

**Understanding the role of creative self-  
efficacy in youth social action**

**A Literature Review**

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## **About the project**

This literature review is part of a research project led by the RSA in partnership with the Centre for Real-World Learning (CRL) at the University of Winchester and funded by the Templeton Religion Trust. CRL is an applied research group at the University of Winchester with a focus on better understanding the habits and dispositions of successful learners and how best they can be cultivated.

This project aims to explore the degree to which young people's sense of their own creativity does or does not influence their propensity to undertake activities intended to make a positive difference in their communities (social action). The findings from the research project are published in the RSA report: *Teenagency: How young people can create a better world*.

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# Glossary

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**Adolescence** – the period of life during which a young person transitions from being a child to being an adult. Developments include physical changes, neurodevelopmental changes, psychological and social changes (World Health Organization, 2018). Because age is not the only defining factor, research focusing on adolescents may vary in terms of its focus age group.

**Agency** – individuals engaging in social structures are ‘agents’ in sociological terms. ‘Agency’ is the capacity of an agent to act in a particular environment. In terms of social action, the community with its needs, would be the environment.

**Campaigning** – working to create change; also referred to as influencing, voice, or advocacy (The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2017).

**Active citizenship** – ‘participation’ is key to citizenship being active. Participation might be ‘social’ (relating to community), ‘public’ (relating to broader structures and institutions) or ‘individual’ (relating to personal acts like how a person spends their money) (Brodie, et al., 2011).

**Civic engagement** – synonymous with ‘social participation’, and ‘prosocial behaviour’, which are all summed up by ‘social action’ (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012, p. 497).

**Community** – refers to social groups that have place or other characteristic (e.g. religion) in common.

**Community service** – in the context of social action, it means taking part in some activity that is intended to benefit the community. Notably, there is an assumption that it will also benefit the individual (Yates & Youniss, 1996, p. 86).

**Creative collective efficacy** – ‘an individual’s belief in the ability of a team to produce creative results’ (Dampérat, Jeannot, Jongmans, & Jolibert, 2016, p. 8).

**Creative metacognition** – ‘a combination of self- and contextual-knowledge used to make decisions about one’s own creative efforts and accomplishments.’ (Kaufman, James, Beghetto, & Watson, 2016).

**Creative personal identity** – how much an individual values creativity (Plucker & Makel, 2010).

**Creative self-efficacy** – beliefs about one’s ability to generate novel and useful ideas and whether they view themselves as having a good imagination (Beghetto & Karwowski, 2017).

**Creativity** – ‘the ability to generate ideas, insights, and solutions that are both original and feasible’ (Kleibeuker, De Dreu, & Crone, 2016).

**Cultural capital** – a form of agency. It refers to ‘the symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be strategically used as resources in social action.’ (Oxford Reference Dictionary, 2018).

**Flourishing society** – within the field of positive psychology, flourishing of society is its goal, rather than a focus on alleviation of pathology or ‘how people survive and endure under conditions adversity’ (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (2018) recognises, similarly, that ‘health is more than the absence of disease’ and so advocates for, and supports research that promotes, social wellbeing.

**Flow** - Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) description of the genuinely satisfying state of consciousness a person experiences when they are working at an optimal level of challenge.

**Human capital** – a form of agency (particularly economic) (Musoba & Baez).

**Meaningful** – social action that is meaningful is challenging, youth-led, socially impactful, progressive (leading to other activities), embedded (becoming a habit), and reflective.

**Meaningful social action** – ‘Young people taking practical action in the service of others in order to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young person themselves’ (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013, p. 6).

**Prosocial behaviour** – synonymous with ‘civic engagement’ and ‘social participation’, which are all summed up by ‘social action’ (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012, p. 497).

**Self-actualization** – refers to the psychological theory of Abraham Maslow that espoused a human hierarchy of needs. The process of self-actualization represents a move towards fulfilment of the highest-order needs. In particular, these needs are a universal human need to find meaning.

**Self-efficacy** – ‘the personal belief that one is capable of doing something or carrying out some course of action’ (Feist, 2010, p. 121).

**Social action** – this review focuses on a very specific use of the phrase ‘social action’ that relates, essentially, to people setting out to change things, for the better. ‘Things’ might be the environment, processes, practices, facilities, spaces, or any other thing that improves lives for others, in a small way or a large way. It is ‘practical action in the service of others to create positive change’ (Kirkman, Sanders, & Emanuel, 2015). In sociological terms, social action has a broader meaning in that human action is influenced by the social context within which it takes place. Social action in this sense is an act that takes into account the actions and reactions of other individuals, or ‘agents’. Action is ‘social’ ‘insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course’ (Weber, 1968). While ‘change’ has a (albeit subjective) goal of ‘for the better’, there is no ‘value’ judgment in Weber’s social action – sociology’s object is to interpret and explain.

**Social capital** – ‘networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups’ (Keeley, 2007, p. 103).

**Social participation** – synonymous with ‘civic engagement’, and ‘prosocial behaviour’, which are all summed up by ‘social action’ (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012, p. 497).

**Social proximity** – the perception of social links between an individual and his or her co-workers (Dampérat, Jeannot, Jongmans, & Jolibert, 2016, p. 8).

**Volunteering** – ‘Volunteering can be understood theoretically as three overlapping categories of activity: unpaid work or service, activism, and leisure’ (Nichols et al 2016, p.3). A similar term to ‘social action’; it is defined as ‘any non-compulsory activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which is of benefit to others (excluding relatives), society or the environment’ (Hill, Russell, & Brewis, 2009).

**Volunteerism** – four defining attributes: planned action, long-term behaviour, involves ‘nonobligated’ helping, occurs within an organisational context (Penner, 2004, p. 646).

**Young people** – while YouGov research (2018) showed the general public categorise anyone under 30 as ‘young’, The Campaign for Youth Social Action (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013, p. 2) focuses on 10-20 year olds.

**Youth-led social action** – this is another way of saying ‘meaningful social action’ because, by definition, meaningful social action is youth led (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013, p. 6).

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# Executive Summary

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Having young people who actively choose to undertake social action is widely believed to be of benefit to society. This review explores two relatively recent concepts which may bring a greater understanding of this kind of engagement - creative self-efficacy and meaningful social action. Creative self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her creative capabilities, and meaningful social action is social action which is beneficial both to the community and to the person undertaking it.

The review poses an over-arching question: are young people with higher levels of creative self-efficacy more likely to undertake meaningful social action?

To begin to develop answers to our question we seek to understand young people's motivations in more detail. There are a number of reasons why young people choose to take part in meaningful social action and we describe these and the frameworks which have developed around them. Explanatory factors are part demographic, part arising from personal attributes, part linked to social pressure and part as a result of a diverse set of 'triggers' which can either motivate or inhibit engagement.

We then explore the concept of creative self-efficacy and its origins both in thinking about self-efficacy and also with respect to the wider idea of creativity. As part of this exploration we look briefly at how creativity and how creative self-efficacy are developed during adolescence. Given the breadth of creativity as a concept, we use a five-dimensional model currently being used by the OECD and by PISA as a framework to enable us to explore self-efficacy in relation to creativity in more depth.

Finally, we explore the possible linkages between creative self-efficacy and meaningful social action which is at the heart of our question.

Using an integrative approach to the literature review, we were able to point to a small number of potentially fruitful connections in five areas which seem to merit further exploration:

1. heightened imaginative awareness and potential empathy in the lives of others
2. levels of curiosity and interest in social issues
3. perseverance, self-efficacy and the likelihood of making a positive difference more widely
4. an interest in collaboration and a sense of social belonging
5. an ethic of excellence and a willingness to become involved in voluntary activities in areas of interest.

At a higher, more theoretical level, we also offer a potential synthesis of these lines of thinking, framed in terms of creativity, self-efficacy and the concept of growth mindset.



This review of existing literature is the first stage of a more extensive piece of research seeking to understand more about the power of creativity and about potential ways of engaging young people in socially beneficial activities.

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# Background

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This review of literature is part of a larger investigation into the degree to which young people's belief in their own creative capability does or does not influence the likelihood of them taking part in meaningful social action. The project is led by the RSA in partnership with the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester and funded by the Templeton Foundation

When it comes to improving the lives and prospects of young people, for several decades the main focus in the UK has been on the quality of formal education outcomes, often with a specific interest in literacy and numeracy. More recently there has been interest in young peoples' lives outside of school, in all of the less formal activities in which they engage, for lack of engagement by young people in civic society is generally considered to be detrimental to its flourishing (Holdsworth and Brewis (2014, p. 204). A number of organisations – the #iwill campaign is a good example – are seeking to encourage young people to undertake a range of social action.

'Meaningful social action' has emerged as a useful concept with which to describe the kinds of community activities in which young people are being encouraged to engage. This idea encompasses volunteering, positive social action and service. This review defines meaningful social action as 'practical action in the service of others in order to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young person themselves' (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013, p. 6).

At the same time there has been a realisation across the world that, as well as the knowledge and skills which are traditionally valued by schools, other important capabilities such as creativity, perseverance, openness to experience, tolerance of diverse opinions and productive engagement with society are important (Heckman and Kautz 2012; Gutman and Schoon 2013).

A growing body of evidence suggests that certain behaviours are strongly connected to and, in some cases, influenced by certain kinds of mindsets. Key concepts here include self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), growth mindset (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2014) and agency (Martin, Rajala, & Kumpulainen, 2016). These mindsets all take aspects of an individual's self-image or self-identity to explore the levels of self-efficacy which they bring to tasks both at school and in their wider lives.

One concept – creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002) – interestingly explores something which is generally valued by society and by individuals: creativity (Lucas, 2016), and a broad definition of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and combines them in order to explore the ways in which an individual's level of creative self-efficacy may or may not impact on their creative behaviour and performance.

Underlying the research that this literature review seeks to inform is the soft hypothesis that youth social action and creative self-efficacy are mutually reinforcing. There are a whole host of reasons why youth social action is a ‘good thing to do’ and developing young people’s creative self-efficacy is only one such outcome.

The question could therefore be asked: why focus on creative self-efficacy as an input and an outcome? Why not focus on how youth social action is both helped by, and drives, development of other capabilities in young people? Vice versa there is a whole host of possible benefits to creative thinking and creative self-efficacy.

These are important issues. Unlike other so-called ‘21st Century skills’ or ‘soft’ skills, creativity is inherently values-driven (Glaveanu, Branco and Neves-Pereira, 2017) and rarely seen as anything other than a social good. Of all constructs that represent learnable dispositions, creativity as we define it in this review contains many, possibly the most, elements which correlate with both conventional forms of success at school (Hattie, 2009), and lifetime success such as well-being, agency, employability.

This study thus explores as many connections as possible between young peoples’ creative self-efficacy and the likelihood of them taking meaningful social action. It is worth noting immediately that young people’s social action away from school and home is notoriously difficult to research (Bronwyn, 2012). Given that both concepts are emergent we would not expect to (nor did we) find any systematic or meta-analytical studies and certainly none which specifically addressed both our areas of interest.

We adopted an integrative approach to the literature review (Torraco, 2005). An integrative method enables a research team to review, critique and synthesise literature in a robust way such that new perspectives can be developed. Starting with reference lists from the small number of studies explicitly exploring either creative self-efficacy or meaningful social action, we identified 114 research items, mainly journal articles, for inclusion in the review. We also made use of any grey literature suggested to us by our expert panel or from our own networks. Regular meetings with the Creative Learning and Development team at the RSA also helped to ensure challenge, rigour, and opportunities for the synthesis of new thinking.

This literature review supports a study that ultimately looks to make recommendations for policies and practical interventions that encourage and support adolescents to engage in meaningful social action in greater numbers and with greater frequency. The study, for the first time, seeks to understand possible links between creative self-efficacy and meaningful social action.

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# 1 Young people and meaningful social action

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## 1.1 Defining meaningful social action

‘Meaningful social action’ has recently come to be seen as a useful umbrella concept to describe a range of beneficial activities undertaken by young people outside of formal education.

### 1.1.1 Key terms

There are a number of different terms used to describe the core of what this review terms ‘social action’, a ‘relatively new’ and ‘somewhat contested’ term (Birdwell, Birnie, & Mehan, 2013, p. 9). We use the prefix ‘meaningful’ to further clarify the type of social action in which we are interested. On reviewing a body of literature on ‘social engagement’, Marzana et al. (2012, p. 497) found synonyms including ‘social participation’, ‘civic engagement’, and ‘prosocial behaviour’. For their own work, examining antecedents of both voluntary and political engagement, they chose to use ‘social action’ as an expression they believe ‘sums up different types of behaviours’. This term, they argue, covers both ‘volunteerism and political participation’. They suggest that the most ‘complete definition’ of social action comes from 2007 from Snyder and Omoto, which they sum up as ‘all the activities in which people act in ways that will benefit not only themselves as individuals, but also the larger communities of which they are members’.

The concept of ‘citizenship’ is relevant to our exploration of social action. ‘Participation’ is said to be a ‘crucial aspect’ of conceptualisations of citizenship (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012, p. 485).

In the context of ‘active citizenship’, Brodie et al. (2011) define three types of participation that formed a very broad definition:

1. Social participation: the collective activities that individuals are involved in, including being involved in formal voluntary organisations, informal or grassroots community groups, and formal and informal mutual aid and self-help;
2. Public participation: the engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy, including voting, contacting a political representative, campaigning and lobbying, and taking part in consultations and demonstrations;
3. Individual participation: people’s individual actions and choices that reflect the kind of society they want to live in, including

buying fair trade or green products, recycling, signing petitions, giving to charity.

### 1.1.2 Quality framework for youth social action

Following on from the announcement in 2012 by the UK Prime Minister of an independent review into ‘youth social action’, it was recommended that a ‘quality framework’ was needed in order to agree what the term meant. A Framework Advisory Group drew representatives from business, education, and voluntary sectors and was headed by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and the Young Foundation. IVR’s focus was on developing a shared definition of social action. The Young Foundation developed an outcomes framework (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013).

The definition of social action arrived at was ‘Young people taking practical action in the service of others in order to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young person themselves’ (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013, p. 6). The Ipsos MORI survey (2015), commissioned by the Cabinet Office to track the progress of the #iwill campaign, does not quite capture all aspects of this definition in its own: ‘practical action in the service of others to create positive change’. ‘Meaningful’ is captured by a range of activities ‘that help other people or the environment, such as fundraising, campaigning (excluding party political campaigning), tutoring/mentoring, and giving time to charity (p. 4).

The degree to which social action is ‘meaningful’ may sit on a number of continua. These are the six principles underpinning quality and meaningful youth social action:



Figure 1: A set of principles which define great youth social action (Ockenden et al., 2013)

According to the Behavioural Insights Team’s interim report into the link between social action and skills development, social action is defined broadly as ‘practical action in the service of others to create positive change’ (Kirkman, Sanders, & Emanuel, 2015), and The Cabinet Office uses the same definition (Birdwell, Birnie, & Mehan, 2013). This covers

a range of activities benefiting other people or the environment, but still focuses on meaningful, or ‘high impact’ social action using these same six principles.

The National Youth Agency gives examples of social action: fundraising, volunteering, and campaigning. The Behavioural Insights Team excludes political campaigning but adds mentoring/tutoring and giving time to charity.

### 1.1.3 Making social action meaningful

Use of the word ‘meaningful’ reflects the need for a degree of ‘quality control’ over what constitutes the sort of social action this review is exploring. Verbal support for a cause, in the form of social media echoes (likes, retweets, shares), for example, is counted as social action by Birdwell and Bani (2014, p. 19) in their report for Demos. Under a stricter criteria for social action this would not be counted as ‘meaningful’, not least because of the improbability of gauging (or causing?) any social impact from such action.

Penner (2004, p. 663) distinguishes between what he calls a ‘liberal’ and a ‘radical’ view. Rather than stepping in to fill a gap where the government may be unwilling or unable to act, the radical would concern himself more with becoming an ‘agent for social change’ and solving the problem at the source. Penner argues that there are ample opportunities for both sorts of action. Sometimes the cause of a problem is complex and needs to be investigated by research scientists. In this case it might be all a young person can do to address the problem rather than the cause. Addressing the problem is surely no less ‘meaningful’.

In an earlier report for the RSA, Buddery (2015, p. 10) writes of a shift in thinking about ‘public service volunteering’. A ‘new set of volunteering practices’ are moving away from ‘point-of-need service delivery... towards preventative interventions’ that require creativity. Although the language is of public service volunteering and not directed at youth, the shift towards more proactive forms of engagement is familiar territory in the discussion of meaningful youth social action.

Just as no-one is wholly confident of their creativity, so no piece of social action is wholly meaningful. It may be helpful when talking about meaningful social action to talk about a continuum from tentative interest to genuinely meaningful:

Expression of interest <-----> meaningful participation

In practice, for a young person, this might involve stages such as:

After-school club → one off community activity → regular activity → co-designing activities → leadership role

In terms of the ‘quality framework’ in the previous section it may be that the continuum reflects some other aspect of meaningful social action such as the degree to which it is challenging, socially impactful, progressive, embedded, or reflective. For example, the steps included in Shier’s (2001) Pathways to Participation look at the ‘youth-led’ aspect:

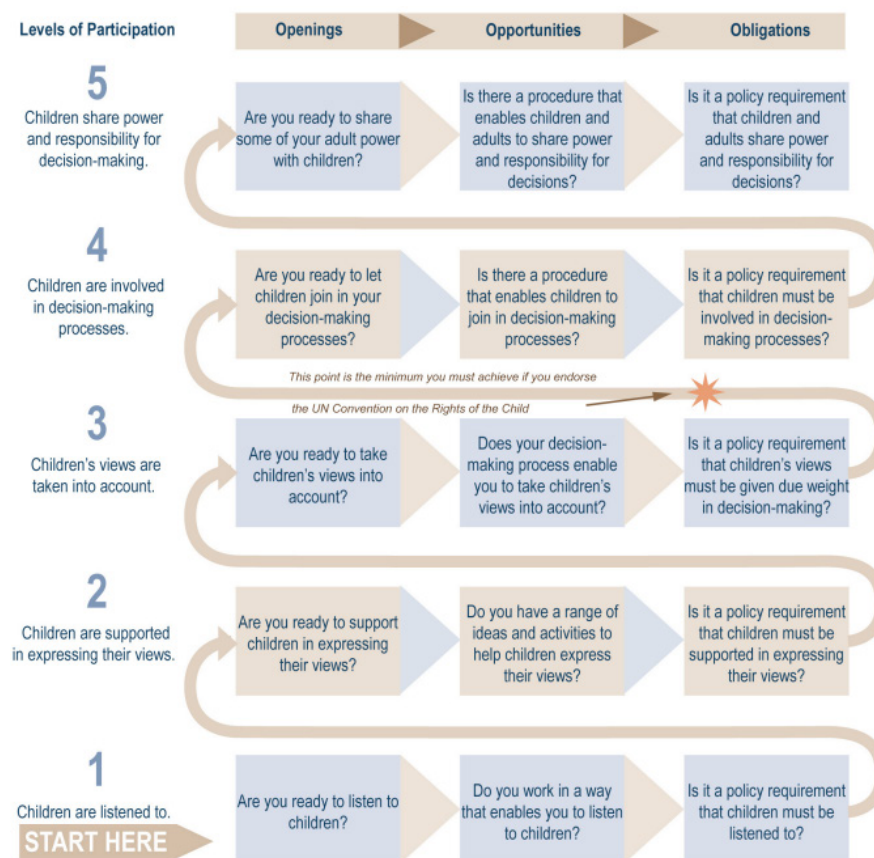


Figure 2: Shier’s Pathways to Participation

#### 1.1.4 Attributes of social action

Marzana et al. (2012, p. 498) focus on two forms of social action: ‘volunteerism’ and ‘political participation’. In defining the boundaries of social action, they turn to Penner’s 2004 theoretical model, and apply his understanding of ‘volunteerism’, which identifies ‘four important attributes that are [volunteerism’s] hallmarks’. Penner argues that volunteerism is the more common and probably more important form of prosocial behaviour (a synonym for social action). As such, Marzana et al. argue that these four attributes are ‘also entirely applicable to the other form of social action’, i.e. political action.

The four attributes of volunteerism are, argues Penner:

1. it is a planned action;
2. it is a long-term behaviour;
3. it is a form of ‘non-obligated’ helping that is undertaken in a gratuitous way; and
4. it occurs in an organisational context.

Marzana et al. (2012, p. 498) suggest that social action can be categorised



‘thanks to the crossing of two variables that organize its meaning’. These are: ‘the structuring and duration of the commitment itself’:

- In terms of the structuring of the social action: this is referring to its organisational / institutional features: the place, the rules, the values etc.
- In terms of the duration: this is referring to the time spent on the social action, varying from a few minutes, to a daily commitment. The authors suggest that voluntary action and political action are two forms of social action that represent the most structured commitment of the most longevity.

A study by Holdsworth and Brewis (2014, p. 214) uses the term ‘volunteering’ in the context of Higher Education students. Participation in this activity can include helping out a friend or relative or being involved in a society.

Volunteering is another term used in a similar way to social action. It is defined as ‘any non-compulsory activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which is of benefit to others (excluding relatives), society or the environment’ (Hill, Russell, & Brewis, 2009). Activities can be formal or informal. The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) (2011, p. 23) tells us that volunteering is only one way that individuals can contribute to their community. Other ways include what they call ‘civic participation, informal help, and charitable giving’.

## 1.2 Young people engaging in social action

Evidence of young people’s engagement in social action is mixed in terms of both quantity and quality and can provide apparently conflicting results.

In terms of ‘volunteering’ the TSRC tells us that there is ‘limited longitudinal research on participation in the UK, other than relatively small-scale qualitative studies, from which limited generalisations can be made’ (2011, p. 24). It cites the British Household Panel Survey that has been asking questions about volunteering at two-year intervals since 1996.

Data about youth volunteering in Britain is primarily of the self-report variety. Birdwell et al. (2013, p. 10) detail the sources of information about participation and in summary there is:

- The biannual UK Citizenship Survey 2001-2011 and the subsequent ‘scaled-back’ (from 10,000 to 7,000 respondents) Community Life Survey;
- A 2009 Ipsos MORI one-off survey of 1,997 16-25 year olds (England);
- A 2010 Ipsos MORI Young People Omnibus survey of 2,756 11-16 year olds (England and Wales);
- The 2007 Helping Out survey of 2,156 individuals.

A report from Harvard Graduate School of Education (Weissbourd, Jones, Anderson, Kahn, & Russell, 2014) paints an interesting picture of the contrast between the values parents mean to instil in children and the values children actually hold. ‘At the root of the problem’ argue the



authors ‘may be the gap between what parents say are their top priorities and the real messages they convey in their behaviour day to day’. In a study of over 10,000 students from 33 schools across the US, ‘caring’ as a priority – with 22% of students opting for it – ranked below ‘achievement’ and ‘happiness’ (48% and 30% respectively). ‘Caring’ was also less of a priority to older students, with ‘happiness’ ranking above either ‘caring’ or ‘achievement’.

Hill et al. (2009) suggest a decline in volunteering between 2005 and 2009 for all age groups. While Demos (Birdwell & Bani, 2014), looking at the National Citizen Service (NCS) available to 15-17 year olds in England and Northern Ireland, concluded that ‘today’s teenagers are more engaged with social issues than ever’. A foreword from its CEO claims that contrary to ‘popular stereotypes’, today’s teenagers ‘are shown to be behaving more responsibly when it comes to drink and drugs; caring more about social issues both at home and abroad; and being more willing to get out and take action to make their world a better place’. Such a foreword is an expression of belief rather than a reflection of the evidence.

Demos refers to 14-17 year olds as the ‘last cohorts of Generation Y’. It cites others who have called them ‘Generation C’, standing for ‘connected’; adding that ‘citizens’ is another relevant ‘c’. The way one so-called ‘generation’ is defined is not a precise science and relies on interpretations of major societal and behavioural trends to understand where one generation ends, and another begins. The review suggests today’s teenagers are ‘characterised by their tolerance, compassion and motivation to tackle social issues’. It cites the Cabinet Office’s Community Life Survey (2013-13) which suggests that 16-19 year olds volunteered more. It argues that ‘given the right opportunities and support, today’s teenagers might just transform our notions and expectations of active citizenship’ (p. 14).

What the Demos data does not do is track changes across all age groups over time. Anyone using the internet, in possession of an email or social media account, is likely to find themselves inundated with online petitions as soon as they show interest in any ‘cause’. Use of phrases like ‘using social media for activities like raising awareness and funds for charity and expressing support for political causes’ can actually be done via a Facebook ‘like’ or ‘retweet’ on Twitter. The impacts of such ‘social action’ are of course negligible. The report doesn’t shy away from the fact that social action and ‘becom[ing] involved in politics and good causes’ can include ‘liking’ political causes on social media and signing a petition (p. 19). This type of action is not limited to teenagers, it’s simply something they are able to do that previous generations of teenagers were not. Teenagers believe they are gaining momentum behind social issues, although in many cases they might be shouting into an echo chamber. Another report from Demos found clear support for the idea that ‘that there is a strong connection between a user’s ideology and the users and news sources they interact with, and that offline beliefs play a key role in the way users behave online’ (Krasodonski-Jones, 2016, p. 8).

Holdsworth and Brewis (2014) tell us that student volunteering at university ‘has probably never been so popular, or at least been so visible’. Clearly there is a difference between the two. They note that student contribution to the community within which the university sits is ‘a well-established tradition’. In the 1960s and 70s, engagement was conceptualised as more student-led than it typically is today.

### **1.3 Summary**

Meaningful social action is a relatively well-defined concept encompassing citizenship, volunteering and participation. Activities tend to be informal but can also be formal. The fields of social and community action are well-established, with the focus on youth-led and the interest in 'meaningful' being a more recent focus of interest. There is limited longitudinal research on participation in the UK 'other than relatively small-scale qualitative studies, from which limited generalisations can be made' (TSRC, 2011, p. 24). Data is broadly self-reported. It is difficult, therefore, to be precise or authoritative about the amount and depth of meaningful social action by young people over time.

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## 2 Influences on young people's engagement in meaningful social action

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A key task of this literature review is to explore the range of reasons why young people participate in meaningful social action. Understanding why people behave the way they do is a notoriously complex area of study. Nevertheless, understanding the mechanisms of social action is a substantial field of study and there are a number of well-regarded frameworks describing the various social factors influencing young people's participation. Large-scale empirical data about the factors predicting youth volunteering in the UK is non-existent (Bennett & Parameshwaran, 2013) and the findings in this section are consequently tentative.

### 2.1 First participation

A particular focus here is the reasons for first participation. It would seem that repeat engagement is less of an issue given the wealth of research showing that those who volunteer once are significantly more likely to volunteer often in later life. For example, Brodie et al. (2011) found that 'successful' participation contributes to repeat participation.

Getting people started, however, is more of an issue. The #iwill campaign aims to increase youth participation in social action, which it monitors through an annual report. Most recent results of the survey, conducted by Ipsos MORI, showed that 41% of young people were unsure of how to get involved.

Repeat participation is increasingly likely if individuals are engaged when young (Arthur, Harrison, Taylor-Collins, & Moller, 2017). For example, the Ipsos MORI survey found that 'committed' respondents (in comparison to 'potential' and 'reluctant') had their first volunteering experience before the age of eleven. Efforts to increase participation could be more successful if they focus on those younger than 'mid-teens' (Birdwell, Birnie, & Mehan, 2013, p. 4). The Ipsos MORI recommendation was, similarly, that the 'reluctant' group may be more likely to participate if introduced to social action when young (Ipsos MORI, 2015).

### 2.2 Perspectives on participation

Participation has been studied from a variety of perspectives (Bekkers, 2005), including from sociology (looking at the impacts of resources such

as human and social capital, and financial), psychology (looking at the influence of personality), and political science (exploring political values and attitudes). Bekkers claims that there are inherent weaknesses in studying participation from any single disciplinary approach. Such studies 'are incomplete because they disregard the role of the variables that are part of the other discipline' (p. 440). For example, a sociological perspective generally assumes that resources are the limiting factor preventing some from applying their good intentions (assumed to be universal). Preferences and values (and indeed those good intentions) are out-of-scope for sociological exploration. Bekkers's own approach seeks to consider the interactions between social, political, and psychological influences. Ten years on from Bekkers's paper, Carlo et al. (2005) tell us that social psychology and personality theorists are recognising the need for interdisciplinary research, and 'have proposed that our understanding of prosocial behaviour will be enhanced by examining the interplay of traits and motives'.

### **2.3 Frameworks for participation**

A number of studies have attempted to address the issue of what motivates individuals to engage in social action. A variety of frameworks has consequently emerged, each of which attempts to give a comprehensive picture of the range of factors. These frameworks can be helpful in guiding our thinking about influences on engagement. We also broaden our exploration to what we might call 'inhibitors' or 'barriers', a consideration that not all frameworks seek to address.

To present a full list of factors divorced from their frameworks and then reconstruct them into our own would not give a faithful picture of the literature. Instead, we present an overview of each framework in its whole state.

Frameworks addressing factors influencing participation in social action	Positive influences
Antecedents of social action (Penner, 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic characteristics (education, income)</li> <li>• Personal attributes (dispositions) (personality traits that mediate prosociality, values)</li> <li>• Volunteer social pressure (direct - asked, indirect - expectation)</li> <li>• Volunteer activators (personal circumstance, a historic event)</li> </ul> <p>Demographic characteristics are not causal but mediated by other factors. Personal dispositions and social pressure are not independent</p>
Why people participate in 'active citizenship' (Brodie, et al., 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual factors, including motivations, personality, identity and resources</li> <li>• Relationships and social networks, including with an individual's family, friends, neighbours and colleagues</li> <li>• The groups and organisations through which people participate, and the particular structures, processes and culture of those groups;</li> <li>• The local environment and place, including local spaces, events, institutions and politics</li> <li>• Wider societal and global factors, including national events, social movements and long-term societal and global trends.</li> </ul>

<p>The ‘participation equation’ – a combination of factors that explain why participation in ‘active citizenship’ begins (Brodie, et al., 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation (helping others, developing relationships, exercising values and beliefs, having influence, for personal benefit, being part of something) +</li> <li>• Trigger (emotional reaction, personal life event, external influence) +</li> <li>• Resources (practical resources, learnt resources, felt resources) +</li> <li>• Opportunity</li> </ul>
<p>Factors that predict volunteering among youths in the UK (Bennett &amp; Parameshwaran, 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human capital (income, youth’s health status, youth’s self-esteem, parental social class)</li> <li>• Cultural capital (frequency of adults taking youth to theatre, dance, music concerts, sports events, museums and galleries, frequency of discussing books at home)</li> <li>• Social capital (extra-curricular religious class attendance; parental volunteer activity, number of close friends)</li> <li>• Other factors (gender, age, ethnicity, location in a rural area)</li> </ul>
<p>Antecedent motivations for volunteering (Hill, Russell, &amp; Brewis, 2009)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ personal feelings (e.g. satisfaction, feel good)</li> <li>▪ personal needs (e.g. pastime, relationships)</li> <li>▪ altruism</li> <li>▪ experience (e.g. skills and work prospects)</li> <li>▪ personal inducements (e.g. qualifications)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>Marzana, Marta, &amp; Pozzi, 2012)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic variables (socioeconomic status, educational title*, principal occupation*, parents' occupation level, gender~, having had civics education component in school~)</li> <li>• Personal attributes (ability to regulate emotion and interact efficaciously, prosocial traits/ dispositions*, self-determination*, social trust*, religiosity*, personal values, engaging in civic behaviour***, sense of community*)</li> <li>• Social / family pressure (family values, parental engagement in social action*)</li> <li>• Activators (opportunity, participation in youth clubs from an early age*, invitations to participate from significant others**, experience of extracurricular activities*)</li> </ul> <p>~ not tested</p> <p>* research confirmed this factor did discriminate between volunteers and non-volunteers</p> <p>** 'extremely motivating factor' (p. 503)</p> <p>*** 'the variable with the greatest discriminatory value' (p. 505)</p>
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<p>Predictors of individuals' tendencies to engage in prosocial behaviour over time (Caprara, Alessandri, &amp; Eisenberg, 2012, p. 1,299)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personality trait – agreeableness</li> <li>▪ Values – self-transcendence (a higher order value)</li> <li>▪ Beliefs – empathic self-efficacy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of young people involved in social action, and their motivations for involvement (Yates &amp; Youniss, 1996)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characteristics and motivations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Agency</li> <li>▪ Social relatedness</li> <li>▪ Moral-political awareness</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

*Table 1: Frameworks addressing factors influencing participation in social action*

It is worth noting here that concepts of ‘social’, ‘cultural’, and ‘human’ capital are categories that require careful use and may not be altogether helpful in any case. In the Higher Education Handbook of Theory and Research, Musoba and Baez (no date, p. 152) argue that the language of social capital has been too readily adopted by theorists to make simplistic arguments such as

‘Students from historically discriminated groups have been deprived of cultural capital, and as a result... have been unable to achieve as have students who have such capital... Thus, to help them succeed... we should help them attain more cultural or social capital.’ Bourdieu’s theories of social capital should, they argue, be understood at the social level, and not at the individual level.

Some of the frameworks for participation this review identifies do categorise these different forms of capital. They do not ultimately tell us what we can do to change any of these, however, hence this review’s focus on what is known to be malleable: dispositional characteristics.

Approaches to studying volunteering behaviours shown in the table above do tend to explore the role of individuals’ dispositions. A smaller body of work has explored the role of group memberships in helping others. We look at this issue in our discussion of social capital and also refer back to it in our exploration of the main question: whether young people with high levels of confidence to express their creativity are more likely to engage in social action.

A study by Marzana et al. (2012) looked at the antecedents of two forms of social action that it describes as representing the most structured and the most long-lasting types: voluntary action and political action. They found no empirically tested model to answer the question of what determines social action. Nevertheless they, as we, found Penner’s (2004) model of volunteering helpful. Marzana’s research tested 14 constructs relating to Penner’s four categories to measure the predictive power of



Penner's variables. The research was carried out on 706 young Italians aged 19-29.

They conclude that 'the picture of youth engaged in social action is complex and needs further investigation'. At this early stage of our research we have used Penner's categories to summarise initial thinking. These are:

1. Demographic characteristics
2. Personal attributes
3. Volunteer social pressure
4. Volunteer activators

His work is fairly atypical in the body of work examining participation in social action because, as Bekkers (2005, p. 440) recognises, it is one of the few exceptions to the rule that 'personality and social psychologists have devoted little attention to the way [prosocial] dispositions are intertwined with social conditions or political values'.

Before focusing on Penner's antecedents each in turn, we detail three approaches to categorising influences on involvement in social action:

1. Bennett and Parameshwaran's (2013) broadly demographic focus
2. Brodie et al.'s (2011) multifactorial explanation
3. Yates and Youniss's (1996) characteristics and motivations.

### **2.3.1 Bennett and Parameshwaran**

Bennett and Parameshwaran's (2013, p. 2) large-scale research from the Third Sector Research Centre explored factors that predict volunteering among youths in the UK. Its focus is more strongly on those factors that might sit within Penner's 'demographic characteristics' category.

It found that factors relating to 'cultural capital' and 'social capital' of a young person bore the greatest influence on their participation in volunteering. It divides antecedents into four categories, with the pertinent aspects in parenthesis:

- Human capital (income, youth's health status, youth's self-esteem, parental social class)
- Cultural capital (frequency of adults taking youth to theatre, dance, music concerts, sports events, museums and galleries, frequency of discussing books at home)
- Social capital (extra-curricular religious class attendance; parental volunteer activity, number of close friends)
- Other factors (gender, age, ethnicity, location in a rural area)

In the study of 4,760 10-15 year olds, significant differences in the likelihood of volunteering were found in the first instance across social classes (a human capital measure). The higher classes were more likely to be engaged than those from lower class backgrounds. Yet when measures of social and cultural capital were included in the analysis, social class effects became insignificant.

Some striking findings included that likelihood of increased volunteering activity is associated with three of the four categories:

- Social capital
  - the number of close friends a young person has
- Cultural capital
  - attendance at extra-curricular religious classes;
  - role-modelling by parents who volunteer their own time;
  - young people's engagement in cultural activity.
- Other factors
  - being female
  - being of a young age
  - belonging to an ethnic minority group
  - living in a rural area.

These factors can be incorporated within Penner's framework: social and cultural capital relate to 'personal attributes', other factors to 'demographic characteristics'.

### **2.3.2 Brodie et al.**

The Pathways Through Participation study (Brodie, et al., 2011) was a two-and-a-half-year research collaboration between the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR). It explored how and why people participate in 'active citizenship'. The project found a multifactorial explanation for participation – its beginning, continuing, and ending – as one might expect. These factors 'shift in significance over time and are in turn shaped by the impact of participation itself' (p. 4), which suggests a feedback loop of sorts is in operation. 'Successful' participation (and it is likely that individuals judge this using multiple measures) contributes to repeat participation. The 'multitude of factors' (p. 4) include:

- Individual factors, including motivations, personality, identity and resources
- Relationships and social networks, including with an individual's family, friends, neighbours and colleagues
- The groups and organisations through which people participate, and the particular structures, processes and culture of those groups
- The local environment and place, including local spaces, events, institutions and politics
- Wider societal and global factors, including national events, social movements and long-term societal and global trends.

The first 'individual factors' category is broad and includes aspects from Penner's 'personal attributes' category (motivations, personality, and possibly identity) as well as Penner's 'volunteer activators (resources)'. It could be argued that the remaining three categories are a mixture of Penner's 'social pressures' and 'volunteer activators'.

### 2.3.3 Yates and Youniss

Yates and Youniss (1996, p. 85) use categories that predominantly speak to Penner's 'personal attributes'. From a US perspective, this relatively old piece demonstrates that an 'increased national interest in service programs' is not a recent phenomenon. It cites evidence that involvement of high school seniors over a sixteen-year period was 'historically consistent'. It reviews 44 empirical studies and develops a framework for involvement in this kind of social action.

The framework is built around three concepts. The authors explore the characteristics and motivations of participants, and a number of themes emerged including:

- agency
- social relatedness
- moral-political awareness.

In terms of 'agency', service (participation in social action) is associated with 'personal directedness and increased self-understanding' e.g. self-esteem; 'industry as an essential basis of identity formation' (p. 87). Participants are found to be 'active, intense individuals who enjoy service' (p. 88). Comparisons can be made between participants and nonparticipants in terms of personal competence and motivations:

- Personal competence: Is the service of participants in some way motivated by efforts to master their own environment? Studies that looked at 'personal competence' concurred that 'participants have higher internal locus of control than nonparticipants... and are oriented more toward achievement through independent action than through conformity' (p. 88). Others were 'driven by their ideals' (p. 89).
- Motivations: Studies looking directly at motivation found a common theme of positive affect. Positive experience, enjoyment, feeling good, and a sense of meaningfulness, arose particularly in situations where individuals were able to contribute to the welfare of other people (p. 89).

In terms of 'social relatedness', comparisons can be made between participants and nonparticipants in terms of:

- Personality factors: Participants tend to be more 'social', with a greater desire to help others, and sense of social responsibility.
- Family characteristics: A number of studies found that one or both of participants' parents were involved in community service (p. 89). The authors suggest this involvement provides both a model for young people to emulate, and a readier source of opportunity for participation.
- Institutional affiliations: Involvement with other institutions was also linked with participation. Examples given were the YMCA and youth clubs for girls and boys. The church was the institution most frequently associated with service. Again, opportunities for involvement as well as a clear articulation of the purpose

of service are reasons put forward for this. A large scale study showed that intrinsic religious orientation ('where internalized values guide one's behaviour') rather than extrinsic religious orientation (behaviour 'directed by utilitarian and instrumental motives') predicted volunteer participation (p. 90).

In terms of moral-political awareness, comparisons can be made between participants and nonparticipants in terms of their moral motivation and their political activism. Participants with moral justification for taking part are more likely 'to engage in political and civic activities in adulthood' (p. 90):

- Moral motivation: Motivations of participants tends to be couched in terms of moral feelings and attitudes', with higher levels of compassion and benevolence. Two studies found altruism ('wanted to do something useful/help others') and egoism ('enjoy doing the work') were given as the first and second most popular reasons for taking part, although they disagreed over the order! (p. 91). The authors propose this 'raises the question of whether older volunteering adolescents emphasize personal goals more than younger adolescents do' or whether there is a developmental factor at work as helping others becomes infused into a person's identity such that they begin to articulate motivations in terms of what makes them feel good as they get used to serving others.
- Political activism: Findings of one study suggested that 'service in youth can lead to a growth in moral-political awareness beyond the immediate experience' (p. 91).

## **2.4 Penner's four factor framework of volunteering**

We turn now to Penner's categorisation of the antecedents of volunteering, incorporating ideas from the preceding frameworks where they fit, irrespective of whether Penner's framework cites them by name. The four antecedents of the initial decision to volunteer are shown in Figure 3 overleaf:

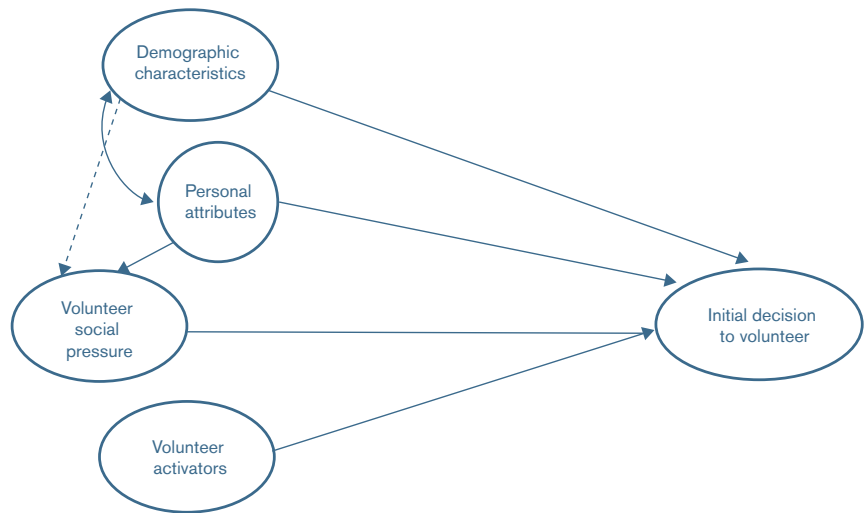


Figure 3: Penner's schematic model of the decision to volunteer (2004, p. 648)

We now look at each in turn, inserting relevant research and sometimes expanding Penner's antecedent categories as we uncover new material that relates to each. In particular, as each of the categories is explored, it is clear that within each antecedent there are factors that would 'inhibit' young people's participation, rather than influence it positively. As such, 'inhibitors' are discussed within each of the categories as appropriate.

#### 2.4.1 Demographic characteristics

There is an extensive literature reporting 'a consistent association between certain demographic characteristics and volunteering...' (Penner, 2004, p. 649). In this review, we find the following important demographic characteristics:

- Income
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Religion

The (2015) Ipsos MORI survey found 'key demographic differences' remained similar to the year prior. In summary:

Female	45%	Male	39%
Most affluent	49%	Least affluent	38%
Religion	45%	No religion	39%
White	43%	Ethnic minority	36%

Table 2: Ipsos MORI 2016

### Education and income

The demographic characteristics ‘most commonly associated with volunteering’ (p. *ibid.*) are education and income.

Penner discusses how these are not causal relationships but are mediated by other factors. He points out that the relationship between income and volunteering ‘may be mediated by the amount of free time a person has’. For example, individuals on lower salaries are more likely to be hourly paid, and consequently less able to take time out to volunteer. ‘Income’ also impacts the decision indirectly via its impact on other antecedents. Under ‘volunteer social pressure’ parental influence or peer pressure will be affected by income. Under ‘volunteer activators’, resources and opportunities to participate may also be a function of demographics.

We met Bennett and Parameshwaran’s (2013) study earlier in this review, where we identified their helpful finding that while social class is too broad a category to be helpful in identifying antecedents to social action, social capital is of interest. Inevitably, cultural capital (particularly the engaging in cultural activities aspect) is linked to opportunities afforded through education and by income.

According to an independent review of ‘full-time social action’, commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Holliday, 2018, p. 2), young people ‘from the poorest backgrounds tend to be the least likely to access structured social action opportunities’ because they are less likely to be able to afford to, and less likely to be supported to do so.

Besides income and education, immutable characteristics of interest include ethnicity, age, gender, and religion and gender and discussed below. Although any attempts to increase engagement in social action should be mindful of patterns of engagement that are distinguishable between these different categories, we pay more attention in this review to those ‘attributes’ that are malleable at an individual level.

### Ethnicity

There is evidence of variation in the degree of involvement of different ethnic groups in volunteering in Britain. Birdwell et al. (2013) cite the 2005 Citizenship Survey data showing higher rates of involvement amongst both British White and British Black 16-24 year olds in comparison with their Asian peers.

In a chapter on the impact of ‘race’ upon volunteering in a US context, Misick and Wilson (2007, p. 213) demonstrate that while Whites ‘were more likely to have volunteered than any other racial or ethnic group’, this is ‘partly because they have more education and higher incomes’. Once these two factors were controlled for however, the difference flattened out. One exception remained, which was the difference between Whites and Asian Americans, ‘which became more pronounced’. The authors also note the complex relationship between race and class because the two do not operate independently.

## Age

Adolescence is ‘a crucial period in life concerning the emergence, consolidation, and development of political points of view (Flanagan, Beyers, & Žukauskiene, 2012).

Citing research from 1999, Caprara et al. (2012, pp. 1,292) claim ‘researchers have not found clear increases with age during adolescence in prosocial behaviour’. They do find some evidence that ‘moral reasoning about prosocial moral dilemmas’ change in late adolescence and early adulthood which may affect an individual’s values.

Weissbourd (2014) finds that younger youth are more likely than older youth to consider ‘caring’ to be a priority. Birdwell et al. (2013, p. 4) suggest there are some ‘gains to be made in trying to get more involved in social action more regularly and at a younger age’.

Bennett and Parameshwaran (2013) find that age is ‘positively associated with increased youth volunteering’ but no further information is given in this short briefing document.

Birdwell et al. (2013, p. 4) found that young people under 16 opt for activities involving sport and exercise, children, and hobbies / arts, ‘while activities connected to religion or politics are unpopular. Those in the 16-19 age bracket tend to volunteer more than those aged 20 plus (p. 13).

Research from the Jubilee Centre (Arthur, Harrison, Taylor-Collins, & Moller, 2017) explored how young people develop a ‘habit of service’ using questionnaire data from over 4,500 16-20 year olds in the UK – the largest of its kind. They define a young person with a habit of service as ‘someone who has taken part in service in the past 12 months and confirms they will definitely or very likely continue participating in the next 12 months’ (p. 5).

Their key findings are that those who start volunteering before the age of ten are more than twice as likely to have formed a habit of service than if they started aged 16-18 years of age. In common with the Yates and Youniss paper (1996) they find that young people are more likely to have parents and friends involved in similar kinds of service. Notably, friends were found to be more of an influence than parents. In terms of other factors affecting their participation, young people with a habit of service ‘have service embedded in their school/college/university environment’ (p. 5).

## Gender

Meaningful participation by older boys (16-20 in a survey of 10-20 year olds) showed significant increase between 2014 and 2015. This said, young females still participated more on the whole (Ipsos MORI, 2015). Research has shown that females are more likely to engage in social action (Bennett & Parameshwaran, 2013, p. 2; Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012). Why might this be? Personality and motivations are two (linked) reasons. Davies (2017) finds a number of studies that identify greater prosocial attitudes in females. A study by Caprara et al. (Caprara, Alessandri, & Eisenberg, 2012) finds that the personality trait ‘agreeableness’ – one of the ‘Big 5’ traits on which there is clear consensus – is significantly related to prosociality. The complex relationship is shown in Figure 4.



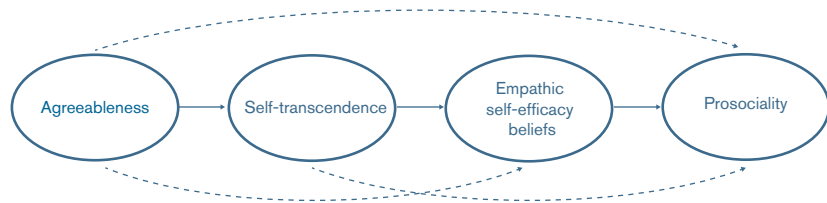


Figure 4: Caprara et al.'s (2012) diagrammatical representation of their theoretical model. Solid lines represent direct paths; dotted lines represent indirect paths.

There has been little research focused upon the differences in citizenship development between males and females (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012, p. 561). Research examining young people's political development nevertheless sheds a little light onto our subject of social action in its recognition that there is a difference between males and females in their 'social and civic participation'. Social and civic participation (along with parents' participation in political engagement) then impacts upon young people's developing political participation. This relationship is mediated in part 'by a sense of community and institutional trust'.

Cicognani et al. (2012, p. 563) make the claim that family can play a role in the involvement young people have through the way they 'encourage' male and female adolescents in different ways based upon gender stereotypes that 'traditionally' point males towards becoming autonomous while protecting females and pointing them towards more 'caring organisations'; with volunteering given as a prime example of this.

While we do not doubt that gender stereotypes represent societal norms and expectations and are based in them to some degree, there is robust evidence that some element of these stereotypes is borne out of difference not accounted for by social role theories. Social role theories of development 'assume gender differences result primarily from perceived gender roles, gender socialization and sociostructural power differentials' (Schmitt, et al., 2017). Yet in the societies where the most has been done to equalise the playing field into a position of radical equality (with the Scandinavian countries being notable), the personality differences between men and women – which influence their behaviour and life and career choices – are maximised. This is to say that 'contrary to predictions from the social role model, gender differences [in personality] were most pronounced in European and American cultures in which traditional sex roles are minimized' (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2014) and 'when men and women have more freedom to pursue their intrinsic interests, the well-established sex difference in occupational interests will become more strongly expressed' (Stoet, Bailey, Moore, & Geary, 2016). Schmitt et al. (2017) agree with the inadequacy of social role theory for explaining variations in men's and women's personalities. De Bolle et al. (2015, p. 183) found similarly in their study across 23 cultures, both English and non-English speaking, 'some suggestion' that larger sex differences in personality occurred in 'egalitarian' cultures.

What this tells us is that differences between males and females in their involvement in social action cannot be accounted for with a 'social role' perspective alone.



In terms of 'sex differences in personality traits' across cultures, De Bolle et al. (2015, p. 182) concluded that age significantly affected sex differences for a number of personality traits, as 'adolescent girls start to display higher levels of sex-typed personality traits at an earlier age than boys' in a way that relates to puberty and cognitive development.

In terms of social action, girls and young women 'only slightly outnumber boys and young men overall, but gender does have an impact on the type of activities undertaken' (Birdwell, Birnie, & Mehan, 2013, p. 4).

### Religion

As an influence, religion is complex and hard to categorise in such a way that eliminates repetition in a report laying out influences against a framework such as Penner's:

- Demographic characteristic: Affiliation with a religion is, in a broad sense, a demographic characteristic. Indeed, the Ipsos MORI poll found more widespread participation among 'those expressing an affiliation to a religion' (45% of this group participated) 'than those who have no religion (38% participated).

Affiliation was not drilled down into further in this study.

It is clear that not all religiously involved young people participate in meaningful social action. As a demographic characteristic, religion offers little by way of explanation. We might more helpfully discuss religion in terms of:

- Personal attributes: Within the 'religion' influence, there are differing degrees of personal conviction and personal involvement.
- Social pressures: There may be social pressures from family and religious community that relate to religious practice.
- Volunteer activators: Religious communities may offer facilitating organisational structures and social connections that afford opportunities for participation.

The importance of religion in the participation in, and even development of, social action should not be underestimated. In a paper on 'social feeling' and 'empathy', Swanson (2013, p. 129) uses a number of works to explain the cause and impact of the historical development of social feeling. She argues that 'sympathy' has its roots in religion. It

has historically been closely related to a Judeo-Christian concept of selfless love' which 'allowed a strand of dissenting Anglicanism to erode the hierarchies of everyday class relations in the eighteenth century, foregrounding the love of that which is small, or dependent, and the 'littleness' of human individuals equal in the sight of a powerful and benevolent God. This enabled a new psychological understanding of those - such as the female servant - who had hitherto been regarded as extraneous to such consideration, to develop alongside the psychological shaping of oneself as a project.

She links to Rodhri Hayward's work that argues:

... many of our modern ways of understanding and describing emotional experience derive from theological models and practices of the self so that religious experience became an important way in which the emotional self was searched and elaborated, and explorations of the spiritual were critical to the identification of the unconscious as part of the founding of the discipline of psychology at the end of the nineteenth century. The concept of sympathy and its association with mutuality are also threaded through the history of the related concept of 'altruism' as a moral, political and, by the early twentieth century, also a psychological capacity.

Sympathy and altruism, and the social action they lead to, cannot be isolated from the religion in which it can be argued they developed.

#### Demographic characteristics that inhibit 'social action'

Davies's (2017) review finds a number of demographic-related barriers to participation in social action.

He cites lack of time as a demographic barrier because of the way it has 'particular pertinence among young people' as a group (p. 41). He cites research that claimed lack of time was, in fact, the most significant barrier to young people. Volunteering was perceived as an 'intensive activity that had to compete with other demands' (p. *ibid.*), and an activity with an opportunity cost that was too high when set against the need for paid work.

He cites actual cost: not only can perceived opportunity cost be high but perceived/actual financial cost – such as the outlay in travel expenditure – can be high (Davies, 2017).

Factors relating to particular demographics touch on 'personal attribute' and 'social pressure' inhibitors also. For example, particular social pressures or perceived attitudes can be relevant to particular demographics:

- Peer pressure has been cited as a barrier to volunteering, particularly among young men who may joke they have 'a reputation to uphold' (Davies, 2017, p. 44).
- 'Other people's attitudes' is also a concern among certain demographics (Davies names black and minority ethnic backgrounds, adults with disabilities, and ex-offenders), who perceive that they may be discriminated against.
- At a personal level, and yet related to demographic factors, barriers also include lack of confidence. His review finds that childhood poverty and disadvantage can present a barrier to confidence.
- Also relating to disadvantaged backgrounds, young men in this demographic may find the perception of 'volunteering' 'off-putting' (p. 44). Whether the same is true of 'social action' is debatable.
- Where volunteering rates are lower – in deprived areas or low income households – opportunities to 'serendipitously' access volunteering opportunities may be lower (p. 39).

Youth can be a barrier to involvement in social action where organisations stipulate lower age limits for participation. Davies provides several sources of evidence indicating that youth are ‘undervalued as potential assets’, ‘viewed as problematic’, not capable’, and ‘a risky population’ to engage in volunteering activities (p. 45).

Holliday (2018, p. 6) finds some ‘key barriers’ to young people – particularly those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds – engaging in what they call ‘full time social action’.

#### **2.4.2 Personal Attributes**

This review aims to understand why young people undertake meaningful social action. Penner (2004, p. 650) tells us that there are ‘stable dispositional correlates of a prosocial behaviour’. ‘Personal attributes’, he says, include ‘beliefs and attitudes, needs and motives, and personality characteristics’ and they are ‘relatively strong predictors’ of social action (p. 649).

Personal attributes as a category of influence are of particular interest. While they include personality traits and values that are relatively fixed, they also encompass more malleable motivations and capabilities; attributes it may be possible to influence with the right interventions.

Tendency to engage in social action is never the result of a single cause, but a complex interaction of various factors mediating one another, which complicates any attempt to understand how we might influence it.

This review describes pertinent findings in terms of:

- Personality
- Motivations
- Religiosity
- Mindset
- Self-efficacy
- Agency
- Creativity
- Resources
- Social capital and ‘psychological sense of community’
- Cultural capital.

#### **Personality**

The Big Five personality traits – as measured by the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R) (Costa & McCrae, 1992) – are:

1. Openness – characterised by originality, curiosity, and ingenuity – and ‘the most debated and least understood of the Big Five traits’ (Musick & Wilson, 2007, p. 40)
2. Conscientiousness – characterised by orderliness, responsibility, and dependability
3. Extraversion – characterised by talkativeness, assertiveness, and energy
4. Agreeableness – characterised by good-naturedness, cooperativeness, and trust
5. Neuroticism – characterised by upsetability – the polar opposite of emotional stability.

These are ‘higher order’, very general, dimensions of personality that are ‘unlikely to be associated with specific behaviours’ (Musick & Wilson, 2007, p. 39). Lower-order traits, over which there is less agreement, ‘should be better predictors of actual behavior’ (p. 40).

Psychologists have debated for many years ‘whether there is an altruistic or prosocial personality that is enduring over time’ (Eisenberg, et al., 2002, p. 993). While Caprara et al. (2012, pp. 1,300) tell us that motivations for social action are contextual and ‘tendencies to pursue others’ well-being may vary under various life conditions and across social contexts and cultures’, Eisenberg et al.’s study supports the view that there is a prosocial personality disposition ‘at least in middle-class individuals in Western culture’. Penner’s research has led him to conclude the same; that ‘there are a stable set of personality characteristics associated with the predisposition to help’ (p. 659).

It is clear why the interest in personality has arisen when the Big Five are ‘unpacked into their lower-order components’, for example, openness to experience means ‘a tendency to seek stimulation and explore new environments, being creative, aesthetically sensitive, and insightful’ (Musick & Wilson, 2007, p. 40).

Penner’s factor analyses conducted in prior work found two dimensions to prosocial personality:

1. Other-oriented empathy (concerns prosocial thoughts and feelings). High scorers for this factor ‘are empathetic and feel responsibility and concern for the welfare of others’ (p. 660). This correlates very strongly with the Big Five factor ‘agreeableness’.
2. Helpfulness (concerns prosocial actions). High scorers for this factor are ‘frequently engaging in helpful actions’ and possess ‘an absence of self-oriented reactions to others’ distress’. This correlates weakly – or not at all – with ‘agreeableness’, but strongly with measures of self-confidence and assertiveness.

These were measured using a 30-item scale, the prosocial personality battery (PSB). Penner also summarises a survey he conducted of 1,100 people in the US. Key findings were:

- The two dimensions of the prosocial personality: other-oriented empathy and helpfulness, both distinguished volunteers from non-volunteers;
- Variables relating to religious beliefs were the only other distinguishing variables;
- Volunteers were more likely than non-volunteers to be members of an organized religion and held ‘stronger’ religious beliefs;
- These differences remained even when volunteers at religious organisations were excluded.

Measures of volunteer activity studied were:

1. Number of organisations worked for
2. Length of time at primary charity
3. Amount of time spent at that charity.

These measures indicate the relative strength of a person's participation in social action. Strength of participation was found to relate to the 'big' influences of education, income, personality, and religious belief: Education and income were 'positively correlated with at least two of these criteria measures' (p. 661).

Both aspects of the prosocial personality were significantly correlated with all three measures.

Strength of religious belief was significantly correlated with all three measures (and remained so even when religious organisations were excluded from the analysis).

Penner cites two further co-authored studies of his own concerning longevity of, or time given to, social action. In the first: scores on the two dimensions of the prosocial personality related to whether a person is a short- or long-term volunteer. In the second, 'other-oriented empathy correlated significantly' (Penner, 2004, p. 660) with time spent volunteering. Penner cites the second study and others that correlate significantly 'helpfulness' with the number of service organisations a person worked for.

The study by Caprara et al. (2012) provides 'some of the strongest evidence available that prosocial dispositions emerge by late childhood and are relatively stable into adulthood' (Eisenberg, et al., 2002, p. 1,003).

Studies prior to Caprara et al.'s (2012, p. 1,299) own recognised 'agreeableness, self-transcendence values, and empathic self-efficacy beliefs' as 'major correlates of individual differences in prosociality'. These factors are all aspects of personality, and the authors describe the complex relationships they find between these factors as 'layers of a hypothetical architecture of personality' (p. *ibid.*). The relationship between the three concepts is complex, for example:

The results also support the posited conceptual model in which empathic self-efficacy beliefs are proximal predictors of the tendency to behave prosocially, mediating the predictive contribution of agreeableness and of self-transcendence, whereas values mediate the prediction by agreeableness of empathic self-efficacy beliefs. Indirect effects further support the assumption that the relations of agreeableness and values to prosociality are mediated by self-efficacy beliefs. There was no evidence of moderated relations (i.e., interactions among agreeableness, self-transcendence, and empathic self-efficacy beliefs), and the posited mediational model fit the empirical findings better than did alternative models including different mediated pathways. For example, the primacy of values with respect to traits was not supported by alternative models (2012, p. 1,299).

Bekkers's (2005, p. 440) review of the literature on participation in voluntary associations finds that personality and social psychologists see volunteering behaviours 'as an expression of prosocial dispositions such as extraversion, agreeableness, and empathy'. The review finds that these behaviours have also been linked to moral reasoning, self-esteem, and locus of control.

Of the Big Five, agreeableness is not alone in predicting involvement in social action, although because 'the agreeable person is fundamentally

altruistic' (Costa & McCrae, 1992) it is conceptually likely to relate to participation. Brown and Taylor (2015, p. 1) researching engagement in 'charitable behaviour' – which is operationalised in terms of donations of time and money – found that conscientiousness and neuroticism related inversely to donating time and money. Conversely, openness to experience related positively. It was also found to be 'the dominant trait in terms of magnitude'.

What seems clear is that personality traits do not act independently of other factors to predict social action. They combine with other attributes (Musick & Wilson, 2007, p. 49). Carlo et al. (2005, p. 1301) examined the interplay between Big Five traits 'agreeableness' and 'extraversion' and prosocial value motivation to understand the combined influence of traits and motivation on volunteering behaviour. Again, the findings are complex, and it is hard to make definitive statements based upon them.

The authors argue that some personality traits relate in a more conceptual way to volunteerism than do others. In the 'less conceptually related' (p. 1301) category they place conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Hence their examination of agreeableness and extraversion, in relation to which they found:

- these two conceptually linked traits (agreeableness and extraversion) 'were more strongly related to volunteerism behaviour' (than the other traits were);
- 'prosocial value motivation partially/fully mediated the relations between agreeableness/extraversion and volunteerism';
- 'extraversion and agreeableness interacted to influence prosocial value motive, which in turn, predicted volunteerism'.

In essence, while traits might be necessary, they are likely to be 'insufficient to predict volunteering' and motives have a mediating effect. People 'who are agreeable with others and who seek social stimulation are oriented toward, and motivated to respond to, the need of others'. Prosocial value motives 'might provide the impetus for volunteerism among individuals who have an agreeable (and extraverted) disposition' (p. 1302).

Returning to agreeableness, Carlo et al. found that while 'there was no supportive evidence for the direct interaction effect of agreeableness and extraversion on volunteering' (p. 1301), agreeableness 'had a significant direct effect' (p. 1302). The authors suggest why this might be so:

One facet of agreeableness involves being compliant with requests from others. Volunteer behaviour is often triggered by requests from others for assistance... Thus, high agreeable individuals may be more likely than low agreeable individuals to volunteer, holding prosocial value motive constant, because they are more likely to comply with requests to volunteer (p. 1302).

There are clear links in this quote to two other of Penner's categories of influence:

1. Demographic characteristic 'gender' (females are higher in trait agreeableness);

2. Volunteer activator ‘triggers’ (being asked to volunteer is a recognised ‘trigger’).

This finding that agreeableness predicts volunteering behaviour was borne out in a study by Dollinger and Leong (1992). Psychology research has been known to suffer from biased sampling and the authors investigated the bias in terms of the Big Five. Their research with its two studies confirmed that agreeableness predicted volunteering (for participation in research studies). They further confirmed their hypothesis that ‘openness’ predicted volunteering.

While there are conceptual differences between volunteering for research studies and participating in social action there is, arguably, a recognisable crossover in terms of motivation. A degree of altruism is a motivating factor in both cases because both tasks help others in a voluntary capacity.

Two studies were set up such that each required a different type of participation from volunteers. For example, degree of face-to-face involvement, and risk. The authors found that different personality traits correlated with participation depending upon the perceived expectations in this regard. They found that extraversion, ‘and its facets of warmth and positive emotions’, was a predictor for volunteering behaviours that involved some level of interaction with others.

Besides agreeableness they suggested that:

- neuroticism may relate to (lack of) participation in volunteer situations where there was some level of physical or psychological threat perceived;
- extraversion may relate to participation if interpersonal interaction is required;
- openness may relate to participation where new experiences are involved, or particular intellectual questions are addressed;
- degree of self-disclosure required;
- conscientiousness may relate to participation where a valued reward is involved (which in the case of social action is by definition the case).

The study thus raises some interesting observations that may bear relevance for considering how different types of social action attract particular personality types depending upon degree of perceived risk, for example.

This notion that different personality traits and volunteer context (i.e. the expectations upon volunteers and the type of activity they will be engaging in etc.) interact to predict participation behaviour also occurs in a study by Claxton-Oldfield et al. (2012). The authors studied personality traits of female British hospice volunteers, finding agreeableness and conscientiousness to be significantly higher than in female adults in general. They cite earlier studies that compared those who demonstrated persistence of volunteering behaviour with those who dropped out. One showed that those remaining ‘had more moderate flexibility, higher tolerance, and little death anxiety’ (p. 690). Another concurred with the lower death anxiety scores, and also found higher purpose in life scores related to longevity of service.



As far as personality's relationship to participation in volunteering, this notion of 'fit' should be borne in mind.

Musick and Wilson (2007, p. 40) review 'the evidence linking personality traits to volunteering' and focus on four aspects of personality in *Volunteers: A social profile*:

1. extraversion – volunteers tend to be more extraverted than non-volunteers;
2. empathy – a lower-order aspect of 'agreeableness'. Controlling for particular factors that relate more strongly to empathy, volunteers were more empathic than non-volunteers;
3. trust – another lower-order 'agreeableness' trait, but one whose meaning is contested. Trust 'helps foster reciprocity... For example, we are more likely to help an elderly person if we trust that people from the next generation will help us when we become infirm' (p. 45). The authors find that volunteers are more trusting than non-volunteers. Marzana et al. (2012, p. 499) include 'social trust' in their discussion of personal attributes as 'a facilitator of public participation', and one that is reinforced in a virtuous cycle as the young person participates.
4. self-efficacy – a lower-order component of the neurotic personality trait (p. 49). Self-efficacy links to 'agency' and to the larger topic under study; that is, 'creative self-efficacy'. In their chapter reviewing the literature on the personality profile of volunteers Musick and Wilson tell us that efficacy is 'often' referred to by political scientists when attempting to explain 'variations in civic engagement' (p. 47). It 'changes the calculus of costs and benefits of volunteer work' (p. 47) and converts empathy and responsibility into action (p. 47). Volunteers 'feel more efficacious than non-volunteers' (p. 49), and self-efficacy 'partially explains the positive effect of education and income on volunteering' (p. 49). What is not completely understood is whether efficacy has a compensatory effect for individuals of less privileged backgrounds.

Returning to our observation of 'fit' between personality and type of participation, Musick and Wilson look at trait 'trust' and ask whether it is 'equally useful for all types of volunteer work' (p. 46). Their analysis of research data led them to conclude that

...trust had its strongest effect on volunteering in the education, arts, and culture category, followed by advocacy volunteering. The effect of trust on recreation and youth development as only half as strong as its effect on volunteering in connection with schools or the arts...

Those individuals who are trusting are, it seems, 'more readily drawn toward some types of volunteer work than others' (p. 47).

#### Motivations

There are two very broad categories of motivator when it comes to social action:



- Individualistic – e.g. employability, ‘fun’
- Altruistic – helping others.

This being so, the complexity of motivations, and the way they can change during the course of an experience, may mean that making a distinction is impossible (Davies, 2017, p. 38).

Thinktank Demos produced a report in 2013 (Birdwell, Birnie, & Mehan, p. 5) examining the ‘state of the nation’ in terms of the ‘youth social action’ concept. It found ‘a combination of altruistic and self-interested reasons’ for involvement in social action by young people.

Notably, ‘self-interested and instrumental motivations’ are ‘far more’ typical for young people than any other age group. Instrumental reasons might include that involvement helps them to learn new skills, to make new friends, or to further their career. Hill et al. (2009, p. 7) looked at motivations for volunteering, and found five broad categories, which are reinforced by other studies:

- personal feelings (e.g. satisfaction, feel good)
- personal needs (e.g. pastime, relationships)
- altruism
- experience (e.g. skills and work prospects)
- personal inducements (e.g. qualifications)

What is interesting about this idea of self-interested motivations is that it is inbuilt into the definition of meaningful youth social action. While Birdwell et al. (2013, p. 8) tell us that there is disagreement about exactly what activities qualify as social action, they point out that the ‘double action principle’ of social action is its most important. This means that ‘In order for an activity to qualify as social action, it must benefit both the wider community as well as the young people taking part.’ It must be ‘socially impactful’ (Ockenden, Unell, Donahue, & Mguni, 2013). Social action is, by its nature, inherently self-interested as well as other-oriented.

This said, the sense of double benefit is not exclusive to social action. Yates and Youniss (1996, p. 86) tell us that community service is similarly ‘assumed not only to help the community, but also to promote prosocial development in participants’. In the case of ‘community service’, however, what is not clear is whether it is participants themselves who hope to gain a double benefit, or whether it is just a known, ‘assumed’ by-product.

Literary scholars have long debated the degree to which humankind has endemic goodness versus the ‘egoist’ perspective that finds ‘at the core of all human motivation a knot of disqualifying self-interest’ (Bricker, 2017). Writers have argued over whether the social good motivated by self-interest is ultimately a virtuous deed and, in fact, whether any virtuous action is not truly motivated by self-interest.

In terms of participants’ first engagement with ‘active citizenship’, Brodie et al. (2011, p. 5) found ‘six categories of meanings’ that serve as personal motivations. Beyond the first category the remaining five are, arguably, all individualistic to a large degree or completely:

1. helping others
2. developing relationships

3. exercising values and beliefs
4. [gaining] influence (possibly in terms of social connections made, although no further explanation is given)
5. for personal benefit
6. being part of something.

A definitional requirement of youth social action is that its benefit must accrue both to the recipient and to the young person performing the social action. This does not lessen altruism as a motivator, but neither does it rule out individualistic motivations. Davies (2017, p. 34) cites several sources of evidence indicating that ‘both motivations can emerge simultaneously’.

A Demos survey (Birdwell & Bani, 2014, p. 17) captured a wide range of benefits to young people of ‘volunteering and other forms of social action’. Benefits could be categorised into those relating to wellbeing, to social cohesion, and to employability. An important question is the extent to which these outcomes of volunteering are also motivations for taking part in the first place. That volunteering made over 90% of respondents ‘feel better about themselves’, ‘care more about others’, ‘work better in a team’, or ‘improved their self-confidence’ does not preclude the possibility that these apparent outcomes may also serve as mostly self-oriented motivators for taking part. Page 18 describes a whole range of benefits to the individuals volunteering.

Motivations vary by age and socio-economic background. Davies (2017, p. 35) draws together three studies that link employability (i.e. individualistic) motives to younger students, or those from less advantaged backgrounds (measured by parental occupation or education).

Ipsos MORI research confirmed a mix of altruistic and personal benefits to youth meaningful social action (these are discussed in terms of benefits felt rather than motivations). Notably the occurrence of personal benefit ‘I felt I had made a difference’ saw a ‘significant’ increase (from 28% to 34%) from one year (2014) to the next, although no explanation for this rise was given.

A study by Omoto and Packard (2016) has some important findings in terms of antecedents of volunteerism. They relate several psychological dispositional characteristics that predict volunteerism: empathy, self-esteem, and ‘generativity’ (the desire to leave a legacy). Their twin study research ‘yielded powerful consistent evidence for the power of PSOC [psychological sense of community] to predict volunteerism, and even activism for a specific, contemporary social issue’. They found PSOC to be the ‘superior predictor’ (p. 286).

### Religiosity

As an antecedent to social action, ‘religiosity’ – as a personal belief as well as a religious practice – ‘has obtained fairly good corroboration in the literature’ (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012, p. 499). Indeed, religious activity was found to be ‘one of the strongest predictors of motivation to voluntary service’ (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012, p. 499).

Bennett and Parameshwaran consider the factor ‘extra-curricular religious class attendance’ as one of three dimensions of ‘social capital’ that they found were associated with likelihood of increased volunteering activity.

Bekkers's (2005) study in the Netherlands finds church attendance to be 'positively related to voluntary association membership'. He cites evidence that in the US, where secularisation has been slower than in a European context, 'religious affiliation [was, at least back in 2002] still one of the key factors for civic engagement'. Increasing secularisation of European society is likely to have an impact upon engagement in social action.

We have already seen that volunteers were more likely than non-volunteers to be members of an organized religion and held 'stronger' religious beliefs.

### Resources

In the later section on 'volunteer activators' we discuss the Pathways to Participation (Brodie, et al., 2011) report's 'participation equation', which is: motivation + trigger + resources + opportunities = participation.

Motivations and triggers are what drive participation. The category 'resources' act to help or hinder those drivers. While the first, 'practical', relates to demographic characteristics, the latter two are more related to 'personal attributes':

- Practical resources e.g. health, access to time and money
- Learnt resources e.g. knowledge, skills, experience
- Felt resources e.g. self-confidence, self-efficacy.

Bekkers (2005, p. 440) frames 'resources' in terms of financial, human, and social capital. He notes that political scientists studying participation have shown that 'political attitudes often intermediate effects of resources'.

'Resources' is a rather general term that can cloud distinctions between categories. For example, Brodie et al. (2011) distinguish these three categories of resource and then talk about what is termed 'social capital' as though it were a fourth category. Bekkers (2004, p. 440) tells us that while sociologists assume good intentions are universal (a bold assertion), nevertheless 'some people have a stock of human and social capital that allows them to fulfil these intentions, while others lack the resources to do so', thus framing 'resources' in terms of social capital. We address 'social capital' on its own.

### Social capital and 'psychological sense of community'

Brodie et al. (2011) cite personal relationships and social networks as a 'critical resource' in addition to their three categories above. These social networks are important to the success of participation because they provide 'access to resources, knowledge, connections and decision-makers' (p. 6).

Recognising that there is no single accepted definition of social capital, OECD's attempt at a universally acceptable one is 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups' (Keeley, 2007, p. 103). Keeley expresses this as 'links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together' (p. 102).

The concept has been studied as both a 'private good' (for example,

Bourdieu saw it as something that an individual could exploit to obtain knowledge) and a 'collective good'. Putnam's work took social capital to a societal level, proposing that 'the social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development' (Sørensen, 2016, p. 393).

Three types of social capital are recognised in the literature:

- Bonds – links to others through a common sense of identity e.g. family, culture, ethnicity. It is social capital held among people within the local community (Sørensen, 2016, p. 392).
- Bridges – more distant relationships that nevertheless share a sense of identity e.g. family and friends further afield; colleagues.
- Linkages – to others 'further up or down the social ladder' (p. 103).

It is commonly assumed that social capital is higher in rural areas (Sørensen, 2016). Research in a Danish context (p. *ibid.*) found that, as far as 'bonding' social capital is concerned, this is true:

... rural areas significantly outperformed urban areas with regards to localized trust, rate of passive and active participation in local civic associations, and various measures of local reciprocity (p. 392).

'Bridging' social capital, however, was found to be 'marginally' higher in urban areas, specifically:

... with regards to trust towards people in general and with regards to the rate of membership in non-local civic associations (p. *ibid.*).

Bekker (2005, p. 447) cites 'level of urbanization' as '[a]nother indicator of social capital'. Bennett and Parameshwaran (2013), on the other hand, include 'youth lives in a rural area' as a significant 'other' factor. Social capital in their study includes household size, number of children in the household, and number of youth's close friends. Only the latter was found to be significant. Ignoring their classification of rural living as 'other', its significance is important to note.

The divide between urban and rural involvement in social action has been recognised in the literature on participation. While, perhaps, rural situation used to indicate high levels of social capital, perhaps this is declining too. Bekker's study in a Netherlands context finds that the rural-urban difference is less than it was 25 years prior. Are networks and ties in urban contexts becoming stronger, or those in rural areas becoming weaker? Sørensen's study (2016, p. 408) found that 'length of residence proved to matter slightly more for rural dwellers'. At a time when people are more mobile (moving for study, work etc.), we might expect social capital in rural areas to suffer more from the impacts of migration.

Linking back to our earlier section on (education and) income, Sørensen's (2016, p. *ibid.*) study found that 'personal income proved to matter slightly more for urban dwellers with respect to building both' types of social capital. It is unclear whether urban dwellers build up

social capital for financial reasons, or whether financial factors impact their ability to build social capital. Either way, it is worth noting that the statistical significance of this finding was low.

A two-study piece of research by Omoto and Packard (2016, p. 272) found that ‘psychological sense of community’ (PSOC) predicted ‘concurrent and future volunteerism’. The research demonstrated the importance of ‘social relationships and psychological connections as potential pathways to volunteerism and social action’.

Although there are various models of the PSOC concept, ‘they tend to include emphases on the importance of membership, shared emotional connection, and perceived commonalities among members of a group’ (p. 273). The group may be defined geographically or in terms of interests, characteristics, or values. As a predictor of volunteering, the PSOC construct is helpful in identifying who might be likely to ‘engage in behaviours’ that benefit the community (in whatever way community is defined).

Omoto and Packard’s second study found that the key driver of activism was not so much the cause – in this case environmental activism. Instead, what motivated was the psychological connection to others who shared the concern.

Omoto’s earlier work (Stürmer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005) looked at the role of group membership in helping. The authors noted that a ‘group-level perspective on helping suggests that the in-group/out-group relationship between the helper and the recipient of help (“helpee”) plays a crucial role in moderating the psychological processes underlying helping’ (p. 532). In conclusion they suggest that feelings of empathy, and also ‘attraction’ (on some level to the helpee) may provide ‘two general “pathways” to helping’ (p. 544) dependent upon whether the helpee is in- or out-group.

#### Cultural capital

Analysis by the Third Sector Research Centre (2013) used a composite measure of youth cultural capital which included frequency of adults taking youth to theatre, dance, music concerts, sports events, museums and galleries, frequency of discussing books at home. The authors found that cultural capital had a significant positive effect, ‘suggesting that youths who are high in cultural capital are also more likely to volunteer’ (Bennett & Parameshwaran, 2013).

It is self-evident that, to some degree, those with high levels of cultural capital influence what defines good taste in a particular society. The sorts of cultural activities listed above reflect a particular view of creativity, but only in as far as it is represented by ‘the arts’.

#### Other personal attributes

Personality, motivation, religiosity, an individual’s access to resources, their psychological sense of community, and cultural capital are a broad array of personal attributes that are known to bear influence on participation in social action. While these broad categories are a comprehensive representation of what the literature offers, they cannot be said to be an exhaustive list of influences. This section serves as a reminder that there are, arguably, other personal attributes – or combinations of personal

attributes – that may contribute to participation, but whose exploration has been outside of the scope of existing studies.

For example, the purpose of this literature review is to make the connection between creative self-efficacy and participation in social action. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss creative self-efficacy in terms of the ‘personal attributes’ creativity, mindset, and self-efficacy. It is posited that the interaction of these attributes serves to influence participation.

### 2.4.3 Social Pressure

Penner’s third category of influence is ‘social pressure’, for which we found some pertinent categories:

- Direct and indirect
- Parental influence
- Social pressures that inhibit participation

#### Direct and indirect

Although Penner gives more weight to personal dispositions, he recognises that social influence processes, both direct and indirect, impact engagement in volunteering. Direct influence might include being asked; indirect might include receiving clear messages of expectation.

Notably, subtle social pressures and personal dispositions ‘are not [entirely] independent’ from one another, which Penner’s model accounts for. For example, requests to volunteer may be more readily targeted at particular types of people (those more likely to be willing, or those more integrated into their community already), or individuals reporting an autonomous decision to volunteer would, in all likelihood have been subjected to ‘subtle social pressure’ (2004, p. 650).

Marzana et al. (2012) include in this category of social pressure – as recognised by several studies – parental influence on the development of young people’s civic identity. Parental influence is a factor that sits between personal attributes and social pressure as two forms of influence that are not independent.

#### Parental influence

Parental influence is important, with young people being more likely to volunteer if their parents do (Bennett & Parameshwaran, 2013). By why is this; is it down to role-modelling, or something more?

Relating more to ‘personal attributes’ than to ‘social pressure’, part of the influence parents have is upon young people’s personalities. When looking at the prosocial personality we cited Penner’s (2004) use of the PSB to measure its two aspects: (1) other-oriented empathy, and (2) helpfulness. Penner subsequently used the PSB to score college students and their parents, and asked students about their parents’ behaviours when students were between six and ten years old. They found that students’ scores on the PSB in:

1. other-oriented empathy correlated positively with parental warmth, nurturance, and agreeableness (as self-reported by both students and parents); and in
2. helpfulness did not correlate the same. Instead, they were



correlated with self-reports of parental modelling of prosocial words and deeds.

This tells us that parents influence young people's prosocial personality both in the way they behave towards them, and perhaps unsurprisingly, in the way they behave towards others. It could be posited that greater parental integrity, in terms of a consistency of behaviour towards their children and others, correlates with higher PSB scores in students, but this is not tested.

We can say for certain that parental role modelling is a key influence. Weissbourd and colleagues (2014) also look at the messages young people receive from how their parents are seen to treat others. The degree to which young people perceive their parents to value 'caring' is associated with the way young people prioritise it themselves. Their survey of over 10,000 middle and high school students in 33 diverse schools found a gap between the way adults perceived their own priorities and what young people perceived adults' priorities to be. While it cites research suggesting parents value 'benevolence' over 'power' in their children, nearly two thirds of young people reported that their parents would rank their offspring's achievement above caring for others. 80% of school adults surveyed concurred with the students' view that parents prioritised their young people's achievement – and then their happiness – over caring. While it illustrates how 'pushy' parents give the message that their own children must be focused on above others; the 'more pervasive problem is subtler' (p. 9) because it shows clearly that parents' values are at odds with the rhetoric of valuing kindness that they espouse. The following illustration shows this well:

It's the steady diet of messages that children get, such as when parents let children quit teams without considering their obligation to the team, or don't require their children to reach out to a friendless kid on a playground, or allow children to talk too much, taking up too much air time with other children or adults...

These behaviours, combined with a focus on their child's own happiness as a goal, demonstrate a toxic individualism that is learned by the next generation through modelling.

#### **Social pressures that inhibit participation**

Pressure to engage in social action can work negatively also. A paper in the *Journal of Youth Studies* (Holdsworth & Brewis, 2014) raised the question of whether the pressure for young people to volunteer may 'undermine the voluntary nature of these activities'.

There are two ways in which pressure to be involved can occur.

Firstly, as a moral imperative within society at large. In the background to their argument the authors consider a misfit between UK government ideology and the real views of individuals within society. The 'Big Society' rhetoric espoused a particular model of citizenship and the boundaries between what the welfare state could or would provide, and every citizen's responsibilities and duties regarding their own community. In conceptualising social action, the UK Coalition Government's rhetoric of 'duty'

rather than ‘agents of change’, for example, was reflected in the National Citizenship Service scheme (p. 206). Holdsworth and Brewis write that the language of ‘rights’ ‘not only challenges the basis on which many people participate, but also creates a moral imperative to volunteer’ (p. *ibid*). Buddery (2015, p. 8) makes a related argument; that volunteering ‘plays a risky game when it gets close to the state’. When unpaid members of the public are used to plug holes in public services, the volunteering sector is, in one way, ‘colluding in’ the budget-cutting of public services. In another way, it risks ‘being maneuvered into a role written for it by government’ instead of being ‘freely chosen and an opportunity for dissent’.

Secondly, as an imperative to be involved from an employability perspective. With increasing competition from equally academically qualified candidates, volunteering is seen as a way to differentiate one’s CV. In an HE market where students themselves foot the bill for their education, student choice is said to be the ‘main calibrator for the HE market’ (Holdsworth & Brewis, 2014, p. 216). Yet in practice, the choice to not be involved in volunteering may reduce students’ options upon graduation.

Both pressures can serve as a form of control. The authors argue that political and institutional expectations ‘could bring about less ambitious forms of engagement’ (p. 217).

The benefits to volunteering works both ways. On the one hand, volunteering effectively fills some of the gaps left by a shrinking welfare system. On the other, ‘it appears almost self-evident that students will gain an advantage in the labour market...[while] ‘doing good’’ (p. 207). Yet this knowledge, the authors argue, can be detrimental to creativity on two fronts. On the one hand this compulsion to be involved is not appreciated by students:

...rather than fostering the creative capacity to get involved and really make a difference, the alignment of volunteering with entry into the graduate labour market has the potential to stimulate suspicion and precaution (p. 216).

On the other hand, when particular HE institutions encourage every student to take part, logic of using volunteering to stand out from the crowd is questionable to students. While students know that volunteering can ‘provide a unique expression of their personal capital’, its capacity ‘is reduced as volunteering is rolled out en masse’ (p. 216). Indeed, the authors found that young people ‘resist the expectation’ to volunteer if they believe that the very existence of an expectation actually devalues the activity. If everyone does it, it doesn’t add any particular novelty value to one’s own CV.

Holdsworth and Brewis’s findings agree with other studies that students do not necessarily volunteer with any regard to strategy, or the benefits it might construe them. Typically, the decision to participate might be spontaneous and rise from a request for help from a friend or teacher, or another external trigger prompting them to take action. Students actually ‘often’ tend to resist structured routes into volunteering (p. 213). One student reflected on the resentment of his peers towards the significance high school teachers assigned voluntary work to their ability to write a good university application. The idea of volunteering as ‘a



means to an end' is something students – both volunteer participants and non-participants – voiced concern about in the study. While recognising the potential benefits of volunteering to their employability, this did not always serve as a motivator and 'students resisted or at least contested these external pressures' (p. 214).

Reasons for students' non-involvement tended to relate to lack of interest and apathy 'rather than structural barriers associated with institutional practices or students' individual circumstances, such as employment or study commitments' (p. 214).

The idea that young people might resist structured routes makes sense if you consider the degree to which independence and control are features young people prize highly. Birdwell et al. (2013, p. 5) found that both 'independence and control over the voluntary activity seems especially important'. The priority given to the 'youth led' principle in Generation Change's (Generation Change, no date) quality definition of youth social action speaks to this need.

#### **2.4.4 Volunteer activators**

These are a broad class of factors that 'activate the desire to volunteer' (Penner, 2004, p. 651). Penner gives diverse examples including a personal loss; an image – maybe of suffering – evoking certain feelings; or a significant historical event that creates a common emotion in a group of people. Penner uses the example of the September 11 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Brodie et al.'s (2011) 'triggers' approach is reminiscent of this category.

Marzana et al.'s (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012) review of the literature in this area leads them to include 'opportunity' in this category. Activators enable young people to be involved. They are 'institutional and relational support that... push them to become involved in some form of social action' (p. 500).

The concept of 'activators' can be helpfully summarised using Brodie et al.'s (2011) 'participation equation'. Their Pathways Through Participation study is of value for this current review in terms of its identification and categorisation of the factors that enable and inhibit participation. We earlier cited the authors' 'six categories of meanings' (p. 5) that serve as personal motivations for participants' first engagement with 'active citizenship':

1. helping others
2. developing relationships
3. exercising values and beliefs
4. having influence
5. for personal benefit
6. being part of something.

These six were combined with ‘triggers’, ‘resources’, and ‘opportunities’ into what the authors call ‘the participation equation’:

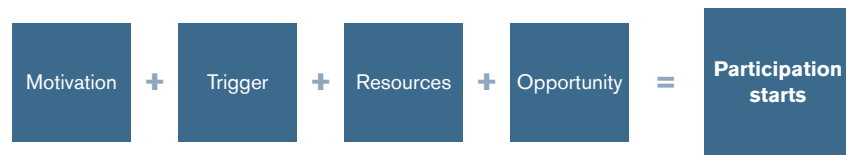


Figure 5: *The participation equation - why participation starts* (Brodie et al., 2011)

Brodie et al. distinguish motivations from ‘triggers’. It would seem that the latter are factors that can be traced back to specific moments in time, for example:

- An emotional reaction e.g. an angry reaction to a decision or response to a threat or need
- A personal life event e.g. a relocation or change in family circumstance
- An external influence e.g. a change in worldview or understanding, or a natural disaster.

Davies (2017, p. 38) cites ‘being asked’ as a commonly reported reason for volunteering in one study. His use of the term ‘trigger factors’ (p. 37) is used to discuss ‘the social context from which routes to volunteering are found’.

Although clearly identifiable, it would seem that from a psychological point of view, triggers are very closely entwined with personal motivations and cannot be separated entirely.

#### Activator related inhibitors

Just as for other antecedents of social action, there are a number of inhibitors that naturally relate to activators and are discussed here alongside them.

For example, lack of opportunity to volunteer (Davies, 2017, p. 38) is a barrier to participation; an inhibitor, which would sit within the ‘activator’ category according to Marzana et al. (2012).

Related to opportunity to volunteer is ‘information’ about such opportunities. Davies (2017, p. 43) calls a lack of information a ‘social barrier’ but it sits more readily within our ‘(negative) activators’ category. Other negative activators identified by Davies include:

- Overwhelming levels of information;
- Lack of connection to social networks that can help digest information;
- A negative image of volunteers and ‘volunteering’
  - as an ‘exclusive construct’ and an activity for ‘middle-aged, middle-class and altruistic females’ (p. 44)
  - as a ‘problematic term for young people’ who have less altruistic motives for taking part, but perceive that ‘volunteering’ (social action?) is about altruism (p. *ibid.*).

Penner defines volunteer activators in terms of personal circumstances and historic events that impact upon a person. Davies (p. 45) finds that young people's experience of school can have a lasting impact on 'volunteering behaviours for those in their early twenties', with suspension from school being the negative experience in question. It is likely that this is correlated with (democratic factor) disadvantage, with Davies providing some evidence of this.

Musick and Wilson (2007, p. 48) find that people are 'put off volunteering if they are easily discouraged by others refusing to help or by the failure to achieve immediate, tangible results'. Other inhibitors included not knowing enough about the issues (of importance within their community), not having the requisite skills, and perceiving their input would make little difference. The latter points strongly to self-efficacy.

## **2.5 Summary**

There are a number of useful frameworks which enable us to examine the range of factors affecting why young people engage with social action. Of these, Penner (2004) is comprehensive and well-regarded, enabling us to gather evidence under his four headings – demographic characteristics, personal attributes, volunteer social pressure and volunteer activators.

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# 3 The development of creativity and creative self-efficacy

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This review covers new ground in its exploration of the impact of creative self-efficacy upon participation in meaningful social action. While chapter 4 will begin to explore these links, this section introduces the concept of creative self-efficacy and summarises evidence of how it develops during adolescence by way of providing a foundation on which we can then build.

## 3.1 What is creativity?

An introduction to the bigger concept of ‘creativity’ is necessary before we move on to exploring the related concept of creative self-efficacy. Creativity is a multi faceted phenomenon occurring in many domains in all aspects of life – school, work, family and the wider world. The study of creativity is some seventy years old. Most researchers trace its inception to the work of J P Guilford (1950). Guilford suggested that there are two kinds of thinking: convergent (coming up with one good idea) and divergent (generating multiple solutions). Building on this line of thought Torrance (1970) developed four sub categories: fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration.

Psychologist and psychometrician Robert Sternberg (1996) has argued that creativity is three dimensional. It requires:

- synthesising – the ability to see problems in new ways and escape from conventional thinking;
- analysing – being able to recognise which ideas are worth pursuing and which are not; and
- contextualising – having the skills in different settings to persuade others of the value of any specific idea.

Both ‘dispositional’ and ‘situational’ variables can impact upon these two factors, thus affecting creativity. The authors conclude that creativity ‘is a function of flexible thinking and taking different approaches to a task, but also of systematic search processes and hard work’ (p. 70).

There is no single, unifying theory of creativity that would tie together all strands of interest to academics. Indeed, some views of creativity are directly in tension with others. Creativity is studied from a wide range of perspectives, and its meaning varies across cultures, particularly from East to West (Tsai, 2012).

Rhetoric around creativity, particularly in education, often frames creativity in terms of one of two contradictory ways. A democratic view would hold that everyone can become creative, and there is benefit to be had to individuals and society by developing this creativity, and a degree of fairness about promoting it to all. On the other hand, an ‘elite’ view is reflected sometimes in such provisions as ‘gifted and talented’ programmes. While few would disagree that young people need stretching to maximise their full potential, the language suggests that ‘giftedness’, ‘talent’, and even ‘creativity’ is somehow innate and fixed. Craft (2001) reminds us that while only a few may aspire to be an exceptional genius, all of us can show a more ordinary form of creative thinking, what she termed ‘little c creativity’, the focus of most teaching and learning in schools.

Whereas creativity is a phenomenon studied from within a wide range of disciplinary fields, it occurs everywhere, every day, and within everyone: what we might call ‘democratic’. ‘Big-C’ creativity is contrasted with ‘little-c’ creativity to distinguish between significant acts of creative ‘genius’ and seemingly less profound acts of putting together ideas in new ways. Kaufman and Beghetto’s (2009) paper further subdivided the Cs to arrive at a ‘4C’ model - mini-c, little-c, pro-c, big-c.’

### **3.1.1 Contexts for creativity**

This idea of context reminds us of two things. Firstly, that creative thinking is both a solo and a collective activity and most often has a social component (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Secondly that creativity can be viewed as domain specific or domain free. It is thus important to recognise that individuals may not consider themselves creative or, indeed, perform creatively, in all situations. There are proponents on both sides of the argument and cases can be made for both views. Typically, where the focus is on individuals and creative processes (such as divergent thinking), the case is stronger for creative thinking ability to be domain general (Plucker, 2005). Conversely, when the attention is on creative products, creative ability tends to be seen as domain specific (Sawyer, 2006) because of the body of knowledge required before creative thinking can truly take place. There is also a school of thought that views creativity as having both general and specific components (Baer & Kaufmann, 2005).

Csikszentmihalyi’s (2014) ‘systems model of creativity’ asserts that three forces underlie creative endeavours: a cultural domain (the rules and norms of creative expression); a social field (where recognition and evaluation of creative ideas happens) and; the individual (with their thoughts and actions). An individual wishing to contribute creatively needs to recognise the rules of the domain as well as the preferences of the field because ‘we cannot study creativity by isolating individuals and their works from the social and historical milieu in which their actions are carried out’.

In terms of categorising different approaches to creativity, there are some helpful analyses. For example, in a comprehensive meta analysis, Treffinger et al. (2002) found 120 definitions of creativity and grouped them into four broad categories – generating ideas, digging deeper into ideas, openness and courage to explore ideas, and listening to one’s inner voice.

Another attempt to make sense of the broad body of work in creativity is by Anna Craft (2008), who provides a matrix of creativity approaches encompassing degree of domain specificity and degree of involvement of others. Figure 6 allows us to visualise different approaches:

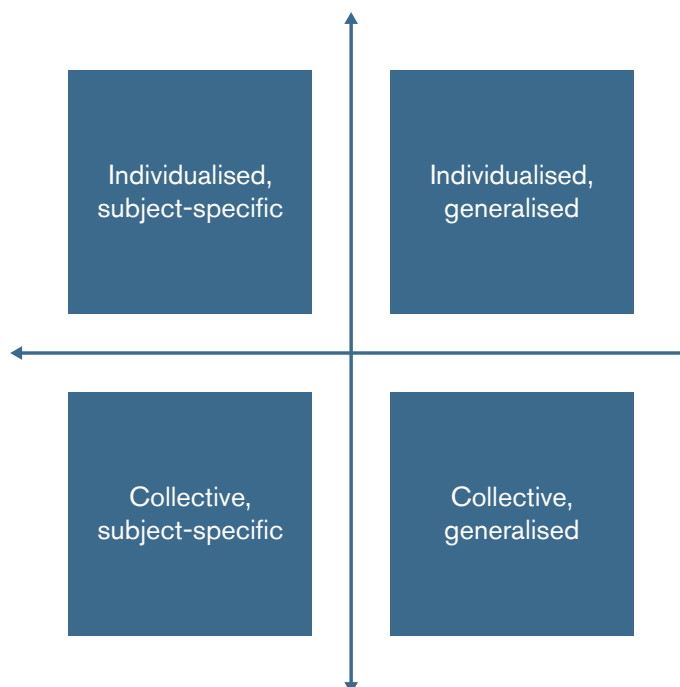


Figure 6: Creativity - Person and location

Craft's model reminds us that creativity exists within and beyond domains (i.e. areas of practice or expertise), and that it has both an individual and a social component.

### 3.1.2 Creativity as 'product'

Creativity in organisations is often referred to as 'innovation', although the idea that groups or teams can also be creative is of interest to researchers. The 4-P model - person, process, product, and 'press' (which refers to environmental facilitators and inhibitors of creativity) - proposed in 1961 by Rhodes is still used as a means of framing inquiries and is relevant to both 'big', and 'little', forms of creativity.

Contrasting Eastern and Western views of creativity, Tsai (2012, p. 16) tells us that in the West, creativity is product-oriented, focusing on 'tangible, observable, and measurable manifestation' and that this 'utility-oriented attribution is a good fit for the Western process model of cognitive problem-solving orientation'.

To the extent that engagement in social action may be a 'product' of creative self-efficacy, this review also gives space to a focus on creative outputs. Yet a product view of creativity is not always helpful and can be more associated with 'big' creativity rather than everyday acts of creativity. Ockuly and Richards (2013) found that presenting creativity to learners with a view to 'inspire and engage' may work better by considering creativity as a process rather than focusing on its product.

Creativity makes use of different cognitive processes (Kleibeuker et al., 2016) and some frameworks have addressed the processes involved in

creativity. For example, Wallas's (1926) four step process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Or Rossman's (1931) seven step process beginning with 'observation of a need or difficulty' ending at 'experimentation to test out the most promising solution, and the selection and perfection of the final embodiment'. Or Fritz's (1991) eight steps beginning with conception and ending with 'living with your creation'.

### 3.1.3 Creativity as a habit

In thinking about creativity in formal education settings there has been a shift away from thinking skills to thinking routines or habits (Costa and Kallick, 2002; Ritchhart et al., 2011; Lucas et al. 2013; Lucas, 2016). For unless creative thinking skills are routinely deployed in different domains, they are only useful in an abstract sense. As with many cross disciplinary capabilities or competences there is a live debate about the degree to which such capabilities are transferable to other contexts (Halpern, 1988)

Creative thinking in the real-world involves both innovation and implementation, originality and functionality. It requires individuals to play with possibilities and make new connections as well as reflecting critically and cooperating appropriately with others; to use intuition and tolerate uncertainty as well as developing techniques and new products/processes. Different creative habits of mind are useful to various degrees according to context and stage.

### 3.1.4 Dimensions of creativity

In this review we use our own model of creativity (2013), Figure 7, to frame the review's analysis of what it is to have varying levels of creative self-efficacy and to analyse in greater depth ways in which it may or may not be connected to meaningful social action.

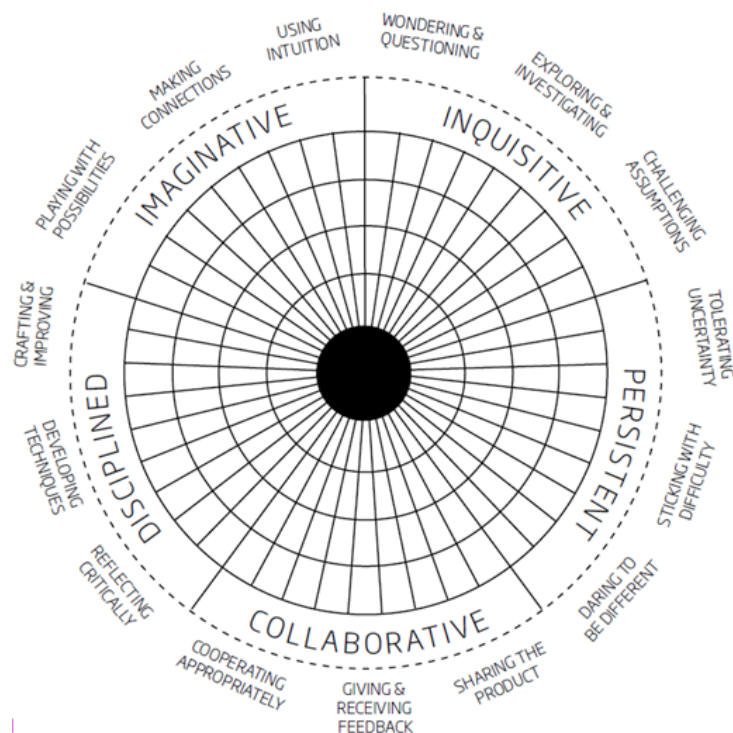


Figure 7: The Centre for Real-World Learning's five-dimensional model of creativity



The framework's use of learnable habits to define creativity has found considerable traction in and beyond schools in both the northern and southern hemispheres, where teachers have found its groundedness in observable behaviours helpful. As well, it has been used as the basis of a 14-country study by PISA into the assessment of progression in creativity. On the strength of this study, PISA's 2021 'innovative domain' assessment of 15-year-olds worldwide will focus on creative thinking.

The conceptualisation of creativity in terms of habits of mind has been explored since by the Center for Childhood Creativity (2015), whose seven 'components' include six categories (the first six) that could be expressed as learnable habits:

- Cognitive: imagination and originality, flexibility, decision making;
- Social and emotional: communication and self-expression, motivation, collaboration;
- Physical: action and movement.

The Centre for Real-World Learning's framework was conceptualised taking into account the rich body of research into creativity. It specifically intended to draw on the field's understanding of the close relationship between 'creativity' and intelligence. In particular, regard was given to the way that both are learnable and, as such can be 'tracked' for improvement purposes – i.e. formative learning.

It is a framework of creative dispositions broken down into five dimensions with three sub-habits under each of the five:

1. Inquisitive (wondering and questioning, exploring and investigating, challenging assumptions)
2. Persistent (sticking with difficulty, daring to be different, tolerating uncertainty)
3. Imaginative (playing with possibilities, making connections, using intuition)
4. Collaborative (sharing the product, giving and sharing feedback, cooperating appropriately)
5. Disciplined (developing techniques, reflecting critically, crafting and improving).

These aspects are explored further in chapter 4, which looks at each of the five habits as a lens through which to draw together some connections between creative self-efficacy and participation in meaningful social action.

### **3.2 How does creativity develop during adolescence?**

An earlier RSA review of creativity explained the 'developmental rationale for an increased and sustained focus [on creativity] during the adolescent years' (Peterson, Ellison, & Hallgarten, 2015). It cites Siegel's (2014) *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain* to illustrate the developmental trajectory of creative thinking capacities during this time of life. Siegel describes adolescence as 'an essential time of emotional intensity, social engagement, and creativity'.



Research by Stevenson et al. (2014, p. 1) tested whether performance in a commonly used ‘creative ideation’ test – the Alternatives Uses Task, or AUT – could be improved by practising the generation of ‘alternative uses’. This test requires participants to think of other uses to which a common object, for example a paperclip or a brick, can be put. The study supported its hypothesis that ‘adolescence is a developmental stage of increased flexibility optimized for learning and explorative behaviour’. The RSA review thus proposes that adolescence is a key period for cognitive development, where young people’s minds can be developed creatively or even inhibited.

### 3.2.1 Creative identity

A link between creativity and social action can be made using the work of Barbot and Heuser. They explain how maturation – in terms of identity formation in individuals – is a process with creative thought process underpinnings. A strong sense of self identity is rooted in part in a person’s values and it is these values that form part of the driving force for social action. Without some other force of compulsion or coercion, young people – in common with the rest of society – won’t take action unless a cause is meaningful to them in some way.

Barbot and Heuser’s (2017) chapter in *The Creative Self* recognises adolescence as ‘a time in which the development of both identity and creativity is particularly salient’ (2017, p. 88). ‘Identity formation’, they say, is ‘best described by the question “who am I?”’ (p. 88). Identity relates to both ideological domain (such as worldview and political leaning) and interpersonal domain (leisure pursuits and choice of vocation or profession). Well-defined commitments to these sorts of decisions and choices help crystallise identity formation.

Identity formation can be seen as a creative process itself, and so some thinking processes ‘may underlie both creativity and identity construction’ (p. 90). In this sense, it is not just that creativity develops as adolescents mature, but that development in creativity is what leads to maturation, at least in respect of the ‘identity’ element of ‘maturity’.

Both the divergent thinking, and convergent-integrative thinking processes that are integral to creative thinking play a part in identity formation. And both are ‘equally important’ (p. 91) in the process of its development. An example of convergent-integrative thinking processes influencing identity is a young person coming to terms with the apparent contradiction in the way they act around different people: more ‘extra-verted’ in a group of friends than in one’s own family, for example.

An example of using divergent processes is when a young person broadens their knowledge outside of their own area of expertise, which serves to explore ‘multiple alternatives about themselves’ (p. 90). The authors concluded that a creative activity stimulating divergent thinking ‘could be an effective strategy to trigger the exploration of possible commitments (or their reconsideration) (p. 91). It is ‘well-defined commitments’ that are the ‘key to forming a mature identity in adolescence’ (p. 88) and, it could be argued, a greater likelihood or possible influencer of social action.

Development of creativity in adolescence is ‘characterized by “peaks, slumps, and bumps”’ (Barbot & Heuser, 2017, p. 89).

The authors lay out a framework showing the relationship between creativity and identity development. Three main aspects of creativity that may contribute to identity development are:

1. Creative thinking process may enhance identity formation processes;
2. Creative activities represent domains of commitment leading to positive self-determination; and
3. Creative activities may be used as outlets for ‘adaptive’ self-expression.

One might think that the way an individual perceives others around them might have a comparatively detrimental effect upon their perception of their own creativity. Interestingly, this is not the case, and ‘creative peers in the classroom tend to strengthen an individual’s creative self-concept’ (Karwowski, 2015, p. 211).

A review by Kleibeuker et al. (2016, p. 73) summarises studies ‘that show that creativity develops considerably during adolescence...’ with a view to uncovering the potential for training creativity in adolescence.

### **3.2.2 Creative self-efficacy**

While creativity is an increasingly established and dense body of literature and research, creative self-efficacy as a concept is a ‘relatively new area of creative-attitude research (Plucker & Makel, 2010, p. 58). The relationship between self-efficacy and creativity is a recent research perspective into social personality traits (Feist, 2010, p. 121). Those well established in the field of creativity, such as Beghetto and Karwowski (2017, p. 19), recognise the difficulty of pinning down the concepts in a measurable way; they reflect that ‘studying creative self-beliefs is, at times, a humbling experience, but always a fascinating one’.

Two concepts ‘gaining popularity in the creativity literature’ are creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity (Karwowski, 2012). The creative self-concept encompasses a range of terms such as creative metacognition, creative self-efficacy, and creative personal identity. Creative metacognition, for example, ‘refers to a combination of self- and contextual-knowledge used to make decisions about one’s own creative efforts and accomplishments’ (Kaufman, James, Beghetto, & Watson, 2016).

As a construct, the creative self-concept has been studied in depth for at least a decade (Karwowski, 2015) and relates to the broader self-efficacy concept.

### **3.2.3 Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy was developed by Albert Bandura (1995) and reflects a person’s belief in their own capabilities to accomplish a particular task or goal. While self-efficacy does not arise as a named factor directly influencing young people’s participation in meaningful social action in any of the reviews we cite, we included it here as its effect, like that for mindset, is acknowledged in other contexts.

Self-efficacy is ‘the product of a complex process of self-persuasion that relies on cognitive processing of diverse sources of efficacy information’ (Bandura A. , 1989, p. 1179):

- Performance mastery experiences. Rooted in reality, ‘[s]uccesses build a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy’ (Bandura A. , 1995, p. 3). Successes that involve a struggle lead to a more resilient sense of efficacy.
- Vicarious experiences. Observing similar others provides a source of inspiration for one’s own likelihood of success (or failure).
- Social / verbal persuasion. An individual’s beliefs in their own ability to succeed can be enhanced by persuasion from others, although ‘unrealistic boosts in efficacy are quickly disconfirmed by disappointing results of one’s efforts’.
- Physiological and emotional states. People make self-efficacy judgments based on how they are feeling; be it mentally or physically.

Self-efficacy beliefs are not simply wishful thinking as in Figure 8.

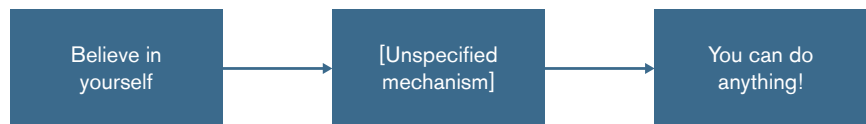


Figure 8: Wishful thinking

Rather they ‘are the product of a complex process of self-persuasion that relies on diverse sources of efficacy information conveyed enactively, vicariously, socially, and physiologically’ (Bandura 1995, 11).

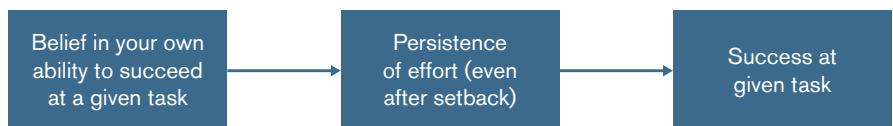


Figure 9: Self-efficacy

Resilient self-efficacy ‘requires experience in mastering difficulties through perseverant effort’ (Bandura, p. 1179). Self-efficacy is undermined by failure if success is always easy.

Bandura’s concept is similar in many ways to growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), a concept that has been developed over a similar time period. Both relate to a person’s beliefs. While self-efficacy is more generally about the ‘activity’ that emerges from these beliefs, growth mindset focuses in on the ‘learning’ activities that emerge from these beliefs. A person who believes their actions will lead to success is more likely to act.

### 3.2.4 Creative self-efficacy

Tierney and Farmer (2002) developed the construct of ‘creative self-efficacy’. Like Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy, creative self-efficacy can be quantified, with some measures being claimed to be reliable and valid (Plucker & Makel, 2010). Beghetto, for example, used a three-item scale, which appeared to demonstrate how apparently simple the concept of creative self-efficacy is. Beghetto’s notion of creative self-efficacy focuses

on students' beliefs about 'their ability to generate novel and useful ideas and whether they viewed themselves as having a good imagination. His 2006 scale included: I am good at coming up with new ideas, I have a lot of good ideas, and I have a good imagination.

Yet in 2017 Beghetto and Karwowski argued that there is actually a 'lack of clarity in how creative self-beliefs have been conceptualized and measured' (2017, p. 4). Their follow-up recognised the 'lack of conceptual and methodological clarity' (p. 19) in past work that has attempted to understand the different types of self-beliefs in the creativity literature (including creative self-efficacy, creative metacognition, and the creative self-concept).

Creative self-efficacy is, unsurprisingly, related to both self-efficacy and to creativity, but also to two related concepts, namely agency and growth mindset.

### **3.3 How does creative self-efficacy develop through adolescence?**

Creativity is commonly referred to as 'the ability to generate ideas, insights, and solutions that are both original and feasible', say Kleibeuker and colleagues (2016, p. 74), who tell us that 'original but infeasible ideas are typically considered strange, whereas ideas that are feasible but not original are seen as mundane...'. Competent creators use creative metacognition to judge whether their own contributions are creative.

A small-scale study by Kaufman et al. (2016) examined the question of whether novice creators – at elementary school level – are able to do this within visual, verbal, and scientific domains. The study took a '4-C' perspective, focusing particularly on categories 'mini-c' (creative to the self but not to others) and 'little-c' (recognised as creative by others). Evidence of creative metacognition was found, with young children being able to 'differentiate between different levels of creativity' (p. 397). Self-ratings matched external, expert raters, in terms of whether little-c creative status had been achieved.

The authors tell us that adults are more likely to underestimate 'highly original ideas', preferring ideas that are 'safe and socially acceptable' (p. 398). Further, as problem complexity increases, effective evaluation of potentially creative solutions (i.e. creative metacognition) becomes more difficult (p. *ibid.*). The study found that young children may also 'tend to underestimate their creative impact', labelling their creativity as mini-c rather than little-c. In terms of what we know about creative metacognition, the researchers recognise that more work is needed to understand how it develops 'within and across domains and how it supports the development of creative competence'. Further, more fine-grained methods of measuring creative metacognition are necessary (p. *ibid.*).

An earlier paper by Kaufman and Beghetto (2013) tells us that creative metacognition can be taught. They recommend teachers help students

- develop a broader understanding of the nature of creativity itself;
- become more aware of the potential costs and benefits associated with creative expression;
- by providing continual feedback about students' creative strengths and limitations;
- recognise the contexts that are more and less conducive to creative expression.

Beghetto's (2006, p. 453) larger scale study demonstrated that girls, English language learners, and 'younger students' reported 'significantly lower levels of creative self-efficacy' than boys, English speakers, and older students. It also suggested that teachers can boost creative self-efficacy 'by providing supportive feedback' (p. 454). Barbot and Hauser (2017, p.92) suggest that creative identity 'might' be strengthened by encouraging 'self-efficacy for creative work, which is itself improved by feedback received on creative work'. Kleibeuker et al.'s (2016) study looking at brain development during adolescence, recognises the role of the prefrontal cortex for performance of divergent thinking. They note that the different cognitive processes underlying creative performance have distinct developmental trajectories.

### **3.4 Connections between creative self-efficacy and creative behaviour**

We have thus far defined creativity and creative self-efficacy, and looked at how they develop in young people. Before moving to look at the link between creative self-efficacy and meaningful social action (chapter 4), we ask: does creative self-efficacy always lead to creative behaviours, activity or action? In other words, does thinking you are creative make you behave in more creative ways? Do creative people always recognise themselves as being creative?

It is one thing to think you are creative. But if it can be demonstrated that a self-perception of creativity leads to concrete action by influencing behaviour, then the argument that creative self-efficacy influences meaningful social action starts to make sense.

We know from the literature on growth mindset that mindsets determine behaviour, but what does the literature say specifically about how creative self-efficacy leads to behaviour change?

#### **3.4.1 Behavioural outcomes of creative self-efficacy**

Over the last 25 years, researchers have examined how an individual's view of themselves may translate into creativity. Shalley et al. (2004) look at the research and conceptual gaps in the field of knowledge about creativity providing a history of the progression of research into creative self-efficacy. Beginning with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (1977), Redmond, Mumford and Teach (1993) demonstrated a positive link between individuals' self-efficacy and their creativity.

The relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and performance is complex because of the intermediary role of motivation but, in summary, 'a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment...' (Bandura, 1995, p. 11). Linking self-efficacy and creative performance, Bandura saw that the former was a necessary condition for the latter (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Bandura believed that '[i]nnovative achievements also require a resilient sense of efficacy' (p. 13).

'Growing empirical evidence' has demonstrated links between creative self-efficacy and 'creativity-related outcomes' such as 'initiation of and participation in independent projects...' (Beghetto, 2006, p. 448). Indeed, creative self-efficacy has been linked to a number of outcomes in various studies (Farmer & Tierney, 2017, pp. 25-33) including: patents obtained (original thinking), intellectual risk-taking, competence in

maths and science, teacher-rated student creativity, research performance, involvement in creative work, self-rated creativity, creativity, founding of start-ups, problem-identification, idea-generation, idea-promotion, self-rated innovative behaviour, creative process engagement, and fluency/flexibility/originality.

Each of these outcomes suggests actual concrete behaviour that is either driven by, or merely correlated to, a sense of creative self-efficacy.

### **3.4.2 Domain specificity**

A study by Pretz and McCollum (2014, p. 227) asks whether ‘our self-perceptions of creativity reflect our actual creative performance’ and find mixed evidence. Indeed, the answer to their question is ‘[s]ometimes’ (p. 233). The authors found that participants were accurate in their self-perceptions when asked about their performance ‘on a specific task they have just completed’ (p. 233). Yet they conclude by noting the importance of self-belief because of the way in which ‘self-beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies’, a statement they base on the work of Bandura and of Dweck.

Bandura argued that highly creative individuals have a strong sense of self-efficacy in their domain of expertise at the very least. They believe that they are capable of carrying out a specific course of action. Feist’s review of the function of personality in creativity finds that research has supported this idea. Similarly, Plucker and Makel’s brief summary of the concept highlights a consensus that an individual’s beliefs ‘are often rooted in a situational or narrow context’.

The issue of domain specificity is directly relevant to this review on the links between creative self-efficacy and participation in social action. We know from Brodie et al.’s (2011) discussion of ‘triggers’ that part of an individual’s motivation to participate stems from certain life events, be it an emotional reaction to a threat or need, a personal life event, or a change in worldview, for example.

What these events have in common is that they bestow emotional connection, or deeper understanding, or empathy, or a desire to find out more, upon individuals encountering them. Where individuals are made more open to becoming knowledgeable about a situation through such events they might be, arguably, more predisposed to take part in some sort of tangible social action.

We know that true creativity – in terms of being able to piece together ideas to solve a problem – is only really possible if one has sufficient knowledge about the situation. Deep knowledge borne out of personal life events, combined with a recognition that they have something to offer (creative self-efficacy) perhaps makes a person more likely to participate within an area of social action that corresponds to a ‘domain’ of expertise.

### **3.4.3 A virtuous cycle**

There is a complex relationship between a person’s self-perception of themselves as a creative individual, and how creative behaviours manifest in reality. Should perceptions lead to creative behaviours, a ‘virtuous cycle’ may occur. Questions we might want to answer are: what does



this relationship look like? How aligned are self-perceptions with reality? Answers to these sorts of questions are important to developing an understanding of the relationship between adolescents' confidence and their action.

Fairly quickly the first question is addressed in the literature. A study by Beghetto (2006) tells us that creative ability is not alone sufficient to cause creative expression. Creative expression, 'like other forms of behaviour', says Beghetto, 'seems to be influenced by self-judgments of one's ability to generate novel and useful outcomes'. These types of outcomes are, we should note, an essential part of what it means to 'be creative': to some extent they must be novel (though all creative thinking is an amalgam of others' ideas) and they must be in some way of use.

Plucker and Makel (2010) identify a 'broader view of creative self-efficacy', which might be helpful. This viewpoint explores 'creative personal identity', which reflects how much an individual values creativity.

There is a cyclical relationship between creative 'identity' and creative activity. Individuals develop 'commitments' that reflect their sense of identity. These have social meaning. Barbot and Hauser (2017) use the example of a young person who answers the 'who am I?' question by referring to their identity in a music band: "I am a musician". Enduring beliefs reinforced by positive performance lead to positive and domain-specific 'creative self-beliefs'. These may become more generalised (i.e. beyond the area of being musical), which is particularly likely if the social area in question is a particularly strong influencer of their self-identity. Barbot and Hauser (p. 92) explain 'creative personal identity' in terms of the 'importance attributed by adolescents to creativity in the overall definition of themselves'.

Notably, those for whom creativity forms an important part of their identity, will 'seek opportunities to be creative in order to maintain a positive image and to affirm this fundamental aspect of themselves' (p. 92) and so there is a 'cyclical relationship between creative identity and creative activity' (p. 92).

#### **3.4.4 Creativity at work and in a domain**

In a longitudinal examination of the development of creative self-efficacy in a work context, Tierney and Farmer (2011) found that increases in creative self-efficacy corresponded with increases in creative performance.

Appu and Sia (2017) tell us that self-efficacy 'shows significant predictive role towards workplace creativity'. Puente-Diaz (2016) also reviewed literature to understand the antecedents and consequences of creative self-efficacy in the work domain. Their review finds that high creative self-efficacy leads to better creative performance, although studies included in that review were of organisations, and supervisors' reports were proxies of creative performance (p. 187). Their literature-derived model includes antecedents such as (organisational) an empowering leadership style and (personal) achievement goals and interventions such as leadership training and creative self-efficacy training.

### 3.5 Summary

Creativity is a well-developed field with a robust empirical and theoretical literature. The concept is multifaceted and learnable, being like intelligence in its learnability. Creativity does not emerge from a vacuum; it is a product of social interactions and thought. Creativity can happen within a particular area of knowledge and practice (a domain) or in a more general way (domain free).

Adolescence is a key time for the development of creativity, which contributes to identity formation. As young people think creatively, they begin to explore possible 'commitments' (beliefs or world-views) and it is 'well-defined commitments' that are the 'key to forming a mature identity in adolescence' (Barbot & Heuser, 2017, p. 88) and, it could be argued, a greater likelihood or possible influencer of social action.

Creative self-efficacy is a well-researched, although relatively recent, concept. It relates to Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. Creative self-efficacy, like related concept growth mindset, is possibly teachable given the right sort of feedback.

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is grounded in reality: experience of 'failure' will soon tell you if you were being over confident in your beliefs. Efficacy is needed to persist with creative endeavours.

There is a connection between creative self-efficacy and creative behaviour, although it is not clear, and much research is correlational. That said, the relationship is generally assumed to be positive. For example, Puente-Diaz (2016) reviewed the literature and found that creative self-efficacy did lead to better creative performance. Beghetto's (2006, p. 448) study of self-judgments of creative ability in 1,322 students suggests the same; creative self-efficacy may be related to a complex set of motivational orientations: a combination of both mastery- and performance-orientation.

When volunteering (social action) puts young people in contact with diverse others, constrained resources, and unfamiliar systems, innovation can be more likely. A fairly large study by Beghetto (2006) found that 'students with higher levels of creative self-efficacy were significantly more likely to report higher levels of participation in after-school academics and after-school group activities' and to plan to attend college.



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# 4 How does creative self-efficacy relate to meaningful social action?

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This review has explored creativity and creative self-efficacy and looked at the link between creativity and the tendency to actually engage in creative behaviour. It has found that in general, there is a positive relationship between an individual's beliefs about their creative self-efficacy and their tendency to engage in creative endeavours.

In this chapter we explore potential connections between youth meaningful social action and creative self-efficacy, the central purpose of this review. We look at the under-investigated question of whether young people with high levels of confidence to express and apply their creativity are more likely to engage in creating positive change in their communities.

There is a consensus about what constitutes meaningful social-action, which chapter 1 detailed. In chapter 2 we highlighted reasons for young people's participation in the well-established frameworks.

One category of well-recognised reasons (antecedents) is 'personal attributes', further broken down in 2.4.2 'Personal Attributes'. Under this set of factors we left a 'placeholder' which we termed 'other personal attributes'. This gap within personal attributes allows us to explore more malleable, learnable personal attributes. We might call these 'dispositions', or 'habits of mind'.

There are many useful habits of mind. To take Costa and Kallick's (2000) habits of mind, for example, we might look at persisting, managing impulsivity, finding humour, thinking flexibly, applying past knowledge to new situations; or others from their set of 16 habits. Or in Building Learning Power (2002) habits include questioning, imagining, planning, persevering, meta-learning, and others. There are many such lists of learning habits; dispositions that help individuals (often called 'learners' in the context of debates about personal attributes worth fostering) get better at doing whatever it is they need to do in life.

We are going to focus on creative self-efficacy as a habit over and above these others in the 'other attributes' space. We are interested in creativity and whether this eminently learnable disposition influences participation (Spencer, 2012). It may not be the only 'other' personal attribute that influences participation, but the evidence suggests that it is a good place to start because creative thinking is a broad capability that depends on the successful coordination of several habits. It brings together five of these

key learning ‘habits’ (imaginative, inquisitive, persistent, collaborative, disciplined) in a powerful way. If the study of personality has its ‘big five’, we believe that creativity should be uppermost in the study of personal dispositions for learning.

Yet no framework to date has analysed influences upon participation in meaningful social action through the lens of creativity.

#### **4.1 Intersecting bodies of literature**

While the literature we have examined is currently inconclusive in explicitly explaining the role of creative self-efficacy in meaningful social action in young people, there are several promising lines of thought to explore. A number of places in the literature can be drawn upon to speak to the issue.

We have looked at the relationship between creative self-efficacy and taking action, in the form of creative behaviour. To explore meaningful social action through the lens of creativity, we look at where creativity intersects two other concepts: ‘self-efficacy’ and ‘growth mindset’.

Both self-efficacy and growth mindset reflect a person’s beliefs. Self-efficacy relates to beliefs about the impact of specific action, and growth mindset relates to beliefs about the nature of intelligence. A growth mindset leads a person to pursue a course of action or learning that is about mastery. A ‘fixed’ mindset, in contrast, leads to a ‘performance orientation’ in learning tasks.

##### **4.1.1 Growth mindset, self-efficacy and creativity**

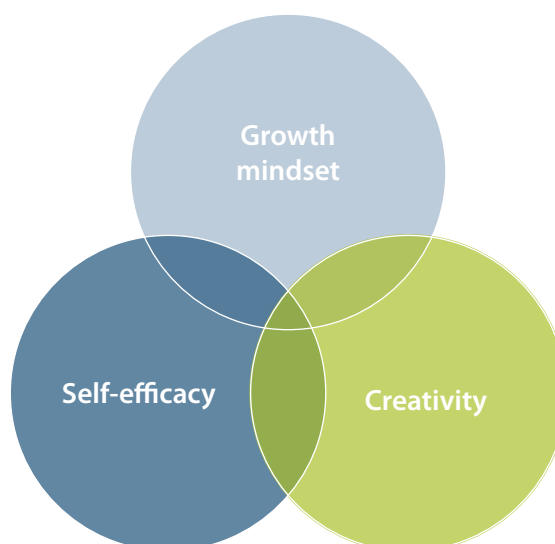
We know from chapter 2 that certain personal attributes are likely to influence participation in meaningful social action, but prior studies had their own frames of reference that did not relate to creative self-efficacy. We are interested in exploring possible relationships between what a person thinks (about their own capacities) and what they go on to do.

There are some intersecting bodies of literature around creative self-efficacy, a concept defined in chapter 3. The personal attributes of chapter 2 could be expanded to incorporate the notion of creative self-efficacy which, itself, could be expanded further to include three personal attributes included in the table below. Table 3 provides a summary of the key means by which each influence brings about greater likelihood of participating in social action.

Personal attributes associated with creative self-efficacy	How attribute may impact upon social action
Growth mindset	Young people who believe that intelligence is learnable are more likely to invest effort.
Self-efficacy	Young people who believe they can make a difference are more likely to invest effort
Creativity	Young people with creative dispositions are more likely to demonstrate creative behaviours.

*Table 3: Influences on participating in social action*

The three influences are also three aspects of the larger concept under exploration: creative self-efficacy, see Figure 10.



*Figure 10: Three aspects of creative self-efficacy*

#### **4.1.2 Growth mindset**

When we talk about mindset we are referring to an individual's beliefs about the nature of their own capability and potential. What you believe about yourself affects your behaviour.

We explore creativity with reference to growth mindset; recognising that through effort and perseverance a person can get better at something. A growth mindset frame of mind values effort and learning from mistakes. Mindsets 'are an outgrowth of self-efficacy and a subset of student agency' (Silver & Stafford, 2017, p. 76).

Dweck's work on 'mindset' (Dweck, 2006) has shown that those with a 'growth' mindset are more collaborative, enjoy effort, and relish challenge. The literature in this field suggests that people with a well-established growth mindset are more likely to seek out challenges and opportunities to learn and develop. In particular, they are more likely

to move outside their 'comfort zone' to do so. This is because they take a 'mastery' approach to learning; taking on challenging tasks for the practise and chance to improve. They are less constrained by the desire to perform and anxious about obtaining success. Learning from their mistakes they improve and grow.

The role of certain kinds of mindset in young people's participation in meaningful social action is a key part of this review because of the established links between what Dweck calls 'growth mindset' and certain kinds of behaviour which might be associated with meaningful social action.

A growth mindset gives individuals an openness to risk-taking, a preference for collaboration, self-belief and strong identities as learners willing to expend effort on chosen areas of activity. That individuals who believe they can do something generally can, obvious as it may seem, is a demonstration of a possible mechanism by which creative self-efficacy might operate in young peoples' lives beyond school.

It is possible that believing oneself to be creative makes it more likely a person will demonstrate creativity. Certainly, creative ability is necessary, but not sufficient, for creative expression (performance / behaviour). Beghetto (2006) tells us that creative self-efficacy apparently seems to influence creative expression in the same way that other self-judgments influence behaviour. We know that in other areas of human productivity, thought can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dweck's work on growth mindset has shown unequivocally that individuals with growth mindset, i.e. those who believe that their intelligence has capacity for growth through persistence, are more likely to persist with, and succeed at, challenging tasks. Conversely, individuals with a fixed mindset do not perceive their intelligence as malleable.

Beghetto's (2006, p. 454) research provided initial evidence that 'students focused on learning and self-improvement also see themselves as having a good imagination and capable of generating novel and useful ideas'. What it doesn't tell us, as Beghetto points out, is how accurate students' self-perception is (if indeed this matters).

The relationship between creative self-efficacy and mindset is complex, however. As well as the intuitive linkage between a belief that efforts yield performance gains, it would seem that a performance orientation (i.e. not 'mastery' or 'learning' oriented, but more about demonstrating one's competency by outperforming others) and creative self-efficacy are not mutually exclusive.

Neither, however, are a performance orientation and a mastery orientation mutually exclusive, according to Beghetto. Indeed, as we saw in our discussion of domain specificity of creativity, one can see oneself as creative in one situation and not another. In a similar way, one can be performance oriented in some situations or domains, and mastery oriented in others.

Beghetto (2006, p. 454) finds that there seems to be a positive association between performance-orientation and creative self-efficacy, which 'may seem somewhat contradictory'. He asks: 'how might the relation between creative self-efficacy and a focus on learning and self-improvement (mastery orientation) coexist with a focus on demonstrating one's competence by outperforming others (performance approach)?'.

The answer he gives makes use of ‘somewhat contested’ research on goal theory, which suggests that ‘a performance-approach orientation can result in adaptive outcomes, and a combination of mastery- and performance-approach goals may represent an optimal pattern in some instances’.

Beghetto suggests his own study provides some initial evidence to support the idea that ‘mastery and performance orientations have a unique, positive relation with creative self-efficacy.’ He calls this an ‘additive pattern’, referring to an earlier study that ‘revealed benefits of both mastery and performance goals’ for promoting optimal motivation (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001). While there would seem to be a lack of academic exploration of the connections between social action and mindset, we include it here on account of its proven effects in other contexts. We situate ‘mindset’ within personal attributes as a category of its own, recognising that it is not the same as the relatively fixed attribute: ‘personality’.

#### **4.1.3 Self-efficacy**

We explore creativity at the level of creative self-efficacy; recognising that a person’s belief about their own capabilities is influential in ensuring those capabilities are expressed as action. This focus on ‘action’ is fundamental to an exploration of young people’s actual participation.

It is likely that young people who believe they can succeed; that their actions bear meaningful impact, are more likely than others to believe that they might be able to make some change in the world.

#### **4.1.4 Agency**

Agency is a term that overlaps with both self-efficacy and growth mindset beliefs. According to Silver and Stafford (2017, p. 68), these two beliefs, combined with the ability to plan, to take action, and to reflect, comprise ‘agency’; a ‘composite set of essential skills’. It is essentially, say Ferguson et al. (2015, p. 1), the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative – the opposite of helplessness’. In short: the capacity to act in a given environment.

Agency is complex: humans are neither ‘entirely independent agents of their own actions’, nor are they ‘neurophysiological computational machines’, acting solely through conditioned response to external stimuli (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). Of all the ‘mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives’ (p. *ibid.*).

It is likely that young people who have a well-developed sense of agency are more likely to display it in the world than those with low agency.

In terms of taking part in the world in a meaningful way, the University of Chicago’s paper Foundations for Young Adult Success (Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015), defines ‘success’ based on a wide review of literature from various fields as well as from interviewing experts and youth service providers. Beyond college and career, success means ‘that young people can fulfil individual goals and have the agency and competencies to influence the world around them’ (p. 1). This sense of looking beyond individual goals to address global challenges is an important part of preparation for successful adulthood. The Chicago

report argues that preparing young people for adulthood means ‘building their knowledge of democratic institutions and processes, and nurturing in them a sense of service to their communities and engagement in the political process’ (p. 13).

The Chicago report (p. 14) argues that a person who is ready to make a successful transition to adulthood has three key factors:

1. the agency to take an active role in shaping one’s path;
2. the ability to incorporate different aspects of oneself into an integrated identity;
3. the competencies needed to effectively navigate a range of social contexts.

The report finds ‘four foundational components’ (p. 3) that underlie development of these three factors:

1. self-regulation – the ‘awareness of oneself and one’s surroundings, and management of one’s attention, emotions, and behaviors in goal-directed ways’ (p. 14)
2. knowledge and skills – ‘information or understanding about oneself, other people and the world, and the ability to carry out tasks
3. mindsets – ‘beliefs and attitudes about oneself and the external world; they are the default lenses we use to process everyday experiences.’
4. values – enduring, often culturally-defined, beliefs about what is good or bad and what one thinks is important in life.

These concepts, while rarely named in reviews of meaningful social action can be deduced from many of them.

#### **4.1.5 Five dimensions of creativity**

It is likely that young people with well-developed creative dispositions are more likely to involve themselves in activities that require, or give opportunities for, being imaginative, inquisitive, persevering, collaborative, or disciplined. Perhaps young people with creative dispositions are more likely to seek out opportunities to develop these dispositions further.

Like mindset, agency and self-efficacy, creativity as we define it in section 3 is an attribute in the broad sense in which Penner uses the word.

We use a second framework as a lens through which to flesh out the connections between creative self-efficacy and participation in meaningful social action. This is our five-dimensional framework of creativity. Breaking creativity down into dimensions is a helpful way of disaggregating a bigger concept to arrive at more nuanced understanding.

In our five-dimensional framework of creativity (Lucas and Spencer 2017), we define creativity in terms of five dispositional dimensions, such that a creative individual is:

1. Imaginative
2. Inquisitive
3. Persevering
4. Collaborative
5. Disciplined.

In the following discussion, we look at indications of likely positive behaviour change when an individual believes they possess these five ‘habits’ or ‘dispositions’ to some degree.

### **Imaginative**

The imaginative individual is able to come up with solutions and possibilities by:

- Playing with possibilities – developing an idea involves manipulating it, trying it out and improving it;
- Making connections – seeing new links between ideas is an important aspect of the synthesising process of creative thinking;
- Using intuition – the use of intuition allows individuals to make new connections tacitly that would not necessarily materialise using analytical thinking alone.

Thinking about what it means to use imagination in terms of social action (helping people and / or the environment) we could talk in terms of ‘empathy’ or, an earlier concept ‘social feeling’.

In a paper on developing students’ social learning and empathy, English (2016, p. 1046) uses Dewey’s notion of imagination to demonstrate that it is a ‘pathway’ to and ‘deeply connected to empathy’. She writes (p. 1053):

Dewey’s concept of imagination illuminates the idea that the work of imagination as ‘taking in’ is an act of empathetically learning from others. It involves taking in the perspectives, feelings and interests of others. As Dewey writes, we do not come to understand another person, even one ‘with which we habitually associate’ just by having more information about him or her...

This connection is ‘underscored in a growing body of philosophical and psychological research on empathy’ (p. 1047). Imagination is an integral part of empathic understanding in the area of counselling (Clark & Simpson, 2013, p. 173), where ‘it is possible for a counsellor to momentarily experience what it is like to be a client through his or her imaginative capacity’.

We might argue, therefore, that imaginative young people may be more likely to empathise with others’ plights and want to connect with them at a social action level. The empathetic person has ‘the ability to not only imagine and consider, but to feel for what lies beyond the personal and known...’ (Swanson 2013). ‘Empathy’ is a relatively recent concept; gaining use in English only in the last century. It has been argued that ‘social feeling’ was ‘particularly critical to that shift in late eighteenth century Western feeling that... allowed the discourse of human rights to flourish’ (Swanson, 2013, p. 128).

Empathy ‘is fundamentally based on a movement of feeling within the individual, a transformation based on the imagining of the inner states of others’. This means that it has an inherent weakness: it is not necessarily based on an ‘authentic understanding’ that comes about through engagement with the object of empathy. It also doesn’t ‘consider the larger social, cultural and historical context, and this understanding cannot be provided by empathy alone’ (p. 142). Empathy, therefore, ‘creates a weak



pathway between emotion and social change, and a problematic basis for political intervention' (ibid.).

Given a heavy reliance on empathy as a platform for the delivery of social happiness, but a lack of precision in distinguishing between its different forms, we could do well to attend to those caveats expressed in early twentieth-century psychological and sociological debates concerning the extent to which an ability to understand the inner states of others has an automatic connection to pro-social behaviours and outcomes, and the conditions in which that ability may be harnessed to positive social change (Swanson, *ibid.*)

Thomas et al. (2009) explored the idea of prosocial emotions to see whether there were more or less 'effective' emotions that might transform emotion into social action. The role of emotion in shaping behaviour has long been studied in clinical, personality, and social psychological research. Group-based emotion and its role in social and political action has also been explored in terms of 'intergroup emotions theory' since the latter decade of the last century.

Citing psychologist Jung from 1938: 'There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion', the authors take the position that emotion can transform apathy into action. They explored emotions guilt, sympathy, empathy, (self-focused) anger, and outrage. The answer to the question it would seem that both moral outrage and (to a lesser extent) self-focused anger may be the most promising in terms of leading to social and political behaviours.

While empathy can motivate 'forms of action to alleviate suffering ... long term change may be remote because it does not address the real issue or productively direct action' (p. 326).

As a predictor of volunteerism, Omoto and Packard (2016, p. 274) cite other studies that tell us 'empathy is a dispositional characteristic that reliably predicts helping, including volunteerism'.

There is emerging evidence (Tocaceli, et al., 2018) that empathy may be driven in part by genetic factors in females – an interesting consideration given the known demographic bias towards females in participation in social action.

### **Inquisitive**

The inquisitive learner is good at uncovering and pursuing interesting and worthwhile questions but in a specific subject and more generally by:

- Wondering and questioning – not simply curious, creative individuals pose concrete questions about things to help them understand and develop new ideas;
- Exploring and investigating – questioning things alone does not make a creative thinker. Creative individuals act out their curiosity through exploration and follow up on their questions by actively seeking and finding out more;
- Challenging assumptions – it's important to maintain a degree of appropriate scepticism, not taking things at face value without critical examination.



Curious, inquisitive young people want to find out more, to explore and to challenge assumptions. They may be more likely to question the status quo and take action. Further, they may also be more likely to seek out cultural opportunities.

The saying ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ can be particularly true within organisations of constrained resource that might typically be associated with volunteering or social action. The combination of limited means and diverse others, unfamiliar ways of working and different systems and tools necessitate young people gaining new insights.

The converse may also be true: inquisitive young people are more likely to succeed in, or even relish, activities that involve meeting social challenges with limited resource.

Of course, social action opportunities are not the only way to develop inquisitiveness and curiosity. Nevertheless, they provide a good setting for potential volunteers to develop their innovation. In recommending to professionals how they might choose such opportunities, Horoszowski (2016) suggests selecting a project that exposes you to different scenarios, connects you to a new network of people, uses your skills, but stretches you beyond your comfort zone.

### **Persevering**

Creative individuals do not give up easily. They have a sense of agency. They keep going by:

- Tolerating uncertainty – being able to tolerate uncertainty is important when actions or even goals are not fully set out;
- Sticking with difficulty – persistence in the form of tenacity is important, enabling an individual to get beyond familiar ideas and come up with new ones;
- Daring to be different – creative thinking demands a certain level of self-confidence as a prerequisite for sensible risk-taking.

Young people with ‘grit’, ‘resilience’, and tenacity’ are not easily set back. It is not hard to make a conceptual link to involvement in social action here. At the very least, persevering individuals are, by definition, more likely to see a project through to completion.

A conference paper (Kwon, Hitlin and Firat 2015) presented research attending to the relationship of grit with personal control – meaning self-efficacy. The research was based on the work of Duckworth et al. (2007) that had suggested grit is determined by a person’s beliefs about their own capabilities and level of control over life outcomes. It found that self-belief is ‘highly predictive of grit’. The explanation given is that if an individual has the belief that they are responsible for their own successes, and that they can influence their life outcomes, they tend to work diligently towards goals over the long term. This sense of ‘control’ ‘can provide individuals with a motivation to develop a gritty disposition’ (p. 15). As more effort is put in, achievement is the result.

Bandura (1997, p. 239) linked his concept of self-efficacy to creative behaviour; saying that it requires ‘an unshakeable sense of efficacy to persist in creative endeavours...’. The five-dimensional framework in Teaching Creative Thinking incorporates persistence as one of its five

habits. Indeed, sub-habits of ‘tolerating uncertainty’, ‘sticking with difficulty’, and ‘daring to be different’ all reflect the need for persistence in their own ways.

Relevant here, too, is the Dual Pathway to creativity model, which defines creativity as the generation of original and appropriate ideas along with perseverance, ‘a function of cognitive flexibility and cognitive persistence’ (Nijstad, De Dreu, Rietzschel, & Baas, 2010, p. 21).

### **Collaborative**

The collaborative individual is able to work with others to solve complex problems by:

- Sharing the product – creative outputs matter, whether they are ideas or things creating impact beyond their creator;
- Giving and receiving feedback – creative thinkers want to contribute to the ideas of others and hear how their own ideas might be improved;
- Cooperating appropriately – the creative individual cooperates with others, taking into account the nature of the group, the kind of problem and the stage which the group has reached.

A sense of creative self-efficacy is demonstrated by a confidently collaborative person. Such an individual knows that what they have to offer is of value and can make a real difference.

We return to Omoto and Packard’s work on PSOC (psychological sense of community) here. The authors observe that many societal and global problems will not be solved by individuals and ‘can only be effectively addressed through the concerted efforts of scores of people’. A large body of volunteers will be needed ‘to engage in local and transnational activism and social action’ (2016, 287). With this in mind, they argue that the PSOC concept is ‘one fruitful target for intervention’.

In a 1972 editorial for *Social Work*, called *Reform and Tenacity*, the editor observed that ‘Community action seems to be the stuff of which social movements are made’. After several years trying to generate social movement from community action, the author realised that social movements may be helped, but cannot be made professionally. Relationships within the community are what allow social action to flourish.

An observation linking the ‘collaborative’ and ‘persevering’ habits of creativity is the notion of ‘social belonging’. Dweck et al. (2014, p. 11) tell us that ‘an important predictor of academic tenacity is students’ feelings of social belonging in school, as well as their perception of the quality of their relationships with others students and with teachers’. Students who believe they have better social relationships in school are more motivated and engaged. The authors cite an Italian study that found ‘3rd graders pro-social behavior – behaviors that lead to positive social relationships in school – predicted their grades in 8th grade even better than did their academic performance in 3rd grade’ (ibid.).

The potential for social action or volunteering to develop individuals’ creativity has not gone unobserved. Social action has the potential to link individuals of diverse background and viewpoint. The correlation between diversity and creativity in terms of collaboration and teamworking

is well known. An article in the *Scientific American* states that ‘[d]ecades of research by organizational scientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists and demographers’ show that socially diverse groups are more innovative than heterogeneous groups (Phillips, 2014). Tested within the context of racial diversity and political orientation, a reason for this difference in innovation is that when people work within apparently homogenous groups, they believe that their perspectives will align and the information they hold is similar. This prevents them from processing the information as effectively as diverse groups. Heterogeneous groups are more likely to share information in the belief that they have something novel to contribute. The need to interact with diverse others necessitates group members to anticipate alternative perspectives, to be prepared to think through their own arguments, and to recognise the effort that might be involved in reaching a consensus or solution.

It is likely – although not necessarily self-evident – that social action would lead young people into more diverse settings in terms of diversity of opinion, age, gender, political orientation etc., than they currently operate within. This would be the case even within relatively homogenous communities.

One caveat to this social action – innovation relationship: the link between team innovation brought about by collaboration, with its whole that is ‘greater than the sum of the parts’, and a tangible growth in individuals’ innovation is not necessarily a quantifiable relationship. Indeed, Bandura (cited in Dampérat, et al. 2016) tells us that the interactive dynamic within a group ‘creates an emergent property which is more than the sum of individual characteristics’. The group may be more innovative, but more evidence is needed if we are to say that this causes a growth – and an enduring growth at that – in individuals’ creative thinking.

A study by Dampérat et al. (2016) in a marketing team context looked at the linkages between personal and creative collective efficacy, presenting an integrative model of the two. They define ‘creative collective efficacy’ as ‘an individual’s belief in the ability of a team to produce creative results’ (p. 8). Again, perception influences actual performance. The authors cite prior research finding that creative collective efficacy increases creative performance of a group.

But does creative collective efficacy increase either individuals’ actual creativity or their creative self-efficacy? According to Dampérat et al. (2016, p. 19), while individual beliefs can transfer into collective beliefs, ‘one’s belief in the creative abilities of his or her team does not influence the perception of one’s own creative abilities’.

They also find that ‘team cohesion’ is important for developing creative collective efficacy because ‘when people feel a strong social proximity, the team is more confident in its creative abilities’ (p. *ibid*). In line with their finding that creative collective efficacy increases creative performance, the authors propose that creativity itself will actually increase when team cohesion does.

We discussed earlier the formation of identity that occurs as young people mature through adolescence. We argued that more clearly articulated ‘commitments’ that strengthen identity can perhaps enhance likelihood of engaging in social action. Individuals with more clearly defined commitments are perhaps more likely to experience closer social proximity – the state of being psychologically near – to other individuals.

## Disciplined

The creative individual develops their knowledge and skill in crafting and shaping the creative product or process by:

- Reflecting critically – evaluation is the way in which progress can be seen and understood and the quality of new ideas or novel thinking can be checked;
- Developing techniques – creative thinkers practise a range of conceptual and practical skills in order to improve;
- Crafting and improving – taking pride in work, attending to details, practising and correcting any errors are indicators of the higher levels of creative thinking.

A study by Beghetto (2006) found that ‘students with higher levels of creative self-efficacy were significantly more likely to report higher levels of participation in after-school academics and after-school group activities’. Given that school attendance is a statutory requirement, many young people take the opportunity to leave the premises as soon as the final period is over. Yet many stay behind for school-based, after-school activities. Just as for social action itself, engagement with after school activities may be impacted by a range of motivations including highly instrumental ones relating to demonstrating ‘interests’ for college applications and CVs. But whether the motivation is to learn, to practise, to win, to take part, or to exhibit commitment, participation in extra-curricular activities demonstrates ‘discipline’.

Given the right opportunities, reflective young people like International Baccalaureate Diploma graduate Frances Marsh (2016) can see the benefits to their own lives of taking part in education and activities that make them a ‘global citizen’. As an integral part of the IB qualification, the ‘creativity, activity, service’ (CAS) course required regular self-reflection. Learning to self-evaluate has contributed to Frances’s development and her understanding that she wants to spend her life doing social action projects that are also for her own personal development.

This literature review has suggested some potentially fruitful connections between creativity and meaningful social action:

1. Heightened imaginative awareness and potential
2. Empathy in the lives of others, levels of curiosity and interest in social issues
3. Perseverance, self-efficacy and the likelihood of making a positive difference more widely
4. An interest in collaboration and a sense of social belonging
5. An ethic of excellence, and a willingness to become involved in voluntary activities in areas of interest.

The review also offers a way of seeing connection between creativity, self-efficacy and the idea of growth mindset. The findings from this review form part of a wider piece of work by the RSA, the findings of which are published in: *Teenagency: How young people can create a better world*.

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