

‘Choice, Voice and Engagement’.
An Exploration of Models and Methods which
promote active Youth Citizenship in the new Europe.

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Abstract: *This paper explores both policy and practice imperatives for the promotion of Citizenship in the Youth Field across Europe. The focus of the discussion is to examine the efficacy of models of participation, their underpinning ideology, and their potential relationship with aspirations of youth citizenship. The title suggests that genuine citizenship can only be achieved if we work with young people in a democratic and openly supportive manner and this paper will highlight the contradictions which exist in the achievement of this ideal. Structurally, it is argued that we will require a new institutional ethos in the new Europe which is prepared to encourage radical, multi-cultural, non-tokenistic forms of civic engagement. The paper will offer evidence of good practice which draws upon empirical research and offers a systematic analysis of processes which would be of practical use to the practitioner and strategist in the Youth Field. Finally, a new model of engagement will be presented to further encourage a meaningful dialogue between partners involved in the promotion of active youth citizenship.*

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Introduction

Any meaningful discussion on youth citizenship must acknowledge the fact that as a concept it is hugely contested and potentially open to contamination and vested interest distortion. In terms of definition it must be influenced by relatively complex notions of state intervention, the market, the common good and rights and obligations mostly prescribed by the 'moral majority'. In many ways the march of globalisation, consumerism and the ascendancy of capitalism across the new Europe adds to this complexity. Despite these contradictions, this paper will present a mainly positive analysis of youth citizenship and its potential to liberate new thinking and action in the field of youth work. The urgency of this debate relates to the very heart of the European Union in the shape of the Treaty of Rome with its three foundation principles of *liberty, equality and social justice*. Europe is in a state of flux driven by the aspirations of emergent democracies, a movement towards centrist politics and societies in transition. Accepting the EU as it is (*acquis communautaire*) may need to be revised in the light of unequal access opportunities for young people aspiring to new forms of citizenship.

In this paper I would firstly like to explore perspectives on citizenship which I believe influence our understanding of effective youth work and the positive developments we seek. Secondly, I will examine the utility of participation models and their applicability in a modern democratic Europe. Finally, I offer field-based insights which I believe will contribute to the youth citizenship debate and the development of skilled practice in this critical area.

What Do We Mean By Citizenship?

The origins of citizenship can be traced back through the philosophical and political traditions most prolific in the civic structures of ancient Greece and the Roman Republics. The rights responsibilities and civic sense of duty were seen as core to a social order aspiring to notions of democracy, *polis* (city states) and the emerging patterns of *civitas* (citizenhood). Developing ideas and rules of engagement relating to citizenship meant being able to participate in the shaping of decision-making and state laws which was seen

to benefit all. This early form of common good was very much focused upon the political nature of participation, dialectics and contradiction.

In more recent times the democratic ideals have developed through shifts in the social structure away from a minority property owning educated citizenry to a wider populace. The demands for an extended franchise and an opening up of government have all been the result of citizen struggle within our emerging democracy. The contemporary view of citizenship is one that describes adult rights as a citizen and responsibilities within a framework of community or state membership. This is held together under a system of representative democracy. Young people in the main have not been encouraged to get involved in adult decision making because of their perceived lack of maturity and some would argue that this is the central issue within any genuine debate on Youth citizenship (see Cardiff Declaration, 2005) To be 'seen and not heard' has perhaps more meaning than we realise. The development of citizenship for young people is somewhat contradictory.

France (1996:28) observes that:

“The re-structuring of citizenship for the young is the growth and development of new forms of social controls, which limit young people’s choices and restrict their opportunities to become autonomous adults”. (p28)

From the outset this perspective alerts us to the fact that the concept may be open to contamination. France cites a number of examples to support his argument including the detrimental changes in benefit entitlements for young people and the increasing dependency on the family for both advantaged and disadvantaged youth. To enable us to examine more critically the concept of citizenship and how it relates to participation it would be useful to establish some working definitions.

The classic contemporary analysis by Marshall (1950) in his work is a useful starting point for any meaningful analysis of citizenship. Marshall argues from a reformist perspective, which suggests that social policy reform can

challenge the worst aspects of economic and social inequality. The three core elements of citizenship he describes are:

- Civil rights
- Political rights
- Social rights

The civil elements are made up of the right to encourage individual freedom, freedom of speech, thought and faith. The right to own property conclude contracts and the right to justice. The political element asserts that people have the right to vote, join a political body of their choice and influence the institutions of the state. The social element relates to the right to expect economic welfare and security as well as the right to....“share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society” (p.249). For Marshall, the institutions most likely to uphold these values were the education system and social services responding to the needs of the community in general. The perspective cites the expansion of citizen’s rights from the eighteenth century, culminating in the redistribution achievements of the post war welfare state. The implication was that citizenship could counterbalance the negative effects of capitalism and the so-called free market.

“The dynamic of class inequalities stemming from the capitalist market organisation of society can be moderated to some degree. The worst excesses of class inequality can be successfully ‘abated’ through the expansion of democratic social rights”. (p244)

The concept of citizenship is contested by many. Willow (1995) has developed an explanatory framework, which draws upon Marshall’s three core elements but with a clear focus on participation by young people as the means to real citizenship.

The Political Case

The so-called democratic deficit is often highlighted as a major outcome arising out of youth alienation and disenchantment. At the last United Kingdom election in 2005 only 37% of eligible 18-24 year olds voted. Perhaps

more disturbingly the number of young people who said they actually care who wins the next election fell from 68% in 1994 to 39% in 2003. (MORI 2005)

The Legal Case

This focuses primarily upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as ratified in 1991 by the UK Government. The ratification is a declared intention that law, policy and practice will be compatible with the principles and standards of the convention; of which 40 of the 54 articles ascribe direct rights to those under 18 years. Willow categorises Legal rights under three headings:

- participation rights
- protection rights
- provision rights

The Social Case

The case for participation as advocated by Willow involves debunking the idealised picture of childhood where young people are presented as having little to say or do except play. Instead she draws on empirical data which highlights the fact that young people have real concerns which to a great extent mirror the adult community but also display a greater sense of urgency e.g. bullying, parental arguments, violence etc. Whilst acknowledging the fact that young people may not always have the skills, knowledge or experience to make decisions at all levels, Willow argues in favour of Article 5 of the Convention that we should nurture child's 'evolving capacities' (p13). This offers a much more dynamic alternative for those services involved in youth participation.

In many adult dominated 'learning' situations young people have been passive consumers receiving the wisdom of their elders. Is it any wonder that they quite often mistrust this new liberatory approach? Moir (1999:16) contrasts both stances well:

"The liberatory approach is concerned with the development of critical and reflective thinking and understandings about the nature and complexity of

the world they live in, creating the opportunity to take action for change. Education in this approach is not assumed to be neutral.

Conversely...on domestication.....he writes.....At the root of this model (domestication) is the assumption that young people are in some way deficient, and can be made good by youth work. The political, social, economic and cultural issues which directly impact on and shape their lives are largely ignored". (p16)

A radical shift in the cultural ethos of learning institutions such as schools, colleges and universities will demand a new way of working which is far more interactive and democratic; genuinely working with, as opposed to for, young people. A more creative stance which 'embraces uncertainty' and nurtures critical dialogue will be the new guiding dynamic (Taylor and White 2001; Pease, 2002). This transformation will have substantial implications for institutions across Europe engaging with young people. The major government initiative exploring citizenship led by Crick (1998:10) outlines the goals for addressing this deficit.

"We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally; for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting, to build on and to extend radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and public service, and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves". (p10)

Empirical research suggests that there is a significant pre-occupation with social disengagement and youth apathy without full recognition of the social inequity faced by a significant number of young people. This theme is developed by Williamson (2005:13) in his proposition that we need to better understand the 'mutuality' principle as a necessary pre-condition for active engagement.

"Citizenship does not materialise at a particular chronological point through a simple rite of passage. Citizenship is the product of a

process – one based on a mutual relationship between the individual and community. It is contingent on a fundamental sense of belonging to a community....the reasons some young people fail to engage with their communities is that they feel these communities have rejected them. Feelings are as important as knowledge and skills”. (p13)

There is a growing populist consensus (most evident in the United Kingdom) that in our efforts to enable more effective participation and youth citizenship we have overemphasised *rights* at the expense of *responsibilities*. The focus is therefore firmly embedded in our understanding of what constitutes a ‘good citizen’. Young people are perceived as ‘deficient citizens’ (Eden and Roker, 2002). Extensive longitudinal research carried out over a three year period examining transitions into citizenship reveal a much more positive picture with young people taking very seriously their responsibilities to community and society (Lister, Smith, Middleton, Cox, 2005:33). Perhaps we need to fully understand the difference between that which is ‘citizenlike’ and ‘citizenship’ itself. Being citizenlike implies an altruistic, helping, but more passive approach to social change. Citizenship is potentially a more political form which could involve challenging the status quo actively. Sparks (1997:75) Refers to the notion of ‘dissident citizenship’

*“dissident citizenship describes oppositional democratic practices through which dissident citizens constitute alternative public spaces to pursue non-violent protest outside the formal democratic channels”.
(p75)*

The conceptualisation of Youth Citizenship across Europe must capture the social, cultural and economic landscape which supports the rights and responsibilities of young Europeans or in some cases fails them. This must be the focus of the open method of consultation (OMC) currently being implemented across Europe. Kerr (2003:2) following the work of Jenson, et al (1996) represents a challenge which could contribute to a more holistic understanding of how to achieve citizenship in modern day Europe.

- **Diversity** - of living in increasingly socially and culturally diverse communities and societies
- **Location** - of the nation-state no longer being the 'traditional location' of citizenship and the possibility of other locations within and across countries, including notions of 'European', 'international', 'transnational' or 'cosmopolitan' citizenship.
- **Social** rights - of changes in the social dimension of citizenship brought about by the impact of an increasingly global economy
- **Participation** - of engagement and participation in democratic society at local, national and international levels

The ideology of 'third way' politics in Europe draws upon a social democratic philosophy of governance which in many ways is entirely compatible with progressive forms of youth citizenship. Central to the Lisbon strategy (2000) is the notion of a 'knowledge economy', based on innovation and new forms of democratic governance. Youth Citizenship is not a luxury but a necessary prerequisite to the achievement of this ideal. A more devolved government which champions deregulation, decentralisation and the renewal of civil society is something we all seek, but if this style of government perpetuates a 'deficit' model of citizenship based upon a fear of young people then it must be challenged. In the United Kingdom the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were not primarily designed for dealing with young people exclusively but the reality may be different for most people. Curfews, Tagging and advanced surveillance techniques have added to this ubiquitous fear of young people which although never wholly intentional, has become the product of New Labour's Third Way.

There are very real dangers that some aspects of Youth Work become more surveillance based than working with young people in a process driven, relationship based manner. Davies (2005) summarises this potential 'disproportionality' in current youth policy making:

“ In the youth policy field what is crucially different from the 1960s is that today a strategy is being developed based on deliberately

exploiting popular tensions and frustrations – on playing directly on fear and prejudice. The result is to encourage blanket demonising and dehumanising of a whole generational segment of the population by resort to, and then the widespread and continual recycling of, labels such as ‘yob’ and ‘feral youth’. In order to turn the full weight of the state against these demons, disproportionate public and policy responses are then endorsed, which involve serious distortion of the operation of judicial and law enforcement procedures”. (p7)

It is critical that we challenge the ‘deficit’ model in our work with young people and youth work practitioners. The ‘structured dialogue approach’ (see European Youth Forum, 2006), involving diverse interests in the youth field may have real utility. There is evidence to suggest that young people are embracing new modes of communication using web based frameworks which have the potential to re-invent or remix citizenship in a way we could never have imagined a decade ago (see Coleman, 2005). The so called ‘apathetic generation’ may be constructing something very, very special.

YOUTH CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

If Youth Citizenship is the end we seek in our work with young people, active participation is the primary means for achieving this end. This paper acknowledges the work of Hart (1992); Treseder (1997) and others concerned with authentic participation but for my purposes I would like to focus upon Arnstein (1969) and Shier (2001). In 1969 Sherry Arnstein produced a typology of participation. This adopted a controversial stance by suggesting that public participation in planning and power sharing was flawed at best. The focus of Arnstein’s attention was the poor practice she observed in her own work and the work of others seeking the meaningful engagement of existing and potentially new participants. Her ladder of participation, models a framework from the bottom rung of manipulation through to aspirations of citizen control. (See Figure 1) Manipulation and therapy were perceived as window dressing or a form of cosmetic public relations exercise, whilst

informing, consulting and placating were seen to be tokenistic forms of preserving the uneven distribution of power.

Arnstein highlighted key limitations in her ladder typology, acknowledging that in the real world there could be hundreds of rungs on a particular ladder with a progression up or a regression down, depending on the context and the resilience of power holders. There is also some contemporary resonance in her observations of how to de-skill opposition by encouraging a form of pseudo-participation which appears to promote consensus and in some cases compliance.

Figure 1. Arnstein's 'ladder of citizen participation'

Eighth rung	Citizen control	Included in this level are programmes which give power and control to citizens.
Seventh rung	Delegated power	Citizens have significant control. If disputes arise, citizens enter into a bargaining process with officials rather than officials deciding outcomes.
Sixth rung	Partnership	Planning and decision-making is shared at this level.
Fifth rung	Placation	Tokenistic exercises such as allowing a small number of selected people to become members of official committees, with no real intent to redistribute power or resources.
Fourth rung	Consultation	This can be a step toward full participation but consultation alone is not enough to secure citizen participation in ensuring that ideas and opinions are carried into action.
Third rung	Information	Information can be a precursor to full participation but one-way flow of information is ineffective in finding out people's views.
Second rung	Therapy	Here citizens are encouraged to join groups to share their experiences - this level serves to pathologise individuals while leading to little social change.
Bottom rung	Manipulation	Here citizens are placed on 'rubber-stamp' committees to give the appearance of consultation and participation.

The ladder of participation in some ways is stereotypical, presenting stages with little reference to context and this has led many critics to perceive it as an over-simplistic generalisation. In its time, it presented practitioners with a useful model through which they could reflect on their own practice and the intent of their employing agencies more radically. Were they actually enabling young people to participate effectively or were they indeed ‘agents of social control’?

The strengths of Arnstein’s model lie in its accessibility. Having a sense of the graduations involved in citizen participation is a useful starting point for developing genuine partnerships. The weaknesses relate to the assumptions it makes about progression from one stage to another. The participation of young people is more dynamic, unpredictable and situation specific than the model suggests. Also, given that a great deal of valuable work across the youth field in Europe is actually focused on consultation, is it fair to accept that this approach is somehow inferior? Bell (2004) enables us to be clearer about the distinctiveness of each approach by defining with some precision, **involvement, consultation and participation.**

‘Involvement’ is a generic or umbrella term covering a range of activities. These can include information giving and receiving and consulting on specific issues. It does not define the extent of power young people may have to influence the process or outcomes.

‘Consultation’ can mean many things from adult-led activities aimed at exploring opinions that may be acted upon later, to approaches that encourage and support child-initiated and child-driven approaches and self-determination. Consultation can be undertaken on a large formal scale or on a personal, informal level. It is often equated with participation – but crucially, it is usually adults who hold the power to decide what to do with the information.

‘Participation’ refers to young people taking an active part in a project or process, not just as consumers but as key contributors to the direction and implementation of work carried out. Young people are proactive in this process and have the power to help shape the process – their views have the

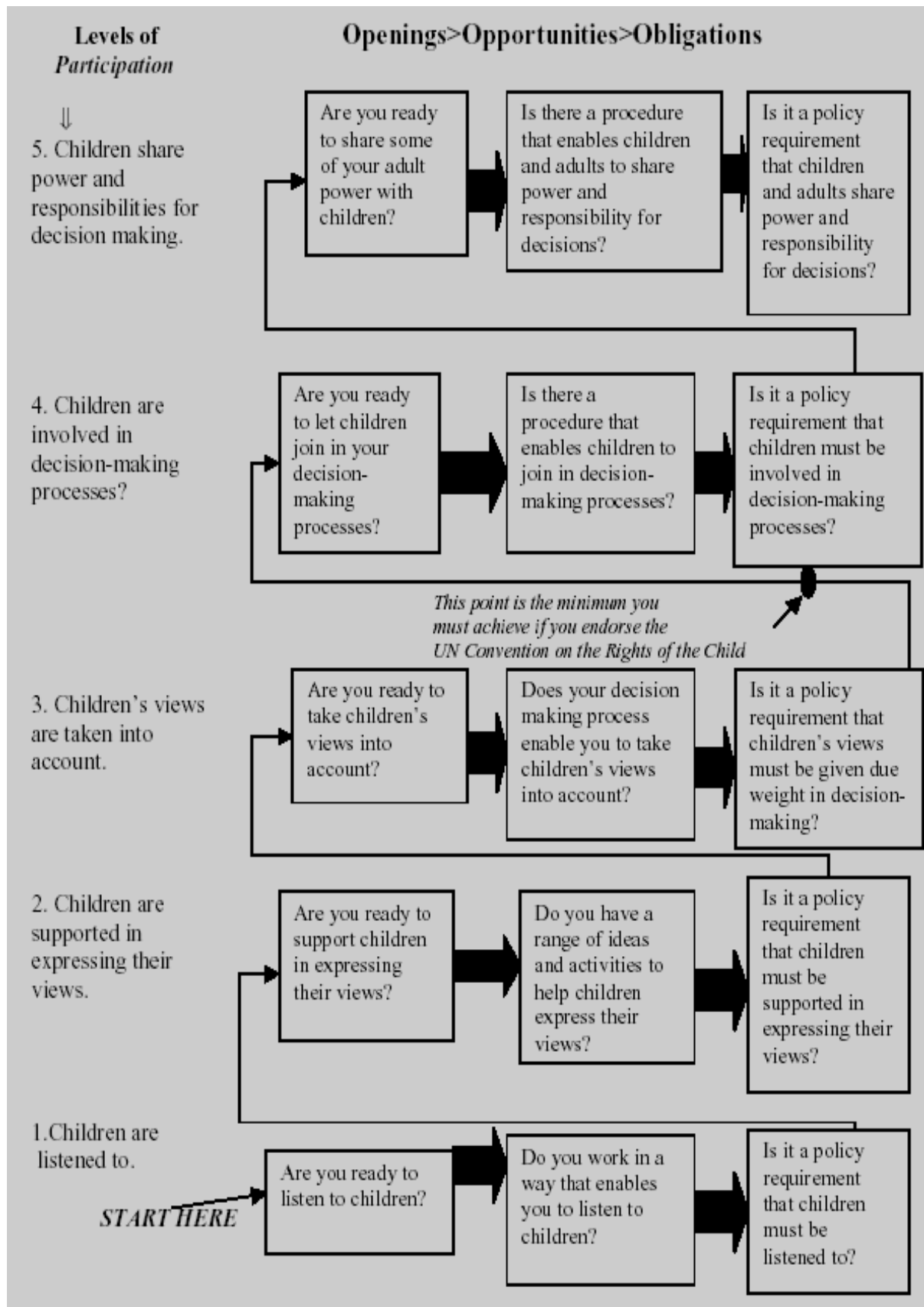
same weight as the adults they are working alongside. Participation refers to children's and young people's involvement in decision-making, whatever form this may take. Consultation means deliberately asking children and young people about their views. These views may or may not be incorporated into political decision-making. Contemporary approaches in European youth field have built on the work of Arnstein and others and have focused on the structural readiness of organisations to involve young people authentically with varying degrees of success. The recognition that young people have been largely excluded by dominant structures and discourses is well documented (Prout, 2001, 2002; Smyth, 1999).

Shier (2001) is a good example of this change in emphasis, from the young person to the organisational culture and its capacity to involve young people (children) democratically. Shier's model outlines five levels of participation. At each level the individual has different degrees of commitment. The 'choice', 'voice' and 'engagement' methods are critical in this regard.

This is clarified by identifying three stages of commitment at each level....openings...opportunities...and obligations. Shier describes these discrete but interconnected stages as follows. The openings describe the stance of the worker who makes a genuine commitment to working democratically with the young person. This could take the form of a statement of intent and does not necessarily mean anything other than solid relationship building. The opportunity stage focuses upon the infrastructure to support practice. This could include resources, training and more participative systems within the organisation. The obligation stage models the existence of built in systems within the organisation where democratic participation becomes a policy norm which is reflected in a new way of working with young people. The model (See Figure 2) is based on five levels of participation which are:

- 1 Children are listened to
- 2 Children are supported in expressing their views
- 3 Children's views are taken into account
- 4 Children are involved in the decision-making process
- 5 Children share power and responsibility for decision-making

Figure 2. Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation



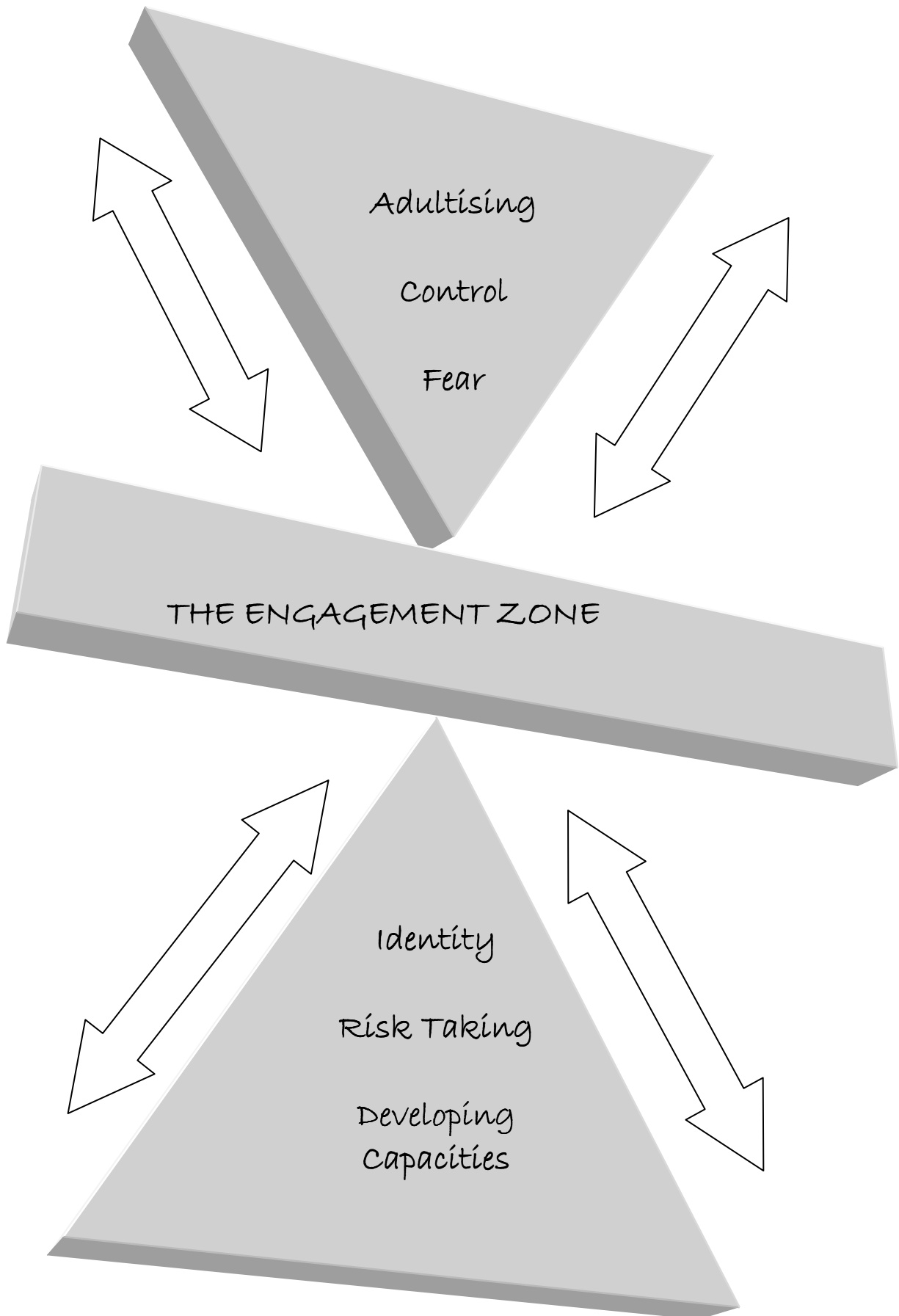
The model proposed by Shier is in contrast to other hierarchical participation models in that it focuses not only on what young people need to do to progress, but importantly what the organisation needs to do to create participative access. Encouraging young people to be vocal can be problematic and this weakness can often be manipulated by adults who engage in filtering what they have to say; a form of pseudo Youth Citizenship perhaps. Fine (1994:19) refers to this phenomenon as “ventriloquism”. In the Shier framework there is an opportunity to challenge this by posing key questions as a potential audit function for organisations using the model. The linkage with the UN convention on the rights of the child and other Eurowide policies also adds to the potential application of the model.

There is currently an interesting shift taking place in practitioner understanding of what appears to influence disengagement by young people, from societal institutions in general. The core characteristics identified by theorists in this area (Brent, 2004; Davies and Docking, 2004) suggest the need to “actively embrace the young people’s collective identities and seek to help them assert these identities more confidently” (Davies, 2005p18) Historically, we have focused our attentions on a participation gap, fed by a lack of confidence or motivation in young people. The intention was always that a fully participating young person, supported by a nurturing adult or two, would somehow influence the structure in such a way that real change would result over time. The reality has been that structure in general has resisted this change and many young people and practitioners have become disillusioned in the process.

Many commentators working in policy and practice now challenge the mythology of youth disengagement and to some extent the acceptance of youth sub-culture as a defining metaphor (Bennett, 2004; Muggleton, 2000). Coleman (2005) describes the phenomenon as ‘mass generational migration from old-fashioned forms of participation to newer more creative forms’. (p2). The link with Youth Citizenship is obvious.

In my own practice in the youth field I have always found it useful to explore exactly who youth work is for? Is it for those who seek to control young people or those who enable them to achieve their fullest potential? The following dialogue model of youth engagement is offered as a basic trigger for discussion by those seeking to explore short, medium and long term change in the youth citizenship context. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3 THE TB (Top-Down/Bottom Up) MODEL OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT. Barber (2006)



Top – Down Pressures

This area of the model focuses on the structural and societal pressures facing young people and those who work with them. Recent empirical research carried out by Barber and Naulty (2005) in the United Kingdom context suggests that top-down, structural understanding of young people is still largely driven by fear and the need to control.

Adultising... refers to behaviour by adults who do not fully accept young people as they are. Instead there are great efforts (sometimes overt, sometimes manipulative, paternalistic and hidden) which seek to accept young people only if they mimic 'responsible' adult values and behaviour. A great deal of the window dressing and politically populist programmes subscribe to this approach.

Control... refers to the much held view that young people must be kept in check at all costs if social order is to remain intact. A spectrum of control ranges from soft socialisation in institutions such as the school and the family unit through to more coercive tactics by the more negative elements of state control.

Fear.... refers to the socially constructed perception of youth as synonymous with rebellion and deviancy. Fear of young people is a global phenomenon, quite often finding expression in moral panics in society and community.

Bottom-Up Pressures

This area describes the aspirational pressures exhibited by young people in the process of engagement.

Identity - Finding Self, Being Self..... refers to the need for young people to develop their own identity internally and through social interaction with others in a diverse range of contexts.

Risk Taking.... The possibility of challenging the status quo and the 'wisdom' of adults is a fundamental part of being young. How this finds expression is a

matter of debate. Those working with young people need to understand this principle if they are to relate effectively.

Developing Capacities...proposes that young people are in a state of transition; their needs, wants and capabilities in a high state of flux. Recognition that young people need emotional and physical space to work this through with adults and peers who respond congruently is essential.

The Engagement Zone

This is the term for the dynamic context where adults engage and interact with young people and structure meets personal agency. The zone is the place for dialogue, compromise, insight and a focus on possibility. In this area there will be expression of anger, cynicism, tokenism, humour, creativity and positive change. Some adults and young people will leave the zone when they feel that their needs are not met; some will remain and continue to struggle optimistically in the hope that change can be achieved.

The TB engagement model is a representation of complex processes but it is hoped that those committed to genuine Youth Citizenship work with young people can use it as a prompt for discussion and dialogue. Not all top-down pressures are negative. In fact some structural forces can, in the right context, be productive and developmental. The demands from bottom up similarly cannot be assumed to be positive and altruistic. The pressures from young people in some ways may be unrealistic, unattainable and naïve. What remains in the zone is the commitment to listening and dialogue between adults and young people.

Conclusions

The promotion of Youth Citizenship in a new Europe is closely allied to a new 'zeitgeist' arising out of changing aspirations, ways of communicating and ways of being. The dominating and sometimes paternalistic attitudes of the moral majority are unlikely to be attractive to young Europeans. Restructuring across nation states, patterns of migration, mobility and a fracturing of cultural homogeneity will feed demands for Youth Citizenship as a distinctive

movement. The European Youth Pact (2005) has the potential to ground the ideals of the Lisbon strategy and influence youth policy development and ultimately practice in the youth field. There is a need to understand the problematic nature of moving from a state of dependence to adult independence in forms of Youth Citizenship. 'Status ambiguity' refers to the phenomenon of not knowing the extent of your own rights and responsibilities and this has significant effects on the sense of purpose felt by both adults and young people (Moore and Rosenthal, 1995p234). Coleman (2004) develops this theme:

"The question of 'status ambiguity' is a key one because of what it tells us about the balance of power in the relationship between adults and young people. If the individual's status is ambiguous, and if his or her rights are not clearly defined, then inevitably he or she will lack the power to influence events and to take control of his or her life.....it is essential that we recognise the effects of the inequality between the generations. Effective communication involves the creation of a relatively equal interaction, with give and take between both participants". (p228)

Those with influence in the youth field need to move beyond economic and consumerist notions of youth relying solely upon vocational skill development. There is a need to actually embrace 'soft skill' development more fully if we are to nurture genuine choice, voice and more radical forms of engagement. The capacity to function effectively as a young citizen relies upon the development of positive relationships, tolerance and creative resilience in action. The movement of positive democratic change needs to be grounded in the policies and practice of all of those who work with young citizens towards the building of a more 'possibility-seeing' Europe.

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