

# Bridging Generations: Leveraging Arts-Based Methods and Evaluation to Foster Intergenerational Dialogue

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## Abstract

This article investigates how arts-based methods not only provide spaces for the enhancement of the skills that can enable children and youth to contribute to intergenerational dialogue but how the arts reinforce and sustain youth voices in the community. It draws on a combined approach rooting Lundy's conceptualization of the United Nations Convention and the Rights of the Child with Sen's Capabilities Approach. The research collected data through focus groups and interviews with 114 youth and 12 adults across two arts-based projects in Indonesia. The thematic areas identified are *children and youth focused spaces through arts-based methods*, *from Artist to Activist*, and *supporting intergenerational spaces*. These highlight how using arts-based interventions, youth gain intergroup capabilities and functionings that can translate into meaningful engagement with adults. The article contributes to our understanding of the importance of creating child-centric spaces that move beyond platforming youth voice, to its support and development.

## Keywords

capabilities, peacebuilding, arts-based methods, children's rights, intergenerational dialogue

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## Introduction

Conflict has a profound impact on children and youth, often leading to long-term psychological and emotional trauma and can result in a loss of education and social stability (Ozcelik et al., 2021). Peacebuilding involves creating a supportive atmosphere for fundamental security, providing tangible benefits of peace, instilling confidence in the political processes, and bolstering the national capacity for sustainable development (United Nations, 2010). To create an effective response to conflict the United Nations has developed a three-pronged approach (United Nations, 2010) that was enhanced, in 2022, with emphasis on promoting the voices of children and youth in decision-making processes with peacebuilding strategies. This meaningful participation has been conceptualized through the creation of “intergenerational dialogue,” a peacebuilding strategy that connects children and youth to adult stakeholders in their community in an environment that encourages mutual understanding, empathy, and collaboration (Fielding, 2007). Effective steps toward creating spaces of intergenerational dialogue, however, can be challenging in peacebuilding environments. Processes of conflict resolution are often based on the principles of justice and reconciliation, with children viewed as part of the “greater whole” of suffering, being added to mechanisms of political reparations or as a tokenistic “add and stir” approach to building a peacebuilding tools legitimacy (Feinstein et al., 2010). Further to this, their voices may be delegitimized as “passive” or expected victims of violence, perceived as “stolen childhoods” and “lost generations” rather than being included in the deeper discourse on the root causes of violence or principles of justice (Feinstein et al., 2010; McEvoy-Levy, 2011). A means to overcome this delegitimization and promote child and youth voice can be found in the use of the arts.

Throughout history, arts and cultural practices have served as tools for navigating conflicts, bridging divides between groups, and articulating ethical values (Cohen, 2017). In Indonesia, the arts have been embedded in programs and initiatives from the introduction of the formal education system, with legislation acknowledging the importance of arts in promoting individual experience (Eisner, 1997). Within Indonesia, arts such as traditional music, dance, and visual arts are widely used in community-building and peacebuilding efforts, offering spaces for children and youth to express their concerns and contribute to social cohesion, especially in areas of conflict (Paterson-Young et al., 2024). This article contributes to knowledge by exploring how capabilities contribute to fostering intergenerational dialogue among children and young individuals engaged in peacebuilding initiatives and how this is mediated through the arts. This article adopts a combined approach rooting Lundy’s (2007) conceptualization of the United Nations Convention and the Rights of the Child with the Capabilities Approach (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1985). It emphasizes how arts-based methods can not only provide spaces for the enhancement of the skills that can aid children and youth to contribute to intergenerational dialogue but also how the arts can reinforce and sustain children and youth voices in the community while promoting its value to stakeholders. It also identified an inherent risk to the arts-based model, namely that embedding an arts-based dialogic tool into a community may create a situation where child and youth voice is “locked in” to the arts and attempts at renegotiating the place of youth voice returns it to tokenism.

## Literature Review

### *Intergenerational Dialogue and Arts-Based Methods*

Intergenerational dialogue has garnered significant scholarly attention due to its potential to bridge generational divides and foster mutual understanding across ages (Bengtson & Oyama, 2002; Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2016; Gudykunst & Kim, 2005). It serves as a platform for sharing experiences, perspectives, and knowledge between individuals from different generations (Bengtson & Oyama, 2002) through open and respectful communication. Intergenerational dialogue can facilitate the

exchange of intergenerational traditions, promote understanding, and create opportunities for challenging age-related stereotypes and biases (Bengtson & Oyama, 2002; Gudykunst & Kim, 2005). Indeed, intergenerational dialogue has been recognized to address pressing societal issues including intergenerational conflict and peacebuilding, by fostering solidarity and cooperation between age groups (Gudykunst & Kim, 2005; Parker, 2016). Research (Bengtson & Oyama, 2002; Gudykunst & Kim, 2005; McHugh, 2003) demonstrating the positive outcomes associated with intergenerational dialogue (both at the individual and societal levels), has shown that intergenerational dialogue can enhance psychosocial well-being by promoting a sense of belonging and connectedness (McHugh, 2003). Research by Liu and Kendig (2016) highlights that intergenerational dialogue has the potential to contribute to the development of policies that promote intergenerational equity and social cohesion.

Intergenerational dialogue not only facilitates the exchange of perspectives and experiences across generations but also empowers young people to actively participate in peacebuilding processes, highlighting its transformative potential in enhancing youth engagement (Parker, 2016). By building platforms for meaningful interaction and collaboration between children and youth, and older generations, intergenerational dialogue contributes to building trust, resilience, and social cohesion within communities affected by conflict (Ngomna & Leke, 2023). The link between intergenerational dialogue and the arts is rooted in the ability of arts-based methods to provide a creative, non-hierarchical platform for expression and communication (Cin et al., 2023; Tom, 2013). By engaging in activities like storytelling, visual arts, music, or drama, both children and adults can share their perspectives, encouraging empathy, active listening, and the validation of diverse voices across generations, enhancing communication, reducing generational divides, and promoting inclusive decision-making (Fielding, 2007).

The arts can also be used to serve as a tool to address trauma from negative experiences and conflicts and contribute to the reduction of future violence (Hunter and Cohen, 2019; Marshall, 2014). The use of digital arts can empower local communities by allowing them to shape their own peacebuilding narrative, aligned with, yet not confined to, Western liberal values (Tom, 2013). Filmmaking has been used to give youth voices a platform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and photography to help refugees address injustices and aid their political participation (Cin et al., 2023). Despite these benefits, determining the optimal settings for applying these methods in peacebuilding activities remains challenging (Shank & Schirch, 2008). For example, these interventions are reliant on external stakeholders and facilitators to lead or train children and youth, which can lead to conformity or the embedding of power dynamics (Alcala and Uribe, 2016; Buchenhorst, 2012).

In Indonesia, there have been “several civil wars, multiple major incidents of ethno-religious violence, as well as a nationwide non-violent social movement for democracy” (Smith, 2020, p. 39) in the last 25 years. Peacebuilding efforts involving government actors, religious leaders, and civil society organizations have occurred in Indonesia, with the arts having increasingly been used as tools for peacebuilding (Naidu-Silverman, 2015). Despite this, opportunities for children to engage have been limited (Octarra, 2022) due to a lack of creative tools that facilitators can use to engage children and young people. Indonesia’s Child Protection Law ensures that every child has the right to be heard and to participate in development planning, mandating that both national and regional governments support children’s participation, however, the inclusion of the arts in the curriculum has been focused on the expression of the individual or the implementation of policy, rather than as a tool to encourage dialogue (Eisner, 1997).

### *The United Nations Convention and the Rights of the Child and Capabilities Approach*

Sen’s Capability Approach, initially formulated in the 1980s and expanded by Nussbaum in 2000, provides a normative framework rooted in the principles of social justice (Cin et al., 2020). According to

Sen (1993, p. 30), a capability is defined as "a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being." It represents the alternative combinations of actions or states an individual can achieve. Building on this, Walker and Unterhalter (2007) described capabilities as the opportunities or freedoms an individual holds to accomplish what they consider valuable. Sen distinguishes between "capabilities" and "functionings," with functionings defined as the outcomes individuals achieve, such as working, reading, being well-nourished, well-educated, or safe (Sen 1993, p. 31). Capabilities refer to the set of functionings that an individual has the possibility of accessing and achieving. Individuals convert commodities into functionings, a process influenced by personal, social, and environmental factors. Within the context of the research, Robeyns (2007) outlines personal conversion factors such as gender and reading skills as impacting how individuals convert the characteristics of a commodity into a functioning. Consideration is also given to social conversion factors, including social, institutional, and structural arrangements which encompass public policies, social norms, discriminatory practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, and power relations (Hart and Brando, 2018). Despite differing opinions around the applicability of the Capabilities Approach toward children's development (Peleg, 2013), and human rights (Robeyns, 2007), it can aid our understanding of the freedom and agency that children and youth may obtain through arts-based approaches to peacebuilding. When combined with Lundy's (2007) interpretation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can it fully offer insights into the role of capabilities and functionings in intergenerational dialogue.

Lundy's (2007) conceptualization of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was built across four interlinked elements. The foundational element of the conceptualization is space: the creation of an area where children are encouraged to share their views, supported by both the community and the state (Lundy, 2007). Lundy also focuses on the role of stakeholders to "assure" the child that they have the right to express their views, rather than simply act as a recipient if the child chooses to provide them (Lundy, 2007). This is interlinked with voice, categorized as the ability of children and youth to express their views, regardless of the capacity to do so. Instead, there should be a focus on providing both the tools and means to enable them to express their views, regardless of whether that view is considered "mature" (Lundy, 2007). The final two elements are also interlinked. Audience refers to the idea that child and youth views are given "due weight" by those who can make decisions that affect them. This element seeks to guarantee children and youth the "right to an audience," a guaranteed opportunity to communicate their views. This ties into influence: the idea that children and youth's views are given due weight, and simply offering the appearance of listening is insufficient, real action must be taken where appropriate, supported by explaining to them *how* their views will be actioned (Bessel, 2011).

The combined models can be used to theoretically underpin the sustainable peace-building strategies first outlined by Lederach (1997). Lundy's model creates a frame for reconciliation processes within a given context, with the capabilities approach denoting the functionings required for children to be effective participants. For example, sustainable peace-building approaches often call for complexity, with a large range of individuals, organizations, and agencies to be drawn together, represented by Lundy's concept of the audience with the expression of their voice being a functioning that requires scaffolding and support by the involved stakeholders (Van Tongeren, 2012).

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Aim***

The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of capabilities in promoting intergenerational dialogue with children and youth involved in peacebuilding activities. Drawing on the Capability

Approach, developed by Sen (1985) and expanded by Nussbaum (2000), focuses on enhancing the freedoms and capabilities of individuals to live valuable lives. The research this article is based upon was gathered through arts-based peacebuilding projects in Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and Rwanda. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The project places co-production at its core, involving children from Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and Rwanda who volunteered to contribute to the project's development through an international Youth Advisory Board (YAB) (Paterson-Young et al., 2024). Multi-method research was conducted for the overarching research project, with this article presenting qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups in Indonesia.

## *Ethics*

Addressing ethical considerations in peacebuilding research necessitates not only acknowledging traditional research ethics practices (Homan, 1991) but also recognizing the importance of research sensitivity (Brewer, 2016). The research team collaborated closely with the team in Indonesia to establish a culturally sensitive ethical process. This involved co-producing participant information in collaboration with in-country teams, ensuring that translated materials were culturally sensitive and ethically sound. In addition, information intended for child participants was co-created with children from the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to ensure its appropriateness within each context.

All researchers underwent comprehensive training covering ethical debates associated with research. This training aimed to ensure researchers were well-versed in standard ethical considerations (such as respecting confidentiality and anonymity, securing voluntary informed consent from children, data protection and storage, integrity and trust, and safeguarding participants) and nuanced ethical considerations that prioritize sensitivity (Brewer, 2016). The nuanced ethical considerations involved ensuring children and guardians of children received details and accessible information on the research to ensure a full understanding of their participation and the potential risks involved. Children and youth were able to safely and freely participate in research through the use of safe spaces where children and youth could freely express their views without fear of harm or retaliation. The overarching guiding principle in both standard and new ethical considerations remained "do no harm," serving as the foundation for the ethical considerations submitted to and approved by the Universities' Research Ethics Committees. Participants received detailed Participant Information Sheets, designed in consultation with local teams and translated into each country's preferred language. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, individuals participating in semi-structured interviews were assigned random identifiers.

## *Participants and Procedure*

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with children and youth engaged with arts-based peacebuilding projects in Indonesia. Interview and focus group schedules were collaboratively developed with researchers in Indonesia to ensure the incorporation of in-country nuances. The overarching aim of the interviews and focus groups was to explore children and youth's experiences of engaging in peacebuilding dialogue through arts-based methods, with questions such as: how do you define peace and peacebuilding? How has engagement with the project aided (or not) engagement with others in the community (for example, breaking traditional hierarchies; students discussing issues with teachers; teachers listening to students, etc.)? How can art-based participatory approaches to community building be utilized by civil society organizations? It is important to highlight that the specific approach to interviews and focus groups was at the discretion of the research team in Indonesia, respecting cultural sensitivities and norms. Overall, semi-structured interviews and focus groups

were conducted with 120 individuals engaged with two arts-based projects<sup>1</sup> in Indonesia, including 55 children (16–17 years old) and youth (18–24 years old) from “Project A” and 59 children and youth from “Project B” in addition to three facilitators and three policymakers. Facilitators and policy makers, engaged with the peacebuilding projects, were invited to participate in interviews to share knowledge and experiences on the use of arts-based methods for peacebuilding in Indonesia. This sample, across two Projects, allowed for a broader representation of diverse perspectives, enhancing the depth across the different Projects and increasing the validity and applicability of the findings.

The research employed a purposeful sampling technique (Bryman, 2012) to recruit participants, specifically targeting children and youth who were currently involved or had been involved in arts-based projects. Each participant was provided with detailed information on the project’s purpose, expectations, inclusion and exclusion criteria, confidentiality measures, withdrawal process, and the procedure for filing complaints. Interviews and focus groups were carried out in the language preferred by the participants and audio recordings were managed by the research team in Indonesia. Interviews were transcribed by the research team in Indonesia and translated by the research team in the United Kingdom using an approved transcription service. A final validation process was conducted by the research team in Indonesia to ensure the accuracy of translations. This article focuses on analyzing the qualitative data derived from children and youth involved in arts-based peacebuilding projects. Its aim is to explore the role of capabilities in promoting intergenerational dialogue with children and youth involved in peacebuilding activities.

## Analysis

All participants willingly volunteered to participate in semi-structured and focus groups, with anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed. As a result, the quotes featured in this article are identified using specific labels, namely “([Project A/B] [Interview/Focus Group] [Participant Number]).” The interviews underwent transcription and were uploaded to QSR NVivo, with any identifiable information carefully removed. Initial coding was conducted in the United Kingdom, accompanied by reflective meetings with the team in Indonesia and the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to ensure context-specific information was captured accurately. Interviews with key stakeholders underwent analysis using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The approach acknowledges that data do not inherently reflect an objective reality but are instead comprising themes representing a “pattern of shared meaning, organized around a core concept or idea, a central organizing concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 844, emphasis in original).

The data analysis proceeded through multiple iterative steps. Each phase remained grounded in the data, with patterns identified within and across interviews to facilitate a deeper understanding of shared meanings and latent constructs related to the research question(s). Initially, data was categorized into codes, each capturing a pertinent and specific segment of the data aligned with the research question. In later stages, codes were refined and abstracted into themes that encapsulated latent constructs within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022). The key themes identified are *children and youth focused spaces through arts-based methods, from Artist to Activist, and supporting intergenerational spaces*.

## Findings

### *Children and Youth-Focused Spaces Through Arts-Based Methods*

The arts-based interventions provided children and youth with new space to express themselves in a manner appropriate for their capacity (Lundy, 2007). This is important as it allowed children and

youth to choose arts-based tools for dialogue that were both useful to them, and that they were confident in using.

I felt confident again in making music.... I returned to music again and performed art again in front of many people. (Project B Young Person Group 8– A8)

This confidence was not based on simply using tools that they were familiar with (for example, performing in a play they had been in before), but rather ones they believed they could engage with effectively, due to their previous experiences. This is important as it shows that the use of the arts can move beyond creating a space of comfort for children and youth to encouraging them to engage with new experiences, evidencing improved capabilities.

The one that was right at practice was playing the [instruments/music] because that was also the first time, I played it. Because when I'm usually dancing, I'm acting like that in the theatre, and when I'm dancing, I'm also dancing in the theatre. So, when it comes to [instruments/music], I've never touched music like that, so I like it. This is my first experience playing [instruments/music]. (Project A Young Participant A – TTA)

Creating youth-led participatory spaces allows children and youth to celebrate togetherness, share differences, and unite, contributing to the promotion of individual freedom and engagement in meaningful activities that add value to one's life (Sen, 1989). Through these participatory spaces, young individuals can explore and develop their personal, social, and intellectual capabilities. They are encouraged to voice their opinions to adults, engage in collaborative decision-making, participate actively in community projects, and feel empowered.

We also often have discussions with the coach, we also have discussions with friends very often, especially as there are differences between [instrument/music] and [instrument/music], and others with others, but at that time we were united with each other, with the coach too, Well, there we discussed it together, sis, and that's not all circles It's just the players but we can discuss everyone together... (Project A Young Participant A – PCC)

As children and youth engaged in these interventions, an area that emerged was how the arts allowed them to engage with their peers and adults more confidently, as well as build their knowledge on *how* people communicated.

I feel happy, it turns out it's not as scary as I thought. I know information ... child safety, and I gained instant amazing friends. I can share my opinion... (Project B Young Person Group 8 – A11)

Courage was an area children and youth reflected upon, not only the courage to speak to new or different people, but also the courage to agree with others, which could be linked to concepts of self-advocacy, and not relying on others to speak for them.

We have to listen to how we have to speak, and what if when we put everything together it turns out that the voice is also better, right? and with existing issues, you can have the courage to voice the same issue. (Project B Young Participant A – H)

As children and youth were encouraged to express their ideas and opinions to each other, and meaningful dialogue was supported through the arts, this could then be further developed through co-production and engagement with cultural artists and facilitators.

Just from the little things, we were practicing the dance, me and peers decided how many beats needed, the facilitator asked ‘okay friends, how many beats do you want to do the dance in? How many moves for this one, that one?’ from small things we can make opinions. (Project A Young Person C)

Creating spaces where children and youth can influence activities can promote both weight and influence in child and youth voices (Lundy, 2007). The arts were noted by facilitators as being effective in creating confident, vocal, and engaged participants compared to other types of intervention. At the same time, listening to children and youth is the start of recognizing their agency (Peleg, 2013).

...confident ... the confidence, usually children are ... like if I’m called by a certain Studio, or School, the children are usually quiet, shy, don’t dare to ask questions, but for the children [Project A participants] here, they are different. (Facilitator 1)

These forms of engagement parallel the pedagogical strategies of project-based learning, wherein the foundational tenets of active engagement, interpersonal interaction, and knowledge dissemination form the crux of the educational methodology (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). The use of the arts creates further benefits by allowing children and youth the chance to engage with a dialogic medium they are comfortable with, without sacrificing the opportunity to engage in new experiences. It creates a platform for them to work with facilitators cooperatively which can help break down social intergenerational barriers, develop their own communication skills, and better understand how others may communicate. All of these are opportunities that improve their capability to engage with intergenerational dialogue. Importantly, it achieves this within a child and youth-centric space, which offers them both agency and support in leading their own development, with facilitators effectively scaffolding their learning (Lundy, 2007).

## **From Artist to Activist**

The previous section focused on how arts-based interventions can create child-centric spaces, within the Lundy typography, where the skills that can underpin a participant, capabilities can be effectively and appropriately developed (Lundy, 2007). The arts, however, can complement the development of other skills, such as leadership, analyzing policy, cooperation, and teamwork. These skills are related to the functioning and capabilities, like agency and empowerment, that can help children and youth engage in meaningful and effective intergenerational dialogue (Robeyns, 2007; Sen, 1993).

So far at [the project] we have not only learned about art, but we have also learned how we can lead others, how we can be led by others, how we can give direction to others and how we can receive direction from others ... there’s a lot of solidarity, cooperation, trust in each other, help. (Project A Young Participant B – PCC)

It gives children and youth the opportunity to learn skills that promote and strengthen connections with other children and youth, as well as the wider community.

Continuing to learn new things ... I feel respected ... here you can learn dancing, music too ... and continue learning how to do public speaking ... I continue to hope that in the future I will be able to increase my relationships, be able to appear in public more clearly and increase my skills. (Project B Young Person Group I – A3)

The opportunity to talk to their peers, build their confidence, and encourage communication promoted critical and analytical skills. Using the arts to tackle difficult conversations led to the development of policy analysis and self-advocacy.

I also have to be able to analyse this, analyse policies ... dare to speak up, increase relationships, that's clear. So, get to know each other from this community, this group. Continue to learn to communicate... (Project B Young Person Group I – A2)

In the context of the capabilities approach, the arts-based activities translate into specific functionings that can represent the realized achievements of children and youth. However, the achievements are not homogenous, with project contexts (i.e., Project B supports children with disabilities) requiring different resources depending on the needs of the children and youth. Nevertheless, these functionings encompass meaningful social interactions, self-confidence, effective communication, critical thinking, creative expression, policy analysis, and self-advocacy. Each functioning can contribute to the overall well-being and agency of children and youth, reflecting the broader objective of the Capabilities Approach to enhance their real freedoms and opportunities to lead better lives.

As this agency evolved, participants began to take ownership of solutions to shared problems and were more willing to engage with external adult stakeholders. Interestingly, the arts also helped participants frame their experiences into stories; linear retellings of events that would be easily understandable to an audience who may be unfamiliar with the topic, or relatable to those who may have had similar experiences in the past.

You can express your story ... not just in written form ... you know, emote icons or symbols. For example, like that, there are a lot of people who feel the change, whether it's like feeling like they're enjoying it, like Azka, like that, you can write it in the chat column like that, instead of writing sorry, give an emote, an icon like a smile like that. (Project B Young Person Group 9 – A2)

As these skills increased, children and youth became more confident in telling their stories to audiences of people they did not know.

Cooperate more together ... sometimes I talk when I collide with other people who want to talk too. Same ... just as confident. The thing is, I will, later on when I perform, I will be watched by a room full of people and I don't even know the person, so I will increase my self-confidence. (Project A Young Participant B – TTA)

There was a sense of pride in crafting a song addressing climate change and presenting it at an event attended by educators, policymakers, government officials, and community members.

In this child campaign, we had plans to make a song about the impact last year. That's why last December we made a song like that about climate change.... The process of getting there is complicated, so you have to do this first, you have to practice, it's not as simple as we advocate, there's a special treatment like that. (Project B Young Participant A – H)

Developing inclusive spaces for engagement is supported by facilitators who have constructed spaces of learning around the arts that encourage the development of participants' capabilities, fostering a sense of civic responsibility.

We were also taught that if you can't participate from the start, don't participate, because from there we also learn that you can't take something for granted, sis, so that's the problem.... If we keep practicing every day,

never taking things for granted, we will definitely be able to do it, be responsible. (Project A Young Participant B – PCC)

**By providing opportunities to participate, taking responsibility, and building confidence, children and youth can be better equipped to engage in societal and political processes, enhancing their ability to advocate for themselves and analyze policies critically.**

These activities promote personal growth and development, enabling young people to achieve capabilities that contribute to their overall well-being and agency.

As these skills develop, they are not spatially locked, with participants looking for opportunities

to promote other areas they believe are in need of support.

I want ... to be able, in the future, to be an example for other children, like the performance on the stage, that tells children who like to bully like that, 'Wow, it turns out bullying is not good'. Then I also want to be someone who brings Betawi culture back again, because actually I also really like Betawi culture.... Maybe the closest hope is that when we appear, the message will be heard, but if the hope is bigger, hopefully this is just the beginning. (Project A Young Participant A – TTA)

This empowerment relies on the creation of strong relationships in which children and youth can 'own' the space (Paterson-Young et al., 2024). In that space their voices become more confident; they transform the messages into performances with hopeful narratives. As the capabilities of children and youth expand, they are more willing and able to engage in dialogue with stakeholders, though importantly, there is an emphasis on audience-performer relationships.

## Supporting Intergenerational Spaces

Youth-led participatory spaces that create opportunities for children and youth to engage with educators, policymakers, government officials, and community members, promoting trust and meaningful relationships (Cuevas-Parra & Tisdall, 2019; Paterson-Young et al., 2024) that allow children and youth to feel connected to the community. The research highlights how participatory spaces created environments that participants viewed as respectful and inviting, fostering social cohesion through establishing accessible avenues for communication (Ozcelik et al., 2021).

Here we are respected, so our opinions are not arbitrary, so for example, people accept our opinions, but our opinions are not used, then it becomes useless as we say it, here the suggestions are collected, discussed, then we get it. It's more like a deliberation system, I like it (Project A Young Participant A – PCC)

This highlights how the arts-based spaces contributed to children and youth feeling their voice was given sufficient weight and influence (Lundy, 2007). This was characterized by one participant as giving children and youth a space "*to have an opinion.*"

Dare to have the same opinion about rights and justice. It's like we have the right to have an opinion and have the right to do that regarding children's rights or the right to have an opinion like that. (Project B Young Person Group 10 – L)

This may speak to one of the challenges for arts-based interventions, namely the ability for those skills to be transferred into the other, adult-focused, spaces. Indeed, studies in Indonesia have shown children are not welcome to speak up or be listened to in adult-focused platforms (Octarra, 2022). Participants were unsure if, when taken out of the arts space, adults would be as open to dialogue and hearing the voice of children and youth.

Usually, children are just silent, and they are not given the opportunity to express their opinion in front of the government, in front of adults. However, in the project activities, we, the children, are the main actors in conveying all our aspirations through fun things with our parents to share opinions or participate. (Project B Young Person Group M – RE)

Indeed, participants noted that other activities in the same area were not as safe or productive for children and youth. This points to the importance of communities and the state in providing a safe and enabling environment for children and youth to exercise the same freedom and embrace meaningful opportunities.

That is very different from other activities, namely that [the project] is a child-friendly activity, because [Artist] himself, who saw the activities at school, turned out to be not as safe and child-friendly as those who take part in these activities. Well, what stands out about [the project] is that it is unique, how about it? That's the way to ensure that the children who take part in these activities are comfortable and safe in carrying out the activities (Project B Young Participant B – H)

This challenge was also acknowledged by policymakers, who hoped to create a sustainable practice of intergenerational spaces by creating partnerships with government, community, and international stakeholders.

The module could also incorporate a balance of partnership, and collaboration between stakeholders, govt, community and foreign parties ... as one of the indicators of global city is cultural interaction, and what [project] has done is supporting Jakarta to become a global city. (Policymaker 3)

The success of these arts-based spaces was that it allowed children and youth to collaborate with adults on equal terms, whereas a move into the political arena with the creation of adult partnerships, led by policymakers may reduce their power. Furthermore, the children and youth also seek to influence policies, and this would require listening, respecting, and accommodating adults.

***For spaces of intergenerational dialogue to be sustainable, there is a need to ensure that either the learnings from the arts-mediated spaces are applied to other levels, such as the curriculum, or that the children and youth are given the opportunity to lead or co-facilitate the creation new spaces for dialogue.***

There are no challenges or obstacles to the process, but the first challenge is the fear that our voices will not be heard by the government, whether our voices will be implemented by the government, because right before that, the voices of the children.... Previously it was rarely implemented, I hope that with [the programme] can also result in implementation from the government, that's how it is. (Project B Young Participant B – N)

In either scenario, adults in the audience need to adopt respect (Lansdown, 2022) and accommodate behaviors that may even translate into adapting their own arts-based approach.

## Discussion

The findings in this article demonstrate that arts-based interventions can support children and youth to develop their capabilities and functionings. This includes improving their sensory modalities, imaginative faculties, cognitive processes, and logical reasoning, thus allowing them to envision positive change (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1989). Children and youth participating in arts-based interventions saw the arts-based tools as providing an innovative mode of communication, that enabled them to reduce conflict and improve communication between different groups (Cohen, 2017; Hunter & Cohen, 2019), in a way that could not only promote the building of a lasting, sustainable peace, but encourage children and youth to become stakeholders themselves in future endeavors. However, their expectations go beyond the arts space to intergenerational spaces where adults would treat them equally, indicating that the capabilities and functionings of children and youth can be fully realized when adults respect children's rights and accept that children and youth have their own capabilities and functionings, or agency (Peleg, 2013).

***The arts were shown to create children and youth-centric spaces where their voices were given sufficient weight, encouraging intergroup confidence, self-advocacy, and the ability to better understand how others communicate which served to help better develop participants' ability to engage in intergenerational dialogue.***

are not considered to have the capacity to have meaningful, or mature, input into the decision-making processes that affect them (Lundy, 2007).

Safe spaces for dialogue can provide a supportive environment where children and youth can engage in difficult conversations about social problems, such as conflict and inequality, without fear of judgment (Paterson-Young et al., 2024). These safe spaces enable children and youth, alongside other community stakeholders, to exchange knowledge and differences and develop community cohesion (Cohen, 2017; Hunter & Cohen, 2019) through a capabilities approach that promotes individual freedom and adds

***If adults control spaces too tightly, this may lead to isolation, limiting opportunities for learning how to interact with diverse perspectives and cope with adversity.***

value to peoples' lives (Sen, 1989); this enables them to articulate ideas between groups (Casey & Webb, 2018). Despite the opportunities created by encouraging intergenerational dialogue in safe spaces, there are potential limitations here as safe spaces create a false sense of security, preventing children and youth from developing the resilience needed to navigate real-world challenges.

The use of arts-based methods to create safe spaces as a means of promoting civic responsibility has been explored in prior research (Naidu-Silverman, 2015). By empowering children and youth to see themselves as civic leaders, with a responsibility to drive change, they are enabled to envision a world where they can shape the social, institutional, and structural arrangements around them. These are the social conversion factors that Hart and Brando (2018) refer to, which themselves are shapers of an individual's own internal capacities and potentials. This means that whilst factors including public policies, social norms, discriminatory practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, and power relations can shape an individual's own perception, it can also enable them to further their own capabilities and functionings (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1989), in a virtuous feedback loop. The data here

suggests that the arts-based methods utilised in these peacebuilding projects enabled this type of impact cycle, supporting positive developments in the personal and social conversion factors surrounding the children and youth (Hart and Brando, 2018; Robeyns, 2007). This empowerment, when linked to cultural resources through arts-based methods, empowers children and youth and their communities by providing a platform for them to communicate their perceptions to an audience (Tom, 2013). This can be the first step toward intergenerational dialogue as it promotes positive outcomes, well-being, trust, resilience, and social cohesion within the participants and their local community (Liu & Kendig, 2016; McHugh, 2003; Ngomna & Leke, 2023). It also contributes to the creation of a means of discussing ‘wicked’ societal problems regarding conflict and peacebuilding between different age and stakeholder groups (Gudykunst & Kim, 2005; Marshall, 2014; Parker, 2016).

There are, however, significant challenges in ensuring that the lessons learned in arts-based settings are not “siloed.” Children and youth are not always traditionally engaged nor listened to in peacebuilding initiatives, and the use of arts-based methods allows their voices to be heard (Nunn, 2020). Participants in the research noted that they were concerned that once these conversations left the arts-based environment, they would return to becoming tokenistic, unheard, or misunderstood. This may cause what Bohman (1996) termed ‘political poverty’, with the youth unable to influence the wider deliberative processes. Peacebuilding literature has noted that political agendas can create tokenistic engagement with children and youth which may further limit their ability to develop skills if they are not encouraged to engage meaningfully (Buchenhorst, 2012).

Finally, we would argue that the use of arts-based methods in peacebuilding programs within communities, through its role in enhancing capabilities and functionings (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1989) and empowering children and youth (and other disadvantaged stakeholders), can be viewed as a form of social innovation. This is because at its heart social innovation involves the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, in a manner that enables the restructuring of society’s norms, values, and institutions (Mulgan, 2019). This enables children and youth, and their wider communities, to build connectedness and well-being (Liu & Kendig, 2016; McHugh, 2003), allowing them to express ideas and promote change in others (as has been seen in this article within Indonesia). Ultimately, it helps to instill a sense of hopefulness for the future, which in its own way can be a powerful enabler of change in society.

## Conclusion

This article contributes to our understanding of how arts-based methods can foster intergenerational dialogue in peacebuilding, focusing on empowering children and youth through creating safe and inclusive spaces. By integrating the Capabilities Approach with Lundy’s conceptualization of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the research offers a framework that emphasizes the importance of creating spaces where child and youth voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes.

***It demonstrates that arts-based interventions are effective in developing the capabilities of children and youth, allowing them to engage meaningfully with adults in peacebuilding initiatives.***

These methods provide developmentally appropriate tools for children while also being accessible to adults, fostering mutual understanding and facilitating deeper engagement. However, the article also highlights the risk that once the arts-based

medium is removed, children and youth may revert to tokenistic participation. Young participants express concerns that their voices will not continue to be valued in the absence of the arts-based

tools, underscoring the need for sustainable, long-term frameworks to ensure their continued involvement in peacebuilding processes.

***The article calls for further exploration of how the capabilities developed through arts-based methods can be integrated into broader, enduring peacebuilding strategies, ensuring that young people's contributions remain impactful beyond the temporary use of arts-based methods.***

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Due to the nature of the research, due to [ethical/legal/commercial], supporting data are not available.

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