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CREATIVITY CULTURE
& EDUCATION

Consulting young people:
a literature review
2nd Edition

Sara Bragg

Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) Literature Reviews

These reports have been commissioned to introduce readers to the main principles, theories, research and debates in the field. They aim to introduce the major themes and writing pertaining to each area of study and to outline key trends and arguments.

About the author

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About the Creativity, Culture and Education Literature Review Series

Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) is a national charity with a vision for all children, regardless of their background, to experience and access the diverse range of cultural activities in England because these opportunities can enhance their aspirations, achievements and skills. We promote the value and impact of creative learning and cultural opportunities through our strong evidence base and policy analysis, stimulating debate among policy makers and opinion formers, and delivering front line, high quality programmes.

Through our research and evaluation programme, we promote a systemic approach to creative and cultural initiatives and one which builds on the excellent practice which already exists to make opportunity consistent, to ensure that all children and young people are included and to place quality at the core of any creative or cultural experience.

CCE's work includes:

- **Creative Partnerships** - England's flagship creative learning programme fosters long-term partnerships between schools and creative professionals to inspire, open minds and harness the potential of creative learning. The programme has worked with just under 1 million children, and over 90,000 teachers in more than 8,000 projects in England. www.creative-partnerships.com
- **Find Your Talent** - how we can help children and young people to access arts and culture: www.findyourtalent.org

Fostering creativity is fundamentally important because creativity brings with it the ability to question, make connections, innovate, problem solve, communicate, collaborate and to reflect critically. These are all skills demanded by contemporary employers and will be vital for young people to play their part in a rapidly changing world.

Our programmes can have maximum impact if teachers, parents, children, young people and practitioners themselves learn from the experience and activities delivered through the programmes. For this reason, one of the most significant legacies will be the product of our research and evaluation and how that is effectively communicated to stakeholders.

However, because Creativity, Culture and Education works by creating partnerships drawn from the widest fields of endeavour, the different stakeholders recognise that there is often a 'knowledge gap' between reflection, analysis, and learning. In addition, the wide focus of approach – which is fundamental to the nature of creativity – means that people are often working at the limit of their disciplines.

For these reasons we have commissioned a series of literature reviews exploring the key issues in current literature and summarising the history and latest developments in each subject. Each review is written by an experienced and respected author in their field. They aim to be accessible, clearly referenced and to act as 'stepping-stone' resources to underpin the research conducted by and for Creativity, Culture and Education.

Foreword

This literature review highlights why young learners should be listened to, and explains how to go about it to generate genuine dialogue and collaboration. It was originally published three years ago, by the Creative Partnerships team at Arts Council England. The programme and team have since been transferred to a new organisation, Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) and, the report is now being republished in the new CCE format and circulated to new partners and participants in its programmes. In this second edition, Sara Bragg has taken the opportunity to update some of the details and references from the first edition including adding examples from her more recent research with the Open University into youth voice work in Creative Partnerships (Bragg, Manchester and Faulkner, 2009).

This review surveys the literature analysing how and why young people can or should be consulted. It is especially relevant to the broader ambitions of CCE because consulting young people and encouraging their participation is important to our work. We need to hear young people's views about what we do, and we need to find ways to draw on their creativity and insights, to maintain our programmes' dynamism and sustainability. However, this will not just happen – it needs to be thought about and structured carefully to ensure that we listen to a range of voices, not just the loudest, or those that fit our own existing agendas.

The methods and methodologies for consulting with, and gathering the views of, young people are surveyed in this report. Its main message is that consulting young people is not a simple or straightforward process and that we need to consider carefully how best to learn about and interpret their views and opinions.

We hope that the report will be useful for those interested in consulting young people. Above all, we believe this report highlights some of the reasons why young learners should be listened to, and explains how to go about it in a way that unleashes their creativity and generates genuine dialogue and collaboration.

David Parker, Creativity, Culture and Education
Julian Sefton-Green

This review introduces readers to the field of consultation work with young people … and indicates some relevant references, broad schools of thought, major conceptual issues and practical approaches, as a guide for those who are interested in this area.

Executive Summary

This review introduces readers to the field of consultation work with young people. It is not a comprehensive review of all published literature (as is, for instance, the review by Coad and Lewis, 2004), but it indicates some relevant references, broad schools of thought, major conceptual issues and practical approaches, as a guide for those who are interested in this area.

The first section discusses why the views of young people should be sought, listened to and acted upon. It looks at a number of factors that make this an increasingly commonsense step to take. These include:

1. legal models, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

2. Government policy agendas, such as Every Child Matters;

3. the recent emphasis on citizenship and on 'learner voice';

4. theoretical frameworks that have argued for a view of children as 'social actors';

5. commercial drivers, such as children's disposable income and influence over family spending in an increasingly consumer-dominated society; and

6. evidence of the benefits of consultation to young people themselves.

In Section 2, the review discusses outcomes and the important message that young people need to feel that being consulted has had some impact and that they have been listened to. These are issues that must be clarified before embarking on any consultation with young people.

Section 3 looks at the range of methods and methodologies available to researchers investigating the perspectives and opinions of young people, and how the choice of approach affects the data collected and the results obtained. There is increasing attention being given to inviting young people themselves to participate in research, as researchers or consultants and section 3.2 briefly explores this terrain. More 'traditional' social sciences are covered by

• Section 3.4 – quantitative methods such as surveys.

• Section 3.5 – qualitative approaches: group and individual interviews; ethnography and observation.

- Section 3.6 – established forms of representation such as Youth Councils, and more recent versions of these, such as consultation events and deliberative approaches.

More recently a number of innovative methods have evolved that aim to access different aspects of young people's experience and to allow views to be expressed in a range of forms. Section 3.7 therefore discusses creative and non-verbal forms such as photography and video, art-based approaches including drawing, collage, sculpture, and audio approaches; guided tours; role-play and drama. Section 3.8 looks at how new media are being used to develop online approaches to consultation, potentially over wide geographic areas.

Section 4 is devoted to research with younger children, defined as aged 11 and below, and it also looks at work with under-5s.

Section 5 considers ethical issues and the appendix contains a checklist of key questions about ethical issues.

Finally, a bibliography that indicates particularly useful texts is given at the end, although references to website resources are given within relevant sections.

Working definitions of terms:

In this review, I use the term 'young people' or sometimes 'children and young people' to refer to all those aged under 18. This is the age range covered both by most of the writing reviewed here, and by the work of Creative Partnerships in schools. Legally, the term 'child' in the UK refers to those under 18 (Masson, 2004). However, this ignores the considerable differences between, for instance, infants and teenagers, as well as within similar age groups, and indeed how the meanings of age vary across cultures. Whilst it may be helpful to think in terms of 'early childhood' (0-5), 'middle childhood' (6-11) and 'young people' for those aged 12 and above, nonetheless, the broad term 'young people' carries the associations of agency and partnership that are desired in this context.

We should also distinguish between participation and consultation, research and evaluation, and in the case of evaluation, between formative or summative evaluation. Although the methods used in each case are often similar, their aims may differ considerably; it is assumed that readers of this review will formulate such aims for themselves.

Consultation involves seeking views, often about an existing programme, normally at the initiative of decision-makers; it can be more or less collaborative and participatory. Participation is often held to be more profound in its reach, engaging early on with a range of stakeholders, or those affected by an issue, project or proposal, in order to generate ideas, deepen debate, come up with solutions, and influence decision-making. Voluntary and public sector organisations have been particularly instrumental in pushing forward participatory consultation methods, and there is a history of participatory development in the third world that also includes young people (Ackerman et al., 2003). If it is to be meaningful to young people and effective in influencing change, participation needs to go beyond one-off or isolated programmes, and to be embedded in relationships and ways of working – thereby developing what is referred to as a culture of participation (Kirby et al., 2003). Despite the positive connotations of the term, it should be noted that a growing body of work challenges how far participation is – in theory or in practice - as radical, benign or empowering as it claims to be, some even describing it as a 'new tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the content, characteristics, and outcomes of a programme to make judgements about it, improve its effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future activities (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). There are debates about what makes 'evaluation' different from other 'research', but the distinctive purpose of evaluation is the aim of improving practice. Kirby and Bryson observe that formative evaluations feed into the development of a project during its lifetime; summative evaluations judge a programme's overall impact or effectiveness at its end. Pilot projects may be best evaluated by formative self-evaluations; summative evaluations should be carried out for established and promising projects (ibid).

Research – most loosely defined as 'finding things out' – may have a range of purposes: much of the academic research discussed here professes to be

concerned with improving young people's lives within a framework of social justice. Market research, by contrast, has generally been represented as seeking to enhance profitability, a goal that generally serves to justify its exclusion from consideration in academic contexts. It is included here in part because it forms such a substantial part of the investigative machinery surrounding young people; because methods are often shared across different sectors; because of the increasing use of similar approaches within the public sector for 'accountability' to stakeholders; and finally because all these factors may encourage more critical scrutiny of the claims made by other forms of research, and indeed participation and consultation.

The new social studies of childhood have challenged the tendency to consider children either in relation to larger entities … (such as families, schools, nations), or as 'becomings' (…of interest primarily because of who and what they will become…). Instead, new studies have argued for a view of children as 'beings', fully-formed now, whose present ideas, approaches to life, choices and relationships are of interest in their own right.

1 **Why consult young people?**

At the start of the twenty-first century, the idea that young people should have a say about many local and national policies, services and issues has become increasingly accepted, embedded in legislation and policy guidance, and facilitated in practice by the provision of training courses, resources and case studies. We can distinguish different places in which young people's views are sought: local and national government, public and voluntary sectors, in relation to education, health, family and social services, leisure, the arts and culture, family law, urban or area regeneration, and the environment; international development; academic research; and not least, the private sector, such as commercial and media companies aiming at a youth market.

However, there are questions about the aims and intentions of work in these different sectors; questions about which subjects or issues young people should be consulted on (e.g. those deemed relevant only to youth or relevant to the wider community), and questions about how consultation should be carried out, why, and with what consequences. Research has already identified a gap between rhetoric and practice in this area (Prout, 2001). Young people can feel sceptical of participative and consultative measures, especially if nothing happens, or appears to happen, as a result.

1.1 Motivators and drivers behind consulting young people

There are various legal, political, academic, economic and social reasons behind this new interest in accessing and understanding children's perspectives on their own lives, each of which leads to differing frameworks for the approach to consultation. In practice, however, most people's motivations will involve a mix of many or all of them.

1.1.1 Legal models and frameworks

The main legal influence has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted by the UN in 1989 and the UK in 1991. It brings together the familiar view of children as in need of protection and provision (as objects of concern), with a different view, of children as individuals in their own right, as 'social actors', who can form and express

opinions, participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions. Article 12 calls for State parties to

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.

Whilst it is not legally enforceable, it is proving a rallying point and lever for children's rights advocates.

A UN Committee reviews progress every five years. In 2009 it recommended (amongst other things) improvements in how the UK enables young people to 'participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives'. In response the UK governments produced a document *Working Together, Achieving More* – a youth-friendly version of which can be viewed here http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk/index/uncrc-working-together.htm

Justifications for consulting young people made with reference to the UNCRC will generally stress children's intrinsic rights as autonomous individuals deserving of equality, choice, respect and consideration, rather than meeting other goals.

Individuals and organisations associated with this framework in the UK include, amongst others:

- Priscilla Alderson (2000b)
- Roger Hart (1992)
- Mary John (1996, 2003)
- Perpetua Kirby (Kirby et al., 2003)
- Gerison Lansdown (1995)
- Ginny Morrow (1999)
- Audrey Osler (Osler and Starkey, 1998)
- Carolyne Willow (2002)
- The authors collected in The New Handbook of Children's Rights: Comparative Policy and Practice (Franklin, 2001)

- The Children's Rights Alliance for England[1] - promotes children's rights and publishes an annual review on the state of children's rights in England
- Arch (Action on Rights for Children)[2] - an internet-based organisation focusing on children's civil rights
- CRIN (Child Rights Information Network)[3] - a global networking organisation that disseminates information about and supports the implementation of the UNCRC
- Article 12 Scotland[4] - a young-person led organization promoting participation and rights
- The Children's Legal Centre[5] - focuses on law and policy and publishes a journal, *ChildRight*.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the UNCRC has been criticized both in terms of the difficulty of applying it in specific local contexts, and for a Western cultural bias in its view of the child as an individual rather than as a member of a community or family: see the useful discussion by Burr and Montgomery (2003).

1.1.2 UK politics and policy frameworks

There have also been political initiatives in the UK to represent children's views and to safeguard their interests, such as:

- The Children's Act of 1989, implemented in 1991, made it a legal requirement that young people are consulted and involved in the process of decision-making on matters that affect them, and that professionals whose work has an impact on the lives of children, consider how this is carried out (Davie, Upton and Varma, 1996).
- In 2003, the Government published a Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003), setting out its approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19, and subsequently underpinned

[1] www.crae.org.uk
[2] www.archrights.org.uk
[3] www.crin.org
[4] www.article12.org
[5] www.childrenslegalcentre.com

legislatively by the Children Act 2004. ECM calls for children to have a say in developing policies that affect them, recognises the importance of children having a voice and expresses a new seriousness in approaches to children. This has led to particular interest in consulting young people by local authorities and other public sector agencies: for instance, the Children's Fund, aimed at children aged 5-13 at risk of social exclusion, carries a requirement that its multi-professional partnerships actively ensure that children's views influence the shape, delivery and subsequent evaluation of services (Coad and Lewis, 2004).

- The New Labour Government created the Children and Young Peoples' Unit (CYPU) in 2000 and announced the involvement of children and young people as a core principle across Government Departments – which was reflected in publication titles such as *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children & Young People* (CYPU 2001), *Working Together: giving children and young people a say* (CYPU 2003), *Listening, Hearing and Responding* (Department of Heath 2002).

- A number of Children's Commissioners have been appointed: for London (2000), Wales (2001), Northern Ireland (2003), Scotland (2004) and for England (2005)[6].

- The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) school inspection framework now requires inspectors and schools systematically to seek the views of young people. The Education Act 2002 places a duty on schools and Local Authorities to consult pupils about decisions affecting them, in accordance with the Secretary of State's guidance.

- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have been required to conduct annual audits since their formation in 1998, including the requirement to gather children and young people's preferences for childcare and other support services (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003).

Some have argued that a key outcome of greater consultation is to change adults' perceptions of young people's capabilities, so that they become more willing to enter into dialogue with them. Craig, for instance, suggests that children have proved 'more robust, articulate and willing to be heard' than adults had assumed, and that this serves to legitimate their further involvement (Craig, 2003). Other advocates of consultative approaches in policy contexts often emphasise the self-interest involved, arguing that

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[6] www.11million.org.uk

young people possess implicit knowledge, experience, even 'expertise', that if tapped can lead to better decisions and to improved institutions, services or projects. Thus, for instance, it is claimed that consultation:

- will make services more appropriate for young people's needs
- will ensure sustainability because young people will be more committed to and enthusiastic about these services
- can help raise the profile of projects or initiatives and give them an identity, so that more young people will be encouraged to use them
- will improve policy by making it more sensitive, helping policy- makers to understand young people's lives and perspectives
- will, in some schools, help overcome disaffection and enhance school improvement
- will lessen young people's resistance, if they feel their views are being taken into account.

One problem here is that these aims may not match young people's perceptions of why they are involved, which may have more to do with changing systems than themselves: they might, for instance, be surprised by the 2003 claim made by the then Education Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, that 'giving children and young people a say in decisions that affect them will impact positively on standards, behaviour and inclusion' (CYPU 2003).

As Kirby and Bryson (2002) point out, the assumption in the participation literature that services will be better if they involve young people in planning, has rarely been investigated. Indeed, it can sometimes be hard to evaluate because of the extent to which it has become an item of faith. Others have also pointed to the potential manipulation in this model – that it serves to incorporate young people, possibly blunting more critical voices about the fundamental purposes of the services or institutions under consideration (Hadfield and Haw, 2001).

Resources

- 'Hear by Right', produced by The National Youth Agency is a set of standards for the active involvement of children and young people in decision making, which has been adopted by many local authorities and other organisations: http://hbr.nya.org.uk/.

- Participation Works is a consortium of national children and young people's agencies that offers resources and training to help organisations involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services: www.participationworks.org.uk

1.1.3 The citizenship agenda and 'learner voice'

The currency of citizenship as a political issue, and statements by the Government about 'stakeholder democracy' have also strengthened calls for increased involvement of young people as members of communities (McNeish and Newman, 2002). Citizenship education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) put the emphasis on young people developing skills of participation in their schools and wider communities, rather than passively acquiring information *about* citizenship, and may be helping to revitalise School and Youth Councils, Youth Parliaments linked to local authorities, and other forums.

Many people argue that consulting young people, and more specifically involving them in decision-making, is not only about recognising their rights, but also about developing skills of cooperation which are necessary in order to achieve a more cohesive and democratic society (e.g. Osler, 2000). It is also hoped that they will be more likely to get involved in democratic institutions when they are older and that 'practising' participation in community affairs and political events can foster a culture in which people take their citizenship rights and responsibilities seriously. In a 'radical' version, consulting young people in sites such as schools will model a greater democracy than currently exists, and by prefiguring it, bring it into existence. In a more pragmatic model, participation is said to teach children the skills of compromise and coping with disappointment, that are features of adult political life.

A longstanding body of scholarship and practice argues that consultation with students should go beyond matters of school organisation to include their views of teaching and learning – in order to improve practice, to help young people develop a language for reflecting on their own learning, and in some understandings of 'learner voice', to promote 'personalised learning' (see in particular the work of Jean Rudduck (2000, 2003), Michael Fielding (e.g. 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; also Thomson 2010 and Rudd *et al* 2006).

Resources

- ESSA (the English Secondary Students' Association), a student-led organisation www.studentvoice.co.uk

- School Councils UK www.schoolcouncils.org

- Institute for Citizenship: http://citizen.org.uk

- Changemakers: www.changemakers.org.uk

- Save the Children's website www.participationforschools.org.uk contains material and case studies exploring the impact of young people's participation in schools.

- The Carnegie Young People's Initiative ran from 1997-2007; it commissioned and published literature reviews and reports *Inspiring Schools*, on pupil participation (Davies *et al* 2006a, 2006b, 2006c), which can be downloaded from http://cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/cypi/publications.

- www.participationworks.org.uk (as listed in 1.1.b);

- www.consultingpupils.co.uk for information on a research project on pupil consultation.

1.1.4 Theoretical frameworks

Interest in children's perspectives has been further stimulated by significant conceptual and theoretical developments, in particular in how children are viewed and understood within the social sciences. The new social studies of childhood have challenged the tendency to consider children either in relation to larger entities of which they are a part (such as families, schools,

nations), or as 'becomings' (that is, as persons growing to reach mature adulthood, of interest primarily because of who and what they will become in the future). Instead, new studies have argued for a view of children as 'beings', fully-formed now, whose present ideas, approaches to life, choices and relationships are of interest in their own right. They argue that children should be recognised as competent agents, who are participants in, and producers of, rather than passive recipients of, social and cultural change. For instance, children are social carers and economic producers, engaged in cultural activities and in creating identities and meanings, and their views of the world do not necessarily match those embodied in adult beliefs and institutions. This change in emphasis places great importance on gaining children's perspectives.[7]

Academic analyses have also challenged the extent to which the increasing emphasis on children's rights and responsibilities is simply a mark of progress and enlightenment. Neo-liberal policies pursued by governments in the past 30 years have dismantled state protection and rights, and require individuals who see themselves as autonomous and self-regulating subjects (Rose, 1999). Even participatory measures that are benign in intent may contribute to this neo-liberal agenda by obscuring the structural factors behind inequalities, in favour of individual responsibility-taking in a 'power-loaded game' (Triantafillou and Nielsen, 2001). Academics in this area have therefore studied the pressures to which children are subjected in this challenging climate, and have pointed out the extent to which they are increasingly regulated and controlled, despite the insistence on their supposed free agency (Prout, 2000). Some writers have argued that in this contemporary context, where earlier certainties about role, employment, identity, sexuality and so on have dissolved for adults as well as younger generations, it would be more appropriate to describe both adults *and* children as 'becomings', rather than describing either as 'beings' (Lee 2001).

Interdisciplinary approaches to childhood have drawn on insights from cultural geography to understand its situatedness – how child identities are embedded in, and shaped by, particular spaces, contexts and relationships (e.g. Holloway and Valentine 2000). Such perspectives also underpin some recent studies of the theory and practice of participation (Kesby 2007), and

[7] Some writers associated with this work include: David Buckingham, Malcolm Hill Allison James, Alan Prout, Chris Jenks, Berry Mayall, Michael Wyness. See also the authors collected in Qvortrup, 2005. Useful collections of essays by some of these and other authors about working with young people can be found in Christensen and James, 2000; Fraser *et al.*, 2004; Greene and Hogan, 2002, 2005; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; Lewis *et al.*, 2004.

have been brought together in studies of consulting young people about
school environments and architecture (e.g. Mannion 2007; Percy-Smith
2006).

1.1.5   Commercial drivers and the consumer model

Children in the West are increasingly seen as a significant market - both in
their own right, as their disposable income is growing, and as important
influencers of choice on family purchases such as cars, computers,
groceries and holidays.

As a result, marketers are spending considerable sums on finding out about
children's perspectives and interests in consumer culture, in order to provide
data that will improve the development or sales of products. Logistix Kids,
for example, claimed in 2006 to speak each month to 400 different young
people aged 7-14 and to spend more than £500,000 each year investigating
trends in the child marketplace. Such data collection is beyond the means
of most academic or voluntary sector researchers. However, not only is the
data usually confidential, it is often restricted in its scope, concerned with
targeting 'emerging, untapped consumer behaviors,' in the words of one US
market research website (Datamonitor, 2005). So they are concerned with
children's consumption rather than their civic participation. Too often,
however, discussions in the public sector about consulting young people
ignore this economic aspect altogether. This review contends that much can
be learned from this area – about contemporary society, about young people
and about methods.

In addition, marketing models and metaphors are increasingly common in
public services, with children, as well as adults, being redefined as the (quasi
or enforced) 'consumers' of the services and goods they receive. This again
justifies the emphasis on finding out what they want and think – and has of
course been the subject of intense debate about its politics and effects.

1.1.6 The personal development model

One of the most frequent arguments in this area is that the process of being consulted will benefit young people personally (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Commonly listed benefits are to their self-respect, competence, confidence, trust in adults and themselves, self-esteem, social inclusion, sense of responsibility for taking increased control over aspects of their lives, understanding of decision-making processes, fun and enjoyment, and definable skills that might be useful in future employment or education, such as managing time, running meetings and public speaking. In education, writers have argued that consulting young people about their learning will enhance their capacity to become self-reflective learners (Fielding and Bragg, 2003), a skill often held to be necessary to thrive in today's flexible, 'knowledge' economy; Hannam's study also discusses links between school participation and achievement (Hannam, 2001).

However, it is noticeable that the benefits of consultation are generally confined to the necessarily small numbers who take part, and thus the benefits for the other young people in their communities remain to be quantified (Davies 2006b). It is also unclear how far young people who get involved in such activities are motivated by these personal benefits, rather than by the hope of change or being listened to. Further, Hadfield and Haw (2000) suggest that this argument may reflect a lack of confidence about success in other areas, such as shaping policy.

Greater attention … needs to be paid at the outset to establishing the parameters and purposes of consultative work. For instance, is the focus too wide to lead to specific actions, or too narrow to seem worthwhile and significant? Does it give young people a genuine role?

2 Before consulting: establishing parameters, purpose, and the 'aftermath'

There is widespread concern (although perhaps less action) about how to make consultation meaningful and effective, rather than short term and tokenistic, and about how to evaluate its impact (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Roberts (2003) remarks that expertise in gathering views lags behind our capacity to do something meaningful with them, and further, that if consultation is cosmetic, it draws on 'one of the few resources over which children and young people exercise some direct control – namely, their time' (2003:27) Many others have also observed that without action and response, consulting young people can paradoxically lead them to become more disillusioned, cynical or apathetic (e.g. Prout 2001).

Greater attention therefore needs to be paid at the outset to establishing the parameters and purposes of consultative work. For instance, is the focus too wide to lead to specific actions, or too narrow to seem worthwhile and significant? Does it give young people a genuine role? How open-ended are the outcomes, or are they already confined to a choice between a narrow range of options? Although this review does not address in any detail 'what' young people are consulted on, one revealing example in the case of schools is how far students are involved in recruiting staff: 'consulting' them can vary in practice from allowing them to show applicants around or to sit in on interviews primarily conducted by adults, to helping to shortlist candidates, drawing up interview questions, conducting separate interviews or participating on equal terms with adults in interviews.

In order to establish a 'culture' of participation, consulting might start with issues that are capable of resolution along the lines young people propose, to build confidence in the process. If there are limits, these need to be communicated clearly to those involved from the beginning. These issues might be particularly marked where young people are involved in processes with a number of other stakeholders, competing agendas and externally imposed or inflexible deadlines to be met, for example school rebuilding programmes or local authority development plans, both subject to a range of pressures.

A strategy also needs to be drawn up at the start to address what will happen to young people's views once they have been gathered by whatever means. How will they be communicated and disseminated, to and by

whom? What kind of feedback loops and spaces for dialogue will be established? Is there a firm commitment from the relevant people to giving a public response, even if nothing can be acted upon immediately? Obvious as this sounds, the process of consulting seems repeatedly to absorb the bulk of energy and resources, while what is needed in the post-consultation period gets overlooked.

Dissemination has resource implications, as findings may need to be communicated in a number of different ways. Conventional written reports and summaries, on websites, in newsletters etc, can reach a number of diverse and broad audiences, whilst other creative methods such as workshops, video or audio recordings or other feedback events, may be more appropriate for young people. Involving young people themselves in the dissemination has been shown to have a strong impact on adult audiences, but care should be taken not to put young people in difficult situations, such as those where they receive negative responses, for which they are unprepared. At the same time, space needs to be created for genuine dialogue to take place, partly in order to clarify the meaning of the findings, partly in order to allow for disagreements and differences of opinion to be aired and compromises negotiated. Young people can be involved in following up changes established as a result of their proposals or ideas. For instance, a consultation on Personal, Social and Health Education provision in one school led to the establishment of a panel of staff and students who discussed together how the curriculum might evolve.

It is disingenuous to see children as finding, discovering, or being given a voice, as if we can simply access their authentic core being. What they say depends on what they are asked, how they are asked it, 'who' they are invited to speak as in responding; and then, in turn, on the values and assumptions of the researcher or audience interpreting their 'voices'.

3 How to consult young people?

This section provides an overview of some main methods that have been adopted and adapted for youth consultation, including forms of 'traditional' social science methods, i.e. quantitative (survey based) research and qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups. New approaches, and the new perspectives on childhood discussed in 1.1.4 have meant that it is increasingly possible to challenge the idea that children are not capable of reflection or sustained engagement with complex issues (Connolly, 1997, Punch 2002). Recent work has produced a number of innovative methods for listening to children that address their competences, experiences of the world and ways of communicating.

Each method has strengths and weaknesses. For instance, it has been argued that visual methods elicit a range of views beyond those of the most literate, and give access to unconscious aspects of responses. Yet such methods may also be seen as intrusive and thus ethically dubious, for the same reasons. There are also debates over the methodologies, practices, philosophical and political issues involved, although these are not dealt with in detail here. Similarly, this report refers to techniques for research, evaluation, consultation and participation, although these terms are subject to a range of definitions and distinctions that are only touched on here.

3.1 What kind of 'voice'?

It is disingenuous to see children as finding, discovering, or being given a voice, as if we can simply access their authentic core being. What they say depends on what they are asked, how they are asked it, 'who' they are invited to speak as in responding; and then, in turn, on the values and assumptions of the researcher or audience interpreting their 'voices'. Lodge (2005) argues that three questions are crucial: who is being asked, about what, and how?

Hadfield and Haw (2000; 2001) argue that 'voice' as a term and concept is being used in an increasing number of contexts and practices, such that its meanings are being stretched. They develop a typology of three kinds of voice: *authoritative, critical* and *therapeutic*. Each type of voice represents a different process of articulation and intended outcome. They argue that using this typology with young people helps them understand what kind of a

voice they might choose to develop, the kinds of obstacles they might face, and the kinds of voice that might achieve the changes they desire.

An '*authoritative*' voice is intended to be representative of a particular group of young people, of varying sizes. Larger groups are often thought to be best represented by surveys, which may limit young people's role to that of respondent, but this voice can include qualitative work that provides powerful, illustrative quotes. Whether it is listened to depends on a number of factors, including how convincingly it is articulated and how far it fits with the existing agendas of its audience.

A '*critical*' voice, by contrast, is often about challenging existing policies, practices and views or stereotypes of a group or issue. It is more concerned with presenting unheard or alternative views to a specific audience, such as professionals, often through a process where young people work intensively with committed researchers or workers.

Finally, a '*therapeutic*' voice validates and supports speakers' own difficult experiences, and suggests ways of coping with similar problems faced by others. Examples might be peer mentoring schemes.

We might add to this typology the '*consumer*' voice in market research, since, as noted above (1.1.5), it is a voice that young people are often asked to express, with little discussion of what it might mean to give their opinions as consumers, or how the findings might be used.

Other critics have extended the voice metaphor to think about voice in terms of 'volume' or the 'acoustic' of an institution, to draw attention to how voice is constructed ahead of individuals, and to highlight the extent to which being heard relies on being able to express oneself in an already acceptable style and language, and to analyse those voices that are most and least heard, by whom (Arnot *et al.*, 2004, 2007). It has also been pointed out that we need to listen to 'multiple' voices, as they rarely agree.

Despite the ideal that all young people are 'stakeholders' in issues that affect them and should be involved, there is some evidence (Kirby and Bryson, 2002) that only a limited range of people get involved in consultation, particularly if it places high demands on individuals. In theory, schools offer an environment in which it is possible to reach a diverse range of young people. Yet even there many hard-to-reach young people go

unheard. There may be gender differences in who gets involved or is most enthusiastic – evidence would seem to suggest girls more than boys (ibid). This has led to some consideration of the advantages of compulsory involvement (where specific groups can be brought into the process, but commitment may be low, and ethical issues about the right to withdraw are raised – see Section 5), as opposed to voluntary attendance (where commitment and possibly enjoyment or positive feelings about the consultation are higher, but the reach less extensive). As discussed in Sections 5 and 6, public and voluntary sector consultation often places a moral value on inclusion of otherwise 'marginal' voices, such as children in care or those with disabilities.

Some critics have also questioned how far it is always appropriate to ask young people to express their views at all. They argue that silence can be an important tool of resistance, and young people should have a right to privacy. Anita Harris, writing about young women, argues that

> The current emphasis on youth voice and visibility is occurring at a time when young people have few opportunities for unmediated, unscrutinized expressions of culture, recreation, critique and social commentary. It also coincides with the disappearance of a genuine public sphere in which participation typically takes place (2004: 149).

She remarks that there is very little shaping of the agenda by youth themselves – especially as youth engagement with each other is increasingly regulated. In relation to education, Mimi Orner asks 'whose interests are served when students speak?' (Orner, 1992). She argues that calls for student voice as a central component of student empowerment 'perpetuate relations of domination in the name of liberation' because they do not take into account the intersection of identity, language, context and power that informs all pedagogical relations. Elizabeth Ellsworth too argues that 'every expression of student voice [is] partial and predicated on the absence and marginalisation of alternative voices' (Ellsworth, 1989).

3.2 Degrees of involvement and young researchers

The UNCRC's recommendation that children should be informed, involved and consulted about all activities that affect their lives has led to a growing practice and body of literature on the role of children and young people as researchers, and reflection on how they can be involved in projects.

Roger Hart's 'ladder of participation' (Hart, 1992) is well-known and much-used or adapted. In brief, the lowest (non-participatory) rungs involve forms of manipulation, decoration or tokenism, which do not allow young people to assume important roles and indeed may actively exploit them for adults' agendas. Higher rungs involve information-giving about roles allotted within adult-initiated projects, and even consultation about their purpose and outcomes. The highest rungs involve shared decision-making on adult-initiated projects, projects initiated and directed by young people with support from adults, or youth-initiated projects with shared decision-making.

There is a certain amount of debate about which of the highest rungs should represent the most significant and beneficial achievement. Some analysts stress the importance of dialogue and power-sharing between adults and young people, while others emphasise young people's autonomy. Practical, as well as philosophical, considerations play a role here. For instance, organisations such as schools, with a perpetually changing cohort of young people and a more stable staff, may find the 'dialogic' model more effective in instilling long-term changes in adult attitudes and skills that can be reactivated with successive groups of young people. Nonetheless, the model has proved useful to many groups and organisations as a guide in assessing the place of young people in the work they do.

In education, Fielding explores attempts to authorise young people's perspectives and interpretive frames, and to move them from being a 'data source' to a 'significant voice' (Fielding, 2001). He outlines a number of models for student researchers, including dialogue, co-researchers (working alongside adults on adult agendas) and students as researchers in their own right, shaping the direction and outcomes of research more directly. Fielding and Bragg identify a number of benefits to be gained from engaging students as researchers, for the young people involved, their teachers and their schools (2003).

In relation to co-researchers, Prout (2002) and Rayner (2003) both discuss how children helped with design of research instruments and interview guides, conducted peer interviews and took photographs. In other instances, young researchers have been trained in traditional research approaches (reading other research, formulating hypotheses, and using methods such as surveys and interviews) and have conducted research themselves (Kellett, 2005; Kirby, 1999; Warren, 2000). The Open University's Children's Research Centre has collected many examples of children's research projects along with support materials: http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk/: see also www.consultingpupils.co.uk; / www.soundout.org. In other cases, particularly with younger children, the research element is less formal. For instance, children might act as journalists or reporters, interviewing others about their experience and communicating that in a video, newsletter or newspaper front page. Such research and (photo)journalism offer a real and ready audience, and roles that young people often value.

It should be noted that young researchers often require substantial support from youth workers or teachers, as well as from professional researchers, and therefore this is not a low-cost option. Adults may take a variety of roles – facilitating, training, challenging, developing ideas, advising, or doing things on children's behalf – and they may also need support from others (Fielding and Bragg, 2003, Bragg, Manchester and Faulkner 2009; and see the example in 6.4).

However, Kirby and Bryson (2002) observe that young researchers often suffer from the same problems raised in relation to typical social science methods (such as poor response rates in the case of surveys, or lack of skill in interviewing). They suggest that some overstated claims have been made in this area:

> The assertions that young people design better tools, have better access to their peers or make good interviewers are usually based on the views of participating young people and workers, and rarely do evaluators give an independent assessment of these. No study has yet asked other young people whom they would prefer to be researched by. There has been little analysis of what characteristics make a good young researcher other than (or even instead of) their youth. A detailed study of peer

research on transitions concluded that it offered "little new knowledge or understanding to these debates" (France, 2000). This was partly because the project "focused more on the research tasks rather than theory building" although the evaluator concluded that theory building (i.e. highlighting and explaining social phenomena) would not have been outside the capabilities of the peer researchers. Young people are rarely engaged in the analysis stage, which they often find boring and/or difficult (particularly statistical analysis). (2002:21)

The use of youth consultants is flourishing in consumer research. Young people may be recruited to supply their own views on products and advertisements, or to publicise 'cool' new products to their friends. Many have argued that this is exploitative (a notorious example is the lack of reward for the young person who came up with the idea of squeezy ketchup bottles) and have criticised the relationships that market researchers establish with consultants as shallow (Quart, 2003; Schor, 2004). However, the issue of whether and how to maintain relationships with young people involved in consultation is challenging in any context.

3.3 Methods

There are distinctions to be made between qualitative or quantitative methods, although in recent years one trend has been towards the use of mixed methods, with emphasis placed instead on methodology (the underlying philosophies and intentions of the work) rather than on the selected methods alone.

3.4 Standard social science approaches: Quantitative

3.4.1   Surveys and questionnaires

As children's roles as consumers and citizens are being taken increasingly seriously, more attention is being paid to collecting data directly from them rather than from their carers or parents (Roberts, 2000). Alderson shows that children as young as seven years can fill out questionnaires if they are presented appropriately (Alderson and Arnold, 1999).

Professional surveys gain a representative sample by having quotas of respondents according to given criteria, such as national statistics for gender, ethnicity and age, in order to make wider claims on the basis of their findings. Organisations can buy into surveys carried out by specialist survey organisations to seek responses on particular themes.

Surveys and questionnaires can be carried out by post, in the street, anonymously, door to door, or with known populations (such as school children taking part in an event). Survey questions may be developed from focus groups (see below), and should be extensively pre-tested to ensure that children will understand the questions. They might seek responses about different dimensions of an issue (for instance, not only seeking opinions of an issue or event, but also asking whether it is considered important in any case). They may be structured or semi-structured; the former consist solely of closed questions, the latter include more open-ended ones, suitable for those confident with writing. Closed statements make them easier or quicker to answer as well as to analyse, and for others to use. Responses can be given in a straightforward 'yes / no' format, as a multiple choice, on a three- or five-point sliding scale (e.g. from strongly agree to strongly disagree), with words to circle, or with sentences to complete; 'smiley' faces can be used with younger children (MacBeath *et al.*, 2003). Some surveys have used aural formats successfully, where children listen to and record their answers on tape (Roberts, 2000).

Respondents may answer in groups or as individuals. Since children can respond differently in different contexts, the location of the interviews (e.g. home or school) is likely to influence how they respond (Roberts, 2000). Self-completion questionnaires can sap children's motivation. Where questionnaires are answered face-to-face with those conducting a consultation, the latter can help with problems in understanding wording and give prompts for unclear answers, but confidentiality is lost to some extent.

Surveys and questionnaires have both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it is claimed that:

- they are generally confidential, private and anonymous
- they are economical, in that they gain broad-brush responses from large numbers of people
- responses can be organised and analysed quickly and efficiently

- arguably, they are popular with young people, perhaps because they are a familiar form (not least from youth media such as magazines)
- they seem inclusive, and can be suitable for young people who are shy or dislike writing
- they can be devised in collective or participatory ways, involving young people in their design and / or advising on their wording.

On the other hand, their disadvantages include:
- they can be overused (hence provoking flippant responses)
- they tend to deal with only a narrow range of issues, which are capable of being expressed in a limited form
- responses can be hard to analyse, as reasons for answers are not given
- they tend to rely on reading skills; younger children may require support and more time to complete them
- They are too often badly designed, without a clear purpose or understanding of how answers might be used
- they can be misused or manipulative (for instance, shaping questions to ensure a particular response is given or to approve policies that have already been decided)
- there can be a poor response rate, except with a captive audience (such as school children required to complete them in class)
- recruitment can be time-consuming – for instance, negotiating access to the young people and the cooperation of participants
- There are issues about whether to offer incentives to respond and how doing or not doing this might skew responses either way

3.4.2 Experimental and quasi-experimental designs

Strictly speaking, experimentation refers to approaches where researchers create settings (e.g. in a laboratory) where variables can be strictly controlled and then manipulated – often without being explicit about the true purposes of the research. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning experimental designs briefly. There would still be, of course, difficulty if the aim was to find a causal link between something that was found to have changed and a

particular project or incident. For instance, school projects may want to collect baseline data on school attendance, punctuality, grades, homework completion and participation in extra-curricular events and compare these at the start and end of a project, or compare 'control' groups (such as a class not taking part in a project). The problem here, of course, is the difficulty of ascertaining a causal link between a changed indicator and a particular project. It is important to find qualitative indicators of success, too (Craig, 2003). Such data might be useful in conjunction with consultation approaches gathering the articulated responses of young people on the same project.

3.5 Standard social science approaches: Qualitative

It is generally believed that qualitative methods are more effective than quantitative methods if the aim is to find out what people feel, think and believe. They include:

3.5.1 Interviews

Individual interviews are among the most popular tools used for gathering views and perspectives. They can be conducted in situ, in a neutral venue, or on the phone. Unlike a survey, where respondents are all asked the same questions, they can be loosely structured to pursue issues of interest. Responses may be written down or recorded (using audio or video). Their advantages are that:

- they often yield much information and thoughtful responses
- they allow interviewers to probe and understand the reasoning behind responses in detail
- they can bring up new issues that might otherwise be overlooked
- they are often liked by participants, provided the relationship with the interviewer is positive
- they can be more personal and private than group interviews, and may be perceived as more confidential.

However, against this it is also argued:

- some young people are not used to talking to an adult one-to-one and may be nervous and anxious
- interviews reach relatively small numbers
- they are expensive and time-consuming – to conduct, to transcribe, and to interpret
- they require considerable skills to conduct well
- it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality, for instance if a child reveals information on which the interviewer is obliged to act.

Some concerns have been expressed as to the appropriateness of interviews as a tool for listening to younger children. Children being questioned may become monosyllabic, or may try to 'second guess' what adults hope they will say, particularly in an educational context where children are used to the teacher knowing the answer. However, the extent to which children are necessarily more suggestible than adults is open to debate (Roberts, 2000). Some suggest that children's views are no less valid than those of adults, yet problems arise when their views compete with those of adults (Craig, 2003). Many problems may be avoided with simple rules such as specifying 'don't know' answers as valid in order to avoid best guesses, avoiding leading questions (Roberts, 2000), interviewing in friendship pairs and paying attention to how the young person is addressed and even how seating arranged (Thomson 2008).

3.5.2 Group interviews and focus groups

Consulting young people in groups can help counter the power imbalances involved in one-to-one situations with an adult posing questions to one child. Focus groups are in effect a group interview, but they may be designed to draw specifically on the interactions between participants to develop responses. Generally, such groups consist of between three and eight participants, depending on factors such as the time allotted. Smaller numbers may better enable the focus to be on the topics for discussion, rather than on group dynamics. With larger groups, two interviewers may be helpful, with one observing and taking notes. Some evidence suggests

that friendship groups are likely to be more productive. Marketing focus groups would generally consist of 8-12 participants and last at least two hours; this length of time is unlikely to be available to those consulting young people in school time.

Groups may be homogenous or diverse to generate debate, and it is important to be aware of power dynamics such as younger participants feeling intimidated by older ones, girls by boys or vice versa. In some cases it might be appropriate to run single sex groups, especially where an issue is likely to be viewed differently according to gender; although mixed groups may promote debate about those differences. Special groups may need to be run for those with particular needs or learning disabilities. In some instances, young people may be recruited to discuss without an interviewer present at all, only a tape recorder (Barker, 1998), or an adult may withdraw allowing participants to continue a discussion on their own. Commercial market research may also recruit focus groups according to particular profiles or target markets, such as 'influentials' (those held to shape peer opinions)] or demographic representatives.

Advantages of groups include:

- group talk may be less stilted, more natural, more reflective, and allow for the 'social nature' of children (Lewis, 1992)

- children may be less intimidated – they can build on familiar primary school practices such as Circle Time (where children are given an object to hold when it is their turn to speak), and interviewers can do warm-up activities to relax them

- they may be more practical in some settings

- they may allow for more depth and breadth in responses than individual interviews, e.g. through individuals being prompted or questioned by others in the group, or feeling able to challenge the interviewer's questions

- the group consensus that is likely to be generated may be useful if investigating experiences that are also social (e.g. about teaching)

- they can raise unexpected or unanticipated issues

- they are less expensive than individual interviews

Points to remember about group interviews include:

- since they are dependent on words, and on group dynamics, some group members may be inhibited from speaking

- some group members may feel that they are not confidential, and this issue should be raised at the outset, with an agreement of confidentiality between all participants

- they can be derailed by irrelevant topics

- they may be dominated by particular individuals, shaping the overall feel of the group and possibly generating an unrepresentative consensus (although as noted above, this consensus can also be revealing)

- as with all consultation approaches, there are dangers in basing decisions on what people state in one particular context, which may not always reflect their actual actions, or their views in other contexts

- attention needs to be paid to issues such as how to record (especially how to distinguish voices), and the skills needed to chair and facilitate

- videoing groups makes it easier to distinguish contributions, but may be impractical and/or intimidating.

Choosing between group or individual interviews requires consideration of a range of factors including the setting of the consultation, the sample, gender and the topic. Reporting of findings should be clear about the origins of the different types of data.

3.5.3 Stimulus material and prompts in interviews

Straightforward questioning may be supplemented with prompts and stimulus material. Some examples include:

- controversial or representative statements to spark reactions: e.g. McCallum et al used four 'statements cards' about learning as prompts with children aged 6 and 11 (2000)

- focus groups may use colour cards to access feelings – different colours evoke different emotions or approaches, and are a way to talk about positive and negative aspects of a topic or project, whilst holding a card; when the card moves on, the feelings go with it. (This draws on the work of Edward de Bono (De Bono, 2000))

- timelines – participants draw a timeline and mark on it the ups and downs of – for example - a project, their own lives, etc. These can also focus on specific issues / capabilities as in 'confidence lines' that show how a person's confidence has changed, for instance over the course of a project, or what they can do afterwards that they could not do before

- ranking exercises: where children are given a set of cards or photographs of activities or issues to rank in order of importance

- word association

- sentence completion

- cartoons with speech bubbles, where participants fill in some that are left blank

See also below on drama, role play and vignettes.

3.5.4 Ethnography, observation and participant observation

Ethnographic research, based in long-term fieldwork, claims to excel in offering in-depth understanding of people and the 'natural settings' or contexts in which they live and work. It produces informed or 'thick' descriptions of ways of life, and pays particular attention to the motives, emotions, perspectives and understandings of those studied. Whilst such research might seem remote from the concerns and practical possibilities of youth consultation, it is mentioned here as a means to understand aspects of the lives and cultures of young people that might otherwise remain inaccessible or opaque, even to those who work with them. Some well-known examples related to young people, education and the UK include: Gillespie (1995); Hey (1996), King (1978); Mac an Ghaill (1994), Nayak (2003), Renold (2005); Willis (1977).

Traditionally, ethnography is a time-consuming, expensive, and often long-term commitment, involving immersion in the everyday life, and amongst individuals, of a particular community (usually for over a year). In practice, much research labelled 'ethnographic' does not meet these standards, although this is not necessarily a weakness. Instead, it may involve repeated interviews to explore specific social issues in various contexts, with 'embedded' researchers sometimes drawing upon their general knowledge of the people and situations involved, and identifying 'key informers' as

particularly important. Market research now conducts what it calls ethnographic research, for instance focusing on 'day in the life' visual material – 'a snapshot into the lives of your target teen or tween consumer [that] promotes a deeper understanding of your teen consumer's lifestyle and mindset' (quotation drawn from website www.alloymarketing.com March 2006).

Observation may be more short-term and generally involves a familiar person (who may also be a participant, such as a teacher investigating their own school) spending extended periods of time in a setting, observing and recording the interactions of participants, and interpreting actions and the contexts in which they occur. There is a strong tradition of observation as a tool in early childhood education practice, as it is particularly useful for understanding the abilities, needs and interests of pre-verbal children (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003). Observation can inform other methods, including participatory methods where children are able to play an active role (ibid). Companies like Lego have tested their products on very young children for years. Since self-reported behaviour may not match actions, Lego takes its products to nurseries to observe children at play.[8]

3.6 Representation and consultation approaches

As well as these methods traditionally used in the social sciences, young people may be involved in other formats that aim to represent their views.

3.6.1 Traditional forms of representation

Traditional forms of representation echo adult forms of election, nomination and representation, and views may be expressed by voting, lobbying, campaigning, etc. Such councils and forums tend to produce a mixed reaction. On the one hand:

- they may be acceptable because of the extent to which they are familiar to adults

- their structures should allow them to be transparent and democratic

[8] www.legolearning.net

- they clearly teach additional important skills that may be useful in civic participation later in life
- they allow an open forum for debating issues
- young people who take part in them are often enthusiastic about them
- where they are genuine, they have been shown to improve the quality of relationships between adults and young people, enabling the latter to achieve new levels of responsibility (Alderson and Arnold, 1999; Lansdown, 1995).

On the other hand, evaluation suggests a number of problems, particularly to do with the gap between the aspiration and the reality:

- There are questions about how far they represent the views of only a few, especially of the 'exceptional' individuals often selected (by adults) to stand for others.
- Their forms (prioritising formal channels and written procedures) might inhibit those lacking the cultural familiarity with them, and especially younger children - in other words, they may reproduce existing power relations and continue to exclude those who are already marginalised.
- They are often seen as pursuing adult agendas or issues that adults have defined as relevant to 'youth' (for instance, school uniform, rather than the curriculum).
- They are often accused of not being accountable to the communities they supposedly represent.
- They can easily be ignored, because young people are often not represented on committees that have real power, such as governing bodies within a school.
- Similarly, they are often seen as tokenistic; some evidence suggests that when a school council is seen as tokenistic, it may have a more negative impact than having no council at all (Alderson, 2000a).
- When young people were asked which consultation methods they preferred, forums were one of the least popular methods (Stafford *et al.*, 2003). Craig claims that young people prefer more participative ways to engage their peers in policy debate (Craig, 2003).

Guidelines on good practice have frequently highlighted the importance of such councils having broad support, wide-ranging agendas, training for those involved, rotating chairing and other roles of responsibility, and a budget controlled by young people to give them real power. Anna P. Robinson's work shows how more visual methods can be used in school councils to make them more representative and accessible (2004). Rayner demonstrates how genuine child-friendly practices can be evolved, in relation to the Children's Rights Commission (Rayner, 2003).

3.6.2 Consultation approaches and events

Bigger and/or one-off consultation events may be held to bring together larger numbers of young people, for instance over a weekend or day. These can be fun and effective for those who get involved, yet exclude many others, especially those who are quieter. Evidence suggests they are popular with those who have taken part in them, but disliked by those who have not. As well as the creative methods discussed below, some increasingly familiar techniques for collecting views and ideas include:

- suggestion boxes – where young people are encouraged to write their ideas or issues and post them in a box in a relatively anonymous space. These are already in use in many primary schools as an ongoing consultation tool; they may be more successful where they are 'owned' by young people – e.g. where children have designed them and introduced the idea to other children (Bragg 2007).

- Related initiatives include 'listening posts', or 'ideas booths' throughout a space, staffed by volunteers who write down suggestions (suggested by School Works, an organisation that has developed participatory approaches to school design and is now part of the British Council for School Environments – www.bcse.uk.net). As discussed in section 3.8, ICT lends itself to similar approaches.

- graffiti walls – where people can write comments or draw pictures, relatively anonymously. Other versions use post-it notes to write comments, which are then attached to a poster or wall

- collective physical debate: for instance, rather than a written questionnaire, participants in an event might be encouraged to stand on a

line representing how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement; or to stand in one of four corners of a room representing different views. Everyone involved therefore expresses an opinion, even if not verbally; whilst the subsequent discussion may lead some to change position, which is actively encouraged.

3.6.3 Deliberative approaches

Deliberative approaches aim to involve participants more fully in the background to projects so that they understand the constraints under which organisations operate and can make more informed decisions. These have been used with adults; for instance, media regulators (now Ofcom) have run longer, more in-depth workshops, experimenting with methods such as asking participants to rank and edit news items. Similar initiatives include 'citizen juries', where groups question experts about a topic over an extended period. These claim some success in deepening understanding, but do not appear to have been used to any great extent with young people. There may however be some parallels with market researchers' 'kids' (consumer) panels, which recruit young people for extended periods of time (up to a year) to provide comments and feedback on developments and new products within an ongoing relationship – for critical accounts, see (Quart, 2003).

3.7 Creative and non-verbal methods

There has been growing criticism of mainstream qualitative methods that rely on verbal or written competence, on the grounds that these provide limited access to the emotional and symbolic aspects of young people's experiences and media-related modes of expression. In response, researchers have in recent years developed a range of additional techniques (Barker and Weller, 2003). These aim to shift the balance away from the written or spoken word to visual or multi-sensory methods, which potentially allow a wider range of children to participate (Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley, 2000; Thomson 2008). For instance, they have been used successfully to enable young people with disabilities to participate in and lead consultation projects (examples include the *Ask Us* project run by The Children's Society and *Two Way Street*, by the NSPCC).

All these methods tend to yield data such as images that need further discussion and interpretation, preferably in dialogue with the child (Coates, 2004; Prosser, 1998). Pink suggests the need to pay attention to: (a) the context in which an image was produced; (b) the content of the image; (c) the contexts in which images are viewed; and (d) how the image was produced, e.g. in terms of technology (Pink, 2003). There has also been some criticism of how such approaches are used and discussed in research (Buckingham 2009; Piper and Frankham 2007).

3.7.1 Photography and video

Still and moving images are increasingly used in participatory projects and consultations, to produce images for illustration, historical evidence, visual record, or stimulus material. The images might be generated by young people themselves, by adults filming young people, or by young people and adults working together. One rationale for using visual media is that they are familiar to young people who have grown up immersed in a media-rich world. Digital cameras, cheap colour printers and online publishing make them increasingly accessible and immediate.

In some projects, young people have taken their own photographs of important places and people in their homes (including their 'personal' spaces such as bedrooms) local or school setting, or as a tool to explore their experiences of the wider environment. Some studies have asked children to take photographs as a starting point for interviews. The photographs also serve as a representation of children's experiences, which might not be easily articulated in other ways. This can be used in school self-evaluation (Prosser, 1992).

Alternatively, young people might work with adults to develop multi-media productions (music videos, short dramas, animations, documentaries) on themes such as gender and identity, bullying in schools or challenging stereotypes (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). These may be screened to policy makers as well as to other young people - who can be expected better to understand the codes and conventions they use, than adults for whom such culture is less familiar (de Block *et al*, 2004; Niesyto, Buckingham and Fisherkeller, 2003).

The use of cameras may raise issues such as:

- gathering 'negative' images that an institution might not want publicised (e.g. in a school, unsafe areas or those where bullying happens)
- the involvement of young children as subjects
- the consent of all those filmed, so that they are not intimidated
- interpreting the meaning of images
- in the case of multi-media approaches in particular, their considerable demands in terms of young people's time, resources and support needs
- how the resulting products are used, with which audiences, for what purposes, and so on.

Guidelines need to be established about how images are to be used at the time and afterwards (Prosser, 1992). Images are not neutral – they are created through devices of camera positioning, framing, lighting etc. They are then selected, and there needs to be sensitivity as to how this happens and how they are used (see Thomson 2008 for extended discussions).

Unicef's MAGIC ('Media Activities and Good Ideas by with and for Children': www.unicef.org/magic) promotes children's involvement in media production; this is also one aim of its Voices of Youth website (www.unicef.org/voy).

3.7.2 Arts-based methods

Drawing and other arts activities have been used as another avenue for young people to express their views and experiences. For instance, in one school, children decorated plates with happy and sad faces and then used these on a tour to indicate how they felt about the environment and activities (cited in Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003). Listening to children talking about their own drawings can reveal important insights into their understandings (Clark *et al* 2001). Groups of young people can also produce posters collectively.

Collages can be a way to express responses without over-reliance either on the written word or artistic creativity. They may be produced individually or collectively, using magazines or sets of images to cut out.

Young people may be encouraged to record their views by keeping a diary (e.g. about responses to a project) or making a scrapbook of images on a theme (for instance, of products they like, in market research; recording a creative or learning process). These can combine writing with drawing or collage (see Bragg and Buckingham 2008).

Constructions in three-dimensions (such as sculpture, building with cardboard or other material, redesigning space) are also possible means to develop and express ideas and views collectively. For instance, a consultation about urban regeneration involved secondary school students taking over an empty shop front with a display about how they would like their community to be in ten years' time (Bragg et al 2009).

Lego Serious Play ('build your way to better business') trains and licences consultants to use Lego with groups of company employees, enabling them to represent aspects of their work, or problems and solutions, in symbolic forms. Its website claims that 'research' shows that 'this kind of hands-on, minds-on learning produces a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the world and its possibilities' and that its use promotes dialogue and taps 'hidden expertise' (www.seriousplay.com). David Gauntlett has developed this method in relation to identity: see www.artlab.org.uk/lego-groups.htm and also Gauntlett, 2007.

3.7.3 Audio-recording

Young children have been involved in audio-recording their experiences and interviewing others. Researchers have found young children to be fascinated by the sound of their own voice, but to require a period of familiarisation with the equipment (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003). Outlets such as local, community or school radio stations mean that outcomes can be disseminated effectively, or further debate encouraged, since radio still has a key role in many young people's media usage. Podcasts offer another dissemination possibility.

3.7.4 Guided tours, 'site visits' and mapping

Tours involve young people taking those seeking to understand their views on a guided walk around their environment (school or community). They can be in charge of the direction of the tour and also of how the experience is recorded, through taking photographs, making maps, drawings and audio-recordings. These have been used by, for example, the UNESCO 'Growing up in cities' project (www.unesco.org/most/guic). The market research version involves 'tag along shopping trips' observing children's consumption behaviours.

3.7.5 Drama and role play

Role play can be an important tool for young people to express their feelings, using their whole bodies as well as words. The advantage may be that issues can be discussed in a de-personalised way, through characters rather than personal experience. Large groups may also potentially be involved in this way. For instance, in one primary school, the deputy head ran assemblies with half the school (120 children), inviting children to get involved as the voices and thoughts of various 'characters' responding to situations they had identified as important to discuss (Bragg, 2007).

Narratives, poetry and storytelling may be used as a way into discussion of problems, or to start people thinking creatively. Vignettes are short stories, usually about imaginary characters in specified problematic situations. These can be written down, read aloud, or (where soap opera storylines or the like are used) on video / DVD. Participants are invited to respond to them by saying how they would cope or what the characters should do. These are often used to explore sensitive topics where it is important to avoid too much personal revelation, to address moral issues, or; to pursue issues that have not otherwise been raised. See accounts and examples in Barter and Renold, 1999 and 'Resources for Investigating Children's Experiences and Perspectives' www.lsbu.ac.uk/families/jrfsibresources.shtml

Role play and vignettes are also examples of projective techniques where participants are assumed to project their own feelings, beliefs and attitudes onto others. They help to access associations, unconscious material, or that which participants might be unwilling to reveal directly.

3.8 Virtual consultation

Interactive and social media – social networking sites, blogs, wikis, discussion forums, virtual worlds, texting and so on – typically evoke both lyrical excitement about their positive possibilities, and fear about their negative effects. Young people's familiarity with these forms suggests that new media are an increasingly important aspect of youth consultation for a variety of purposes, including: gathering views; collective problem-solving; promoting debate and active involvement in decision-making; disseminating information in accessible and varied forms.

At the same time, using new media in this way poses considerable challenges. For instance, young people's use of the media may not correspond to adult expectations or understandings (for instance of what constitutes 'political' action or 'appropriate' self-expression), thus inhibiting dialogue. Online surveillance and tracking of audience activity is providing marketers, advertisers and commercial research firms with a wealth of intimate detail about consumers. Non-commercial websites may find it hard to compete in terms of resources and appeal; and there are striking ethical complexities here, around confidentiality, obtaining consent, the boundaries between public and private, and so on (Buchanan 2003). And whilst large claims have been made for the potential of the 'civic web' in facilitating young people's democratic voice and agency on a global scale, some recent studies have been significantly more measured in their evaluations of what it offers (Banaji 2009, Loader 2007).

This review can only point briefly towards some relevant approaches for virtual consultation.

Existing consultation methods such as surveys may be adapted for online use, and voting can be undertaken online or via mobile phone text messaging; indeed, their online form may have advantages, such as broad reach, speed of response and instant analysis (turning responses into charts or diagrams), which mean that more studies can be undertaken, compared to more expensive 'real world' paper-based methods. However, such approaches may not involve representative groups – especially if they rely on participants having internet access at home - whilst voting online is open to abuse. The key issue with such polls or surveys is ensuring that the target audience knows about their existence and is motivated to respond. Websites such as www.surveymonkey.com offer tools for survey design

(the service is free for surveys limited to 10 questions and 100 responses). Online media support activism over issues that consultations identify as important for young people, for instance by offering facilities for contacting or lobbying local and national politicians – although it is debatable whether these are young people's preferred forms of action.

Social media also offer alternative spaces for discussion and debate, with the advantage of not having to take place in a particular place or at a particular time. They can enable groups and individuals to get and stay in touch with others involved in similar projects or work – although requiring extensive writing might rule out younger children or those with lower literacy levels. A further obvious use of the internet is for publishing and sharing material – for instance, that generated by some of the creative methods outlined above, such as photography, video, audio and so on. Online tools for doing this are freely available.

Resources

- Practical Participation www.practicalparticipation.co.uk, which publishes an online guide and toolkit about youth engagement and social media, and supports Youth Work Online, 'for exploring youth engagement in a digital age': http://network.youthworkonline.org.uk/

- Participation Works www.participationworks.org.uk previously mentioned, also offers guides and resources relevant to online consultation work with young people.

Priscilla Alderson (1995) has shown through her work that children's capacity for consultation varies more according to their experience than their age.

4 Issues in investigating younger children's views

Many of the tools outlined above have been adapted for use with children in early and middle childhood (under 12) as Clark et al found in their extensive review (2003). These have been combined with techniques developed in play therapy and adapted, such as involving the use of puppets. Indeed, the authors give several examples related specifically to work with children under five, including:

- using the popular role-play activity of telephone conversations to ask questions

- toys and puppets used as 'intermediaries' in consultations with young children. For instance, a teddy was introduced to groups of children in pre-school settings and they were asked to tell teddy about their nursery.

- story-telling has also been used in conjunction with puppets, or children have been given an unfinished story to complete

- 'persona' dolls, which come in a variety of ethnicities, are designed to help children explore different feelings and situations, with the dolls acting as intermediaries for them to talk about their experiences or solutions to issues www.persona-doll-training.org

- role play, modelling and other creative techniques.

Priscilla Alderson (1995) has shown through her work that children's capacity for consultation varies more according to their experience than their age. Thus, even very young children with severe illnesses have more insight into their medical treatment and choices than children who have not had the same experience. Others argue that the factors that contribute to reliable consultation with younger children include previous, positive experiences of consultation in the home environment (Cremin and Slatter, 2004). Clark et al further suggest ways that listening can be embedded into daily practice within an institution, which creates a climate conducive to successful one-off consultation. They suggest, for instance:

- prioritising time to listen to children talking, in groups and individually;

- using children's records of progress or 'profile books' as a daily listening tool;

- giving young children increasing control over their personal care;

- explaining, discussing and negotiating rules

- seeking young children's opinions and solutions to problems which arise;

- designing personal 'passports' to listen to and empower young children with special needs.

The 'mosaic' framework for listening adopted by Clark and Moss (Clark and Moss, 2001) outlines important principles, such as being:

- participatory – treating children as experts and agents in their own lives;
- adaptable;
- multi-method – recognising the different 'voices' or languages of children;
- reflexive – including children, practitioners and parents in reflecting on meanings, and addressing the question of interpretation, and
- embedded into practice.

Seeing children as 'social actors', not as passive participants, has profound implications for those who work with children, particularly in how power relations between adults and children are conceived and experienced.

5 **Ethical considerations**

Seeing children as 'social actors', not as passive participants, has profound implications for those who work with children, particularly in how power relations between adults and children are conceived and experienced.

Public and private sectors seem to view ethical issues differently. The Market Research Society's code of conduct, for example, concerns itself primarily with obtaining the consent of the parent or responsible adult of a child under 16, and children's right to opt out or withdraw. It rules out certain topics such as participants' sexual activities, drugs and alcohol use, race, religion and crime, as well as subjects that might upset or disturb them, such as family tensions, income or illness. Food tested on children must be safe to consume, toys must be safe to handle, and other products should be age-appropriate – as also applies to gifts or incentives to participate. Questionnaires should be sensitively written, not overly intrusive or demanding. Respondents should not be harmed by their participation (see www.mrs.org.uk).

Public/voluntary sector and academic ethical concerns are more far-reaching, including issues such as involving children as potential participants with a right to know the outcomes; considering how children are represented; redressing how children's voices have been silenced, and how power differentials might be minimised (Christensen and James, 2000). Overviews of ethical issues are given by Morrow and Richards (1996), Alderson and Morrow (2004), Hill (2005), Coad and Lewis (2004), Lindsay (2000) and guidelines have been published by the National Children's Bureau, Barnardo's, British Educational Research Association and the Glasgow Centre for Child and Society, amongst others. Research Ethics Committees have been set up in universities to oversee research proposals and similar groups could also be established on longer consultation projects to involve different stakeholders (including young people), to help projects keep in touch with debates about policy, practice, ethics, and win support for the work.

Ethical issues typically include:

- **Informed consent:** consent is usually asked of parents, but children also need to be helped to understand the purpose of the consultation, their responsibilities and role within it, how long it will take, its funding, and the consequences and implications of expressing their views. They should also have the right to withdraw, offered at all stages of the process.

- **Inclusiveness:** efforts should be made to include 'hard to access' and marginalised groups, such as minority ethnic, abused, looked after children or those with disabilities or low literacy.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** anonymity and privacy (not revealing personal information in a way that is identifiable, and explaining who will see the data) should be assured. However, confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed, since interviewers would be required to report any personal information where this was clearly in the child participant's interests, such as allegations of abuse. Confidentiality may also need to be discussed with other participants, e.g. in a group interview.

- **Recognition and feedback:** this might include the issue of rewards for participation, such as gift tokens or covering costs incurred, although these should not be presented as inducements or pressures to participate. More broadly, it might involve respecting young people's abilities and experiences, and not patronising or intimidating them. It might also cover debriefing participants and providing them with feedback about the outcomes of the consultation in an accessible way.

- **Ownership:** the difficulty of ensuring 'ownership' (who has access to the data) is particularly problematic in involving children as subjects rather than objects of research. Again, the contrast, to commercial market research where data is confidential to the client or only available at great cost, is marked.

- **Social responsibility:** this involves not harming children through their involvement, as well as considering the contribution of the consultation to children's well-being (is it in their interest?) and to broader social goods and values.

The following summary of ethical considerations for consulting with young people is taken from p.66 of Hill, M. (2005) 'Ethical considerations in researching children's experiences'. In Researching children's experiences: approaches and methods, ed. S. Greene, and D. Hogan (2005: 61-86), London: Sage. Whilst the table refers to 'research', its questions are also relevant to consulting young people.

Key ethical issues in research with children (Based on Alderson 1995)		
	Topic	**Sample questions**
1	Research purpose	Is the research in children's interests?
2	Costs and benefits	What are the costs and risks for children of doing or not doing the research? What are the potential benefits?
3	Privacy and confidentiality	What choices do children have about being contacted, agreement to take part, withdrawing, confidentiality?
4	Inclusion and exclusion	Who is included, who is excluded? Why? What efforts are made to include disadvantaged groups (e.g. those with physical impairments, homeless young people)?
5	Funding	Are funds 'tainted'? Are resources sufficient? In what circumstances should children be recompensed?
6	Involvement and accountability	To what extent can children or carers contribute to the research aim and design? What safeguards and checks are in place?
7	Information	Are the aims and implications clearly explained? Is written documentation available in other languages?
8	Consent	How well are rights to refuse cooperation explained and respected? Are informal 'pressures' used? What is the correct balance of parental and child consent?
9	Dissemination	Do participants know about and comment on the findings? How wide is the audience for the research – academics, practitioners, policy makers, the public, research participants, etc.?
10	Impact on children	How does the research affect children through its impact on thinking, policy and practice? Are children's own perspectives accurately conveyed?

The case studies in this section are deliberately drawn from different sectors to show how funders, methods and aims all affect outcomes.

6 Case study overviews

This section compares and contrasts more detailed examples of consultation with children and young people. The case studies are deliberately drawn from different sectors to show how funders, methods and aims all affect outcomes.

6.1 Market research into young people's views

Commercial research with young people is generally confidential. As a result, accounts of it often have to be drawn from secondary research, which may be written from a particularly critical perspective. In her critique of children's commercial culture, for example, Juliet Schor provides examples of qualitative market research, which she dubs 'the new intrusive research'. Nonetheless, it is clear that consumer research is quick to use or develop the 'creative' and 'in-depth' tools that academics and campaigners have often claimed to be more appropriate and ethical in consulting children. For instance, she gives accounts of the 'ethnographic turn' in market research. Researchers visit children repeatedly in their homes, spending extended periods with children in their most private spaces – bedrooms and bathrooms. They pay parents well and establish trust with both children and parents, but talk to the children on their own. They film children playing with toys and engaged in other mundane tasks such as eating, using these methods because interviews do not always reveal behaviour to which children are reluctant to admit (such as playing with toys they claim to have grown out of). In this way, they access new insights: for instance, seeing children playing with empty bubble bath containers inspired the redesign of packaging.

Schor, J. (2004) Born to Buy: the commercialised child and the new consumer culture, New York: Scribner, especially chapter 6

6.2 BBC: Consulting the audience

The BBC regularly commissions research into its audience, both in-house and from contracted organisations. An example of youth consultation is its evaluation of Blast, a programme to encourage 13-19 year olds in the UK to engage in creative activities such as dance, film, art, writing and music. In

2005, Blast was four years old, so the BBC commissioned a 'SWOT' (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to use in developing its future strategy to 2008. The BBC worked with a research agency experienced with the age group. It engaged different audiences, such as those working for the BBC and related agencies; past, current and potential Blast participants, especially those in 'hard to reach' groups.

It covered different aspects of Blast's work (which includes a website, a presence at events across the UK, workshops, a Young Reporter scheme, competitions, and a BBC2 showcase for teenagers' work). The work used a range of techniques, from face-to-face interviews at events and workshops, focus groups and telephone interviews with internal and external stakeholders (including partner organisations), first-hand feedback of event attendees and also experiences from members of the Blast Youth Panel. Interviews were held with online experts and users of the website.

The report of the findings stressed positive aspects (approval of Blast's commitment to young people, the importance of providing outlets for young people to showcase their talent, the credibility and status lent to it by the BBC 'brand'). However, it pointed to concerns about lack of integration and information-sharing between regions, criticism of the website (particularly for more marginalised groups), of the dominance of some arts over others, and lack of awareness and promotion of Blast: 'Blast feels like a well kept secret: "You feel like the chosen one if you discover it" (Youth panel member)'.

As can be seen, the consultation was interested both in how far the BBC could serve young people ('maximise the audience's experience,' in its words) but also in promoting the BBC's 'brand' and ensuring the best 'value for money' from Blast. The audience in this definition is a 'public' (with needs the BBC can meet) as well as a market (with 'wants'), but seeking audience feedback also meets the strategic needs of a publicly-funded institution to justify and explain its own work. Compare the discussion of broadcasting research in chapter 4 of (Buckingham *et al*, 1999)

Information from Ros Sonderskov, BBC Research, personal communication, 2006

6.3 Multi-method academic research into youth perspectives

Samantha Punch describes methods used in a project about how young people, aged 13-14, perceived and coped with their problems. Eighty-six teenagers were interviewed both in groups of three to six and individually, and were recruited from schools and residential care homes. The latter were thanked for giving up their free time with gift tokens, the former were interviewed during the school day, so did not receive tokens. The interviews included both task-based activities and stimulus material. The latter included providing phrases often used by adults (e.g. 'it's just a phase you're going through') to spark off reactions and discussions; examples of problem pages from appropriate popular teenage magazines; and 'visual vignettes' – short video clips culled from soap operas that showed young people trying to deal with problems. This helped young people remember examples from their life and to be specific about their own coping strategies without necessarily being too personal.

The task-based activities included spider diagrams of coping strategies, charts of people they might turn to with a problem, with grouping and ranking exercises, for instance ordering types of problem according to seriousness or how others might see them. Conscious that teenagers might be unlikely to talk about some issues in any context, Punch developed the idea of the 'secret box' – a sealed and secure box that participants were assured would not be opened until the very end of the research, thus offering anonymity and confidentiality. Teenagers were asked to write down any issues they had not been able to talk about in individual or group interviews and place them into this box. This produced responses on a range of issues, including grief, puberty and sexual abuse. Finally, participants were asked to evaluate the methods and state which they liked best or least. Overall they responded well to the exercises and the structured way the research was carried out.

Punch, S. (2002) 'Interviewing strategies with young people: the 'secret box', stimulus material and task-based activities' Children & Society 16 (1): 45-56

6.4 Academic researchers and 'student voice'

Pat Thomson and Helen Gunter from the University of Nottingham were invited to write a formative evaluation of a comprehensive school's project to introduce curriculum innovation. They chose to conduct it by working with 'pupil voice', initially with pupil consultants. However, they wanted to go beyond pupils as 'data sources', to help them devise and conduct their own inquiries into schooling, design recommendations for change based on their findings, and even implement change themselves. They were committed to working within a radical, rights-based framework, rather than a more instrumental one of standards and school improvement.

They began with a small group of students, a girl and boy each from four school years, selected by teachers. They asked them to advise them on relevant issues, to comment on draft questions for a whole-school survey, and to pilot it. Consulting with the students also informed their other data collection, which included observation, student focus groups and 'mind mapping', and teacher interviews. This data reinforced the importance of the issues to which students had already alerted them.

They then formed an internal research team together with the group of students. This group read and commented on the survey data, voted on the key issue they wished to address, discussed methods and decided to use 'trigger photographs' to explore bullying and safety. Nonetheless, despite this egalitarian way of working, when the student voice was too individualistic or insensitive, for instance towards teachers or groups of other 'low-status' students in the school community, the researchers intervened to assert 'a level of adult power/knowledge which represented a counter discourse of communality, mutuality and an "ethic of care"'. In other words, they concluded that 'voice' cannot automatically be linked with emancipatory or democratic outcomes.

Thomson, P., and Gunter, H. (2006) 'From 'consulting pupils' to 'pupils as researchers': a situated case narrative' British Educational Research Journal 32 (6): 839-856

6.5 Consulting young people with disabilities

Triangle (www.triangle.org.uk) is an independent organisation providing training, advocacy, therapy and conducting consultations with children and young people especially those with complex needs. Its consultations use approaches developed with its own consultative group of disabled children and young people (aged 3-24). These consultations may be about specific services or about children's views more generally. In 1999, East Sussex Social Services worked with Triangle to carry out a consultation with learning disabled children and young people, about their use of a residential respite care service. The consultation attempted to give control of the agenda and the process to the young people, and to listen 'on all channels' to their views, which were communicated through speech, sign, symbols, body language, facial expression, gesture, behaviour, art, photographs, objects of reference, games, drawing and playing. As a result of the consultation, some simple changes were made to the service provided, for example a night-time alarm system was changed, and the consultation resources are now used by local staff to gather children's views.

Marchant, R., Jones, M., Julyan, A., and Giles, A. (1999) Listening On All Channels. Consulting with Disabled Children and Young People, Brighton: Triangle

See also: Marchant, R and Jones, M (2003) *Getting It Right a handbook for involving disabled children in assessment, planning and review processes* Brighton: Triangle

The Children's Society runs an initiative called 'Ask Us', to involve children and young people with disabilities, in consultation. In 2000, the Department of Heath commissioned The Children's Society, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to undertake a national consultation. The use of multi-media helped ensure the inclusion of around 340 disabled children and young people, including some with severe and multiple impairments.

In 2001, six local CDs were produced by groups of disabled children and young people supported by The Children's Society project staff, each focusing on different areas of exclusion, such as access to play, leisure and education and relationships with friends and families. They shared their concerns and ideas

through graphics, cartoons, video and songs that they composed and sang. In addition, summary CDs of their key messages were compiled about the young people's understanding and experience of inclusion, consultation and participation. Eight further local consultations with disabled children and young people took place, based on the principles of rights, inclusion, choice and independence that are in Valuing People, the Government's strategy for learning disabled people. A resource pack, 'How to Ask Us' provides ideas for using multi-media methods to enable disabled children and young people to put across their views and ideas.

Disabled young people have worked as researchers for Ask Us. For example, in Solihull, three young people led their own research on the usefulness of helplines in local authority complaints leaflets. They got some training on basic research methods, and led the research at all stages. In the same project, four disabled children and five of their non-disabled friends did an access audit on eight local parks over one weekend. They called it "Can we go to the park, mum?" and used videos, digital cameras and pictures to record the results. The audit highlighted the inequalities experienced by disabled children in accessing everyday opportunities and local facilities, and helped persuade the local parks department to install accessible play equipment.

See: www.the-childrens-society.org.uk and http://valuingpeople.gov.uk/index.jsp

See also Morris, J (1998) Don't Leave us Out: Involving disabled children and young people with communication impairments. YPS, York for Joseph Rowntree Foundation

6.6 Student-led consultation: student researchers and a whole school approach...

A detailed analysis of activities carried out in 2003-2004 at Brockhill Park School (now a Specialist Performing Arts College) includes an account of work with a student research team (SRT). Two groups of mixed-age students worked with researchers from the International Enquiry Network, initially investigating how language worked within the school, as part of a larger ethnographic study. The SRT then became increasingly interested in exploring the link between certain spaces in the school and particular

behaviours – especially vandalism during breaktimes. When the SRT learned that plans were already being developed for a central space for Year 10 students, they persuaded staff that school-wide consultation and agreement on problems and solutions would help ensure successful implementation. The SRT argued that input should represent the whole student body, even including 'recognised potential trouble-makers' who could wreck any new facility if they felt excluded from decision-making.

The students developed a school-wide survey on use of lunch and break time, which they distributed themselves in order to encourage a sense of confidentiality and thus accurate reporting of 'illicit' behaviours. Many students in the SRT gained in confidence by having to negotiate access to lessons and introduce the survey to classes, and the high response rate may have reflected other students' appreciation of their work. A maths teacher then gave up his own time to help the students understand how to analyse and present their data.

Eventually the findings were presented to the student council, to the headteacher and to other teachers (in oral presentations, discussions and in display form). Some of the findings showed that initial plans for the central space would have been unpopular and needed modification to meet students' needs and wishes. Equally importantly, staff were impressed to see students working in creative and committed ways to improve the school environment, in collaboration with other teachers. There was a 'shift in teacher and student role perspectives, as young people came to be acknowledged as experts in representing the views of their fellow students'. Meanwhile the SRT 'developed a strong ownership of their school and their job as student researchers'.

Brice Heath, S., Paul-Boehnck, E., and Wolf, S. (2005), Made for Each Other, Kent: Creative Partnerships

...and with Year 8

In Ratton School in Eastbourne, teachers working with the University of Sussex selected 18 students (nine boys and nine girls) from Year 8. The school had identified this as a 'lost' year that sometimes failed to reach its

full potential. The students worked in three parallel groups of six. Each had a member of staff to support them, with a senior manager as the overall co-ordinator.

The 18 students and the teachers attended a training day off-campus and then met weekly at lunchtimes. Each took a different topic that emerged from their discussions: 'What makes a good lesson?' 'What makes a good teacher?' 'Student views on grouping practices'. The student researchers devised questionnaires, interviewed teachers and students, and observed lessons. They presented their work in progress regularly to the headteacher, staff and students. A presentation at a year assembly showed their commitment and hard work on behalf of others and seemed to help overcome the resentment that some other students had initially felt at not being included.

By the end of two terms, the students had produced three reports and powerpoint presentations. The research into what makes a good lesson, for example, emphasised teachers' and students' shared perspectives, and students' role in successful learning, with the researchers reporting that

'80-90% of students and 100% of teachers believe that students play an important role in making a lesson a "good" one. "The students ARE the lesson"…. We have noticed that both students and staff want similar things from lessons. There IS common ground between both "sides"!!' (2003:9)

Teachers recognised that they had underestimated Year 8 – that 'students as the "receivers" of our teaching are an underused resource', as the deputy head put it. They became more receptive to student input into curriculum planning. The Key Stage 3 co-ordinator observed a positive impact, particularly on the learning of all Year 8 boys. She commented that the student researchers 'take the skills they've learned back into their lessons. It rubs off on other students, and it rubs out the "boff" thing, so it takes the lid off to allow the development of the whole year'.

Fielding, M., and Bragg, S. (2003) Students as Researchers: making a difference, Cambridge: Pearson's Publishing

6.7 Creative Partnerships and youth consultation

Creative Partnerships was established in 2002 and is a 'flagship creative learning programme'. It aims to foster innovative, long term collaborations between schools (often in areas of socio-economic deprivation) and creative practitioners. In particular Creative Partnerships states that it places young people 'at the heart of what we do' and claims that its programmes are most effective when young people are actively involved in leading and shaping them.

Young Consultants programme, Midlands

One central England Creative Partnerships area has had special responsibility for raising the profile of youth voice within the national organisation since 2005. Under their Area Director, and assisted by the City Council's interest in young people's participation, it has taken a lead in including young people in its planning, delivery, recruitment and programming. Each Creative Partnerships school is required to appoint a small team of 'Young Consultants' who, according to the Area Director, are then trained with a focus on 'the professional development of those young people as partners in their creative partnership' (2009:22). The aim is to mature and develop the young people's experiences over a sustained period of time.

The Young Consultants became involved in recruiting creative practitioners to work in schools. This led to some inspiring moments, as the Area Director explained:

> Over three days 28 applying [arts] organisations were effectively auditioned by the groups of Young Consultants who attended creative workshops provided by the applying organisations and individuals and then gave us feedback on their experience. That was a phenomenal experience on a number of levels. It set the agenda so that it let people know that we were serious about young people's participation in decision-making, and it put the fear of god in some of the practitioners – who'd been on a very good living from education up until that point! It

was a fascinating experience…. the first major 'line in the sand' moment where we went from not having young people involved, to having about 180-200 involved in making decisions at quite a high level about who would join the programme (Interview 2007) (2009:22)

The Young Consultants (YCs) are are given opportunities to participate in events and training outside school. For example, they have helped to organise, deliver and document national Creative Partnerships conferences. They have also been recruited to work as young consultants by the local council and other bodies that are interested in young people's views. When the Creative Partnerships area office became an Area Delivery Organisation, the YCs chose its new name. Their role is now evolving to support the training and development of others through 'mentoring, coaching, acting as champions for the work'. New YCs will work on a rotational basis, spending one year learning about the role, a second year developing their expertise and a third year training new recruits

The Young Consultants programme brought about a significant cultural shift, setting a benchmark for how other organisations should expect to work with it. It had influence within Creative Partnerships itself, encouraging other staff to reconsider how they might extend their own understandings and making it less legitimate to plan work without young people's input.

Local authority 'creative consultation' on its cultural strategy

A Creative Partnerships area office in the West Midlands set up groups of young people from thirteen schools to work with creative practitioners in reflecting on their local area to inform the local authority's Cultural Strategy. The project came about because the local authority, and particularly the individual at the head of the development team, was committed to including young people's voices in future plans for the city. Creative Partnerships here found 'interested audiences for our work with young people,' (2009:25) and were able to engage in discussions and come to clear agreements about the remit of the work, which could then be communicated honestly to the young people involved. The Creative Partnerships Area Director explained,

We were very clear that their voices would inform the thinking of those people that were developing the cultural strategy but we were also very clear that they couldn't expect their ideas for the city to be taken on and realised, that that wasn't part of the brief of the project, but it might have a future. [Interview, 2008] (2009:25)

The young people working with creative practitioners identified ten possibilities for the cultural strategy, which they reported back to their schools. The council discussed these with the young people and these became part of the published Cultural Strategy. In addition feedback loops were established where the young people were invited to hear what adults had said about the Cultural Strategy.

The Creative Partnerships Area Director went on to comment:

Young people were enabled in a way that they typically weren't enabled and they could see where the ideas were going as well. And I think for some teachers it changed the way they started to talk to children. For some practitioners it changed the way they viewed children as collaborators. It gave them new mechanisms for how they would engage with them as partners. (2009:27)

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