Why Youth Participation? Some Justifications and Critiques of Youth Participation Using New Labour's Youth Policies as a Case Study

Rys Farthing

Abstract:

Despite an emerging consensus around the need for youth practitioners to 'do' participation, there has been limited exploration of why participation might be desirable in the first place. Often, heroic claims are made to justify participation, ranging from a radical capacity to liberate oppressed young people to achieving the utmost efficiency in youth policies and services. However, these justifications have rarely been interrogated. This paper attempts to address this anomaly by offering three analyses. Firstly, it constructs four ideal-type justifications for participation from existing literature; rights-based , empowerment , developmental and an efficiency justification. Secondly, it challenges these justifications against three emerging critiques of participation; radical, conservative and secular critiques. Thirdly, it uses New Labour's youth policies from 1997-2010 as a case study to highlights the need for critical reflection about the merits of participation before embracing it as an intrinsically 'good thing'.

Key words: Participation, youth work, youth development, youth policy.

PARTICIPATION HAS become such a powerful idea that is approaching orthodoxy or arguably, tyranny as a practice (Cooke and Kothari, 2002). This is especially true for youth practitioners; participation features centrally in much policy formation and is a near hegemonic practice in youth work. Heroic claims are often made to justify such participation, ranging from a radical capacity to liberate oppressed groups to the ability to achieve the utmost efficiency in policies and services. However for all of this popular currency, these justifications have rarely been interrogated. The aim of this paper is to provide an informed critique of youth participation, by interrogating why the process of participation might be a desirable practice for youth practitioners, and whether these justifications hold up to critique. This paper argues that rather than viewing participation as an intrinsically 'good thing', the merit of participation depends upon the type of society we want for young people in the first place.

This article addresses three areas. Firstly, it addresses an under-analysed area by synthesising

justifications for youth participation from existing literature. A typology of four ideal-type justifications is developed, suggesting that participation can be seen as desirable for its rights fulfilling capacities, its ability to empower young people, to achieve efficiency in services or to support youth development. Secondly, the article looks to other disciplines to develop three critiques of youth participation; a radical critique that suggests participation is an undesirable form of social control; a conservative critique that suggests it is ill-advised, and; a secular critique that suggests that participation is an unwarranted, obfuscated missionary tendency. These three critiques are then engaged to challenge the four dominant justifications for participation, critically evaluating the call for youth participation. Thirdly, applying this typology and critique, New Labour's youth policies from 1997-2010 are explored as a case study. This case study problematises the lack of clarity in applied policy justifications for participation The conclusion suggests that current rationales for youth participation are vulnerable to critique, and that perhaps a more reflective exploration of the why of participation is needed if practitioners are serious about 'bettering the lot' of the young.

Such an exploration is necessary because, despite the near consensus around the need for youth practitioners of all varieties to engage in participation, it is not entirely clear why they must do so or, often, what it is they are engaging in. Without critically exploring the why of participation, embracing the practice becomes an act of faith; a much revered and little analysed habit. This act of faith rests on two assumptions (adapted from Cleaver, 2002: 36): firstly, that participation is intrinsically a good thing, especially for young people, and therefore secondly, that any further analytic developments need to be purely methodological. That is, if participation is inherently good, then we just need to get the methodology right. However, as this article argues, without critical reflection about what is a 'good thing' for young people in the first place, which is born from different visions of the 'good society', youth participation has the capacity to be potentially unhelpful to both individual young people, and young people as a social group.

This article is in essence, analytic in its approach and aims to synthesis existing literature into ideal types and broad schemas. It does, however, engage in some empirical analysis of New Labour's youth policies, with evidence drawn directly from policy documents themselves. The sample for this analysis is derived from Participation Works' outline of participation policy 1997-2010 (www.participationworks.org.uk, 2010).

Youth participation and justifications for its desirability

Before critically analysing why participation might be desirable , it is important to understand some of the multiple and contested definitions of participation already in use and to construct a working definition. Hart (1992: 5), in his seminal essay on youth participation, defined it perhaps too expansively as:

the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.

Since then, definitions that stress the process of participation have dominated. For example, Holdsworth (2001) suggested that:

participation is a verb, rather than a noun – it's a way of approaching our work, of looking at the ways in which society functions, of perceiving a desirable construction of "young people" within that society.

In further defining participation, a plethora of authors have offered a myriad of ideas that appear to coalesce around concepts of engagement in decision-making, taking part and active social citizenship for young people. An analysis of 14 different definitions of youth participation found that:

- Ten described it as making 'decision/s', while two noted the lesser power-sharing concept of 'expressing views' and two a more general 'taking part';
- Seven connected, or perhaps limited, these decisions to matters 'affect/ing' young people;
- Four noted that this needed to be 'active' or required 'action';
- Two associated this action with 'citizenship' and two referenced 'em/power'. (See appendix one for the 14 definitions included).

From this analysis, the working definition of youth participation for the purposes of this paper is; that youth participation is *a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them.*

Figure one: A word cloud make from 14 different definitions of participation (See Appendix One)

This definition is inextricably linked to normative claims about the merits of an active, democratic society. A concern about participation appears to reflect a deeper concern about the role of young people as 'active citizens' in society. This is underpinned by an implicit assumption that young people's active engagement in democracy is an intrinsically good thing. This assumption has been little analysed, and despite the abundance of definitions laden with value claims, theorisation around the desirability of participation and articulations of its inherent 'good' have been limited (Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2010: 3). The literature around youth participation has been dominated by explorations of how to do participation, mostly through the constructing and refining typologies, for example, from Hart's (1992) 'ladder of participation', Westhorp's (1987) 'modular vision', Treseder's (1997) 'circles', and Shier's (2001) 'stepping stone map'. While these have been useful tools for thinking about and extending how participation is done, typologies alone 'are insufficient to address tensions in children and young people's participation and assist in moving this participation forward' (Kay and Tisdall, 2009: 318). Critical analysis of the reasons for participation itself, or the why of participation, have been limited to date.

Often articulations of justifications for participation are 'thin' in scope. For example, early works often simply cited an implicit connection between the process of participation and maximising 'citizenship' for young people. This may be a historical convenience; by the time participation became a serious topic of concern for academics and practitioners in the early 1990s, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989) had guaranteed children the right to participate. Others simply suggested that it was a good idea as it helped to produce better services (see, for example, Schofield and Thoburn, 1996: 1), before addressing the more pressing question of how to 'do' participation.

Breaking with this general trend, three previous authors have given serious attention to articulating justifications for participation's desirability:

Firstly, Sinclair and Franklin (2000) offered eight justifications for participation:

1. to uphold children's rights;
2. to fulfil the State's legal obligations and responsibilities;
3. to enhance the democratic process;
4. to improve services;
5. to improve decision making;
6. to promote children's protection;
7. to build children's skills; and
8. to empower and enhance self esteem.

Secondly, Warshak (2003) offered four key justifications:

1. an *enlightenment* justification that sees young people as bearers of their own truths that only they can share through participation;
2. an *empowerment* justification which suggests that participation can fulfil children's rights and shift power down the generations;
3. a citizenship rational, that sees participation as a way of maximising young people's *citizenship*; and
4. an *outcomes for relationships* based rationality, that suggests participation reduces intergenerational conflicts.

Thirdly, analysing justifications for participation in development, Cleaver (2002) suggests there is a means / ends binary in rationales. He suggests that essentially participation is sometimes justified as a means to some other desirable outcomes, such as increased policy effect or to build skills, or as an ends, where the process itself is seen as a good thing or a right.

As useful as these three schemas are as a starting point, they are not comprehensive. Conflating categories and combining schemas produces a more comprehensive ideal-type typology that is useful for analysing contemporary policy. As ideal-types in the Weberian sense (Weber, 1949) they are designed only to capture common analytic constructs and describe a set of underlying characteristics about the 'good society'; they speak to, rather than reflect actual cases. 'Inevitably, an ideal-type cannot capture all of the complex features of any specific social phenomena' (Giulianotti, 2011: 762). This modified typology offers four ideal-type justifications for participation:

1. A '*thin' rights-based justification*.
    This is essentially a justification for participation that starts with the CRC. It suggests that young people are full, rights bearing citizens, and as such have the right to participate in decision-making that affects them. It points to the need to achieve this right to fulfil the UK's obligations as a duty bearer.

    The vision of the 'good society' invoked by this justification is of a nation-state that upholds its international legal obligations, as codified in various human rights charters.

2. *Participation as radical empowerment*.
    The second argument, which stems closely from the first, presents a critical call for young people's collective empowerment *per se*. While the CRC may provide the initial imperative for a rights-based justification, the empowerment justification moves beyond a call to simply fulfil prescriptive rights obligations, into a more progressive call for young people's participation as a radical tool for empowerment. This justification reflects the ideas captured in the *New Sociology of Childhood* (Prout and James, 1997, Qvortrup, Corsarso and Honig, 2009) – which suggests that social positioning has rendered children and young people marginalised

and oppressed. Proponents of this justification suggest that participation, as a process that requires power sharing, can shift the balance of power between the generations and redress young people's marginalisation. The implicit claim is that young people's marginalisation and oppression is a 'bad thing', so their empowerment must be a 'good thing'.

This justification invokes a particular normative view of democracy (see for example, Dryzek, 2002). It views the 'good society' as active and inclusive, as a democracy where all people participate in decision-making, especially children and young people. This vision of a good society fits nicely with the critical pedagogy (see for example, Freire, 2000) underpinning some youth work practice in the UK.

To clarify the distinction between the first and second categories is not to suggest that a rights-based argument for participation is necessarily 'thin' or unempowering but rather that it does not always, or necessarily, lead to a position where participation is advocated on the basis that there is a need to empower young people and that such empowerment is a good thing. Some rights-based arguments call only for the fulfilment of the right to participate for its own sake, and speak to a different vision of the 'good society' for young people.

3. *Participation for efficiency in policy/practice/services.*
   The efficiency argument implies that participation with young people – through some sort of 'enlightenment effect' (Mannion, 2007) – produces more informed policy or practice. This rationale suggests that young people best know real truths about youth, and that if adults can come to know these truths through participation, policy and practice can be improved. In this context, youth participation is seen as desirable as a source of knowledge for policy makers and practitioners.

   This justification speaks to a vision of young people as citizen-consumers. It invokes a neo-liberal vision of the good society, where young people's citizenship comes to be realised through the consumption of services. The relationship between the state and the market is shifting, and public services are increasingly being modernised and reformed around the discourse of the 'consumer' (Clarke et al, 2007). The role of young people in this reforming state is as a particular category of citizen-consumers. The good society then, is one where the state provides efficient, market like services, and the good citizen-consumer exercises their 'choice' (Le Grand, 2007) to improve this provision.

4. *Developmental justification.*
   The fourth argument suggests that participation is desirable because it can be used to encourage positive youth development. It suggests that by engaging in decision-making, young people can learn the social and emotional skills necessary to thrive as adults. While this rationale often

lacks a clear articulation of the specific developmental theory underpinning this claim, the development of self-esteem, confidence, negotiation skills, a sense of autonomy and a host of other 'soft' skills expected from participation, are integral to a range of developmental theories (such as Erickson (1959), Kholberg (1981), Piaget (1928) and Vygotsky (in Smidt, 2008)). While occasionally development is discussed as 'empowering', such empowerment is always individual rather than collective.

This justification is somewhat agnostic in its visions of the good society. It obfuscates any discussion about what a good society might look like and rather argues that participation is good because it is a tool to enable young people to develop into functional adults within this unexamined society. It is an individualised and conservative analysis – the idea of participation is to develop model citizens, with limited critical reflection about what sort of society they should be citizens of.

Table one: typologies of justifications for participation

Rights-based
- Sinclair and Franklin (2000)
  - to uphold children's rights
  - to fulfil the state's legal obligations and responsibilities
- Warshak (2003)
  - citizenship rationale
- Cleaver (2002)
  - 'ends'

Empowerment
- Sinclair and Franklin (2000)
  - to enhance democratic decision making
- Warshak (2003)
  - empowerment
- Cleaver (2002)
  - 'ends'

Efficiency
- Sinclair and Franklin (2000)
  - to improve services
  - to improve decision making
  - to promote protection
- Warshak (2003)
  - enlightenment rationale (depending on why you enlighten)
  - outcomes for relationships (depending on why you value relationships)
- Cleaver (2002)
  - 'means'

Developmental
- Sinclair and Franklin (2000)
  - to build children's skills and to empower and enhance self-esteem

While alternate typologies may be possible, or distinctions between categories may prove unwarranted, this typology provides a useful analytic tool for critique. This typology is not meant to be the 'final say', rather it facilitates a critical discussion about why participation may or may not be desirable.

Critiques of youth participation

Critiquing participation is necessary to understand why participation may or may not be desirable. Borrowing heavily from other disciplines three existing critiques of participation itself (rather than its methodology) can be identified.

1. *The radical critique*
The radical critique of youth participation suggests that far from empowering youth, participation is simply a new form of governmentality (Bessant, 2003), and this is implicitly a 'bad thing'. While still emergent, this is perhaps the most dominant critique and has emerged in the fields of youth studies, critical theory and international development.

This critique suggests that the act of including young people in decision-making processes is perhaps best understood as another exercise in power over them. As Cohen (1985) suggests, bringing the most 'excluded' to the table can ensure that those with the greatest reason to challenge the state's existing power structures, continue to conform. Engaging young people through 'participation', gathering their thoughts on policy X or service Y does not empower them, rather it simply placates them and increases the likelihood that young people will comply with policy X or use service Y appropriately. According to this critique, participation is best understood as a hegemonic tool for social control, or a cosmetic device designed to secure compliance with an existing power structure (Taylor, 2002, 136) and is a deeply conservative practice.

Participation is arguably not empowering because the concept of 'power' used to link participation to empowerment is inadequate. Lukes' (2005) theory of power highlights this inadequacy. As Lukes (2005) suggested, power 'over people' can exist across three dimensions, and acts in more ways than participatory practice acknowledges. Power is not simply the power of one group over another, in this case the power of older people to make young people do X or Y. This one-dimensional view of power sees it simply as a force that is negotiated between people(s). Power also exists in setting the terms of engagement for this negotiation, or what Lukes (2005) called the two-dimensional view of power. Along this second dimension, young people clearly have very little say in setting the terms of engagement for participation. As the British policy context discussed below highlights, a very adult agenda sets the terms of engagement for young people's participation and outlines why they would like them to do so. Non-participation is not a valid

option for young people; there is no 'opposite' to participation to choose. If young people reject the terms of the debate and choose not to participate, they are very much caste as deviant. This was powerfully highlighted by the *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005) policy document, which explicitly outlined consequences for young people who choose not to participate positively. In this sense, by participating in the first place, young people merely play the reshaped role the government has already set out for them; this might not be empowering.

Power however, also exists in a critical third dimension (Lukes, 2005). This third dimension for Lukes , following the works of Foucault (1964) and Gramsci (1998), highlights the ability of the powerful to shape the norms and values of the powerless. Even the shaping of young people as targets for participation – regardless of the justification – is an exercise of power. Engaging 'young people' in participation already requires the development of the construct of 'youth' in which young people probably had little say. According to this critique, participation is not empowering. It does not gift power from one generation to the other, but rather reinforces the very power relations it claims to challenge through complex, less visible manipulations.

In practice, Bessant (2003 and 2004) persuasively developed this argument in the field of youth studies. Exploring Commonwealth youth policies, she suggested that participation was largely being used as a tool to regulate young people's behaviour, and that this both manipulated and disempowered young people further. Likewise, authors in the field of development studies have highlighted the disempowerment of participation, suggested that the more participatory the inquiry, the more the outcome will mask power structures (Woodhouse, 1998).

For many critical youth practitioners, this might be especially troubling. For example in their powerful open letter, the In Defence of Youth Work Coalition (2009) criticised modern practice as too state oriented:

> *… thirty years ago Youth Work aspired to a special relationship with young people … It claimed to be 'on their side'. Three decades later Youth Work is close to abandoning this distinctive commitment. Today it accepts the State's terms. It sides with the State's agenda.*

If participation simply increases compliance with 'the State's agenda', it may not be a desirable practice for youth workers.

2. *The conservative critique*

Quite in contrast, a conservative critique of participation can be developed that suggests that perhaps the valorisation of young people's knowledge and input is at best naïve, and at worst damaging. Such a position starts with the acknowledgement that participation is underpinned by a rejection of a traditional epistemology; it requires a rejection of adult, professional knowledge

in favour of young people's 'truths'. However this critique questions whether this epistemological inversion is desirable. There are many situations where experts or adults can know best and produce the best outcomes. The many idioms around 'wisdom through experience' or 'wise with age' encapsulate this notion.

Many developmental theories support this pointing to the ways in which children and young people grow both physically and cognitively. Developmental theories that explain or typologise young people's growth inherently point to biological limitations to young people's capacities at given points in time. According to developmental theory, there are things young people can do, understand or know at different stages as they age. Young people develop different knowledge schemas at different stages (as Piaget (1928) and Vygotsky (in Smidt, 2008) highlight) and develop social behaviours as they age (see for example Bronfenbrenner, 1979 or Bowlby, 1988). Some neuropsychologists have even suggested the brain structure necessary to be rational only emerges at 25 years old (Straunch, 2004). The corollary of these arguments is that there are things young people cannot do, understand or know bfore 'their time'. Given this, privileging the knowledge of less capable young people over competent adults would be deeply perverse.

The conservative critique suggests that if young people are limited in what they can know or understand, it is not appropriate to seek their input in decisions that affect them before they are old enough (think: ask a child what they want for dinner, they reply 'sweets'). Rather it is more appropriate to seek expert knowledge to guide these decisions until such time as young people grow into rational, fully evolved adults (think: ask a dietician what a child should have for dinner, they say 'a balanced meal, probably with greens'). This position suggests that participation skews the balance between expert opinion and young people's opinion, and that this can lead to bad outcomes for young people. If the view of some developmental neuropsychologists that young people lack rational competence before the age of 25 is accepted, (Straunch, 2004), sharing any power in important decision making with young people could be a bad idea.

This critique is not often explicitly articulated (although see Purdy, 1992 for an example). However, it can be 'read off' paternalistic youth polices and practices, and takes form, in small ways, through the exercise of welfare paternalism. Young people's knowledge is deferred to parental or professional expertise on a daily basis, for 'their own good'. Young people are often coerced or forced to do things they do not want to do, for reasons they either do not understand, are not told, or outright reject; from going to school, not getting tattoos to delaying unprotected sex. Against their own wishes, young people often get an education, do not get Jedward tattoos and avoid risks of STIs. It would be a very radical youth practitioner (or big Jedward fan) to suggest that these are bad outcomes, or that privileging this parental or professional knowledge over young people in these cases was wrong. Participation according to this critique then, is not just desirable in and of itself alone.

3. *A Secular critique*

Perhaps the most marginal of the critiques, Henkel and Stirrat (2002: 174) suggest that the notion of participation bears many markers of Protestant religiosity and is therefore vulnerable to a secular critique. For Henkel and Stirrat (2002), participation is best understood as the realisation of Protestant ecclesiastical law in practice. This is evidenced by:

- the focus on reversals (think 'the meek shall inherit the earth' as a metaphor for empowering earthly marginalised groups like the young);
- the valorisation of integrating dissenting opinions through a process of co-operation (Martin Luther's legitimate dissent in the reformation sets a powerful precedent for practitioners to strive to include dissenting opinions);
- the significance placed on conversation and dialogue; and
- the duality of good and evil presented in defining processes (participation is good, non participation is evil).

Beyond this, participation has reached an almost hegemonic status for practitioners, and can be seen as a system of world ordering knowledge that is defended by the passionate faith of a community of believers, rather than critical reflection (Henkel and Stirrat, 2002).

While this critique argues that participation is a distinctly Protestant act, more broadly participation also bears hallmarks of Catholic teachings. For example, one legacy from Vatican II was a belief that 'only dialogue and negotiation can solve conflict' (Bishop Tong Hon in O'Connell, 2012).

While drawing parallels between the process of participation and the practices of the Protestant faith does not necessarily undermine the call for participation, it does highlight the possibility of unarticulated, alternative motivations. If participation is simply the acting out of deeply protestant tendencies, far from being 'good practice', participation might just be a deeply obfuscated missionary act. The appropriateness of participation for young people of alternate or no faiths is clearly questionable.

Do these critiques challenge the ideal-type justifications of why participation might be desirable?

Having outlined four rationales for participation and three critiques, the next logical step is to connect them. A shortened summary of this comparison is presented in table 2.

1. *Critiques of the rights-based justification.*

Firstly, the rights-based justification – which suggests that participation is desirable because it

fulfils young people's rights – is vulnerable to perhaps all three critiques, depending on how 'thin' the conception of human rights is. If the purpose of achieving rights is an end unto itself, then the process of participation is vulnerable to a conservative and secular critique. The conservative critique, which suggests that participation badly skews the balance between expert opinion and young people's opinion, provides a rather potent critique for a rights-based justification. Article 5 of the CRC outlines that the state has an obligation to ensure that family members, community members and professionals responsible for a child 'provide in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognised in [CRC, 1989]'. Participation – according to a conservative critique – can place too much emphasis on young people's opinions and desires before they are able to rationally offer them. It places the burden of making decisions on the still developing young person, and this may have severe consequences for the realisation of other rights. The right to an education, for example, may be undermined by a young person's choice to leave school early. A conservative critique simply suggests that participation does not necessarily produce the best outcomes for young people, and does not help them realise the rest of their rights effectively. This critique has been powerfully articulated by Purdy (1992), who at one point uses Piaget to suggest that realising children's rights might not be a good thing.

Secondly, according to a secular critique, participation for young people does not respect their right to freedom of religion as enshrined in the CRC. If participation is an obfuscated missionary act, asking non-Protestant children to participate is simply proselytising. Article 14 of the CRC protects children's right to religious freedom.

Both of these critiques however, simply point to the need to balance the right to participate against other rights enshrined in the CRC – they do not suggest that the 'participation project' should be entirely abandoned. It forces practitioners to ask the deeper question of 'human rights for what?', to devise a fuller conception of human rights, before they can decide how to balance these competing demands.

If the conception of human rights is already somewhat 'fuller'" (or embedded more in critical pedagogy than legal normativity) so that article 12 is read as a call for age-based equality, then the rights-based justification is vulnerable to a radical critique. A radical critique could suggest that a rights-based justification does not pay enough attention to the power relations inherent in the structuring of participation, so that in reality the act of participation can further marginalise young people. The right to participate for its own sake does not address fundamental power imbalances between generations.

2. *Critiques of the empowerment justification*
As alluded to above, the empowerment rationale for participation is vulnerable to a radical critique.

The empowerment justification suggests that participation is desirable because it empowers the young and views the good society as an inclusive democracy. However, there is much evidence to suggest that participation is all too easily co-opted by adult agendas (Cockburn, 2005) and that 'the rhetoric around participation is not always matched by the delivery' (Mannion, 2007: 409). Young people do not set the agenda for their participation, nor do they (as a group) choose to participate. Participation then, simply becomes another disempowering process for young people. This presents participatory practitioners with a critical paradox. If participation is intended to empower young people and develop an inclusive society, but actually functions an insidious form of social control, the participation project needs to be abandoned. The justification for embracing participation is mutually opposed to the practice.

Further, a conservative critique could suggest that the empowerment justification is misguided, as the empowerment of under-developed young people is probably not desirable in the first place. A secular critique could suggest that the desire for empowerment is simply the acting out of religious inversions, and inappropriate for non-Protestants.

3. *Critiques of the efficiency justification*
The efficiency argument, which suggests that participation is desirable because it improves services and policies and views the good society as essentially neo-liberal, is deeply challenged by a conservative critique. If the purpose of participation is to produce more efficient services or better youth outcomes, then prioritising young people's knowledge does not always make sense. If there are some forms of knowledge that older people/professionals hold, they might be able to produce more efficient services or policies than young people. Developmental theory provides a strong argument against valorising young people's knowledge over professional knowledge. This is not however, a call to abandon the participation project all together. Rather it suggests that the information gathered from participatory practices needs to be finely and carefully balanced against the knowledge of experts. This balancing and weighing, between youth and expert opinions, becomes the critical process to developing efficient services and policies; the ability of participation to almost magically make services and strategies effective is not guaranteed.

A radical critique could suggest that participation undertaken to improve policies and services is undesirable in the first place, as it is simply designed to ensure compliance. It would question the underlying assumption that young people's docile role as citizen-consumers in a neo-liberal State is inherently a good thing.

Likewise, a secular critique could hold that participation undertaken for efficient policies and services is undesirable, as it reflects the attempt to develop services/policies that are better at proselytizing.

4. *Critiques of the developmental justification*

The developmental justification simply suggests the participation is a good thing as through engaging in decision-making processes, individual young people will develop the 'soft skills' necessary to thrive as adults. Aside from the dearth of evidence linking participation to development and soft skills in practice (Kay et al, 2006), this justification is difficult to critique in theory. This is in part due to the very vague notion of 'development' that participation is meant to lead to. Youth development has been theorised in many different ways and to many different ends. Without clarity around a specific rationale, youth development is difficult to either defend or critique.

For example, a conservative critique encourages a careful think about the appropriateness of participation *for development*, asking practitioners to evaluate participation against the developmental model they adopt. For example, Piaget's (1928) theory suggests that there are different stages of learning that come at fairly reliable ages, and that functioning above a child or young person's stage is impossible. So asking an eight-year-old child, who is in their concrete operational thinking stage, to participate in a decision making activity that requires abstract thinking would be pointless. Other models, however, suggest that there are zones of proximal learning, or phases children and young people go through where their learning and development is more susceptible to being stretched in certain directions (Vygotski in Smidt, 2008). Participation in the right level of decision-making at these times could be very beneficial. A conservative critique does not reject the call to engage in participation as a tool for youth development, rather it asks practitioners to interrogate their justification and ask exactly what forms of development might legitimately be possible.

A radical critique can also challenge a developmental justification, by reframing participation as a process of subjugation. Radical critics could argue that by encouraging the development of 'State-sanctioned' soft skills, participation can be seen as a form of social control. Practitioners should therefore go one step beyond privileging development for its own sake; instead it might be helpful for practitioners to ask what they are developing young people for. If personal development encourages young people to develop traits that challenge oppression, this might be a good thing, otherwise…

A secular critique could suggest that participation to develop young people is not necessarily a good thing as it could just work to grow Protestant values in the young.

Table two: Justifications for participation against critiques.

Justification – why participation?	Critique – why not participation?
Rights-based justifications; participation because it is a young person's right. The 'good society' adheres to international legal obligations.	A conservative critique could suggest that participation is undesirable as it does not allow professionals or family members to guide young people appropriately, as is their right. Radical critiques would suggest that this justification does not pay enough attention to the power relations inherent in framing participation. Participation could be undesirable, as it is a form of social control and this does not realise young people's broader rights to freedom and equality. A secular critique could suggest that young people have the right to religious freedom, and therefore to not be subjected to participation.
Empowerment justification; participation to empower young people as a social group or as individuals. The 'good society' is an active, inclusive democracy.	A radical reading could suggest that participation could be undesirable as it can be used to subjugate young people and bring them under more social control, this would not be empowering. A conservative critique could say that empowerment of under developed young people is undesirable in the first place. A secular critique could suggest that such power inversions are an undesirable acting out of protestant ecclesiastical law.

Efficiency justifications; participation as a way to improve service delivery/policy/practice. The 'good society' is neo-liberal and citizens are consumers of state services.	A conservative critique suggests that valorising young people's knowledge as more accurate than professional knowledge is undesirable as it does not always produce the most efficient services, policies, or outcomes. A radical critique could suggest that efficient services/policies are undesirable in the first place, as they are just a more effective form of governmentality. A secular critique could suggest that efficient services are undesirable if they are produced through missionary processes.
Developmental justification; participation as a way to achieve individual, personal development. No vision of the 'good society', but inherently conservative.	A radical critique challenges the implicit assumption that helping young people develop into responsible adults is a 'good thing'. Developing social (as opposed to anti social) citizens may simply be a means of silencing dissent. A conservative critique could suggest that the nature of the development that can be expected from participation should match known models of development, otherwise it is pointless. A secular critique could suggest that participation is undesirable as it works to develop young people in Protestant ways.

Case study: the desirability of youth participation under New Labour

Having outlined some justifications and critiques of participation, I now turn to the task of applying this analysis to New Labour's youth policy, 1997 – 2010. This analysis problematises the dynamics of justifications, highlighting the political drift and co-opting of the concept that stemmed from the multiple, uncontested understandings about why participation might be desirable. Although critiques have only been sketched out below – due to the limited scope of this paper – hopefully the discussion about shifting justifications makes the need for critical analysis more evident.

Youth participation emerged as a stand-alone policy concern in England in the late 1990s (Kay et al, 2006), evidenced by the release of *Learning to Listen: Core Principle for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001). *Learning to Listen* (2001) presented participation as a new, core task for Government Departments because of the efficiencies it can generate. It boldly asserts on page one that participation is a good thing because 'the result of effective participation should be better policies and services'. And while in some of the text, this efficiency argument is couched in the language of empowerment, it is not radical; *Learning to Listen* talks of empowering young people to take control of policies and services only so they can be improved. The policy problem was very much represented as a problem with inefficient and inadequate public services.

In addition, the document does go on to *briefly* provide two additional justifications; rights-based and developmental. The ratification of the CRC was noted, and *Learning to Listen* suggests that involvement promotes citizenship and inclusion. This particularly thin interpretation of CRC rights has both limited participation to involvement and added an element of conservatism, by coupling citizenship with the more integrationist language of inclusion. Secondly, almost without expansion, the document states that involvement promotes 'personal and social education and development' (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001: 6).[1]

This prioritisation of efficiency may reflect the early meteoric rise of 'evidence based practice' as a dominant New Labour ideology (Alcock, 2008), or the mantra of 'what matters is what works'. Participation was presented as an ideologically neutral way of making policy and services work, however as the conservative critique would suggest – it is not necessarily self-evident that participation would improve public service provision.

Further New Labour youth policies highlight a 'pick and mix' approach to justifications, demonstrating shifting political priorities and policy problematisations. Despite being produced only 22 months later, *Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES, 2003) prioritises different justifications for participation. ECM continues using both the efficiency argument and the rights-based argument, albeit in a different order, but omits the developmental argument. ECM states that involving

children and young people in the development of better services is firstly 'important in its own right' (DfES, 2003, para 5.47) and secondly because it creates bottom up pressure for positive reforms. The problem was firstly identified as a lack of realisation of young people's rights, and secondly as a problem with service provision. Again, there is the capacity for a strong conservative critique, it is not self-evident that participation improves services, nor that the realisation of young people's right to participate is a good thing.

The subsequent *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005) green paper and the White Paper, *Youth Matters: the Next Steps* (DfES, 2006) maintained the dual justification presented in ECM. Notably though, *Youth Matters* inverts the rights-citizenship nexus; the right to participate became the duty to be a citizen. For example, on page one, *Youth Matters* states that opportunities for involvement should be denied to young people who behave anti-socially (DfES, 2005: 1). That is, unless young people are already acting in a way that demonstrates their integration into mainstream society, they should not be able to exercise their right to participate. This logic is vulnerable to a radical critique; is it really desirable for policy or practice to further increase the State's control over already marginalised young people? Is integration into a society that oppresses a good thing?

Secondly, and secondarily, *Youth Matters* argued that participation was a key way of ensuring that youth services meet local needs efficiently. Again, the conservative critique would suggest this logic was questionable.

A year later, *Aiming High for Young People* (DCSF, 2007), outlined a strategy to reform 'leisure' for young people and provide opportunities for positive activities. Given this focus, the document develops a dual vision of participation. Firstly, it suggests that participation can occur through engagement in the positive activities (such as taking part in a poetry slam) and secondly, it provides for participation as the process of planning or delivering activities themselves (such as running or funding the slam). As discussed below, it remains debateable if the first type of participation is 'participation' at all. This split understanding of participation – as 'decision-making' and 'doing stuff' – was also present in the accompanying *Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families* (DfES, 2007a).

Aiming High presents two justifications for the dual vision of participation; personal development and efficiency. *Aiming High* (DCSF, 2007:13) states that 'participation in positive activities, and support and guidance from trusted professionals and adults, plays an important role in enabling children to gain (soft) skills' . This marks a return to a developmental justification for participation, which had been absent in *ECM* and *Youth Matters*, and again represents the problem as a problem with young people themselves – their under-development in this case. A radical critique offers an alternative perspective on this logic. It might suggest that the need for young people to develop the social and emotional skills to assimilate into mainstream society is perhaps undesirable in the first place.

Aiming High also utilises an efficiency justification: 'when young people have the opportunity to influence services they are more likely to find them attractive and to access and benefit from them' (DCSF, 2007:14). Tellingly, this justification is erroneously labelled 'empowerment' in the document, despite lacking any radical potential. Regardless, accompanying legislation did give young people some control over Local Authority budgets for youth services. Despite the drastic depoliticisation of participation, and even if this was done for efficiency reasons, it is nevertheless possible that *Aiming High* was in parts genuinely empowering.

Care Matters: time for change (DfES, 2007b) also used the justifications present in *Aiming High* (DCSF 2007) and is vulnerable to the same criticisms.

Labour's last youth policy, *Young People Leading Change* (DCSF, 2008), put forward a slightly different vision of youth participation, aimed at stretching the leadership capacities of already empowered young people. These empowered young people were to take active leadership roles in the community 'for the benefit of wider society' (DCSF, 2008:16). While this may have been Labour's first focus on empowered young people, their participation was still seen as a means to a more instrumental end. The policy problem was very much represented as a problem with young people, in this case empowered young people not taking leadership roles. A radical critique could suggest that it would be *particularly* undesirable for empowered young people to participate in State-sanctioned leadership roles, as it would only serve to bring the most empowered young people under the State's control.

Table three: a summary of definitions of participation and its justifications in recent policy documents.

Policy document	'Vision' of participation for young people	Justifications engaged
Learning the Listen: Core Principle for the Involvement of Children and Young People (2001)	Being involved in planning and delivering services	Rights-based Efficiency Personal development
Every Child Matters (2003)	Being involved in planning and delivering (broadly) protective services	Rights-based Efficiency

Youth Matters (2005 and 2006)	Taking up positive opportunities and planning and delivery	Rights-based, but very focused on responsibilities Efficiency
Aiming High for Young People (2007)	Taking part in and planning/delivering organised activities	Personal development Efficiency
Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families (2007)	Being involved in planning and delivering children's services	Personal development Efficiency
Care Matters: time for change (2007)	Being involved in shaping services for young people in care	Efficiency Personal development
Young People Leading Change (2008)	Empowered young people leading projects to improve the community	Efficiency Some personal development

Overall, Labour's 1997 – 2010 administration was marked by two key shifts in justifying participation. Firstly, there was gradual hollowing out of any radical potential that participation may have offered, reflecting the broader shift in focus from rights to responsibilities that was occurring at the time (Alcock, 2008). Increasingly under New Labour, the justifications presented for 'doing participation' shifted towards framing the policy problem as young people *themselves*. For example, what had emerged as a call to engage young people in decision making because it was their political right (as in *Learning to Listen*, 2001) and because real, positive reforms could be achieved through this, gradually dissolved into being important because it 'enable(ed) children to gains (soft) skills' needed for their future (DCSF, 2007:13). The policy problem shifted from a problem of the State (inefficient, inadequate services and a lack of realising rights) to a problem with young people themselves (their under-development). The reasons for 'doing participation' shifted from potentially radical to ameliorative, and this has real consequences for the types of participation – and indeed citizenship – open to young people.

Secondly, following from this, presenting young people as the policy problem limited the scope of their decision making to increasingly depoliticised domains. The political spheres within which young people's participation – and citizenship – was called for noticeably narrowed between 1997 and 2010. Policy debates shifted from engaging young people in decisions about important policies and services, as the problems were with the State (see for example *Every Child Matters*, 2003) to getting young people to 'do stuff' because the policy problem was now young people themselves

(see for example *Young People Leading Change*, 2008). The types of participation outlined in *Aiming High* (DCSF, 2007) for example, could hardly be described as politically powerful nor as offering radical opportunity for youth liberation. While there is no denying that young people can engage in individual decision-making processes through taking part in activities, such as choosing a poem to slam, this vision is highly depoliticised and provides limited scope for empowerment. This makes sense if young people had become the policy problem; why would right-minded policy makers and politicans share more power with problematic and under-developed young people? Returning to the earlier definition of youth participation as *a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about, issues that affect them*, it is debateable if 'participation' within these narrower spheres is participation at all.

Analysing justifications renders visible the policy framing of the 'problem' behind the call for participation. Behind these shifts – from empowerment to control and from politics to entertainment – lies an implicit articulation of the good society. The 'good society' undergirding the political drift outlined above is a society where young people are, once again, less powerful. It is a society where problematic and under-developed young people are kept active and developed through positive activities, so that they may become good citizens. They are denizens of today, citizens of tomorrow. Without critiquing the justifications presented for youth participation and analysing why it has been presented as a good thing, it can be difficult to understand the possible consequences of 'doing participation' with young people today.

Conclusion

The history of New Labour's participation policies highlights the need to unpack implicit assumptions about the merits of participation. A lack of clarity about why we engage in youth participation may present a deep challenge to the capacity of policy makers and practitioners to better 'the lot' of the young. It points to a fundamental question for policy makers and practitioners; why are you doing participation, and is whatever it is that you are doing, what you *mean* to be doing?

Four main justifications for participation are often engaged; an argument that it fulfils young people's rights; that it empowers youth; that it makes policies and services efficient; and that it helps develop young people. These justifications are however, vulnerable to a range of criticism. Criticisms can be radical and suggest that participation is simply an act of control conservative in nature and suggest that is it simply not a wise idea, or secular and suggest that it is a modern, missionary act. This points to a need for deeper critical reflection about why we 'do' participation. Why fulfil rights? Why empower? Why develop young people? Effective services for what? Critical reflection around these deeper questions –reflecting on your normative judgements about

what are good things for young people and what a good society looks like in the first place – is perhaps the only way to ensure that youth participation can better the lot of the young.

Note

1. The priorities of this tripartite justification appear to have filtered across into other policy documents, with these justifications repeated in later research into youth organisations in a similar manner (Kirby et al, 2003 pp. 7).

References

Alcock, P. (2008) *Social Policy in Britain*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bessant, J. (2003) 'Youth Participation: A New Mode of Government' *Policy Studies 24* (2/3), pp. 87 – 100.

Bessant , J. (2004) 'Mixed Messages: Youth Participation and Democratic Practice', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 39 (2) pp. 887-404.

Bessant, J. (2009) 'The Politics of Scary Youth: Policy Making and Prejudice', *Journal of Youth Work* 1, pp. 23-45.

Bowlby, J. (1988) *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*, London: Routledge.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press

Cabinet Office (2011) *'National Citizenship Service'* (online). http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/national-citizen-service-introduced (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Cameron, D. (2011) 'Human Rights: In My Sights', *The Express* (online) http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/266219 (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Chambers, R. (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, London: Longman Publishing.

Charlton, J. (2000) *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability, Oppression and Empowerment*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Children and Young People's Unit 2001, *Learning the Listen: Core Principle for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (online) https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/_arc_AbouttheDepartment/Page9/CYPUCP1 (accessed 1 Feb 2012).

Clark, A. and Percy-Smith, B. (2006) 'Beyond Consultation: Participatory Practices in Everyday Spaces', Children, *Youth and Environments* 16(2) pp. 1-9.

Clarke, J., Newman, J., Smith, N., Vidler, E., Westmarland, L. (2007) *Creating Citizen-Consumers: Changing Publics and Changing Public Services*, London: Sage.

Cleaver, F. (2002) 'Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to

Development' in Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (eds) (2002) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books pp. 36-45.

Cockburn, T. (2005) 'Children's Participation in Social Policy: Inclusion, Chimera or Authenticity?' *Social Policy and Society* 4(2) pp. 109-119.

Cohen, S. (1985) *Visions of Social Control*, Cambridge: The Polity Press

Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (eds) (2002) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books.

Davis, J. and Hill, M. (2006) 'Introduction' in Kay, E., Tisdall, M, Davis. J., Hill, M. and Prout, A. 2006 *Children, Young People and Social Inclusion: Participation for what?* Bristol: The Policy Press pp. 1-22.

Department for Children Schools and Families (2007) *Aiming High for Young People* (online) https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/PU214 (accessed 1 Feb 2012).

Department for Children Schools and Families (2008) *Young People Leading Change* (online) https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Leading-Change.pdf (accessed 1 Feb 2012)

Department for Children Schools and Families (2010) *'Participation: Frequently Asked Questions'* (online) http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/participation/faq/participationfaq/ (accessed 23 Dec 2010).

Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Every Child Matters* (online) http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/EveryChildMatters.pdf (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Youth Matters: Green Paper* (online) https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/Cm6629 (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Youth Matters: Next Steps* (online) http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Youth%20Matters%20Next%20Steps.pdf (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Department for Education and Skills (2007a) *Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families* https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/PU188.pdf (accessed 1 Feb 2012).

Department for Education and Skills (2007b) *Care Matters: time for change* (online) http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm71/7137/7137.pdf (accessed 1 Feb 2012).

Department of Health (2002) *Listening, Hearing and Responding: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People*. (online) http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008816 (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Dryzek, J. (2002) *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eriksun, E. (1959) *Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers*, London: International University Press.

Foucault, M. (1964) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in an Age of Reason*, London: Routledge.

Freire, P. 2000 Pedagogy of the Oppressed, London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Giulianotti, R. (2011) 'The Sport Development and Peace Sector: A Model of Four Social Policy Domains', *Journal of Social Policy* 40(4), pp. 757-776.

Gramsci, A. (1998) *Selections From the Prison Notebook*, New York: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hart, R. (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, Florence: Unicef Innocenti.

Henkel, H. and Stirrat, R. (2002) 'Participation as Spiritual Duty: Empowerment as Secular Subjection' in Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (eds) 2002 *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books pp. 168 – 185.

Holdsworth, R. (2001) *'Youth Participation'* [Unpublished paper.] Charting the Course: ACT and SE NSW Regional Youth Services conference, Bateman's Bay, October.

Illich, I. (1977) *Disabling Professions*, Marion Boyars, London.

In Defence of Youth Work Coalition (2009) *Open Letter* (online) http://indefenceofyouthwork. wordpress.com/2009/03/11/the-open-letter-in-defence-of-youth-work/ (accessed 9 July 2010).

James, A. and James A. (2004) *Construction Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kay, E. and Tisdall, M. (2009) 'Governance and Participation' in N. Thomas, and B, Percy-Smith. (eds) *A Handbook of Children's Participation: perspectives from Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge pp. 318 – 29.

Kay, E., Tisdall, M, Davis. J., Hill, M. and Prout, A. (2006) *Children, Young People and Social Inclusion: Participation for what?,* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K. and Sinclair, R. (2003) *Building a Culture of Participation*, London: DES.

Kohlberg, L. (1981) Essays on Moral Development, Vol. I: *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Lee, N. (2001) *Childhood and Society: Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Le Grand, J. (2007) *The Other Invisible Hand: Delivering Public Services through Choice and Competition*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Lukes, S. (2005) *Power: A Radical view: Second Edition*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

McCreary Centre Society 2002 *'Youth Engagement'* (online) http://www.mcs.bc.ca/youth_ engagement (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Mannion, G. (2007) 'Going Spatial, Going Relational: Why 'listening to children' and children's participation needs reframing', *Discourse*, 28 (3) pp. 405 – 420.

Midleton, E. (2006) 'Youth Participation in the UK: Bureaucratic Disaster or Triumph of Child Rights?' *Children, Youth and Environments* 16 (2) pp. 180 – 190.

National Commission on Resources for Youth. (1975) *Youth Participation: A Concept Paper. A Report of the National Commission on Resources for Youth to the Department of Health,*

Education and Welfare, Office of Youth Development. (Online) http://sparkaction.org/node/23715 (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Noam, G. (2002)'The Meaning of Youth Participation', *New Direction for Youth Development* 96 pp. 1 – 4.

O'Connell, G. (2012) *'The Seventh Chinese Cardinal in the History of the Church: John Tong Hon' Vatican Insider* (online) http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/world-news/detail/articolo/cina-china-church-chiesa-iglesia-vescovo-bishop-obispo-11901/ (accessed 3 Feb 2012).

O'Donoghue, J., Kirchner, B. and McLaughlin, M. (2002) 'Introduction: Moving Youth Participation Forward', *New Directions for Youth Development* 96: pp. 15-26.

Piaget, J. (1928) (2001) *Judgment and Reasoning in the Child*, London: Routledge.

Prout, A. and James, A. (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, London: Falmer Press.

Purdy, L. (1992) *In Their Best Interest? The Case Against Equal Rights for Children*, London: Cornell University Press.

Qvortrup, J., Corsaro, M., Honig, S. (2009) *A Handbook of Childhood Studies*, Palgrave, London.

Schofield, G. and Thoburn, J. (1996) *Child Protection: The Voices of the Child in Decision Making*, London: IPPR.

Shier, M. (2001) 'Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations', *Children and Society* 18(2) pp. 107-117.

Sinclair, R. and Franklin, A. (2000) 'Quality Protects Research Briefing 3: *Young People's Participation' Research in Practice: Making Research Count DoH*, (online) available at www.makingresearchcount.org.uk (accessed 15 Dec 2010).

Smidt, S. (2008) *Introducing Vygotsky*, London: Routledge

Staunch, B. (2004) *The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries About the Teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids*, New York: Anchor books.

Taylor, H. (2002) 'Insights into Participation from Critical Management and Labour Process Perspectives' in B, Cooke, and U. Kothari, (eds) 2002. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books pp.122-139

Thomas, N. and Percy-Smith, B. (2010) *A Handbook of Children's Participation: perspectives from Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge.

Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering Children and Young People*, London: Children's Rights Office/Save the Children.

Warshak, R. (2003) 'Payoffs and Pitfalls of Listening to Children', *Family Relations* 52 (4) pp. 373-384.

Weber, M. (1949) *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan.

Westhorp, G. (1987) *Planning for Youth Participation: A Resource Kit*, Adelaide: Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia.

Wikipedia (2009) *'Youth Participation'* available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_participation (accessed 1 Nov 2011).

Woodhouse, P. (1998) 'Thinking with People and Organisations: People as Informants' in A, Thomas, J. Chataway, M. Wuyts, (eds) *Finding Out Fast: Investigative Skills for Policy and Development*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (online) http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm (accessed 12 Dec 2011).

Appendix 1:

The definitions or articulations of participation used to generate the working definition

'the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.' – Hart ,1992

'participation is a verb, rather than a noun – it's a way of approaching our work, of looking at the ways in which society functions, of perceiving a desirable construction of 'young people' within that society.' – Holdsworth, 2001

'Youth participation is about giving children and young people (usually up to the age of 18) the opportunity to express their views on aspects of life that affect them.' – Midleton, 2006

'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.' – CRC, 1989

'Participation is taking part… most closely linked with decision making.' – Davis and Hill, 2006

'Children's participation in decisions that affect them as individuals requires a child-centred approach. This implies taking account of their wishes and feelings and including the child's perspective in all matters. This is ongoing and requires continuous dialogue but may also be exercised around procedures such as assessment, care planning and reviews, child protection conferences, care or adoption proceedings, Family Group Conferences and complaints.' – Sinclair and Franklin, 2000

'Ultimately, youth participation is not only about creativity and belief in youth. It is also about power. How much decision-making are we willing to let grow out of the voicing of concerns?' – Noam, 2002

'… a constellation of activities that empower adolescents to take part in and influence decision

making that affects their lives and to take action on issues they care about.' – O'Donoghue, Kirchner and McLaughlin, 2002

'Simply defined, participation is the act of taking part in or 'becoming actively involved' or 'sharing' in (Collins English Dictionary 1991), but the reality of young children's participation is more complex. As Kirby and colleagues point out, participation is a multi-layered concept that may involve young people's active involvement in decision-making at different levels, from the everyday to a specific event (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin and Sinclair 2003). Participation is also fundamental to the practice of active citizenship.' – Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2010

'Participation should go beyond consultation and ensure that children and young people initiate action and make decisions in partnership with adults, for example, making decisions about their care and treatment or day to day decisions about their lives.' – Department of Health, 2002

'Asking children and young people what works, what doesn't work and what could work better; and involving them in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, on an ongoing basis.' – DCSF, 2010

'Youth participation is the active engagement of young people throughout their communities. It is often used as a short-hand for youth participation in many forms, including decision-making, sports, schools and any activity where young people are not historically engaged.' – Wikipedia, 2009

'Youth participation is the involving of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others— i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. Other desirable features of youth participation are provision for critical reflection on the participatory activity and the opportunity for group effort toward a common goal.' – National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1975

'Meaningful youth participation involves recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels.' – McCreary Centre Society, 2002

◀ **Back to Contents Page**