connections with

friends often seemed to accompany, enhance or enable momentary ‘being’ experiences, as well as developmental ‘becoming’ ones. Having agency to maintain these connections was important, but young people identified that in the absence of school, doing so was subject to the availability or certain resources or conversion factors that would enable this.

6.4.3 Summary

School holidays change the landscape of social connections with friends and family. In section 6.2 and 6.3 I outlined some of the different activities and experiences that young people have during school holidays so it follows that the people they do that with (or without), and how they interact with each other in that context, will also differ. Without the routine and structure of school life, friendships might require different ways of being maintained, but equally without the constraints of this daily structure there is more time for family relationships to be enacted in different ways or different places compared to term time.

6.5 Case study: young people’s experiences of enhanced capabilities in a school holiday programme

In this chapter I have explored some of the features of school holidays that enhanced young people’s wellbeing, highlighting how this time can affect young people’s agency and expand the capabilities they have to achieve functionings that they value, both in the short term for ‘being’, and the longer term for ‘becoming’. In this study, the majority of young people attended some kind of structured leisure school holiday programme during their school holidays. For some of these young people these programmes acted as conversion factors enhancing their capabilities to achieve functionings that they valued and might not have otherwise been able to achieve.

According to Scottish Government statistics 23% of children were living in relative poverty in Scotland in 2021-24 and three quarters of children living in poverty live in households where the adults are in paid employment (The Scottish Government, 2025). As I explored in Chapter 2, school holidays can create significant financial burden on families (Stewart et al., 2018) and families

may not be able to ‘turn up’ the parental investments of money and time to compensate for the absence of school (Hastings and LaBriola, 2023) particularly in lower income households and where parent/carers have to continue to work over this period. Free or low-cost school holiday programmes in areas where parents/carers are experiencing economic disadvantage can therefore play a key role in supporting families during school holidays but can also go above and beyond simply providing childcare by creating safe, enriching and fun environments for young people to ‘be’, ‘become’ and connect with others. In this study the data generated with a small group of participants (n=5) attending the same youth organisation (Youth Project A - YPA) are worthy of specific attention and are presented here as a case study. This is because they not only exemplify the ways such organisations can enhance young people’s capabilities, but because one of the key aims of this organisation is to serve young people living in an area of high deprivation (see section 4.4.2.2 for further detail on YPA).

Five of the young people interviewed for this study were regular attendees at YPA throughout the year. During the summer holiday when they were interviewed (2022) they had also contributed to the project as volunteer Young Leaders (pseudonymised term), a role that had been developed by the project’s staff to encourage and support young people to engage in a more responsible role within the organisation. The Young Leaders acted as volunteer helpers across YPA’s summer programme, arriving early to help set up, supporting groups of young people attending the summer programme and helping organise activities under the supervision of the project staff. The summer programme ran every weekday throughout the summer holiday (without charge) and the young people interviewed attended for most of this time, as such the accounts of their school holidays were dominated by their experiences there. Some of the feedback they provided was focused on the summer programme, and some more broadly about the youth project and the opportunities they felt they had had by being part of it.

Experiencing school holidays as Young Leaders in YPA

New experiences: Participants spoke about the opportunities they accessed through YPA that were, for the most part, not opportunities they would normally

have. These were opportunities to engage in a range of free leisure activities with their peers in a safe and enjoyable environment during school holidays and included badminton, football, games consoles, arts and crafts, table tennis, pool tables, Lego, bouncy castle, organised games and some trips to leisure activity centres e.g. trampolining, go-karting, laser-tag. Organisations being able to provide resources, and supporting young people to convert these into chosen functionings is crucial for those young people who do not have access or support to do so in school holiday time. However, rather than simply being a way of keeping young people occupied and safe in the absence of school, there were a number of additional functionings that participants seemed to be able to achieve, particularly in the role of Young Leaders and these will be described below.

Building responsibility: The young people in a Young Leader role during school holidays took on particular additional responsibilities in the holiday programme compared to their term-time experience in YPA. John (below) spoke about this sense of responsibility and how it was nurtured in the youth project, and that taking on this Young Leader role was seen as an outcome of trust built having risen “through ranks”.

John (15): [speaking before the upcoming summer holidays] Yeah I've got a really good deal because of [YPA], and also a lot I think as you grow up in [YPA] they start to show you a lot more, treat you like an adult, sometimes like, I know a lot of people over the summer, and I'm gonna be trying it over the summer as well, they get a [Young Leader role]...I know a lot of people that do it just now that do it so they do and it goes up through ranks.

In section 6.3.3 I explored how young people experienced cycles of fertile functionings as they incrementally built confidence in themselves and the trust of their parent/carers to develop new functionings. In YPA a similar incremental development happened in interaction with YPA staff over term-time that then opened up new opportunities during holiday periods to take on this role.

Being in the moment, Time for agency: The young people who took up Young Leaders roles seemed to have done so entirely through their own choice with no sense from any of them that this had been a decision that was particularly influenced by parents/carers or the youth project staff. Although they were in

roles of relative responsibility, the Young Leaders still spoke about choice in being able to decide different activities during their time in the holiday programme, and of having fun and enjoying their time there as well.

George (12): Aye, every week I was there every day. I was obviously looking after the kids and then I got a bit of free time. I got to do badminton and then just do stuff like that. You are watching the kids and maybe you will get to do your own thing. But it was really good, it was a lot of fun.

Although George's role as a Young Leader meant he was being asked to supervise those attending the programme, he describes a balance between this responsibility and having self-directed time for his own enjoyment. This relates to both earlier themes in this chapter around the value of agency in choosing how to spend time, and being able to enjoy these experiences in the moment.

Social connection with peers and non-family adults: The social connection that YPA offered these young people was clear from the way they interacted in the centre, and with each other during interview. In the absence of school, organisations like YPA can be an important source of social connection during school holidays, but even during term-time this organisation seemed to nurture relationships between young people and non-family adults in ways that contrasted with the experiences these young people had with teachers at school.

John (15): It's good for you and all that in the sort of sense that you get familiar faces, everybody's nice, stuff like that yeah.

Friendships were explicitly spoken about, but there was also a strong sense of being at ease in each other's company and in the company of the adult staff. The adult staff spoke to them with respect and there was a clear sense of respect and trust reciprocated by the young people. George and Sean spoke about support offered to them by the staff that seemed to contribute to this respect they had for, and trust they had in, the staff:

Sean (15-16): [STAFF MEMBER]'s helping me get the bus pass thing tomorrow and he can help you get jobs and that as well.

Researcher: So they help you beyond just having a place for you to come and do activities?

Sean: Yeah they help you with stuff you need as well.

George (12): They're always telling us if you need somebody to talk to we're always here.

Sean: They'll help you with anything you want, even schoolwork or anything.

In turn this support and respect seemed to be modelled by the Young Leaders. For example, Kyle, below, spoke about helping the young people attending the summer programme, making sure younger participants were included and enjoyed their time there.

Kyle (14): Sometimes a wee wean [child] hasn't won a game in a while... if it's a [Young Leader] and a kid in the final you've to let them win so if somebody hasn't won a game in a while you end up doing a kid's game with everybody.

Many of the functionings that these young people achieve in YPA are clear practical experiences and activities e.g. learning/practicing a skill, and the organisation are a conversion factor in enabling young people to choose these functionings. However, there are also other functionings such as being responsible or being supportive that emerge out of the multitude of experiences they have in this supportive environment. In the interactions they have during the year, young people have opportunities to develop and exercise agency, build confidence and trust supported by adults who recognise the particular challenges that young people in this area might experience. For these young people, school holidays are a time when the fertility of these year-round functionings are realised, and when particular new capabilities are expanded.

6.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored young people's experiences of leisure time in school holidays and how this affects their wellbeing in terms of the capabilities and functionings during this time. In Chapter 5 I highlighted what young people valued about the various functionings they were able to achieve (e.g. learning), was often located in goals or aspirations for adulthood: their motivations were future-orientated. I drew a parallel between these future-driven values and the social construction of childhood as a process of 'becoming' an adult. In contrast, in the first part of this chapter (6.2) I explored how participants' accounts of school holiday leisure time demonstrated that what they valued about the functionings they achieved (e.g. playing) was often located in current fun or enjoyment: their motivations were present orientated. This reveals an alternative construction of childhood, as a time for 'being'. In describing these

‘being’ experiences participants revealed the ways they were able to exercise and experience agency in new ways, being facilitated by the increased free time that school holidays created and the new or repurposed spaces they were able to inhabit during this time.

In Chapter 2 I detailed the narratives that have dominated the academic discourse on school holidays and highlighted the deficit approach these have often taken in declaring school holidays as a time for ‘learning loss’. In contrast to this I presented in 6.3 an alternative framing of school holidays in which learning and development, or ‘becoming’, still occurs in the absence of school. Through explicit learning practices, or more implicit acquisition of knowledge and experience, building of skills and responsibilities, young people demonstrated how the choices they made in the leisure activities they engaged in were not only motivated by pursuit of immediate enjoyment, but also by the more future-orientated goals they had for themselves.

In school holiday leisure, as with time spent in school, social relationships were a key factor in how young people experienced the various activities they took part in. In 6.4 I explored how young people’s social interactions change during school holiday time, and how these can act as a conversion factor in achieving functionings (or not). In the absence of the structure of school, young people’s experiences of both friendships and family relationships were altered, with some opportunities to connect being enabled, while others were constrained. Throughout their accounts, young people placed considerable value on their social relationships and their ability to enhance subjective wellbeing, as well as enabling or enhancing capabilities and functionings.

I close the chapter with a case study that highlights the valuable role that school holiday programmes can play in some young people’s experiences of school holidays. In the absence of school, not all young people will experience school holidays in the positive way that the participants in this study have. However, understanding these positive experiences can help reveal ways in which school holiday programmes can meet the needs of young people, beyond simply providing activities. This might include ensuring there are opportunities for young people to have self-directed time and agency over the spaces they inhabit, or ways to develop responsibility and learn new skills that are of value

to them. This case study reflected on some of the ways this organisation is providing such opportunities for young people. Some of the key features highlighted in this study will be reflected in the next chapter when I explore the similar experiences of young people in community arts organisations.

Chapter 7 The role of creativity, and Community Arts Organisations, in School Holiday wellbeing

7.1 Overview of Chapter 7

This chapter explores how school holidays impacted on the creative practices of young people, and the creative spaces they occupied, and how in turn this affected their wellbeing. The chapter is split into two distinct parts, the first of these focuses on creativity in school holidays, specifically on young people's agency in relation to their creative experiences. This draws on data across pre- and post-holiday interviews with young people, and focus groups in community arts centres. The second half of the chapter focuses entirely on the two community arts organisations exploring what it is about these spaces that lead young people to engage with them, and what young people can achieve as a result of this engagement. This draws solely on data from the focus groups with young people volunteering in these organisations, and interviews with adults employed there. In doing so this chapter aims to focus on answering RQ3: How does engagement in creative activities affect young people's experiences of school holiday time?

7.2 Creative Agency in School Holidays

In chapter 2 I outlined the predominant academic definitions of 'creativity'. However, as with the term 'wellbeing', these definitions may not necessarily correlate with how young people conceptualise this term. In order to contextualise young people's accounts of creativity in this study, I asked them in their interviews and focus groups to describe what creativity or 'being creative' meant to them. These responses related to both their own definitions of 'creativity' and what they perceived to be of value in being creative. The ways participants defined creativity varied in similar ways to academic definitions: some described it in terms of art forms or skills (e.g. 'Big-C' (Glaveanu, 2010)) or as the process of producing something new. However, most focused on describing creativity, and their creative pursuits, in terms of what being creative allowed them to do, and how they felt as a result.

As explored in Chapter 6 (6.2.2 and 6.2.3), young people in the study tended to experience enhanced agency during school holiday time through increased self-directed time and control over the spaces they inhabited, allowing them to make choices in how they used their leisure time in ways that differed from term time. As a result, many participants chose to engage in creative activities during this time. Young people's accounts of their own creativity revealed two different but related accounts of their agency: *using* agency and *experiencing* agency. This section will explore these two nuances of creative agency firstly focusing on how participants spoke of *using* their agency to achieve a desired functioning (7.2.1), and secondly how it felt to *experience* agency through the practice of being creativity (7.2.2). Lastly, it will revisit a cross-cutting theme of this thesis in examining how participants compared their creative experiences, and agency therein, across the environments of in-school and school holidays (7.2.3).

7.2.1 Using school holiday agency to achieve creative functionings

Almost all participants reported engaging in some kind of creative activity(ies) over the school holiday period. Participants recounted a broad range of different examples of creative functionings across what could be considered structured, casual and family leisure (Mukherjee, 2020). These varied in terms of the level of adult supervision, with more casual leisure activities tending to have less adult involvement but sometimes requiring facilitation, for example in the provision of resources. Some of these creative experiences were examples of engaging in, or experiencing, particular art forms (e.g. drawing and painting, crafting, dancing, photography, playing or listening to music, going to lessons or classes for music, art, drama, dance) but there were also more subtle forms of creativity discussed (e.g. inventing things, solving puzzles, cooking/baking, editing/creating digital media, creating games, learning/helping out with joinery, imaginative play, coding, making videos, building Lego or digital worlds).

Focusing on artistic and creative practices offered some young people an opportunity to be able to avoid boredom or have control over keeping

themselves occupied, exercising their agency to meet their needs in the present moment.

Alena (10): And if I'm bored then I would get my sketchbook.

Corina (14): [describing the impact of drawing] Keeping my mind off all the tedious things

Corina, above, implies that drawing offers a distraction from things that might be on her mind. This echoes the self-reflective way that participants in Chapter 6 were able to exercise agency in a responsive way, choosing how and when to engage in different activities during their school holiday time in response to how they were feeling.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I explored how young people valued experiences that had both impact on their current wellbeing, and perceived value for them in the future. Similarly, creativity and creative practices were also framed in this way, as potentially leading to specific careers in creative industries, or where creativity would be useful in future work and life more generally.

Will (10) - It definitely helps you in life, especially...with some jobs it helps you better than others... if you're engineering stuff, maybe you need to design this new engine for a rocket, you need to be creative and use your knowledge and think, this might not work or it might do something else.

Cal (10): [speaking about why going to drama class is important] My dream is to be in a movie, like a marvel movie

Those who accessed creative opportunities in the community arts centres involved in the study also spoke about these future benefits, this is explored in section 7.4.

Young people who participated in pre- and post-holiday interviews were encouraged to collect or record their school holiday activities to help them remember these for the second of the two interviews. Some participants chose creative ways of documenting these or chose to bring creative artefacts for their follow up interviews, showing the value they placed on being creative. This included photos that young people had taken themselves with some presented to me in creative ways, for example as collages and slideshow videos.



Figure 7-1 Photo collage

One participant made a series of digital collages (Figure 7-1) showing the different activities and events that she had experienced over the holiday period. Some of the collages showed a number of different activities she took part in, and others focused more on one event or theme. Each collage was different, and she had taken time to add comments in different colours and fonts with different backgrounds and emojis to embellish these. The example above shows a series of images that she has chosen in order to illustrate her comment about going far out in the water. In all her collages the images she chose and the way she presented them seemed to have been intentionally done to evoke a sense of the activity in me, the viewer.

Similarly, another participant made a paper collage (Figure 7-2) with photos and images of things he printed out to show the different activities he took part in.

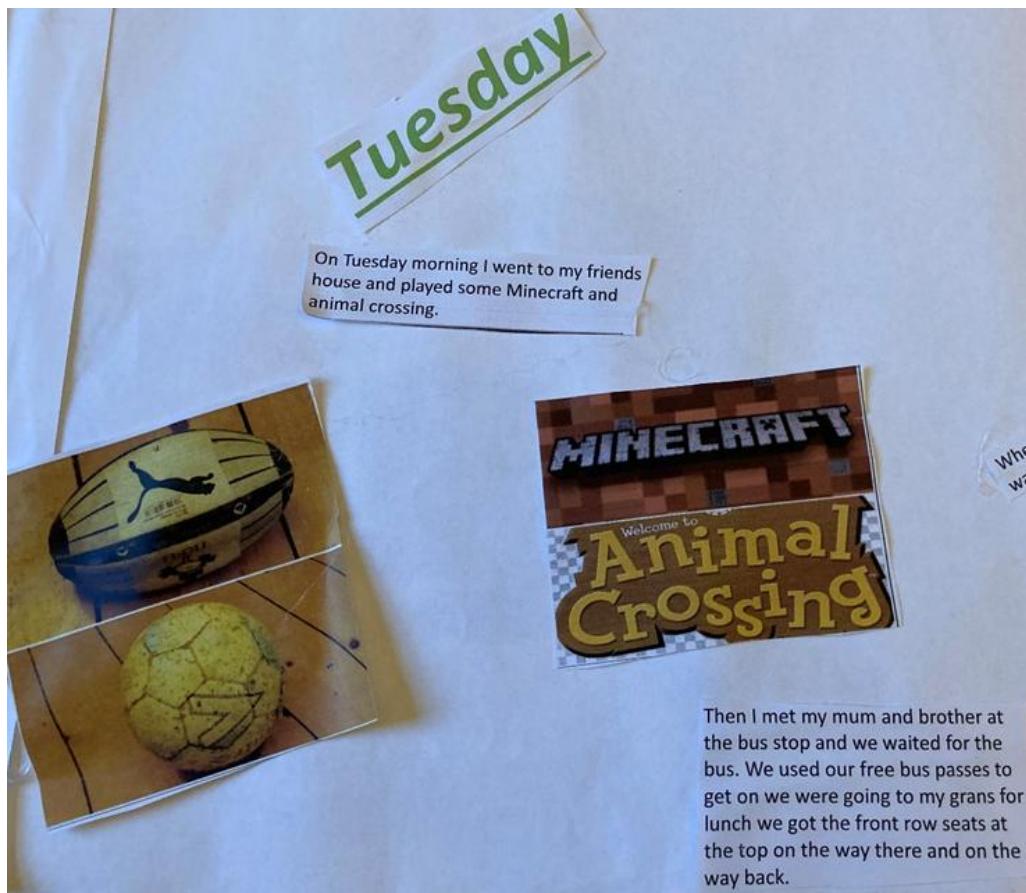


Figure 7-2 Paper collage

He went into more detail for some of the elements he included on the collage, for example the bus journey described in the bottom right, thus drawing more attention to these, making sure they were included in our discussions and highlighting their importance in his experience of the holiday period.

Some participants showed pieces of art that they had been working on during the holiday period. Several participants sent me images of drawings and paintings they had been working on; one showed me over a video call the paintings she had made at her youth arts project, and another showed me her painting and sewing projects in person (Figures 7-3 and 7-4).



Figure 7-3. Participant's digital art

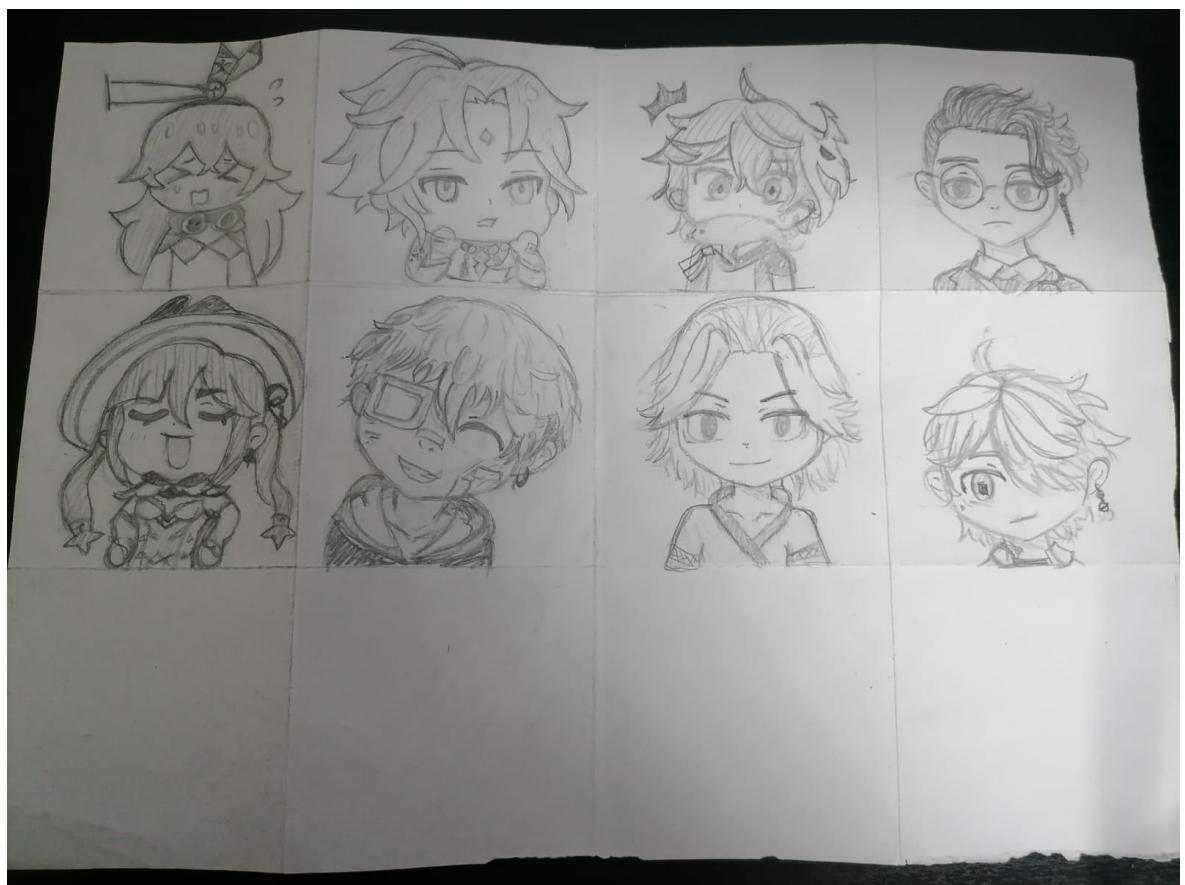


Figure 7-4 Participant's drawings

Both participants above spoke to me about the different techniques and materials they liked to use in creating their art, the process they normally adopted in creating, and the kind of styles that influenced them.

During the post-holiday interview I offered participants the option to draw or write their holiday experiences using a timeline approach, although I left it open to participants how they decided to draw this (see Chapter 4). Some participants took up this suggestion and drew and populated timelines of their holidays during the interview while they discussed the different experiences and events they marked on these projects. While most of these had a linear representation of time, some participants had a different approach. One participant, for example, drew a mountain range and wrote different activities in the peaks and valleys of these (Figure 7-5).



Figure 7-5 Memory path/Timeline (mountains)

Another participant took a less linear approach and drew different areas of the sheet with different activities and events, using symbols and icons to signify different features of the holiday period (Figure 7-6).

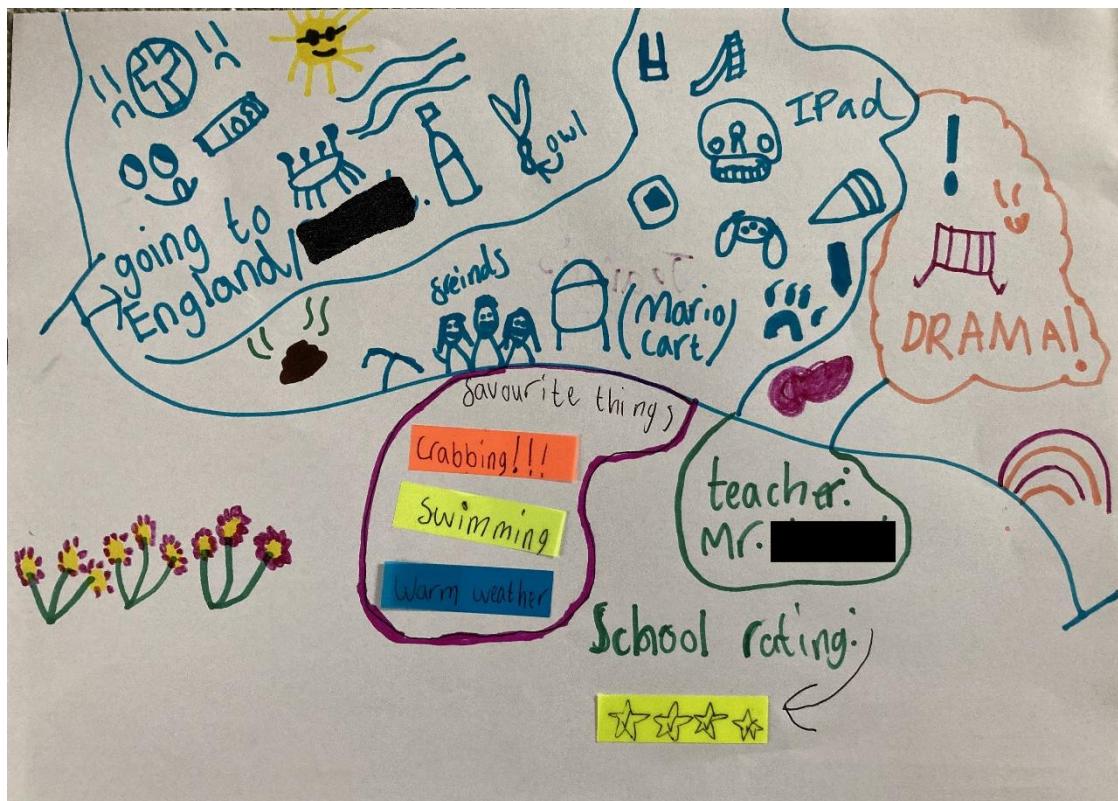


Figure 7-6 Memory path/timeline (symbols)

In Chapter 6 I identified that increased free time in school holidays can act as a conversion factor, enhancing young people's agency to choose functionings that they value. As described above, participants in this study were able to achieve creative functionings in school holidays, but many of the creative activities described by participants also required resources to be available to them. This was not only in terms of material or financial resources but also other commodities such as parental time, physical space at home or opportunities in the community. In the example below, Lucy described some of her creative capabilities during school holidays.

Lucy (10-11): We have quite a few days where we just sit at home. We might go over to the park, or we might go for a little walk or something, but generally we get to do what we want. So if we say to mum in advance like Mum, we want to do playdough today, then we can do that. And there's lots of different things that we can do. We've got a whole cupboard filled with art stuff and paints and creative bits, and Mum and Dad try hard to get us that sort of stuff for our birthdays and Christmases so that we have them.

In Lucy's case, unstructured time during the holidays allowed her to self-direct how she spent this time, but parental resources in the form of art supplies and

allocated space allow her to convert this free time into creative functionings that she values. Her parents, and their level of support, act as conversion factors here since they not only facilitate her being able to choose, but plan for resources to be available for her to use. This reflects a similar sense of interplay that is discussed in Chapter 6 between young people and their significant adults where young people's position as active agents, able to choose and lead decision making, is negotiated and constructed mutually between adult and young person.

In describing their various creative functionings, participants often spoke about the way these activities or experiences made them feel, or the purpose they felt they served in benefiting their subjective wellbeing, this will be explored in the next section.

7.2.2 'Being' an agent through creativity

Many of the participants descriptions of how being creative made them feel seemed to centre around agency, particularly in feelings of freedom, control, autonomy and an ability to be seen as an independent individual, capable of creating.

Will, below, described a freedom he experiences in deciding where to take his creation.

Will (10): So when I'm doing creative drawing or creative writing or just creative, really, anything, I just feel...I don't feel... What's the word? I don't feel controlled. I feel like I can just run wild. If I'm doing clay, oh, should I add a tail onto this thing? Oh, yes, I'm going to add a tail onto something that doesn't usually have a tail then it just might turn amazing.

He alludes to a sense of 'being in the moment' that accompanied this, which echoes the temporal experiences of school holidays more generally (Chapter 6, 6.2). Alena, below, similarly described this 'presence' in going wherever her imagination took her in the activity without any planning or predetermined direction.

Alena (10): Sometimes when I'm drawing I don't know what to draw. So then I just draw something random, and it turns out to be good...

sometimes I draw something. I don't like it, so I rub it all out and then I draw something else. And I look and I see. I look at it. And when I look at it, I see something that I can draw. So then I just do it. I don't even know what it is. It's just a thing.

Although it was the process of being creative that several young people focused on in terms of how it made them feel, Lily (below) links her own sense of subjective wellbeing more with the output, of achieving something.

Researcher: Do you think that being creative or doing creative things affects your well-being or how you feel?

Lily - Yeah. It makes you happy...Not for some people. It might not make everyone happy.

Researcher: But it makes you happy?

Lily: Uh-huh

Researcher: What is it about being creative or doing creative things that makes you feel happy do you think?

Lily: It makes me feel like I've accomplished something.

For some young people it was clear that doing something creative was not simply about the end product created but that there was a greater imaginative process accompanying the activity itself, a sense of being in control over where it would go and being able to express that however they chose. Several participants, particularly the younger ones spoke about imaginative play. Cian (below) spent large parts of his holidays with his cousins (of varying ages) in different types of imaginative play that required organisation between them and incorporation of different ideas and cooperative storytelling.

Cian (11): We [participant and his cousins] opened a café... Then we kind of, kept that going for a couple of weeks or so and we got like ...it was in one of my cousin's houses and it was just, kind of, in the lane.

These kinds of descriptions imply that the activities were led by the young person (or group of young people) and their imagination(s). Even in a group, young people felt they still had a relative freedom to make choices without the guidance or involvement of adults, incorporating their ideas into the game creating the story together in the moment.

Being able to control the story, driven by their own imagination, was evident in some participants independent activities too. Rosa (below) showed me a painting she had done and talked me through it in detail including the names of the

planets and aspects of each that suggested imaginary back stories had evolved for these while she was painting it.

Rosa (10): We've got a cat planet and then we've got the rose planet, we've got like a wave planet... There's like this little like kind of stripy planet... A random purple planet, actually it's the lonely purple planet. And then we got, this was my first planet, it was a pink planet.

Researcher: How does it make you feel when you're doing these drawings?

Rosa: Happy

In these accounts it seems that, similar to experiences of school holiday leisure, not only is the agency in a creative process important to young people but the feeling that comes from being the agent making the decisions and achieving the resultant functioning.

For many of the participants, being able to express their identity and emotions was central to being creative. This not only speaks to the *feeling* of being an agent in a creative process but additionally points to the value young people placed in being recognised as such by others.

Nicole (15): I used to think it was just like 'art'. And being creative in art but you can be creative in your own style and everything and your own music and all that so that's what I think it is, just like your own self, your creative style and everything. 'Cause not everything has to be about like drawing to be creative you can have creative styles and music taste and everything and stuff you want to do is creative so.

Irina (13): If you weren't really creative then you would just be the same as everybody else and then you would have the same everything as everybody else and then it would just be like everyone in the world would be the same.

Both Nicole and Irina describe creativity in this sense, as a unique expression of identity and individuality through the way we present ourselves and the things we do.

Having freedom to express feelings through creativity was seen by some young people as in and of itself important in improving or maintaining wellbeing, as described by Corina (below).

Corina (14): I think it's kind of important, since you can express sometimes, not for everyone, but you can express your own feelings in creativity.

Others, like Sian (below), linked this more specifically to the idea that creative expression and practice offered a direct therapeutic benefit in relief of stress or anxiety.

Sian (16): I definitely think being creative like has a very positive effect on your well-being as it gives you like an outlet. So like if you're stressed about anything like even if you're not doing anything related to, like, what's stressing you or whatever, like, I don't know, whenever you're stressed, like just sitting and like drawing something or like you can take your like anger out, but you can also just, I don't know it gives you like something to do to distract yourself from like if you're stressed or like unhappy about anything.

Sian described not only this 'outlet' of creative expression as important in reducing stress, but also that creative practice could be intentionally employed as a coping strategy as a distraction from challenging emotional experiences.

The sense of agency here extends not just to having the ability to choose actions independently, but also to being able to manage processes within herself, not being controlled by her emotions. In expressing how creative agency made them feel and what they were able to achieve with it, young people once again related this to their comparative experiences of being creative in school. These will be explored in the next section.

7.2.3 Comparing creativity in and out of school

As I discussed in Chapter 5, it is difficult to consider school holiday time without the foil of school time, and in young people's accounts of creative experiences this was no different. Schools provide formal learning opportunities in arts subjects and participants spoke about opportunities to study art, music and drama at school, both secondary and primary school levels. However, for the most part participants' discussions focused mainly on music opportunities when comparing creative opportunities in and out of school. Free musical instrument lessons are available in some Scottish schools (varies by local authority) but access is increasingly inequitable (Wilson et al., 2020) with significant unmet demand and increasing numbers of local authorities charging fees (Broad et al., 2019). Some participants in this study had been able to access free instrumental

lessons in school, although these were not available to everyone and young people had to go through a selection process to be able to start learning. Some of those who accessed free lessons also had access to paid for music lessons in their own time. The community arts organisations participating in the study offered free and low-cost music lessons to their young people (see 7.3) and some interview participants in the study also accessed free music tuition in other similar community arts organisations. Although school music departments in Scottish secondary schools tend to have ensemble opportunities, none of the young people in the study spoke about taking part in these and any musical groups that young people spoke about were accessed entirely through community arts organisations.

There were opportunities for creative practice for participants in their schools, but several young people described these as feeling different or limited compared to creative experience outwith school. Schools were framed as a place where creativity was assessed, controlled and defined. For some, simply the experience of being at school was felt to impact on their creativity, which was able to flourish more during time away from school.

Jay (13): I think it [being creative] helps your well-being because like, especially with being at the summer holidays and stuff like school suppresses that creativity so much that it's just like you...as soon as you don't have to wake up early to go to school and then you wake up and you're feeling better and you can do stuff and you can be creative then it just helps you so much more.

For Jay, being in or out of school seems to act as a conversion factor for achieving creative functionings. Specifically, he linked his ability to be creative to having agency in school holidays over practical elements such as waking time (which echoes experiences of others described in Chapter 5) and the knock-on impact this might have on a sense of wellbeing, and ability to engage in creative practice.

Some participants centred agency in their comparisons, describing school as a place that they felt limited artistic self-expression.

Sam (15): Usually like I love art but not in school because they tell you what to do. You're not really expressing yourself. But maybe here [community arts organisations] you can do that...Same with music and

stuff like if you wanna do your own stuff they [the school] don't really let you

Jay (13): If the definition of art is self-expression and you can't express yourself in art class, then you're not really *in* art class

There is something of a paradox that Sam and Jay felt existed wherein the teaching of creative subjects, through the parameters and restrictions required to assess it academically, seemed at odds with encouraging artistic expression. Similarly Daisy, below, spoke about the requirement to do both theory and practical parts of these subjects in schools as a potential deterrent from choosing these subjects.

Daisy (13): If you do like expressive subjects like music and drama, yeah, it's not optional like if you want to do only theory or only practical you will need to do both of them because like 60% of your grade is practical, in drama anyway, actually and in music. 60% of your grade in music and drama is practical.

Some young people felt they did not want to pursue arts subjects because of the need to do both theory and practical elements, with preference for one or the other being given as a reason for wishing to exclude the other e.g. wishing to compose music but not perform for an audience as would be required in examination. Some, like Corina (below) felt that they wanted to keep creative pursuits for out of school time (as leisure), and this perhaps alludes to a comparison of enjoyment between in-school and extra-curricular arts experiences.

Corina (15): I didn't pick art for school. I would like to keep art as like a hobby.

Corina spoke at other times about concerns over getting "good grades" to open up choice in her future, so she may have had concerns about the value of arts subjects. As discussed in Chapter 5 a subject hierarchy and narratives around the value of arts for future employment or education can guide choices around subject selection. Other participants had faced barriers in choosing the creative arts subjects that they wanted to because of timetabling issues limiting selection of multiple arts subjects, and the requirement to take certain non-arts subjects, again perhaps pointing to a particular bias around the value of these.

The young people who were particularly engaged in performing arts outside of school tended to do so via arts organisations and most reported that they did not select creative subjects in school. Nicole had been playing music via a community music project for several years and had become an accomplished musician, playing in ensembles, volunteering with their school holiday programme and accessing nationwide opportunities after being put forward by the organisation. She had chosen not to take music at school and was reassured by her conductor's experiences.

Nicole (15): Yeah. I didn't pick music in school. But [conductor], he's the conductor. He was like, I didn't pick music in school. And I'm still a conductor here. And I go to all these, I have all these opportunities. He used to travel the world.

Some participants alluded to an academic hierarchy with subject choices or spoke in ways that suggested they (or those around them) did not value arts subjects. Islay, below, appeared to place less value on drawing even although she spoke at length about her enjoyment of this, because spending her time doing schoolwork would be of more benefit to her in terms of career choices.

Islay (15): It's really annoying because if I'm doing like schoolwork or something that's actually important, then I'll be just thinking like I won't be able to like, focus on it for that long. But then, art, which is something that I enjoy but not considering a career in is something I can like focus on for like five hours straight.

Researcher: You said it's not as important. So why is it not as important?

Islay: I don't really know. Just like it's not qualifications that kind of like determine what you do in your life, I don't really know.

This future-focused prioritisation was apparent in several participants of similar age who were beginning to take subjects or sit exams that would determine their next academic opportunities. Given the need to achieve certain exam results to access further and higher education opportunities it is understandable that parents, teachers and young people themselves would place such importance on academic work. However, given the benefit that young people in this study reported from school holiday leisure time, and the associated agency and opportunity to do non-academic activities that they value, it is reasonable to assume that a negative impact on wellbeing could be associated with limiting or preventing these activities in order to prioritise academic study. Staff in both

participating arts organisations had recognised this from their perspective, with some young people not attending as much near exam time. One staff member spoke about concerns they had with schools' approach to teaching creative subjects and encouraging creativity more generally, and their perception that schools did not recognise the benefits for young people's wellbeing (and schoolwork) that creativity could bring. They felt that because creative subjects had particular restrictions that this excluded some young people from being able to have creative opportunities.

Staff2: You know the schools judge every animal on their ability to climb a tree, you know, which is not. It's not gonna work for all these young people...[a young person], his music teacher told him there's no way he would pass drums, so he should stop the subject. He's like, 'I want to do it' so [youth worker] volunteered to teach him because the teacher's like 'I'm not showing you anymore, he's not gonna pass anyway'. But this kid loves drums more than like anything else...absolutely loved it. So [staff member] taught him and spent time with him.

They continue this (below) in highlighting the hierarchy they perceive between academic work and creative endeavours out of school.

Staff2: We've had young people that's advice [from teachers] has been to stop doing extracurricular activity because they need to concentrate on their exams...the term extracurricular kinda makes it like this is just a wee extra thing that's not as important as the things you need to do here when really it's as important for all of us to be creative, whether that is drawing or art or anything

There is a sense throughout the data, even from those who value arts subjects and their engagement in them, that being creative, whilst seen as important for wellbeing is not as important as longer term academic and career-related achievement. An underlying message in this stance is of course that wellbeing itself, particularly subjective wellbeing in the present, is not as valued as longer-term material achievement. This links back to one of the key points in Chapter 5, where young people perceive school as something to be endured, for longer term gain.

7.2.4 Summary of 7.2

Young people in this study demonstrated the ways in which school holiday time allowed them more agency with which to achieve creative functionings in ways that were not possible, or more limited during term time. School holidays expand creative capabilities in this way but in achieving these functionings young people were also able to *experience* agency in the active process of being creative. There was a stark contrast in young people's experiences of arts and creativity in school, compared to that of school holidays. Despite the benefits that young people attribute to being creative, this is not always prioritised in their lives. Community arts organisations offer an alternative environment to school in which young people can find creative opportunities and experiences. As I will go on to detail in the final section of these findings chapters, these organisations enhance young people's capabilities in a multitude of ways, while still placing value on *creative* capabilities and functionings.

7.3 Experiences in Community Arts Organisations

As detailed in Chapter 4, part of the data generation for this study involved engagement with two community arts organisations in Greater Glasgow through: a) focus groups with young people who attended the organisations on a regular basis (including throughout holiday periods) and who took on additional volunteer responsibilities; and b) interviews with staff involved in running the organisations. The analysis presented in this section is based on the data that specifically related to the organisation itself, rather than broader school holiday or life experiences.

A quote from one of the arts organisations' staff distils why it is of value to understand the experiences of the young people in these settings.

Staff1: I think the difference is, fundamentally, between somewhere like here [arts organisation] and somewhere like school and the home environment is that you don't have to be here. So young people are electing to come into this space and then there's a why around that.

The aim of this section is therefore to address this "why": why young people elect to come into these spaces, what is it that they value about being there and how this relates to their capabilities and functionings. The themes presented

here explore the importance of young people feeling safe and being able to build confidence as a result (7.3.1); feeling part of something, equal and connected (7.3.2) and being supported to grow and develop ways of being that impact on them both in the present and the future (7.3.3). In 7.3.4 I will bring these three themes together to examine them more directly within a CA perspective.

7.3.1 Feeling safe, building confidence

Having an inner sense of safety, physically, emotionally and socially, was a commonly valued feature of the community arts spaces into which young people chose to enter and engage. They connected this sense of safety with having a positive impact on their own wellbeing, particularly on growing and maintaining self-esteem and confidence.

As described in Chapter 4, groups were given a set of cards showing twelve ‘capabilities domains’ (see Appendix 4) as prompts for our discussion. Both groups of young people independently selected ‘being safe’ as the first capability card that they wanted to discuss in relation to the arts centres that they attended. In both groups, the definition of ‘safe’ was broad ranging from a sense of safety in expressing their individual identity and opinions to a physical safety in the environment of the arts centre. They linked this to a sense of acceptance and freedom from judgement, that they experienced within the arts centres.

7.3.1.1 Identity safety

Participants considered their arts organisations as ‘safe spaces’ where they could be themselves. Central to this safety was feeling understood by others and able to feel free of judgement.

Erin (16, ArtsOrg1): I feel like you’re more seen here.

Walter (16, ArtsOrg2): You don’t get judged.

Erin (above) implies a relationship with others in the arts centre that allows her to be known and understood by others in a way that is different than her experience in a school environment. These themes of freedom to express themselves and share how they feel without judgement were reinforced in

interviews with arts centre staff. They highlighted this sense of safety as a key conversion factor impacting on the choice young people made to keep attending.

Staff1: - They're coming in here because it's a space in which they can express themselves.

Staff2: - I think young people here, they express their selves, they're comfortable with staff as well and they're super open with us as much as they want to be, which is... they're always told that they don't need to tell us things that they don't want to. But even without us asking, young people are very open about how they're feeling

In this second quote above the staff member draws on the relationships between the staff and young people as a causal factor in creating a level of comfort necessary for young people to feel able to express themselves. Staff and young people linked the ability to express themselves not only with having an environment in which they felt comfortable doing so, but also as an outcome of the increasing confidence achieved from engaging in the different aspects of the organisation (explored further in 7.3.3).

Young people described how coming to the organisation made them feel more positive, even in the short term. Walter and Elliot below talked about how being in the arts centre affects how they feel and behave.

Walter (16, ArtsOrg2): I'll leave here and I feel like Jesus

Elliot (14, ArtsOrg2): Yeah, Jay and I just walk out of here doing the catwalk.

Some young people, like Daisy and Bob (below), spoke about the contrast they saw in how they felt and behaved in their arts organisations compared with how they felt and behaved at school.

Bob (12, ArtsOrg1): But also here like you can tell like this is like way more friendly than school.

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1) - See in here, I don't care, I'll talk to anyone but like outside of here I'll like, I'll usually shy away in the corner. Like in school I'll sit in the corner and I will not say a word. I won't put my hand up in school or anything but here it's completely different cause...safe spaces, spaces you feel comfortable.

Daisy's reluctance to participate in elements of school was echoed in other participants' comparisons of school and arts centre participation. In Chapter 5 (5.4.2) Elliot and Amy spoke more specifically about the outcomes they anticipated in school (bullying) as a reason for their lack of participation compared to that in the arts centres. For them the attenuation of their own behaviour in school was in order to mitigate against harm. Without this perceived threat being present in the 'safe space' of their arts centres they felt free to behave differently, more in line with their individual identities.

This was further reinforced by staff members in recounting their observations and thoughts about how the young people might differ in this environment from that in school.

Staff1: It's holding a mirror up to you in a different way. You're seeing a new facet of yourself. And I think for the first time perhaps outwith the school environment and outwith the family environment...They're seeing themselves in a different way, their esteem is being built because they can see 'oh I *can* do this' or 'this helps somebody else'.

This staff member suggests that not only can young people feel safer being themselves in this environment but that being there helps young people see and understand parts of their identity in new ways, particularly around what they are capable of achieving.

7.3.1.2 Physical safety

Although emotional and social safety were central to discussions in both organisations around 'feeling safe', young people also discussed how the organisations made them feel physically safe. In ArtsOrg1 the young people told me about an incident that had led to new security doors being put in..

Amy (15, ArtsOrg1): They put those doors in to make sure everyone's in and secure now... And everybody checks the door when they come in to make sure the security door's actually shut and it's not the wrong way round.

In addition to describing the physical safety measures, Amy implied a sense of shared responsibility around making sure the doors function effectively and that the building, and occupants, remained secure. This links to both themes of

feeling a sense of ownership in the organisation and developing responsibility that are discussed later in 7.3.2 and 7.3.3.

Similarly in ArtsOrg2, Elliot described how the behaviour of staff signalled the importance placed on physical safety by the organisation but also the care that staff showed toward young people.

Elliot (14, ArtsOrg2): Another one for feeling safe is like [Youth Worker] won't like go home until everyone does.

Sam (16, ArtsOrg2): ...He'll make sure that everyone gets home alright.

There was a sense from young people's descriptions of the level of care and thoughtfulness that staff had, that the boundaries of this care stretched beyond the end of a shift or the closing of a building, and that this was recognised and appreciated by the young people.

7.3.1.3 Creating and maintaining the 'safe space'

Staff and volunteers (which the young people participating were) were seen as key to creating a 'safe space'. The ways in which young people felt that staff and volunteers achieved this was through non-judgemental, caring and encouraging attitudes and behaviours.

Researcher: OK, so tell me, what is it about here that makes you feel safe?

Bob (12, ArtsOrg1): The staff and volunteers

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1): They just want everyone to feel safe and feel valued and cared about.

Daisy and Bob were both volunteers and so were not only speaking as young people experiencing this safe space but also as agents responsible for reproducing it for others. Daisy emphasises not only the importance of participants feeling physically safe but also emotionally safe. She positions herself as both a receiver and giver of care within this space and this relates to themes developed further in 7.3.2 and 7.3.3.

There was a clear trust exhibited by the young people toward staff, with young people offering specific examples of staff responses to safeguarding concerns, or how they anticipated staff would behave around disclosing and discussing

problems. Although young people felt they had more confidentiality with staff at the centres compared to school situations, they were also very clear with me that they still expected staff to act in a way that was appropriate to safeguard the young people.

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1): If you voice a concern and like it'll get took up to a safeguarding officer and they'll take it seriously if there's a genuine concern, if say, if it was at school, at home, wherever you are, [ArtsOrg1] will ask you about it, make sure you're OK and if needed, they will go to someone who'll get you help if you're in an uncomfortable situation.

Inherent in building and maintaining this trust seemed to be the belief that staff were listening to young people and taking time to understand what they were saying and how they were feeling

Walter (16, ArtsOrg2): You're listened to. You can talk about anything. And they'll sit and listen to your story.

This reflects again a sense that young people felt they could speak without judgement, contributing to an environment in which they were safe to be themselves. For young people experiencing additional marginalisation this was particularly important.

Taylor (14, ArtsOrg2): No judgement. I would say that's one of the biggest things about here. Like a lot of the people here are LGBT+ or something that you might get judged for right, like.. Alternative like yeah? But here everyone just kinda respects that, it just is a thing.

Riley (15, ArtsOrg2): Yeah well I'm autistic, and whenever I need to stim I can just go ahead and stim without any judgement about it.

Staff in both organisations spoke about how representation of marginalised identities in the staff group appeared to be especially meaningful to the young people, in both allowing individuals to feel comfortable in their own identities, and more broadly in celebrating diversity and encouraging inclusivity.

There is recognition in these young people's comments of a sense of equality as being "differently equal" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), where they can feel equal in status to the adults in these spaces while at the same time acknowledging their differences. These young people feeling empowered to speak to adults in a way

where they feel equal but while also being open to guidance from them suggests that they experience agency in these relationships through being able to seek support, and in being responsively supported.

Encouraging reflective practice in the young people seems to be one way in which staff develop this atmosphere of guidance without disempowering.

Staff1: So that's great that you feel safe. How do we help to maintain that for other people? How did you feel when you first started coming? And that's the beauty of that model, especially with young people, the peer led model is so powerful.

In asking these kinds of questions of young people, staff are handing the power to those young people to actively consider why they feel safe, and how that can be reproduced and maintained. The next section offers further examples of staff practice, and these are explored more directly in 7.3.3.

7.3.1.4 Opportunities to practice and develop confidence in a safe space

Although a general sense of 'feeling safe' was seen by the young people as helpful in contributing to them building their confidence, participants also gave examples of the kind of practical steps that organisations took when to enhance young people's capabilities, for example in supporting them to gain confidence around musical performance.

Amy (15, ArtsOrg1): Most of us when we joined, and were getting lessons, we didn't feel that confident even doing that and some of the staff members and volunteers would come in and sit in with us for like the first 2 or 3 lessons and then they would leave while we were in the lesson and we didn't even realise and at the end we'd be like 'I've done it myself', and become more confident in themselves.

Amy (above) gives an example of how different individuals needs are met by the staff, where young people are supported to navigate around potential barriers to their creative learning e.g. initial lack of confidence. Bob, below, focused more on the social confidence that he felt developed by being around different groups of young people and adults in the arts centre environment.

Bob (12, ArtsOrg1): [You] learn how to be confident around people.

The staff member below highlighted how creative practice can be particularly challenging for young people to grow confidence in and emphasised the need to appropriately support that development.

Staff3: The exposure that [creative expression] comes with, that is huge that you, you need to feel safe to do it, and if you don't feel confident that you're going to be safe and supported in the environment, then you're going to expose yourself creatively when it might be something really emotional. Whether it's a bit of visual art you're creating, or a musical performance, or a film that you're making, or a script that you're writing, if you put yourself in it.

There is recognition by this staff member of the specific vulnerability associated with expressing emotions or elements of 'self'. The way that they chose to frame this is not specific to young people and instead implies that any person, regardless of age, is likely to experience this vulnerability. This phrasing in itself emphasises the way that staff considered young people as equals, while acknowledging differences that might exist (e.g. lack of experience and confidence). This consideration exemplifies the care that young people reported feeling from staff, and that I felt in listening to how they spoke about the young people in their centres.

While these arts centres offered young people the opportunity to 'do' things that they might not elsewhere, this theme highlights the opportunities to 'be' that such spaces can provide. Through producing and reproducing an environment of mutual care and trust young people are offered an environment where they are able to express themselves in ways that feel limited in the school environment.

7.3.2 Mutuality and connection

Throughout the accounts of both young people and adult staff members in arts organisations there were repeated examples of reciprocal feelings toward each other, as well as shared views and feelings about certain issues. Participants demonstrated and described a strong sense of community and connection with peers, including adults, and of collective ownership over the space and what they felt it represented.

7.3.2.1 Being treated like an equal

Young people perceived the staff's approach to them to be centred on treating them like equals or 'like adults'.

Amy (15, ArtsOrg1): They look at us as the same as them.

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1): Like everybody, like people will treat you like an adult. Like they won't, regardless of your age like [ArtsOrg1] will treat you as you're an adult. No matter what age you are, they take you seriously. If you've got a concern, they're gonna look into it. They're not gonna be like, "oh, they don't know what they're talking about, they're just 15, they're just whatever age."

Daisy, above, focuses on being 'taken seriously' and implies that the norm is that young people's knowledge or opinion is usually dismissed by adults. Others framed their relationships with staff as being built on respect.

Walter (16, ArtsOrg2): Here there's a mutual respect.

These ideas were reinforced in interviews with staff, who explicitly emphasised their intention to foster an environment where young people are respected and treated as equals across the age range. The staff member below gave some examples of how this is done in practice, with the common thread that young people are treated in ways that would not differ from adult participants in the same space.

Staff2: When young people come here, they soon realise that we speak to them like we would anyone. We speak to them just as an equal level because we just see everyone as the same....But we've had young people in here that are still, they're putting their hand up to ask questions or asking if they can have permission to go to the toilet, which is something that we keep saying 'don't ask, just let me know you're going'. Like, imagine saying 'no' to somebody. 'No, you can't go to the toilet'... it's ridiculous that kind of stuff, I've had young people come in here and call me Sir. It just is force of habit.

This staff member described how young people naturally fall into a performance of 'pupil' around certain interactions with adults in the centre. This staff member implies that rules like this are not conducive to creating an environment where young people are treated equally. Highlighting how young people can take

time to adjust to this kind of approach, suggests that this is embedded in how young people approach interactions with adults, even outwith school.

7.3.2.2 Being listened to, and interested in listening

Young people spoke frequently in their groups about feeling listened to by adults in their arts organisations and how this made them, and their ideas, feel valued. The ways in which this led to a sense of the organisation as a ‘safe space’ are discussed in 7.3.1.

Walter (16, ArtsOrg2): Like here we can like speak. It's like we're valued as like we're not just kids you don't know what you're on about it's like at [ArtsOrg2] they want our opinion more than like an adult like you're just valued more.

Walter (above) describes feeling that young people’s opinions are not just equal but hold higher value than adults. This links to staff framing their organisation as being led by young people, more than simply run in consultation with them.

An undercurrent of mutuality was often present in these descriptions where young people would describe not only the feeling of being listened to by the adult staff members but also their own interest in listening to the opinions or experience of the adults. While some of these descriptions were centred around learning from staff experience in a practical sense, e.g. in learning instruments or setting up equipment, others referred to a subtler communication between staff and young people centred more on small talk and sharing of personal interests. Elliot and Sian, below, frame this kind of interaction as ‘casual’, or the staff as ‘down to earth’ but there seems to be a deeper sense of connection as if these smaller interactions around shared interests might build an openness and trust that can be utilised when young people need to speak about something more serious.

Elliot (14, ArtsOrg2): And the people here are more down to Earth and like they have respect like around us. And like you can tell they are still an authority figure but like it's really different to a teacher, because if you're like talking to a teacher, you don't really want to talk to them.

Sian (16, ArtsOrg2) And it's not just like, [Staff member]’ll have conversations with you quite casually if you just want to talk to him

about something whereas in school the teachers don't do anything like that.

Elliot: Like, yeah, like [Staff member], I talk to [Staff member] about like comics and stuff. And it's just like I could spend like, a good 30 minutes doing that. But in school, you'd like, have no like authority to do that. At all.

Elliot describes the staff as still retaining some kind of 'authority' but perhaps rather than being reflective of a hierarchy between the two this could be interpreted as a sense of trust and an acknowledgement of a supportive role adults can play for young people in society rather than a straightforwardly authoritative one (developed in 7.3.3). There is an inference that young people can experience equality within their interactions with these adults while being aware of the differences between them, and that their sense of agency is enhanced by connecting and interacting with these adults on topics of mutual interest. Both young people use the comparison with teachers here, implying this opportunity for more casual small talk is missing in those relationships. Interestingly, Elliot does not put this down to a lack of time or space for this kind of interaction but rather their lack of "authority" as a young person, implying a sense of inequality within those relationships. The staff member below reflects this same feature of these relationships but links this directly with young people feeling more able to be themselves around staff.

Staff2: When young people come in, they realise that we do speak to them in hopefully that similar language...a similar language to what they're used to, or they can speak to us about music or interests that. I still feel like I have the same interests as when I was their age...I think all the staff here have that, you know? Which is good, and hopefully that cultivates that kind of thing that when these young people are out and about and they see you in the street, they'll stop and chat to you and have patter with you and you know it's really nice to see and it brings it out in them as well like they can be more themselves around you.

This staff member elaborates further, in that shared interests are not the only feature of these positive interactions but that the language or tone they use might also play a part. The use of 'patter' in this cultural context implies a sense of fun in the kind of small talk that is being engaged in, and they suggest that using this as a tool in these interactions allows young people to feel more able to be themselves.

For some young people, being listened to was important in terms of them feeling safe, as described in 7.3.1. For others they recognised that being listened to had an impact on how the organisation itself was shaped, from the activities offered to the general ethos.

Sian (16, ArtsOrg2): [Youth group] is entirely meant to be, like, we lead it. So like, if you didn't want to do something, you could just say to them and they would like, not make you do it. Or like if you really had something you wanted to do if you can find a way to do it, they would help with it.

Staff1: I think that's why it's so important then, when we work with the young volunteers, that they are able to see the tangible results of what they do. Because it's not just a pat on the head. They know immediately if they're being fed a line. They need to know that what they're doing is actually fundamentally vital to the inner workings of this organisation... And that your contribution matters and is important and valued.

The quotes above emphasise how the existence of youth volunteer roles and a general youth-led ethos emphasised equally by both the young people and the staff in both organisations, highlighting the shared vision that was held around this. The opportunities that this way of working led to, and the perceived impact of this, are discussed further in 7.3.3.

7.3.2.3 Peer connections

A strong sense of connection, collective purpose and ownership was evident in the way young people in the focus groups spoke about their organisations and interacted with each other. On my visits to the arts centres, to introduce the study and later to run the focus groups I was able to observe the way that the young people interacted with each other. In both centres there were comfortable seating areas, couches and floor cushions. The young people sat close together in these, often in direct physical contact. In one centre where the focus group participants sat on couches, the physical closeness extended to some of the participants draping legs or arms across or over each other. They seemed entirely at ease doing this, and it seemed a regular way for them to be with each other. This behaviour demonstrated to me the closeness of their connections with each other, and how comfortable they felt in the environment of the centres. In their focus groups, young people spoke about the kind of

community that existed within the organisation, the connections and friendships they felt they had made in being a part of their organisations.

Daisy (14): [ArtsOrg1] is a family

Amy (15): I was gonna say [ArtsOrg1] is a family... I wouldn't know her [Daisy]. We've been friends for seven years, that's a strong friendship, seven whole years.

Daisy and Amy made these statements emphatically and passionately. The description of the group as a family seemed deep and sincere. When the groups were speaking about this level of connection with each other some of the statements rendered an emotional vulnerability in the speakers but their level of openness and comfort about speaking about each other like this suggested to me that this was not the first time they had discussed issues like this together.

Some participants spoke about how these relationships had developed and highlighted shared interests they found with each other as being a facilitating factor in this.

Fraser (14, ArtsOrg2): So see the very first time I came here, I sat next to Walter and we talked about music and films for like the full of [volunteer session]. It felt like I'd known him like 5 years. Same with everyone after I got to know them, yeah.

Others felt that a sense of shared ethos rather than specific interests had been important for them:

Irina (13, ArtsOrg2): When I came here I wasn't really interested in media or anything that [ArtsOrg2] does, I came here basically because there were people from my school and I just moved to [TOWN] and I was trying to find friends and I was like, OK, this sounds pretty nice. So I just met people and we actually don't really have a lot of stuff to like together in general, but it's so nice just to hang out with people like... We just, you know, we have just same mentality.

Irina speaks about being able to 'hang out', a phrase that came up several times across the interviews and focus groups. As described in Chapter 6 this was often used without further description of what that entailed and may emphasise this as time and space where young people experience and exercise more agency together as a group.

Taylor, below, used a similar term 'meet up...and just chill'. They felt that the collective commitment to the group made it a particularly positive experience and implied that the routine of seeing each other regularly helped develop these relationships.

Taylor (15, ArtsOrg2): For me, I'd just say that it's quite like a nice wee thing, just like having this group of people that just are willing to meet up every single [week] and just chill... every single week this wee group of people just volunteer themselves. And then because of that, you end up getting close.

Staff in both organisations were explicit about their intention to foster this sense of community both within, and as part of, broader society.

Staff3: See the second someone comes in the door we say to them they're a member of [young people group]. There's no hierarchy like you're either you're not a member yet or you are a member, and everyone's voice carries the same weight.

Staff1: Because what you're doing there is you're working alongside your friends. And you're part of something bigger. And I think as human beings, there is a fundamental need to be part of something bigger to be part of this social whole...contributing towards a community and society and that our contribution matters no matter what it is we're doing.

The regularity of seeing each other throughout the year in out of school time, not just during the summer holiday activities, was a feature of both groups and ultimately may have affected how school holiday programmes and activities were taken up and experienced there.

Building this community of young people and a strong understanding of their needs and desires was seen as key to staff in building a responsive approach in the opportunities they facilitated, including those available specifically in school holidays. Staff spoke about the importance of longevity and embeddedness in their communities as a way of ensuring the support and opportunities they offered met the needs of those communities, essentially finding ways to strengthen themselves as a conversion factor or broadening their impact.

Staff1: The important thing is that you're getting it right, so what you're putting on the ground is what's needed. And you know, as an

organisation based in the community, you know what's needed because you're listening to your membership.

This sense of being both led by a community of young people, but also protective of them through responding appropriately to their needs is explored further in 7.3.3.

7.3.2.4 Community connections

Beyond a strong connection with each other and the organisations, young people and staff spoke about the value they saw in connection with communities outwith the organisation itself. This included the local community members, other partner organisations including schools and with a broader cultural and occupational creative community.

Participants spoke about how their organisations support the broader local community, including families of the young people attending, either directly or by signposting or supporting access to other services. One organisation had a community food cupboard where people could donate and collect food items, the other ran sessions for adults where there was free food alongside a creative activity. Daisy, below, reiterated the non-judgemental ethos that underpinned how staff approached supporting families.

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1): Like, in [ArtsOrg1] no one, none of the participants or the parents are judged for anything... If they notice something, if they think it's worrying... they would take the parent aside and ask if they needed help

Although young people in focus groups alluded to support that their organisations offered to their parents and families, staff spoke more explicitly about this. They also noted that there had been a recent shift in the level of support needed for families as the strains of the pandemic and cost of living crisis became more apparent in their communities.

Staff1: We work more now in support of the families than we ever have before, so we've got much more of a relationship and we know much more about the background of a lot of young people than we used to, and I think that just tallied with how difficult things are for people at the moment.

Staff2: It's about chatting to the parents as well, now more than it has been and helping them understand things as well.

Connecting with the young people in their organisations and the local community was not only seen as being supportive, staff also described looking for ways to welcome in new members and celebrate the diversity of those already in their community.

Staff1: - So we're looking at how we become even more inclusive than we are at the moment, so how we work with those families to really celebrate cultural differences and cultural similarities.

There were a range of examples given by the young people and staff of arts and creative industries opportunities that occurred in their organisations. Staff described how these opportunities not only relied on in-house expertise and experience of the staff but also on the connections to broader artistic communities that they brought with them because of their professional experience in this area. These kinds of opportunities will be explored further in the next section.

7.3.3 Opportunities for developing and exercising agency and responsibility

7.3.3.1 Young People as Volunteers

Informal and formal feedback from young people was important to both organisations but a key strategy that both used to embed young people as part of the organisation structure (rather than a user of it) was with volunteering roles. As described in Chapter 6, this was also the case in Youth Project A, and for another young person who took part in the interviews, who attended (and volunteered at) another community arts organisation. In both community arts organisations in the study this had initially grown from more of a youth forum strategy and had developed over the years into roles that required leadership and responsibility. The young people spoke about short term and long term impacts they experienced (or anticipated) from being trusted with this level of responsibility, in particular how this connected to their own sense of agency.

At both arts organisations the volunteer groups influenced and informed the direction of the organisations, alongside other young people attending. However

both volunteer groups had additional responsibilities, if they chose to take them up. At ArtsOrg1, volunteers helped in the drop-in sessions during the week but took on more responsibility during the school holiday programme when they supported staff with running this and led groups of other young people in different activities (in a similar way to those in Youth Project A, see Chapter 6). A key feature of this role was being responsible for welcoming and engaging with other young people, usually those younger or newer to the organisation. The way they spoke about connecting with and supporting their peers clearly mirrored the kind of behaviour and attitudes they had experienced themselves from the staff.

Mila (15, ArtsOrg1): You need to communicate with them and helping out like just little kids and like if they're new like trying to find a place for them where they can feel good and not feel there's like a pressure to be here and a pressure to make friends. Like just be yourself.

Mila described finding ways to embody the values she had experienced in the organisation, encouraging new young people to feel safe and welcomed. She notes the importance of emphasising to these new members the lack of 'pressure to be here', in essence reinforcing to them their agency within this space.

Amy (below) described how volunteers acted as an additional tier of people who can be approached and spoken to by the younger members of the organisation's community. She and Daisy also highlight how their position as young people themselves contributes to this, making them potentially a more accessible and trusted entry point for newer or younger members to begin to overcome concerns they have about speaking to others.

Amy (15, ArtsOrg1): Even if it's not using the arts and crafts table or the games table they'll always come up to you and talk to you about their school day and stuff. And you ask what they're doing. If they don't feel confident enough to talk to the staff members they'll talk to one of the younger ones, the volunteers

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1): Because a lot of the volunteers are still participants, but we're older than them but we're not so old that we're adults, we're all under 18

Amy (15, ArtsOrg1): We can understand more

The idea that new members of their community might find it difficult to adapt to the way of being in the organisation echoes the comments from staff (section 7.3.2) who noticed how young people's behaviour toward adults was so conditioned by the social rules in school that they initially kept to some of these rules in the arts organisations (e.g. calling staff 'sir').

Volunteers at ArtsOrg1 were also asked to take up practical responsibilities, particularly in the school holiday programme, for example making sandwiches for the participants or leading practical tasks.

Amy (15): Well we did the compost box in the summer and we got told we could paint it so me and someone else took a group of like different kids and we all painted a different side

The volunteers spoke about how the sense of being relied upon changed how they spent their time during the school holidays. Daisy compared this to her levels of motivation during school term.

Daisy (14): Yeah, but like not only the participants but the staff are relying on me for help...It helped me actually get up and out early because I've got a really bad habit of being like late [to school]... But being at [ArtsOrg1] because it's work experience and because I'm committed to it I'm like, "OK, I want to be here half an hour early at least early, just so I'm there on time, I can help set up". And it kicks off my day, I'm up and I'm actually doing something rather than like laying in bed, starting to get ready like 11:00 o'clock

A feeling of being relied upon, of being responsible, imbued a sense of commitment in Daisy that motivated her in ways that meant she felt differently about practical aspects of her routine. For her, agency is experienced in this responsibility, having this role that she has chosen to accept has led to her making decisions about how to meet what is required of her in this role.

In ArtsOrg2, the volunteers help with the income generation strand of the organisation (technical production of live events), taking roles, for example, in sound and lighting engineering, guided by staff. This is ongoing throughout the year at weekends, but larger events tend to happen during summer.

Fraser (14, ArtsOrg2): I was quite surprised with the amount of responsibility because I did my first kind of event. It was the [LOCAL COMMUNITY FESTIVAL] and I was on the lights and I absolutely loved

it, I got a lot of compliments for it. They were letting me, like I thought I was gonna be watching somebody do it, and I was, I was getting to do it straight away.

Fraser clearly felt that being trusted with this level of responsibility was unusual, implying that he has not experienced this elsewhere. There is a strong ethos in the organisation of 'learning on the job', and young people are brought into that role as members of the volunteer group, treated as trainees rather than observers. The young people at ArtsOrg2 discussed how their volunteer role impacts on how others, particularly parents, see their ability to be responsible or trusted.

Walter (16, ArtsOrg2): Because like if I'm here, right, my mum sees me being responsible. It's like I'm going here. I'm doing stuff. It's like you're setting up stuff at a bigger event. So like, setting up events is a very responsible thing so it shows you're like more responsible sort of adult almost. So like your parents are like 'oh look he's not actually that brain dead'.

This sense of proving oneself in these volunteer roles echoes the experiences of the young people volunteering at the YPA summer programme (case study in Chapter 6). Achieving this functioning of responsibility is seen to open up new opportunities with parents trusting young people with new scenarios, leading to new functionings as a result of the experiences they have in the youth organisations.

In both arts organisations, valuing the ethos of the organisation was portrayed as a responsibility in itself, protecting the kind of culture that the young people experienced and reproducing it for others who joined. One staff member attributed this to the sense of ownership that young people felt in the organisation and its culture.

Staff3: They feel that ownership in it and that comes down to not just that possessive thing over a particular space, but in the way that they support one another. Like the responsibility belongs to us all to ensure that that these beliefs are, you know, they're perpetuating, they permeate the entire thing, and that we all play a role and support one another. And it's not just this top down thing that's the staff doing lessons or whatever but that we're all the same we just do different things in the same organisation.

This staff member explicitly points out that responsibility for maintaining and reproducing the culture of support in the organisations is held by all members, regardless of age. Staff in both organisations highlighted both the increased responsibility of the volunteer role, and the support and encouragement of adult staff as important factors in building young people's confidence in their own ability. As with many of the young people's accounts throughout this study, the staff member below makes the comparison to school experience when describing how they see young people building this confidence through experiencing new levels of responsibility and enhanced agency.

Staff1: For the young volunteers particularly who've got an extra level of involvement in that, who are the ones who are making it happen, then I think there's empowerment in that for a young person...[young people] are given very little autonomy in their lives. They are told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, where to go, how to feel. And some of the feedback actually that we got from some of the young volunteers was exactly around that how in school it felt very tokenistic. They were maybe asked what they think, but it's never actioned and not listened to. We're following a curriculum and if you don't fit the mould then that's it, there's nowhere for you to go. In some of that feedback they said that's what's great about here is that you see that information is being actioned on. But not only that the action was taking place, but it was by the young people themselves. So I think that what that teaches a young person themselves is that they are able. 'Oh, I didn't know I could do that'.

This staff member described how actions and outcomes in the organisation were directly related to young people's participation, as co-production in developing services, rather than consultation at an earlier stage. They related this to young people not only being able to be an active agent in producing these outcomes but additionally being able to acquire evidence of their own skills and abilities.

In describing their arts centres, participants painted a picture of these as environments in which feelings of safety, responsibility and connectedness were fostered by young people and staff alike. Participants implied a gradual process with new members taking time to adjust to the kind of atmosphere of these organisations. This was particularly the case with shifting how young people see themselves in relation to adults: from the power differential experienced in school (and/or home and/or broader society) to one where they see themselves as increasingly equal to adults and with agency in their own right.

7.3.3.2 Adults as curators and facilitators

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, young people were positioned (and positioned themselves) as recipients of increased freedoms, that their agency was enhanced by their participation in the arts organisations. However, there was also evidence that the provision of these freedoms often required careful management by the adults involved. There was not a sense that this management was unsupportive or restrictive, rather that adults took on a curatorial role, relying on their experience, knowledge and social capital to ensure that young people's needs were met without compromising their experience of greater agency.

Safeguarding around child protection issues was raised by both young people and staff. Young people felt that the staff being trusted adults was an important aspect of creating the sense of safety that they experienced, and that staff were aware of their responsibilities (see 7.3.1). However, the staff also spoke about playing a protective or gatekeeping role in considering what opportunities were brought to young people, or in educating them about possible risks with different opportunities that might present.

The staff member below described two separate examples of this kind of curation: raising young people's awareness of specific risks they might encounter, and considerations staff make to ensure that the young people, and the culture created within the organisation, were not exploited.

Staff3: It's not just the opportunities that we make available to young people, it's the things that we try to protect them from as well...it's like being a parent and guiding young people. If you deny them the opportunity to make a mistake, then they're not gonna develop in the way that that they should. But there are things that are just wrong you know, and it can be as basic as when our young people get to the age where they start giggling. And we're like 'avoid pay to play¹¹ stuff, don't let people do it, if someone says this to you this is probably what they mean, don't get caught in that stuff. It doesn't need to be that way'.

¹¹ 'Pay to Play' gigs involve music promoters and/or venues charging bands a fee to play or requiring a minimum number of tickets to be sold in order to play.
<https://musiciansunion.org.uk/working-performing/gigs-and-live-performance/fair-play-guide>

The staff member described a grey area between guiding and protecting, implying that some mistakes that young people might make are in some way essential for their development but that others might require more careful protection from. While many of the staff, and young people's accounts frame agency as universally beneficial, here this is more ambiguous. Although there is the implication that there may be longer term benefit to making mistakes in a developmental sense, there are potentially negative consequences to young people's agency in the short term. There is an acknowledgement here of vulnerabilities of young people to, for example, exploitation and the implication that adults make judgement calls on which risks young people should be exposed to or not. While managing risk exposure could be seen as reducing young people's agency, the staff member also describes this protection being enacted through engaging with the young people and explaining to them what the risk is. Rather than removing the risk entirely, young people remain agents, informed of the risk but still able to take it if they wish.

Similarly, staff in both organisations raised concerns about the exploitation of young people in participation or consultation exercises.

Staff3: If we feel that our young people are being used for that ticking box thing, then we don't do it. So that if someone comes to us for a kind of consultation thing like is this of value to you or is this of equal value to you and the young people participating in it? And if it doesn't seem that way, we don't do it either, even if there is some, you know, perceived prestige to be involved in it, we don't do it because I think it's vital that we don't allow our young people to be exploited like that and to suffer the consequences of a consultation process in which again they are ignored.

There is a strong sense of frustration in this staff member's account. One which was echoed in the other organisation. It is a similar frustration that I encountered when I contacted the non-arts youth organisation YPA to ask about recruiting participants. Organisations such as these appear to have embedded such strong practices of listening and responding to young people, engaging them in the actions and outcomes as well as the input, that they have an understandable intolerance for organisations who appear tokenistic in their approach to consultation with young people. The staff member above highlights that the effect of consultation with young people can be particularly negative

where it leads to no perceived action, and that it is a risk to be protected against in the staff's curatorial role.

7.3.4 Being and Doing in Community Arts Organisations

The role that these community organisations played in young people achieving particular functionings (beings and doings) was complex and multifaceted. In this section I will summarise the three key areas of the Capabilities Approach that highlight how these organisations supported young people to achieve these functionings.

7.3.4.1 Responsive and sustained resources

In order to make resources available to young people, these organisations were responsible for converting their own capital into those that could be used by young people. An interaction between the young people who felt empowered in the environment of the organisation, and adults who took on a curatorial approach to meeting their needs seemed to result in **responsive** resources (e.g. access to materials, services, facilities). These resources were developed in congress between these groups drawing on the expertise of both adults and young people in deciding what those should be.

Both organisations adopted a youth-led model and aimed to provide opportunities that were responsive to the needs and requests of the young people engaged in their organisations.

Staff3: We'll always talk about how we'll turn on a dime. Like if we're on one track and the young people are like let's do something different, if it's a go-er we'll make it happen. So if young people didn't want to do that, we wouldn't have done it

Formal and informal feedback from their young people helped staff build responsive resources and opportunities but staff also felt that being embedded in the community and providing support on a longer-term basis was important to get a full picture of young people's (and their broader community's) needs. The staff member below spoke about this, comparing the impact that short term 'pop-up' projects run by organisation not based in the community can have on the young people who engage in them, especially when the young people are

left with no means to continue on in an area of interest after having been introduced to it through the project.

Staff1: ...if you're coming up with an idea, you're pulling it out of the air and you're parachuting into the community.., it might happen, it might not. But then what's there afterwards? You've always got to think about what comes next for young people, what're they going to do or where they're going to go when they return to school. They might have new skills and ideas about what they want to do but where have they got to go to do those things?

The staff member used a particular programme as an example of a finite project that engaged local young people but that could not sustain access to opportunities longer term. This issue of longer term impact of short term and transitory interventions has been highlighted in evaluations of similar arts-based interventions designed to engage marginalised young people (Millar et al., 2020). This presents a counter process to that of 'fertile functionings' (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), in which new functionings become redundant as young people meet a dead end where opportunities or resources are not available or can no longer be converted to functionings. The staff member who spoke about this, emphasised the need to understand the broader aspects of young people's lives to ensure that new skills or aspirations can be continually supported beyond the end of projects that introduce or develop these.

Although the activities of the organisations were built on this kind of young person-centred approach, it was emphasised by staff and young people that individual choice in terms of level of engagement was still encouraged and respected.

Staff1: Yes, I think it's like a space they come into that they define where nobody is saying to them you must do this, that and the next thing. They're offered a range of activities that have kind of been mutually agreed on by the group anyway and they can engage with them at whatever level they want to...Some young people will come in and know immediately I want to play the drums. That's all I want to do. I want to play guitar.. But there's a lot, the vast majority of people I would say, come in and they just want to be here.

The idea that the majority of young people 'just want to be here' returns to the previous themes of safety and connection that participants highlighted. While opportunities to 'do' were available, it is the 'being' that was particularly

valued by them. This reinforces the previous point that consistency, longevity and embeddedness in the community might be better suited to providing these sustained resources and opportunities for ‘being’, and that shorter term projects valuing the time-limited ‘doing’ might have less ability to support wellbeing in the same way. In terms of school holiday programmes, existing community organisations and physical centres might support aspects of wellbeing in this way that shorter term ‘holiday only’ programmes do not.

7.3.4.2 Fertile functionings

Wolff and De-Shalit use the term ‘fertile functionings’ to describe “functionings the securing of which is likely to secure further functionings”(Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007, p10). Young people and staff participating in Strand 2 of this study gave numerous examples of fertile functionings in describing their experiences within their community arts organisations. Many of these examples focused on acquiring skills but the range of what they described covered both hard and soft skills and was not limited to arts or creative industries skills. For example, both organisations provided music lessons or opportunities for playing music together and prioritised creating and maintaining an environment where young people felt listened to, encouraged and valued without judgement. By allowing opportunities to build both hard skills (technical musical ability) and soft skills (confidence) in this way, opportunities to take part in musical performance in front of an audience were more likely to be taken up. The functionings of playing an instrument and being confident secured a subsequent functioning of musical performance to an audience. For some, like Daisy below, there has been what might be better described as a cascade of fertile functionings where each subsequent opportunity she has taken up has been able to be converted to a new functioning because of what previous ones have given her. For her, even hypothetical future opportunities were seen as possible to take up because of the development she had experienced through the opportunities she had been able to take up in ArtsOrg1.

Daisy (14, ArtsOrg1): My first performance at [ArtsOrg1] was so long ago I don’t even remember what it was, I think it was singing or playing guitar it was one of the two but it was really early and I was nervous, really nervous for it but now I’ve performed on stage, I’ve learned lines, I’ve done plays and I want to pursue performing as a career so it’s definitely helped me get to that place ‘cause I think

years ago if someone had said ‘how do you feel performing on stage or performing as a career?’ I’d be like ‘are you joking me’ but I’ve found performing is a safe space, I’m not being judged by performing, it’s the persona, the character or the music and I’m able to work with my ability to make it sound good.

Once again safety is highlighted by Daisy as she describes not only the doing of the activity but the being and explains how this change in confidence was a slow process over several years, emphasising the importance of longer-term support and permanency of her ‘safe space’.

For the most part, discussions in the focus groups centred on current and past experiences of their lives and involvement in the arts organisation (the ‘being’ perspective). However, as Daisy touches on above, young people in both groups also reflected on different functionings they had through the arts organisations that they felt might benefit them in later life or were likely to influence decisions they made about careers (a ‘becoming’ perspective). These included soft skills like leadership, relationship-building, problem-solving and hard skills like artistic and technical abilities.

In thinking about how the experience might be helpful in the longer term, Erin and Daisy spoke about their interests in pursuing careers working with young people and how their experience as volunteers might help them with this. When asked why she wanted to study childcare at college, Erin replied:

Erin (16): Sort of being here [arts organisation]. That makes you want to do it.

Jay, below, felt that being able to learn music had helped develop his aspirations for a career path.

Jay (13, ArtsOrg2): That’s definitely what happened with me, because like, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do and I started learning guitar and stuff and coming to [ArtsOrg2] and now I’m fairly confident that I want to have like career in music when I grow up, you know just in some way or another.

For these young people, being able to be in an environment that not only offered opportunities but that actively valued these (e.g. working with young

people, and creative arts) meant that young people's aspirations were impacted, potentially altering future choices to take up new functionings.

7.3.4.3 Conversion factors

Providing resources does not necessarily mean that young people are able to, or will choose to, convert these to functionings. Certain elements of the community arts organisations explored in this chapter acted as conversion factors in expanding the capabilities (real freedoms) to be able to achieve functionings, and in impacting on young people's choice to do so. As described in this half of the chapter, through creating an environment in which young people felt safe (7.3.1), valued as an important part of a collaborative ecosystem (7.3.2), and trusted with responsibility (7.3.3) these organisations affected the conversion processes of the young people taking part. These factors were not distinctly separate but acted as part of a conversion *system*, contributing to the ability and choice of young people in cycles of related functionings over time, these themselves then altering future resources and capabilities.

One overarching thread that connects these conversion factors is the way in which a socially constructed power dynamic between adults and young people was reconstructed by, and with, the people (of all ages) involved in these organisations. It is this reconstructed power dynamic that seemed to be a driver of the multiple conversion processes that led to young people achieving functionings in this environment. It is also where many of the frustrations and barriers experienced by young people seemed to lie in other environments, most notably in school. I conclude this section, and indeed the findings of this thesis, with this point in particular because these organisations exemplify the importance of rethinking and reconstructing this relationship between young people and adults. These organisations (along with the case study organisation in chapter 6) show how young people's capabilities can be expanded in out-of-school time, and the contribution that this reconstructed adult-young person relationship plays in doing so.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the ways in which engagement in creative activities can enhance young people's wellbeing during school holidays. In the first half of this chapter the focus was on the threads connecting the various ways young people found to be creative during school holidays, how this compared to school time, and how this impacted upon them. In Chapter 6 I presented the analysis that school holidays can enhance young people's agency through increased freedoms over the use of their time and the spaces they inhabit. In the first half of this chapter I have built on this to explore how that agency is not only exercised in achieving creative functionings, but that the sense of agency itself is more acutely experienced through engaging in the creative process itself. As has been the case throughout this thesis, an exploration of school holiday creativity can be enhanced by also appreciating the comparative experiences in school, and young people's accounts reveal a starkly different experience of creative agency in that setting.

The remainder of this chapter has been dedicated to an examination of an alternative setting to school in which young people can learn, and engage in, creative practices: community arts organisations. While these organisations enable young people to achieve creative functionings that might otherwise be constrained, their impact reaches more broadly into young people's lives and wellbeing. In co-creating their organisation and ethos, alongside young people as equal partners they produce an environment in which participants feel safe, can build confidence, feel connected, respected, and valued. In such spaces, young people are supported by adults but still recognised as agentic beings in their own right and can both 'be' and 'become' in achieving the functionings that they value in the present, and for their futures.

Chapter 8 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored experiences of school holidays from the perspectives of young people for whom these periods are an established part of their lives. The overarching aim was to enrich understanding of the ways in which school holidays impact on young people. Specifically, this study aimed to focus on the following research questions (RQs): 1) How do young people experience school holidays?; (2) In what ways does being on holiday from school affect young people's wellbeing?; 3) How does engagement in creative activities affect young people's experiences of school holiday time? I have addressed these questions via a methodology situated within Childhood Studies and drawing on the Capabilities Approach.

In this final chapter, I discuss the key findings of this research (section 8.2-8.5), reflect on the strengths and challenges of the approach I adopted (section 8.5), and make some recommendations for future research and school holiday provision (section 8.6). I contribute knowledge that suggests that school holidays have a positive impact on the wellbeing of young people, providing opportunities to expand their agency, learn and develop, and engage in activities they value both in the here and now, and for their futures. By employing a capabilities lens, integrated within a Childhood Studies perspective, I have explored what young people's views and experiences of school holidays can tell us about how these periods away from school impact on their wellbeing, where wellbeing is constituted of the substantive freedoms they have to *be, do, and become* what they value. The existing research landscape has, primarily focused on the detrimental effects of holiday time on young people's learning and health. In contrast I argue that school holidays can bring, thus far unacknowledged and largely unexplored, benefits to young people's lives.

8.2 Constructing and reconstructing childhood in and out of school

This study did not set out to focus on school experiences. Yet, throughout the interviews and focus group data, reflections on in-school experiences were

embedded in articulations of school holiday experiences. Young people framed their experiences of school holidays and term time in a comparative way, highlighting key differences. In brief, school holidays were seen as a break, a time for respite from the challenges of school. Essentially, in answering RQ1 ('How do young people experience school *holidays*?'), it has been important to also understand - and make visible here as a foil to holiday time - the ways in which young people experienced *school*. In particular, this focus drew out what it is about school that can make the long breaks of school holidays so welcome, and necessary, in the eyes of young people.

In Chapter 3, I detailed how the emergence of Childhood Studies challenged the scholarly norms that had positioned children as 'works in progress', as 'human becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994). This new paradigm argued for a reconstructed view of childhood, and children as worthy of study in their own right: for who they are now, not just who they will become in adulthood (James and Prout, 2015). However, this socially constructed view of children, and childhood, is not restricted to the academy but extends to broader society, and this was strongly evident throughout this study, particularly across the comparisons participants made between in-school and school holiday experiences.

Across the findings chapters my analysis of the data has shown that there were a range of aspects of school that young people felt they needed a break from, and for various reasons including schoolwork stress, difficult relationships with teachers and peers, and constraints of institutional rules. An overarching feature of these was the way in which young people's agency was constrained within school term, and how this changed in school holidays. Young people's experiences pointed to a lack of control, choice and autonomy in school, which they linked to the way they were viewed by adults in this environment, and to some extent by society more generally. For those who engaged in organisations outwith school, this was accentuated further by the contrasting way in which they were treated by adults in these spaces. My analysis suggests that the way in which young people felt that they were viewed, and treated, by adults in school is indicative of this socially constructed view of childhood as primarily a period of development, and children as 'incomplete' or 'human becomings'. Within this construction, adults are seen as the end goal, the 'complete being', and it is

adults who hold the power to decide what is the 'best' route for young people to achieve this end goal.

My analysis in Chapter 5 highlights how this construction of children as 'human becomings' is particularly influential in schools in the way school culture values the future over the present, and adult perspectives over young people's. To some extent this is understandable as it reflects a material reality of young people's biological and psychological development, and school as an environment designed to support this development through the process of learning. However, future-focused development and growth do not have to be the only priorities in children's experiences of school, and long term (adulthood) outcomes should not be the sole markers of success for education.

The construction of children as 'becomings' (over 'beings') is taken up and reproduced by young people themselves, as evidenced in participants' value judgements of the choices they make in this environment, even when this is experienced as detrimental to their wellbeing in the present. Through schooling, young people - including those in this study - are seen to be (and see themselves as) engaged in developmental work, the key goal of which is to accumulate potential benefits useful in later life. This equates to what Paulo Freire (2005, p72) described as the "banking method" of education. What my findings show is that young people can experience this focus on the future, and its associated drive toward attainment, as stressful and something from which they value having respite during school holidays.

In the data generated in this study, time away from school was presented positively for the most part, and as a 'respite' from school. Although these young people valued what school provided in the longer-term (through gaining education for later career choices) their experience in the present was often negative. In contrast to their accounts of in-school time, young people's accounts of school holiday leisure were imbued with *both* a sense of enjoyment and mindful experience 'in the moment' (of 'being') and of future-orientated acquisition, learning and development (of 'becoming'). This was the case across a variety of leisure activities, both structured and unstructured. Based on the analysis presented in this thesis, school holiday time, including that spent in more structured environments, appears to allow an alternative construction of

childhood to emerge, with balance between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. The ways in which young people were able to bring about this balance between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ in their school holidays centres on the different way their agency was situated during school holidays in comparison to term time.

8.3 What the Capabilities Approach brought to understanding school holiday wellbeing

This section will discuss some of the key findings from this capabilities-informed analysis that address RQ2 (In what ways does being on holiday from school affect young people’s wellbeing?). The formulation of the capabilities model that informed this thesis (Figure 8-1 below) drew on theoretical concepts from several authors (Sen, 1993; Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007; Hart, 2013; Austin, 2018; Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018; Hart, 2019; Bazzani, 2023). Within this model, being able to *do* and *be* what one values relies on being *able* to convert available resources into functionings (actual beings and doings) and *choosing* to do so. These abilities and choices are subject to influence, to varying degrees, by a range of conversion factors.

In much of the existing research on school holidays, and in the implementation of school holiday interventions the focus is on either end of the capabilities model: resources and functionings. As I described in Chapter 2, school holiday research has tended to focus on measuring particular outcomes that are interpreted as broader functionings (E in Figure 8-1), for example, test results as a measure of learning, or weight as a measure of health. The implementation of holiday clubs or intervention programmes have often focused on the provision of resources (A, B and C in Figure 8-1) in order to adjust these functionings, for example provision of activities focused on maintaining specific types of learning or increasing physical activity and weight loss across a holiday period. Some holiday provision, particularly in the UK, has focused more on provision of resources to compensate for the absence of school-based provision around basic needs, particularly access to food and adult-supervision in the absence of school as a childcare resource.

What the CA brings to understanding school holiday wellbeing is a focus on the middle of this process, particularly on young people’s agency and the factors

affecting this. The CA frames wellbeing as the substantive freedoms that individuals have to achieve the functionings that they value. Therefore rather than focusing on the resources or functionings independently, a capabilities perspective demands an appreciation of what connects the resources to the functionings, and how this is affected by different factors for different individuals. This framing has enabled me to centre young people's values, perspectives and experiences in my analysis, in line with a Childhood Studies perspective, without ignoring the resources available to young people and the functionings they are able to achieve (or not) in school holidays.

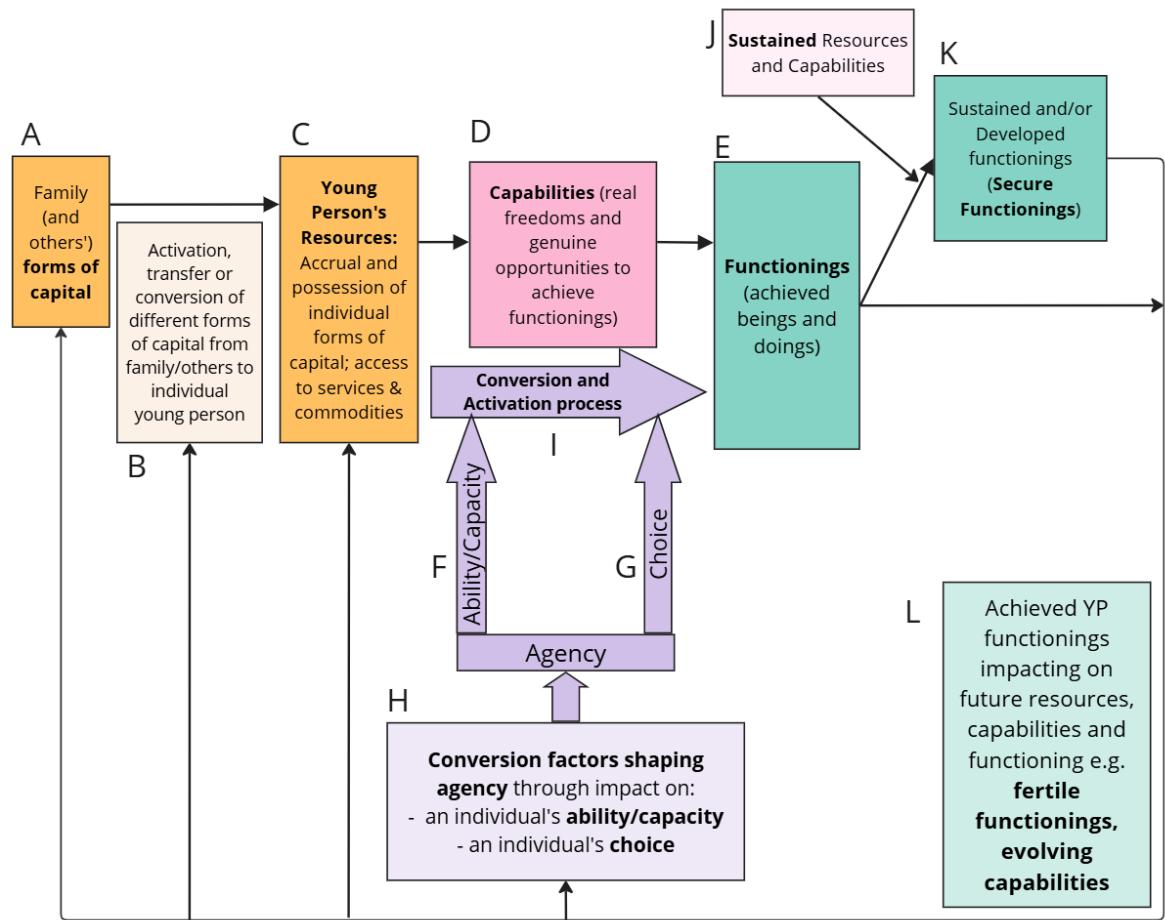


Figure 8-1 CA model (replicated version from Figure 3-3 for reference)

8.3.1 Expanding young people's agency in school holidays

A key critique of Childhood Studies has been the under-theorising of children's agency in comparison to the empirical evidencing of children as agents (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). I have therefore sought throughout this work to develop a

clear conceptualisation of young people's agency in addition to empirical evidence of young people exercising this agency in their school holidays.

The CA provides a useful framework that ensures that attention is paid to the role agency plays in achieving beings and doings. However, as I described in Chapter 3, although agency is an embedded feature of the CA, there is often no explicit acknowledgement in the capabilities' literature of the difference between the elements of 'ability' and 'choice' as constituent aspects of agency. This is particularly the case around the theorisation of conversion factors where attention is directed toward how these factors affect *ability* to convert resources into functionings, and sideline how these factors also affect *choice* to do so (or not).

Throughout this thesis I have drawn a clear distinction between ability and choice (F and G in Figure 8-1), and in terms of conversion factors have considered how these shape both the *ability (or capacity)* to transform resources into functionings, and the *choice* to 'activate' a capability (a potential functioning) into a realised being or doing. My analysis of the data generated supports the importance of making a distinction between ability and choice aspects of agency: when considering how they were impacted in and out of school, participants focused more considerably on factors constraining their choices than they did on those constraining their abilities. The next two subsections will focus on what young people's school holiday agency can tell us about how young people's wellbeing is affected during this time.

8.3.1.1 Exercising agency: achieving functionings that are valued and chosen

As I explored in Chapter 6, participants frequently framed school holidays in terms of their leisure experiences. Throughout their accounts they spoke not only about the activities they engaged in, the social connections therein and the spaces they inhabited when doing so, but also emphasised the level of choice they had, and their reasoning for the selections they made. These reasonings centred on their own personal values and, in Chapter 6, I examined how these were temporally orientated: seeking immediate gratification doing the things they enjoyed in the moment ('being'), as well as doing the things that aligned

with what they wanted for their future selves ('becoming'). Although participants did speak about the resources (including access and opportunities) available to them (or not), their primary focus tended to be on what *they chose* to do and why it was of value to them. My analysis suggests therefore that school holidays provide opportunities for young people to choose activities that align with their values, in ways that are not always available to them during term.

8.3.1.2 Experiencing and developing agency: an evolving capability

As described above, agency within the CA model can be conceptualised as being constituted of both an ability/capacity aspect and a choice aspect. In this model, agency determines whether or not a resource is transformed into a functioning, influenced to varying degrees by conversion factors.

However, agency can also be thought of as a capability in itself, as a capacity to make decisions, and one that develops and evolves throughout life. The analysis I have presented shows that in their decision-making and choosing, participants valued and enjoyed the *experience* of being able to choose, the *sense* of agency that accompanied the choosing, regardless of the outcome, and which was often lacking during in-school experiences. This sense of agency was also linked to further capabilities and functionings: developing or building trust, confidence and self-esteem in part through the primary functionings (e.g. learning an instrument) but also through this experience of having been agentic in the process.

It may be that for young people, so unused to being able to make choices and decisions about their lives, that awareness of this ability to be an agent was heightened and valued in ways that differed from adult perceptions. However, this growing sense of confidence in one's own ability to make decisions, to be independent, autonomous and responsible was an overarching theme across the data. The study's findings suggest that school holidays provide a landscape in which agency as a capability can develop through these experiences in ways that are less limited than those in school.

8.3.2 Capabilities and functionings evolve during school holidays

The concept of *evolving* capabilities (Ballet et al, 2011) accounts for the developmental way that capabilities are not fixed but change or emerge throughout the life course. This emphasises the temporal and dynamic way that feedback loops link current functionings to future capabilities and functionings and build on past ones. A similar concept is that of ‘fertile functionings’ (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007) whereby certain beings and doings lead to new functionings.

Examples of evolving capabilities and fertile functionings were part of my analysis throughout this thesis. Participants described ways in which they built on their existing capabilities to develop new ways of being and doing, or deepen their abilities in existing functionings during school holidays. Some of these involved practise in existing skills, for example practising instruments, playing football, reading for pleasure. Others described developing new levels of independence or responsibility more clearly associated with ‘growing up’, for example going new places alone, taking on responsibility for younger people, and supporting the running of youth organisations.

What these data evidence are ways in which young people’s school holidays included experiences of growth, development and learning. This is counter to the narrative that paints school holidays as a period of ‘learning loss’ (Entwistle and Alexander, 1992, 1994; Cooper et al., 1996) and highlights the narrow definition of learning that research on summer learning loss has adopted (see Chapter 2). Further, these findings speak to the complexities of learning and development and the ways that these can emerge in non-academic settings and in the absence of formal teaching.

In my analysis I highlighted where some of these evolving capabilities and fertile functionings were evident as a by-product of some school holiday leisure activities that were valued more for the pleasure in-the-moment that participants experienced. In other circumstances these were more explicitly taken up by young people because of the longer term benefit they perceived these to have, but were still enjoyable in the present. This points to an interaction between experiences of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ in school holiday

time, where young people were able to benefit from activities *both* in the present and potentially the future. This is in contrast to the data generated in this study around in-school learning experiences, where young people reflected on these as lacking positive in-the-moment experiences and being driven by future outcomes. In-school learning was perceived as a trade-off, where young people endured experiences in the present for the future benefit these were perceived to have. There is therefore evidence that such a trade-off is unnecessary, that learning and development activities can be both valued in the present, and for their future benefit.

8.3.3 Key conversion factors in achieving school holiday functionings

While young people's accounts revealed multiple conversion factors that enabled or constrained their ability to (and choice to) achieve different functionings, there were two overarching factors that were particularly evident in my analysis: free time, and interactions with adults. Both factors, discussed in the subsections below, impacted on young people's ability to exercise and experience agency in the ways described above (8.3.1), and were therefore key to their school holiday wellbeing. This supports previous findings around the connection between experiencing autonomy in leisure and young people's wellbeing (Fattore et al., 2017; Persson Osowski et al., 2024).

8.3.3.1 Free time

Across the data, free time was highly valued by participants and its increase in school holidays a particularly positive feature of this time. In my analysis I highlighted how the self-direction of activities during this free time enabled young people to choose functionings that they valued and were aligned with their individual interests. In addition, as described above, being able to make decisions, even within other constraints, led to feelings of autonomy and control that contributed to positive experiences of this free time, beyond just the value of the chosen activity itself. The affordance of free time in school holidays therefore acted as a conversion factor, enabling young people to take up particular functionings. Its absence, or restriction, during term time may contribute to this being a comparatively less positive time for this group of young people.

In Chapter 3 I discussed how research on young people's leisure has tended to focus on structured leisure activities, often problematising rest and more passive or unstructured leisure activities (Cartmel et al., 2024), what Mukherjee categorises as 'casual leisure' (2020). This view seems to pervade outwith academia with parents/carers appearing to value more structured leisure for their children (Shannon, 2006; Ooi et al., 2020) and young people themselves internalising the feelings of 'wasting time' in leisure (Batchelor et al., 2020). However, this construction of casual leisure as being of intrinsically less value was not as apparent in my analysis. Although there was some evidence that young people received messages from their parents/carers about the value of different leisure activities, all participants were afforded free time, and accompanying agency to direct that time. It may be that in school holidays, when there is more time for young people to fill and when parents/carers have pressures of juggling work and childcare, that casual leisure is reconstructed differently, as an acceptable 'rest' from school or as a necessary tool to enable parents/carers in managing their different responsibilities. Within this time young people may be more readily afforded self-directed time, without receiving or reproducing concerns around their own productivity or the value of particular leisure activities.

8.3.3.2 Interactions with adults

Whether at home or in school holiday clubs and year-round youth organisations, young people's interactions and relationships with adults were often key to them achieving desired functionings. This was not only in terms of provision of resources (by adults transferring, activating or converting their forms of capital to young people) but also where adult support acted as a conversion factor, enabling young people to be able to achieve functionings, including supporting and facilitating their freedom to choose.

My analysis in both Chapter 5 and 6 contrasted the experiences that young people had with adults in school, and out of school. The power dynamic between young people and adults was experienced in markedly different ways across these environments and impacted upon young people's realised functionings and their experiences of their own agency in determining these functionings. This was particularly evident in young people's experiences of youth organisations. As

discussed in section 8.2, childhood and children appeared to be constructed differently in these environments with explicit emphasis placed by staff on respecting young people's autonomy and encouraging them to see themselves as active agents in the organisations.

8.4 Creative capabilities and functionings in school holidays

This section will discuss some of the key findings that have contributed to answering RQ3 (How does engagement in creative activities affect young people's experiences of school holiday time?) and how these findings relate to the broader existing literature.

8.4.1 Creative capabilities expand in School Holidays

The analysis I presented in Chapter 7 highlighted a variety of ways in which young people are creative through their school holiday leisure time, the value they placed in being creative, and some of the ways in which they felt creativity was beneficial for them in the longer term. As with data across the study, school holiday creative experiences were framed in comparison to those in school.

These data suggest young people perceived a reductive approach to creativity in school, where the primary focus in creative subjects was felt to be on assessing, controlling and defining the creative outputs. As a result, their creativity was constrained in school, because their freedom of expression was restricted by academic processes. Frustrations extended to perceived restrictions in school on arts subject selection, and a perceived value hierarchy around subjects (particularly with a focus on future value). These findings support previous research on 'curriculum narrowing' (reduction in range and number of subjects studied) in Scotland under Curriculum for Excellence (Shapira and Priestley, 2020; Shapira et al., 2023) and those of the 2018 Young Scot survey (National Youth Arts Advisory Group, 2019) where young people highlighted their desire for more creative subject options and for improved equity in how arts subjects are valued in comparison to other subjects.

In contrast, school holidays, as with broader leisure experiences, afforded young people increased agency to achieve creative functionings, where they wished to.

In my analysis I highlighted how participants expressed their experiences with creativity in ways that demonstrated how creativity both emerged from increased agency (being able to make choices in the creative process) and was also instrumental in creating a sense of agency within individuals (feeling autonomy and control). Previous research has shown how space and time spent alone directing one's own activities can allow young people's imagination and creativity to flourish (Fattore et al., 2017). The findings presented in this thesis evidence how school holidays can provide such space and time for creative capabilities to expand. In addition, the ability to access and engage in arts programmes was instrumental in expanding creative capabilities for some young people in school holidays and these will be discussed in 8.4.3.

8.4.2 Creative practice as a fertile functioning

Data generated in this study showed how participants explicitly connected being creative with improving or maintaining their own subjective wellbeing, examples of which echoed findings in previous research particularly around social and emotional wellbeing (Zarobe and Bungay, 2017). As with broader leisure these wellbeing benefits were located in both the short term 'in the moment', and future. Creativity was framed as a source of pleasure and a sense of accomplishment, but also as an 'outlet' to express challenging feelings and relieve stress.

Beyond the value of creativity in-the-moment, the data revealed ways in which young people were able to develop as a result of their creative practice, including in ways that were not necessarily arts or creativity related. There was explicit acknowledgement of potential future benefits to career development or more general life skills, but my analysis also showed how valued creativity was for deepening connections with self and others, offering young people ways to express their own identity, and connect with others with whom they felt kinship. Creative functionings were therefore fertile functionings, impacting on future capabilities and functionings. Although participants often used their school holiday time in creative ways on their own, being creative with others was also an important feature of many participants' experiences, particularly those engaged in formal classes or participating in ensembles and organisations. The following section will focus more closely on how being part of a creative

community impacted on the school holidays of young people involved in community arts organisations.

8.4.3 Creativity as a vehicle: The role of community arts organisations in young people's school holiday functionings

The community arts organisations involved in this study created a year-round environment, including school holiday programmes and activities, that exemplify how organisations can improve young people's wellbeing in out of school time by supporting them to achieve functionings that they value. While creative arts practice was the central focus of these organisations, the ways in which they supported young people's wellbeing reached far beyond expanding only their creative capabilities. Creative arts provide a particularly useful vehicle for providing this support, but there are lessons that can be learned from these organisations that have implications for school-holiday provision more generally and even for schools themselves. While the provision of resources is important, my analysis has drawn particular attention to the importance of ethos in these organisations and their embeddedness within communities.

Both community arts organisations expanded the creative capabilities of their young people by providing arts-specific opportunities and resources, but my analysis also explored how their ways of working with young people created additional conversion factors that enabled young people to take up these opportunities/resources, for example playing instruments, learning to engineer live music, acting, drawing, filming etc. They did this by adopting a flexible and responsive approach to the support they offered, bringing *potential* creative capabilities into the realm of genuine opportunities for young people by making these accessible and inclusive. Additionally my analysis emphasised the importance young people and staff placed on the organisations being youth-led. Young people placed value not only on having choices within the organisation but also democratic power to guide the organisation and its activities.

In the data generated in focus groups with young people in these organisations feelings of safety and equality were particularly prominent. In their organisations, participants were able to build confidence, exploring and expressing their identities in environments they felt less vulnerable than

elsewhere. In my analysis I emphasised how an important feature of this safety was the collaborative way participants perceived it to be built and maintained, by members, both adults and young people. The connections that young people felt to each other, and to their organisation seemed to emerge from the mutual trust, appreciation and equity that they felt within these communities. This culture that was created acted as a conversion factor that expanded the agency of the young people involved by both impacting on their ability/capacity to achieve functionings (in and out of the organisation), and their choice to do so. Csikszentmihaly's (2014) extensive work on creativity, in particular his systems model of creativity has emphasised the importance of the social context and relational interaction, in allowing creativity to flourish. Within this model, mentorship, including between peers, has been shown to bestow social and cultural capital on mentees in a way that mirrors what might occur in some families (Hooker et al., 2014). The findings of this present study strongly support this stance and provide evidence of this in practice in the ways community arts organisations support young people's creative functionings.

This study has also emphasised the broader ways that community arts organisations can enhance young people's wellbeing, beyond creative skills. My analysis specifically focused on the development of agency and responsibility through young people's volunteership in school holidays and out-of-school time, and the trusted/trusting relationships with the adult youth workers that enabled this. The evidence presented here contributes to the existing evidence base on the ways in which arts-based programmes and organisations play a role in improving young people's wellbeing both through positive experiences in the present *and* those that are developmentally beneficial (Burnard and Dragovic, 2015; Ennis and Tonkin, 2018; Chapin et al., 2022; Nugent and Deacon, 2022). These findings also support the broader literature on youth work, particularly in highlighting key features of their ethos such as safety, flexibility, inclusivity and positive relationships between peers and with adults (Fyfe et al., 2018; Hill, 2020), as well as the potential longer-term benefits that these have for young people (Davidson, 2024).

What this study specifically highlights, is how such initiatives can be particularly important for young people over school holidays when term-time and school-based support is absent. However, providing resources and offering opportunities

is not necessarily enough to ensure that young people will be able to, or will choose to, take these up. In my analysis of staff interviews I highlighted the importance staff placed on their organisations' embeddedness in the community in helping them understand and recognise the barriers that exist for local young people and how to address them. Embeddedness seems to not only allow organisations to better understand their community but it also allows them to offer sustained resources that could lead to secure functionings for the young people they serve. Some staff were directly critical of short-term programmes that opened up opportunities to young people for a short time, allowing them to achieve new functionings, but that young people had no way of continuing in after the end of the programme. This has particular implications for school holiday programmes, which often exist only in these periods, and highlights the value in using existing youth services, embedded in communities when delivering school holidays programmes.

8.5 Reflections on the research process

Having discussed the theoretical and empirical contributions of this thesis, I will now reflect on some of the key methodological contributions and identify some challenges, limitations and aspects of the research process that might have benefited from an alternative approach.

8.5.1 Combining Childhood Studies and the CA

Bringing together the CA and Childhood Studies allowed me to engage with and address some of the critiques of each (that to some extent mirror one another), particularly around agency. As I described in Chapter 3, the CA has been criticised for under-theorising agency, whereas in Childhood Studies there has been a drive toward more relational conceptualisations of young people's agency. Combining these perspectives has allowed me to contribute to addressing these critiques. In conducting this research, the CA has given me a framework to focus on the specific features that make up young people's experiences school holidays, drawing attention not only to what they do in this time but to the factors that affect their agency to do or be what they value. Childhood Studies has allowed me to analyse these interrelated features of young people's lives (the capabilities, agency, conversion factors and

functionings) from a clear ontological and epistemological stance, to more deeply interrogate what these features can tell us about the role school holidays play in young people's lives. In addition to the contribution this pairing brought to answering my research questions, I believe this research has highlighted the potential for combining these perspectives in other areas of research with young people, and more broadly the contribution it can make to theorising young people's agency.

8.5.2 Recruitment: Who I spoke to and who I did not

The context of the pandemic and the inflexible timescale (being tied to immovable school holiday dates) meant my choices in recruitment were limited to some extent. During data generation and analysis I became aware of the absence of perspectives from young people who **do not** experience school holidays as generally positive, or indeed who experience them as harmful. In Chapter 4 I detailed the recruitment strategy I employed, principally advertising the study on social media and through local organisations. When potential participants made contact I recorded whether they were a parent/carer or the young person themselves. Despite roughly half of the initial contacts being made by young people themselves (as opposed to a parent/carer on their behalf), only two of the fourteen young people who went on to participate in the study had made contact themselves initially. This meant that the majority of interview participants had parents/carers who had proactively contacted me on their young person's behalf. In my interactions with parents/carers following this, at their homes or by email/phone, I was conscious that most of these people were interested in the research subject itself, and engaged with their young people in ways that was unlikely to be representative of all parents/carers.

I was, however, also able to make contact with a youth organisation who helped with recruiting five participants. Interviewing these young people was more challenging in the busy and time-restricted environment of their youth centre and led to shorter interviews in small groups. However, I felt this was an important trade off to be able to include young people whose perspectives might differ from those recruited via parent/carer contact. Ultimately these interviews generated particularly insightful data, particularly on their experiences of support via the organisation, which is why I felt it was important to use a case

study to draw attention to these experiences. However, these participants, similar to those recruited via their parent/carer, also represent a group of young people who appear to have support from engaged adults interested in their wellbeing, as do those young people who engaged in focus groups through community arts organisations.

The young people who participated in the study represent a wide range of different demographic groups (see Table 4-2), but what they all appear to share to some extent is the presence in their life of an adult who is actively engaged in supporting that young person's wellbeing. While this does not in any way diminish the value of the data they generated, it does highlight a need for future research to explore ways of recruiting young people who do not have this kind of support in their school holidays.

8.5.3 Data generation methods: centring agency and creativity

My initial rationale for including different ways that young people could engage in the interviews (making, recording or collecting artefacts to share and/or drawing timelines) was underpinned by a desire to meet different needs and interests of a range of young people of different ages. However, on reflection, and particularly in light of my analysis, I realise that it is perhaps the tool of *choice* itself that is particularly important in framing these research interactions with young people. In my analysis I highlighted that the *experience* of agency itself, and being considered an agent by others, can be as valuable to young people as the actual outcome of the choice. Similarly on reflecting on the methods I used, I have considered that perhaps the symbolic gesture of offering choice helped to reassure young people that I considered them agents, and as differently equal. Similarly, inviting participants to engage in their own data gathering during school holidays, allowed young people to exercise agency in how they interpreted that and engaged in it. Additionally it reinforced a mutual ownership of the sessions, generating data together.

Similarly, I have reflected that by using creative tasks I signalled to young people that I considered creativity, and specifically *their* creativity, as of significant value to my research and in doing so encouraged young people to share feelings about their relationship with their own creativity that they might

not otherwise have. There was however varying enthusiasm from participants about drawing the timeline and this seemed related to age, with the older ones not being as interested as the younger participants. I tried my best to pitch this in a way that did not seem that I was patronising them, reminding them these were only optional. It was also harder and slower for participants to engage in drawing timelines over video call and was not as productive as in person.

8.5.4 Data generation methods: being young person-centred

In section 4.2.2 I discussed the perspective I adopted related to children and childhood, seeking to centre young people's lived experiences. This approach was in direct contrast to the majority of existing research on school holidays. As such I prioritised engaging directly with young people rather than including interviews with their parents/carers. While this approach allowed me to explore in detail the viewpoints of young people, centring my analysis on the issues that young people prioritised and emphasised in their accounts, there are two possible repercussions of this that I have reflected on and will discuss here. Firstly, that additional data generation with parents/carers may support a deeper understanding of the context in which young people experience school holidays. Secondly, that parents/carers can, in certain circumstances, play a valuable facilitatory role in interviews with young people without decentring their perspectives.

8.5.4.1 Understanding the context of young people's school holiday experiences

During data generation I was led, as much as possible, by what young people wanted to discuss. Although interviews and focus groups followed a topic guide, I allowed data generation to be led by what participants focussed on, prompting them to explore and expand in more detail on the topics they chose to bring to the discussion on school holidays, creativity and wellbeing. With the CA underpinning this work I included questions exploring the factors that participants felt impacted upon their ability to do, and be, what they valued during school holidays. During data generation, and analysis, it was clear that while young people did describe their experiences of their own agency in relation to structural factors, the structural factors identified were almost entirely limited to those related to the way they felt perceived, and treated, by

adults in different environments. In other words, they focussed on the impact that age as a factor of social stratification had on them. There was very limited discussion or acknowledgement of other factors of social stratification (e.g. social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality). Where these did feature (specifically ethnicity and sexuality - see section 5.4.2), they were described in terms of the failures of school systems to adequately manage intolerance and bullying rather than as a factor enabling or limiting what young people can be, or do, in school holidays. As I developed my theoretical framework during analysis I was introduced to Hart's (2013; 2016; 2019) Sen-Bourdieuian model highlighting the transfer, conversion and activation of different forms of capital into resources that young people can mobilise (see CA model Figure 8-1). I included this in my model, but as discussed throughout this thesis, the data generated with young people focussed more substantially on agency. As such my analysis centred on the impact of conversion factors influencing young people's ability, and choice to take up opportunities that were available to them, rather than the availability of resources, and the factors affecting this.

Although age was clearly a powerful factor of social stratification for these young people, I have reflected on the reasons why there is a relative absence of discussion in the data on social stratification factors beyond this. It is possible that at least some of the young people taking part had a limited awareness, particularly of social class, and the way this might impact them. It is also likely that although the participant group represented a broad range of demographic groups (see Table 4-2), many of those participants that were more likely to be in lower socioeconomic groups (based on SIMD of home postcode) were actively engaged with youth organisations who provided free, and low cost, access to supervised spaces and leisure activities. It is possible that engagement with these organisations may therefore buffer young people from the impact that factors such as low family income may otherwise have on their experiences of school holidays. Since we also know that parents may put the needs of their children before their own during school holidays, for example going without food in order to ensure their children are fed (Shinwell and Defeyter, 2021), it is possible that the young people participating were unaware of the impact of factors such as low-income during school holidays. Interviewing parents/carers in addition to young people, or including direct questions in topic guides, may have

allowed more of an exploration of the structural and contextual factors that affect the resources (forms of capital) available to young people during school holidays ('A'-'C' in CA Model, Figure 8-1).

8.5.4.2 Parents/carers facilitating engagement

As I described in section 8.5.2, parent/carers may have played a role in facilitating sign-up and ongoing participation in the study. However, I have also reflected on the ways that some parents/carers facilitated their children's engagement in the interviews themselves. Young people were free to choose whether or not they were interviewed alone or accompanied. In the case of two participants who were neurodivergent I noticed a clear, and seemingly beneficial, effect of having their parent present for the interview. In both of these situations the parents supported their children to remember and elaborate on different topics. Sometimes the interaction itself resulted in them constructing the knowledge between them but because I had not included parent/carers as participants I was unable to include their data in my analysis, and on occasion the young person's data lost context without this inclusion. I had considered in advance how the inclusion of parent/carers in a joint interview might lead to the young person feeling disempowered or unable to share their experiences with me in an uninhibited way, and I had considered how young people may choose to be accompanied by a parent/carer in order to feel more secure in their interaction with me. However, I had not considered how a joint interview in some circumstances, might provide additional insight that individual interviews could not.

8.5.5 Coping with the unexpected

As with many studentships that have spanned the early 2020s the COVID-19 pandemic affected the course of my work, and life, in many ways. From the practical challenges of stay-at-home orders and no childcare, to the mental and physical impacts of living in a pandemic and contracting the virus itself, it has coloured the way I have engaged with this work from the outset. However, I was, unlike many of my colleagues, able to learn from the different experiences and strategies that researchers had employed in 2020 by the time I started in January 2021. This helped me plan in a detailed way to be able to conduct my

research in the event of whatever direction I could imagine the pandemic might move next. In hindsight, that planning also helped me manage the other unexpected events that occurred, in particular, the death of my mother-in-law on the day I was supposed to conduct my third and final focus group. A further aspect of this preparation was the attention I had given to strategies that would support my own wellbeing. Having had a particular interest in my previous role in developing support for researchers engaged in emotionally demanding research, I was able to draw on the strategies and resources I knew would go some way to helping me navigate this time. Drawing on the support of a peer network was especially helpful to me and reinforced my belief that such resources are an essential part of the research journey.

8.6 Recommendations

8.6.1 Future research

Existing school holidays research, detailed in Chapter 2, is based on the assumption that school term-time and school holiday time are comparable in a way that can then easily illuminate causal factors of observed changes. However, applying a two-condition scientific model to two conditions that vary so widely creates a significant barrier to drawing any meaningful and actionable conclusions from outcomes measured between these conditions. The evidence presented throughout this thesis highlights just how different young people's experiences are between being in school and being away from it. I would therefore propose that future research examining school holidays strives to understand this time period as distinctly different and worthy of study in its own right, rather than as a comparator to school term. As I explored in Chapter 6, participants in this study showed evidence of continued learning throughout their school holidays. While this may not be in numeracy or literacy as measured in standardised tests in SLL literature, I have argued that the opportunities young people experience during school holidays to learn and develop are valuable assets to their achieving wellbeing both in the present and the future. School holidays should therefore not be considered as a time where learning is absent, rather that school holiday learning is different from that experienced in school.

This thesis has demonstrated the value in exploring young people's lived experiences of school holidays, a perspective that previous research has overlooked. Future research should therefore seek to expand on this by continuing to place young people's perspectives, rights and values at the forefront of investigating the impact of school holidays. As described in section 8.5, future studies may wish to consider recruitment methods that can engage with young people whose voices are seldom heard or who are not supported, either at home or in the community, in the way that participants in this study appear to have been. Additionally data generation methods might seek to include parents/carers in a way that contextualises the data generated with young people or supports them in the data generation process, while still centring their voices within this.

8.6.2 School holiday provision

In Chapter 2 I outlined some of the ways existing school holidays literature has had impact, including contributing to a narrative that school holidays are detrimental to young people and should be re-thought. I have argued in this thesis that school holidays are an important part of young people's lives that have the potential to positively impact on their wellbeing in ways that have been largely overlooked in the existing literature. This omission is likely due in part to the absence of young people's perspectives in the majority of previous research on this subject. While this thesis contributes to countering that literature, it is unlikely to bring sufficient balancing weight. In the absence of a more balanced literature base, future provision, be it in considering changes to school calendars or design and implementation of school holiday programmes, should therefore seek to engage with young people themselves to better understand their perspectives, and responsively meet their needs.

Most of the young people in this study seemed to have families who were able to provide safe, nurturing environments and opportunities for leisure for them during school holidays. However, we know that this is not the case for all young people, and that without state provision during school holidays some young people can be more at risk of harm (Stewart et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that parental means (not parental values) dictates the quality and quantity of school holiday activities (Chin and Phillips, 2004; Bennett et al., 2012; Holloway

and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). During holiday periods, in the absence of public provision for young people, higher income families can ‘turn up’ their investment in compensatory ways that are not available to lower income families (Hastings and LaBriola, 2023). The experiences of those participants in this study who took part in free (or optional donation) school holiday activities provided by youth or community arts organisations highlighted the important role that these play in providing opportunities for all young people, but particularly those who do not have opportunities during school holidays to be safe, supported and able to take part in leisure activities.

Many of the participants attended school holiday activities run by organisations they engaged with throughout the year. I presented a short case study of the experiences of five participants in one such organisation providing leisure space and opportunities for young people living in an area of high deprivation. In this, I proposed that the deep social connections that young people built with peers and adult staff over time in this organisation were responsible for the resultant commitment that young people showed toward the organisation and their role in it. This finding was further reinforced in focus groups with young people volunteering in community arts organisations and supports previous findings around the benefits that holiday clubs can provide that go beyond simple provision of food and/or activities (Defeyter et al., 2018; Stretesky et al., 2020; Long et al., 2021a; Long et al., 2021b; Shinwell et al., 2021). Additionally, there is evidence from this study that organisations embedded in communities, able to understand and respond appropriately to the specific needs of that community can provide secure functionings for young people in ways that more transient programmes cannot. From the perspective of school holiday provision, programmes may therefore be best delivered by organisations who are able to offer ongoing opportunities and continuity of support, and who have connections to, and understanding of, the community they serve. While these organisations (including but not limited to arts organisations) are important sources of potential school holiday support they often experience financial precarity, and are subject to short-term funding cycles (Ward et al., 2022; 2024). In order to protect this valuable resource it is vital that they are adequately funded and that there is recognition of the importance of secure longer-term stability for these organisations and the young people they support.

8.7 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to enrich understanding of the ways in which school holidays impact on young people specifically by asking how young people experience these periods, how this affects their wellbeing, and how engagement in creative activities interacts with these experiences. By exploring the perspectives of young people using qualitative methods and reflexive thematic analysis I have argued that school holidays can provide largely overlooked benefits to young people's wellbeing.

Using a theoretical framework rooted in Childhood Studies, and operationalising the Capabilities Approach within that, I have examined the real freedoms that young people have to *be* and *do* during their school holidays in ways that are meaningful to them and valued by them. This has illuminated the extent to which young people's agency is expanded in school holidays, particularly in comparison to the constraints of school, and how this agency expansion can lead to new ways of experiencing being and doing. Comparative experiences between school and holidays also revealed a shift in how being and doing was temporally located for young people with school holidays presenting a time to both *be* in-the-moment and *become* for the future. During school holidays, being able to make choices, to reflect on what they need and want, and actively action this, was of value to young people in and of itself, alongside the outcomes these choices led to. Having freedom to choose to achieve valued functionings not only led to in-the-moment benefits but also to the expansion of future capabilities. Young people's creative practices and experiences exemplified how this could occur: exercising agency within creative practice, experiencing agency within the creative process and developing qualities through this process that could lead to new capabilities and functionings, both creative and more generally.

Although increased free time in school holidays was a key factor in facilitating the expansion of agency, so too was the balanced facilitation of key adults in young people's lives, particularly adults who were able to acknowledge young people as active agents and support them in developing and maintaining this agency. This was clearly evident in the experiences young people had in youth organisations where they felt individual and collective agency in their co-constructed and mutually upheld communities. Members of these communities,

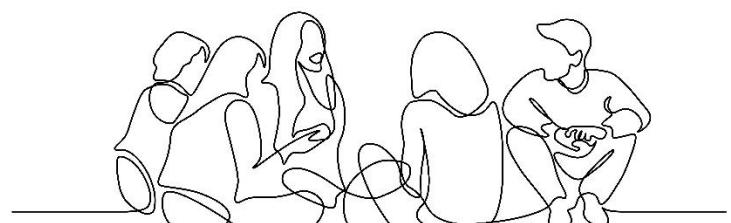
of all ages, seemed to construct young people as 'differently equal' in contrast to the ways in which young people felt seen in school.

Previous research on school holidays has been significantly focused on quantitative health and learning measures as a predictor for *future* health and wellbeing outcomes and has failed to adequately include the perspectives of young people themselves to better understand their lived experiences of this time. This preoccupation with how children will 'turn out' is a reflection of the dominance of a socially constructed view of childhood as primarily a state of development, and of children as 'incomplete'. This dominance, and the resulting absence of young people's perspectives, has shaped the landscape of school holidays research in such a way that the evidence produced cannot be relied on to present a full picture of the relationship between school holidays and young people's wellbeing. While this research has contributed to enriching that picture, future research should focus on furthering the inclusion of perspectives of a range of young people in different geographical contexts, particularly young people whose experiences of school holidays are not positive, or who lack adequate support to achieve wellbeing during this time. Better understanding of the factors that shape young people's wellbeing requires unpacking and re-balancing the tensions between adult perspectives and those of young people. Re-constructing young people as both beings and becomings, as differently equal to adults, can contribute to improving the way society supports young people's wellbeing in, and out of, school.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Example of Participant recruitment pack

Participants (and where relevant their parent/carer) were sent a recruitment pack containing: Introduction letter, Participant Information Sheet, Privacy Notice and Consent Form. There were 5 different versions of these with minor differences depending on whether they were to a young person, parent/carer or staff member and which strand of the study they were participating in. One example (young people in Strand 1) is included here for reference. All final versions were approved by The College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow (initial approval 03/02/2022, amendment approved 25/04/2022 (Application 400210128).



Invitation to take part in the 'Wellbeing in the School Holidays' Study

Researcher
Photo

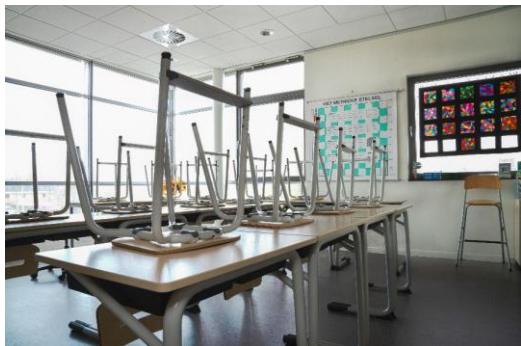
My name is Susie and I'm a researcher at the University of Glasgow working on a project called "Wellbeing in the School Holidays".

My email address: s.smillie.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Research is a way of finding out more about something. The kind of research I do looks at what things affect how people feel in their minds, bodies and lives.

Understanding this better can help change things to improve people's lives.

We all have different lives so it's important that research tries to include the variety of experiences different people have.



This project is about **school holidays**, so I'd like to hear what you think about school holidays, how you spend this time and how it makes you feel.

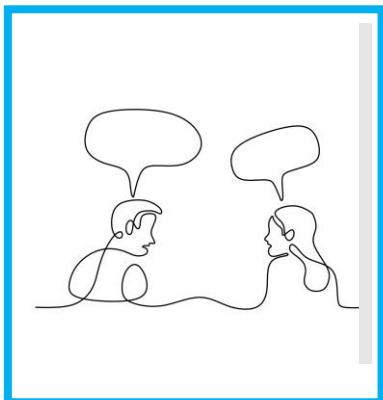
When people take part in research like this it's

important that they have enough information about it so that they can agree to take part ('consent') knowing what it is they're agreeing to.

For that reason there are pages that follow this one with lots of information. It can be a lot to take in so please take your time, speak to someone you trust if you want to discuss it more, or you can **contact me** if there's anything that isn't clear or you would like more information about.



Here are some of the main important points:



- I'd like to meet you twice to have a chat about school holidays (once before the holidays and once after).
- We can meet in your home or somewhere else.
- You can have a parent/carer or a friend who is also taking part in the study with you if you want.
- I'd like to record our chat so I can remember what we said.
- You don't need to answer any questions that you don't want to.
- You'll receive a gift voucher to thank you for your time



College of Social Sciences

Young Person Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Wellbeing in the School Holidays

Researcher: Susie Smillie

Supervisors: Stephanie Chambers and Nick Watson

I hope that this sheet will answer any questions you have about the study.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to find out more about how young people feel during the school holidays. This includes the kind of things they want to do, are able to do, and choose to do, during this time. I also want to find out if creative things (like drawing, listening to music, or making something) are important to young people in school holidays.

My job as the researcher on the project is to work with young people to collect information about this and then to write about it in a way that other people can learn from. This can help other people (like teachers, other researchers, people in government) to better understand how young people feel and what they need.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You are being asked to take part because you are aged 10-15 and you go to school in Glasgow or the area that surrounds it.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part in this study. Even if your parents/carers have agreed to you taking part you can still decide not to take part if you do not want to. If, after you have started to take part, you change your mind, just

let me know and I will not use any information you have given me in my writing.

There are two different parts to this study so you might have taken part in something before, or you might be asked in the future. You can take part in both if you want to.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part I will ask you to meet with me twice to talk about yourself and how you find school holidays. I'll also ask you to act as a researcher of your own summer holidays. You can do this by recording what you do (e.g. taking photos, keeping a diary or drawing) or collecting things that remind you about what you did and how you felt (e.g. keeping ticket stubs, making a list of songs you listen to or tv shows you watch).

I'll meet with you before the summer holidays and again at the end of the holidays/start of new term:

- When we meet before the holidays I'll ask you to tell me a bit about your life and the kind of things you enjoy doing, what you think your summer holiday is going to be like and what you hope to do, or not do.
- When we meet after the holidays it will be a bit like "show and tell" - I'll ask you to bring along anything you have recorded, collected or made that you would like to show me. These things will help us talk about your summer holidays, help you remember what you did and how you felt. If you decide not to bring anything that's fine, we can still talk about what you remember doing during the holidays and how this was for you.

At any of our meetings you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to.

Each meeting we have will last about an hour and I will record your answers on a voice recorder so that afterwards I can listen carefully to what you said. The recording will also be written out like a script so that I can look more carefully at the different things you, and the other young people taking part, say.

If you write or draw anything or show me anything you have collected or made during the summer I would like to take photos of these but I won't take photos of you or anything that could identify you. I might ask you for permission to use some of these photos in things I later write about the study, you don't have to agree to this if you don't want to.

You can meet with me alone or if you feel like it would be helpful your parent/carer or a friend who is also taking part in the study can sit in the meeting with us.

To thank you for your time taking part in the research I would like to give you some 'Love To Shop' gift vouchers that you can spend in lots of different high street shops. We have a £10 voucher for you after the first meeting and another £10 voucher after the second.

5. Will the information that I give you in this study be kept confidential?

I will keep the information in a locked cabinet or in a locked file on my computer. When I write about what I have found, your name will not be mentioned. If you like, you can choose another name for me to use when I am writing about what you said. No-one else will know which name you have chosen. (More details on how we use and look after your information is in the document 'Privacy Notice').

When I come to write about the project I will sometimes use quotes, which means I might write exactly what you, or another young person, has said. I will not use anything that would be recognised by other people who know you.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you, or other young people, might be in danger of harm, I might have to tell other people who need to know about this. If this is ever the case I will do my best to talk to you about it first and explain what I need to do.

6. What will happen to the results of this study

When I have gathered all of the information from everyone who is taking part I will write about what I have learned in a thesis (a long essay). This will be read and marked by senior researchers and then made available on the university website. I might also write shorter essays for journals (research newspapers) or tell other researchers about my work at conferences. At the end of the study I will tell you and the other young people who have taken part what I have found out about the different experiences of school holidays and how these affect young people.

7. Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow

8. Who can I contact for further Information?

If you have any questions about this study, you can ask me, Susie
(s.smillie.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

or my supervisors, Stephanie (stephanie.chambers@glasgow.ac.uk) or Nick
(nicholas.watson@glasgow.ac.uk)

or the Ethics Officer for the College of Social Sciences, Dr Susan Batchelor,
email: Susan.Batchelor@glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this.

End of Participant Information Sheet

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project

(Young Person Participant)

Name of project: Wellbeing in the School Holidays

Researcher: Susie Smillie

Supervisors: Dr Stephanie Chambers, Prof Nicholas Watson

Information about you (your ‘personal data’)

This sheet will explain what the University of Glasgow (called the ‘Data Controller’) will do with personal information about you, your ‘personal data’, that you give while taking part in the Wellbeing in the School Holidays study.

More detail about what taking part in the study involves is in the **Participant Information Sheet** that is with this notice.

Why we need your personal data

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details so that we can do our research. We only collect data that we need for the research project.

We need your name and your contact details (or your parent/carer details) to keep in contact with you while you’re taking part. We will use pseudonyms (fake names) and numbers in place of your name throughout the research so that you are not identified.

We might ask you for some other personal data (e.g. gender, ethnicity). This is so that we can try to represent different groups of people in the research. Personal data like this might also affect how you experience school holidays, so it might be something you talk about with the researcher when you are meeting with them.

Legal basis for processing your data

Your personal data is protected by law so we must have a specific legal reason for using it.

Our reason is that the research is what is known as a “task in the public interest”.

What we do with it and who we share it with

Almost all of the personal data you give us is processed by researchers at University of Glasgow, mainly by Susie Smillie.

Sometimes we use a separate company for transcribing (writing out) the recordings of interviews and group discussions. The person transcribing the recording will not know your full name or contact details. This company, and the people who work for them have an agreement with the University to maintain confidentiality and are bound by the same laws around personal data. The recordings and transcripts are transferred to them, and back to the University, in a secure way using passwords and secure storage.

We keep your name and contact details separate from all other information you give us and we use pseudonyms and numbers in place of your name.

Security measures are in place to make sure that your personal data remains safe: personal details are stored separately from all other research data (in separate locked cabinets/drawers and in separate secure electronic folders on password-protected, encrypted devices that can only be accessed by the researchers.

Please see the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** with this notice.

We will provide you, and your parent/carer, with a summary of the study findings at the end of the study.

What are your rights?

GDPR (the set of laws that help protect your personal data) makes sure that people have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and changes or deletion of personal data and to object to processing. People may also have the right to restrict the ways the data is processed. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see [UofG Research with personal and special categories of data](https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfo/office/az-topics/research/). (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfo/office/az-topics/research/>)

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfooffice/gdpr/gdprrequests/>) or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

How long do we keep your data for?

Your **personal** data (name and contact details) will be kept by the University only until the end of the study (until 01/10/2024). when we need your details to send a summary of the research findings. After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data (the information you speak about to the researcher) will be retained for ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines.

End of Privacy Notice _____

**Wellbeing in the School Holidays Study
Young Person Consent Form (Interviews)**

I would like to hear what you think about school holidays, how you spend this time and how it makes you feel.

Please circle 'Yes' or 'No' to show that you agree to taking part or not.

1. Have you had a chance to read the information I gave you and had an opportunity to ask me any questions about it?



2. Do you
want to go ahead with talking to me about school holidays?



3. Do you understand that you don't have to take part if you don't want to, and that you can choose to stop taking part at any time, or ask to skip any questions you don't want to answer?



4. Can I record our chat and take photos of the things you
write/draw/show me?



5. Can I tell other people what you think? I will not tell them your name.



6. Do you understand how we will look after the information you give us and what we will use it for?



Please write your name in the box below to show you agree to taking part.

I agree to take part in the study:

TO BE COMPLETED BY RESEARCHER

| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |
|--------------------|-----------|------|
| | | |

Appendix 2 Debrief sheet



Thank you very much for spending your time taking part in this research and for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me.

If you have any questions about the research I'm doing or about your involvement in it you can email me at
s.smillie.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Talking about yourself and your experiences in this way can sometimes cause you to feel a lot of different emotions. If you feel like you need to talk to someone more about how you're feeling you can speak to someone you trust like a friend, parent/carer or other trusted adult. If you would rather speak to someone who doesn't know you personally but that you can still trust you can try contacting a service like Childline. You can speak to a Childline counsellor online or on the phone about how you're feeling or you can explore their website for more general advice.

Childline - 0800 1111 / www.childline.org.uk

If you would like to talk to someone other than Childline and would like help finding the right service I have a list you can look at or I can make some other suggestions if you would like.

Appendix 3 Recruitment Flyer and example social media post

What do you do in the school holidays?

We are looking for people who:

- Are aged 10-15
- Go to school
- Live in, or near, Glasgow

Researchers at University of Glasgow are looking for young people to take part in a study about school holidays: **how young people spend this time and how it affects them.**

Taking part means speaking to a researcher about what you do, or don't do, over the summer and how you feel about this.

If you take part you'll receive **up to £20 shopping vouchers** to thank you for your time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.schoolholidaystudy.co.uk or scan the QR



Wellbeing in the School Holidays Study
@SchoolHol_Study

...

What do you do in the School Holidays?
We are looking for young people to take part in the study who:
- Are aged 10-15
- Go to school
- Live in, or near, Glasgow
Participants get up to £20 shopping vouchers as a thank you for their time
More info at schoolholidaystudy.co.uk

What do you do in the school holidays?

We are looking for people who:

- Are aged 10-15
- Go to school
- Live in, or near, Glasgow

Researchers at University of Glasgow are looking for young people to take part in a study about school holidays: **how young people spend this time and how it affects them.**

Taking part means speaking to a researcher about what you do, or don't do, over the summer and how you feel about this.

If you take part you'll receive **up to £20 shopping vouchers** to thank you for your time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.schoolholidaystudy.co.uk or scan the QR



2:29 PM · Mar 7, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

Appendix 4 Interview/focus group topic guides

Young person interviews

Interview 1 (Pre-Holiday)

NB. Examples of how these points will be phrased are given in *italics*

- Pre-interview

- Demographics form - young person completes (or completes in advance online or brings with them completed), if needs support then complete together
- Reiterate right to skip Qs, ask for breaks or end interview

“You don’t have to answer every question, if you don’t want to answer you can just ask me to skip it and we’ll move on. If you need a break at any time just let me know and if you feel like you want to stop the interview completely that’s fine too.”

- Reiterate right to withdraw

“You don’t have to take part in this study at all, and if you change your mind at any time you can withdraw from the study without giving me a reason.”

- Explain use of data and confidentiality (and circumstances that might lead to having to breach confidentiality)

“In the information sheet that I gave you it explains that everything you tell me is confidential, but if you were to tell me something that made me concerned that you or another person was at risk of harm then I might need to tell someone about that. If that was the case I would do my best to tell you that was the case and explain what I needed to do. Do you understand?”

- Explain research interest/aim

“The focus of the research is on what young people do in school holidays and how this affects them, but I’m also interested in understanding more about how young people use creative activities during this time so I’ll ask you about what you do generally but I’ll also ask you some questions about creativity and things you do that you think are creative”.

- Explain the structure of the interview ahead.

“I’ll ask you some questions just about yourself generally to give me a better understanding of the things you enjoy doing and how life is for you, then we’ll talk more about how you feel about school holidays or how you’ve spent this time in the past, then we’ll move on to more about what you have planned or how you would like your holidays to be this summer. I’ll sometimes ask you to explain something a bit more to me or I’ll check back with you that I’ve understood something properly.”

- Reminder of young person’s ‘data collection’ and that this will be discussed more later on.

“After we’ve finished talking about all this we’ll work out together how you might want to try and record what you do and how you feel over the summer before we meet again.”

- Ask young person if they have any questions or anything they want explained further

Interview

- General

- Explore general interests and where/when there is opportunity to engage in these, and with whom.
- Creative activities: If creative interests/activities brought up naturally then explore nature of these, motivations, perceived

pros/cons. Otherwise check understanding of “creativity” and give examples, before asking if they do anything they think is creative.

- Home: explore where young person lives and who they live with
 - E.g. Can you tell me a bit about what life is like for you at home
 - Probe who lives with, area, own space, ability to control own activities
- Friendships/family relationships
 - E.g. Can you tell me a bit more about who you think of as being closest to you: friends or family, who do you get on well with? Who do you feel supports you?
 - Probe how much time spent together and whether affected by holiday time
- Wellbeing: explore how young person defines wellbeing, what aspects they think are generally important or not, what they think affects their wellbeing positively or negatively.
- Time out of school
 - Explore general ideas about what is important for young people’s wellbeing specifically in out of school time
 - Explore normal routine during term time e.g. after school/weekend activities, who provides care, where do they go, how do they feel about this, how do they wish this was different
 - Explore past holiday periods - activities, programmes, who cares for them, how have they felt about this, what would they rather these periods were like, what do they think are the barriers that prevent them from doing what they would rather be doing

- Own wellbeing out of school: in their experience of out of school time (holidays or evenings/weekends) what aspects do they think improve their wellbeing and what aspects negatively affect it
- Upcoming holiday
 - Imagined “perfect holiday” scenario - explore how they would like to spend this time
 - Break down each aspect of ‘perfect holiday’ and explore how they think this would impact on their wellbeing and the perceived barriers preventing each aspect in reality.
 - What plans do they have in reality - organised activities, formal plans or less formal ideas of what might happen
 - Leading on to discussion of how the young person might want to try and record or ‘collect data’ on their own holiday time
- Finishing interview
 - Agree on some ideas for summer holiday ‘data collection’
 - Ask young person if they have any questions to ask
 - Explain young person can keep in touch over summer if they need any guidance on what to collect/record or if they have any questions that come up
 - Arrange time for second interview
 - Give ‘debrief’ leaflet and voucher and thank them for taking part

Interview 2 (Post-Holiday)

Pre-interview

- Reiterate right to skip Qs, ask for breaks or end interview

“You don’t have to answer every question, if you don’t want to answer you can just ask me to skip it and we’ll move on. If you need a break at any time just let me know and if you feel like you want to stop the interview completely that’s fine too.”

- Reiterate right to withdraw

“You don’t have to take part in this study at all, and if you change your mind at any time you can withdraw from the study without giving me a reason.”

- Remind about use of data and confidentiality (and circumstances that might lead to having to breach confidentiality)

“In the information sheet that I gave you it explains that everything you tell me is confidential, but if you were to tell me something that made me concerned that you or another person was at risk of harm then I might need to tell someone about that. If that was the case I would do my best to tell you that was the case and explain what I needed to do. Do you understand?”

- Remind research interest/aim

“The focus of the research is on what young people do in school holidays and how this affects them, but I’m also interested in understanding more about how young people use creative activities during this time so I’ll ask you about what you did during the holidays but I’ll also ask you some questions about creativity and things you do that you think are creative”.

- Explain the structure of the interview ahead.

“We’re going to spend most of this meeting talking about how the summer holiday has been for you, the kinds of things you did and how you felt. If you’ve

brought things that you collected or made we'll look through those and talk about them in more detail. As before I'll sometimes ask you to explain something a bit more to me or I'll check back with you that I've understood something properly.”

- Ask the young person if they have any questions

Interview

OPTION A. IF young person has collected/made/recorded items for “Show and Tell”:

- Ask them to select item they want to talk about (If young person has brought a lot of items ask them to choose whether to present them in order of importance/value to them or in chronological order)
- Showing them the ‘Memory Path’* ask them where during the holidays this occurred and how often and marking it on the path (drawing directly on or using sticky note). If happened very frequently can be drawn on above or below.
- Explore what the item represents/reminds them of - activities/events and feelings:
 - Appropriate probe questions will depend on nature of item(s) and what it represents:

e.g. describe the event/activity in more detail, who were they with, what were they doing, was it organised/informal, who else was involved in it, was it something they wanted to do or not, how did it make them feel, do they feel like there were benefits to it or negative effects, would they want to do it again in future holidays, how easy was it for them to be able to do it, what made it easier or more difficult to be able to do, what would they rather have been doing, what made it particularly enjoyable/or not, what would have made it a more enjoyable experience, did they feel safe/comfortable/included/cared for

- Repeat for each item
- If there are additional items they want to add they can do so on a 'Memory Path'

NB. IF young person has not brought items but **did** collect some (e.g. forgot to bring them) can offer young person opportunity to write list of the items they remember first and follow OPTION A with the notes or can just follow OPTION B.

OPTION B. IF young person has not brought items and did not collect/record/make anything use 'Memory Path':

1. Show them 'Memory Path'*
2. Using sticky notes or drawing/writing directly on the sheet support the young person to add memories of their holiday experiences onto the sheet e.g.
 - Starting from the most recent memories and working back (or vice versa)
 - Asking them to think of a time they particularly enjoyed in last ~6 weeks, and/or a time they didn't enjoy and working forwards and back from that time point
3. With each 'memory' added to the path explore the experience as in point 3 in OPTION A.

* = Memory path is a large sheet of paper with a road/path drawn on to represent chronology

General Qs for all

1. Overall experience of summer holiday - to what extent was it positive or valuable overall

2. Looking back at the things discussed/marked on the Memory Path is there a key event/experience (positive and/or negative) they think they will look back on in future

3. Return to school
 - How are they feeling about this / How was it returning to school
 - What aspects were/are they looking forward to or not
 - What will make/made it easier or more difficult
 - If they are already back was it how they thought it would be

4. Thoughts about school holidays in general thinking about all children not just their own experience
 - To what extent do they think young people's wellbeing is affected by school holidays (positively or negatively)
 - What do they think would improve experiences for those who have negative experiences during this time?

Final closing points

- Ask young person if they have any questions
- Explain next steps in study and that a summary report will be sent to them but reiterate they can contact if they have questions
- Give debrief leaflet and acknowledge how emotionally challenging speaking about our own experiences can be, encourage speaking to someone they trust (see debrief leaflet)

- Signpost if needed
- Give voucher
- Thank them for their time and for taking part

Focus groups

Groups in individual organisations

Equipment

- 12 flip chart pages each with a capabilities domain written on (and some spare sheets)
- 12 Capabilities Domain Cards (see WSH_Str2_FG_CapabilitiesDomainCards_v1.docx)
- Coloured pens
- Decorative stickers and tape
- Coloured sticky notes
- Name tag stickers
- 2 encrypted Dictaphones and (or one with external microphones)
- Snacks and refreshments
- [If online using Jamboard, Zoom whiteboard and chat and recording via Zoom to replicate the above]

Pre-FG

- Checking completed consent and demographic forms returned for each
- Group confidentiality agreement (agreeing to keep what is said in this room in this room, including identifying who was here)
- Remind about use of data and confidentiality (and circumstances that might lead to having to breach confidentiality)
- Reiterate right to not answering, being able to ask for breaks or leave the group.
- Reiterate right to withdraw
- Check understanding and answer questions

Explaining Capabilities approach, aim of study and what to expect from the group task

My research is using an approach called the capabilities approach and it's a way of thinking about wellbeing as a combination of a lot of different factors. That includes some of the things you might already consider to be 'wellbeing' like physical and mental health but it also includes other factors like having the opportunity to take part in things you value, have friendships, have a voice in your community, have access to nature, feel safe, be protected by the law those kind of things. A key part of the capabilities approach is to consider what opportunities are available for people to do the things they value and be who they want to be.

My research is specifically looking at how school holidays can affect young people's wellbeing through those different factors and opportunities, or lack of opportunities. And I'm also interested in the role that doing creative things or being involved in creative activities can play in young people's wellbeing.

A few years ago some researchers in Scotland asked some groups of young people to come up with a list of factors or general opportunities they felt were important for young people's wellbeing e.g. the opportunity to feel happy and the opportunity to be healthy. [SHOW CARDS WITH CAPABILITIES DOMAINS]



I'm looking for your experience and ideas to help explore just how these apply to young people who come to community arts centres like [ARTS ORGANISATION NAME] during the school holidays.

So these factors that I've mentioned are called Capabilities and we're going to start by taking each of these in turn and talking a bit about whether you think coming to [ARTS ORGANISATION] during the school holidays, or other times, affects young people's wellbeing in a way related to each of these cards. That can be positively or negatively.

So for example [give example specific to organisation "e.g. 'access to nature and/or pets' card: - "*I know you have some garden area here so we might talk about whether that's something young people have access to or not, if you think this is a positive experience for people or not, if you think they would be able to access nature elsewhere if they didn't get that opportunity here*"].

What you come up with doesn't need to be based on your own personal experience it can be based on how you've seen other people use the centre or the things you've heard the centre doing but that you weren't involved in.

You don't have to speak up if you don't want to, if you would rather you can write or draw your ideas on these sticky notes or you can write directly onto the sheet if you'd rather, or you can do a combination of those things. We'll start off working on one at a time but then we'll spread them out so if you then have an idea you want to add to one we've already worked on you can do that at any time. You can use any of the pens or stickers and tape. You don't need my permission to start writing or drawing ideas you can do that while any of us are talking. The only thing I'd ask you to do is to please not write your name or anyone else's name on anything - if you forget and you do then just let me know and we'll blank it out.

After this group (e.g. in a few weeks) we'll be doing a joint group with another community arts centre and when we get together then we'll have a chance to talk about the similarities and differences between the two (we'll use some of what we talk about today), what each can learn from one another but also more generally about what you think needs to be in place to support or improve young people's wellbeing during the school holidays.

Does that make sense?

Any questions?

Task

- Ask participants to choose one of the cards
- For each card ask participants to think about any activities, resources or ways they are treated in the centre that might be examples of how the organisation might support young people in each domain
- While each point is added or brought up:

- Clarify what is said/written/drawn to check understanding
- Probe for more detail to whole group not just person raising point
[Depending on what the activity/event/resource/environment factor is that has been brought up]: e.g.
 - Is this school holiday specific or all year (applies to other questions below e.g. are benefits the same in school holidays as rest of year)
 - Perceived benefits and any costs/disadvantages of it
 - Facilitators and barriers to access
 - Perceptions of what influences young person choices to get involved/take up the opportunity
 - What could be done differently/improved around this?
 - Are there similar opportunities elsewhere e.g. at home or school
- Once all cards/sheets have some ideas on them lay all these out and allow participants to move between them as they want so they can add additional ideas.

On close:

- give participants debrief leaflet
- thanking them for their time
- reminding them that there will be the second group and a chance to add ideas then as well
- encouraging them to contact if they have any questions about the study or the task.

Follow-up focus group

NB - This is the original topic guide for a group combining both organisations. This did not go ahead, and instead an individual follow-up group was conducted in one of the organisations. This follow-up focused on reviewing the previous feedback and further discussion of capabilities domains (in place of Task 1), and discussion of priorities for organisations designing or running school holiday programmes, including their own organisations (Task 2).

Equipment

- Summary pages from individual Focus Groups
- Flip chart pages
- 12 Capabilities Domain Cards (see WSH_Str2_FG_CapabilitiesDomainCards_v1.docx)
- Coloured pens
- Decorative stickers and tape
- Coloured sticky notes
- Name tag stickers
- 2 encrypted Dictaphones and (or one with external microphones)
- Snacks and refreshments
- [If online using Jamboard, Zoom whiteboard and chat and recording via Zoom to replicate the above]

Pre-FG

- o Checking completed consent and demographic forms returned for each
- o Group confidentiality agreement (agreeing to keep what is said in this room in this room, including identifying who was here or where they were from)
- o Remind about use of data and confidentiality (and circumstances that might lead to having to breach confidentiality)
- o Reiterate right to not answering, being able to ask for breaks or leave the group.
- o Reiterate right to withdraw
- o Check understanding and answer questions

Explaining task (5 mins)

When we met before I explained a bit about the capabilities approach and showed you these cards [SHOW CARDS] with the different areas of wellbeing. [Check everyone remembers and give reminder overview if not]. We talked about ways that the arts centres work or what they offer that might impact on wellbeing in one or more of these areas. Today we're going to talk a bit about the similarities and differences between the two centres, what each can learn from the other, but we're also going to try and come up with ideas more

generally about what you think needs to be in place (either at your arts centres or more generally) to support or improve young people's wellbeing during the school holidays.

A reminder that what you come up with doesn't need to be based on your own personal experience it can be based on how you've seen other people experience the school holidays.

As before you don't have to speak up if you don't want to, if you would rather you can write or draw your ideas on these sticky notes or you can write directly onto the sheet if you'd rather, or you can do a combination of those things. You can use any of the pens or stickers and tape. You don't need my permission to start writing or drawing ideas you can do that while any of us are talking. The only thing I'd ask you to do is to please not write your name or anyone else's name on anything - if you forget and you do then just let me know and we'll blank it out.

Does that make sense?

Any questions?

Task 1 - What can we learn from each other (15mins)

- Depending on group size split into smaller mixed groups (participants from both centres)
- Give each participant 2 summary sheets (one from each of the individual groups) showing capabilities domains and the types of activities/resources/environment provided by/accessible at the centre
- Ask groups to look at the sheets and discuss the similarities and differences between the two centres
- Ask each participant to put one or two key things they think that the other centre are doing that they would like to see their own centre doing
- Feedback as a whole group
 - o Probes:
 - Why does this sound appealing?
 - Do you think YP in your area would be able to access this/be interested in this
 - What would be the benefits of it for them
 - Would there be any disadvantages to it
 - Would it bring in new people to the centre

Task 2 - Design a summer holiday programme for the young people in your area (40 mins)

- Split back into smaller groups (if group size allows) and give flipchart sheets and a list of the capabilities domains
- Ask participants to design a school holiday programme that they think would appeal to the young people in their community and provide opportunities for wellbeing (capabilities domains sheet for reminders)
 - o They can write or draw their ideas
 - o It has to appeal to young people who need support for their wellbeing during holidays
 - o It has to be local but doesn't have to be based at their centre, they can include short trips away from the local area
 - o It doesn't have to be arts based or related

- Researcher will come round each group and discuss their ideas with them to get more detail/clarity

On close:

- give participants debrief leaflet
- thanking them for their time
- distribute vouchers
- encouraging them to contact if they have any questions about the study or the task.

Staff Interview Topic Guide

NB. Examples of how these points will be phrased is given in *italics*

- Pre-interview
 - Reiterate right to skip Qs, ask for breaks or end interview
 - Reiterate right to withdraw
 - Explain use of data and confidentiality (and circumstances that might lead to having to breach confidentiality)
 - Explain research interest/aim
 - Explain the structure of the interview ahead.
 - Ask if they have any questions or anything they want explained further

Interview

Organisation and role overview

- *Could you start by telling me a bit about the organisation your work for, its main purpose or aims and its remit and your role within that?*
- *Can you give me an overview of the kind of services the organisation offers? (whole community not just young people)*

Opportunities for young people

- *Can you tell me what sort of opportunities you feel that the organisation offers specifically school-age young people in the community?*
- *Are there opportunities you think they get here that they're unlikely to get elsewhere, if so what? And why do you think these are lacking elsewhere?*
- *What do you think attracts young people to taking up these opportunities here?*
- *What do you think are the main barriers to young people taking up these opportunities?*
- *How do you think young people benefit from coming to the centre or getting involved in activities here?*
- *Do you think there are any costs or sacrifices young people have to make in coming here?*

Holiday programmes

- *Thinking specifically about school holidays can you tell me about your school holiday programme and how this differs from term time?*
- *How do young people use the centre during the school holidays? E.g. do they get involved in activities or come to spend time more informally*
- *What do you think are the benefits to young people of being able to come here during the holidays?*
- *Are there factors that help you run this programme e.g. funding or other support? And what are the barriers to being able to provide it?*
- *What do you think works particularly well in the programme?*

- *What could be improved and is it feasible for you to make those improvements, if not what barriers are there to that?*
- *Do you have any other plans for developing the programme in the future?*

Arts and creativity

- *[If haven't already covered this] Thinking specifically about arts and creativity what do you think are the benefits to young people of being creative or being able to have arts-related or creative experiences? Are there any drawbacks?*
- *What do you think gets young people interested in or seeking out creative activities or experiences?*
- *What do you think are the main barriers to engaging young people in arts and creativity?*
- *Are there things you've found from your experience here that work well to engage young people in arts experiences or creative practice who might otherwise be reluctant?*

Use of young person advisory group

- *You have a group of young people who act as a kind of advisory or steering group for the organisation, can you tell me how that came about?*
- *Can you tell me more about their remit and the kind of activities they are involved in?*
- *What benefits do you perceive for young people involved in this group? Are there any disadvantages/costs/sacrifices?*
- *What do you think are the benefits to the organisation? And any disadvantages/costs?*

Final closing points

- Ask Participant if they have any questions
- Explain next steps in study and that a summary report will be sent to them but reiterate they can contact if they have questions
- Signpost if needed
- Thank them for their time and for taking part

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