

NEW 02534

Panel presentation

**Moving from research "on" or "about" to research "with" or "by" ...:
Exploring the roles of young people in educational research**

HOW02535 Paper 1

Talking about youth participation - where, when and why?

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Abstract

The notion that people should have a say in decisions that affect them has been around for a long time. Much of the recent writing about youth participation draws on the work of community development officers like Arnstein (1969) in the area of citizen participation, based on explorations of democracy. This paper will review some of the broader discussions of youth participation and invite the audience to consider their application to education, and educational research in particular.

Introduction

Within the research literature, for some time there has been discussion about the role subjects play in a research project. For example, increasing awareness of the effect of colonisation on Indigenous peoples has alerted researchers to the potentially exploitative nature of their projects. We are seeing increasing inclination towards problematising the roles Indigenous peoples should play in research on, for and about them, including shaping the research design, collecting and analysing data, and negotiating who "owns" the research.

Young people are another group in society on whom and about whom, much research is done. They have also traditionally been constructed and positioned being incapable of making decisions for themselves, who need adults to "look after them". But there are growing moves towards ensuring that young people's voices are heard in a variety of arenas. In education, questions are being raised about the roles students can play in research - but, for a range of reasons, including moral and ethical ones, the answers are not always easy to find.

This panel session will explore some of the roles young people can take in research projects and the issues around this. Each paper will briefly highlight some of the ways in which they can participate in research and raise questions that the audience will be invited to pursue in a spirit of collegial inquiry.

This first paper will explore the concept of youth participation in general, by considering definitions, models and rationale. The second paper will explore how technologies, particularly digital video, might be incorporated more fully into child-focused research. The third paper will consider young people's participation in research, and will focus on the experiences of those involved in two projects conducted outside the education arena, to open up issues around peer research for discussion.

Youth participation: an increasing trend

Currently, there is much discussion about the rising trend of young people participating in decision-making which affects them (Anonymous, 2001). In schools, for example, school councils have been established, with varying degrees of responsibility and autonomy. Negotiation of classroom rules is becoming increasingly common, and some schools involve students in negotiating the curriculum.

Legislatively, this theme is reflected in some significant Acts that have been proclaimed in recent years in Queensland. The Queensland *Commission for Children and Young People Act (2000)*, for example, states that: "the Commissioner must ... consult with children (and young people) in ways that promote their participation in decision making". In the exercise the Commission's functions, it is a challenge to find ways of involving young people in decision-making processes in a way that promotes their wellbeing and empowers them.

The Queensland government has also developed a *Youth Participation Strategy* and established a State Youth Advisory Council (SYAC) which provided leadership in developing the Queensland Youth Charter (Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2002a). In this Charter, the Queensland Government makes a commitment to include young people in government decision-making: Government departments are required to report annually about the "actions and processes they have conducted to include young people in program, policy and service development (Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2002b, p. 6)".

In addition, there are National Youth Parliaments, and local councils are establishing youth councils or committees and involving young people in projects. The amount of interest in youth participation is reflected in the growing number of websites related to this. (See Figure 1 for some examples.)

Sites providing information about youth participation (Alivizatos, 2002)

1. Youth Participation in Urban Recreation Planning <http://www.sfu.ca/cns/sk8/info.htm>
2. 'Corrugated Iron' Youth Arts: Youth Participation Policy <http://www.octa4.net.au/youtharts-ciya/youth.html>
3. Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training: Publications and Resources on youth participation http://www.ovet.tased.edu.au/pub_res/index.htm
4. The Foundation for Young Australians <http://www.youngaustralians.org/>
5. Youth Australia www.youthaustralia.org.au
6. Youth Action & Policy Association www.yapa.org.au
7. Western Young People's Independent Network: Involving Young People in Decision making Participation - Listen to us! <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~wypin/youth.htm>
8. Measuring Youth Participation <http://www.ayf.org.au/Resources/Measuring%20YP/1.htm>
9. Spinach - The Adelaide City Council's Website for Young People. The site also has a youth policy. www.spinach.adelaide.sa.gov.au
10. The Queensland Governments Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs website www.GENERATE.qld.gov.au
11. Queensland Government, Department of Employment and Training: What is the youth participation strategy? <http://www.youth.qld.gov.au/ypstrategy.htm>
12. Queensland Government, Department of Employment and Training: Publications and Information Sheets including the Youth Charter www.youth.qld.gov.au/publications
13. South Australian Office for Youth, Youth participation handbook www.maze.sa.gov.au
14. Ausyouth, Youth development papers www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth
15. NSW Commission for Children and Young People www.kids.nsw.gov.au
16. The New South Wales Association for Adolescent Health Website <http://www.naah.org.au/>
17. Children and Young people Unit in UK www.dfee.gov.uk/cypu
18. A collection of general youth participation resources <http://www.youthgas.com/quickguides/participation.htm>

Figure 1

However, these initiatives are underpinned by different understandings of the word 'participation'.

The meaning of young people's participation

The words 'involvement', 'consultation' and 'participation' are sometimes used interchangeably and can have quite different meanings. Australian educational literature on parent-school relationships has tended to see 'involvement' as being more passive than 'participation', which implies power-sharing. This paper will use 'participation' as a generic term and explore different types of participation, more in keeping with international literature.

Participation refers "to the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives" (Hart, 1992, p. 5). According to UNICEF it is the fundamental right of citizenship and the means by which democracies should be measured (Hart, 1992).

Wilson (2000) believes that participation can be classified into two main categories, the first being superficial or tokenistic, the other being "Deep" (Wilson, 2000, p. 26) participation or 'democratic play'. 'Deep' participation is an umbrella term encompassing "active (Holdsworth cited in Wilson, 2000, p.26)", "authentic (Cumming; Soliman cited in Wilson, 2000, p.26)" and "meaningful (Wilson, cited in Wilson, 2000, p.26)" participation. 'Deep' participation means young people experience elements of citizenship and democracy in their everyday lives, in real and holistic situations with meaningful outcomes or actions.

There are various models in the literature which reflect the range of ways in which young people can participate. The next section of this paper will examine some of these models.

Models of participation

A number of theorists have proposed frameworks or 'typologies' which articulate the degree of participation individuals have in any given project or social endeavour. Manly (2000) states that there may not be opportunities for young people to participate elsewhere in their lives other than those in the public and community arenas.

In 1969, Arnstein developed a seminal article on citizen participation that included eight levels, symbolized by a 'ladder', representing the degree of control a citizen has over an initiative. Others, as identified by Guijt and van Velduizen (1998), have adapted the 'ladder metaphor', to create different models of participation and empowerment, each with different goals, purposes and methods. These include:

- Paul's 1986 model which describes four levels signifying the benefits of participation, whether those involved share information, are consulted, make decisions, or initiate action.
- Biggs 1989 version, depicting the relationship between researchers and farmers through four phases - contractual, consultative, collaborative and support.
- Guijt 1991 advanced four levels corresponding to the local people's involvement in key project stages.
- In 1992, Adnan's proposed an eleven level model which characterises the increasing degree of people's control over information and initiatives.
- Farrington and Bebbington in 1994 divided their four levels of power into shallow versus deep and a wide versus a narrow range of activities.
- Stiefel and Wolfe's 1994 model has eleven levels distinguishing political use of the term participation - for example, to improve project efficiency, trade unionism or democratic movements.

- In 1995, Cornwall's seven levels showed the shift of control over decisions from outsiders to local people.
- Selener's 1997 figure included four levels based on a thematic approach such as community development, action research in organisations, education, or farmer participatory research.

However the four most well-known models of participation and empowerment for young people are those of: Hart (1992), Westhorp (1987), Shier, (2001) and Rocha (1997). This section of the paper will explore these typologies in more depth.

In 1992, Hart developed a ladder of participation with eight levels which reflect who is drives the development initiative. The first three levels are classified as being non-participatory. Hart argued they serve adult purposes of being seen to consult or involve young people, but in reality they afford no real opportunity to participate. The top five rungs of the ladder represent increasing degrees of participation.

Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation

8. Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults 7. Youth-initiated and directed 6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth 5. Consulted and informed 4. Assigned but informed	Degrees of Participation
3. Tokenism 2. Decoration 1. Manipulation	NON-participation

Figure 2

In 1987, Gill Westhorp of the Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia identified a six stage continuum of youth involvement. This continuum does not imply that more or less control is better, just that the options exist and that some will be more appropriate in some situations than others. A variety of different strategies and approaches will ensure that a variety of different young people can participate.

It should be noted that the continuum poses a series of questions which must be answered to ensure genuine participation by young people. These questions focus on the mechanics of participation and emphasize the level of participation necessary. The questions include articulation of aims, framing the level of participation, selection of target group/s, delineating participants' support needs, exposing barriers and the execution of evaluation strategies.

The six stages of Westthorp's (1987) Continuum

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
A d h o c i n p u t	Struct ured Consul tation	Influ enc e	Deleg ation	Negot iation	Co ntr ol

Figure 3

Shier, (2001) offered a useful alternative to Hart's ladder of participation. The model consists of five levels of participation. At each level, individuals and organisations have different degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment. The model tries to clarify this by identifying three stages of commitment at each level - openings, opportunities and obligations.

Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation

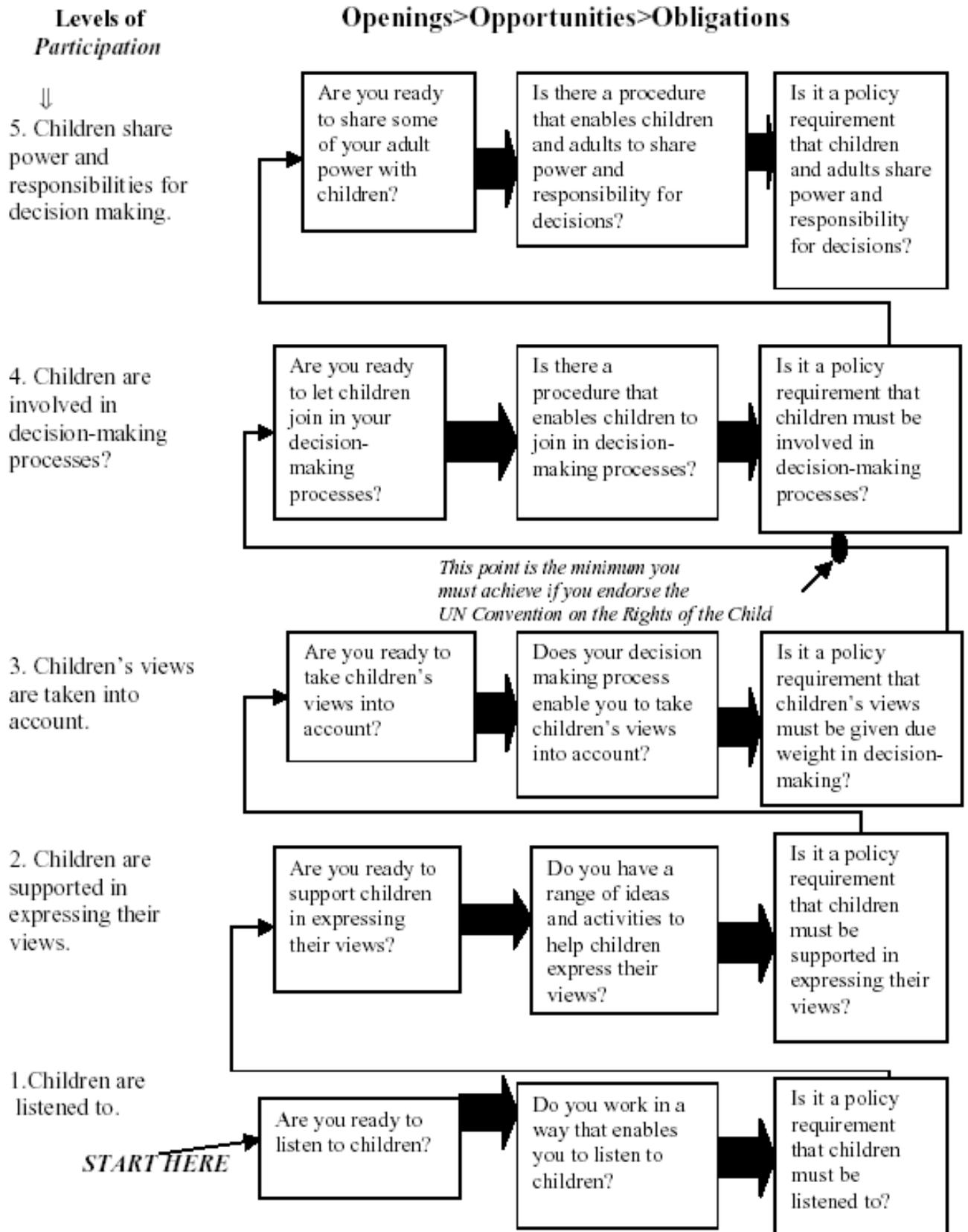


Figure 4

Rocha (1997) took a different approach. She uses the term "empowerment", and devised a ladder where the intended arena of change shifts from the individual through to community based on classification of power experiences, including the source of power and its object or target. In this model, activities are not:

evaluatively arranged along an axis that characterizes one as less beneficial and one as more beneficial. They are arranged on the ladder based on the intended locus of their outcomes: from individual to community empowerment (Rocha, 1997, p. 34).

Rocha's (1997) Ladder of Empowerment

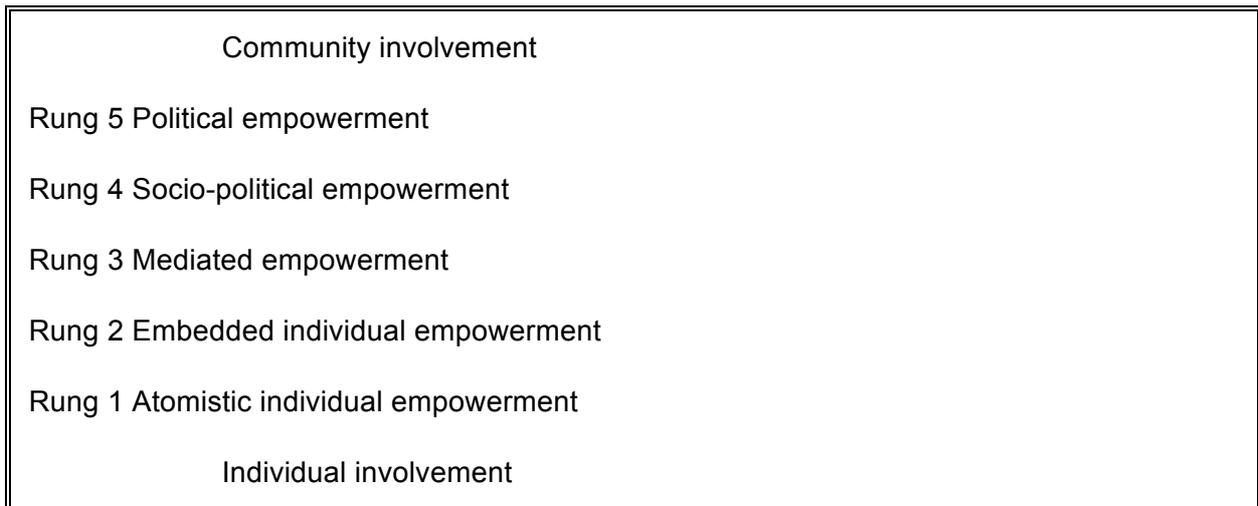


Figure 5

Rungs 4 and 5 reflect the notion that participation can lead to political action. This is particularly relevant to our discussion of young people and research later in this paper.

Why participation?

A quick scan of writings about youth participation reveals that there are many reasons to encourage young people to participate. The next section of this paper draws on the conceptualisation developed by Howard (1994) in her study of parent involvement in schools. Her work acknowledges the differences between surface and deep participation as it builds a more elaborate typology. Howard argues that the reasons for participation can be categorised as pragmatic, educational, human rights and democratic, and to this we would add, technical and transformative.

Technical reasons

We have used this term to refer to situations where the requirements of a project demand the involvement of a group of people. As indicated above, Queensland state government departments are required to demonstrate their efforts to involve young people in government decision-making under the *Queensland Youth Charter*. Such a stipulation can mean that project leaders include young people primarily so they can say they have. This can lead to tokenistic approaches to participation.

Pragmatic reasons

Sometimes young people are involved in a project for practical reasons, for example, because the organisers of the project can see they are a key source of information. Other projects acknowledge the specific skills young people have which will be of benefit to the project. As one example, in School District #23 in British Columbia, Canada, eight surveys of graduate students have been carried out since 1994, focussing on student satisfaction with their high school experience and their employment and training experiences after leaving school. The telephone survey has been carried out mostly by Grade 10 students who are trained and supervised by professional researchers. This is an example of using young people as a resource, on the assumption that the young people who are subjects of the research will be more responsive to other young people surveying them. This assumption is backed up by consistent high response rates in this particular project (R. Early, personal communication, November 2, 2002).

When young people are involved in a project for pragmatic reasons, it is common for that involvement to be superficial, and not based on shared decision making.

Educational reasons

In April 2002, Australian National Training Authority (ANTA, 2002) released a research report titled *Due Credit: Examining the potential to recognise the skills achieved in youth development programs* along with a discussion paper and consultation questions on this topic. One of the areas identified for further exploration was the development of a youth participation certificate, to allow formal recognition of the skills young people can develop through their involvement in a range of projects called "youth development".

Reports of projects where young people have taken leadership roles often highlight the benefits to those young people and the skills and knowledge they develop as a result (e.g. Kirby 1999). Miller and colleagues (2001) argued that the students in their research project developed new skills such as:

facilitating interviews, framing open-ended questions, probing for depth, listening, analysing and interpreting data...through active participation in real-life research projects. Successful collaborative experiences may also increase high school students' self-efficacy and give them confidence that they have something to contribute to their peer group and the adult community (Miller et al., 2001, p. 23).

Human Rights reasons

A view often put forward is that people have a right to be involved in decisions which affect them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes a strong call for children and young people's participation as a fundamental democratic right, and challenges these power systems to advance children's opportunities for participation, especially through having their voices heard (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990; Hart, 1992).

Article 12 of the Convention states that:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child [and] for this purpose the child shall, in particular, be

provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative procedures affecting the child.

Article 13 of the Convention states:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or any other media of the child's choice.

In a study of processes in the substitute care system, a young person, asked to describe his reaction to not being involved in making a decision about his life, said: *"Decisions that involve me are basically my life. This is my life. Why are you talking about it as if I don't exist?"* (NSW Child Protection Council, 1998, p. 53)

Democratic reasons

Federal and State governments are concerned that young people appear to be uninterested in engaging in the political democratic processes. Governments have also acknowledged the need to increase young people's civics knowledge. This is evidenced in the National Profile (Curriculum Corporation, 1994a) and Statement (Curriculum Corporation, 1994b) for Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), developed in 1994 in response to the first *Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia*.

However, democracy can be seen as a political system for running a country or, more broadly, as an attitude or philosophy that colours relationships between people. "Mechanisms which will allow the voice of ordinary people to be heard are an essential part of our democratic system" (Ahern Report, 1979, p. 22).

A democratic society is pervaded by an attitude that relationships are guided by "dialogue, confrontation of opinion, shared responsibility and participation in decision-making" (Blakers, 1980, p. 59-60). In her classic text, Pateman (1970, p. 35) argued that, for a democratic society to exist, "the necessary qualities in individuals can only be developed through the democratisation of authority structures". Participation is a means of such democratisation.

Transformative reasons

Intervening to improve children and young people's participation is seen by UNICEF as one way of fundamentally improving a whole society. Such projects have an explicit agenda of re-including the opportunities for expression that are otherwise removed as the dominant social discourses take precedence. In this way, they aim to fundamentally change society. They are transformative.

Young people's participation needs to be examined in light of the power relations in any society, and human endeavours to achieve equality (Prout, 2001). For instance, opportunities for disadvantaged youth to participate meaningfully in various activities and programs in society are often limited by the society's implicit or explicit power structures and systems (Hart, 1992; Smyth, 1999; Angwin, 2000; Prout, 2001, 2002). The struggle around whose views are represented is ongoing with the outcome usually being that smaller, quieter voices get "drowned out by the other's louder, more dominant, and putatively more epistemologically legitimate" (Shacklock & Smyth, 1997, p. 4).

This discussion of the rationales for youth participation is offered tentatively. Like the various models proposed, we see it as potentially useful as a framework for examining young people's participation in projects to help illuminate the nature of that participation.

However, in considering how young people might participate in research, we must consider our basic beliefs about and understandings of both young people and research. Depending on how we construct these, we will be more or less open to the potential of working in partnership with young people in research projects.

Constructions of Youth

The dominant language used to talk about young people is relatively recent. Hall (as cited in Berger, 1988) first used the word 'adolescence' in a 1904 psychology text while Burt first referred to "the young delinquent" in 1926. The term 'teenagers' was coined in the USA in the 1940s to label pop music supporters, and the term 'youth culture' was first used by Talcott Parsons in a 1942 article on '*Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States*'.

The approach that emerged in the 1950s and is still evident today sees young people as "exotic deviants" (Watts, 1994, 25).

...[F]rom the perspectives of the major institutions of social order, youthfulness is excess; it is an implicit or incipient disorder; for society it is a 'problem' that requires handling, control, cooperation or channelling in socially approved directions (Berger cited in Watts, 1994, p. 25).

Youth is "a slippery concept" (Kenway, 1993, p. 10). When does it start and finish? Some would say that there is a fluidity that transcends demarcation. There are instances in any adult life where behaviour or attitudes could be construed as 'childish' and, in the same way, young people can display remarkably 'adult-like' actions or perceptions.

Young people are often seen as less than adults, as adults-in-the-making, as having no real place except at some time in the future when they become "real people". In fact, Davies and Banks (cited in Weiner, 1994, p. 64) take this further by stating that young people are "not accorded full human status within society".

Most would agree youth is defined by the period that marks the physical, psychological and social transition into adulthood. The United Nations defines young people as those up to the age of 18, while many government policies consider youth to be from 13 to 25 (Wyn & White, 1997).

In recent decades, adulthood has been closely linked to the autonomy that results from employment. However, being defined as an "adult" is no longer important to many young people. They may now seek to define their independence by engaging in 'adult behaviours' such as substance and alcohol use and sexual activity.

The concept of youth as an homogenous group is flawed. It infers there are more similarities than differences between young people. This ignores their diverse experiences, levels of maturity, gender, sexuality, abilities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the role the relations between groups of young people, geographical location, institutions, economics and politics play in identity formation. Youth is therefore more accurately described as a relational stage (Wyn & White, 1997), where young people are "very much individuals in their own right, developing through a sequence of critical transitions from childhood to adult life" (Mudaly, 1999, p. 41).

Although youth participation is recognised as an ideal, there has been little serious investigation of the process of direct youth involvement in decision-making, and little critical examination of the impact of such involvement (Calvert, Zeldin & Weisenbach, 2002). Questions such as: "Are youth truly empowered?" "Do they want to be?" and, dare we say, "Are they capable?" have not been seriously investigated in the past.

While many young people feel disenfranchised from the processes of power and their ability to make a difference, they still care deeply about issues relevant to them, such as education, employment, the environment, health and sexuality (Hallett, 1999). Genuine participation in decision-making should deal with issues of most concern to them.

However there is a problem ensuring serious participation and representation by young people in Australia's political institutions due to a culture of limited institutionalised avenues for their input. Our political institutions and actors fail to be aware of, or respond to, social intelligence about the values and aspirations of young people (Norton, 2001). Instead young people need to find ways to engage that are appropriate to the time and technology available to make their voices heard.

Increasing public or political representation or inclusion of young people requires overcoming widespread beliefs that young people are incapable of contributing to public debate (Prout, 2001). In fact, it has been shown that where young people have experiences with, and overt permission to participate in decision making processes, their competence in reasoning increases. That is, the more autonomy young people are given, the better they are able to exercise it (Bowen, 1998). Therefore, for their voices to be heard there needs to be a change in how we perceive and construct "youth" and "young people".

Young people have been shown to have a 'standpoint' and from this position, social life looks different (Prout, 2002). Each young person experiences and interprets their social reality from a range of multiple and intersecting positions involving aspects of their identity such as class, gender, ethnicity and disability. It is argued that adding young people's voices and views to social research enriches our understanding by completing it. For example, in the work by Christensen (2000), children's views of family and quality time provided an interesting contrast to the views and assumptions of adults.

This is consistent with the interpretivist school of thought who argues that understanding any social action involves understanding the meaning, or *verstehen*, that underlies the action (Schwandt, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This is context specific and depends on the intentions of the person. The interpretivist researcher's aim is to make sense of individual experiences, to *"try and reconstruct the self-understanding of actors engaged in particular activities"* (Schwandt, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.193). However, we can take this even further.

Young people's standpoints exist in a local social setting and young people are shaped by and contribute to shaping these settings (Prout, 2001). The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Children 5-16 research program shows that young people have a clear perspective of their lack of voice together with their exclusion from decision making (Prout, 2000, 2001). "They emerge as reformists, not revolutionaries when it comes to 'having a say'" (Prout, 2001, p.198). For example, they accept the responsibility that parents carry in caring for them; they look to their parents for moral values, protection and provision. They also present their every day life as consisting of restrictions. This occurs in terms of choice, consultation, participation and basic respect for their moral status. Young people in general, but especially children, have little control over how their time is organised and the spaces that frame their lives. Contemporary childhood and to an extent, youth, emerges from this as bounded by surveillance, constraints and controls (Prout, 2001). Research findings argue

that young people need to be seen as part of the network rather than at the bottom of the hierarchy, with all parts of the network important.

The findings from the ESRC research projects have indicated young people's desire to participate and have a voice in decision making. Young people want a voice that is not tokenistic or limited to marginally important issues (Prout, 2001, 2002).

In most cases researchers have concluded that [young people] have something important to say and to contribute. That [young people's] input could be of value in developing and improving services is clear - from, amongst others, the Programme's research on [young people] caught up in domestic violence (Mullender et al, as cited in Prout, 2001, p.199).

Research involving young people is about ensuring that the perspectives of groups, "previously excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures and discourses", are given 'voice' (Smyth, 1999, p. 4). The notion of voice needs to be understood as a constructed entity, emanating from the interaction or alliance of the different actors through the intersection of different practices. Examining the practices that do and do not elicit these voices can be a first step. We can then move from just considering just the young person's own practices to considering those that can enable or disable the production of voice (Prout, 2001).

However, the notion of giving young people a 'voice' can be problematic. Issues around the transparency of interpretation of their 'voices' or what Fine (1994, p. 19) calls "ventriloquism" have to be carefully monitored. Systems of checks and balances must be employed to aid triangulation of data and make the filters through which young people's 'voices' are presented visible.

It is argued that young people's realities are portrayed through their stories, artworks, conversations, and dramatic play, and that researchers need to listen to their voices expressed through these 'languages'. To this end, social researchers need to find ways of accessing young people's voices in ways that respect the authenticity of their experience. This involves reconceptualising young people in ways that recognise them as active participants and recognise that their wellbeing can be better served by greater inclusion in the processes of social life. Too often, research involving young people is removed from their reality, with adults pursuing their interests in ways that render young people passive. The flip side of this is the need to pay closer attention to the social practices that make young people's contributions invisible (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Prout, 2001).

Conceptualisations of research

A researcher's view of the roles young people can play in research will depend not just on how s/he constructs childhood and youth. It will also depend on how s/he constructs research. If we want young people to participate in research for transformative reasons, we are moving into the realm of critical research. This is picked up in Paper three.

The literature on young people as researchers reveals two ways in which they are theorised and enact research activity. In both, young people are actively engaging in research; however the reasons behind the research activity differ, and the nature of the support they experience differs. In the first conceptualisation, research is a 'tool for learning,' or a process through which knowledge is constructed. In the second, research is a means by which young people gain insight into conditions in their lives, and are empowered to enact on those conditions. In the first case, young people work with educators to varying degrees, and in the second, they work with trained researchers, also to varying degrees.

The 'students as researchers' approach involves young people investigating problems as topics a student-negotiated curriculum, and constructing their own knowledge using 'research methods' as tools for learning. They do not collaborate with trained researchers but with their usual classroom teachers. The knowledge and understanding young people derive about researching as a technique for learning is well documented, especially in the early childhood education field.

In this field, there is a long tradition of acknowledging the ability of children to investigate and theorise about their physical and social environments (Troyna, 1994; Johnston & Nicholls, 1995; Atweh & Burton, 1995). Students commonly generate hypotheses to make sense of what they observe, and carry out rudimentary 'research' to test these hypotheses. As students develop skills in observing, questioning, and other fact-finding activities, by which their predictions and hypotheses can be tested, their 'research' skills become increasingly refined. The logical extension of children's disposition to be 'researchers' can be seen in approaches to curriculum which involve students negotiating the topics of investigation and being active 'research' collaborators with teachers and their peers. Students construct knowledge in a collaborative partnership with others, not only about the topic they are researching, but also about how to be researchers.

Young people as co-researchers

The involvement of young people in research projects alongside adult researchers in the educational research arena is a relatively recent phenomenon. Of the projects discussed in the literature, most report that young people's involvement concerns data collection, rather than analysis, write-up, or action based on the findings. Atweh and Burton (1995) argue that students can have legitimate involvement in research for three reasons.

Firstly, the view of Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998), Atweh (n.d.) argues that participatory research involves different players involved in and affected by a problem, who should take responsibility for researching it and working towards its solution. To this end, the process of finding a solution, and the solution itself, is embedded in the context, and is more appropriate for those involved in the research than if the research had been conducted by 'experts' outside the context.

Secondly, young people experiencing the problem or social situation being researched are in a better situation to know the 'inside story'. This is consistent with the principles of ethnographic research where participants observe their lives from within their lived experience.

Thirdly, the involvement of young people contributes to the empowerment of the researched community itself (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1986; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Participation in action research projects enables young people to gain skills which can equip them for the future, by taking responsibility for, and control of aspects of their lives.

A student who participated as co-researcher in a study undertaken by Oldfather (1995) said:

...I learned that learning is not only learning from books, but learning from people around you. I used to think that when you learn there is only one right answer.

Another stated:

...And when I find it frustrating is when I.... I'm not listened to. And that's also what our research is about: "Being heard" and "your opinion counts". And when you don't feel that way, it really gets frustrating.

There are many ways that young people can be involved in research projects. These will be explored more fully in the other papers in this panel. Paper 3, in particular, will focus on

that type of research which is seen to be a political act, emancipatory in intent and transformative in nature. Employing or engaging young people as researchers can be seen as a political form of action (Alder & Sandor, 1990). This method of research challenges the dominant orientations to social research, but is becoming more widely accepted (Alder & Sandor, 1990; Hetzel, Watson & Sampson, 1992; Wilkins & Bryans, 1993; Atweh & Burton, 1995; Oldfather, 1995; France, 2000; McLeod & Malone, 2000; Phillips, Stacey & Milner, 2001; Calvert et al., 2002).

Such research involving young people can best be seen within the sociological discourse as opposed to psychological, behavioural or medical discourses. It is argued that this provides a more useful and emancipatory discourse for understanding and conceptualising young people as researchers (Morrow & Richards, 1996). However, this involves the need to move to a sociology where young people are taken seriously in how they experience their lives in the here and now as young people. (Quoted from Paper 3 SPE02537)

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