Our Homes, Our Schools: How Housing Affects Young People's Learning Capabilities

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List of acronyms

CA - Capabilities Approach
CANDI - City and Islington College
DfE - Department for Education
DPU - Development Planning Unit
GLA - Greater London Authority
HDV - Haringey Development Vehicle
IMD - Index of Multiple Deprivation
NGO - Non-governmental organisation
Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education,
Children's Services and Skills
UCL - University College London
UN - United Nations
Citizens UK have been working with the DPU at UCL for a number of years now to pioneer pupil-led research with our London partner schools, and this year has proven one of the most successful. Our collaboration has unearthed stories and data which are illustrated in this report—which begins to paint a picture of the housing issues that are blighting our communities, and how they are impacting our young people’s education aspirations and attainment.

London’s housing crisis is well documented - impacting everyone from the homeless to property developers, from young professionals wanting to get on the housing ladder to families being forced out of the city due to spiralling rents, from single parents in overcrowded temporary accommodation to university students subject to rogue landlords. What is often undocumented however is the voice of young people and how the housing crisis is impacting them. This report and the process we’ve gone through not only produces data for research, but begins to give a voice to these young people and unearth potential leaders.

We’ve seen young people leading the campaign for greater gun control in the United States in 2018 and there is no reason why young people in London can’t lead the call for housing reform. The trust that the UCL students were able to build with pupils enabled young people to share their own stories of housing with greater honesty, awareness and eloquence than we could have imagined, and this has greatly contributed to the richness of the report. The UCL researchers have been able to utilise the stories we’ve heard to support the young people as researchers themselves - carrying out surveys, mapping, and photography— which has most importantly developed the pupils into young leaders.

This research doesn’t happen in isolation and isn’t produced in a vacuum. Research is just one phase in the Citizens cycle of action on housing. Following listening and research, we act. Since the research, the young people have taken it upon themselves to take action in their local communities to make a difference. For example St Ignatius Primary School have started a campaign for a Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme to be introduced in the London Borough of Haringey, using the evidence of poor quality housing conditions in the private rented sector to make the case for greater regulation - even receiving national press coverage for their campaign efforts. With the research truly pupil-led, the young people have ownership of its findings and this means the report will live on in the London Citizens campaigns for more genuinely affordable and safer housing for young people in this city in the coming years.

MICHAEL PUGH
Citizens UK
1. Introduction

Stephanie Butcher and Alexandre Apsan Frediani

This report seeks to explore the ways in which the current housing crisis ongoing in London is impacting young people’s capabilities to learn.

1.1 Why Housing?

It is clear that London’s housing market is in a state of crisis. As articulated by Watt and Minton (2016) there is a long-term shortage of genuinely affordable housing, private rental prices are notoriously expensive, and are insecure as well as unusually deregulated. Watt and Minton (2016) argue that “a key manifestation of the housing crisis is that ordinary Londoners’ ‘right to the city’—their capacity to remain in the city and especially in gentrifying areas with rapidly rising rents, house prices and land values—is being eroded” (2016: 211). Furthermore, they argue that London is experiencing a “particularly vicious intertwining between housing as speculative rent-seeking investment vehicle and housing as an agent of social insecurity” (2016: 206). While there have been a vast number of studies which have sought to outline the impacts of housing on lower-income residents of the city, there has not been any particular study looking at its impact on young people’s ability to learn and have access to meaningful education opportunities.

1.2 Why Learning Capabilities?

Studies have likewise demonstrated large gaps in educational achievement between the brightest students from poor and more wealthy backgrounds (Crowley, 2003; Mueller and Tighe, 2007). As such, education has been identified as both a key conduit for social mobility, as well as family background playing an important role in educational attainment. Meanwhile, an ongoing era of austerity means that 88% of schools across London have been faced with budget cuts—with the reduction in spending on vital services such as the pupil premium, breakfast clubs, and other support programmes. Thus, schools are finding their capacity to support students in an increasingly precarious position, with the most critical impacts for the poorest or vulnerable families. This report makes the claim that the experience of austerity in the housing sector cannot be separated from the very same experience in education. Delving deeper into the connection between the two reveals vital impacts on the ability of young pupils to learn and aspire in their homes and schools.

1.3 Shape of the Research

This research is the product of an ongoing collaboration between Citizens UK and the MSc Social Development Practice programme, in the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL. While the partnership with Citizens UK has been ongoing for five years, this represents the second year of engagement particularly with this topic. In 2016, we worked with eight schools across different boroughs in London, to open up and explore the link between housing and learning capabilities. These initial findings can be seen in the 2016 report: ‘Housing and Learning Views from Young Citizens in London, UK’, which generated a range of reflections around overcrowded or poor quality conditions in learning spaces, difficulties with long commutes, and a high level of future concerns around housing for young people.

This year, the exercise was repeated with students in three schools: the Willow Primary, St. Ignatius primary (Borough of Haringey) and City and Islington College (Borough of Islington) to build upon and deepen these reflections. In the three chapters following, we have set out to contribute to this emerging research imperative, with the hopes that the reflections here will be valuable for shaping discussions around housing. Its biggest contribution, however, is the commitment to highlighting emerging priorities as identified by young pupils themselves. Thus, key to this research was the creation of spaces for young people to reflect upon their daily experiences, concerns, and aspirations—and to support them in critical thinking about action in the future.

Research Design

The research represented within this report was undertaken over a seven-week period. It was motivated by four questions:

1. What are the housing profiles of students, and their particular challenges?
2. What are the learning aspirations of students, and how well is this reflected by the wider policy environment?
3. How do students’ housing experience shape their access to learning assets?
4. How do policies and institutions shape both housing experiences affect the learning environment?

Key to this project was the use of interactive and engaging methods to allow MSc students and the young pupils to co-create knowledge. Across a series of seven workshops, students were engaged variously in debates, drawing exercises, participatory photography, and other visual and interactive activities to collectively discuss housing and education issues. In addition to work with the students, MSc students also conducted interviews with teachers and parents, building a rich portrait of individual and collective narratives.

The research design, implementation and analysis was guided by an analytical framework that draws on Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach. The students used a ‘Capability Map’ developed to help the groups to make sense of the information being generated in ways that would address the four research questions. The map calls firstly for an exploration of the housing practices of young people, as well as a discussion on what constitutes meaningful learning outcomes. From the young people’s perspectives, these are explored as learning aspirations, and linked to values articulated in policy documents as well as schools’ vision and missions. The map then identifies issues that might condition or be affected by the relationship between housing practices and learning outcomes. These include young people’s learning assets (such as access to libraries, space to do homework, support networks etc.) and learning opportunities (related to the policy and planning processes affecting operations of learning formal and informal actors and institutions). Furthermore, the map also outlines the need to identify some structural drivers that might be shaping this relationship between housing and learning: such as gentrification, Brexit or austerity policies. The diagram below outlines the Capability Map used by the groups.

Apart from making an empirical contribution drawing linkages between housing and learning capabilities in London, the report also makes a methodological contribution by illustrating a way to implement the capability approach through participatory methodologies.

1.4 Cross-Cutting Findings

While the chapters below each outline their own findings particular to the schools and boroughs in which they worked, there are a range of cross-cutting findings which are shared:

Firstly, the students we worked with identified a squeeze on valuable learning spaces. Building on the issues identified in the previous year, several students again highlighted a lack of space, heating, or good lighting in their households as hindering their ability to complete homework tasks and their studies. This year, however, also raised visibility around the associated challenges in schools in the ongoing climate of austerity. Teachers across the three schools have shared the concern that budget cuts have led schools to ever-increasing numbers of students, placing additional pressures on limited facilities. For students, this has been experienced in classrooms with more students, or in a lack of study spaces appropriate to either their tasks or age—impacting their performance.

Secondly, students were extremely aware of housing concerns, impacting a sense of well-being, security, and aspirations. One of the most striking findings across this year—and particularly with the primary aged students—is that they are incredibly aware of the complexities of their housing situations. Students could articulate challenges faced by their parents ranging from rogue landlords, broken facilities, to concerns around the high cost of rent. This holds implications around the well-being of young people as they respond to the pressures of insecurity. For some of the older students we worked with especially, this manifested in a clearly articulated desire to obtain stable and well-paid employment in the future—sometimes at the cost of other aspirations which were deemed to be not as secure. Nonetheless, many of the students involved in this research also demonstrated a growing political awareness and motivation to challenge this status quo throughout the life of the project.

Third, this research highlighted the vital role schools have played in politicizing and ‘filling gaps’ created by the inadequate housing market. Whether this is in the creation of afterschool clubs to compensate for working parents, or in the provision of breakfast clubs—schools themselves are playing a critical supportive role for students. This research further highlighted the particularly political role that schools are also undertaking, as advocates for issues around housing and student rights, which might be further built upon and supported through organizations such as Citizens UK. Nonetheless, the ongoing environment of austerity—hitting education as well as housing—has meant that the three schools we worked with are finding it increasingly difficult to play this function. The loss of funding has particularly impacted the pupil premium, breakfast clubs, and closed many early start centres, which some teachers or parents identified as generating additional pressures.

Finally, these reflections have pointed to a contradictory policy environment, which has undermined the flourishing of students. While the Department of Education outlines that education should be “equal for all, no matter what their background or family circumstances” (Department of Education, 2018), the current shape of the housing market—characterized by unregulated private markets, rising rents, the loss of council housing, and in the case of Haringey, the sell-off of public
Figure 1.7: Capability Map on Learning Aspirations. Source: Alexandre Apsan Frediani.
assets through the high-profile Haringey Development Vehicle—has eroded the capacity of certain students to achieve these educational aspirations. As such, this report joins Citizens UK in asking for stronger support on these policy issues—related to rogue landlord action, guarantees not to move council residents with children during term-time, or in demands for a smaller radius of rehousing, so that students can maintain their valuable school networks.

In the following three chapters this report unfolds a deeper analysis of the above findings, grounding this in the specific schools and boroughs, and highlighting a range of concrete actions that students themselves have proposed to create space for change. As such, this report advocates for a broader conceptualization of the housing crisis, seeking to unpack the range of ways this may impact school pupils—and foregrounding the voices of young people themselves in advocacy for the future.
2. Willow School

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2.1 Introduction

The present report outlines the findings of a participatory action-learning research project investigating how housing conditions can impact the learning capabilities of London’s young citizens. Developed in partnership with Citizens UK and designated project schools, the research was led by UCL students from the Master of Science Social Development Practice at the Development Planning Unit (DPU). The research project, of which this report is a product of, was developed by working with students, teachers and parents from ‘The Willow’ school on the Broadwater Farm Estate in Haringey.

Firstly, we introduce a neighbourhood profile and contextualise the background against which this project took place, as well as its relevance regarding London’s current housing crisis. Secondly, we highlight the methodological framework, based on Amartya Sen’s Capabilities Approach. We then discuss the two key findings of the research project: the lack of council investment and resources is impacting on Willow students’ outstanding well-being and learning outcomes; and there is limited engagement between the community and Haringey Council. Finally, we conclude with a series of recommendations for ongoing civic action.

Housing and Education

London’s population has steadily increased due to both natural growth and migration, counting 135,000 more citizens from 2014 to 2015 (Mayor of London, 2017). As compared to 2014-15, the homeless population increased by 7% in 2015-16 (ibid). Although the number of households on London’s social housing waiting lists decreased from 2012, the list still counts 227,549 available households (Ministry of Housing, 2017). It is acknowledged that cities in the United Kingdom, and especially London, are facing a ‘housing crisis’ determined by the inability of housing supply to match the growing demand, and exacerbated by the cost of housing which is unaffordable vis-a-vis average London salaries. Therefore, it is not simply about building new homes, but rather more affordable ones. According to the Mayor of London’s 2016 press release, only 738 out of the newly constructed 4,880 affordable houses in 2015 were de facto affordable at ‘social rent rates’. As a consequence, more Londoners are experiencing overcrowding, unsafe infrastructure and other critical housing issues which profoundly affect their lives. In the case of young people, housing is particularly important in that it has the potential to affect their educational attainments. The UK’s Department for Education (DfE) prioritises children’s safety and well-being both in and out of school, recognising that education should be “equal for all, no matter what their background or family circumstances” (n.d.). Nevertheless, there seems to exist a conflict between education policy and London’s housing in “preparing people for adult life with the necessary skills and character to contribute to society” (ibid).

Neighbourhood Profile

This research was carried out in Haringey, a borough which has consistently ranked high in house price to income ratio, outranking the statistics for both London and England from 2004 to 2012 (The Haringey, 2017a). Within that same period, the 2011 census data showed a high proportion of rented accommodation and social housing, 58.2% and 17% respectively. With two-thirds of the borough’s population being from ethnic minority backgrounds, this makes it one of London’s most diverse boroughs (The Haringey, 2015).

The students in this research come from the Broadwater Farm Estate, a social housing estate in Haringey, built in 1967 and counting 1,063 properties. The Estate has experienced difficulties since its establishment, with its structure and design being repeatedly reported as being inadequate. Furthermore, it has been perceived as experienced criminality and anti-social behaviour, leading to stigma associated with the area. This reputation and the lack of investment in the Estate has led to discussions about regenerating the area, potentially putting residing families at risk. The Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) outlines a possible regeneration plan for the Estate to “redress tenure imbalances and alter the currently negative perception of the area” (The Haringey,
This would include 50% of the land being transferred from the local government to private owners part of a property-development company called Lendlease. At present, in the HDV there is no proposal for new social housing to be built and let at social rent rates, but only that, under the HDV, 40% of housing will be affordable, with no clear definition of rental rates nor of what affordability means. At the moment, however, the HDV currently states that no decision has been made regarding the Estate and that no regeneration would take place until after 2020.

The Willow Primary School

The Willow Primary School is part of the Broadwaters Inclusive Learning Community and has been judged as outstanding by Ofsted (May 2017). In its vision the school states:

[...]our children are passionate learners who excel academically and are resilient, reflective, creative and confident [...] Competencies needed to thrive in the current and future world (The Willow Primary School, 2017).

The school has a supportive learning environment and staff. According to the lead project teacher “if you ask a child ‘what do I need to do this task?’ they say ‘I need to be determined’ [...]They know these words and they use them” (Tomlinson, 11 October 2017 – Personal Interview) (Figure 2.1).

2.2 Analytical Framework

The participatory action-learning research took place over seven weeks and was developed as part of an ongoing investigation of the impact of housing conditions on learning outcomes for children led by Citizens UK. To frame this research, we employed Sen’s (1999) Capabilities Approach (CA) which focuses on people’s capabilities and freedom to live a life they value, acknowledging that people have different values and aspirations depending on what they value as important. This framework prioritises the choice and process of development rather than its outcome, reflecting on perceptions alongside personal as well as external influencing factors. As contented by Frediani:

Within the fundamental components of this approach are included agency, power relations, and participation. Vulnerability, risks, and assets are components that shape the conversion factors of the CA (2010, p. 185).

In the case of The Willow, this implies that children’s ability to achieve learning encompasses both personal and external factors, such as housing conditions and policy alongside the learning environment. To operationalise the CA, a Housing and Learning Capabilities Map on the model of Figure 1.1 was used to analyse the findings, which are presented below.

2.3 Methodology

Throughout the research, we were aware of the need to create a comfortable and safe environment for children to feel confident and free to express their points of view. Our research objectives aside, the most vital aspect was guaranteeing that all were engaging with the activities in a learning space based on tolerance and respect. This compelled us to always be analytical, self-reflective and conscious of our positionality as researchers, taking into consideration our given backgrounds and assumptions.

In order to understand how housing conditions were—and continue—affecting children’s learning capabilities in school, a range of—qualitative—participatory action-research methods were applied. With a sample of approximately seventeen students aged between seven and ten, our seven sessions (see Appendix 2.a) consisted of: a semi-structured interview with the lead project teacher; introduction to the project and trust building (Figure 2.2); narrative storytelling (Figure 2.3); participatory photography (Figure 2.4); photo elicitation; action planning; and discussion with parents (Figure 2.5). Although each session was built around specific questions and guidelines, the participatory nature of the tools allowed us to appreciate the children’s own visions, what they most value in life, as well as to support their self-awareness of their capabilities and empowerment.
Each session was executed weekly, and followed similar dynamics:

- Activities and main objectives for each session were designed before the facilitation each week;
- Most of the session’s planning was sent beforehand to the lead project teacher for feedback;
- Each session had one leading researcher in charge of the facilitation, while other researchers performed different tasks, such as recording, note-taking, and helping the process;
- Most sessions started with an icebreaker;
- After each session, a collective reflection with the lead project teacher took place to discuss challenges and improvements, as well as to evaluate our overall performance.

These were complemented by reviewing secondary sources such as officials reports, academic articles, national, regional and local statistics, as well as general literature on the matter.

It is essential to acknowledge that our research does not intend to generalise the Estate’s entire population. In fact, our findings are based on the participating students’ everyday living experiences, as well as on their parents’ opinion. Nevertheless, the information and knowledge they provided is a valuable contribution towards the debate on the importance of improving housing conditions and its implications for young London residents.

Figure 2.2. The Willow children. Source: Chapter authors.

Figure 2.3. Narrative storytelling. Source: Chapter authors.
2.4 Key Findings

A number of issues were raised by the participants throughout the research, indicating that housing conditions within the Estate were poor. Children reported different elements, but common themes included overcrowding, deterioration of Estate facilities, rodent and insect infestations, water leaks and damp conditions leading to recurring ill health. Finally, anti-social behaviour within and around the Estate was highlighted as a distressing factor for children. Based on these issues, two key findings have been identified.

Finding 1: Lack of council investment and resources is impacting on Willow students’ outstanding wellbeing and learning outcomes

The DfE names its responsibilities as relating to more than solely education, and including:

[…] supporting professionals who work with children and young people, helping disadvantaged children and young people to achieve more, making sure that local services protect and support children (n.d.).

The experience of Broadwater would suggest the Estate’s community to be a high priority for the DfE, also given the disadvantaged backgrounds of young students and their families. In this context, the support provided by local services to children’s education is similarly relevant. The DfE further prioritises children’s “safety and wellbeing”, noting that they need to be “protected from harm” and that “vulnerable children are supported to succeed” (n.d.). This priority thus addresses children’s lives beyond education. However, throughout the action-research conducted, it became clear how the lack of these crucial support services outside The Willow’s remit is impacting on children’s well-being and ability to learn. In this sense, the mission of the DfE to promote children’s well-being and safety is undermined due to the lack of necessary services that should be provided by the government, both locally and nationally. Holistic learning mechanisms are needed to link education with contributing factors such as housing conditions.

As an ‘outstanding’ school, The Willow is recognised as a central part of the community, providing a safe and enjoyable environment for children to learn. During the photo elicitation session for instance, one student indicated the school as a safe place. Similarly, a parent also stated that they prefer leaving their teenage children waiting in the school reception (when at a parent meeting) rather than at home or within the Estate, pointing to the school as a community hub and a support system for families.

Our research evidenced a link between children’s wellbeing at home and their learning outcomes at school. Living conditions and overcrowding were reported as impacting on children’s health and their ability to learn, evidenced by their tiredness, ability to concentrate and school attendance. This was also compounded by safety concerns within the community, as children reported that their parents would not allow them to play within the Estate unless within a clear line of sight from their homes. Certain play areas were labelled as favourites, being considered safe by both parents and children, as they are closer to their homes and patrolled by security guards. This safety consideration was also found to impact on children’s aspirations. Additionally, parents cited the reduction in health services and information – particularly
related to early childhood development—available to the community, leaving families with limited information on how to best support their children’s health care. It was commented that families do not generally know where to go and what to do, thus undermining the longer-term well-being of their children.

The final consideration under this finding is that the staff of The Willow School is extremely dedicated to the community, both within and outside school hours. Recognising the challenges faced by families in making sure their children are healthy and learning, the School provides breakfast and after-school clubs, a support offered through additional unpaid hours by teachers and school staff. This was referenced in the 2017 Ofsted report, stating that the “school is a central and important part of the community […] ensures that pupils and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are extremely well supported” (p.5). The School also recognises the impact housing has on students, working closely with housing officers to “avoid evictions and supporting their needs for clothing” (Ofsted, 2017, p.5). This emphasises how the school provides a safety-net for children, allowing them to thrive when community services withdraw and families struggle.

**Finding 2: Limited engagement between the community and the Haringey Council**

A consistent theme across all sessions with the children as well as during the meeting with parents, was the constrained relationship between the community and the Haringey Council, specifically pointing to their difficulties in getting the council to work on repairs, as well as to their ability to gain access to information and to voice their concerns.

On the one hand, unsafe infrastructure in their homes, as well as dangerous adjacent shared and outdoor spaces were reported. Children and parents shared their experiences of unsanitary conditions, especially in shared spaces like the elevators. An anecdote from the participatory photography session about a hollow part of the wall reads: “I don’t feel safe here because if I was to lean on this then it will cut my hands bad” (Student, 2017 – Photo Elicitation). Most participants shared stories of broken heaters and damp walls causing them to get sick, as well as mice and spider infestations in their homes, which do not represent one-time episodes, but are the recurring reality of research participants living in the Estate. As part of a questionnaire submitted to the parents, one question asked: *Do you face any challenge in housing?*, to which one of the parents answered: “need for repairs and the house conditions need not be overlooked by council conditions” (Parent, 2017). This is key because when basic household necessities are not available or do not function properly, then the day-to-day living and learning of students are negatively affected.

Facing these problems, the stakeholders in our research feel that there has been a lack of engagement and accountability on the part of the council. Parents have approached the council multiple times and in various ways, including face-to-face consultations, phone calls or written correspondence with delayed or no response at all from the council. For example, one parent reported that concerns such as apartment exchange requests due to overcrowding have not yet been answered to. One parent shared, “leaking was coming through for the last three years. The council doesn’t do anything and if they fix it... in a few months later it comes again; because they don’t really do the fundamental job” (Parent, 2017). All together, these experiences of neglect have left some with the feeling of disempowerment. The Estate community demands the council to improve existing amenities, but more importantly, stakeholders voice the need for recognition that there is a critical gap in the process of engagement.

Lastly, there has been limited information and space available for parents to raise concerns. During the meeting with parents, we realised that while they were unaware of existing associations, they were interested in organising themselves to discuss and address these issues as a group. Until now, The Willow has played an instrumental role in empowering parents by creating spaces for them to voice their concerns via parent-teacher meetings. In terms of participation, stakeholders emphasised the lack of information including more comprehensive details about the upcoming regeneration project, making them feel excluded. This information, which is part of their rights as citizens of the Broadwater Farm Estate, should include the potential impact on their housing, compensation, and proposed timeframe schedule.

**2.5 Recommendations**

This report makes a claim for full transparency from the council to convey information and upcoming actions. We recommend key actions to bridge the gap between community’s aspirations and broader processes at stake. If no well-defined system is in place to ensure the process to be inclusive and participatory, it may be problematic and lead to feelings of invisibility and disempowerment. “People feel ineffective that their voice is not heard” (Tomlinson, 2017). Indeed, as advanced by Mouffe (1992), if all voices are not included in the discussions, one should expect less equitable outcomes.

Aiming to achieve greater outcomes for the Estate, our report also suggests that The Willow continue supporting children to participate in the housing project and to be empowered to become a driving force in influencing local decision-making. The evidence from this report highlights the vital role the school has played in strengthening residents’ networks and spaces to interact and socialise.
We encourage children to continue their engagement by developing and conducting a survey to persuade the rest of the school into joining the debate around housing, particularly other pupils facing similar problems.

Secondly, we noticed a strong sense of community. Parents and children in our research trust each other and the school, in that they face similar challenges and understand each other’s situation. The implementation of a parents’ association for The Willow might be an important instrument for families to build a common agenda on the proposed regeneration plans for the Estate. For instance, in order to engage residents in the council’s public meetings, these recommendations intend to emphasise agency and participation. Their significance crucially extends to challenges residents may face in the future. In this regard, Saxena (2011) states that ‘participatory practices’ are related to a process in which people are able to mobilise themselves to achieve effectiveness, efficiency, empowerment and equity.

Finally, the reflection of a mother and teacher at Willow suggests that housing issues may in fact be a way of getting people’s attention to and commitment to solve the more complex challenges all these families face, such as immigration and unemployment: “these families want a change, but they don’t know how to start” (Teacher, 2017). Selener (1997) claims structural changes in people’s lives arise when mobilised citizens become social actors and engage in a process towards better social outcomes. Thus, there is space to strengthen community mobilisation towards the body of challenges faced by stakeholders, so that they are able to engage more strategically with the council in view of future development plans.

2.6 Conclusion

The Willow is an outstanding school providing essential support for children in the Broadwater Farm Estate, with a strong sense of community thriving among students and their parents. Nonetheless, children’s learning outcomes are undermined by their critical housing conditions and the lack of access to public services —particularly related to health and information for early childhood development, or in maintenance and repairs to the Estate. This has the potential to be changed through ongoing dialogue between the council and citizens, so as to ensure the process to be fair and consultative, where all voices are considered.

2.7 References


Our Homes, Our Schools: How Housing Affects Young People’s Learning Capabilities

[Accessed: 6 December 2017].


3. City and Islington College

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3.1 Introduction

Unregulated global capital continues to financialise housing, transforming it from a social good into an exclusionary asset, a precedent witnessed in London’s housing crisis, construing a prominent and pervasive political and social issue (Minton, 2017). In his call for more efforts in the UK government’s 2017 Autumn Budget to tackle London’s critical housing situation, London Mayor Sadiq Khan proclaimed the housing crisis as “a massive social issue - causing poverty, health problems and at its starkest, homeless and rough sleeping” (Khan, 2017). Unquestionably, education is one of the key areas affected by the housing crisis.

Research has shown the interlinkages between housing and education, demonstrating how factors ranging from absence of affordable housing (Crowley, 2003) to overcrowding (Mueller & Tighe, 2007) can negatively impact children’s developmental and educational outcomes. To further examine the relationship between housing and learning from the perspective of social development approach, this research was conducted by UCL students from the MSc Social Development Practice in partnership with Citizens UK. Participants – and co-investigators – in the research were made up of students and one teacher, Daniel Lawrence, from City and Islington College.

City and Islington College and the Borough of Islington

City and Islington College (CANDI, henceforth) is comprised of five centres. This research focused on one of them, the Sixth Form College. Overall, CANDI counts 1,500 students, and is recognised nationally for providing ‘good’ educational services (Ofsted, 2016). According to CANDI’s 2015 Annual Review Report, 33% of students progressed to higher education in 2014, amongst which, 56% went on to study at Russell Group Universities. In the same report, it is stated that although the college is situated within Islington, CANDI’s students come from all over London, with 32% from the neighbouring boroughs of Haringey, Hackney and Camden, and 45% from outside the immediate area (Figure 3.1).
Islington has an ethnically diverse population; however, the ethnic composition of owner-occupied type of housing tenure is unrepresentative of this diversity (Figure 3.2). The high proportion of white home-ownership suggests that ethnicity is linked to housing inequalities, in particular affordability and overcrowding. As evidenced in a report by Runnymede Trust (Elahi & Khan, 2016), ethnic minorities are especially vulnerable to employment and housing disadvantage in every London borough, most notably to housing inequalities as compared to White British. Such disparity is epitomised by the ethnic composition of CANDI’s student body (Figure 3.2), which suggests proportions do not reflect Islington’s actual home-ownership by ethnicity. This further suggests that to address the housing crisis, one needs to go beyond affordability (class) issues to also explore other critical facets of identity.

### Rationale of the Research

Financially, CANDI receives 75.6% of its revenue from the government, although there is no assurance that government funding will continue at the same level (Capital City College, 2016). In fact, to make sure the College could continue benefiting from government funding, in 2016 CANDI had to merge with Westminster Kingsway College. By increasing the number of students, CANDI would increment its revenue through tuition fees (Lawrence, 11 October 2017). Yet, as a consequence, the same amount of facilities and resources are critically put under stress by increasing matriculation. Building upon students’ learning experiences and aspirations, this report intends to examine the relation between housing and education, in the wider context of London’s housing crisis.

#### 3.2 Analytical Framework

The analytical lens employed to frame the research is based on Amartya Sen’s (1999) *Capability Approach* and its adaptation by Frediani (2010), which proposes to integrate Sen’s approach with individual, local, as well as structural factors shaping people’s *capability space*. If Sen’s theory identifies human development in terms of people’s capabilities to achieve valued aspirations, rather than measuring the successful achievement of these aspirations themselves, Frediani proposes an alternative perspective “focusing on resources and their transformation into achieved functionings” (Frediani, 2010, p.178); resources which could be tangible or intangible. This research sought to assess the impact of housing conditions on students’ learning aspirations, considering fundamental and multi-level factors such as choice, agency, power relations and processes of participation.

This research defines ‘capability’ as consisting of the opportunities students have to achieve their learning expectations. Correspondingly, the learning process is a ‘functioning’ that determines personal development, linked to students’ learning aspirations as well as future functionings, such as attending a highly reputed university or getting a decent job.

To operationalise this integrated approach, a ‘Capability Map’ was used to assess learning capabilities considering four key themes:

- **Housing profiles** (homeowner, private tenant, council tenant and temporary) explored using a parent survey, participatory photography and debates;

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**Figure 3.2.** Ethnicity Make-Up of Islington, Home-ownership and CANDI (Islington Council, 2013). Source: Islington Council, 2013.
3.3 Methodology

Research activities were developed during seven weekly sessions between October and November 2017. The participants are politics or sociology college students, aged around sixteen years old and coming from different boroughs.

Using a variety of techniques and exercises, based on participatory action research (PAR), the project sought to investigate how housing conditions are affecting students’ capabilities to learn. Specifically, this research sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Understanding the relationship between housing conditions and education (learning assets and learning aspirations);
2. Enhancing students’ learning process in their Politics’ project through a hands-on experience;
3. To raise suggestions for future advocacy around housing by Citizens UK.

To achieve these goals, multiple methodologies were used during the various workshops. Through their implementation, the central objective of the study was to collect key data while empowering students. In this context, it is essential to point out that this project did not intend to be all-representative, but rather sought to be a reflective exercise which could engage with the analytical perspective of students. The methodology was limited by time constraints and continuity, as students did not attend every session.

Research methods included a semi-structured interview with a member of staff, focus group discussions, participatory photography, a structured debate and surveys, among others. A key method employed was the photo elicitation, which utilised images to prompt discussion around students’ housing and learning experiences. Participatory photography showed different realities and empowered students to express themselves in a different way (Luttrell and Chalfen, 2010), contributing to the promotion of critical dialogue and to the collection of personal experiences without us –the researchers– invading the privacy of students’ homes (Hirst, 2015).

The research also involved a focus group discussion about the positives and negatives of the school as well as of students’ housing assets, allowing for a more critical view on their housing conditions and their relationship with learning aspirations. Similarly, during the structured debate, which was facilitated by one UCL student, CANDI participants were able to make key links among common themes and identify future priorities to enhance their learning capabilities.

Complementing the above, secondary research and a literature review were used to provide context and depth to the information obtained during the workshops with CANDI students.

Appendix 3a shows in detail all the activities designed, their accomplished objectives and outcomes.

3.4 Key Findings

The information gathered through the workshops, and analysed through the previously illustrated theoretical framework, revealed five main findings.

Finding 1

Firstly, it was found that students recognise a relationship between housing and learning, characterised by both positive and negative aspects. Interestingly, students differentiate between ‘house’ and ‘home’, the former referring to material and lived experiences while the latter construes positive aspects of safety and comfort, with subjective and aspirational dimensions. This distinction could be attributed to the framing of the concept of ‘housing’ in the workshop. The negative aspects of housing conditions and learning assets, referred to by students include distractions, over-comfortability, lack of available help, and low security levels in the neighbourhood. A recurrent concern was parental pressure and overcrowding, which according to Fergusson (2013) might result in diminished academic achievement. The adverse conditions drive students to look for better options at school:

“[My classmate] can’t work because siblings kept coming in her room so she had to go to the library until later hours. It made her learning more difficult” (Student, 2017 - Photography Session).
Nevertheless, students mentioned their houses and learning assets as also presenting positive aspects; namely, more space to work (than at school), availability of resources (laptops), comfort and safety.

**Finding 2**

The second finding relates to learning as perceived by the students. Generally, when students are asked about their aspirations, **learning is understood mainly in its academic dimension**. Specifically, this refers to going to university and developing a professional (and profitable) career, leaving aside other domains such as social, cultural or personal learnings. The idea that attending university is ‘a must’ is contrasted with the reality for CANDI students, since only one third progressed to university after college in 2014 (CANDI, 2015). This represents a valuable space for further research, exploring the extent to which students understand learning mainly as a tool for ‘utilitarian’ (economic) purposes, or rather part of an integral process of personal training and growth.

**Finding 3**

The housing crisis and its economic pressure on the students’ parents highlights another key finding. Students experience **high pressure for academic success in the wider context of national economic insecurity**, which relates to the perception of learning being primarily academic. Indeed, with parents inciting them to aim at ‘traditionally profitable’ careers to afford living in London, students feel tension and frustration when faced with the predicament and personal contradiction of abandoning their ‘dreams’.

“I started off with history, sociology and psychology. I started off wanting to do counselling, helping young people, but it changed because my parents didn’t want me to do that—there’s no money in that. My Dad was like, you need to do something that puts yourself first, you can help other people but you need to provide for yourself first” (Student, 2017 - Speech session).

**Finding 4**

Considering multi-dimensional inequality is essential. In particular, this research has suggested that ethnicity is another relevant dimension for further exploration. As previously mentioned, the majority of CANDI students belong to ethnicities other than white, which also can be contrasted with the high proportion of white homeowners in Islington borough. For the diverse student body, housing inequalities were experienced in time-consuming distances and overcrowded transport to get from their home boroughs to their school in Islington. While the links between ethnicity and housing are only hinted at in this finding, this does highlight the contrast between schools that are ‘well-located’, the ethnic makeup of homeownership in prime boroughs, and the impacts (namely long commute times) for residents that may not be able to secure housing in high-value areas with good schools.

**Finding 5**

The aforementioned findings led us to identify the role of CANDI within the housing crisis, and its relations with learning assets, as crucial. In fact, the College becomes constructed as the predominant space through which students can fulfil their academic aspirations. In this regard, CANDI is perceived as a positive place; students can seek help from teachers and personal tutors, or capitalise on module flexibility which allows them to explore best options for their academic future. Whilst supported by its positive reputation and ranking in the Ofsted 2016 Report, the College is also associated with high levels of academic exigency, at times resulting in tiredness and boredom from the students (Workshop, 18/10/2017).

The recent budget constraints imposed on CANDI, and the increase in student enrolments proposed as a coping mechanism to maintain the previous funding levels, has resulted in the ‘overcrowding’ of college facilities and resources, with fewer teachers being available. As demonstrated by Glewwe et al. (2011) and Riddell (2008), this is important since access to resources can highly impact on student achievement.

The underlying question then becomes the role and extent to which CANDI can help students overcome this crisis, which is evidently and significantly affecting their aspirations and learning experiences. When interviewing Daniel Lawrence, he commented that while the school does not have a structured policy in response to the crisis, it was and continue collaborating with other actors:

“We don’t lead on anything, however in the last few years our students have done a lot of work with Citizens UK. The Politics department has also set up an enrichment programme that invites students to undertake some political engagement and give a presentation on what they have done at the end of the year. The UCL project was one of these” (Lawrence, 11 October 2017 - Interview).

Given the links between education and housing, and the considerable expectations placed by students on academic success not always matched by CANDI’s university enrolment statistics, further exploring the pressures and roles for educational institutions is most pressing. At the same time, students are increasingly conscious of their housing experiences, even more so as the wider
housing crisis is a topic stimulating their political awareness. During the activities, students defined housing as a human right, owing to its link to active participation in society. Re-elaborating on the initial conception of housing as a financial domain determined by prices and rents, students’ views then extended to its social aspects as related to the role of politics in perpetuating these issues:

“We are the majority but not many people want to go against the system. They have the fear of what may turn out worse in the long run” (Student, 2017 - Photo Activity).

“How can they understand it if they have never experienced it” (Student, 2017 - Debate Activity).

Considering the above findings, a controversial theme emerges; CANDI is reconstructed as a site of aspirational conflict. Whilst the College’s funding is subject to city-wide budget cuts, students, parents and the government itself still expect it to promote high levels of educational achievement and learning aspirations. Students, who feel they cannot pursue their career paths of choice as a result to parental pressures, are in fact responding to wider structural drivers in the national economic environment, just like their parents are responding to the UK’s recent financial austerity. These pressures are compounded when combined with budget cuts, and exacerbated by inadequate learning assets.

3.5 Ways Forward

The ways forward proposed by this research focus on two main –interlinked– issues identified as urgent by students: overcrowding and limited space for studying. These were collectively addressed during the final workshop session, which opened up the debate around how they could be acted upon.

In order to tackle overcrowding in their households, students decided to create an advertising message titled “Space + Privacy + Comfort (SPC)”. Through the SPC slogan, students intended to highlight to responsible authorities and politicians what are the necessary attributes conducive to a productive space for studying. Through its creation, they wanted to catch politicians’ attention while raising awareness; unfortunately, no further action was defined within this proposal.

Students also focused on the limited availability of physical spaces, especially on the inadequacy of libraries in terms of the organisation of space according to student age, level of education and relevant subjects. The students, together with Citizens UK, came up with a framework that would enable them to outline these problems to local politicians as well as to identify new work-spaces themselves. Students proposed mapping the location of existing facilities near their school and houses. They agreed to identify the hot spots through photographs and videos, highlighting alternative places for studying along with their corresponding pros and cons. In addition, they decided to start carrying out surveys, petitions, and engage in talks in order to voice their challenges to local authorities and councillors. The data collected will also be shared with other colleges to build up a network so that students can place pressure on their respective councillors to act on the space deficit for studying in London.

Political awareness was promoted throughout each workshop, with students affirming: “housing is an issue that directly affects most of us, and the council isn’t doing enough to support the people.” (Student, 2017 – Final Workshop). This opened up discussion for different initiatives to uptake so as to promote change amongst local governments and councillors. It is envisioned that, their plan to map neighbourhoods’ study spaces with Citizens UK will enhance the legitimacy of future campaign demands.

3.6 Conclusion

This participatory action-research conducted at CANDI unearthed important interlinkages between housing conditions, availability of study spaces and students’ learning capabilities, thus demonstrating the multiple connections between London’s housing crisis and students’ learning processes.

During the workshops, we were able to assess learning assets, social trends, school characteristics, students’ learning aspirations and related problems they face daily. This processes initiated discussions with students on how learning as an academic process is also driven by an economic concern, related to whether they will be able to afford London’s living costs, thus having major implications for their future plans and career aspirations.

Overcrowding, both at home and inside school facilities, together with the lack of study space, were the two key issues raised by students as critically affecting their learning opportunities. In this sense, the school is a critical actor in supporting students’ educational process. However, this role is threatened by budget cuts which are likely to worsen overcrowding within the college.

As a consequence, students were motivated to raise their voices and participate in actions that could alert political authorities of the problems young people encounter throughout their learning process. As our research came to an end, Daniel Lawrence conducted a supplementary session with CANDI students, during which they would prioritise their main concerns. The outcomes will be
shared during a future meeting with Citizens UK, which will also allow them to define and advance their political voice in future campaigns.

The overall process clearly validated the importance of students vocalising the issues affecting their learning capabilities and aspirations in the context of the housing crisis in London. In its residents’ communication and engagement strategy, the City of London Housing Service declares: “Our vision is to engage effectively and work collaboratively with residents so that they may influence our priorities and the way we work” (City of London, 2017, p.3). In line with this and with the purpose of the research undertaken, the strategy emblematically highlights the importance of academic research, which, in alliance with civil society institutions, can enhance the understanding, documentation and dissemination of the critical concerns of students living in London, thus promoting meaningful campaigns and effective solutions.

3.7 References


4.1 Introduction

London is undergoing a serious housing crisis where-by Londoners experience overcrowding and/or poor housing conditions, and many still struggle to afford their rent or to buy their own homes. Simultaneously, residential supply of social and affordable housing has failed to keep pace with the growth of housing needs.

In the last decade, London housing prices have increased by 80% (Land Registry, 2017) while minimum wage has risen only by 36% (ONS, 2017). This mismatch implies that low- and middle-income households will be the most affected by London’s housing crisis.

The borough of Haringey counts a high number of low- and middle-income households, with 32% of Haringey residents earning below the living wage. This implies that about one-third of residents in Haringey face hardship in affording decent living standards, including in housing (Trust for London, 2018). To further exacerbate the problem, rent prices in the Borough have increased by 55% from 2011 to 2016 (Trust for London, 2018).

Based on factors such as income, employment, health and disability, education and skills, barriers to housing, crime, and living environment, the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) illustrates that Haringey is currently the sixth most deprived borough in London, characterised by limited access to housing and services (Figure 4.1).

The factors highlighted by the IMD have incentivised numerous regeneration projects in the borough. This is prominently demonstrated by the ongoing proposal of the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV), which aims to address housing shortages and to rejuvenate the area via a partnership between Haringey Council and a private partner, Lendlease. According to the HDV, 1,000 homes are to be demolished and replaced by the construction of 5,000 ‘affordable’ homes. While the government’s official definition of ‘affordable’ rent implies houses are rented at 80% of their market value within the local area (BBC, 2016), in this report, the term ‘affordable’ is in fact a point of contention. That is, the cost of housing at over 35% income may be especially unaffordable to low-income families, highlighting the inadequacy of definitions pinned at 80% of market rate (BBC, 2016).

In light of the continuous rise in London’s housing prices since 2007 and of how Haringey is struggling to cope with such rises, our participatory action-learning project aimed to investigate how the housing crisis is affecting the learning capabilities of students of St. Ignatius Primary School.

St. Ignatius Catholic Primary School is located in the Borough of Haringey and has 415 students aged between three and eleven. The school was rated as ‘good’ by Ofsted in 2015. With a student body comprising 99.6% of students coming from ethnic minority backgrounds, St. Ignatius reflects Haringey’s extremely diverse demography, composed of two-thirds ethnic minorities (Haringey Council, 2015). Students’ reflec-
tions on housing and neighbourhood issues reflect the lack and inadequacy of access to housing in Haringey, which critically influence its status as one of the most deprived borough in London.

4.2 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this research draws on Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach, which focuses on people’s capabilities (or opportunities) to obtain what they value (or aspire to) in life (Sen, 2000). As conceived by Frediani (2010), the opportunities available to people to achieve their valued aspirations are influenced by environmental, structural and individual factors.

Structural and environmental drivers that have led to London’s housing crisis pose significant challenges to student’s ability to learn. As it will be illustrated, issues such as size and affordability of houses, as well as the presence of rogue landlords affect students’ learning assets, such as adequate space for studying. These learning assets also impact on students’ capabilities to achieve learning outcomes, ultimately influencing achievement of future aspirations.

The Capability Approach, used as the analytical basis of this report, offers a useful tool for exploring students’ learning aspirations and the opportunities available to them to achieve them (see Appendix 4a).

4.3 Methodology

This participatory action-learning project intended to explore how housing experiences affect learning capabilities of students at St. Ignatius school. Our methodology for the scheduled sessions drew from participatory methods such as participatory photography, drawing activities, semi-structured interviews and action planning. All activities sought to gather information about students’ perspectives of the housing challenges they experience as well as how these affect their learning capabilities. What we found to be particularly engaging for students, and most useful for the purpose of our research, were visual activities which enabled children to express their thoughts creatively. All activities were also followed by small group discussions, thus providing us with detailed qualitative data to better understand the participants and supplement our report with more coherent findings.

Before actively engaging and working with students, a semi-structured interview with St Ignatius’ Head Teacher and the teacher participating in the project was conducted to understand the school’s as well as students’ backgrounds. Following this, six two-hour sessions with fifteen students from Years 5 and 6 were conducted over the course of three months (Appendix 4b).

The methodology employed presents some limitations: not every student brought back pictures for the photo elicitation session; photos can be potentially biased by instructions given to participants; and not all students attended every session. As a result, findings might not represent every participant’s experience. A session with the students’ parents was also planned for, but no parent attended, thus impeding our ability to infer how parents perceive housing experiences affect their children’s learning. Nonetheless, we value the individual and collective stories shared here by the young pupils as opening up valuable discussions.
4.4 Key Findings

Two main findings were identified by this research.

**Finding 1: St. Ignatius performs a social and political role in the context of London’s housing crisis**

Overall, our research found that St. Ignatius performs both a safety net and activism role for students and their families.

As housing prices rise, parents may either have to work longer hours or double jobs to afford housing and other family expenses. This makes the need for affordable childcare imminent. Since 2011, thirty youth centres around London have been shut down due to investment cuts from councils, of 36% on average (Berry, 2017). As reported by teachers at St. Ignatius, a local community centre funded by the council, which provided services such as free meals and after-school childcare, was closed in 2016 due to lack of funding and reduction of staff (Bonner and Hammond, 2017). The shutting down of community centres in Haringey, is reflective of a wider social shock in the area and within London (Cosslett, 2018).

To ease the constraints on parents, St. Ignatius provides access to needed human, physical and social learning assets after the closure of the local community centre, including after-school and breakfast clubs. After-school clubs allow students to stay in school for an additional 45 minutes. All students who participated in the project attend after-school clubs at least once a week, and nearly one-third attend every day of the week, making this service valuable for our participants. However, since 2015, funding for education has dropped by 7% in the UK (Independent, 2017), making teachers take on additional responsibilities and work longer hours—often under pressure—for extra-curricular activities to be executed (Bonner and Hammond, 2017). St. Ignatius’ teachers, in addition to their normal responsibilities, thus run these critical after-school clubs voluntarily. These increased pressures are indeed not limited to St. Ignatius, but have been documented elsewhere in the borough. For instance, in Muswell Hill, Haringey, some schools have even started asking if parents would consider paying monthly fees to support the school and teachers (Evening Standard, 2017).

Breakfast clubs and free meal schemes have also been adversely hit by budget cuts, negatively impacting students in that “children living in substandard housing also frequently experience other problems such as family turmoil or a poor diet, which affect their physical and emotional development” (Shelter, 2006, p.10). Services such as school-run breakfast clubs are very cost-effective and can tremendously improve children’s learning (The IFS, 2016). St. Ignatius provides free meals for families below a certain income, however, the Head Teacher shared that the percentage of students qualifying for receiving free lunches went down from 46% to 26% recently owing to a lowering of the income threshold to access this service (Bonner, 2017). Similarly, in London, reports have indicated that half of the students under the poverty line cannot access free school meals (The Guardian, 2008). In the context of London’s unaffordable housing and wider crisis, St. Ignatius has played a critical role in supporting students through these valuable programmes, despite the immense pressures related to cuts in funding.

**Activism and Workshops around Housing**

“Unless we deal with the basic needs such as food and shelter, everything we are trying to do as educators is just trying to stick plasters [on it]” - (Curran, October 2017 – Parents’ Coffee Morning)

This teacher at St. Ignatius acknowledged that their role as an educator extends beyond teaching to include support in addressing challenges to students’ capacity to learn, thus positively impacting their wellbeing as well as their grades (ibid). After recognising that many families are struggling with housing-related issues which are affecting students, St. Ignatius started working with Citizens UK to alleviate these issues. Activities include housing rights workshops for parents and town-hall meetings with duty-bearers and other stakeholders to discuss topical issues such as a landlord licensing scheme.

Thus, in addition to providing human, physical and social learning assets via school-provided clubs, St. Ignatius (with help of Citizens UK) provides political assets that enable those affected to claim access to those goods/services. Under London’s housing crisis, several parents have drawn upon the help and support they get from St. Ignatius. This is reflected in reports from the Head Teacher that many families when moved by the council out the borough continue to enrol their children in St. Ignatius, despite potentially longer commutes from home to school.

**Finding 2: Students’ hyper awareness**

Throughout the sessions of this action-research project, students demonstrated they are hyper aware of housing challenges, namely rogue landlords, affordability of housing, overcrowding, and issues of safety within neighbourhoods; and how these affect them and their future learning and housing aspirations.

**Rogue landlords and affordability of housing**

London’s housing crisis partially emanates from a system which cannot tightly monitor landlords through current legislation, even though this compromises Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which “protects a person’s ‘right to respect for his private and
family life, his home” (Minton, 2017, p.60). This is reflected in the experiences shared by students, revealing awareness that landlords breach housing contracts by avoiding important maintenance and instead doing “minimal work on the house” (Student, 2017). Not only are conditions subpar in private accommodation, but students in council houses also expressed discomfort with some of the conditions in their house.

Students shared experiences of mould in their homes, leakages and cockroaches. One student reported how a mice problem in her home “prevents me from studying comfortably as I like to do my homework on the floor” (Student, 2017). It has been shown that 32% of children in bad housing, with issues such as exposure to mould and mice, suffer poorer general health and specifically respiratory health problems as compared to 24% of children in good housing (Shelter, 2017). Therefore, a deprivation of physical assets such as appropriate maintenance by landlords, provides implications for worse human assets, such as students’ health in this case.

Students are also aware of the problem of affordability of their housing. Many stated that private housing is “too expensive” as “landlords like to take a lot of money from tenants” and “could kick me out if my parents don’t have the money to pay rent” (Student, 2017). They commented “…It’s unfair because people have to spend more money for very little space” (Student, 2017). This mirrors one key concern of London’s housing crisis, whereby ‘affordable’ houses are priced up to 80% of the market rate and Starter Homes are priced up to £450,000 in London. If parents are spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing, they become at risk of deteriorating mental health (Minton, 2017). Students themselves identified implications of housing affordability on their learning capabilities as “the cost for rent and other expenses may reduce the amount of money left available to spend on the child’s education” (Bonner, 2017). Additionally, students identified implications of unaffordable housing for their mental health; “This can be stressful on the child which will also affect them at school”, they said (Student, 2017). Evidently, human assets (student’s mental health) is also impacted by restricted financial assets as a result of unaffordable housing. These micro-experiences shared by the students we worked with are reflected in wider research, which has acknowledged that “living in cold, damp housing [increases] children’s chances of experiencing stress, anxiety and depression” (Shelter, 2017, p.14).

Overcrowding

Students’ awareness extends also to the issue of overcrowding, with many unequivocal that their homes are “too crowded” (Students, 2017). One student revealed that she shared a bedroom with her two siblings, cousin and parents. Another lamented that, “the council want to move my family back to my old house but it’s small and there’s not enough space” (Student, 2017). Moreover, students determined that overcrowding directly means “I don’t have enough space to do my homework” as “my siblings come into my room” or “I can’t do my homework at the kitchen table because my parents will make smelly food” (Students, 2017). Students confidently defined what they consider basic requirements for adequate homework spaces, and that anything sub-par could negatively impact the quality of their homework. Thus, lack of spaces for homework due to overcrowding can imply lower future human and financial assets, in that the resulting “lower educational attainment” increases “the likelihood of unemployment or working in low-paid jobs” in adulthood (Shelter, 2006, p.9). Additionally, overcrowding has been linked to issues of mental health such as depression and anxiety (Shelter, 2006). In this sense, overcrowding deters children’s learning assets and puts at risk their capabilities to obtain valued outcomes.

Learning and housing aspirations

Students’ awareness of housing experiences conceivably shapes their learning and housing aspirations. First, it is interesting to note students’ aspirations and their knowledge of the capabilities they need to achieve what they value. Students described their future steps for the next fifteen years from point A to point B: “I need to work hard, get good SATs results and then go to college and university”, even referencing having a ‘Plan B’ “if anything goes wrong” (Students, 2017 – Narrative Storytelling Workshop). Their learning aspirations are mostly related to economic outcomes that will allow them to solve the housing issues they are experiencing.

Students are aware of demolition of social housing and consequent displacement of individuals and families from their homes. In this regard, some students’ physical aspirations include owning medium-sized houses in the future, reflecting their consideration of the fact that “having a big house means crushing other people’s houses and parks and bringing them down” (Student, 2017).

However, many still aspire to own large-sized houses in future, claiming that “having a big house means other people will notice I’m a good person” (Student, 2017). Further discussions with the students unravelled that what they aspire to have in the future was directly related to what they currently do not have, for example, their ‘own room’ (as they currently share their room with other family members), swimming pools, gardens, exercise facilities, driveways. These physical aspirations, in conjunction with students’ desires to “work hard” and “have lots of money”, reflect definitions of physical aspirations from policy (Students, 2017). An overwhelmingly neoliberal, performance-driven national school curriculum encourages students’ gradual devel-
opment into an internationally-competitive workforce (Hicks, 2017), to improve national economic growth. This is inspected and regulated by Ofsted, who reports directly to Parliament.

Our findings offer only hints for future research. There are some questions requiring further investigation: Are students aware of how structural drivers ('rent gap', the private sector, and/ or lack of transparency by local government) contribute to unaffordability and overcrowding of London housing? Do students observe/feel the impacts of potential mental health issues on their learning capabilities and aspirations? Are students aware of how neoliberal UK education policy affects their learning capabilities and aspirations? Furthermore, with “housing and mental health in England both frequently described as in ‘crisis’ and with the NHS “facing increasing demand [but] constrained budgets” (Shelter, 2017, p.5), it is important to acknowledge potential threats to children’s agency.

Clearly, structural drivers within the national context shape children’s hyper awareness of housing issues and learning and housing aspirations. However, despite limitations, students’ hyper awareness also contains the potential to challenge those structural drivers propelling London’s housing crisis. This is incorporated in the recommendations suggested by this report.

4.5 Ways Forward

The recommendations in this section were identified drawing on the workshops carried out with the students of St. Ignatius. They seek to raise awareness of how London’s housing crisis affects students’ learning capabilities and outline actions to be considered at city-level, aiming to alleviate negative impacts of housing on children’s life chances.

Figure 4.4. Students’ proposed actions after brainstorming activities. Source: Chapter authors.

Figure 4.5. St. Ignatius students – “House of Horror”; the model (upper left); broken bathroom (upper right); overcrowding (lower left); poor facilities, deteriorated walls and damps (lower right). Source: St. Ignatius students.
Our action-research project ended with ‘The Action Planning’ session (see Appendix 4b). This aimed to capitalise on students’ hyperawareness of their housing issues and their aspirations to advocate for change. Specifically, the final action proposed by students was the construction of a model house, the ‘House of Horror’ (Figure 4.5), through which students facing housing issues could expose and share their experiences. They proposed to hold an event to showcase this model house to the local council, as a means of voicing their concerns and raising awareness on how housing can affect children’s learning. In this direction, the ‘House of Horror’ ultimately acts as a catalyst for claiming for improved housing in wider Haringey.

Along with local-level action, larger-scale action is considered necessary to ease the impacts of London’s housing crisis on children’s learning capabilities. First, the UK government should strive to evaluate and redefine the concepts of overcrowding to reflect children’s physical aspirations of improved leisure and homework spaces (Shelter, 2016). Currently, children between one and ten years old are counted as half a person (Minton, 2017). In contrast with this framing, our research demonstrates that young people under ten are extremely aware of their housing situations and unacceptable environments, as well as how that affects their own sense of well-being. Second, despite there being “no all-encompassing statutory definition of affordable housing” (The House of Commons Library, 2017), Citizens UK has advocated for redefining ‘affordable housing’ from 80% of market prices to one-third of incomes. The findings from this report suggests the need to push forward this definition to alleviate problems associated with affordability, such as potential deterioration of children’s mental health. Altogether, children, such as the participants from St. Ignatius, should be consulted on how they feel they are being impacted and what their needs are. Using Citizens UK’s London Assemblies as precedents, children should continuously be incorporated into actions brought forward by Citizens UK to Government.

4.6 Conclusion

The workshops revealed how deeply London’s housing crisis is affecting children. It is clear that students who participated in the project have not only experienced some setbacks in their learning, but that also their aspirations are shaped in terms of achieving housing security.

St. Ignatius Primary School has played a very important role in protecting children’s rights around this issue, setting up support services, such as after-school clubs and breakfast clubs, that help strengthen learning experiences and possibly learning outcomes. The school has also played an activism role that has contributed to the mobilisation of parents and community in general, through alliances with different organisations like Citizens UK. Leverage is gained through collective action.

Regardless of children being uninformed of precise statistics or redevelopment projects such as the HDV, and of our methodology having several limitations, this project revealed that children are very much aware of some of the actors involved in London’s housing crisis and their corresponding responsibilities. They are also aware of how, as a result of political decisions, this crisis is responsible for issues of rogue landlords, unaffordable housing, overcrowding, and lack of adequate spaces for children. Similarly, they recognise how these can be detrimental to their interests. In light of children’s abilities to determine actions and solutions to their housing issues, it is important to enhance their agency and involve them in discussions. Children’s participation in decision-making “increases children and young people’s citizenship and social inclusion, and also their wider personal development” (National’s Children Bureau, 2010, p.7).

It is important to consider that political change is immediately necessary as children are daily affected. As an example of the severity of the crisis, two of the students participating in the research had to move in the middle of the school year due to housing allocation and long commutes to St. Ignatius, which exposed them to stress and anxiety ultimately affecting their learning capabilities.
4.7 References


----- (2017a). The impact of housing problems on mental health. Shelter, UK pp.3-17


### Appendix 2a. Sessions activities and objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Main activity</th>
<th>Primary objective</th>
<th>For the researchers</th>
<th>For the participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Semi structured interview with lead project teacher</td>
<td>Presentation and overall information</td>
<td>To introduce ourselves with our partner in school, as well as our main objectives and motivations</td>
<td>To dialogue and express the main concerns regarding the housing crisis in the zone and how this impact in children learning. Also, to show us the school and provide recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Project’s introduction</td>
<td>Research’s presentation and trust-building</td>
<td>To introduce ourselves to the students, explain the project’s objectives and start to develop a trusting relationship</td>
<td>To express themselves freely in a friendly environment based on trust and respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Narrative storytelling</td>
<td>To understand housing conditions and learning aspirations</td>
<td>To gather information to understand their living conditions and their learning aspirations.</td>
<td>To dialogue and to express creatively their own personal representations about housing conditions and learning aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Participatory photography</td>
<td>To understand housing conditions and opportunities</td>
<td>To understand opportunities and risks students and their parents face regarding their housing conditions as well as those of from their neighbourhoods.</td>
<td>To express and give voice about their real-life situations, to have a sense taking control over their self-representations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Photo elicitation</td>
<td>To understand housing conditions, learning assets and opportunities</td>
<td>To use photographs/images that students have taken of their living and learning environments to investigate what students have or don’t have access to as learning assets and what they value as learning assets.</td>
<td>To participate in identifying their surroundings and what learning assets they have access to and further investigate what additional assets would be useful to them in their future learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 6</td>
<td>Action planning</td>
<td>To help further implementation of citizen UK’s project, empowering pupils and bridge people together</td>
<td>To present the main findings and elicits feedback from the class.</td>
<td>To engage in identifying next steps to identify ways to take the research findings forward and identify potential solutions based on it, this could also include identifying a group of active parents and students to continue the research project alongside Citizens UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 7</td>
<td>Parents meeting</td>
<td>To understand housing conditions and learning aspiration</td>
<td>To comprehend the main issues and difficulties of the families regarding the housing situation in the community, and how this is linked to the learning capabilities of the students</td>
<td>To express their main worries, problems and overall conditions regarding social housing in their community, in a safe space where they are going to be listened with respect and zero-judgement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3a. Workshop Schedule and activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pre-Interview with Daniel Lawrence           | 11th Oct | Present the objectives of workshop  
Collect information about the background and current situation of C&I College  
Set expectations of this workshop | Semi-structured Interview with Daniel Lawrence                                                 | General idea of the school and students;  
Issues about the budget cut;  
Expectations of this workshop                                                                 |
| Introduction: Timeline of the workshop       | 18th Oct | Present the objectives of workshop  
Build a sound relationship between team and new students  
Clarify the plans and the goals of this workshop  
Explore what activities students want to do in the following sessions | Group presentation – emoji activity;  
Project timeline;  
Construction of workshops activities;  
‘Home’ and ‘School’: initial associations to those concepts | Activities student are willing to participate in each session;  
Initial meanings and fundamental emotions associated with both home and school |
| Awareness of Learning Experiences (Assets)   | 1st Nov  | Raise the awareness of housing crisis  
Explore students’ learning experience at home and school  
Identify students’ learning assets and abilities  
Raise suggestions for public policies  
Introduce Photo Elicitation | Debate Activity  
-Watch film(s)  
-Debate: The local council is looking to invest in either the home or school environment to improve learning ability. Is the home or school more deserving of funding? What are the strengths of one location over another? What policies should be implemented? | Pros and cons of School & Home assets;  
How investment in these assets may impact learning capabilities in short/long time |
| Exploring housing context by images          | 11th Oct | Understand neighbourhood profile  
Explore housing context and personal experiences  
Identity emerging trends/themes | Photo elicitation  
- ‘How is your personal learning experience at home?’  
Mapping activity | The ability to learn was strongly related to housing conditions;  
Positive and negative aspects of learning at home as a study space;  
Reflection on what it means “being political”;  
Map with boroughs where students live |
### Parent Survey (Replacing Coffee session)  
**17th Nov**  
To understand students’ housing and learning abilities from the parent’s perspective  
To explore emerging issues (housing and learning)  
**Online survey for students to interview their parents**  
3 answered surveys:  
- Different housing profiles  
- Parents highlight that students need an appropriate space for studying  
- Availability of different learning facilities at home and nearby  
- School as a pathway to university

### Looking towards future (Aspirations)  
**22th Nov**  
Explore students’ learning aspirations and their future projects  
**Speech activity**  
Create a speech to give to students applying to the City & Islington college  
Most students want to go to the university;  
Tension between their own aspirations and society’s expectations;  
Pressure from their parents in the elections of their careers

### Final Workshop: Sharing of findings and defining campaign suggestions  
**29th Nov**  
Present outcomes  
Examine reactions/ responses  
Produce campaign suggestions for Citizens UK  
**Final Message Activity**  
- Choose 1 issue to work with and create a message  
- Define 1 action to deal with that issue  
Prioritize main problems identified by students;  
Planning to take some actions with Citizen UK (mapping)
Appendix 4a. The Capability Map as a tool for exploring how Housing affects Learning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-workshop Interviews with teachers [Oct 11 2017]</td>
<td>Interviews with teachers in St. Ignatius School</td>
<td>Learn backgrounds and information of school and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 1 Introductory Workshop [Oct 18 2017]</td>
<td>Introduction and BINGO game Activity of drawing the place like and dislike in school and home</td>
<td>Try to build good relations with students Make students have the preliminary and simple understandings on our project Get information on school and home (eg. facility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 2 Narrative Storytelling workshop [Nov 01 2017]</td>
<td>Draw pictures about: - the jobs in 15 years (eg. Lawyer) - the house you want to have Interview after painting</td>
<td>Gain the aspirations from students Interview could receive more details of aspirations about future and house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 3 Participatory Photography [Nov 08 2017]</td>
<td>Introduction of Participatory Photography (What? Why? How?) Practices on using camera Handout explains taking pictures at home</td>
<td>Enhance students be more involved in the project Investigate housing conditions Try to explore the neighbourhood profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 4 Parents Coffee Morning [Nov 17 2017]</td>
<td>Parents Coffee Morning Interviews with parents</td>
<td>Gain more details about house situation from parents Try to explore the parent aspirations on students Enrich neighbourhood profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 5 Photo Elicitation [Nov 22 2017]</td>
<td>Survey on house and school: - moving - after-school clubs - how and how long to go to school Photo Elicitation</td>
<td>Discuss the emerging issues in house Share stories about house and neighbourhood More details about housing situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 6 Action Planning [Nov 29 2017]</td>
<td>Further questions about education and housing Action planning</td>
<td>Summarize the previous workshops Find more understanding of student son relation between house and education Help students to decide further action of this project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Development Planning Unit, University College London, is an international centre specialising in academic teaching, research, training and consultancy in the field of urban and regional development, with a focus on policy, planning management and design. It is concerned with understanding the multi-faceted and uneven process of contemporary urbanisation, and strengthening more socially just and innovative approaches to policy, planning management and design, specially in the contexts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East as well as countries in transition.

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MSc Programme in Social Development Practice. The central focus of the course is the relationship between active citizenship and development, with the recognition that diverse identities and aspirations are critical components of social change. This course responds to the increasing focus on well-being and ‘people-centric’ approaches, evidenced both by the revised policy priorities of many development agencies, and the discourses of grassroots organizations, which question market led processes of development. At the same time, there is a need to problematize such approaches, given the power relations operating at various scales, from the global to the local, and the social dynamics of rapidly urbanizing societies. These concerns highlight the challenge of recognising and valuing difference in a way that strengthens, rather than fragments, collective action, and ensures universal principles of equity. This course offers the opportunity to engage with the theoretical and practical implications of promoting well-being and citizenship in the context of social diversity, exploring the traditional realm of the social sector as entry point to influence wider contestations of rights and citizenship as manifested in development initiatives.

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