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Inner-City Youth 'Building Their Own Foundation': From Art Appreciation to Enterprise

Sarah Reddington and Christine McLean

Introduction

In recognition of entrepreneurship as a potential mechanism to enhance youth viability and active membership in their communities, this chapter explores the experiences of underserved youth who participated in an arts-based entrepreneurship programme located in a low-economic region of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.[1] The central focus of our research in exploring the young people's experiences with an art-based entrepreneurship programme was to understand better their unique perspectives having experienced a lifetime of having little power over the ways they live, learn and explore their art. Explicitly, we investigated the experiences of fifteen underserved youths with a ten-week art-based entrepreneurship programme, called ARTpreneur. ARTpreneur, run by the Halifax

[1] 'Underserved' is defined as facing systemic barriers that result in decreased access to services and supports.

S. Reddington (✉) • C. McLean
Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS, Canada
e-mail: Sarah.Reddington@msvu.ca; Christine.McLean@msvu.ca

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non-profit organisation Youth Art Connection, provides experiential arts education to empower young people facing economic and social barriers as a means to build skills, confidence, and knowledge related to their creative art practice (Youth Art Connection, 2020). The ARTpreneur programme describes itself as a programme that meets young people 'where they're at' to help them grow arts-based businesses and social impact projects (Youth Art Connection, 2020). In this study, the youth who attended YouthArt in the Fall 2017 were invited to critically reflect on their time and participate directly in the analysis of their own arts-based experiences. The most direct outcome from this research was to determine 'what comes next' in relation to extending arts-based entrepreneurial youth experiences and evaluating the effectiveness of these programmes in relation to enhancing their active membership within their communities. In this way, the youth will have a reason to believe that their involvement will make a difference (Delgado, 2004). As McGrath (2001) suggests, it is important to understand better 'the nature and meaning of young people's experiences at critical junctures in their lives' and the 'impact on young people's capacity to draw on "resources"' (p. 482). We argue across this chapter that contemporary underserved youth must be understood within the context of the material and social conditions that produce barriers and limit their capacities to contribute meaningfully to their communities as viable art entrepreneurs. What must be challenged are the oppressive conditions that reduce their capacities to contribute to their local community as young artists. In this chapter, we aim to highlight the young people's immense desires to have an authentic existence within their local arts industry and illuminate the struggles they encounter that make the process at moments feel insurmountable.

This type of inquiry supports learning about how arts-based community programmes can help underserved youth who face several barriers when it comes to starting companies and how to gain access to skill training to succeed in our increasingly competitive global economy. For instance, outmigration is a significant factor that limits their viability to stay and succeed in their local communities and it is further compounded by their minimal access to resources, especially when having to face adverse economic conditions often precipitated by the removal of local

services and the collapse of employment opportunities within their local communities (Barry, 2011; Corbett, 2006; Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000; Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Marshall, 2001; Ryser et al., 2013). Youth similarly experience diminished access to post-secondary education in rural sectors and young people who do choose to migrate to larger city centres face poverty, stress (Couldry, 2010; Mitura & Bollman, 2003), work dissatisfaction (Looker & Naylor, 2009; McGrath, 2001), and social marginalisation (McGrath, 2001; Trell et al., 2012; Valentine et al., 2008). Having attended large government bureaucratic public school systems where academic and extra-curricular programming are governed by cultures of consumption and gross commodity imagery, youth receive the message that to be successful they must locate power, become commodified and climb the corporate ladder to achieve fulfilment (Giroux, 2011). As a result, the identities of young people are assigned value based on their capacities to attend post-secondary education or training and earn six figures (Giroux, 1996). By placing the marginalisation of late capitalism at the centre of this problem, we argue that critical pedagogy has the potential to address the economic, cultural, social, and political barriers that place limits on the participation of youth in their respective communities and in larger global economies. It is also imperative that institutions, local businesses, non-profit organisations, government, and private sectors come together and support youth by offering them access to creative skill training and mentorship to succeed.

In this chapter, we utilise Paulo Freire's (1970) work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as his theories suggest the relevance of not just participating in the arts, but the need to pose questions, to engage in dialogue and active praxis. That is, Freirean theory is built on a relational dialectical approach with a praxical view of applying knowledge as a means of becoming and liberation. Here, we believe Freirean theory is valuable as it can help us understand better the transformative nature of the young people's experiences with ARTpreneur and open up a space to illuminate the collaborative community actions of youth. Part of our work is to create a renewed way of thinking about underserved inner-city youth through the lens of Paulo Freire's (1970) work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. By applying aspects of Freire's critical pedagogy, we suggest that we can support and advance youth enterprise and, in the process, locate new ways to value

youth identity and experience. We, therefore, use Freire's work across this chapter as a catalyst to highlight how oppression disempowers the youth in significant ways. For Freire, the oppressed conditions within societies that restrict individuals from their active participation in the world require attention. Importantly, we must interrogate the cultural, economic, social and political conditions of late capitalism that situate young people as docile societal participants. According to Freire, to be an engaged citizen is to be an active subject capable of transforming the world, yet communities and schools frequently silence youth voices and ignore their creative capacities to generate change.

From the onset of this research, we prioritise youth voices as they have been historically subjected to disparaging discourses, such as 'youth at risk', and adolescents as 'a problem to be solved', that become entrenched in child and youth policy documents (Giroux, 1996). This is largely accomplished by listening to the young people's unique perspectives. To do this, we follow Freire's (1970) concepts, namely we invite youth to enter into dialogue and critical self-reflection as a means to destabilise oppressive social conditions and become active agents in their own lives. It should be noted upfront that we recognise that critical pedagogy in isolation cannot transform marginalised social conditions for young people, but it does have the capacity to ignite them in developing a critical consciousness for systematic change (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1996, 2011; hooks, 2009; McLaren, 2015). In this capacity, we suggest that by inviting underserved youth into dialogue we start the process of opening their minds to locating more liberating arts-based community opportunities. Increasingly, we find Freire's (1970) notion of entering into dialogue and problem-posing, and his commitment to liberating the body from oppression, a particularly useful theoretical framework to analyse the young people's actualisations in relation to agency, art and art enterprise.

Theoretical Framework

Much of the original theory behind Freire's (1970) work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is used in this chapter as a form of analysis to problematise the objectification of young people. We assert that Freire's critical

pedagogy, with its central theme of entering into dialogue, can provide the basis for a renewed critical stance for the ARTpreneur participants. According to Freire and Macedo (1995):

> [D]ialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing. (p. 379)

Here, by applying Freire's theory of dialogue, we support an empowering form of inquiry that encourages youth to problematise issues surrounding power and invites them to critically self-reflect on their art and art enterprise. Allowing the oppressed to enter into dialogue and develop critical self-consciousness on their positions in the world is an essential juncture for Freire as he indicates that individuals must be able to acquire knowledge from their lived experiences and use this to create change. 'Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other' (Freire, 1970, p. 53). This conscious act of problem-posing is not a static entity, but rather an emergent process filled with the capacity for transformation. 'The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*' (Freire, 1970, p. 84). This contrasts with what Freire calls the 'banking concept of education' whereby young people have historically sat as docile subjects while professionals bestow knowledge upon them.

To counter the banking model, Freire favours young people to become co-constructors of knowledge and active investigators of their own lives. A critical component of Freire's dialogical and problem-posing theory is to attend to the cyclical nature between action, reflection and dialogue that leads to what he calls *praxis*. Thus, 'problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality,

thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation' (Freire, 1970, p. 81). Across our conversations with young people, we encourage them to engage in liberating praxis, to become critical investigators and not static participants. Here, the process of gathering in focus groups and discussing their experiences of participating in the ten-week ARTpreneur programme becomes a potential site for transformation through dialogue and praxis.

Methodology

In this study, we investigate the experiences of fifteen underserved youths with a ten-week art-based entrepreneurship programme, called ARTpreneur. To do this, we conducted focus groups with ten youth, ages 16–25, who registered in the Fall 2017 ARTpreneur programme held in North Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. During the focus groups, participants were invited to talk about their relationship to community and the connections they felt when participating in the programme. We intentionally chose the inner-city sector of North Halifax to conduct this research as youth residing in this area experience one of the highest rates of poverty in our province at more than 30% (Statistics Canada, 2016). As well, a recent community-driven data programme reports that only 1.8% of Halifax residents are employed in the cultural and art industries, down 11.1% since 2010, and down 39.8% since 2000 (Community Foundation of Nova Scotia, 2012). In addition, youth aged 15–26 years in this low-income urban sector who were recently interviewed by the Government of Nova Scotia—Communities, Culture and Heritage Department—indicated they lacked feelings of engagement in their community in relation to identity and belonging, youth engagement, arts and culture and access to employment, with an overall C+ rating (Community Foundation of Nova Scotia, 2012). Given these statistics, there is a need to increase the number of creative opportunities for youth in low-economic sectors and to strengthen economic opportunities for young people (Frymer, 2005; Stockdale, 2006).

The ARTpreneur programme serves this purpose by providing underserved youth in low-economic neighbourhoods with the entrepreneurial skills to turn their art passion into a business (Youth Art Connection, 2020). In essence, participants in the programme transform from learners to creators and curators of their art. Specifically, the ten-week ARTpreneur programme involves weekly self-reflective practice that is driven by participant dialogue and narrative accounts of their experiences. In addition, local art mentors from Nova Scotian communities come to the ARTpreneur sessions each week to share their stories creating a unique space for the underserved youth to learn about the art industry. This follows Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue, critical reflection, and praxis. By reflecting with mentors, the participants are able to share their passion for art and learn about ways to enhance their art product within their local sector.

The themes covered in ARTpreneur include learning modules on participants' connections to community, their art craft, and ways to develop skills to turn their art form into enterprise. In addition, the ARTpreneur programme provides a space for underserved youth to receive mentorship. The youth across this chapter identify the significant struggles they experience in their communities, namely they identify early on that they have experienced mental health issues, unemployment, abuse, homelessness, and/or time in prison. In recognition of the youths' significant barriers, we attempted to create a welcoming space where they could share their perspectives openly through dialogue and try to make sense of the structural barriers they encounter within their communities. At the same time, we wanted to give these young people a chance to critically reflect on their art-based practice, to problem-pose and co-create spaces of legitimacy where their art, opinions, knowledge(s), and experience were validated and recognised as authentic and valuable.

Our research involved audiotaped conversations and three semi-structured focus groups with fifteen ARTpreneur participants. The semi-structured focus groups occurred at the onset of ARTpreneur (Week 1), in the middle (Week 5) and at the end of the programme (Week 10). It should be noted that some young people were more vocal about their experiences than others during the focus groups. In following a philosophy of supporting youth agency and voice, we respected any silences and

focused on creating a space where youth had full autonomy. In this chapter, we share the experiences of seven of the fifteen participants. Our rationale for focusing on seven participants follows Freire's notion of entering into deep dialogue and critical self-reflection. The seven participants that we follow in this chapter were between the ages of 19 and 24 years at the time and shared a love for music and writing.

Prior to delving into their art-based practice, the young people explained to us their current position in relation to community. Three participants identified as working part-time in their local community while attending college or university, three participants were unemployed, and one participant was a full-time university student. The participants attending college stated that they found it difficult to balance work and school, and as a result, there was little time left for music. Two participants indicated they were experiencing housing insecurity and spent time couch surfing at friends' apartments. One participant's homelessness came about after incarceration in Federal prison, and as a result, she was unable to secure employment. Another participant explained she was a single parent, unemployed and had significant mental health issues. She echoed the previous participant's struggles to find work, manage her mental health issues, and care for her baby. These marginalised conditions resulted her giving her baby to her grandparents for full-time care with visitation. Table 5.1 summarises the participant demographics as well as the barriers the participants experience when trying to turn their art into enterprise within their local community. Pseudonyms are used to safeguard their identities.

One emerging theme in relation to barriers was the limited access to music venues to play and share their art craft. In fact, six participants stated they attempted to play at local music venues, such as Open Mic nights at bars, but found access to these venues a significant struggle. In particular, the participants noted the music scene in Halifax was difficult to 'break into' and often reserved for more established, older artists.

In advance of sharing the data, it is important to state that the Director of Youth Art Connection invites underserved youth who attend the ARTpreneur programme to be constructors of their own knowledge and language, rather than being passive recipients of curriculum content. This philosophy, driven by the Youth Art Connection (2020), is rooted in

Table 5.1 Participants

Participant	Employment/status	Age (yrs)	Self-identified barriers
Ali	College (part-time) Job in retail	22	Student loans Access to music venues to play Mental health issues
Jacob	University (full time)	22	Student loans Mental health issues Access to music venues to play
Mac	University (part-time) Job as a DJ	23	Student loans Access music venues to play
Maddie	College (part-time) Job in restaurant industry (waiter)	22	Student loans Mental health issues Access to music venues to play
Macy	Unemployed	23	Access to music venues to play Financial insecurity
Anna	Unemployed	24	Young single parent Housing insecurity Mental health issues Financial insecurity
Tess	Unemployed	19	Criminal record Financial insecurity Homelessness Unable to afford an education

Freire's pedagogy and generates a nurturing ethos of community engagement. Further, ARTpreneur encourages its participants to think beyond the limitations of their socio-economic community and see the possibilities of transforming their art into enterprise. The first excerpt of data addresses the youth's experiences with vulnerability and being subject to mental health issues, objectification, and feelings of inadequacy.

Powerlessness and Social Division

Tess: *I struggled so much being in care and the foster system. I have really bad anxiety and panic attacks. I am finally on medication and it's better. I am now just trying to get bursaries because I need more education, but I can't afford it. That's part of my whole thing when*

I got out of prison, I jumped right into university, but I didn't know what the hell I was doing and so I left. I just need like the grammar type stuff … I have a criminal record. I can't really work at any place I want to. I gotta get a job. And as far as job, I'm screwed regardless until 2025. I can't do anything besides waitressing. Hopefully, in my next job they don't run my name cause last time I got a job, they ran paperwork and then fired me!

Anna: *I found out I was six months pregnant while in the hospital with a kidney infection that caused me to code [respiratory arrest], so I almost lost my life and then the father of the child left so I dealt with all that. I am trying to compartmentalise flashbacks and stuff and the symptoms of the PTSD. I suffer from complex PTSD from multiple abusive experiences growing up and in my past. Just a lot of shit and I found music is something I've always found solace in. I always kind of joke around that English isn't even my first language even if it is, music is my first language.*

Jacob: *From the age of eighteen to twenty-one I went through severe depression and anxiety. I had ADHD and executive functioning disorder so actually regulating emotions is extremely difficult. I've always had this feeling of being different, but also felt my emotions were much stronger than everyone else's. I have elements of guilt and redemption and longing for spiritual principles of non-dwelling and like human consciousness and reconnecting with nature. My music when I listen to it, it heals me.*

Ali: *I have a lot of really traumatic experiences and struggles with a lot of things. Music has helped me come out of really dark holes that I've been in. Music has really helped me recover a part of myself and kind of heal from bad experiences.*

Anna: *Yeah, I'm faking that I'm a confident person. I can be a confident person. I just have things that stop me from being that. I've written affirmations to myself, and I have a little speech that I wrote to myself it's just like do you remember all the shit you went through, and what it took you to get out of that. I tell myself I am resourceful, I am dedicated, I'm passionate, and anytime I think of a word like that I write it on my mirror. So, every morning when I look in the mirror, I read that and I read it out loud and I'm like, yeah, you fucking rock!*

Freire's (1970) understanding of marginalisation as objectification and dehumanisation emerges in this data as these young people identify significant struggles, namely abuse, incarceration, foster care, childhood trauma, and mental health issues. These feelings of powerlessness and social division are prominent in their initial stories, as evident when Tess speaks of the challenges after being incarcerated and seeing the inequities that exist for her when trying to find employment, 'I have a criminal record, I can't really work at any place I want to'. Others address barriers in relation to childhood trauma and abuse that has created mental health issues and impacted their confidence as young people. Freire (1970) speaks to the relevance of consciously reflecting on the 'here and now' as a point of initial departure: 'Only by starting from this situation—which determines their perception of it—can they begin to move. To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting-and therefore challenging' (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Here, the collective discontent makes us acutely aware of the disparaging social conditions that leave these young people feeling vulnerable and powerless, as seen when Anna states, 'I'm faking that I'm a confident person' or Ali who states that she has had 'really traumatic experiences and struggles'. However, Freire (1970) also believed that power structures could be challenged by offering critical counter-narratives against the dominant pedagogy.

We get glimpses of this in the above set of data. Explicitly, we witness Anna desiring change and wanting to legitimise her future trajectory by using a daily affirmation, 'I tell myself I am resourceful, I am dedicated, I'm passionate'. Freire also reminds us that one's history is never predetermined and that there is always a possibility for people to collectively change the world. We witness Jacob drawing on this notion when he eloquently identifies that he longs for 'spiritual principles of non-dwelling and human consciousness and reconnecting with nature'. Tess equally expresses a desire to change her life path by pursuing an education and we also see Ali signal that she uses music to help her 'come out of really dark holes'. In this capacity, from the onset of our conversations, these young people disrupt the dominant discourse of youth powerlessness, isolation, and vulnerability. In fact, we see them taking a critical contemporary understanding of their status in the world and, in the process, begin to

challenge their oppressed histories. In this next excerpt of data, we continue to follow the participants' dialogue as they begin to gain increased critical consciousness.

Building Dialogue

Jacob: *I think as an artist you really need time and if you work full time and you go to school, you're exhausted. Most of us are just trying to make those basic needs met, like rent and food.*

Tess: *I have nobody else besides the program. I don't even have a peaceful place right now at home to write or whatever. This place has made me feel a lot more uplifting about myself. Everybody sharing their insecurities and everything. I have met lots of people and they're so open and confident it seems, but I've been noticing since being here that they're really not confident and they do have anxiety like everyone else.*

Jacob: *Yeah, and I think that having more programs like this that provide the skills and connections can be really useful. I know that even from just being in the open mic scene and talking to people that when youth launch music at venues they're usually pretty small crowds. There's no network and I don't know if the audiences are loyal to artists anymore. If you're an artist it's almost impossible, it's really challenging and maybe part of it comes from just like the nature of art. It can be really hard to get the repetition right as a young artist into an audience.*

Anna: *I find in the North End there are a lot of musicians, but we have a long trek to get anywhere to play our music. It's full of musicians because it's a relatively affordable place to live, and considerably centralised while keeping us away from all the alcohol to some extent. But, at the same time it's hard at our age because the music community is a little elitist.*

Freire's work has enormous value in highlighting the deep roots of oppression that youth can experience in their communities as he reminds

us to look at core social conditions that have the potential to place limitations on young people's capacities to thrive. Moreover, Giroux (2011) reminds us that '[t]oo many youth are now rendered invisible and disposable in a world' (p. 93); thus, this 'culture of disposability' (p. 91) is a harsh and dehumanising reality. This is evidenced when Anna identifies her struggles with the local music industry, 'it's hard at our age because the music community is a little elitist'. Jacob further acknowledges his marginalised social conditions when stating, '[m]ost of us are just trying to make those basic needs met, like rent and food'. Tess also signals, 'I don't even have a peaceful place right now at home to write'. Here, by entering into dialogue with one another, the youth begin to confront power structures and locate new ways to understand their current positions in the world. Through the art of dialogue and critical self-reflection, these youths are learning to question dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, class, power, and equity. hooks (2009) calls this 'coming to voice' where young people, through collective participation, use confessional narratives to constructively disrupt institutional powers that have limited their capacities to act (p. 139). This is a critical juncture as, historically, youth do not feel free or comfortable 'coming to voice' and challenging the social order (hooks, 2009). As Freire (1970) eloquently states, '[p]eople teach each other, mediated by the world' (pp. 79–80) as evident when the youth dive into further dialogue and discuss with each other the values that drive their art forms.

Maddie: *I use my music as therapy. The whole idea of my EP is basically revealing my true feelings about people and being honest about how they've affected my life. It helps because I find when I'm not doing anything my brain just dwells on all the things that are making me sad and there's a lot of changes that have happened in my life recently that are really intense, so this helps to distract myself.*

Tess: *Well, my book is about going to prison. And you know, it's Federal prison. Federal prison. So, I just want to get this frickin' book written. I've been writing this, really writing it since I was nineteen but dilly dallying since I was fourteen when I was back in the homes [foster care] and stuff … I would love to take my book*

and go a route of advocacy, but I have a criminal record and I won't be able to get that cleared until 2025 cause of the new laws so that prevents me to do a lot of things. I look sweet and innocent, but it's a pretty big deal and it's been a mistake I made when I was eighteen and I'm twenty-four now and it's ruining my life.

Ali: *I try to write songs that are pretty cathartic. A lot of times I'll just be walking down the street and I'll just think of a lyric, and I think of a line that could become something and I immediately write it down. And sometimes I'll start playing with it in my head. I'll actually have multiple songs and bits of multiple songs and I'll just smush it all together and make it work.*

Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy emphasises active praxis and draws on lived experiences to empower change. 'Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality,* does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication' (Freire, 1970, p. 58, emphasis in original). Here, we witness these youths' agentic potential when discussing various avenues for their art. For example, Maddie articulates how she uses her 'music as therapy' as a site of potential transformation. Tess equally signals self-determination when she says, 'I would love to take my book and go a route of advocacy, but I have a criminal record and I won't be able to get that cleared until 2025 cause of the new laws so that prevents me to do a lot of things … it's been a mistake I made when I was eighteen and … it's ruining my life'. Despite Tess's significant struggles, she demonstrates a desire to transform and take a route of advocacy with her writing. McLaren (2015) identifies how critical pedagogy does not lull in the 'realization of endpoints nor does it wallow in cautious lethargy' (p. 320). On the contrary, it is designed to engage in a culture of questioning and 'gesture in the direction of hope' (p. 320). This speaks to the role of critical pedagogy when working with underserved youth as it can serve as a vital mechanism to imagine new life trajectories and destabilise oppressive dominant ideologies. As educators, we must re-orient our traditional pedagogical approaches and allow young people to be active decision makers of their own lives. 'The leaders must believe in the potentialities of the people, whom they cannot treat as mere objects of their own action; they must believe that the people are capable of participating

in the pursuit of liberation' (Freire, 1970, p. 169). The next excerpt of data demonstrates what can emerge when we give youth opportunity to stake a claim in the world:

Jacob: *Like they got us [ARTpreneur mentors] to connect and go over again our core values. I've been building this dream in my head of who I want to be, working on myself and now stepping into this place with real people, it feels almost like a realisation. I think, before ARTpreneurs, I was developing skills within myself, my habits, my artistic talents, my ability to approach and to build up confidence and get over a lot of anxieties and neurosis that I was dealing with. Now it's nice to meet other artists who are also sort of in the same field, and I've kind of made some friends through it. I'm looking to continue to grow my skills, like talking to people and meeting other artists is something I want to continue to do.*

Macy: *We're definitely always experimenting and expressing our ways. Finding ways to relate to each other. But our life experiences drive us, you gotta stay strong and true to yourself and the journey. Loving yourself always, but also taking into account everybody's going through some shit, for sure.*

Tess: *Yeah, stay true to yourself, be yourself.*

Maddie: *Being here is helping me think more clearly about my path and direction instead of having these highs of success and these lows like I'm never going to make it. I've been feeling a lot more optimistic about my project. I've been feeling more driven and motivated.*

Macy: *I agree. Meeting all these young talented people who are inspired, just like keeps ya pushin'—it's fire … It's definitely opened our minds and our hearts for sure to different avenues that we probably would not have thought of if not showing up here to be honest. It has helped me to think about how I can profit and get people to listen to it [our music] and kind of push it more.*

The young entrepreneurs begin to exhibit confidence in their crafts and more purposefully acknowledge their own talents as valuable

resources. This is evidenced when Jacob explains, 'I've been building this dream in my head of who I want to be, working on myself and now stepping into this place with real people, it feels almost like a realisation'. In the process, they also find beacons of enterprise and new supportive relationships. 'Meeting all these young talented people who are inspired, just like keeps ya pushin'—it's fire' (Macy). We also get emerging glimpses of liberating praxis as seen when Maddie shares, 'I've been feeling a lot more optimistic about my project. I've been feeling more driven and motivated'. Freire (1970) explains that '[l]iberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (p. 79). In this context, we see the immense value in community art-based organisations, like ARTpreneur, as a purposeful outlet for underserved youth to gain life perspectives and see the value in their art practices.

Mac: *Ultimately, this seems like a direction to go in if you wanna make music that you can put out digitally and it doesn't sound like crap. Because nobody wants to listen to stuff that sounds like crap. I've had my fun writing songs and playing them for friends at campfires or whatever but now it's like, okay, I want to get this to sound good in your car, sound good on your phone, sound good everywhere. So, I'm getting really technical with it.*

Macy: *Yeah, exactly what he's saying, we wanna, you know, promote good feels, you know? Good vibes because music is therapeutic you know? And everybody wants a releasing point, something to sit down and basically meditate to, so that's what we are kind of working on. Our vibe of, you know, express the outers. So yeah, each day is a new day for us for the music scene, but you know always working towards mastering each thing that we put into our hands pretty much. We can build our own foundation and we can do the things that you said that you want done and support those who are probably feeling the same.*

Anna: *Just being an artist is not the only way to make money off of it, you're a talented singer, you could get into jingle writing, go around to businesses, and write a couple fun little ditties and go around to*

businesses and be like 'hey, do you want to make a commercial?'. It is so much easier to sell than the personal stuff.

Jacob: *My EP has fourteen songs and I hope to have it finished in time. But I also have my YouTube channel I've been kind of keeping in the dark, and just reading and taking notes and stuff like that. I really believe I'm building my brand. I want it to be a channel about artists and habits and sort of awareness and consciousness. And me as a person, you know this is my story, this is what I've come to develop, and these are what I have done to get here. So, kind of like making a blissful experience is what I'm trying to do within myself.*

Anna: *I also believe that a sense of community is incredibly important. Arts are important for the community and without community you don't have following for an artist. You have to have an audience, you have to have support, you have to have people who are willing to get your stuff out there even if it's two or three people, it's still a community. I think having an existence of art encourages the community to bring that together. You're all looking at the same thing [art] but interpreting it differently and so that brings a sense of belonging. I feel like community creates art and art creates community.*

This data demonstrates what is possible when youth are given an opportunity to affirm their own realities and places in the world. From this, these youths embark on a journey of optimism as seen when Macy explains, 'we can build our own foundation', or when Jacob notes that he is building his 'brand'. Their confidence and curiosity emerge once more when Anna signals we can also 'make money off' our art craft through writing 'fun little ditties' and selling them to businesses. Mac similarly denotes that 'this seems like a direction to go in if you wanna make music that you can put out digitally and it doesn't sound like crap'. Thus, their experiences with ARTpreneur profoundly awaken a renewed way of being in the world and a space to hone their passions for the arts. At the same time, these young people begin to understand better their connections to community. As Anna eloquently says, 'I feel like community creates art and art creates community'. For Freire, pedagogy has to be meaningful, and we see this emerge for Anna and the other youths when

identifying the symbiotic relationship between art and community. 'Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information' (Freire, 1970, p. 79). In this way, we see critical pedagogy igniting a space for potential social change and a vital opportunity to engage policy makers, cultural planners, educators, non-profit art organisations and government to problematise new ways to create opportunity for underserved youth.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates the power of art-based youth entrepreneur programmes to enhance young people's capacities to construct knowledge and feel empowered via art production and enterprise. Moreover, we see the immense value in bringing youth together and entering into critical dialogue as it serves to revitalise their positions within communities and expand the autonomy of the individual. As mentioned from the onset, it is imperative that youth become critical agentic citizens rather than consuming subjects. In this capacity, a form of empowering pedagogy presupposes a notion of a more just future where underserved youth can come to terms with their power as critical subjects and shift to question their own place in community. In short, this project points to the need for educators, youth organisations, child and youth practitioners, cultural city planners, government, and industry to invest in our youth. As McLaren (2015) states, '[i]t is in the boulevards of broken dreams and streets of despair and desperation where critical pedagogy can make a difference … we-the-educators-can play an important role in this struggle' (p. 56). We equally recognise that creating spaces for critical reflection will not change the poor social and material conditions that young people face and that situates them in oppressive spaces (Shor & Freire, 1987). For youth living in poverty, experiencing mental health issues, abuse, and neglect, we can only improve their lives by attending to the conditions in which they live (Giroux, 1996; McLaren, 2015). Explicitly, youth need to be invited to the consultation process and have an opportunity to critically analyse their communities' cultural and economic positions.

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