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Constraints to youth participation in the current Federal political environment

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**CONSTRAINTS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE CURRENT FEDERAL
POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

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Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work)**

**This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Social Science by Research**

**Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Science
Edith Cowan University**

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EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This research explores the constraints to youth participation through the mechanism of the National Youth Roundtable. In 1999 the National Youth Roundtable was established as the centrepiece of the Federal Government's 'Voices of Youth' initiative, designed to go to the grass roots of the youth population and seek their participation on matters of policy development. This was to be the new interface between young people and the Australian government, replacing the peak body for youth affairs as a more effective participation mechanism.

The participants on the National Youth Roundtable meet in their own time in March and September each year and between those two meetings are expected to undertake significant community studies. At the final meeting each year they present their reports to various government ministers. To date there is: no process in place to give formal consideration to Roundtable outcomes; no directions to the Department (Family and Community Services) to provide briefings on Roundtable recommendations to Cabinet; and no imperative to distribute copies of formal reports to any Members and Senators. There has been comprehensive evaluation of the National Youth Roundtable processes since its inception in 1999.

My primary research question was: "what are the constraints to youth participation in the current federal political environment?" Secondary questions included: what gaps in the development of youth participation mechanisms are exposed through an analysis of the literature regarding the history of youth participation?; what are the original and current objectives of the National Youth Roundtable and how is its effectiveness measured?; what did members through the National Youth Roundtable think would be achieved and what, in their view, has been achieved?; what observable mechanisms of communication are in place at the face to face meetings of the National Youth Roundtable?; who decided on these mechanisms of communication?; and what strategies, structures and processes would enhance youth participation at the federal level as a result of the findings of this research?

This research is framed within applied post structuralist approaches that presume that youth participation mechanisms are a technique by which unengaged young people come under governance, surveillance and control. In particular, the research was

attentive to the capacity of various youth participation mechanisms to engage young people as empowered subjects who are aware of the terms of their engagement, who are accountable to, and able to hold accountable, those to whom they give power. The work of French theorist Michel Foucault is central in the production of these ideas.

The seven young people chosen for the study were principally from Western Australia and were members of the National Youth Roundtable between the years 1999 and 2006. In addition to the young people I also interviewed the Executive Director of the Federal Youth Bureau in Canberra. Data collection methods included: examination of documentary evidence; in-depth interviews; a focus group; examination of documentary evidence; and participant observation.

After a review of literature on young people and participation, chapters explore: research partnerships with young people; the history of the National Youth Roundtable; Government and participants perceptions of the expectations for and the achievements of the National Youth Roundtable; the structure and processes of the National Youth Roundtable and the impacts on participants; the contribution of the National Youth Roundtable to youth policy development; and how a youth led National Youth Roundtable might look.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter Trinity Grace Bridgland Sorenson and my dear father Alexander Dudley Bridgland who passed away suddenly on the 7th October 2007. My dad always encouraged me to do my best and create things that will endure. Trinity and my dad have inspired me to finish this research. For my daughter, my overwhelming desire for her is that she grows up in a society that celebrates her for who she is, the gift that she is and the contribution that she makes to all our lives. At the time of final editing of this thesis, we became aware that Trinity was going to have a baby brother or sister, and this thesis is dedicated to that little person also.

A special thanks also goes to my step daughters Hannah and Tegan. Your patience and willingness to help while I was writing my 'book' was wonderful, especially looking after Trinity. Helping me to celebrate the completion of each chapter getting was great too!

Words are difficult when it comes to the gratitude that my supervisor Sherry Sagers deserves. She has been a mentor, an academic coach and a listening ear, at times when the task ahead of me seemed too daunting. What she has inspired me to be is the researcher and academic that I need to be, and to begin to 'flex my academic muscles'.

Thank you to David Palmer for his insights, knowledge and honest feedback.

My mum has been a source of constant encouragement, taking the time to ask how I am managing, to edit when I needed it, and to just listen to my rants on the phone.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background to the study

In 1999 the National Youth Roundtable was established as the centrepiece of the Federal Government's 'Voices of Youth' initiative, designed to go to the grass roots of the youth population and seek their participation on matters of policy development (FaCS, 2005b). This was to be the new interface between young people and the Australian government. Dr David Kemp (Federal Minister for Youth from 1997 to 2001), in 1997 announced that the peak body for youth affairs would be de-funded and that a National Youth Roundtable would be established to replace it, as a more effective participation mechanism. In June 1998, the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (hereafter referred to as AYPAC), the peak body for youth affairs in the non-government sector was de-funded amidst claims that it did not represent the needs and aspirations of Australia's youth population. AYPAC took a 'broad church' approach to inclusive membership, as it had large membership based youth organisations sitting alongside state Youth Affairs Councils and religious based organisations. The result was that AYPAC represented the interests of groups who themselves had contact with more than one million young people (AYPAC, 1998).

Prior to its de-funding, AYPAC had taken the concept of a National Youth Roundtable to the Minister for Youth Amanda Vandstone (Federal Minister for Youth from 1996 to 1997) as a mechanism to enhance youth participation at all levels of government. AYPAC had secured significant funding from private sources to fund the Roundtable to run alongside the peak structure as a both/and approach. AYPAC was able to be critical of its organisational structure and saw the need for a ground up approach to youth participation. The Roundtable would be sourced and run at a state

level and then feed into a national structure, enhancing accessibility and responsiveness. This process however, also had limitations as the challenge of what constitutes a democratic locally based participation mechanism was still an issue with which to grapple.

I was the Chairperson of AYPAC at the end of this time and the news came as a shock and disappointment to me and the Australian youth sector. I had been involved with AYPAC for six years, originally as a young person. We had unanimously agreed that the original concept of the Roundtable would enhance the strong work of AYPAC. Since that time, the National Youth Roundtable has functioned with little participation from the youth sector.

The participants on the National Youth Roundtable meet in their own time in March and September each year and between those two meetings are expected to undertake significant community studies. The only remuneration they receive is their direct costs, such as airfares to and from Canberra, accommodation while there and some support for stationary for their research (FaCS, 2005a). At the final meeting each year they present their reports to various government ministers. To date there is: no process in place to give formal consideration to Roundtable outcomes; no directions to the Department to provide briefings on Roundtable recommendations to Cabinet; no imperative to distribute copies of formal reports to any Members and Senators (Lundy, 2001). How and why has the Roundtable been adopted as a legitimate mechanism to garner the participation of young people?

The significance of the study

There has been no critique or comprehensive evaluation of the National Youth Roundtable processes since its inception in 1999. Is the Roundtable a more democratic process instigated by government to ensure that there is a clear process directly affecting policy development? There is significant energy devoted to the National Youth Roundtable and outcomes need to be visible and meaningful. The current outcomes of the Roundtable are indeed highly visible, but are still highly questionable (Bessant, 2004a).

Since the Howard Government has been in office, numerous peak organisations have been de-funded. The de-funding of peak bodies critical of government particularly

affected peaks representing the poorest Australians such as the Australian Federation of Pensioners and Superannuants, National Shelter and the Association of Civilian Widows, while the Australian Council of Social Service had its funding greatly reduced. National Shelter, a federation of State peak bodies, representing some 700 community and housing consumer organisations was de-funded, despite being supported by successive governments for twenty three years (ACOSS, 1998). According to some commentators, the de-funding of AYPAC was unfortunate:

AYPAC had been created in 1991 and operational funding had enabled good policy research well promoted through Triple J. The youth round tables that replaced AYPAC had no continuous existence or capacity to develop policy capacity and conduct policy monitoring (Sawer, 2002, p.41).

Some argue that the youth sector nationally has suffered without the strong voice of a national youth peak body and have been calling for an evaluation of the Roundtable since 1999. The funding required for the Roundtable annually is in excess of half a million dollars. In comparison, AYPAC required \$320,000 and had also secured private sponsorship to fund the proposed National Youth Roundtable (Lundy, 2001).

The purpose of the study

The structure of the governance of the National Youth Roundtable mechanism illustrates a larger issue to do with the legitimacy of young people in our society. The National Youth Roundtable has created a precedent and model of how young people can be treated. Further to this it exacerbates the notion that the youth category are constructed as problematic and how this legitimates their governance by authority structures. Foucault would argue that the aim of liberal democracies is to produce citizens who are capable of governing themselves and others and hence mechanisms such as the National Youth Roundtable become apparatus by which government can do this (Foucault, 1972, 1980). So the purpose of this study is to examine constraints to youth participation in the current federal political context.

Research question

What are the constraints to youth participation in the current federal political environment?

Secondary questions

- What gaps in the development of youth participation mechanisms are exposed through an analysis of the literature regarding the history of youth participation?
- What are the original and current objectives of the National Youth Roundtable and how is its effectiveness measured?
- What did members through the National Youth Roundtable think would be achieved and what, in their view, has been achieved?
- What observable mechanisms of communication are in place at the face to face meetings of the National Youth Roundtable?
- Who decided on these mechanisms of communication?
- What strategies, structures and processes would enhance youth participation at the federal level as a result of the findings of this research?

Definitions

Youth/young people

Many countries define youth/young people as the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law: often referred to as the ‘age of majority’. This age is often 18 in many countries, and once a person passes this age, they are considered to be an adult. However, the operational definition and nuances of the term ‘youth’ often vary from country to country, depending on specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998).

Debate exists around the notion of a homogenous youth category; hence the definition of the term youth or young person is far from simple. The World Health Organisation and the Australian Medical Association define the youth category as

between the ages of 10 and 24; however, this arbitrary age definition is far from adequate (ACYS, 2004). The United Nations defines 'youth' as:

...a statistical artifact to refer specifically to those aged 15-24 years. Another meaning, used in discussion of the policy responses of Governments to the particular problems faced by young people, is based on a sociological definition of youth as a transition stage between childhood and adulthood. More precisely, it comprises a series of transitions "from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence to independence, and from being recipients of society's services to becoming contributors to national economic, political, and cultural life" (UNDP, 2000, p.15).

The National Youth Roundtable uses the ages 15-24 for their definition of young people (FaCS, 2005a). These definitions will be further explored throughout the process of the research.

Organisation of the thesis

Chapter two contextualises my research, exploring the literature surrounding 'youth' and introduces the notions of: youth and exclusion; governmentality and resistance; issues with representation; young people, participation and the government; principles for youth participation; and contemporary youth participation.

Chapter three discusses research partnerships with young people and details my: theoretical framework; design and methodology; sample; data collection and analysis; research validity; ethical considerations; and limitations.

Chapter four paints a picture of the history and current context of the research, investigating the de-funding of AYPAC and the political climate that generated this situation. Chapters five, six and seven discuss the research findings and probe a number of significant themes in depth. These themes include: the emotional impact of the Roundtable on the participants; the structural procedures that impact on the participant's engagement with political processes; and how the Roundtable impacts on government policy making processes.

Chapter eight challenges us to think differently about citizenship and young people, recommends new ways of doing youth participation and embraces the idea of 'youth led futures'.

CHAPTER 2

Young people and participation

The purpose of this study was to explore how the current federal government listens to young people via the mechanism of the National Youth Roundtable. This requires a detailed understanding of the emergence of the youth category, how this category has been situated politically, its subsequent problematisation and how this has spawned issues of governance and resistance. In particular, this raises issues of representation and the legitimacy of young people's participation in government contexts. All of these matters will be examined in order to place this study within the framework of current literature, and particular attention will be given to existing notions of youth participation and how government processes impact on these understandings.

The social construction of the 'youth' category

There is a significant canon of literature regarding the emergence of the notion of youth, demonstrating some divergent views. Bessant, Sercombe and Watts (1998) explore the issue through an analysis of various theories of youth. The assumptions which people make about young people and the nature of 'adolescence' depends upon the theories which they hold about youth (1998, p.26). For instance, if adolescence is understood as a time of emotional and behavioural 'storm and stress' (G. S. Hall, 1904), then young people may be problematised. Conversely, if adolescence is perceived as another stage that all of the population travel through, then young people may be seen differently (Sercombe, 1992).

Foucault has much to say about the social construction of groups. He discusses this notion at length in works like *Madness and Civilization* (1988) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and refers to the phenomenon as “the constitution of the subject” (Rabinow, 1986, p. 6, p.9) or what Hacking (1986) labels “making up people” (p.6). The question is: how do human beings become ‘subjects’? Furthermore, how do they become self-conscious, acting beings, acting out of their self-consciousness, and how are they subordinated by processes of domination and control (Rabinow, 1986, p.11)? According to these authors, the process by which ‘youth’ emerges as a social category in the West is not merely accidental, nor neutral, nor natural, but a product of the organisation of power. According to Paul Rabinow’s useful summary (1986, p.8) this “history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” has three major movements: firstly ‘dividing practices’ which involve the identification of a subject population, and some way of isolating them and conferring special treatment; secondly, a series of knowledges and techniques are developed and employed to single out some sector of the population for special analysis; and finally a scientific classification which is related to dividing practices, and deeply implicated within them is established. Scientific classification names the subject as a particular kind of human being (in this case a ‘youth’ or an ‘adolescent’). This process actually invents a new kind of person and it sets up the subject as an object for study, within “the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences” (Rabinow, 1986, p.208). In each and every instance, the claim to knowledge is a claim to power, and the generation of discourse becomes a structure of containment and control (Foucault, 1977).

As a result, self formation occurs (Hacking, 1986). While human beings confined in institutions often do not have much control over what is happening to them, Foucault is interested in the work that subject populations do to cooperate with the discourses and institutions that define them (Foucault, 1977). Young people actively construct a self-identity around being young by the way they dress, the way they behave and the kinds of music they listen to (Brake, 1985; Wyn & White, 1997). So, ‘youth’ is not just something that is imposed on the young. It is about how young people constitute themselves as ‘youth’ or ‘adolescents’ under conditions of domination and subjection, how young people learn how to be ‘teenagers’, how they negotiate between the ‘student’ identity and the ‘delinquent’ identity at school for example (Foucault, 1988).

An analysis of ‘youth’

Discussions of the youth category come from a variety of theoretical positions, and approaches that have been focused on throughout this research were principally Marxist and Foucaultian. Other theoretical approaches that have contributed significantly to youth theory are the neo-Marxists and feminists (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; Rabinow, 1986).

Since the emergence of the youth category after the Industrial Revolution when children were separated out from adults and the ensuing attention that this category has received, much debate has emerged regarding the notion of young people’s legitimate participation in society (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; R. White, 1990; Wyn & White, 1997).

... in those societies in which the status of the adolescents and young adults (particularly the males) is high, change will tend to be slow ... where their status is low, and their seniors can effectively block their access to adult statuses and impede their assumption of adult roles, then there is likely to be a predisposition to change, to social innovation and experimentation, to a ready response to the opportunities which may be offered by an alien, intrusive culture to follow alternative and quicker routes to power and importance (Musgrove, 1964, p.22).

The origin of adolescence is then, for Musgrove, not the rate of social change, but the practice of excluding young people from positions of power and importance. Often, the social force behind this, he argued, was demographic: decreasing mortality led to reduction in positions of political and economic power. The older generation, in order to protect their own positions, instituted controls of various kinds to artificially keep young people in economic and political dependence (Musgrove, 1964; Wyn & White, 1997). However, this becomes even more complex when considering what we can then deem to be adulthood. Youth theorists tended to work on the basis that youth was problematic and adulthood was not. However, the notion of ‘adulthood’ needs to be viewed as being as inscrutable as ‘youth’.

Adulthood which once seemed an monotonous predictable time of life, has more recently come to seem problematic and mysterious, We find ourselves asking whether adulthood is a period of stability or of change, whether adults ‘develop’ or only drift, whether there are patterned stages of adult development or only less successful responses to external pressures (Swidle, 1980, p.24).

Adulthood is no longer a certain destination and what has emerged is that the once ‘fixed’ notion of adulthood has become fluid (du Bois-Reymond, 1998).

Accounts of different practices linked to 'youth' have a substantial historical and anthropological standing (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; S. Hall, Jefferson, & Clarke, 1976). At different times and within different cultures the relative significance of 'youth' as a signifier of status and identifier of behaviour in the public sphere changes (Musgrove, 1964). At some points it may be a useful category, at others it may mystify more than it informs. At this moment it is likely that the substantive changes in the social and economic structure, which have, for example, eliminated the 'youth labour market' in the space of a couple of decades, will have a similar impact to those that Musgrove (1964) wrote about (Wyn & White, 1997). Just as adolescence was created by social and economic changes wrought two centuries past, we might now be witnessing its demise. Comparative studies increasingly show changes in the sequence and pattern of transition to an extent that the rationale for its use is being rapidly eroded, however, dominant discourses still advocate for these convenient notions (Jeffs & Smith, 1998b). As du Bois-Reymond argues we are encountering a world in which:

Status passages are no longer linear but synchronical and reversible. The life-course of modern young people does not necessarily follow the model of finishing school, completing professional training, getting engaged to be married, and then beginning an active sex life; instead a sex life may commence while still at school, and a trial marriage may take place rather than an engagement (1998, p.66).

There are further major problems with 'youth' and these can be illustrated in relation to the three central traditions of the sociology of youth as first proposed by Hall in 1904 (G. S. Hall, 1904). These traditions are characterized by Wyn and White (1997) in a contemporary context as youth transitions, youth development and youth subcultures. These mirror a Marxist analysis of the youth category: young people are categorised and institutionalised to regulate their participation. Youth transitions examines the way in which youth is "constructed and structured through the institutions that 'process' the transitions to adulthood" (Wyn & White, 1997, p.5). The classic processes here involve schooling and the movement into further and higher education and the labour market. In the literature, youth development is often tied to a notion of 'troubled youth' and draws upon psychological understandings of youth. The focus is then on developmental stages, individual differences, moments of stress and risk-taking behaviour (Brake, 1985). In respect of youth subcultures there tends to be a defining interest in "the production and consumption of culture and the process of identity formation"(Wyn & White, 1997, p.82). Much of this work has its origins in studies of

groupings such as mods, rockers and skinheads that appeared in the 1970s (Brake, 1985).

With regards to transition, the first problem we encounter is that the concept of transition to adulthood seems to be fast-fading in industrialised countries, a notion flagged by Musgrove in 1964 (Musgrove, 1964). During the last few years, in order to keep it alive, this process has undergone constant revision. We have been asked to use the concept of transition in an array of re-constituted forms. ‘Delayed’, ‘broken’, ‘highly fragmented’, ‘elongated’, ‘extended’ and ‘blocked’ transitions have been paraded before an increasingly perplexed, sometimes irritated, audience (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999, p.13). What they each share is desperation to hold fast to the concept of an imagined mainstream in which the majority of young people neatly go forward in a uni-directional way towards some magical moment when adulthood is conferred (Wyn & White, 1997). As such they are aligned to a predominately economic view which, predominantly for young men, sees full-time employment as the pivotal signifier of adulthood (Irwin, 1995; Musgrove, 1964). An excellent but somewhat grotesque example of this approach argues that to become adult it is necessary to have a job and to make money (Morch, 1997). This has been argued in a more current context by Bessant (Bessant, 1996, 2002, 2004), Fergusson (2004), and Checkoway and colleagues (2003), who assert that young people are perceived in terms of their pathways to citizenship, not as competent citizens. Young people are seen in terms of their delayed status, rather than understood in terms of a range of trajectories into adulthood (Fergusson, 2004). Thus, those who postpone “life decisions typical for adulthood, such as taking a steady job or building a family” (du Bois-Reymond, 1995, p.72) are allegedly less than adult, less than mature and not deemed to be legitimate citizens.

It appears that whether we are discussing employment, education, family status or housing there is no longer (if there ever was) a point where ‘final choices’ are made (du Bois-Reymond, 1998). This has clearly been the case in the post eighties, where rapid and crucial changes have taken place during and after restructuring of arrangements for post-sixteen year olds in three areas: education and training provision, youth labour markets and benefit arrangements (Fergusson, 2004, p.293). Additionally while there may be questions around Beck’s (1992) influential thesis, that individuals are becoming less constrained by traditional social forms and his talk of ‘risk-biographies’, what cannot be denied is that people in industrialised countries

increasingly blend work, leisure and education. For example, they move in and out of educational systems - exploiting modular course structures, credit accumulation and transfer schemes, new forms of assessment (such as the accreditation of prior learning) and distance learning to construct a more individualised educational experience (Beck, 1992). In so doing they package learning to better suit their needs, home circumstances, employment or finances (Ainley, 1997; Fergusson, 2004; P. Scott, 1997). All this results in a mixing of full-time and part-time study, work and leisure in way that can extend the sphere of autonomy of the individual. 'Transitions' that were previously linked to youth are frequently no longer the sole property of a particular age group. Backtracking, re-visiting, revising and the reversing of earlier decisions regarding life style and content are a growing feature of life, however, this process in youth is seen as problematic and assumptions are made regarding young people's participation and fecundity throughout this apparent route (Fergusson, 2004; Wyn & White, 1997).

At this point we come to a central question: are the various social situations experienced by young people distinctive? If it is possible to establish that young people encounter a unique set of situations and social experiences, then there may be a case for treating youth (or adolescence) as a useful category on which to base explicit intervention (Hacking, 1986; Springhall, 1984). In part this takes us back to the discussion around transitions. Many of the activities associated with youth - taking part in education, entering the labour or housing markets, cohabiting and so on, occur across a wide age range (Fergusson, 2004; S. Hall, Jefferson, & Clarke, 1976). What is arguably unique is that these things may be encountered for the first time, and that as a result young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviour. This is the tenuous thesis on which much social policy development in relation to young people is based (Bessant, 1996; Irwin, 1995). There are arguments to indicate that people do return to this turmoil after the youth stage, in fact, Daniel Levinson contends that life is a series of transitions and crises (Myers, 1998), however, it is usually termed another crisis and thus socially sanctioned.

Frith (1986) identified the absence of any significant developments in the sociology of youth during the first half of the 1980s. Little has changed. This field of study has produced little of substance, and certainly almost nothing fresh or original for nearly three decades. It has become more inward looking. As a sub-discipline it is unlikely to disappear (although perhaps it should) as too many have invested too much

in it. It will linger on - not least because governments continue to be concerned about 'troublesome youth' and require people to research into the topic. Bessant (2004) argues that this trend is continuing; that is, the obsession with the governance of youth and the view that they are inherently difficult and require monitoring and regulation. Regardless of regular injections of research funding, youth as a meaningful category is likely to become increasingly irrelevant. Exhausted, reduced to picking over the minutiae of young peoples' lives and re-working its own tired models it will stagger on - as a scan of journals such as *Youth and Policy* and *Youth Studies Australia* testify (Jeffs & Smith, 1998a). Indeed, we can find articles on 'youth' that do not explore young people's experiences in any sustained way. As people seek out difference rather acknowledging commonality, 'youth' as a meaningful concept continues to slip from view (Bessant, 2004; Fergusson, 2004). This has consequences with regards to citizenship and young people: if 'youth' is becoming a meaningless term, then recognising young people as citizens is questionable. This has implications for young people and participation and will be explored more comprehensively in subsequent sections.

Youth and exclusion

The period of youth is significant because it is the threshold to adulthood and it is problematic because adult status itself is problematic (Wyn & White, 1997, p.9)

The idea that youth or adolescence is constructed by processes of exclusion is one which gradually becomes more common in work around the youth question through the 1960s and 1970s (Smith, 1984). Other youth theorists emerged, writing from neo-Marxist perspectives, building on previous thinking. Sheila Allen (1968) shared Ann Seig's (1975) understanding that youth is a social category structured by processes of exclusion. However, what she brings to the youth problematic is an analytic understanding of the significance of class, race and gender. A critical and widely read contribution to this new focus was her 1968 paper in *Sociological Review* which argues that:

... social relationships have to be understood as part of a dynamic process, in which social situations are the consequence of structural contradictions operating at different levels and with different intensity (Allen, 1968, p.65).

Social processes need to be understood in terms of the structural base of the society and for Allen, the structural base is centrally tied up with the ownership of the means of production, and the social position of subjects tied up with class. She asserts:

Age relations are part of economic relations and the political and ideological structures in which they take place. It is not the relations between ages which explain change or stability in societies, but change in societies which explains relations between different ages (Allen, 1968, p.70).

Allen's assertions underpin the notion that it is critical to understand the extent to which the youth category is a product of the exercise of power to control particular groups and that the existence of a youth category enables those with power to increase their wealth and influence (Allen, 1968; Musgrove, 1964; Sercombe, 1992; Sidoti, 1998). This also links with Allen's claim that youth as a category connects with other social categories like the working class and once again reiterates the entitlement of society to control the category through social 'contracts' (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; Sercombe, 1992). What this effectively does is eliminate young people from positions of power and many decision making capabilities and these processes become socially sanctioned. The corollary of these actions is that young people are excluded from such things as citizenship rights and these processes are not questioned (Fergusson, 2004).

Issues of governmentality and resistance

Man is not fitted for society by nature, but by discipline. (Thomas Hobbes cited in Burchell, 1999, p.1)

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (Foucault, 1983, p.96).

Much has been postulated about the notion of governmentality and in order to shed sharper light on this vexed issue it needs to be detached from its dogmatic contexts, the fixed and institutionalized ways of thinking about it. I propose therefore to use Foucault's conceptions of 'governmentality' and 'technologies of government' so as to break from assumptions, particularly in relation to the exclusion and control of young people and thus uncontested principles, thereby aiming at achieving a better

understanding of the diversity of ways in which political power may manifest itself (Foucault, 1991). Foucault (1991) coined the term ‘governmentality’ to mean a form of activity designed to shape, affect, or change the conduct of a person or persons (p.6). Governmentality can be understood both in a wide sense of the government of the self and others and in a narrower sense of self government. According to Foucault governmentality has touched us all, so that we are not the free, autonomous individuals that the liberal framework and liberal education would make us out to be. The self, or personal identity, is constituted by others, by official discourses and ‘contracts’, and by what Foucault calls ‘power/knowledge’ (Foucault, 1983). What is of concern here is that the power of these processes is veiled from much of society and thus people interact without being aware of the way in which they are being governed (Foucault, 1980). As Marx and Engels recognised in *The Communist Manifesto*, to discuss social relationships in terms of ‘contracts’ disguises the wider, often hidden power relationships which underpin and shape observable reality (Marx & Engels, 2002).

The recurrently quoted justification of the term ‘government’ as the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 1991, p.2) could serve as a springboard into Foucault’s theorising about governmentality (Faubion, 2001). Rather than limiting our analysis to how a ‘governor’ exercises authority over the ‘governed’ or of governing ‘others,’ Foucault defines government in such a way that it also allows us to address the question of how we govern ourselves and hence embraces notions of liberal governance (Foucault, 1991). Governing, therefore, symbolizes not only a relation towards externality, but also towards the interior. This is particularly relevant in relation to young people, as the aim of liberal democratic processes is for individuals to become autonomous self-regulating and self governing, internalizing surveillance processes (Sercombe, 1992). The action of “self on self” and the problematisation thereof imply a tight, although not always sufficiently illuminated, connection between government, politics and administration on the one hand, and the space of lives, selves and persons, on the other (Dean, 1996, p.12). In *The History of Sexuality* (Vol.1) and later writings, Foucault describes the techniques by which others constitute our identities and how we do it to ourselves, to constitute our own, and calls them, respectively, ‘technologies of domination’ and ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault, 1978, p.47). Technologies of domination are concerned with the way in which the human sciences and professionals classify, objectify, and normalize us as persons who will lead useful, docile, and practical lives. In this way, young people become what Foucault (1983, p.139) refers to as “docile bodies” who are self governing and internalize self-regulation and government.

The theory of governmentality (or the art of government, as Foucault sometimes refers to it) which links governing (*'gouverner'*) and modes of contemplation (*'mentalite'*) asserts that "it is *not* possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them" (Foucault, 1980, p.16; Lemke, 2001). The focus thus is on the power/knowledge nexus (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Foucault, 1980) which, in turn, necessitates a series of questions ranging from "by what means (technologies/vocabularies) governing is accomplished" to "what forms of thought/rationality are employed in practices of governing" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.56). It is important to pause here so as to reflect upon the traditionally held (by those in power), albeit faulty, conceptions of power in institutional or static terms, since power always circulates:

It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads, they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation (Foucault, 1980, p.98).

Further to this, an explanation of the dispersion of power as a network is crucial (Foucault, 1980). Governmentality has two dimensions: representation and intervention (Lemke, 2001). More particularly, by defining the discursive field, that is, how and where it will be discussed, government specifies the space within which the exercise of power is 'rationalised.' Once a particular way of thinking about particular issues/problems is established within a society or, in other words, once a particular 'truth regime' (Foucault, 1980, p.25) and, by extension, 'reality' is constructed, the ground is paved for the introduction of already legitimized political technologies for tackling these issues/problems. This process is firmly in place in relation to young people as has been previously elucidated (Rabinow, 1986). It is tempting to interpret political technologies only from the 'governor-governed' standpoint thereby trying to capture formal technologies of management which seek to 'instruct' or 'rule' individuals 'from above' in their public activities (Foucault, 1980, p.28). Yet, as Miller and Rose forcefully argue, problematisation of top-down managerial control is usually achieved at the expense of locating 'indirect' mechanisms which play a very important role in fabricating and maintaining (self)-government. In other words and especially in the case of governing economic life, 'indirect' mechanisms seek "to act upon and instrumentalise the self-regulating propensities of individuals in order to ally them with socio-political objectives" (Miller & Rose, 1993, p.82). Thus whole populations naively

and unconsciously become regulated and controlled and maintain structures of authority and dominance (Bessant, 1995; Fergusson, 2004; Sercombe, 1992).

Modern versions of governing seem to emphasize self-mastery and/or care of the self, via self-regulation rather than the sovereign power of the state acting directly on subjects by means of prohibitions (Bessant, 2004a). Yet contemporary techniques of self-regulation or self-mastery should not be interpreted as ‘neutral,’ even though the general trend may point to the shift from compulsion to choice (Foucault, 1980; Rabinow, 1986). Just as a consumer may express his or her personality only through the structured choices of the market, without (ever) realizing that it is not his or her, but the market which ‘governs’ his or her uniqueness, we may uncritically appropriate the hegemonic discourse which makes us believe that it is us who choose the means of self-mastering (Foucault, 1983). White and Hunt caution us that “the choices forced on subjects can be highly coercive” (M. White & Hunt, 2000, p.19). This is precisely because the boundary between the private and the public disappears, since the regulation of personal conduct becomes intrinsically linked to the regulation of political and civic conduct (Dean, 1996). Power thus “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives” (Foucault, 1980, p.39). Given the extent to which we believe that the distinction between the unregulated private and liberally regulated public is important, we have to conclude that we have become trapped in the “paradox of freedom” (M. White & Hunt, 2000, p.22). In this context freedom itself is not free. We are compelled to act freely, there is no way to avoid being free. Sartre asserts that much of our life is the avoidance of being free, most often unconsciously (Stack, 1992). Given this, it is important to now explore the concept of governmentality in relation to current examples.

Governmentality at work

Many decades have been consumed with discussion regarding the issue of youth participation; however, in 2006 we are still seeing reactive approaches to policy regarding young people. “Many local and state governments have enacted laws to regulate the movement of people in public space” (Salmon, 2005, p.10). This is a particularly salient point, with policies nationally being imposed on young people because they are perceived as being a powerless group and in need of control and

discipline (Sercombe, 1999; R. White, 1990). As Salmon suggests “young people in public spaces, particularly in groups, can be viewed with suspicion and fear. Community perceptions of young people are largely influenced by negative images, particularly in the mainstream media” (Salmon, 2005, p.9). Sercombe proposes that media representations of young people can feed community fears that young people are a problem and a threat (Sercombe, 1999). One example of this is the Western Australia youth curfew in Northbridge in Perth. Young people are not permitted on the streets after 10pm, as they are seen as being in danger and creating a nuisance. The curfew came about after sensational media stories of young Indigenous people harassing people for money and acting in ‘anti social’ ways. Northbridge is an entertainment precinct and these groups of young people were creating what Crane terms “facility stress” (Salmon, 2005, p.19). He states:

...an issue may present as a management of behaviour issue but be underpinned by design deficiencies and a lack of amenity that in turn results in ‘facility stress’ not allowing cooperative use of the space by multiple groups of users (Crane cited in Salmon, 2005, p.19).

Despite evidence that Northridge was experiencing “facility stress”, due to the proliferation of ‘al fresco’ dining, young people were viewed as being the source of the problem. What emerged was that there was conflict between commercial interests and young people’s use of public space, and the result was that certain groups of young people were stigmatised and deemed to be public nuisances (YACWA, 2003b). There was no systematic assessment of these claims and there was no consultation with young people prior to imposing this sanction on their freedom (Salmon, 2005). Issues such as this further highlight the fact that young people have no legitimate way of affecting government processes and policies, despite the fact that they comprise a significant percentage of the population. In addition to the Northbridge situation:

Proposals for youth curfews have also been considered in Queensland, South Australia, Sydney, Alice Springs and the Gold Coast. In Victoria the State Opposition have proposed a midnight curfew for young people (15 years and under). This proposed law would authorise police officers to return a child to their home if they are found in a public place after midnight or judged to be acting in an anti-social manner (Salmon, 2005, p.10).

Crane (1999) discusses a number of other current examples, where young people are systematically excluded from public spaces. These include the World Expo 1988

site, which has been redeveloped by the Southbank Corporation in Queensland and the Myer Centre in Brisbane. These have been the site of “facility stress” between competing commercial interests and the use of space by young people, who are not necessarily seen as consumers in the commercial sense. Crane argues that principles of inclusivity need to be developed by local governments and corporations to ensure that young people are included in planning public spaces (Crane, 1999; Salmon, 2005; Sercombe, 1999).

However, this systematic exclusion builds resistance within young people and externalises their responses into what is deemed to be anti social behaviours (Foucault, 1980; Sercombe, 1999; R. White, 1990). Crane (1999, p.13) asserts:

The goal of inclusivity also involves recognising that little attention has been paid to how young people go about defining, creating and discovering space and the forms of resistance they use as responses to the exclusion they experience and the normalising pressures applied to them.

These issues constitute another layer of complexity regarding young people’s participation in what Sercombe refers to as the “common wealth” and cannot be ignored when considering meaningful participation (YACWA, 2003a, p.1).

Issues with representation

Given that young people are often excluded from full participation in public life, and are not seen as legitimate citizens due to their lack of economic contributions, it is important to now examine issues to do with participation (Bessant, 1996, 2002, 2004a; Fergusson, 2004). One issue that emerged strongly in the course of this research was assumptions around young people’s participation and concerns around representational legitimacy. Hence, before discussing young people and participation in government contexts, it is important to have a clear understanding of representation and the concerns it raises. Pitkin (2004) states:

Representative government has become a new form of oligarchy, with ordinary people excluded from public life. This is not inevitable. Representation does make large scale democracy possible, where it is based in participatory democratic politics at the local level (p.335).

What becomes evident here is that there are large scale misunderstandings regarding representative democracy, and Pitkin argues that there are solutions. It is important to

clearly demarcate between democracy and representation. Jean-Jaques Rousseau in his classical work, first published in 1762, on the nature of social contracts argues that democracy stands at odds with representation in modern understandings. He asserts that democracy requires the active personal participation of all assembled together deciding public policy (Rousseau, 1969). Despite repeated efforts to democratise the representative system, the predominant result has been that representation has supplanted democracy instead of serving it. What has emerged is that those elected to ‘represent’ a constituency act not as agents *of* them, but *instead* of them. For young people, given that suffrage has only been extended to those over the age of eighteen, being ‘represented’ is problematic (Bessant, 2000).

With the increase in popularity of structures such as Roundtables as embodiments of representative and democratic processes (Bessant, 2004a; Mutebi, 2005), it is important to contextualise what constitutes representation. Assumptions regarding the ability to ‘represent’ a population surface, as confusion regarding voting mechanisms and claims to ‘represent’ by an individual are limited. This is where it is important to acknowledge the difference between a delegate and a representative. A delegate may be chosen to attend a Roundtable for instance, but they cannot make any claims to represent the population of which they may be member (Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; McClelland, 1996). A representative is elected by a constituency to represent their interests as in the case of elected parliamentary members (McClelland, 1996). This will be explored further in the course of this research using the National Youth Roundtable as an example.

Young people, participation and the government

Ideas and practices regarding representation, control of populations and resistance are significant when governmentality is concerned and are of interest to Foucaultians with regards to the application of their methods to the study of youth participation. This includes the study of the history of ideas such as participation, youth development and citizenship or to what Foucault describes as archaeology and genealogy (Foucault, 1972).

Participation can be defined as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (Hart, 1992, p.5). Political

theorists have long argued about the extent of direct political participation needed to uphold democratic principles, however they tend to agree that some participation is essential to this form of government (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Pitkin, 2004; Rousseau, 1969). Before considering possible definitions of political participation, it is useful to consider how young people's participation in community life more broadly can be conceptualised.

UNICEF suggests that participation is the means by which democracy is built and is a standard against 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" participation or "democratic play" (Wilson, 2000, p.26). "Deep" participation is an umbrella term encompassing "active", "authentic", "meaningful" participation (Wilson, 2000, p.26). 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 (Bessant, 2004a; Wilson, 2000). Providing a space for children and young people to participate by engaging in dialogue and exchange allows them to learn constructive ways of influencing the world around them. It provides children and young people the opportunity to assume increasing responsibilities as active democratic citizens (Bessant, 2004a; Hart, 1992; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998). These authors assert that the goal should not be simply to increase participation, but to increase meaningful participation in the social, political, cultural and economic life of the country (FaCS, 2005a; Hart, 1992; Pitkin, 2004).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) encourages the community to regard children as subjects of rights, rather than simply as needing protection (Bessant, 1996; Hart, 1992). Article 12 of the UNCRC specifically addresses young people's participation and freedom of expression.

Article 12

1. Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Lansdown suggests Article 12 should be interpreted to mean that adults are obliged to ensure children are enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on all relevant matters to which they wish to contribute and indeed the government itself advocates this approach in relation to young people (FaCS, 2005a; Lansdown, 2001a, 2001b). The term ‘being given due weight’ implies the right to have their views taken seriously according to their status. It also acknowledges that as a child or young person matures, the way in which they participate may vary (H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998).

The *State of the World's Children* report (published annually by UNICEF) highlights the responsibility of everyone to take the views of children and young people seriously and aid them in developing their competencies for authentic and meaningful participation in the world (Bellamy, 2002). The report also suggests we must recognise the multiple voices of children and young people, both verbal and non-verbal (Bellamy, 2002). This is particularly relevant in considering political participation, as some young people may choose to voice their opinions on an issue in a form we do not traditionally regard as being used for that purpose (Bessant, 2004a; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998).

Participatory practices give children and young people the ability to contribute to democratic dialogue and practices in various domains (Bellamy, 2002). Young people cannot be expected to make transitions into the adult world if they are not given the opportunity to experience economic and political realities (Bessant, 2004a; Jukes, 2002). Engaging in community life and participating is empowering and assists young people in feeling that they are capable of making a valuable contribution to society (Smith, 1981). There is also evidence to suggest participation has numerous health benefits that result from feeling valued by the community. Promoting meaningful participation of children and adolescents is essential to ensuring their growth and development (Bellamy, 2002; Bessant, 2004a).

Participation also benefits the wider community. Encouraging young people to be creators rather than simply consumers means they are more likely to be agents for social change rather than social control (Bessant, 2004a; Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; R. White, 1990). Furthermore, if young people experience projects which are

open and accountable, this encourages democratic principles and respect for democratic ways of operating (Crane, 1999; Hacking, 1986; Wyn, 1995).

Principles for youth participation

Having explored the various contexts of youth participation, it is important to consider some overarching principles of participation, in order to provide a framework to build meaningful 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, and numerous other authors reiterate this point (Bessant, 2004a; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998; Wierenga, 2003).

According to the Foundation for Young Australians, the following broad principles need to be used as the basis of youth participation strategies (FYA, 2003) (Appendix A). Firstly, youth participation should be beneficial for young people: why should young people be involved and what do they stand to benefit from their participation? This includes consideration of: informed choice; enjoyment; relevance; developmental benefits, for instance social, political and economic awareness; educational opportunities both formal and informal; relationship opportunities such as chances for young people to build wider networks; support, supervision and monitoring; resourcing; and direct benefits such as payment for consultation on a specific issue (FYA, 2003). These principles are also echoed by Bessant (2004a).

Secondly, youth participation should recognise and respect the needs and contributions of all involved. It should be sensitive to intrinsic difference in experience, status, power, control, knowledge of resources and language. Other issues to consider include: accountability (including monitoring and feedback); goals and strategies whereby young people identify the problem as they see it and examine alternatives; a sense of ownership for participants; value regarding their participation; negotiation concerning young people's role and adult responsibilities and commitments; the avoidance of tokenism; the flexibility and space to incorporate young people's value systems, availability, commitments, language skills, culture, financial resources and

access to transport for instance; acknowledgment that young people are not an homogenous group; recognition that some tasks need to be undertaken by trained professionals; ongoing evaluation; appropriate recruitment processes; and confidentiality.

In 1969, Arnstein published 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 (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein has influenced numerous other developments of the 'ladder metaphor', to create different models of participation and empowerment, each with different goals, purposes and methods (Paul, 1986; Biggs, 1989; Guijt, 1991; Adnan, 1992; Farrington & Bebbington, 1994; Stiefel & Wolfe, 1994; Cornwall, 1995; Selener, 1997; Guijt & van Velduizen, 1998). The four most well-known models of participation and empowerment for young people have been constructed by Hart (1992), Westhorp (1987), Shier, (2001) and Rocha (1997).

Hart's ladder of participation has eight levels which reflect who drives the development initiative (Hart, 1992). The first three levels are classified as non-participatory. Hart argued they serve adult purposes in reality affording no real opportunity to participate, a point made also by Bessant (2004a) . The top five rungs of the ladder represent increasing degrees of participation (Table 1).

Table 1: Hart's 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

Source: Hart (1992, p.7)

Hart's non-participatory levels include such processes as events where young people have no idea of the (real) purpose, but are invited to attend to do a performance, for example. They may be attending for the participation 'perks' rather than the cause. Other practices that are deemed to be non-participatory are when adults are employed to engage young people in an organisation, so that the organisation can be seen to be consulting with young people. These activities can include action groups, workshops and forums. What needs to happen in order for these processes to move to being participatory is for young people to be able to influence the structure and running of these organizations, where young people initiate the action (Hart, 1992; Wilson, 2000).

In 1987, Gill Westhorp of the Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia identified a six stage continuum of youth involvement (Westhorp, 1987). This continuum does not imply that more or less control by young people 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 (Table 2).

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 and level of participation. The questions focus on: 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 (Westhorp, 1987).

Table 2: The six stages of Westhorp's continuum

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
Ad hoc input	Structured Consultation	Influence	Delegation	Negotiation	Control

Source: Westhorp (1987, p.3)

Expanding on each of these stages is essential in understanding Westhorp's participation processes. *Ad hoc or unstructured input* involves a one-way information flow from young people to a body or organisation and has advantages in that it reaches larger groups of young people and input can be sought from very young people or

disadvantaged young people. However, the input from young people requires some interpretation and there is limited ownership by young people (OFY, 2003).

Structured consultation entails two-way information flow between young people and decision makers. There are a number of advantages evident here, especially increased credibility with the adult population because it is adult focussed. It also enables direct input from young people, particularly those who are very young and those who are disadvantaged. It is less time consuming for the organisation and in-depth exploration of issues is possible. Disadvantages include: the outcomes not being what the young people want; the outcomes reflecting adult interpretation of need; young people may not feel a sense of ownership of the process; and it can create expectations for rapid response, and disillusionment if this does not happen (OFY, 2003).

The third phase of the spectrum is *influence* whereby once an organisation guarantees recognised input by young people, then some level of authority is promised. The advantage of this process is that young people have a direct link to decision making and they have the opportunity to voice issues. The shortcomings are that it restricts the number of young people who can have input, it may necessitate young people fitting in to adult structures and it can be token if not composed appropriately (OFY, 2003).

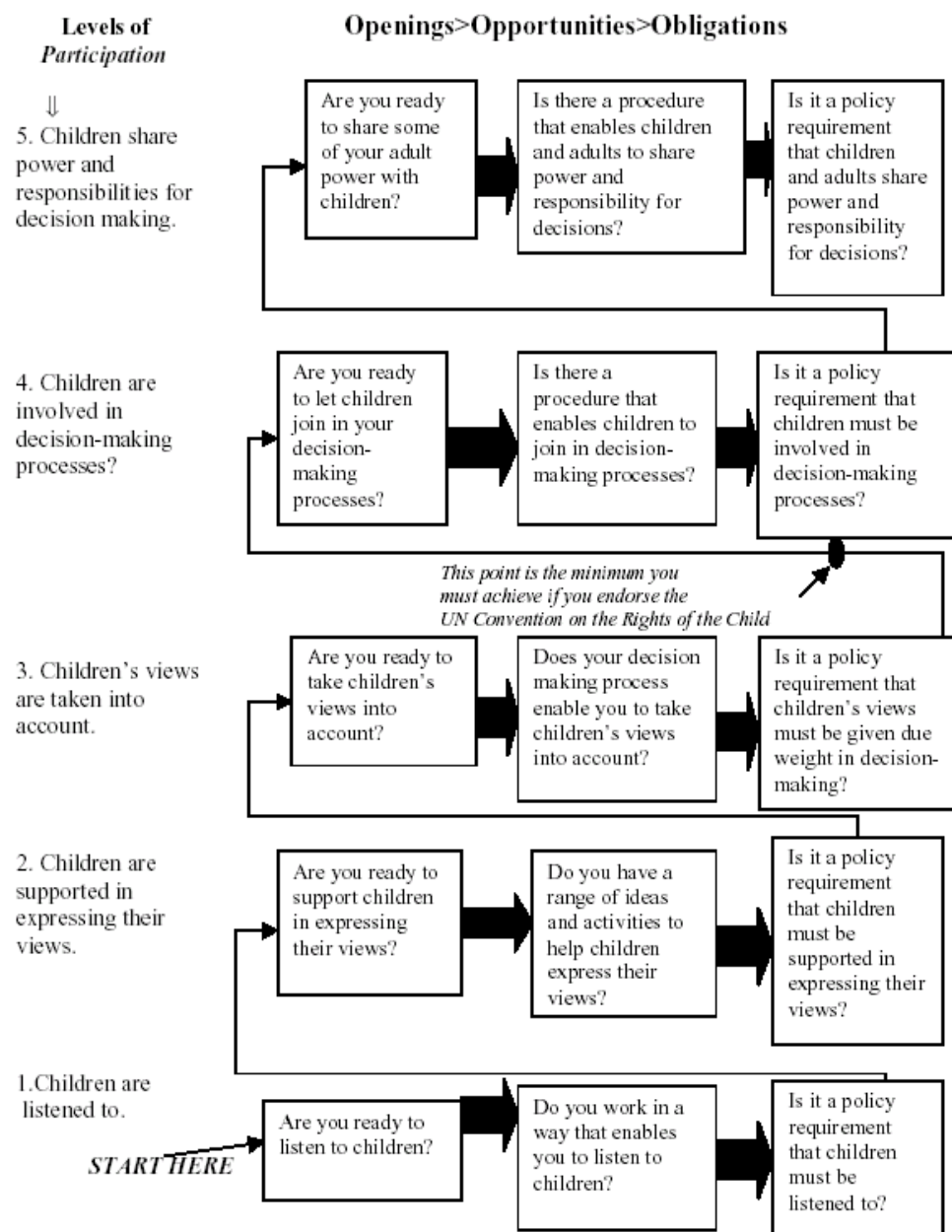
The fourth stage of the continuum refers to *delegation* and is when young people are given responsibility for a particular task or aspect of an organisation's work, such as having a youth spokesperson. The benefits here include young people having genuine and unambiguous responsibilities and it can be tailored to young people's need and concerns. The limitations are that it may still exclude young people from decision making and uncertainty over expectations may cause disagreements (OFY, 2003).

Negotiation is the fifth stage and the implication is that young people have some bargaining power, so that decisions need to be acceptable to them and those with the ultimate power of decision-making. The advantages are that it can create a genuine partnership, provide significant developmental benefits for young people and young people are actively involved in decision-making. The weakness of this approach is that it can be a time consuming process, and may require young people to adapt to adult structures and necessitating the adoption of decision-making processes to ensure that they are youth friendly (OFY, 2003).

Control is the final step and at this level of involvement, young people make all the crucial decisions. This will ensure the total involvement of young people in all aspects of decision making with their ownership of decision-making. The disadvantages are that these processes involve taking risks, can be time consuming and adults find it difficult to relinquish power whilst being prepared to provide support if requested (OFY, 2003).

Shier (2001) offered a useful alternative to Hart's ladder of participation. The model consists of five levels of participation (Shier, 2001). 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 (Table 3).

Table 3: Shier's pathways to participation



Source: Howard, Newman, Harris and Hardcourt (2002, p.5)

Shier's pathways follow a series of critical self-evaluative questions and detail the ascending levels of young people's participation. As each level is achieved, the degree of ownership by young people increases. There is a point in the process where a statement is made about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), claiming that this level must be attained in order to endorse UNCROC. The highest level of participation is where "it is a policy requirement that [young people] children

and adults share power and responsibility for decisions” (Howard, Newman, Harris, & Harcourt, 2002, p.5).

Common themes to emerge from the models that have been examined thus far include: participation is not a short term process; adults need to consciously cede their organisational power to young people at some stage to ensure that participation becomes meaningful; and listening is the core of all participation. If these principles are honoured, then meaningful participation becomes more achievable.

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 (Table 4). What Rocha is attempting to clarify is that empowerment means different things to different people and disciplines. This aids in defining what the outcome will be with regards to an individual’s increasing engagement with community/political life. 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).

Table 4: Rocha's ladder of empowerment

Community involvement
Rung 5 Political empowerment
Rung 4 Socio-political empowerment
Rung 3 Mediated empowerment
Rung 2 Embedded individual empowerment
Rung 1 Atomistic individual empowerment
Individual involvement

Source: (Rocha, 1997, p.32)

Rungs four and five reflect the notion that participation can lead to political action and emphasise that individuals and communities can engage in collective action to achieve goals of participation. What Rocha effectively identifies is that individuals need to

understand the nature and terms of their action and engagement, so that they can make informed choices.

From the many models of participation examined, it is indeed clear that the road to meaningful participation is not a smooth one; it has many twists and turns and can trap the unwary person with ease.

Contemporary youth participation

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. Rocha (1997) has attempted to understand empowerment and other authors have contributed to a collective understanding of participation. It seems that there is more knowledge about what not to do than there is about effective practices.

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 (Newman, Barnes, Sullivan, & Knops, 2004).

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 (Pitkin, 2004). Pitkin asserts that "as for those who set policy and shape the images, insulated from any reality, they soon become captive to their own fictions" (Pitkin, 2004, p.341-342). Young people find themselves engaging in meaningless consultations, workshops and forums and fail to have any effect on policy makers. Instead they need to find ways to engage that are appropriate to the time and technology available to make their voices heard (Bessant, 1998).

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; UNYA, 2003). 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 (H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998). 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' (Fergusson, 2004; R. White, 1990).

Young people have been shown to have a 'standpoint' and from this position, social life looks different (Fergusson, 2004; 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 (Sercombe, 1992). It is argued that adding young people's voices and views to social research enriches our understanding by completing it (Saggers, Palmer, Royce, Wilson, & Charlton, 2004).

This is consistent with the interpretivist school of thought (expressed in this research through phenomenology) which argues that understanding any social action involves understanding the meaning, or *verstehen*, that underlies the action (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" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.93). However, this can be extended 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; Sercombe, 1992). 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, 2001, 2002). "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 (Fergusson, 2004). 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 (Bessant, 2004a; Fergusson,

2004; 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 (Banks, 1999).

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 (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 the young person’s own practices to considering those that can enable or disable the production of voice (Fergusson, 2004; Howard, Newman, Harris, & Harcourt, 2002; 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 (Banks, 1999; Moustakas, 1994).

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 (Behar, 1996; Crane, 1999). 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 (Calvert, Zeldin, & Weisenbach, 2002; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998). Too often, research involving young people is removed from their reality, with adults pursuing their

interests in ways that render young people passive (Banks, 1999). The flip side of this is the need to pay closer attention to the social practices that make young people's contributions invisible (Banks, 1999; Prout, 2001). Hence, vigilant consciousness needs to be heeded with regards to current approaches.

As has been revealed, internationally and at all levels of government in Australia, there has been increased emphasis being given to the topic of youth participation. International Youth Year in 1985 served as a catalyst for these developments. In Australia and globally, however, the strongest leadership is coming from the community sector (FYA 2003). This requires careful analysis. Recent publications have applauded governments in Australia for the efforts that they are making to include young people in all aspects of decision making, which is essentially youth development (FYA 2003).

Youth development encompasses a wide spectrum of activities. However, there are certain hallmarks which are present in all of these activities. They are structured, formal activities, which aim to develop specific skills and qualities in a young person. They recognise that voluntary community service is a vital part of forming connections with the community, and ensure that young people have the opportunity to participate in such service. These activities present young people with challenges that help them to develop positive personal qualities, develop self-knowledge, and acquire the skills they need to be good citizens and happy adults (Worth, 2001, p.1).

These initiatives include a proliferation of 'how to guides' and 'principles of youth participation' from many of the state governments. However, even though young people are being included in these processes, they are still viewed as fundamentally powerless (Jukes, 2002). If young people suggest controversial approaches to youth policy, for example, their suggestions can easily be silenced as they do not have adult status in economic, citizenship, or political measures. In her report *Global priorities for youth: youth participation in decision-making*, Lansdown charts a global rise in interest and activity around this topic (Lansdown, 2001b). In this context, young people in decision-making are linked strongly to issues of both human rights and social effectiveness. Lansdown points out that it is imperative that at a policy level, those who are being affected have a say in the decisions being made (H. Matthews & Limb, 2003).

In 2002, for the first time ever, the UN committee which explored young people's issues in Helsinki also included significant numbers of young people. In other forums also, this is increasingly expected and slowly happening, although there is still a

long way to go (UNYA, 2003). This still does not adequately address the issue of youth participation. The principles of youth involvement that need to be comprehensively understood as being different in their approaches and outcomes are: citizenship; youth participation; and youth development (Evans, 1995; Rocha, 1997).

Firstly, there are a range of understandings of young people's citizenship, two of which are: minimal citizenship, and maximal citizenship. These two approaches can frame what is done quite differently. The notion of minimal citizenship is concerned with shaping young people for the future, and their potential. Maximal citizenship, on the other hand, respects individuals' birthright to citizenship, and focuses on what young people are, and what they intrinsically contribute to society currently (Evans, 1995; Holdsworth, 2002; Walby, 1994).

A minimal citizenship approach emphasises: civil and legal status, rights and responsibilities to society; that citizenship is gained when civil and legal status is granted; and that a good citizen is law-abiding, public-spirited and exercises political involvement through voting for representatives. This notion links directly to Foucault's ideas about how liberal democracies produce citizens who are capable of governing themselves and others and directly links to youth development (Evans, 1995; Fergusson, 2004).

The youth development methodology links closely with the minimal citizenship tactic and focuses upon developing young people into well-adjusted adults and community participants and embraces, albeit unknowingly, the Foucaultian notions of control and surveillance (Foucault, 1977; R. White, 1990). Historically this is a dominant approach, particularly in material emerging from the US, New Zealand, some Australian government sources, and the International Youth Foundation. Although much of the ground work that has been done under the banner of youth development is extremely valuable, and adds significantly to the evidence base of what works, in terms of a conceptual framework, it is problematic (FYA, 2003). The first fundamental flaw is that a development approach emphasises the end point, as properly formed adults capable of self regulating their behaviour, rather than valuing their opinions and contributions currently (Bessant, 2004; Wyn & White, 1997). In this sense, this is both a deficit model and an adultist framework which needs to be approached critically (H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998).

Secondly, a youth development approach by definition actually limits the focus of what is happening to young people, and this is part of the problem. Youth development encapsulates the notion that it is only young people who are in need of development. In order for young people to be able to participate meaningfully in their communities, this research, along with many other voices (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999) highlights the need for the entire community to be constantly changing and adapting. Yet much of the relevant research writing about youth development is underpinned by older assumptions that young people are the focus and that they are problematic by definition (Bessant, 2004a; Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; Fergusson, 2004; Wyn, 1995).

Thirdly, development approaches have historically been characterized by imposition. A development approach has underpinned many top down initiatives targeted at youth, often shaped without their input (Hart, 1992; Westhorp, 1987). The desired outcomes are framed for young people. Even though the newer youth development work rhetoric refers to community and youth development as running parallel to each other, these have traditionally had very different modes of operating (R. White, 1990; Wierenga, 2003).

Maximal citizenship, conversely refers to the consciousness of oneself as a member of a shared democratic culture and a participatory approach to political involvement. It is important to also consider ways to overcome the social disadvantages that undermine citizenship, especially in relation to young people who are often denied full participation rights in society. (Bessant, 2004a; Evans, 1995; Holdsworth, 2002).

In terms of the material that has been written about youth participation, two main approaches emerge. The first focuses on youth development: how young people can be shaped by being involved. The second is rarer and more radical and involves re-shaping communities, and the role of young people in that process. It can be argued that the latter is a far more useful model than the former. In terms of choosing a central framework for understanding, a youth development model is insufficient, and denies youth participation principles significantly. Youth participation becomes passive or limited to a set of arrangements that already exist, which contributes to their marginalisation and exclusion (Wierenga, 2003).

International examples of maximal citizenship include the B'Yeard project, supported by Birmingham University. Young people have been trained and supported as action researchers by teaching staff from the university. The young people have conducted peer research on young people in decision-making. They have explored how the voices of young people are heard and have presented their findings to community workers and leaders at a conference which they organised themselves in early 2003 (B:Yeard, 2003; Bessant, 2004; Simpson, 2003).

A simple pattern emerges: being involved and engaged leads to more opportunities to become involved and engaged. The reverse of this equation is also true: those that are not involved often stay excluded, both in terms of real world opportunities and the way that they are thinking (Bessant, 2004a). The Foundation for Young Australian's report indicates that while some young people had found a way to make a difference they knew others who had been excluded from these processes. These others may have cared deeply about their communities but did not feel that they had the opportunity to contribute (Wierenga, 2003).

Conclusion

What has emerged from this review is that the 'youth' category has been artificially constructed by various social, political and economic factors and this has led to a range of responses from government. The result is that the youth category is now able to be manipulated, measured and controlled and this is done in the best interests of society. Exclusion and the need for 'youth participation' are key themes that emerge as a consequence of these processes. If young people were engaged and included the need for participation would be superfluous. Hence a range of initiatives and methods have been explored as a means by which participation can happen. What surfaces is disturbing: whilst there seem to be a myriad of approaches being explored, the issue of youth participation is still largely unresolved. This in turn has a marked influence on the mechanisms that the government can utilise to elicit the views of young people.

CHAPTER 3

Research partnerships with young people

Theoretical framework

This research is framed within applied post structuralist approaches that presume that youth participation mechanisms are a technique by which unengaged young people come under governance, surveillance and control. In particular, the research was attentive to the capacity of various youth participation mechanisms to engage young people as empowered subjects who are aware of the terms of their engagement, who are accountable to, and able to hold accountable, those to whom they give power (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; Sercombe, 1992). The work of French theorist Michel Foucault is central in the production of these ideas.

Foucault identified a number of other discourses regarding the nature of power and knowledge systems through his work in *Madness and Civilisation* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). What is at work in both texts is that power and knowledge systems are constructed in relation to illness: to define and confine it. The metaphor for this power is the ‘gaze’ of the physician, the doctor, the warden who looks at, labels, and assesses his wards:

The gaze of power/knowledge involves a number of processes: to be caught by the gaze is to be objectified and rendered a thing rather than a subject; the gaze is a matter of applying a language or mathematics to the thing seen so that it is constituted by the observer in his terms; knowledge (power) forms at the intersection of seeing and speaking; the individual is thus both subject and object (Foucault, 1983, p.199).

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault takes up the prison as the zenith of confinement, where the ultimate metaphor for the ‘gaze’ is surveillance and the goal of confinement is to treat the soul, to make a criminal do penance in the penitentiary. He also applies these principles to other institutions: education, the military and the raising

of children. Discipline has a hand in constructing the modern individual, in part through the internalisation of surveillance: as the watched becomes more visible, the watcher becomes less visible; and we watch ourselves, control ourselves and are thus both more and less powerful. Foucault argues that what is constructed in this process are “docile bodies” that are both economically more productive and also politically more obedient and as power is internalised on the micro level, we can better control ourselves to perform socially sanctioned acts and functions (Smart, 1994, p.152). But as we internalise power, we also internalise the power to resist and it is this power, diffused throughout the social body in capillary form that constructs the individual subject (Foucault, 1972; Smart, 1994).

The post structuralist theme of Foucault’s work, then, runs from confining institutions and the work of power as domination to the constitution of the individual, to the inter-workings of sex, truth, power, the body, and the individual. Hence, it is applicable to young people who have been ‘gazed’ upon, labelled, categorized, objectified, studied and in turn have constituted an alternative discourse to the dominant through the process of resistance (Fergusson, 2004; P. Kelly, 2000; R. White, 1990).

Youth participation is what Foucault calls a technology of liberal governance. Through it individual young people are transformed into citizens by what Foucault (1991) calls technologies, discourses, programs and other tactics aimed at making these young people politically active and capable of self-government. It involves young people doing considerable work on the self so that they can become the managers of their life. Even when this doesn’t appear overtly coercive, it works by getting young people to see their own interests being served. They become ‘self-empowered’, ‘self-determining’, and ‘self-managing’ subjects. Foucaultians would say that this is how liberal governance works to govern at a distance (Foucault, 1980; Smart, 1994).

The goal of this research was to examine how this process works at a number of levels and whether the National Youth Roundtable is indeed a mechanism by which this happens.

Research design and methodology

Puzzlement at how to interpret ‘the structure and essence of experience’ (Patton, 1990, p.88) of the young people who were participants of the National Youth

Roundtable led me to consider the nature of the meaning of an experience and how it shapes us as people. I yearned to deeply understand the experiences of the young people and how liberal governance processes work in this context. This led me to consider a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology should make manifest what is hidden in the ordinary, everyday experience. The aim of phenomenology is to determine what an experience means for the person who has had the experience and provide a comprehensive description of it (Moustakas, 1994). It rejects the notion of objective reality and embraces the subjectivity and richness of individual realities (Henderson 1991). It is without theories about causes and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions (Spielgelberg, 1975). A basic philosophical assumption of phenomenology is that one can know what one experiences only by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken conscious awareness (Husserl, 1962). According to Van Manen (1990, p.22), there are many interpretations and modifications of the approach, but all hold true to the premise that:

It is an interactive, descriptive approach to research in order to identify the essence of behaviour. It employs direct enquiry, in which questioning provides further insight into the lived experience.

Perception, therefore, is elicited from the participant's not the researcher's viewpoint and it adopts an holistic perspective. The context is seen as a source of measuring and understanding (Hinds, 1992) and not as a source of contamination. Focus is placed on the wholeness of experience and not just individual parts. This approach is often used to increase understanding where previously there was little information or awareness. To achieve the goal of the phenomenological method, the discovery of the meaning of human experiences, researchers must awaken their own presuppositions and make them appear by abstaining from them for a moment (Smith, 2003). This process, called 'bracketing', involves peeling away the layers of interpretation so the phenomena can be seen as they are, not as they are reflected through preconceptions. This was a critical process for me as I was acutely aware of the experiences that shaped my desire to do this research in the first instance. Bracketing does not eliminate perspective; it brings the experience to clearer focus. As the layers of meaning of interpreted experiences are laid aside, what is left is the perceived world prior to interpretation and explanation (Racher & Robinson, 2003).

In addition to this it became evident to me that I needed to consider carefully some of the principles behind Participatory Action Research in my own study.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a method of research where creating positive social change is the predominant driving force. PAR grew out of social and educational research and exists today as one of the few research methods which embrace principles of participation and reflection, and empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation (Hughes & Seymour-Rolls, 2000). This is indeed relevant when considering the aims of my study, in which principles of participation and social action are of paramount importance. It became evident throughout my research that it was not enough to simply undertake the study, but I needed to consider what role I then had to play in order that this piece of research became reflexive and affected some change.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) identify key stages in the process which reflected the process that I was committed to undertaking: the group undertaking PAR identifies a thematic concern through discussion and reflection. These concerns are integrated into a shared or common goal. The group agrees to collaborate and participate in a PAR project because of this integrated goal. The group and the members of the group are thus empowered to plan and act to create a social change. A change in practice is affected and observed using an appropriate research tool. The group critically examines the results and then the group has new knowledge from which theory may be developed. This knowledge and theory may be focussed on the observed effects of the change affected or the processes which occurred, or both (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

There were several instances where the young people had struggled to know how to get further exposure for the reports they had written as part of the Roundtable. In one instance I referred one young person to an appropriate journal editor. This was part of my ongoing commitment to youth participation throughout my research and a critical component of participatory action research, where there is a mutual obligation between researcher and participants in shaping and assessing the meaning of the research (B. Hall, 1981). Hall (1981) outlined characteristics of participatory research that guided the processes of my research and in examining them they were particularly relevant to youth participation processes.

The 'problem' originates within the community or workplace itself, which was particularly relevant given the background to the research (B. Hall, 1981). Given my subjectivity and the fact that I was intimately involved in the processes leading up to the

first Roundtable, my thoughts on the 'problem' were first hand and I was keen to engage with the Roundtable community to see if my thoughts were indeed valid. From my initial interviews, it became evident that the young people were passionate about being listened to and were motivated to see action happen and had felt powerless in getting their message out. Hence when the opportunity to participate in the research emerged they were very enthusiastic.

The research goal is to fundamentally improve the lives of those involved, through structural transformation. This is the ultimate goal of the research to improve youth participation mechanisms in the federal context. This became evident through the language that the young people used when reporting their experiences, and that they had felt a sense of loss and disappointment when their term on the Roundtable concluded. I became passionate, through seeing the pain that the young people were still experiencing, to see some social change affected. It also became evident that the process of being interviewed about their experiences was a therapeutic experience for many of the young people (Banks, 1999).

In PAR, the people in the community or workplace are involved in controlling the entire research process and given that the pilot interview influenced the process of further interviews and the young people identified themes, this was an important principle. Their thoughts and responses indeed influenced the way I conducted the research process as I did not want my study to further disempower them or for them not to be legitimately heard (Banks, 1999).

The focus of participatory action research is on oppressed groups whose issues include inaccessibility, colonization, marginalization, exploitation, racism, sexism, and cultural disaffection for instance. The young people interviewed all strongly identified that they felt disappointed in the Roundtable and what it had promised as opposed to what had been delivered. They all felt unheard. In addition to this, the youth category is systematically disempowered through their voiceless status (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998; Fergusson, 2004).

Participatory research plays a role in enabling by strengthening people's awareness of their own capabilities (Hope & Timmel, 1995). All of the young people identified that the research process had been powerful in reigniting their 'passion' for the issues that led them to the Roundtable in the first instance. In several instances the

young people reengaged with their own research material and were motivated to get more outcomes than they had initially settled for.

The researchers with specialised training may be outsiders to the community, but are committed learners in a process that leads to social action rather than detachment (Hope & Timmel, 1995). This is cognisant with my commitment to ongoing youth participation processes throughout my research. I was an outsider somewhat, but through my research became involved with the research participants. This then necessitated the use of constant 'bracketing' to enable me to remain clear about my own goals.

Throughout my study, I embraced these principles, so that the young people became empowered subjects, aware of the terms of their engagement and partners in social change. Many of them felt 'stuck' when it came to the conclusion of their time on the Roundtable. One young person likened it to being 'thrown back' like a fish when it is decided that they are not useful or big enough. This stimulated much thought on my behalf both considering phenomenological thinking and that of PAR. I realised that I could not carry out the research with integrity and then not have it become a 'living' document. One young person suggested that I should get letters of support from other Roundtable members, indicating that she not only believed that what the research was saying was a common feeling amongst Roundtable members, but also that she was prepared to make these connections on my behalf, because she believed that my message should be out there for the public to scrutinise.

For this research, honouring principles of authentic participation could not be genuine unless the reactions of the young people were heard (Moustakas, 1994). If my research was going to empower young people, I needed to ensure that the process I utilised when exploring issues with the participants was empowering. I did not want the experience with my research to mirror any frustrations and disappointments the participants felt with the Roundtable. I did not want my research to add to any feelings of powerlessness that might have occurred; hence my approach had to be gentle and reflexive.

The sample

The seven young people chosen for the study were principally from Western Australia and were members of the National Youth Roundtable between the years 1999 and 2005. I interviewed two members from the 1999 Inaugural Roundtable, one from the 2000 Roundtable, one from 2002, two from 2003 and one from 2005. Some of the young people were known to me previously through my role with the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and AYPAC. All the young people were chosen due to their ongoing involvement in youth issues and social activism and range in age from twenty one to thirty (although they ranged in age from fifteen to twenty four when they were on the Roundtable). In this sense, the sample of seven young people was purposive (Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988).

In addition to the young people I also interviewed the Executive Director of the Federal Youth Bureau in Canberra. This process proved to be a challenge as it took me quite some time to verify my validity with the Youth Bureau and to then get in contact with the Executive Director. There were numerous emails regarding my trip to Canberra and making a suitable time with her given that the Roundtable was in progress at the time I visited. Further discussions and interviews with other Youth Bureau staff were blocked by the Executive Director as the staff concerned were very busy with the Roundtable and after the Roundtable were taking some well deserved recreation leave. This made it impossible to interview them at the time.

Data collection

Data collection included diverse sources: documentary evidence; in-depth interviews; a focus group and observation.

a) Documentary evidence

The academic and scholarly literature surrounding the notion of ‘youth’, the history and problematisation of the category and control were all carefully examined. Further to this I was vigilant in probing how this current understanding affects how young people are listened to as citizens with valuable contributions to make (Foucault, 1983). A careful note was also made regarding the language and discursive patterns that emerge throughout the various speeches and written documentation and how the

structure of conversations influences proceedings (Foucault, 1980). This gives hints as to the difference between the rhetoric as opposed to the reality of the events.

The evidence included a number of documents from the National Youth Roundtable website with regards to achievements of the Roundtable over the past five years. Topic area reports and individual participants' final reports have also been scrutinized including those of Naomi Godden, Ben Whitehouse and Craig Comrie. In addition to this several papers written for conferences and presentations by Roundtable members have been examined.

Further to this, the speeches of Dr David Kemp and Larry Anthony (Federal Minister for Youth from 2001 to 2004) have been examined with particular attention being paid to discursive patterns and the change in approach and language that has evolved between 1999 and 2004.

To grasp each document's significance, I needed to concentrate on *intended*, *received*, and *content/internal meanings*. Qualitative analysis views the author as a self-conscious actor addressing an audience under particular social and political circumstances (J. Scott, 1990). My task was to read the text in terms of its symbols, as an anthropologist does with rituals. This 'reading' may be derived from secondary sources and or other research methods such as participant observational studies. I needed to consider not only how existing interpretations are constructed, but also how new ones are developed and employed particularly through the use of discursive patterns. While an author's intended meanings are important, analysing the reader's or listener's social situation is also crucial to interpreting the text.

Aside from the emphasis on intended and received meanings, there is also content meaning upon which *content analysts* and *semioticians* focus their attention. This examines the relationship between *a signifier* (that is, a symbol or word) and *a signified* (that is, a concept or idea to which the signifier refers to), and its relationship to *a referent* (that is, a material object or language system). The signified may not refer to a material object, but instead refer to the way in which a system of language (through its signs) organises the world. Content analysts focus upon the relationships *within* the text, and its relationship to *other* texts. A *critical-analytic stance* considers how the document (in my study these were Ministers' speeches) represents the events that it describes and closes off potential contrary interpretations (for example, oppositional understandings) to the reader (J. Scott, 1990). This stance considers the way in which a

text attempts to stamp its political, cultural and economic authority upon the social world it describes (Foucault, 1972). In so doing, the social world might be characterised by the exclusion of valuable information (for example, on women, minority groups or young people) and the characterisation of events and people in particular ways according to certain powerful interests (Foucault, 1983). All of these considerations were indeed critical when examining the documentary evidence surrounding the National Youth Roundtable.

Scott (1990) lists a number of cautions and criticisms of documentary research methods. Given its social context and identity, the researcher will give a selective and biased understanding of a document, and may even deliberately choose and select particular documents (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Inevitably, authors of documents will decide to record and leave out information informed by the social, political and economic environment of which they are part. Historical documents, thus, are amenable to manipulation and selective influence. In undertaking my documentary research, I needed to be aware of these influences and not assume that documents are simply neutral artifacts from the past. In the case of documents concerning the Roundtable, it was important to consider that each document was intended for a specific audience, to build and reinforce a particular way of speaking about, and accumulating knowledge regarding the processes of the Roundtable (Foucault, 1983).

While technologies such as the internet offer possibilities for acquiring documents, researchers have to exercise a critical reflexivity since much of the documents on the internet are produced by powerful political, cultural and economic groups, who want to ensure that particular images reach the public domain, and wish to counter bad images with more favourable representations (J. Scott, 1990). More recently this has been challenged, as many fringe groups and individuals now have access to the web, and indeed young people are now using it as a legitimate form of public space (Salmon, 2005). The Source website (the government's youth website) could be considered the milieu for such documents as it draws careful attention to the 'outcomes' and 'achievements' of the Roundtable.

b) In depth interviews

In depth interviews provide an array of rich data and are typically used in phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). Given that it was my desire to understand deeply the individual realities of the young people, this research tool was chosen. A pilot study was carried out with one young person prior to the commencement of the data collection to trial the questions and technique. The main aims of pilot studies are to refine research instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules. They may have greater use still in ethnographic approaches to data collection in foreshadowing research problems and questions, in highlighting gaps and wastage in data collection, and in considering broader and highly significant issues such as research validity, ethics, representation and researcher health and safety (Sampson, 2004). The list of participants is included (Appendix B). Information from the pilot study was subsequently included as part of the study. All the young people were interviewed once. Coding and analysis of the themes began as soon as the pilot interview was completed (Colaizzi, 1978).

The young people all participated voluntarily and did not want payment. In the first instance I phoned or emailed them and supplied them with information about the research and then gave them the consent forms (Appendix C) and interview questions prior to the interview (Appendix D). Two of the interviews were undertaken via email, due to cost factors and difficulty in making connections via phone. This method posed some questions for me with regard to the validity of the material I would elicit. After some careful consideration and numerous emails trying to organise phone interviews, it was decided that email responses would be effective, as the focus was not on standardising the responses, but on the richness and depth of the responses. It was also agreed that if the emailed information required clarification, it would be followed up with a phone conversation.

The interviews were all set up at times and locations convenient for the young people and where they felt comfortable. Two of the interviews were conducted at the young people's places of work, one was conducted in a park close to the young person's home, one was at a University campus and one was at the young person's home. I began by introducing myself and talking about the goals of the research emphasising the importance of youth participation principles. The interview style that I adopted was semi-structured, as I had a number of questions that I indicated that I wanted to ask, but

was also keen for the interviews to go in the direction that the young people desired. Hence, if they brought up specific issues, I would then follow up on them with further questions if appropriate. The informal style of the interviews suited the young people as it enabled them to talk freely about issues that were of particular concern to them, in a relaxed way. The interviews were begun by asking them about their history with the National Youth Roundtable and once they got started they began to explore a whole range of concerns. This approach enabled them to tell the narrative of their involvement with the Roundtable in an unconstrained way. We returned to the questions I had prepared when they indicated that they wanted to move on to another topic. I would often prompt them with open ended questions to stimulate further exploration of particular issues. This was also done through the effective use of paraphrasing (Geldard, 1998). In several of the interviews, my questions opened the 'floodgate' whereby they began to report many experiences and perceptions that they had felt unable to express anywhere else and reported at the end of the process that it had been refreshing to be able to talk without fear of judgement or reprisal.

There were a number of challenges in ensuring that the interviews were completed. The young people chosen are all very active in various campaigns and were often interstate and unavailable. It took three months to make suitable times with two of the participants and numerous email and phone calls were exchanged throughout this time. Two of the young people now reside overseas, so making times to talk with these young people took numerous attempts and in the end, an email process whereby they did the interview in written form was the most effective. One young person alone took four attempts to meet and I ensured that I phoned prior to the scheduled meeting so that I would not waste valuable time. All of this proved to be very time consuming. Booth (1999) in her paper outlines that there are a number of methodological considerations when working with populations that are vulnerable or transient, and a flexible approach to my interview schedule was a primary consideration (Booth, 1999).

Due to my growing knowledge of interviewing techniques and the principles of phenomenological and participatory action research, I became aware that at times in my initial interviews, I was leading in my questioning techniques. I had to adapt my style, acknowledge my failure and ensure that my interviewing style adapted to reflect this new knowledge. Hence, I became acutely aware of my own biases, experiences and professional opinion throughout the process. Prior to each interview I acknowledged them to myself and endeavoured to put them aside so that I could really 'hear' what the

young people were trying to say. In this sense I attempted to bracket my experiential knowledge in order to capture the empirical reality outside myself (Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988) and portray accurately the reality described by the young people who participated in the study. I did not in any way try and influence the type of information I was eliciting from them as this would detract from their 'voice' and the legitimacy of their experiences and opinions. In this way, I was able to suspend my judgement of the situations with which I was presented (Geldard, 1998). I was conscious of the fact that many of them had not felt 'heard' through the process of the Roundtable, so I was extremely careful to treat the information that they provided with responsibility and care and to ensure that they were heard in the process with me. It was important to monitor my own reactions to the information being presented at all times, because reactions from me could taint the young people's ability to speak freely.

The interviews lasted up to one and a half hours and were recorded on a laptop computer using MP3 recording software and then transcribed by me and a transcription specialist. Initially I began transcribing thematically, and not verbatim, but it became apparent that in order to capture the richness and depth of what the young people were saying, that I needed to transcribe all of what they were expressing (B. Hall, 1981).

A researcher's approach to transcription underscores her or his individual theoretical and epistemological assumptions about research. Riessman (1993) addresses the issue of transcribing texts as an interpretive practice:

Transcribing discourse, like photographing reality, is an interpretive practice. Decisions about how to transcribe, like decisions about telling and listening, are theory driven and rhetorical. . . . Different transcription conventions lead to and support different interpretations and ideological positions, and they ultimately create different worlds. Meaning is constituted in very different ways with alternative transcriptions of the same stretch of talk.(p.13)

In all of the literature much emphasis is placed on rigor in the transcription process (Riessman, 1993). Oral interviews are usually transcribed verbatim, which means inclusion of every utterance, pause, tone of voice, and frequently, body language. Precision is important because the researcher is analysing the structure of language. Usually, meaning is found within the transcribed words because language is thought to be transparent; thus, the structure of the transcript conveys the intended meaning and is cognisant with the aims of phenomenological approaches (Moustakas, 1994). The assumptions of the interpreter are generally not in question. It does not seem possible to

do an exact reproduction of people's speech. All that can be done is to attempt to reproduce the communicative events as closely as possible—they will never be exact. Also, it is not achievable to replicate past events. The stories (and transcriptions of these stories) do not mirror the world as 'lived' because the stories are constructed retrospectively despite my best attempts to create the 'lived experiences' of the young people (Spielgelberg, 1975). We can only attempt to reconstruct life events and hope that there will be some degree of verisimilitude. As an analogy, there are qualitative and interpretive differences between being an actor in a play, watching the play, or reading the play.

All recordings were coded using the participant's names (with their permission). Field notes were taken by myself during the interview and were used in the transcription process and analysis. Each participant was given a copy of their interview for review and asked if they were satisfied that this was an accurate representation of the issues that we had discussed.

c) Focus group

In addition to the in depth interviews a focus group was chosen as a way to synthesise themes which had already emerged and to add richness to the data collected. The term 'focus group' was coined in 1956 to apply to a situation in which the interviewer asks group members very specific questions about a topic after considerable research has already been completed (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.365). Kreuger defines a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Kreuger, 1988, p.18).

Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations. The key element here is the involvement of people where their disclosures are encouraged in a nurturing environment. It taps into human tendencies where attitudes and perceptions are developed through interaction with other people. During a group discussion, individuals may shift due to the influence of other comments. Alternately, opinions may be held with certainty. Kreuger suggests that the purpose is "to obtain information of a qualitative nature from a predetermined and limited number of people" (Kreuger, 1988, p.26).

Interviews are an important part of any research project as they provide the opportunity for the researcher to investigate further, to solve problems and to gather data which could not have been obtained in other ways (Cunningham, 1993, p.93). The group interview (focus group) is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that finds the interviewer/moderator directing the interaction and inquiry in a very structured or unstructured manner, depending on the interview's purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.365). Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) suggest that the focused interview with a group of people "...will yield a more diversified array of responses and afford a more extended basis both for designing systematic research on the situation in hand..." (p.135).

The focus group comprised a dinner and then a group discussion. My aim in all of the process was to emphasise to the young people that I was genuinely interested in hearing their voices throughout the development of the research and I wanted to create an atmosphere whereby they felt genuinely valued. When setting up the focus group I asked them what process they thought would work best. Several of them suggested a meal together and when I offered to host a dinner they were very enthusiastic. I also enlisted the help of two 'independent' observers and transcribers through the process of the focus group. This helped in ensuring that I was consistent with my methods throughout the group and allowed to totally focus on the group process rather than having to be concerned with keeping field notes. Both of the transcribers were also experienced researchers who regularly worked with young people. It was also helpful to debrief with them after the event, as the process had been intense. The group was recorded using a laptop computer utilising MP3 recording software. Once the focus group was transcribed it was then thematically categorised using N6 research software.

Morse and Kreuger both suggest that the information collected in the process of a focus group can be richer because it is enriched by the group experience and 'bouncing' ideas off each other (Morse, 1994). This was certainly true for the group as they took the opportunity to elaborate on many different areas of concern and comment extensively on emerging themes. Often one comment would trigger a cascade of responses from other participants.

The process also allowed for triangulation of the emerging research data which strengthened the validity of the study and further minimised the need for bracketing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Many of the young people disclosed personal

disappointments at the process they had engaged in and had not had a chance to debrief. They all reported that the in depth interview process had been positive as they had been given a chance to tell their stories. Some reported that the process had re-ignited their passion to get their information out into the public arena again and that they felt privileged to be chosen to take part in the study. All the young people concurred that they felt empowered as they realised that their experiences of the National Youth Roundtable were not isolated. Their collective hope was that through my research their experiences will contribute to the National Youth Roundtable becoming a more integrated participation mechanism for young people. They also suggested various strategies to ensure that their message would be heard through my research and offered to help in getting the message out.

d) Observation

Participant observation is a method of data collection that involves watching and studying a particular culture or social group in order to describe, explain, and interpret the meaning of its actions. It is the method of choice for researchers following the ethnographic tradition and is most often identified with anthropology. Participant observation can be conducted as either an outside observer or as a participant who watches and investigates while functioning as a quasi member of the group (Schwartzman 1993). My observation included participant observation at the National Youth Roundtable meetings in Canberra in March 2004. This was the first meeting of the 2004 Roundtable and formal presentations were to be made to various government ministers. This was a key meeting as it framed the processes and procedures for the remainder of the 2004 Roundtable.

There were a number of issues with regards to participant observation. Whilst being there I was deliberate in observing the following: the setting; the human/social environment; activities and behaviours; informal interaction and unplanned activities; the language of program participants; non-verbal communication and observing what does not happen and other surprise findings (Quinn Patton, 2001). Observation was needed in order to assess what mechanisms were in place to ensure that the formal reports from the participants became part of the policy making process for Government. A careful note was made regarding the language and discursive patterns that emerged

throughout the event and how the structure of conversations influenced proceedings (Foucault, 1983).

Data analysis

Prior to beginning the interview and transcription process I became cognisant with N6 research software. N6 is designed to assist researchers to organise and analyse text-based qualitative data (Mosley, 2005). I first imported the raw files into the software and printed out reports of each of the transcriptions which included line numbers. From this point I was then able to manually identify key themes and then re-import them into N6 so that I did not have large sections of data that I did not wish to use. This made the process of using N6 much more effective and streamlined the coding process considerably, as I was able to use the quick edit function utilising line numbers that had already been identified.

Each transcript of the young people's experiences was analysed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological methodology. All the participants' oral or written interviews were transcribed verbatim and read in order to gain a feel for them. As has been mentioned previously, there are a range of concerns with regards to transcriptions and their ability to effectively tell the stories of the research participants (Riessman, 1993).

From each transcript significant statements and phrases that pertain to the experience under investigation are extracted. This was done prior to the focus group as I needed to triangulate the themes that had emerged from the various interviews with the group (Kreuger, 1988). Meanings are formulated from these significant statements and phrases and utilising N6 made this process more efficient and effective as I had manually identified the key themes before then, using the software to organise and manipulate the data. The formulated meanings were then organised into clusters of themes which emerged clearly through the N6 coding process.

Utilising Colaizzi's methodology demanded that I begin the coding of themes simultaneously while further interviews were conducted. I was very keen to use the focus group to return the information from the in depth interviews for validation and expansion of the themes if the group decided that they wanted more information added. This created urgency to my coding process, but also meant that the information was fresh for all of us.

The results of the data analysis were then integrated into a full description of the experience and this was triangulated and refined through the process of the focus group and as each participant examined their transcriptions and commented on their accuracy. My task as the researcher was to then prepare statements regarding the collected data (Kreuger, 1988). The first step was to transcribe the entire interview. This provided a complete record of the discussion and facilitated analysis of the data. The next step was to analyse the content of the discussion. The aim of this analysis was to look for trends and patterns that reappear within either a single focus group or among various focus groups. Kreuger (1988, p.109) suggests that content analysis begins with a comparison of the words used in the answer. Also, the researcher must consider the emphasis or intensity of the respondents' comments (Kreuger 1988). This became very apparent to me throughout the process as all of the young people were passionate and articulate. This then built an exhaustive description which hopefully achieved final validation. Any new relevant data that was then obtained from the participants was incorporated into the fundamental structure of the experience (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The outcomes of this whole process were then examined in relation to the research question and the literature review and were synthesised into themes detailing some of the strengths and weaknesses of the National Youth Roundtable processes. Some of these themes included: the constraints to young people's participation in the policy making processes of Government; the National Youth Roundtable participant's expectations of the achievements of the Roundtable and what was achieved; and the structures and processes that might enhance youth participation as a result of these findings. This then included recommendations for further research and action.

Validity

The exact nature of 'validity' is a highly debated topic in both educational and social research since there exists no single or common definition of the term. A much cited definition of 'validity' is that of Hammersley's (1987, p. 69): "An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena, that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise". Although this would seem to be an all-encompassing and reasonable description, many other definitions fail to envisage such a "realist approach" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.282). The fact that there are so many possible definitions and replacement terms for 'validity' suggest that it is a concept entirely relative to the

person and belief system from which it stems. Establishing ‘credibility’, ‘auditability’ and ‘fittingness’ in qualitative research ensures rigour as distinct from terms such as reliability and validity in quantitative research.

There are many human science scholars who are taking an holistic, reflexive approach to science and who are investigating the moral and emotional aspects of their work (Behar, 1996; Denzin, 1997; Josselson, 1996). As researchers, we are “situated actors” (De Vault, 1990, p.101) and we need to understand the nature of our participation in what we know. We need to include ourselves in our research texts in visible ways in order for the reader to discern our interpretations. Also, there needs to be a place in research for somatic and emotive ways of ‘knowing’ in the construction of knowledge. Reflecting on the process of self-disclosure and its impact on knowledge production during the research encounter is a starting place. Indeed this can only add to the validity of the research process as reflexivity is paramount in the methodology (Riessman, 1993).

In phenomenological terms this process, although ‘bracketed’, serves to add depth, richness and reflexivity to the whole research process (Moustakas, 1994). I tried to not let my beliefs and assumptions shape the data collection process, or impose my own understandings and constructions of the data, but instead used a reflexive approach in addition to bracketing to enrich the interview process (Crotty, 1996).

Ethical considerations

It is regularly claimed that young people are the focus of much research and that there are an increasing number of journals devoted to following their lives, and an increasing number of adults continually trying to understand the ‘youth’ phenomena (Banks, 1999). This is in part fuelled by the continuous media portrayals of young people as folk devils and deviants (Cohen, 1973). Much of this research is conducted by adults on young people where young people are defined as being ‘other’ (Bessant, Sercombe, & Watts, 1998). This investigation is frequently political and an analogy can be drawn with the European mapping of other lands “as part of the process of exercising control, colonising and trade through knowledge of local society” (West, 1999, p.182). This has as much to do with the control, power relationships and the social relationship and status of adults and young people as it has to do with good research practice. Given

my status, careful consideration needed to be given to this dynamic, and I was determined that none of the young people would feel that their status was being undermined by my research.

West (1999) goes further to state that traditional social research has essentially been ‘us and them’, the powerful and the less powerful, with one group having a set of questions about another. He asserts that the purpose of research may vary, “from gaining a qualification and career to reinforcing policy making” (West, 1999, p.183). Some adults may not be much older than the young people they are researching and hence issues arise regarding the status of adults and young people, socio-economic position and education. I became more aware of this as my research progressed and as my knowledge of research methodology grew. My concern was that the research would become distant from the young people who were the subjects of the study. Awareness of my power as a researcher with the ‘client group’ and as a professional also shaped my approach, as I proceeded carefully and aimed to be transparent with the young people at every critical point in the research process.

Various codes of ethics have been developed for research involving young people; however, Graeme Stuart suggests that research with young people introduces additional ethical dilemmas that are not always easily resolved. Stuart believes that codes may need to be modified to include strategies concerning disclosure to maintain the integrity of young people's contribution to the research, and to respect young people's decisions regarding participation (Stuart, 2001). This was indeed an important issue in working with Roundtable participants. I was determined to report their experiences with clarity and integrity and allow them to participate at the level that they wished to.

Fundamentally, phenomenology and PAR methodologies claim that the participants are the experts in their situations and that they can give meaning to their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Stringer, 2004). My concern with the research becoming distant from the young people was indeed real, and West (1999) stresses that there are fundamental issues with the participatory research paradigm that include people's rights of ownership over the research, their lives and ideas.

This research was approved by Edith Cowan University's Ethics Committee. The young people were all given an easy to read consent form to sign and they all commented that it was helpful to have it to read beforehand. Assumptions regarding the

literacy of the participants was carefully considered and hence the reason why I gave them all the forms beforehand. The consent form detailed my expectations and their rights with regards to any information that they provided and I emphasised that they could choose to remain unidentified and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time or withdraw information at any time after the interview. They all willingly signed the consent forms prior to the interviews.

Ethical considerations for focus groups are the same as for most other methods of social research (Homan, 1991). For example, when selecting and involving participants, researchers must ensure that full information about the purpose and uses of participants' contributions is given. At the beginning of the focus group, I reiterated the goals of the research, emphasising confidentiality, the withdrawal of information at any time within the interview and after the focus group. I was honest in keeping the young people informed about the expectations of the group and topic, and not pressurising them to speak was identified as good practice (Homan, 1991). A particular ethical issue to consider in the case of focus groups is the handling of sensitive material and confidentiality given that there will always be more than one participant in the group. At the outset I needed to clarify that each participant's contributions will be shared with the others in the group as well as with me and the transcribers. The young people were encouraged to keep confidential what they heard during the meeting and I had the responsibility to anonymise data from the group. I explored this issue with them and it became apparent that they did not want to remain anonymous, but chose to have their full names included. This emphasised how committed they were to see my research change processes that they saw as being in need of significant modification.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to my research, the major one being access to meetings of the National Youth Roundtable, given that members of the Roundtable are briefed as to whom they are to speak and what they are permitted to say. In addition, many of the Roundtable sessions are not open to the media or public. I did, however, attend the Official Opening of the 2004 Roundtable and this proved to be quite illuminating with regards to the language and discursive patterns that emerged and how the participants began to use them. What surfaced was an array of rich information, so although at first access seemed to be limited, what I did attend was invaluable.

Traditional positivistic social science has devalued the role of subjectivity (Ratner 2002). However, given that I was involved in the discussions regarding the framework for a National Youth Roundtable prior to the model being used by Government, my subjectivity was a strength as it provided insight into much of the unpublished background to the development of the Roundtable. There was much value in adopting a sceptical approach in relation to my past position and involvement and in particular being critical of the rhetoric and ideas of all those who operate in youth affairs. I was able to reflect critically on the process and my role in that process through the use of effective bracketing (Crotty, 1996).

The question of the universality of my research findings was a significant consideration, given that I interviewed a small number of young people (Russell & Gregory, 2003). However, through the literature on youth participation and the adoption of those principles throughout the research, the question of young people's voices being authentically heard is addressed. My intention was not to produce a generalisable account, but a deep, valid account of a few young people. The insights from this could inform more extensive, generalisable research (Russell & Gregory, 2003).

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the theoretical frameworks guiding the research process, methods of data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations and limitations. What is important to note is that all of these issues must be carefully considered in relation to research with young people. It is not adequate to deal with this population using traditional methods as the population are vulnerable and open to exploitation. This was a priority for my research: that the methods I utilised would be authentic, honourable and gentle and would model principles of genuine youth participation.

CHAPTER 4

History and Hopes

When the Howard Government was elected they de-funded the youth peak body AYPAC and replaced it with the National Youth Roundtable. This deprived young Australians of a professional lobby and support organisation, not only for young people but also for other youth organisations, bolstering the whole sector. The Roundtable which replaced it served an important purpose of giving a selected group of young people direct access and engagement with government Ministers, but it could not replace the vital research, advocacy, lobbying and networking capacities of AYPAC (Tom).

Tom Dawkins, a Roundtable member in 1999 had this to say about the environment surrounding the emergence of the National Youth Roundtable. The National Youth Roundtable was introduced by the federal Government in 1999 as its latest initiative in the suite of programs designed to consult directly with the youth population. This chapter introduces the concept of the 'Roundtable', its mythic origins and current contexts. This will be done by firstly exploring the folklore surrounding the first Roundtable, through the symbols, ideals and dreams of King Arthur. I will then examine the political climate that spawned the Roundtable and how and why it emerged as a potential mechanism to garner the participation of young people in political processes. Further, the process leading up to the de-funding of the federal youth peak body, the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (hereafter referred to as AYPAC), will be examined. A brief explanation of the story of King Arthur's Roundtable follows:

Now this was the time of year in which had been set the marriage of King Arthur and the Lady Guinevere at Camelot, and at that place was extraordinary pomp and glory of circumstance. All the world was astir and in a great ferment of joy, for everybody was exceedingly glad that King Arthur was to have him a Queen.

In preparation for that great occasion the town of Camelot was bedight [to dress or array] very magnificently, for the stony street along which the Lady Guinevere must come to the royal castle of the King was strewn thick with

fresh-cut rushes smoothly laid. Moreover it was in many places spread with carpets of excellent pattern such as might be fit to lay upon the floor of some goodly hall.

Thus came the wedding-day of the King, bright and clear and exceedingly radiant.

So this herald-messenger came straight into the castle where the King abided waiting, and he said: "Arise, my lord King, for the Lady Guinevere and her Court draweth nigh unto this place."

For seventeen of the noblest knights of the King's Court, clad in complete armor, and sent by him as an escort unto the lady, rode in great splendor, surrounding the litter wherein the Princess lay. And the framework of that litter was of richly gilded wood, and its curtains and its cushions were of crimson silk embroidered with threads of gold. And behind the litter there rode in gay and joyous array, all shining with many colors, the Court of the Princess--her damsels in waiting, gentlemen, ladies, pages, and attendants.

And when high noon had come, the entire Court went with great state and ceremony unto the cathedral, and there, surrounded with wonderful magnificence, those two noble souls were married by the Archbishop.

And that day was likewise very famous in the history of chivalry, for in the afternoon the famous Round Table was established, and that Round Table was at once the very flower and the chiefest glory of King Arthur's reign.

For about mid of the afternoon the King and Queen, preceded by Merlin and followed by all that splendid Court of kings, lords, nobles and knights in full array, made progression to that place where Merlin, partly by magic and partly by skill, had caused to be built a very wonderful pavilion above the Round Table where it stood.

And when the King and the Queen and the Court had entered in thereat they were amazed at the beauty of that pavilion, for they perceived, as it were, a great space that appeared to be a marvellous land of Fay. In the midst of the pavilion was a Round Table with seats thereat exactly sufficient for fifty persons, and at each of the fifty places was a chalice of gold filled with fragrant wine, and at each place was a paten of gold bearing a manchet of fair white bread. And when the King and his Court entered into the pavilion, lo! music began of a sudden for to play with a wonderful sweetness.

Then Merlin came and took King Arthur by the hand and led him away from Queen Guinevere. And he said unto the King, "Lo! This is the Round Table."

Then King Arthur said, "Merlin that which I see is wonderful beyond the telling."

After that Merlin discovered unto the King the various marvels of the Round Table, for first he pointed to a high seat, very wonderfully wrought in precious woods and gilded so that it was exceedingly beautiful, and he said, "Behold, lord King, yonder seat is hight the 'Seat Royal,' and that seat is thine for to sit in. And as Merlin spake, lo! There suddenly appeared sundry letters of gold upon the back of that seat, and the letters of gold read the name, *ARTHUR, KING*. And Merlin said, "Lord, yonder seat may well be called the center seat of the Round

Table, for, in sooth, thou art indeed the very center of all that is most worthy of true knightliness. Wherefore that seat shall be called the center seat of all the other seats."

Then Merlin pointed to the seat that stood opposite to the Seat Royal, and that seat also was of a very wonderful appearance as afore told in this history. And Merlin said unto the King: "My lord King, that seat is called the Seat Perilous, for no man but one in all this world shall sit therein, and that man is not yet born upon the earth. And if any other man shall dare to sit therein that man shall either suffer death or a sudden and terrible misfortune for his temerity. Wherefore that seat is called the Seat Perilous."

"Merlin," quoth the King, "all that thou tellest me passeth the bound of understanding for marvellousness. Now I do beseech thee in all haste for to find forthwith a sufficient number of knights to fill this Round Table so that my glory shall be entirely complete."

Then Merlin led King Pellinore forward and behold! upon the high seat that stood upon the left hand of the Royal Seat there appeared of a sudden the name, *PELLIAORE*. And the name was emblazoned in letters of gold that shone with extraordinary lustre. And when King Pellinore took his seat, great and loud acclaim long continued was given him by all those who stood round about.

Then after that Merlin had thus chosen King Arthur and King Pellinore be chose out of the Court of King Arthur the following knights, two and thirty in all, and these were the knights of great renown in chivalry who did first establish the Round Table. Wherefore they were surnamed "The Ancient and Honorable Companions of the Round Table."

Now as each of these knights was chosen by Merlin, lo! as he took that knight by the hand, the name of that knight suddenly appeared in golden letters, very bright and shining, upon the seat that appertained to him.

Thus was the Round Table established with great pomp and great ceremony of estate. For first the Archbishop of Canterbury blessed each and every seat, progressing from place to place surrounded by his Holy Court, the choir whereof singing most musically in accord, whiles others swung censers from which there ascended an exceedingly fragrant vapor of frankincense, filling that entire pavilion with an odor of Heavenly blessedness.

Then all the knights arose, and each knight held up before him the cross of the hilt of his sword, and each knight spake word for word as King Arthur spake. And this was the covenant of their Knighthood of the Round Table: That they would be gentle unto the weak; that they would be courageous unto the strong; that they would be terrible unto the wicked and the evil-doer that they would defend the helpless who should call upon them for aid; that all women should be held unto them sacred; that they would stand unto the defence of one another whensoever such defence should be required; that they would be merciful unto all men; that they would be gentle of deed, true in friendship, and faithful in love. This was their covenant, and unto it each knight sware upon the cross of his sword, and in witness thereof did kiss the hilt thereof. Thereupon all who stood thereabouts once more gave loud acclaim.

Then all the knights of the Round Table seated themselves, and each knight brake bread from the golden pattern, and quaffed wine from the golden chalice that stood before him, giving thanks unto God for that which he ate and drank.

Thus was King Arthur wedded unto Queen Guinevere, and thus was the Round Table established (Jung & von Franz, 1970, p. 12-13).

The Round Table became the place where Arthur's knights gathered, symbolizing equality, unity, and oneness. Much of Arthurian tradition hinges on the quest for the Holy Grail. During the time of Arthur, the quest for the Holy Grail represented the most important spiritual pursuit one could undertake, because the Grail itself possessed holy significance. For those who were able to find it and for those who were worthy enough to approach it, The Holy Grail possessed the ability to heal the sick and wounded, restore youth, and provide unlimited amounts of divine food (Jung & von Franz, 1970; Loomis, 1992).

Is the government in search of the Holy Grail of equal participation of young people through the Roundtable? It is a magnificent legend with some timely messages for modern day: equality; participation; chivalry; a voice for the voiceless; true friendship and camaraderie. What lessons can we learn from this wisdom, what principles could the National Youth Roundtable possess so that it could transcend difference? Bessant (2004a) claims that Roundtable processes have been adopted as participatory processes as they are said to have democratic practices embedded in them (p.384). The government was deliberate in adopting this as a process, so that young people can increasingly participate and make the transition from schooling and dependency to paid employment as seamlessly as possible. This connects with notions of citizenship whereby the paid employment is deemed to be the most legitimate way of securing that citizenship (Bessant, 2004a, p.390).

Roundtables are meetings, usually around a table, to examine an issue through discussion by all participants. Each participant is a stakeholder, so the issue is debated from many sides. Free discussion and diverse opinions are encouraged. Experts in a field can participate, as well as residents, business people, and interest groups. Roundtables are often breakout groups, focusing on one or more topics related to the entire issue or project. Seminars and workshops often use a roundtable format, but what is distinctive about roundtables is their emphasis on thorough discussion of an issue (Bosoki, 2002; FHWA, 2005).

What emerges is concern about the concept of a Roundtable from some of the participants. Ben Playle, a member of the 1999 Roundtable, in his paper “A Rectangular Roundtable?” had this to say about the Roundtable as a concept:

As participants settled in their chairs around the imposing rectangular table in the Main Committee Room of Parliament House, something seemed out of place. While the Federal Government’s inaugural National Youth Roundtable is generally proving to be an excellent venture, the Government’s geometrical confusion at the official opening is symbolic of several problems with the new process.

This geometrical confusion will be highlighted subsequently as it dovetails into issues such as representation that require closer examination. Naomi also reflected on some of her assumptions regarding the Roundtable structure:

...when I think of a Roundtable, I think about you being on an equal level and actually being heard and listened to...

It appears that several of the participants had preconceptions of the notion of the Roundtable structure. The trend towards using Roundtable structures has been popular since the early 1990s particularly in higher education contexts (Martinez, 1999). The National Centre for Public Policy and Higher Education in South Dakota supports the efficacy of the Roundtable structure stating that Roundtables have “...helped move ideas toward actual implementation. Roundtables are used as a strategy for change, as a means of developing consensus on priorities and on the actions necessary to address those priorities” (Martinez, 1999, p.72).

In addition to the notion of consensus based approaches, roundtables can be said to simply be special forums where a variety of interests are represented in a non-hierarchical setting (Bosoki, 2002; Mutebi, 2005). Increasingly, governments world wide have used them as tools to engage a range of populations. A useful example is from Thailand, where the government has attempted to increase citizen participation through their instigation:

Today, there are regular ‘Roundtable’ meetings between the Nan municipal authorities and the chairpersons of every community committee. The municipality uses these roundtable meetings to consult regularly with the community on several municipal activities and on policy implementation as well

as to encourage community initiatives through public participation (Mutebi, 2005, p.19).

Key activities where Roundtable structures have proved to be effective are: to consult on government activities; to discuss policy implementation and to encourage community action through participation. The popularity of roundtable structures is indeed significant, and as the demand for citizen participation continues, so will the demand for roundtable processes at all levels of society.

The Arthurian Roundtable mythology appears to be significant to the current National Youth Roundtable, as several participants have raised it as an issue. The symbolism is important to the aims and outcomes of the Roundtable, as young people go to the Roundtable with hopes of equality, participation and reciprocity.

The de-funding of AYPAC

The National Youth Roundtable became known through the de-funding of the peak body representing youth affairs. It is important to understand the role of the national youth affairs peak body and the effect of its de-funding on the establishment of the Roundtable. AYPAC had been created in 1991 and operational funding had enabled good policy research and was well promoted through Triple J, Australia's youth radio station. AYPAC was Australia's only national youth policy organisation representing over 350 youth organisations and networks which were in direct contact with over one million young Australians.

The Roundtable that replaced AYPAC had no continuous existence or capacity to develop policy and conduct policy monitoring (Summers, 2004). In addition to this Senator Andrew Bartlett commented:

The same day as AYPAC's de-funding, the Youth Roundtable was announced - short conferences for young people with limited ongoing support or networking, the Government is able to control the agenda, and limit the access of participants to non-government members of Parliament. The Round Table is a reasonable initiative in itself, but it does not replace a properly funded peak organisation that is able to do research and link the work of youth affairs organisations across the land (Bartlett, 2003).

David Kemp (Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs) asserted “Australian youth have more direct access to Government than ever before” (Kemp, 1999a). Dr Kemp was commenting following the announcement that the lobby group Australian Youth Policy Action Coalition (AYPAC) would cease activities from June 1999. He claimed that young people are now seeking broader representation and access to government than can be provided by a single lobby group.

Young Australians are diverse and it is important to have forms of representation which allow this diversity to be expressed. The National Youth Roundtable, the government’s principal consultative body with youth, gives every young Australian the chance to represent their generation (Kemp, 1999d, p.1).

According to Kemp, a single lobby group could not represent young people as effectively as broader representational processes. Consequently, the National Youth Roundtable emerged at a politically charged time. The media release by Kemp not only signaled the end of the peak body representing youth issues but flagged that the National Youth Roundtable would replace AYPAC as the centerpiece of the Government’s youth consultation mechanisms. This was all done on the same day.

AYPAC’s response was measured: “It is with regret that AYPAC today announced that it will close its doors in late May 1999. AYPAC has survived for the last year without government funding through project work and financial contributions from members and supporters” (Matthews, 1999b). The Executive Officer of AYPAC, David Matthews issued a media release detailing AYPAC’s concerns:

...we have concluded that AYPAC is unable to operate across a range of important policy areas on our current funding base. The continued existence of a wounded AYPAC has disguised the fact that young people are not been actively represented across these areas. The situation was not sustainable (Matthews, 1999b).

Other members of parliament detailed their concerns. Senator Andrew Bartlett had this to say about the process:

At the time of the de-funding of AYPAC, we said it was a classic case of shooting the messenger. AYPAC was generating commentary and criticism about youth unemployment, education, health, homelessness etc and a lot of the news wasn’t good. There had been a peak national youth body in this country for 20 years (Bartlett, 2003).

AYPAC was forced to negotiate clear outcomes based funding as a possibility for ongoing funding with Government. This included: AYPAC's Millennium Program for young Australians; transition pathways; policy and programme implementation and support; and youth forums and coordination in the non-government youth sector. In addition to this AYPAC reiterated its core funding outcomes for community organisations which included: policy; consultation, representation and co-ordination; services to constituents / information dissemination; and, governance. Within this framework, AYPAC indicated to government that it would also be interested in scoping work on new initiatives and emerging priorities. In summary AYPAC's proposal to government was: an Outcomes Agreement negotiated by AYPAC and the Commonwealth which would guide the development of a work plan; an agreed process between the Commonwealth and AYPAC to identify areas of potential future joint activity and to guide future Outcomes Agreements; an expressed commitment and process for regular communication and open dialogue between AYPAC and the Commonwealth; and a separate schedule which related to the funding provided for the major youth event (Bridgland, 1999a).

The political backdrop

In order to understand the political significance of the National Youth Roundtable, the political climate surrounding its emergence also needs to be examined. In the 1970s Australia began, on a much broader scale than before, to support the growth of peak bodies to represent sections of the community that were unrepresented or poorly represented in parliaments or the upper levels of bureaucracy. Young people were, not surprisingly, notable among those absent from the upper echelons of decision-making as were many groups particularly dependent on services provided by government. There was an attempt to bridge this gap between policy makers and policy takers by funding organisations to represent those affected by changes in government policy. The philosophical rationale was to strengthen weak voices, sections of the community that would otherwise be unheard in public debate and policy development such as young people (Sawer, 2002).

According to the Industry Commission (1995), peak bodies are representative bodies that provide advocacy, representation, co-ordination, information,

research and policy development on behalf of member organisations within a given sector or representing a specific section of the population. They are consulted in the process of policy development, and give evidence to parliamentary inquiries and at the committee stage of relevant legislation. AYPAC was notable for its unrelenting input into the development of the Common Youth Allowance legislation (Sawer, 2002a, p.2).

The demand for ‘consultation’ in policy development became normal at all levels of government in Australia (Sawer, 2002a). In order for consultation to occur, governments needed *bona fide* and representative organisations with which to consult. In some cases this involved fostering the creation of bodies that could perform the role of community representative at the table. By 1990 the federal government was funding 38 national peak bodies in the community services and health area alone. These represented diverse constituencies from homeless youth to long-established groups representing the blind and the deaf (Sawer, 2002).

Significantly, in 1990 the Commonwealth Minister for Community Services and Health, Brian Howe, invited the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (HORSCCA) to report on the rationale for peak body funding. This parliamentary committee reported that the strongest justification for funding such bodies was that it enabled disadvantaged groups to be represented in the formulation and implementation of policy, with such advice balancing the input of organised private interests. The Committee recommended that funding be limited to providing the infrastructure needs of non-profit representative bodies that were democratically responsive to their constituency. The Committee strongly endorsed the view that “an integral part of the consultative and lobbying role of these organisations is to disagree with Government policy where this is necessary in order to represent the interests of their constituencies”(HORSCCA, 1991, p.16-17). However, when AYPAC was defunded, one of the strongest claims by Kemp was that AYPAC was not funded to disagree with government (Kemp, 1999d), reflecting the sharp philosophical differences between both the governments of the day and the respective ministers.

Melville (1999) examined the changing roles of peak bodies and the resulting constraints on their advocacy and representative functions. These functions included: representation of marginalised and stigmatised groups that are not ‘vote winners’ and would otherwise lack voice; involvement in policy process of those most affected by government decisions, the groups most reliant on government intervention for equality

of life chances (Sawer, 2002a, p.3). As one young person commented, these issues of representation are of particular relevance to them as:

The key consequence of the Government's decision to abolish AYPAC is it is no longer accountable for its decisions to young people under the age of 18. Being unable to vote, young people now have no way to formally participate in the Australian political system (Bo'sher, 2005, p.5).

This is not to say that the representative functions of community-based peak bodies have been unproblematic. The question of how the representation of the unrepresented is to be organised has often been a point of conflict between governments and peak bodies. The issues have included government convenience; the preference for a body that will aggregate views across a sector and provide government with fast, co-ordinated responses to policy proposals. This was an issue with which AYPAC struggled and readily acknowledged its inherent challenges (Summers, 2004).

Also related to government convenience has been a preference for organisational models that mirror those in favour in government. Increasingly in the 1990s under the Keating and Howard governments this meant a preference for a 'purchaser/provider' model whereby peak bodies with recognisably corporate structures would deliver tangible outcomes, often short-term in nature and related to government objectives rather than community identified priorities. This shift from operational funding for representational roles to project funding tied to outcomes supporting government objectives certainly occurred for AYPAC towards the end of its funding by government (ACOSS, 1998).

A different set of organisational issues has concerned representational legitimacy: questions about the breadth of coverage of the supposed constituency, the degree of accountability to it and the extent to which office bearers reflect the characteristics of those represented. The parliamentary review discussed above recommended that "organisations should have democratic processes for election of their governing bodies and executives which ensure appropriate matches between the make-up of the membership and representation at board and executive level" (HORSCCA, 1991, p.39). The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt stated in the NSW Legislative Council Hansard regarding AYPAC:

It comprises a strong and diverse coalition of youth affairs organisations, individuals and young people. As honourable members would be aware, youth affairs is a field in which a wide range of government agencies are involved, so a co-ordinating body that can advocate on behalf of young people has an important role to play. Membership of AYPAC includes a range of diverse organisations, such as the Australian Association of Police Community Youth Clubs, Australian Rural Youth, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, the National Union of Students, Scouts Australia, and many other youth organisations. I have outlined those organisations to inform the Chamber of the diversity of the youth organisations that are part of AYPAC (Tebbutt, 1999, p.544).

In Australia, the Coalition Government under Howard's leadership has adopted an approach to repositioning equality-seeking groups as special interests outside the mainstream (Summers, 2004). Before and after the 1996 federal election campaign Howard set out to manage the insecurity attendant on economic globalisation by an appeal to a more comfortable past. He responded to the resentment created by wage and social services cuts by suggesting that the problems faced by 'ordinary Australians' had arisen because government had been too busy listening to special interest groups to attend to their needs (ACOSS, 1997; Sawer, 2002a). Hence, disadvantaged sections of society became even more marginalised. Referring to the likely forced closure of AYPAC, Tebbutt spoke of this as "...the latest casualty of the Howard government's attack on advocacy organisations" and expressed her concern that AYPAC "...will no longer be able to advocate for young people at a national level" (Tebbutt, 1999, p.545).

The Howard attack on special interest groups was by implication an attack on the extra-parliamentary forms of representation that had enabled more sections of the community to have a voice in policy development. The legitimacy of peak bodies was undermined by suggestions that they did not represent their supposed constituencies and that they distorted grass-roots opinion.

There is much to consider in relation to the history of the Roundtable and the environment from which it emerged. There has been a strong trend globally towards the increased use of Roundtable structures, and a scan of the literature indicated that to varying degrees, the principles of participation embraced by King Arthur at the inaugural Roundtable are reflected in current models. The key principles fundamental to the National Youth Roundtable include: consultation, inclusion and participation. What has emerged is that some of the assumptions by Roundtable participants regarding these

principles have not been observed or experienced and have resulted in some confusion and frustration. Bessant (2004a) has also alluded to this in her work regarding democratic practices and young people and the principles of Arthur's Roundtable.

The United Nations Youth Association Australian Committee voiced their concerns about the Roundtable processes and its effects on youth participation and empowerment:

The United Nations Youth Association, as an organisation run by youth and for youth, believes that greater youth participation and empowerment is of the utmost importance.

However, in recent years, the relationship between youth and the Government has become largely detached, particularly through the de-funding and disbanding of the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC). Moreover, the efficacy and true representative nature of newly established bodies such as the National Youth Roundtable must be questioned. These approaches appear at odds with the broader aim of consulting with a wider cross-section of the youth community.

UNYA feels that organisations run by young people, for young people are most appropriate when interacting and consulting with young people on a daily basis. UNYA believes that the Australian Government must maintain and build on their existing interests in youth affairs. Young people must be given a greater say in determining youth policy, as well as in advising Governments in relation to all non-youth related policy areas. Without this, there exists a real risk that youth participation and empowerment, in the context of consultation, will become little more than token (UNYA, 2003).

Conclusion

This chapter has plotted the history of the National Youth Roundtable and has examined the environment surrounding its emergence including the political backdrop and the de-funding of AYPAC. What is evident is that the climate surrounding the appearance of the National Youth Roundtable was politically volatile and the processes leading to the de-funding of AYPAC were questionable. The legitimacy and capacity of the mechanism that claimed to replace the broad functions of AYPAC was also thrown into question. This sets the scene for the implementation of these claims regarding youth consultation and participation. Hence, subsequent chapters will explore various aspects of the National Youth Roundtable, particularly with regards to listening to young people, the structural processes of the Roundtable and the attendant affect it has on its participants and national youth policy development.

CHAPTER 5

Enchantment to disappointment

Each year fifty young people are appointed to the National Youth Roundtable for a period of twelve months. During that time they are flown to Canberra for two face to face meetings of all of the participants (usually in March and September) and the period flanked by the meetings is when they research and write up their community projects (also referred to as topic areas). The young people who are successful in gaining a place on the National Youth Roundtable are initially attracted by what the Government offers, namely a unique opportunity to participate in forming policy about young people. David Kemp (Minister for Youth from 1997-2002) reiterates this theme:

A constant theme which has emerged, from all the meetings of the Roundtables that we've had, has been the desire for greater inclusion of young people and their empowerment in the society (Kemp, 1999c, p.1).

This chapter explores the participants' expectations of the experience, taking into account what the Government promised for the Roundtable. It then tracks what they felt they actually achieved, and the ensuing emotional impact of these processes.

Government promises

Each year the Government promotes the National Youth Roundtable as one of the key processes in the development of its youth related policies. Media releases are circulated widely and information and application forms for the Roundtable are distributed through the internet, major national newspapers, schools, TAFEs and other youth related media (FaCS, 2005b). Simon, for instance, said: "I'd seen posters advertising it up at Uni, checked out The Source website and applied". The Government utilises a range of techniques to attract young people to apply and uses a particular form of rhetoric regarding young people. Their most recent media release details this:

Roundtable 2005 – A Voice for Australia's Youth

Applications for membership of the National Youth Roundtable 2005 are now open. If you're aged between 15-24 you can apply to be part of this prestigious group of tomorrow's leaders.

"The Roundtable is the centrepiece of the Australian Government's youth consultation mechanisms and it brings together young people to discuss issues that have an impact on youth," Mrs Ley said.

"Members address issues of importance to the Australian Government relating to youth and work in collaboration with relevant Government departments and Members of Parliament, in consultation with their communities.

Last year over 660 young Australians from across the country applied for one of the seats on the hotly contested Roundtable. "

Excerpt from a Media Release 18.1.05 by Sussan Ley MP, Parliamentary Secretary (Children and Youth Affairs)(Ley, 2005).

Every year the request goes out to Australia's young people, to come to Canberra, the nation's capital, and have a voice, a significant voice in shaping policy for young people. The government claims that the Roundtable is 'hotly' contested, that you will be among a select group if you are successful (FaCS, 2005b). Passionate young people are lured to the Roundtable as a unique opportunity to have a voice at a national level regarding the issues that are important to young people and what the Government seems to offer coalesces with that passion. As indicated by one young participant on The Source website:

We all had one underlying element uniting us, this was our passion and dedication towards our communities and more so, our dedication to the betterment of this land of ours. This, added to our enthusiasm and optimism, linked us in this journey that has culminated to this point...(FaCS, 2005b).

While this passion is indeed tangible, there are a number of mitigating factors affecting this. Evidence suggests that the popularity of the Roundtable is steadily declining, for a range of reasons. Perhaps the Government's claim that the Roundtable is 'hotly contested' needs to be challenged. Tanya Plibersek, the Federal Shadow Minister for Youth, reports that:

Application levels for the NYR have fallen by more than 50% since 2000 with only 450 people applying this year [2005]. Fewer and fewer young people are applying for the NYR because the chances of being selected are so slim and the

effect of the NYR on Howard Government policy is negligible (Plibersek, 2005).

In the first year of the Roundtable (1999), well over one thousand young people applied, now this number has dropped to less than half that number (Plibersek, 2005). Questions need to be raised as to why this steep decline has occurred in spite of the Government's promotion of the Roundtable as a direct remit to Government: this in itself encourages young people to apply.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, today welcomed the new members who will provide a valuable insight into the issues confronting their generation today in Australia. The National Youth Roundtable was established by the Howard Government in 1999 to give young people aged 15 to 24 years the opportunity to speak directly with the Government about issues important to them (FaCS, 2005b).

Therefore, successful applicants have every reason to believe, from what they are told prior to travelling to Canberra, that they are vital to the Government in the policy development process regarding young people and that they will be resourced at every stage of the process:

The Government will work with the members to provide them with the practical tools and the confidence needed to bring forward their views on youth issues of national importance (FaCS, 2005b).

The Government also talks about many other benefits, which seem attractive to young people, such as personal growth and participating in youth policy development. Kemp, in his opening speech for the 2001 Roundtable, alludes to the value that his fellow parliamentarians place on the Roundtable participants and the outcomes:

I know when I talk to my parliamentary colleagues how much they look forward to the opportunity to interact with you, because this is an opportunity for them which they don't have every day. They talk with young people in their electorates but they don't often have the chance to talk at length with people who've had a chance to reflect very deeply on what it means to be a young person in Australia today and to express the great diversity of young Australians (Kemp, 1999c).

In this statement, Kemp does indeed acknowledge that the young people chosen are a significant resource and possess insights on which the Government relies. He emphasises that young people are an expert source of information regarding youth

issues. This claim is cognisant with the Government's choice of the Roundtable as a mechanism to increase the participation of young people (Martinez, 1999). Kemp continues to explore this:

And that is really the view of the government itself, that we have a chance to learn from you about what it is like to be a young person in Australia today in the whole variety of circumstances that have made up your lives and your experiences. But, in one way or another, all those achievements are being brought together here to assist the government to think through more carefully how we put in place policies that are going to affect not only your lives, but the lives of many other young Australians (Kemp, 1999c).

This is a considerable claim, that the young people chosen will indeed influence policy that potentially affects the lives of numerous young people (Martinez, 1999; Mutebi, 2005). Many of the young people expressed this specific desire in their interviews. For Craig, this was a major factor in him applying for the Roundtable:

I hoped that I would have a role in being a voice for the voiceless...a conduit. I hoped that I would have an opportunity to voice my opinions and those of other young people. Young people at that age have no other ways...they can't vote. Consultations tend to avoid young people, but there aren't many things that don't affect young people, but they have no voice.

Building on this zeal the Government offers one final enticement, that of personal development. For many young people, being a member of the National Youth Roundtable and consulting with Government directly is a hefty addition to their list of achievements and an emergent resumé. Larry Anthony (Federal Minister for Youth 2001-2004) details this:

Secondly, of course, and part of it, which wasn't really the design of the Roundtable,... is I think for yourself, an enormous amount of personal development (FaCS, 2005b).

Anthony clearly indicates that personal development for the participants was not an intended outcome, but merely an advantageous by-product of the processes. This then raises the question of what the Government did originally intend to give the participants in exchange for their contributions, and it would seem that the privilege of being on the Roundtable and being able to document that they were involved was deemed to be sufficient. Kemp indicates that the participants will have access to a whole range of options:

So the Roundtable's influence is already spreading out in ripples and waves to influence the way in which Government deals with young people and the way in which young people have access to empowering information and empowering opportunities (Kemp, 1999c).

So then, how does the Government influence young people to participate? By offering such things as an opportunity to be authentically heard, the chance to make a significant difference to national youth policy development and the lives of numerous young Australians and to be among the chosen few who can claim to have done this.

What the participants hoped to achieve

Moving on from the enticements of Government it is imperative to examine the participants' expectations of the National Youth Roundtable. The young people interviewed elaborated on a number of personal expectations which included the anticipation of being heard by Government. What has become apparent is that each participant had slightly different expectations, but clear themes have emerged: expectations; personal development; being heard; having an impact; meeting with government ministers and meeting other young people who shared similar convictions. These will be discussed in more detail in this section.

A strong and clear raft of potential outcomes emerged as well as a degree of confusion regarding what they did actually expect. Linden expresses some of this uncertainty:

There were times I thought that maybe being from the bush or being caught up in traditional culture, that there could be some barriers there that might affect me being in the National Youth Roundtable. But it ended up being something totally different to what I thought it was going to be.

When I probed this question further with Linden with regards to his expectations, he found it difficult to elaborate as he felt that the preparation prior to going to Canberra had been patchy and he was unsure about what to expect at all. He had only a few brief phone calls with the organisers before attending his preparation weekend in New South Wales. This was his first trip out of Western Australia. The learning curve for Linden was significant.

Naomi, in contrast, due to various experiences of consultation in Canberra immediately prior to attending the National Youth Roundtable, had very specific expectations:

...I expected the government would were going to listen and actually wanted to listen. I had this definite expectation that I was actually going to be able to have an impact and that that they were pulling me all the way over to Canberra for a reason you know [that] I was potentially [going to] make it.

Naomi had a clear agenda about wanting to be seriously listened to by Government. When I asked more about her understanding of the phrase “potentially [going to] make it” she expected that her views would have an impact on Government and the decisions they make regarding young people. For Naomi the Roundtable represented the highest level of participation in Government decision making for young people in Australia. Prior to the Roundtable Naomi had participated in two significant forums: she won the state award for the ABC’s (Australian Broadcasting Commission) Heywire competition for rural young people, and the prize was to attend the National Youth Issues Forum in Canberra a week before the Roundtable. She was also a youth delegate at the Australian Constitutional Convention in 1998.

For other participants such as Craig, a familiar expectation emerges and connects with the rhetoric presented by the Government.

...my expectation was that it would be a legitimate consultative body and that we would be the national voice on youth issues. It was a great opportunity to have a forum to express my views. My expectation was that we would have a lot of direct contact with the government and that they would see us as being really important. I assumed that we would have a captive audience.

Ben’s expectations were similar:

... I was attracted to the glossy approach! You go there with high expectations about spending time with Ministers etc...So I thought that I would get to meet Ministers and other important people and that they would listen to what I have to say. I also liked the idea of finding out about the political processes.

For Tom, the expectation regarding debate and discussion is a familiar one, but he also looked forward to meeting peers of a similar calibre.

I recall being keen on having the chance to express opinions directly to government as well as of the prospect of meeting some amazing and interesting young people. I expected respect, support and genuine opportunities for debate and discourse.

In addition, Thomas detailed his professional board sitting agenda and how it had flourished into a lucrative practice:

Ah! In the last five years every 2½ weeks I've got flown around the country. I have a really decent Frequent Flyers Program and in the last 2½ years I was on a variety of Boards that paid. Some paid really well and I was also given extra work for Government Departments as well on top of that which was only because I was on the Boards. You know it was a nice little business I was having back then.

This is where we see passion linked to entrepreneurialship, which is one reading. Another could be a cynical adoption of political jaunts, and it confronts participation issues dealt with by Westhorp (1987). Westhorp claims that young people must benefit in some way from being the experts in their field, whether that be monetarily or by other methods (Westhorp, 1987). It also builds on the assertions made by Larry Anthony previously, whereby one of the benefits for the young people is personal development. It seems that the young people are lucid about the personal benefits of their participation, and they go to Canberra with a clear agenda concerning how they will personally benefit, despite a lack of information from Government regarding what they might achieve.

In contrast to these participants who all had high expectations of the Roundtable, Simon, a current Roundtable member had this to say:

I went into NYR with incredibly low expectations. Having known quite a few delegates from previous years, I was expecting the first residential to be eight days of talking, to be followed up by six months of project work, and a second meeting of being ignored by government.

Simon's more cynical expectations stemmed from what he had been told by previous participants. For many of the participants without this exposure, however, language around issues such as consultation, being heard, having impact and having direct contact with Government Ministers emerge, fuelled by the idiom of the Government. It appears

that while some participants were very clear about what to expect, for instance, Naomi who had recent experiences on which to base her expectations, others were less clear due to a whole range of factors. This was the case for Linden, as he had not experienced forums such as the Roundtable before.

Naomi also had other expectations around personal outcomes:

...yeh... the other expectations was that I was going to learn some skills for myself and I guess learn about the project process and you know go through the many steps in consultation and all those kinda things and so on.

She was clear that in addition to an unambiguous agenda regarding being heard by Government, that she also had some outcomes that she wanted to achieve for herself. For some of the older participants who were more established in work or study, being a participant on the National Youth Roundtable was a prime opportunity for them to advance their own agenda. For Thomas, it was simply a stepping stone, an opportunity to get national exposure to his issues and to make the links necessary to further his own goals. Thomas recounts:

To be honest, my expectations was that this is just a junket - and it was a great opportunity because it lead me to get on to other Councils and things like that such as the National Disability Advisory Council where I can further my OWN agenda in disability movements, ethnic disability movements and then mainly equity and equality.

Hence, clear themes emerge such as: personal development, being heard, having an impact, meeting with Government Ministers and meeting other young people who shared similar convictions.

What the participants thought was achieved

The participants reported that they all achieved a range of things, some different to what they expected. These included: having political impact; gaining leadership

skills; communication with government Ministers; and linking their passion with their topic area research.

Finding out from the inside how to manipulate political processes was important for Ben, especially being the son of career bureaucrats and very involved in student politics at university.

He [Brendan Nelson, Federal Minister for Education] remembered me from student demonstrations at Curtin!...in reality you get all of eight seconds with Ministers that aren't even connected with your topic area...what's the point? No one takes it seriously and you find yourself crashing back to reality.

Ben came away from the Roundtable believing that his expectations were not realised and wondering whether his time in Canberra was meaningful at all. Feeling like there was no particular point or tangible achievements was an overwhelming prospect to manage for Ben and led to significant disenchantment for him. It could be argued that a young person with Ben's background may be more experienced in manipulating the political process and that his expectations were more realistic, but he has come away from it quite disturbed.

For some participants then, the process was politically motivated and despite high levels of frustration with Roundtable processes, their own agenda kept them motivated and engaged. For Ben though, perhaps more knowledge meant that expectations were higher and that left him further to fall when his expectations were not realised. For other participants such as Linden, the influence of others was persuasive, namely his school principal and teachers. Linden was encouraged to apply so that he could develop his leadership skills which had further implications considering his Aboriginality. Linden described this how it affected his decision to apply for the Roundtable:

Yes there was support from teachers and the [school] principal he was very supportive. He really wanted to help me with my leadership skills....and for me to be a role model not just only for Aboriginal students at the school but also non-Aboriginals and in the wider community.

In addition, for most young people, simply the chance to be away from home, stay in hotels and visit Parliament House was indeed alluring and attractive. Being part

of official functions, attending receptions at Government House, and sightseeing around Canberra was all very enthralling. Many of the participants reported this:

For the participants...the trip to Canberra was fantastic and getting to go to Parliament House was a buzz and see how it works from the inside. We're exposed to it all and made to feel special. (Ben)

The flights to Canberra, staying in hotels, being able to go to Parliament House...they're all amazing opportunities. (Craig)

One participant reported this on The Source website:

When I think highlights, I can't go past the reception at the Governor-General's place. He was taller than I had imagined, but I noticed his house didn't feel like his *home*. He had those very 'museum' velvet ropes everywhere to prevent careless young people finding their way into his bedroom or something. Fair enough. We got to see the famous office where the sacking of Gough Whitlam by John Kerr took place. And me without my camera!

Even though it is often assumed that issues around independence are important to young people (Jeffs & Smith, 1998b), this did not emerge as a central issue with the participants. The chance to be away from home and visit important places was mentioned by several participants, but does not rate as highly as outcomes such as personal development, leadership and entrepreneurship.

The participants indicated as their interviews progressed that they became increasingly disenchanted with the Roundtable process. For Linden this was a considerable issue, not only for him, but for his Aboriginal culture:

...something that was a little unfortunate was that all of us had different topics that we were wanting to bring forward to Government and I remember that we were all sent to ministers [that dealt with the] field of the topic and I was ...researching and looking at [what] was the effect that mining has on Aboriginal people...spiritually, physically, mentally, and also environmentally as well and because it was such a wide range of things. I think it was hard for them to assign me to a certain minister. But to this day I don't really think that my message was really heard.

Linden expressed frustration and concern that the impact of mining on Aboriginal people, even though he thought it was of national significance, was deemed to be too big and difficult to address. Hence, for Linden, and some other participants, disenchantment set in when they felt like their chosen topic was not given the

prominence it deserved. He said that doing the interview had reignited a passion in him that had been snuffed out by Government. He found that his frustrations re-emerged.

...I spoke to him (David Kemp) and the question I asked him he ...didn't give me a straight out answer. I had to... um... sort of re-phrase the question and I had to ask the question again and still I wasn't given a specific answer to my question. Ah... it sort of it made me feel like all this research, all this time that I have spent here at the Roundtable it was a bit of a waste you know. And it was like I left the Roundtable a little disappointed. I didn't have any problems with the Roundtable but with just the answer I got from the Minister.

Linden felt strongly that his issue had not been addressed and that David Kemp, because he did not have a Minister that he could refer Linden to, had attempted to address the issues, but had circumlocuted them which increased the frustration in Linden. It could be argued that rather than disinterest on Kemp's part, that it was simply a communication failure, but for Linden this was not the case in his opinion. For Linden, a softly spoken, attentive individual, dissatisfaction emerged increasingly as he recounted his experiences:

...I actually got about six or seven minutes with five or six other Roundtable members who also came to see David Kemp. I was a little bit disappointed because he answered their questions and he spent a more time with them. I don't know, maybe it was because my questions were a little controversial, I'm not sure what it was but he was able to answer everyone else's questions but it was like he didn't know how to answer my question, he sort of dodged it a few times here and there.

Linden kept returning to the issue of not having his concerns adequately addressed. His expectation in making the trip to Canberra was to express his concerns regarding a major issue (mining) impacting on the Indigenous population and do further research on it. He felt that he was largely ignored. This sent a clear message to him and indeed the broader population regarding the importance Government places on issues such as this. Evidently, Linden's issue was too large and controversial to even consider seriously.

I don't know if my views have impacted on government as I said before there wasn't any feedback. What can you do? Yes very disappointing. (Long pause.....) It was disappointing enough just spending six minutes with David Kemp but it was disappointing that in six minutes you know like I was sort of the second last person and [I felt that] all these other blokes, they had a

good talk for about fifteen minutes. Every question was answered my question wasn't answered.

I sat with Linden as he explored an exciting but frustrating time in his life, and it became obvious throughout the process of the interview that he was doing his best to put words around his feelings and to express his pain, for the first time. I found that many times, what began with a vague thought then proliferated into a fully blown explanation and reflection. We sat together in silence numerous times throughout the interview while he processed his thoughts. It would have been wrong of me to interject and offer explanations, because this story was his and needed his voice to bring it to life. For him the hurt was palpable and reflects on him as a young person, carrying a culture that seems to be undervalued, and the experiences of the Roundtable emphasised that yet again. My concern in undertaking this research was that the experience of undertaking the interview with me was indeed empowering. For Linden it was far more than simply a topic area, it is at the core of his being, his meaning and it appears that the Government have no conception of the depth of the passion of the participants.

Another important factor to consider in this example is Indigenous modes of communication. Modes of communication within Indigenous populations are different from Western approaches. There is significant literature showing that different cultures have identifiable dimensions, goals and expectations, and that variations in learning styles, modes of communication and participation impact on the effectiveness of communication (McDonald, 1993; Ryan, 1992). It appears that the Roundtable is not able to accommodate these different modes of communication and this could be a factor contributing to the frustration felt by Linden. His final comments indicate this:

...My expectations have not been fulfilled. I thought I was going there ...[and] I would be heard...but maybe you know there's a time and place for these things. I don't know. But I don't feel as though my expectations of my topic that I brought forth to the Roundtable I don't think it has been fulfilled. Maybe there's another time and place for it I really believe that because it's something that I really want to speak my mind because growing up in the bush as a young boy. Speaking the language and growing up within the culture it has I've got the passion I know what it's like to go out like when the mining people go out there they see a dollar sign. But me I see a whole different culture a world out there I see out there it's my home this you know I'm not made to be in the city.

He emphasised that perhaps the Roundtable is not the appropriate forum for his issues and he acknowledges that there may be more suitable forums. He also indicates his

awareness of the limitations of communication, acknowledging that he sees the world very differently to the way the Roundtable operates.

Naomi's Roundtable topic area became her life and she poured countless hours into the whole process. Her passion was for rural young people and their access to post secondary education. She went through exhaustive processes to ensure that the information she was gathering was comprehensive. As she details, she was highly motivated to make her message public and for it to be the voice of rural young people.

What I really hoped to achieve was what I did which was get this report with some really solid information. It's a 100 page report with 180 case studies of regional young people and their experiences with Youth Allowance. I guess that I was focusing on was the fact that some regional kids are just not getting to uni because they just can't afford to and they aren't eligible for Youth Allowance and their parents can't afford to support them. For me the regional campus is not such a big issue as being supported to go to Uni.

Naomi assumed that by gathering all of this information into a detailed report that the Government would take advantage of this and reassess eligibility criteria for rural young people, so as to address a major issue for rural young people. This is a concern regarding the purpose of the Roundtable, as it indicates an inadequacy of the Roundtable in educating young people about the complexity of policy development processes (Ralston, Lerner, Mullis, Simerly, & Murray, 2000). Chapter seven will deal with this issue more comprehensively.

A major aggravation for Naomi was once the report was completed, she could not get anyone to actually read it and take it seriously.

And so I got all these case studies from around Australia 'cause I emailed ridiculous amounts of people and got back some wonderful, amazing stories and all of that. Anyway and I did lots of research as well and then what I hoped to achieve was have this report[and] give it to these people in Canberra and then have them actually look at it and recognize that there was an issue and then do something about it. And... I got to start by giving it to them and they recognize the issue as well.

Naomi experienced some of the similar obstacles that confronted Linden, meeting with Ministers whose area was largely irrelevant to their topic area. For her, the disillusionment kept escalating, and she was not one to be silenced about an issue about which she is so fervent:

... Yeh, we did to chat to Ministers. I actually met with... I mean this was disappointing as well because...the person who was responsible for the area my project was involved in was Larry Anthony (Minister for Youth) but I didn't meet with him. I met with John Anderson (Minister for Transport) and the Department of Transport and Regional Services, which was good because he understands the whole regional stuff but what's the point, but then it wasn't even his area really. It wasn't his area or youth portfolio or anything to do with the Youth Allowance.

These frustrations then spawned a range of different approaches. What impressed me was the level of energy that Naomi sustained over the Roundtable term. She spent countless hours emailing, phoning, researching, writing and pursuing. As she recounts, she became a deliberate annoyance to the Minister for Youth and his Chief Advisor, and this was a well thought out process to achieve her goals:

...so what I did was once every couple of weeks I'd send updates to Larry Anthony on how my project was doing and updates to Larry and also to his Advisor Peter McConnell about where I was up to, what was going on. I was absolutely irritating and very annoying and I did it on purpose so basically they knew who I was when I arrived [in Canberra] again in September. Peter McConnell...oh he knew who I was. To the point where he'd say "Yes Naomi I've read your report it's ok" I'd have to stalk him?! You have to otherwise you just don't get your message heard. So I did that and I just kept hounding them all the time not just Larry Anthony others as well, I sent it to Brendan Nelson and even some members of the Opposition, I just really tried to just get the word out there and to the point where I was I set for a meeting or phone call with the Head of Youth Allowance and spoke to her about it and she's not there anymore. So I guess what I wanted to achieve through all of that and through so much work in terms of really getting into that system. I worked really hard and keeping them aware and up-to-date where I was at and with my Local Member down at Margaret River and hassling him getting him on board. In the end it was..kinda really disappointing because I thought I had some very solid evidence and they just really couldn't take it.

Her efforts seemed to be tireless and very intentional, so that her message was at least out there to be heard. It is one thing to undertake such an exhaustive piece of research at no real cost to Government, but to have to work so unyieldingly to have the report even looked at is very disheartening. This dissatisfaction certainly emerged for Naomi:

...well I look at it like this... I did this free bloody review of their system for them and surely they should take something like that and get a bit excited by it!!

My concern was that for Naomi this had been a life consuming process, only to have her report sit idle and unread. When probed about this, she was quite philosophical, but also determined to maintain her integrity and value in the whole process.

For Naomi this also unearthed some deeper issues regarding her value and worth, especially in relation to being a 'token' young person and this touches on a more personal aspect of her participation.

...But I think that I never [want] to be seen that I am token. If I'm going to be token then I don't want to be part of it. I want to be heard. And in some ways because there hasn't been much of an outcome of what we've all done through this process it feels like we are kinda token.

She is realistic about her role in the whole system, but remains motivated and passionate despite significant obstacles. Even though she is aware of the flaws in the Roundtable, she is still prepared to pour her energy and passion into it in the hope of changing the system.

...a couple of years ago when it first began it was such high profile - John Howard was coming and listening to projects. Now they have got a youth spokesperson in Parliament representing young people and at my Roundtable he rocked up for half an hour of speeches or something. I just don't think they are taking it seriously. They are not giving it the credit it deserves. So obviously they see the flaws in the system as well. It really is...more and more token, and more and more just their attempt to pretend to listen to young people.

Naomi's passion is very much alive despite her repeated disappointments, and she is creative, if she cannot get her message to Government via the Roundtable, she will find another means. The process of the interview with me challenged her to reassess and look for alternative ways to get her report read. It was important that again, I let her story emerge, her passion resurface and for it to breathe and live again. From then it would create a life of its own. The message is not dead, the issues are still real ones for rural young people and for Naomi, it is part of her story. The following quote exemplifies how she has managed to survive political processes so far and displays a maturity far beyond her years

...bureaucracy as I have learnt more and more about it I find it really frustrating but I guess it is a reality and it is part of the whole system and we have to work with it. It has jaded me a bit. Every time I speak to a politician I think "are you really listening do you really care or are you here just about your own

workload?” You do have a very quite a cynical point of view when it comes to politicians actually. And just in terms of their representation of us and of my voice. Our country has elected [you and] does he actually listen to what I am saying? And I’m jaded about that. And certainly or disappointed really I just work so hard and I’ve got 180 people who work hard with me and gave me their stories and just feel like they haven’t been able to really get it out there and do what could have really happened with it.

Like Naomi, Ben had high hopes and expectations:

...you go there with high expectations about spending time with Ministers etc, but in reality you get all of eight seconds with Ministers that aren’t even connected with your topic area...what’s the point. No one takes it seriously and you find yourself crashing back to reality.

As Ben’s hopes were in no way realised, his defence was to become somewhat facetious in his approach. He quickly became realistic about what to expect. While his topic area was important to him, it soon became obvious that it was of little or no importance to the Government. However, during his interview he spoke about the fact that despite frustrations and disappointments, the Roundtable process has been life changing and has led him to where he is today. He is still passionate, committed and is making a real difference in the passage that his life is currently on, as he is working towards travelling internationally with the United Nations Youth Association. During the Roundtable he continually felt disappointed about the impact of his topic area and the work he put into it. It seemed like his work fell on deaf ears and resulted in a range of hopes and expectations:

...I did the transition to tertiary education and the support networks that were around. 70% of young people don’t know where to get support. I stalked an advisor of Larry Anthony’s for ages to get a letter of support ...still haven’t got it! You’d think it would be the number one issue for Larry Anthony...but no!

These issues seemed to dominate for Ben:

So I thought that I would get to meet Ministers and other important people and that they would listen to what I have to say. I also liked the idea of finding out about the political processes. “I got my 12 seconds of fame” We got to meet Brendan Nelson...there were nine of us in the room and we had 20 minutes in total, so I had 8-10 seconds in the whole time. The biggest thing was who was keeping time and the right way to greet a Minister!

Ben wasn't interested in the finer points of meeting etiquette, for him it was about getting his message across to Government. That was why the Government had selected him to be on the Roundtable.

The worst part was meeting with Larry Anthony, the Minister for Youth. He was 30 minutes late and we had 25 minutes with him and there were 14 of us. I reckon I got six seconds that time. Everyone in the end expected nothing and got pretty jaded. Don't get me wrong...we met some great people! FaCS were realistic about it. They said that we weren't going to get much time and in the end we know that they didn't give a shit.

This frustration with timing and etiquette was a recurring theme for Ben, as this is what seemed to impact on him most significantly about the outcomes of the Roundtable.

Another strong theme emerged around the issue of those who control processes being concerned about the outcomes of those processes. In his words:

If I could change something...it would be that people give a shit...that I'm not just one of 14 passionate young people with eight seconds to say what I need to say. It's more detrimental than good...most people got cynical and lost their passion.

The notion that passionate young people were repeatedly disappointed with the lack of space and time to meaningfully dialogue with Government is for Ben a very serious issue. There are consequences that need to be heeded:

It was a huge learning experience for me about the reality of things. It has shattered my illusions of government. However, it's also been an integral part of my journey...I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for that experience. If you're promised a chance to be listened to...then that needs to be followed through on. If not, you end up with very jaded young people.

For Ben, the foundation of the Roundtable is flawed and with Westthorp (1987) and Hart (1992) he questions the authenticity of young people's participation. Is the Roundtable a legitimate mechanism for youth participation, whereby young people are valued and respected for their various insights and experiences? He strongly suspects that the answer to this is no, and in fact the impact of the Roundtable is that it further alienates and disenfranchises young people. Simon concurs with these thoughts and encourages the Government to:

... stop 'consulting' young people and start engaging with them... To think before acting, to stop operating as bureaucrats all the time and to start communicating with young people in ways that they can understand.

Thomas, and various other participants are aware of the broader processes in play:

Looking from the government's perspective I guess for them it's all about strategising for social engineering. How do you get a bunch of people to think the way you want them to think and follow their agenda, how do we breed a bunch of liberal voters? It's guaranteed now... that people who've grown up with the Liberal Party[in power] in the last 10 years are Liberal voters.

The participants talked about being manipulated by the Government, and how the processes of the Roundtable are about window dressing. For Ben:

It's all so fake but made to look so good! It was a huge learning experience for me about the reality of things. It has shattered my illusions of government.

Further to this, Thomas reflects on how he perceives the Government has developed the processes and functions of the Roundtable and how it has evolved to become increasingly orchestrated and controlled, an issue which is increasingly difficult to challenge and question:

They took the power away from the people who speak out.... The measures and controls were instigated in the 2000 Roundtable and it's become more controlled ever since then. The government does not want us to move on because when you move on you progress in your thoughts. When you progress in your thoughts you develop new ideas when you have new ideas you become questioning. When you question you know they don't have the answers.

Tom, another participant, summarised his feelings thus:

My expectations were disappointed in 1999, and have been disappointed subsequently by what I've heard of the Roundtable since by people on it in later years. I think that while a few good ideas have been picked up there has been little evidence of an increased understanding of, interest in or response to youth issues by the Howard Government in the time the Roundtable has been operating.

Conclusion

Having examined the various enticements offered by Government to young people to participate on the National Youth Roundtable, this chapter has become a cautionary tale. The emotional impact on the participants of the experience of the Roundtable needs to be taken seriously. Themes such as disillusionment, disappointment, hurt and apathy emerge as the aftermath of the Roundtable. When these themes are coupled with attendant issues to do with youth participation, namely: representation, consultation and legitimacy, then the effects of the National Youth Roundtable are significant. Participants reported that they went from being engaged, excited and hopeful to being hurt, disillusioned and disenchanted. The effect of this is further exclusion, a ramification that must be honestly considered.

CHAPTER 6

Did you say something?

The previous chapter discussed the emotional impact of the Roundtable experience on the participants. It dealt with the young people's perceptions of the Roundtable, their ensuing feelings regarding their impact on that process, and the value of their contributions. This chapter develops the journey, examining the structural processes that are in place at the Roundtable. It then scrutinizes the impacts that these practices have on how young people engage with political processes. I will also examine how these processes perpetuate practices whereby young people are systematically excluded from full and meaningful participation in matters that affect their lives (Bessant, 2004a, p.24). It is important to note that these structural processes contribute significantly in shaping how things happen at the Roundtable. They also signal on what terms and how young people will be listened to as they serve as moulds and filters for the information from the participants.

There are various key activities of the Roundtable and structural procedures surrounding these activities that contribute to shaping their outcomes. These procedures or protocols include how the participants are chosen, media protocols and meeting procedures. As will be revealed, these practices shape how young people subsequently connect with further political processes. Finally, I will examine how structures such as the Roundtable can pervert meaningful participation and the notion of authentic 'listening'.

There are a range of key processes that require examination in order to understand the Roundtable and its impact. Additionally, it is important to understand the context in which these processes exist. The year is organised into the following events

for Roundtable participants: the application process, the selection process, a preparatory residential workshop (up to eight days long), the first face to face meeting in Canberra (which is usually held over five days in March), the topic area/community project research phase and then the final meeting (in September). After this meeting, topic area reports are meant to be finalised and prepared to be published on The Source (the government's youth website).

Structural processes

The selection process

Each year the Government seeks applications for the Roundtable and approximately 10,000 application forms are distributed throughout schools, youth and community organisations and youth support groups. A hotline is also set up to take enquiry calls from interested young people. Young people can obtain application packages from either the Federal Youth Bureau through a toll free number or from The Source website (Kemp, 1998, p.400). For Simon it was simply "I'd seen posters advertising it up at Uni, checked out The Source website and applied".

The application form is an eight page document (Appendix E) that can be found on The Source website. The form is not immediately obvious on the website; a refined search needs to be done to access it. It is not listed under any of the main menu items, but appears with a number of other options when a specialised search is sought. I can only assume that when it is application time that the form is moved into a more prominent position on the website, with a direct link from the main menu. The form covers a large range of issues and is in the track changes mode, so all applicants can see what has been deleted and modified from previous application forms. It certainly detracts from the professionalism of the form having the edits all visible. Issues covered include: what is the National Youth Roundtable; timeframes regarding commitments from members; what information is required with the application; the selection process; who will pay; what support and resources are available to members; how the Roundtable will be conducted; and where to send applications. These issues are covered on the first two pages and then the actual form to fill out follows on from that. The application form includes sections on basic demographic details (age, date of birth,

cultural background, language, disability, education, employment) followed by a section which deals with the release of personal information.

In addition to the application, the participants are required to sign a release of personal information form (section B of Appendix E). The Federal Youth Bureau states that the Roundtable attracts media attention and members should expect to be photographed, filmed, interviewed and/or reported on and published by the media and organisers. The organisers also receive requests for the personal information of successful applicants, including name, locality, contact details, biographical details and other information already provided on the application. The organisers request that applicants indicate what personal information they are prepared to have made available to various parties that may ask, such as (but not limited to) media representatives, other Commonwealth Government departments and Parliamentarians. They indicate that they will not disclose your contact information to members of the public. If the application is successful, the organisers indicate that they will discuss the release of personal information in more detail.

The final section of the application deals with community involvement, knowledge and interest in youth issues, consultation with young people and the community and then asks for two referees and parent/guardian consent. Finally the applicant is asked to sign a declaration which includes a commitment not to consume alcohol or illicit drugs while involved in Roundtable events. For many young people the application procedure is detailed and the process of selection protracted.

I didn't hear anything for ages. I applied in October and didn't hear a thing until the following January...I got word that I was short listed. (Craig)

I went to apply in late 2004 for 2005, but the Federal election got in the way and I heard nothing for months, until in January I was informed that they'd reopened applications. (Simon)

Finding out how Roundtable participants are selected is difficult. There is no information available on The Source website for applicants regarding the selection process. I also phoned the Roundtable hotline to enquire about the selection process, and I was informed that it was dealt with internally. The only data I could access regarding the selection process was through an interview with Casey Chambers

(Executive Director of the Federal Youth Bureau) as even the young people were unsure as to how the selection process worked. According to Chambers:

We work through people's applications. Obviously, they're very different. People have different backgrounds. How do you compare someone who's passionate about mental health with someone who's passionate about sustainable agriculture, one of whom will have a personal experience, one of whom might be only 15 years old....There's a vast difference of ability. What we try and look for is the passion, the ability, not to represent, but the ability to consult with their community. It's not only the ability, to but commitment as well...It does need to be somebody who we perceive who is going to stick with it....We then try and make sure we've got a good diversity of rural/remote, metropolitan, different states represented, different sorts of interests, so they're not all in housing, they're not all into same sex marriages, and really, as far as we can, try to get a bit of a diversity of where we think they're going to come from.

The participants are chosen depending on the range of issues that they are perceived to be involved in and for their ability to carry a project through to its completion. Kemp expands on this in his opening speech for the first Roundtable:

Those of you here today were chosen to represent the diversity and aspirations of Australia's youth. The Government set out to bring together 50 young Australians, aged from 15 – 24, who were a truly representative cross-section of their generation. I believe that we have achieved this:

- one-third of you come from regional Australia, and two-thirds from urban Australia;
- you represent all States and Territories and are spread across the age range;
- you represent many cultural and religious backgrounds, non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds;
- some of you are employed, some studying and working, and some are unemployed;
- some of you have vast experience in youth forums and political activism, and others have undertaken significant voluntary work in their communities; and
- some of you have overcome barriers such as disabilities, overseas conflicts and homelessness.

You are a truly representative group of young Australians – yet truly outstanding individuals (Kemp, 1999c).

Kemp notes that participants are chosen because of their perceived 'representativeness' of diverse issues and population groups. It does appear that Kemp and Chambers

contradict each other: Chambers states that it is “the ability, not to represent, but to consult”; whereas Kemp claims that the Roundtable is “a truly representative group of young Australians” (Kemp, 1999b, p.1). Sussan Ley refers to the participants as “ambassadors for their peers” (Ley, 2005, p.1). In a sense, this use of the term representative could be said to reflect the common use of this term, rather than the strict technical definition. The Roundtable has been given a representative status that carries with it decision making legitimacy. However, the whole notion of representation is problematic (McClelland, 1996; Prezeworski, 1985): if the participants are going to claim to be representative, then they need to be elected to be on the Roundtable, by those that they represent. This, however, is clearly not the case, in fact they are “appointed by bureaucrats and policy-makers who not only instigate, but also organise and run these participatory forums” (Bessant, 2004a, p.400). This gives the members delegate status, but not representative status and this is the weakness in Kemp’s claims (McClelland, 1996). In an attempt to strengthen his claims regarding representative status, Kemp outlines the composition of the selection committee:

Final Roundtable membership was chosen by a specially formed selection committee which included representatives from youth organisations, the education sector and young people themselves (Kemp, 1999a).

Chambers expands on this:

The selection panel has some external people as well....They put them all in a bit of an order... then have a couple of half days where we sit down and go through them with people who are external to a [Government] department. They include people from the non-profit areas who’ve got an interest in youth participation and also maybe some older youth Roundtable members. It differs every time. We don’t want to be pulling on the same people all the time. People who’ve been facilitators in the past can be, can often spot things. So again we want to make sure we’ve got a good range of people from a good range of backgrounds so that’s how people are selected.

Hence, what emerges is a comprehensive process whereby the most ‘suitable’ participants are selected. Various measures such as the selection panel which comprises a range of people representing different interests are utilised to ensure that the process is as transparent as possible. However, claiming representative status is still problematic and cannot be ignored (Bessant, 2004a; McClelland, 1996).

Craig has this to say about the application process:

My experience of the application process was that it was long winded and that the questions were flowery, so I just wrote lots of crap in response to them...telling them what I thought they wanted to hear.

Not only did Craig feel like his application was quite hollow and false but as previously mentioned, he had to wait many months to hear of the outcome. Another participant, Simon had this experience:

Fill in a form, hear back in 6 months. Did receive a postcard telling me they'd got my application, which was nice. The only reason I had any idea of what was going on was that I knew two people on selection panel (who had to remove themselves from decision if I got on NYR).

Simon had applied previously, so he was aware of the process and also the delays, so for him, his own contacts kept him updated as to progress. Thomas has this to say about the process:

I should just put it in for a laugh and pander to what they want as a perfect candidate for the Roundtable.

Thomas knew that he was the 'perfect' applicant, coming from an ethnically diverse background, having a disability and running his own business: a package that is hard to resist. He represents diversity in one neat parcel! It does then throw into question the meaning of the application and selection process and just how it does *select* diversity, that is, is it ever possible to select diversity in an authentic manner? There have been various suggestions regarding how the Roundtable members could be selected in order for it to be more representative. This involves sourcing membership from locally based connections voted on by young people, then feeding into state based networks and then through to national meetings (AYPAC, 1998). It has been acknowledged by AYPAC and others that this process is also problematic, but it can claim to be more representative given that the young people are voted for by their peers (McClelland, 1996) .

For Ben the procedure was similar to Craig and Thomas, it was done quickly:

I went home and did it in one night; there was not much to it. Filling it out made me very excited although I was very used to applications such as this.

Ben reports that although the application process was mundane, it did make him feel excited, perhaps even a little inspired as to what could be achieved. For each of the participants, their emotional investment was not significant at the time of applying; they had a clear idea about what they perceived the Government wanted and hence wrote to that affect and were all successful. They know that the Government were looking forward to a diverse cross section of young people. One young participant's speech found on The Source website has this to say about the outcome of the selection process:

Country people and politicians, teen mums and gay blokes, Indigenous people and new immigrants, people at school and business people – wow! What a mix; and what an eye- opening experience for me.

I am a white, heterosexual, 22 year old male, who has progressed from a stable middle class home, through private school and university and is now to now be employed as a middle class professional – full circle really.

While I would not trade my path for another, my life has certainly been somewhat sheltered from many of society's issues. If I was to draw one personal outcome from the National Youth Roundtable 2002, it would be being able to experience the diversity of the people, and the opportunity afforded to interact with people representing the myriads of society; from so many cultures and communities (FaCS, 2005b).

For this young person, the diversity of those chosen has been an “eye-opening” experience, as he details that he has grown up sheltered from many social issues. For him, diversity is a major strength of the Roundtable. There is an issue that has been overlooked though, as this participant like others perceives diversity as correlating with representativeness. McClelland (1996) argues that there is a difference between a delegate and a representative. A representative is chosen by their constituency and can claim representative status, whereas a delegate is not voted for by a constituency and cannot claim this status (Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; McClelland, 1996). It is clear from the selection process for the Roundtable that the members are delegates, not representatives. It would be a clearer process if the Government made this more understandable from the outset. They could explain to the young people that they were delegates, who were a diverse group, but that they cannot represent all young people as they are not voted onto the Roundtable by their peers. Even though the Government uses word like ‘represent’, ‘consult’ and ‘diversity’ with regularity, the meaning of these words in the context of the application and selection processes is questionable.

Tom expanded on the Government selection process and thus concluded:

Another facet of this is that the Government controls the parameters around the selection of members. So while in the first year, my year, there was a demographically representative spread of ages between 15 and 24, ever since it has been skewed younger. This would fit with the idea that effective advocacy and sophisticated opinions are not the main purpose. It is interesting to note that in my year it was largely the older members, at uni or beyond, who made a fuss about the inadequacies of the system and the need for improvements, while, in general, the younger members were thrilled just to be there.

The issues raised by Tom add another layer to the debate: a clear analysis of how the Government controls the selection process in order to minimise dissent so that the program can run as smoothly as possible. Playle's (1999) critique of the Roundtable also alludes to these issues, stating that there are limited mechanisms in place to question the legitimacy of the Roundtable processes. Craig remarks:

At the time I was 15 years old and I did not have a very well developed understanding of the big picture, so I was pretty happy to go along with it all. I was involved in the second year that it had been installed, so problems were still being ironed out....The one thing I'll say about that is that was that the Roundtable was strongly weighted towards younger people.

What emerges is that even though the application and selection process appear on the surface to be simple and transparent, the reality is different. There are some flaws in the approach that need to be addressed in order for the Roundtable to be all that it claims to be: consultative, diverse and representative.

Media protocols

Another aspect of the Roundtable structure that contributed to the outcomes of the Roundtable was media protocols. Media protocols clearly demarcate how and on what terms the participants are to speak to the media and hence play a part in shaping the public perception of the Roundtable. There are several issues that emerged that will be examined. These include: representation; control of information; management of conflict; confidentiality; and the use of politically sensitive information.

Craig has this to say:

The media spokesperson in each group was chosen by DETYA [Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs] and they were calculating in how they chose them. We were coached to be positive. Each day the media spokespeople were briefed as to what to say to the media. We were told that if we spoke to the media that we were speaking on behalf of all young people, so that made us all very worried about what we could say. The media were all over the young people...it was crazy!

The media protocol was really manipulative. We could not talk on our own behalf and were told to be really careful. We were made to feel very cautious and were all encouraged to talk in flowery language which made it all sound great. There were several issues that we were steered away from talking about. We were strongly discouraged against talking about the GST or euthanasia, unless it was very clear that it was us as an individual commenting. Most participants chose not to say anything.

For Craig issues surrounding the media were significant. He had concerns about the fact that media spokespeople were: chosen by DETYA; coached carefully especially in relation to being positive and steering away from talking about sensitive issues; and told that they spoke on behalf of all young people. Craig felt that this was a subtle but effective way of manipulating young people to be very cautious. He was aware of issues around representation, and he knew that he could not speak on behalf of all young people. The Government's assertion that the participants spoke for all young people is questionable given the nature of the selection process (Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; McClelland, 1996).

As part of the acceptance of his selection, Thomas was faxed a confidentiality agreement to sign prior to attending the Roundtable. The agreement included such things as not being able to disclose the outcomes, what was discussed, and any conflicts that arose between participants and Government were not to be divulged publicly. It is important to note that this confidentiality agreement was dropped by Government for subsequent Roundtables. The process meant that for Thomas:

We had to go through the Department [Youth Bureau] regarding everything we said in terms of the media. Kemp's media advisors controlled me very tightly within the Roundtable process. They always pushed the media away from me. There were only a few of us that they policed vigilantly.

Despite this perceived domination, Thomas remained defiant, claiming "we didn't care, we all still spoke out". For other participants in subsequent years, media processes were

tightened, and as many participants indicate, the media became less and less involved; hence processes such as those experienced by Thomas became less relevant.

Framing this debate with ideas from Foucault is illuminating. Foucault (1978) refers to the relationship between power and resistance extensively in his writings. It is particularly relevant for mechanisms utilised by the Roundtable. He states:

I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them... but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible (Foucault, 1978, p.39-40).

What Foucault explains is that power and resistance are coextensive and interdependent. The question remains how we, as active subjects, might intervene intentionally in the field of power relations to work towards minimising domination (Foucault, 1978). The media protocol utilised by the Roundtable was designed to create resistance whereby participants feel constricted by controlling processes and thus ignore them. They do this through policing the actions of the participants, and Foucault would argue that at the same time as the participants were objecting to it, they were in fact participating in the practices of domination. However, what the participants soon became aware of was the notion of “playing these games of power with as little domination as possible” (Foucault, 1978, p.40).

What the Government failed to recognise was the resourcefulness of many of the participants. When the young participants sensed that the boundaries were not reasonable, they ingeniously used other strategies to reach their goals. Hence Thomas’ response to the Government’s ‘games’:

They’d put us in a media room in Parliament House and tell us you can’t walk around because you’ve got a Restricted Pass. So what did we do, we went to the Labor guys and said “can you get us an Unrestricted Pass?” And then we’d put them on when no one was looking, then we’d just walked around and talk to people. We were accessing the Media Boxes and the Press Rooms...whatever we liked...

Even though the participants were tightly controlled around media issues, they found other ways to get their message across and quickly learned how to negotiate power

relations (Foucault, 1978). They found that if they were not listened to by Government, they would go to those who would, even if this meant using less than honest methods. For many of the participants, building alliances with Members of the Opposition was a way to ensure that they got their message out. Craig details his experiences:

There were sessions open to the media and also closed sessions. Only opportunities to speak to the media were regulated through DETYA. They controlled us talking to Opposition members also and opportunities were very limited. Kate Lundy [Shadow Minister for Youth] was not invited to any of the events and had to gatecrash them. Natasha Stott Despoja [Youth Spokesperson for the Democrats] helped Roundtable members to speak to the media and also had to gatecrash events. Both Kate and Natasha were very well liked by members of the Roundtable and helping members speak to the media was very tactical on their behalf but it was the only opportunity that we really got.

Government indeed controlled media access to information and sessions. So not only were the participants firmly managed, so were the media, ensuring that the message that got out was one that the Government orchestrated. Stories about the control processes throughout the various Roundtables continue. Craig's and other's frustrations led to some strong responses:

One very good friend of mine was interviewed on radio... he said something to the effect that the PM [Prime Minister] needed to be very wary and watch out for Roundtables as they felt that he wasn't listening to their concerns. Vern got spoken to about the fact that it wasn't the appropriate type of language to be using when it came to speaking about the PM and that he had to watch himself in the future.

Vern's intentions were sincere. He wanted to get his message across, and used alternative ways of doing so, but was disciplined as a result by the organisers. The disciplinary procedure meant that when a participant was deemed errant, then their actions were 'policed vigilantly' by the Government's media advisors. Playle (1999, p.4) makes this comment to conclude his critique of the Roundtable:

The Roundtable has already provided excellent media coverage for both Dr Kemp and Mr Howard. Dr Kemp's media advisers are doing their job, and doing it well. Now Roundtable participants are acquainted with each other, participants must ensure that their efforts and outcomes are equally recognised by the media. When the media listens, the community listens, and the Government listens – that is the real challenge of the Roundtable.

Ben indicates that the Government is very clear about what they want to achieve through the media. They have orchestrated it carefully and have achieved their purpose effectively. Ben also points out that the participants need to utilise the media effectively to get their message out to the public. This is problematic, given the nature of the controls on media protocols mentioned previously. What Ben is really indicating, is that despite participants' best attempts, their effectiveness will be limited given the controls. There are several issues to consider carefully as a result of these findings. Bessant (2004a, p.400) comments on Roundtable processes:

This raises questions about the politics inherent in managing the adult-initiated directed participatory processes and in whose interest the forum is operating. What is the primary purpose of youth participation; whose interests are advanced?

Meeting protocols

Meeting protocols structure a significant part of Roundtable processes. What emerged through the interviews was that several major issues have to be considered, namely: the formality of meeting procedure; the fixed agenda; no free discussion or opportunity for dissent; and a strong focus on what the government wished to communicate.

The Roundtable meets twice each year with official proceedings at Parliament House. I attended the first meeting of Roundtable 2004 as a participant observer and was startled by the formality of the process. Each speaker read from prepared notes that were all placed on the lectern prior to their speech. These notes were not brought to the lectern by each speaker in turn as the rustling of papers would detract from the smooth running of the proceedings. I was impressed at how seamlessly the processes between speakers flowed. None of the speakers struggled with pieces of paper as could be expected. Each speaker prior to their speech thanked the person who introduced them and then proceeded to list those present who needed to be publicly acknowledged for instance: parliamentary colleagues. Several times, the Master of Ceremonies would introduce a person whose only task was to officially introduce the next speaker. This occurred when Larry Anthony was due to speak. The Deputy Secretary for Family and

Community Services (Mark Sullivan) was introduced by the Master of Ceremonies. Mr Sullivan's only task was to then introduce the Minister, Larry Anthony (FaCS, 2005b).

Additionally, official transcriptions of the various Roundtable meetings on The Source website indicate effectively the formality and focus on correct meeting etiquette. The Master of Ceremonies introduces everyone officially, and then proceeds to run the ceremony strictly according to the agenda. Each section of the proceedings is tightly scripted so that the right people are mentioned and thanked. Each participant has to prepare their script which needs to be scrutinised in advance by the organisers. Only those who are chosen by the Youth Bureau to speak in advance have the time allocated to them, hence the agenda is tightly managed. Free discussion and question time was not evident in any of the transcripts on The Source website or at the meeting I attended. There appears to be no room whatsoever for discussion, debate or dissent. Tom had this to say about his experiences of the agenda setting process:

[The agenda] was dictated to us by the organisers/Department. It was not a very empowering process. We did not even get a copy of the agenda until we arrived for our first meeting in Canberra. When we tried to alter the process slightly to better facilitate our expression (which was what we were there for) we were, for the most part, stymied.

Bessant (2004a, p.400) also comments on this:

The political influence of Youth Roundtable participants, for example is evident in the fact that they have minimal opportunities for agenda setting. Young participants respond to a set program or issues that they had little part in determining.

Even though participants expressed a desire to input into the agenda setting process, it is clear that this was in place long before they arrived.

In addition to the transcripts, audio files are available of various other meetings and they also place a strong emphasis on timing, who to thank and who to acknowledge. Many of the Roundtable members stumble over the long list of people they need to acknowledge before being able to proceed with their speeches. Questions as to why such strict procedures were put in place need to be asked. Craig has this to say:

We spoke to the PM [Prime Minister]...he met with all the Roundtable. The organisers chose the people to ask questions of the PM. It was manipulated so that any critical questions were silenced. The PM was very wary of the

Roundtable. It was a manipulative, calculating process to make sure that the young people didn't have their own voice. So although there wasn't a written protocol as such there was a strong process, so that if you spoke out of turn you would get into trouble.

Craig here is very critical of the way in which events were orchestrated so that the message that the Government wanted to project was the dominant one. He felt like the agenda was driven by Government and there was no space for any discussion of exploration of issues. He mentioned that those who spoke out of turn would "get into trouble", as was the case for his friend Vern, who was taken aside and spoken to by the organisers for his comments regarding the Prime Minister. All of these actions were facilitated by the focus on protocol and Ben has this to say about his experience of meeting processes:

The biggest thing was who was keeping time and the right way to greet a Minister! I can't believe that they didn't focus much on what we were going to say...it was how we said it that was important...pandering to the Ministers.

Evidently, there were significant amount of time devoted to briefing participants on correct protocols when meeting and greeting a Minister. This appeared to the participants to be a waste of valuable time and just (as Ben comments) 'pandering' to the Ministers and to formality for the sake of it. This practice further emphasises power imbalances and the position of young people in that power ranking. Craig illustrates this:

[They need to create] opportunities where politicians and young people are on the same playing level...it's not us all sitting around this big table and Robert Hill [Minister for the Environment] comes in and we all have to say hello to him...where he's important and you're not as important and you have to show respect. It's just stupid...we spend so much time on Roundtable learning how to address the Ministers and we all sit around and leave the special seat for the Minister.

Hence for many of the participants, the meeting protocols were alienating and defeating of the purpose of their position on the Roundtable. The intention of the Roundtable, as understood by the participants, is for hierarchy to be diminished and for participants to all feel equal, in line with Arthurian principles (Bessant, 2004a; Bosoki, 2002; Mutebi, 2005). They expected to have open and frank discussions with Ministers and the meeting protocols effectively distanced them from doing so. It is important to note that Arthur did occupy the centre seat (the first among equals) of the Roundtable and

Government through its actions also assumes this role. Senator Lundy (1999, p.1) comments on this, alluding to Dr Kemp as Arthur and highlights that the Roundtable is a 'sham' as the knights are not valued by Arthur.

An address by Nicola Roxon (Federal Shadow Minister for Youth) and Christopher Pyne (Federal Member for Sturt) to the Sydney Institute entitled "Building Political Relevance for Young People" examined why young people are not participating in political processes. Roxon states that young people are interested in politics, but that reason for their lack of engagement could be because they find processes used by politicians irrelevant. She states "perhaps they are not interested in our language, or maybe in the issues we identify, or young people are just not that interested in US!"(Roxon, 2002, p.83). Pyne (2002) asserts that young people have less time and less motivations to become involved than previous generations and parliamentary processes are becoming less attractive to young people. Young people believe that the answers to their concerns are not necessarily found in engagement with party political processes. This is a trend not only is Australia but also in the United Kingdom and America.

What emerges is that young people are becoming less tolerant of parliamentary culture and are choosing to engage with issues that affect their lives in different ways (Pyne, 2002). Both Roxon (2002) and Pyne (2002) agree that young people are choosing to connect around issues and areas of interest rather than party politics as has been the trend in the past. "Many young people believe there's no point in joining a political party because they can't really change anything and no-one will listen to them" (Pyne, 2002, p.92). Roxon, Pyne and Lundy agree that new methods are required to engage young people meaningfully.

Methods that have worked in the past with young people are no longer effective and politicians need to find other ways, but these changes (if any) have not filtered down to Roundtable processes as yet. It needs to be clearly stated that it is not only the style and culture of parliamentary processes that are problematic for young people, is also the added barrier of rising disinterest in party politics.

Disenchantment with the political processes

There is a price to pay for exposing young people to processes such as those discussed so far, that of disenchantment with those political processes. The result has been a growing level of disquiet amongst the participants. They identified a range of issues that will be explored which included: the integrity of politicians; democratic processes; and the role of Government in people's lives.

Naomi speaks about the effect that the Roundtable processes have had on her:

Every time I speak to a politician I think "are you really listening do you really care or are you here just about your own workload?" You do have a very quite a cynical point of view when it comes to politicians actually. In terms of their representation of us and of my voice...our country has elected him and does he actually listen to what I am saying. And I'm jaded about that...disappointed really I just work so hard and just and I've got 180 people who have worked hard with me and have given me their stories and just feel like they haven't been able to really get it out there and do what could have really happened with it.

Naomi has heard the rhetoric and the promises from the inside and as she states, she has become "jaded and disappointed" at what the Government says as opposed to what it delivers. She questions the whole democratic process of electing politicians to represent their constituent's voices. She continues:

Sometimes I wonder if they get those who don't know about the system and try to give them this false illusion that the Government's there to help them and then it doesn't because as we learn more and more about it we realize that our voice is really quite quite silent.

Thus Naomi feels voiceless and disillusioned about the role of government in people's lives. This is especially strong for her in relation to young people and their passion to see change happen.

...there are so many young people that are passionate about so many different things and believe (and maybe it's our youth or something) but we have this idea that we can actually make a big difference and I believe that we can. I believe that young people have so much power and should be listened to and should be able to utilise that power. So when an opportunity like this comes from Government and they'll pay for it all and they say that you can come and you can tell us what you are doing and we'll help you out with the project. To me is that that's a huge reason why you have to get involved in it.

Naomi is aware of the reality of the situation, that even though the opportunities for participation are quite vacuous, she remains passionate and hopeful that she (and others) can affect change. For Ben, the sentiment is strong:

If you're promised a chance to be listened to...then that needs to be followed through on. If not, you end up with very jaded young people.

His warning is clear. Processes such as the Roundtable that promise young people the opportunity to contribute directly to Government policy but do not follow through result in cynical, disillusioned young people.

Participants' criticisms of the impact that the Roundtable is having on young people were reflected by others. The Shadow Minister for Youth from 1998 to 2001 Kate Lundy, publicly supported a number of young people who were disillusioned by the Roundtable processes, so that their issues could be heard. Lundy has also voiced concerns about the value and processes of the Roundtable.

...Roundtable members have been the victims of misleading information from the Federal Government with regard to the role that they would play in the youth policy development process. They have been in regular contact with us and have stated that they are incredibly disillusioned with the process and treatment of the National Youth Roundtable (Lundy, 1999).

Lundy summarises the many grievances brought to her from participants of the Roundtable in 1999. To add insult to injury the Government:

planned to shelve 25 of the 50 Roundtable Members after the first meeting of the Roundtable to enable them to remove those individuals who were outspoken in their opposition to various key Government policies; forced Roundtable delegates to sign an agreement which stipulated that they would not speak to the public about the Roundtable process, drink alcohol during their stay in Canberra even if over the age of consent, or visit other Members of Parliament whilst at Parliament House; banned the use of votes as a democratic process of decision making; restricted access to Roundtable endorsed media to a select group of individuals (2-3 from each state) to silence their most outspoken critics amongst the Roundtable; altered the Youth Media statement written by members of the Roundtable to reduce member's opposition to government policy; publicly informed Roundtable participants that they were to be a "direct line to Government" then privately informed them that explicit statements or recommendations were not appropriate, rather, that they should merely offer the Government a diverse range of opinions; employed a consultant with no experience in hosting political forums, and who subsequently lost all of the files of material produced at the first Roundtable; actively restricted the access of the

Opposition and minor parties to the Youth Roundtable delegates, including their contact details, regardless of the fact that they initially signed a disclaimer, part of which allowed the distribution of their details to Parliamentarians; and has secretly organised for some, not all, of the Youth Roundtable delegates to meet in Canberra with various Government Ministers (Lundy, 1999).

The litany of grievances here are numerous and considerable. What, however, are the alternatives? We have an obligation to examine this further in relation to exclusion and participation.

Perpetuation of the processes of exclusion

If the participants become disillusioned, what effect does this have on how young people view their participation? Despite appearances, participants feel excluded as they lack: control over agenda setting; the ability to challenge older policy makers; research experience and support; understanding of areas for debate; and understanding of the ongoing purpose of a peak body. These factors highlight issues regarding the participants' worth and the value that is assigned to their contributions. Bessant (2004a) asserts:

If we are to learn from the English experience, then participatory mechanisms that fail to give young people material effect to their voice encourage cynicism and teach young Australians to be non-participants. This in turn can have serious long term consequences for Australia's democratic status.

It would seem that instead of offering authentic opportunities for participation and engagement, the façade of participation robs the process of anything meaningful. Craig claims:

The whole process is void of young people's development...they completely ignore this over the whole time.

From the participant's perspectives the appearance of consultation and participation is what is of paramount importance to Government.

I'm being kinda cynical... but it's [the Government] being seen by the country that they are actually consulting with young people... you know, they are doing their bit hearing our voice (Naomi).

I could observe that the strength of the Roundtable is that it protects the Howard Government politically from charges that it doesn't listen to or show any interest in young people. (Tom)

From the government's perspective...it's all...and I'm trying not to sound too critical "Look at our wonderful government and how they are listening to young people". (Ben)

In particular, the Government wants the process to reflect well on their policies and Ministers.

They [DETYA] certainly make sure that the media know about all the 'good' stuff. If there is a young person who is doing a project that supports their priorities or one of their policies then they make sure that the media know about it. At the end of the process...they base their evaluation on the amount of media they got about a certain issue...a measure of success is the amount of positive media they received...how many photo opportunities there were...good on them...the Roundtable was successful...they honestly believe it...If Larry Anthony gets in photos with young people then that's a good thing too. DETYA and the Ministers were only interested in how many media hits they could get to make sure that they look good. Getting a photo in the Australian is a big deal (Craig).

Tom's experience is illustrative of the problems:

The Government has control over the topic-areas places boundaries around what can be discussed.

Lack of a voting mechanism means qualitative measures of the extent to which the Roundtable supports or opposes with a particular point-of-view or policy don't exist, so 50 Roundtable members put forward almost 50 points-of-view and all exist in equal weight to the others so far as the report is concerned.

The busy nature of all participants and lack of research support often rob the reports of academic rigour and sophistication.

So, compared with AYPAC, while the appearance of youth consultation and advocacy is there, the end result is vastly less effective in actually putting forward alternative policy.

Tom is commenting on a range of issues that Bessant also notes and challenges: namely the lack of resourcing and research support. The participants were also frustrated that this lack of support results in a lack of "academic rigour and sophistication". Bessant states:

There are also equity issues concerning the resourcing of the young people selected as 'youth participants'. The capacity to influence policy often depends on whether young participants are fully equipped with the skills and knowledge and versed in the debates about which they will be deliberating. It depends on the availability of information and one's ability to research issues thoroughly. The data and expertise available to young participants are typically not enough to support them in ways that facilitate full participation or a serious challenge to the official agenda. Inequalities between youth roundtable participants and older policy makers are not addressed (Bessant, 2004a, p.401).

Hence participants do feel excluded and this affects how they see their role and the worth of their contributions.

Unless young people are confident that their opinions will be treated with respect and seriousness, they will quickly become discouraged and dismiss the participation process as ineffective with all the implications this has for the confidence in democratic processes as they grow into adulthood (Matthews et al cited in Bessant, 2004a, p.400).

Bessant is clear here that the results of these processes are significant and potentially damaging. Pyne (2002, p.93) also acknowledges the consequences of these processes from a politician's perspective: "how can the major political parties reconnect with today's busy, disillusioned and politically uninspired youth?" Pyne touches on a range of outcomes that are illustrated effectively through Roundtable processes that have been explored. Moreover, processes such as these only serve to highlight that the Roundtable, instead of being a participatory mechanism, effectively works to exclude young people.

What is participation?

It is important at this point to examine what participation entails and how this brings a sharper focus to Roundtable activities. Issues that require further exploration include current literature that surveys understandings of youth participation: faulty participation mechanisms; reciprocity; and the participant's experiences of these methods.

..genuine youth participation is defined here as a two-way process, where all parties express their views and wishes with decisions being jointly made... Youth participation is described in terms of partnerships between adults and young people... (NCYLC cited in OFY, 2003).

For Tom, however, the Roundtable experience was one-sided:

Most of the political young people I know are aware that it's a tokenistic waste of time. Superficial inclusion will never truly inspire people, and many of the people you'd most want on it are those who would choose to disregard it. Many other young people don't feel confident enough to apply for something like the Roundtable, or wouldn't hear about it or don't feel they have anything to say about politics (they're wrong of course, but this probably isn't the format for them).

Matthews, Limb, Harrison, and Taylor (1998) discuss the consequences of faulty participatory processes:

Poor participatory mechanisms are very effective in training young people to become non-participants... In many cases these operate as little more than ideas groups'...used to disseminate information and communicate ideas, rather than being concerned with the business of making decisions (p.24).

In Hart's (1992) "ladder of participation", the first three levels are considered to be non-participatory and then subsequent levels demonstrate increasing degrees of participation. The levels in summary are: manipulation; decoration; tokenism; assigned but informed; consulted and informed; adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth; youth-initiated and directed; and finally youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults. What Tom highlights in his previous comment emphasises the first three levels referred to by Hart and calls it "superficial inclusion".

This underlines the important issue of who initiates participation, a concern of many authors (Bessant, 2004a; Hart, 1992; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998). Matthews, Limb, Harrison and Tyler (1998) note from their studies:

Successful youth participation depends in part on the conditions in which it is initiated. There is a need to identify who has initiated the participation and their purpose in doing so. Where adult-dominated agencies initiate participation, there may be ulterior motives such as conflict resolution or social control (H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998, p.24).

Hart concludes that at the level it engages young people the Roundtable is non-participatory in that it serves adult purposes of being seen to consult with young people, but in reality affords no real opportunity to participate and maintain control (Bessant, 2004a; Foucault, 1983; Hart, 1992).

Principles of participation require that young people should feel their participation is valued and that they have ownership in the process. Youth participation is about negotiation between young people and relevant adults. Young people should not necessarily dominate the decision making process. The knowledge, responsibilities and commitments of the adults involved also need to be acknowledged. Finally the avoidance of tokenism is important, that is, young people must be offered real roles or they will quickly recognise that they are not being taken seriously (FYA, 2003).

The participants' experiences don't seem to match with these ideals. Naomi spoke at length about how much work she put into her topic area, as her part in consultation and participation. These are her reflections at the end of the process:

It's like having a mentor say: "OK you've done your project now, this is the person who will work really well with you, how about you get in contact with them and [they can] help you with your project now..." Rather than "thanks for coming you can go home now, and you can [be certain] that your project has done these wonderful things and you have done this wonderful thing" and then nothing's done with it.

She expected to have someone work with her to ensure that the message of her project was carried through to the people who needed to see it and for the process to become a two way affair. Naomi believed that her project was valuable as it affected many of her peers, but believes it has now fallen on deaf ears and sits idly on numerous bureaucrats' shelves. She is resigned to the fact that this is the case, but this only serves to underline her concerns about a two way participation process:

What is confusing for some of the participants is that the message from the Government seems to include the possibility of dissent:

We've never asked you to agree with the Government on its policy positions. What you put to us are your ideas, and you have the right to disagree with us and we have the right to weigh up your ideas and say, 'we'll take that one and we won't take that one' (Kemp 2001).

What they found was that dissent was one-way only. Participation requires some form of reciprocal obligation (NCYLC 1995 cited in OFY, 2003). If young people are not engaged in a two way process of mutual exchange and influence, then the process becomes tokenistic and decorative at best and exploitative and manipulative in its most insidious form (FYA, 2003; Hart, 1992).

Kemp asserts that the young people *are* controlling the process, that it is the young people who direct the process and that the Government merely respond. He states:

..and I have no doubt whatever that these presentations are going to be very valuable and indeed very stimulating to those responsible for national policy here in Parliament House, and they're going to flow through to future policy initiatives and decisions (Kemp 2001).

The Government claims that the Roundtable participants are critical in the policy development process, but Kemp is not specific about how this process will happen. This contradicts the experiences of the participants' who feel like their contributions have been 'token'. It is not adequate then, for the Government to set in place this arbitrary procedure as outlined by Kemp, whereby policy development processes are enacted at the caprice of government ministers depending on what is politically expedient at that time.

Thus, regardless of the rhetoric that emerges in Ministers' speeches, their embodiment of participation principles and practices needs to be considered. Each of the various participation models which were outlined earlier in this thesis have significant things to say about these types of participation practices. Westhorp in particular asserts that:

...meaningful participation means that the young person has an ongoing opportunity to contribute his/her knowledge and capabilities to the decision-making process, to further develop their expertise. By so doing both the young individual and the organisation concerned will benefit (cited in OFY, 2003, p.45; Westhorp, 1987).

Westhorp then defines what she calls ad-hoc or unstructured input, which involves a one-way information flow from young people to an organisation and its decision makers, examples of which include periodic events such as the National Youth

Roundtable (cited in OFY, 2003). Clearly the processes involved with the National Youth Roundtable embody this course of action and perpetuate this cycle, whereby young people are exploited as future resources and reciprocal obligation with regards to participation is diminished (Bessant, 2004a). At best the Roundtable could be loosely deemed to be structured consultation and as mentioned, the outcomes may be skewed towards the adult population (Bessant, 2004a; Westthorp, 1987). It can also create unrealistic expectations regarding the rapidity of responses and disillusionment can occur if this is not the case.

The principles of participation that have been discussed are broad and descriptive, but need to be applied to youth participation practices, such as the Roundtable to undergird their integrity. The various methods of participation that are currently popular need to be examined to demonstrate the diverse benefits of participation. It needs to be stated, however, that youth participation is not a settled subject area and methods need to evolve with the changing needs of the youth population. If it is claimed that participation methods are exhaustive and have matured, then this is problematic (Bridgland Sorenson, 2003).

How the Roundtable perverts participation

What remains to be examined is how the Roundtable distorts genuine participation through its carefully executed processes. These processes include: assumptions regarding the Roundtable structure; effects on participants; and the broader implications for young people's participation.

Naomi reflects on her anticipation that the Roundtable would be truly a 'roundtable':

...in terms of a roundtable I don't know how it reflects a roundtable at all. 'Cause when I think of a roundtable I thought us being on an equal level (as the Government Ministers)...and actually being heard and listened in the one opportunity where we met the Minister.

Bessant also comments on this expectation:

The roundness of the table also suggests a style of furniture and design of the room that facilitates equality. Being seated around a roundtable implies that there is no “head of the table”, nor does the seating order apparently imply a hierarchy of importance or status (Bessant, 2004a, p.400).

It would seem that Naomi is justified in expecting to be heard, given the nature of the ‘roundtable’. She continues:

Even that was intimidating because they had their advisors taking notes and the Minister was giving opinions on your projects was great. He would go back to his office and do his office stuff and it was not really a serious thing and not listening seriously to your opinions suggesting how to make some changes so that the idea of a roundtable is a real roundtable. We all discussed that and we didn’t know why it was called the Roundtable. (Long pause.....).

The young people wanted an authentic Roundtable, where their voices were equal to that of Ministers, but the reality was different. Bessant states:

Yet, despite the official talk about participation and the use of metaphors like Roundtable, no statutory commitment or legislative requirements are forthcoming as measure to ensure practical effect is given to the voice of youth participants (Bessant, 2004a, p.400).

Naomi’s thoughts reflect the gap between what was promised and achieved:

So are my views impacting on government? Not really. I think my views are impacting upon some people... I certainly thought I was being listened to. It feels like they say to us “thank you for your report, I read it.” But in terms of them actually them doing something about then... No”. I don’t feel like anything is really happening. It’s always a kinda polite - polite recognition of all the grubby work I’ve done and then nothing else really.

Hence the platitudes are regular and predictable, and the participants expect them. Naomi became accustomed to the response: “thank you for your report, I’ve read it”. What she goes on to say flies directly in the face of the principles of participation mentioned previously:

You can (and I’ve seen it happening) consult and then you still implement your own agenda anyway. If that’s what the Government’s doing then I don’t know why they are even bothering to actually have us involved. I don’t want to be someone they just consult with; I want to be someone they will actually work with. And that’s how I actually see the aim of the Roundtable: working with the Government to make change, not just talking to them about it.

Naomi feels like the Government has a very clear agenda, but continues to confer with young people to, in some way, legitimate their flawed methods. What Westhorp (1987) asserts is that this practice is exploitative and corrupt. The Government cannot continue to make claims regarding representativeness and participation when their processes are clearly faulty. Linden is still unsure about his participation

I don't know if my views have impacted on government as I said before there wasn't any feedback.

Linden received no feedback whatsoever regarding all the effort he put into his topic area, so the two way flow of information was perverted and he is still wondering, a residue that Westhorp (1987) warns against.

For Ben, it is not only about Government, but also how they choose young people to deliberately evade the issue of consultation even more. He details:

There were many unspoken suggestions by FaCS...they would let us know that this was the reality and that we needed to fit in. FaCS have heard all the criticisms before and cannot do anything about it. I don't want to be like the NYR (Roundtable)...all glossy and earning big \$\$\$....I want reality... The National Youth Roundtable is NOT REAL...it's meant to be but it's just not.

Something interesting emerges, which emphasizes the Government's (FaCS) culpability: they are aware of the criticisms, but are not prepared to do anything about it. What also becomes apparent is that this occurs at both levels of government most concerned with the Roundtable, that is, parliament and Government departments. For Ben, the repercussions are significant and underline the Government's perversion of authentic youth participation in both contexts:

They do have a chance to do something real at the Roundtable...and to listen to young people's stories. When you are offered a chance to tell your story and you are not listened to...you become disaffected...this is worse when experiences aren't validated...

Disaffected is a strong word here, and so far over 350 young people have participated in Roundtables, and the ripple effect of their attitudes must be having an effect on the youth population. The message that the Government is not really prepared

to listen is seeping out. This may help to explain the steady decline in applications to the Roundtable (Plibersek, 2005). Is it better, therefore, to not do anything rather than do something that is having such damaging effects on some of the participants? Craig highlights the issue that the Roundtable has great potential to provide a voice for disenfranchised young people:

I think the main factor is that there are a lot of young people who feel disenfranchised by the current system of government in that there is no other way that young people can be heard. There are a lot of young people out there who are not interested in being involved in the program (the Roundtable), but there are a hell of a lot of young people who are interested in having a voice. So if an opportunity like this comes up there are lots of young people interested in gaining the right to have a voice which a lot of young people would look on the Roundtable as being the mechanism that makes sure that they are not being done over by Government.

This potential is not realised, according to Craig. Is the Government misrepresenting principles of participation by claiming that the Roundtable is just that, a roundtable? Bessant underlines these issues:

an analysis of the official youth participation agenda reveals that there is considerable talk about democratic practice, but a failure to acknowledge the existing barriers to young people (Bessant, 2004a, p.402).

Mechanisms that claim to facilitate youth participation such as the Roundtable, need to address some inherent structural barriers. Bessant (2004a, p.402) underlines these issues stating that:

it also reveals a will to extend the governance of young people under the guise of participation, as well as a failure to establish participatory mechanisms that give material effect to young peoples' voices.

To add to this list of approaches inimical to participation, Craig comments:

The outcomes from the 1999 Roundtable were suppressed by DETYA and the Opposition wasn't allowed to see it...and were kept quiet. But through Ryan Heath and Kate Lundy they were leaked. It's all crazy and a stupid sordid mess...of them trying to hide people who are being critical of them...once again.

Why then were the outcomes allegedly suppressed, why were young people silenced and how does this concur with participation principles? Not only did processes within the Roundtable pervert participation, but when the outcomes were not in line with Government thinking, then power was exercised to silence them.

The Government refers to the Roundtable as a “prestigious group of tomorrow’s leaders” and claims that:

The Howard Government remains committed to continuing to involve people through programs such as the National Youth Roundtable, giving Australia's leaders of tomorrow a voice today (FaCS, 2005a).

However, the notion of ‘future leaders’ is problematic, as signalled by the Foundation for Young Australians in the youth development model of youth participation (FYA, 2003). Even though this statement could be considered to be mere rhetoric, it embodies perceptions of young people as future commodities, not as an existing, legitimate and vital part of the community today. Hence, young people’s value is seen not in what they can contribute in their current state, but what this potential will mean in a future context, particularly as economic contributors (FYA, 2003). This raises questions regarding the legitimacy of participation techniques utilised. Bessant (2004a, p.401) reminds us of the goals of participation:

The movement to extend and deepen the practices in institutions that make democracy possible are both fragile and incomplete. The current status of young people reminds us of this challenge. Just as older people have long had access to places in which to give voice to their experiences and needs, so it is now time to allow more young people access to those political spaces.

Conclusion

The issue of listening is a key concern of this chapter, in which the structural aspects of the Roundtable and its impact on the quality and authenticity of the outcomes from the Roundtable are examined. What has emerged is that the practices of participation utilised by the Roundtable have meant that young people have become further disenchanted with political processes. This perpetuates processes of exclusion

and contributes to the cycle of resistance and powerlessness experienced by young people. From all accounts, this is a disturbing finale.

CHAPTER 7

There's no such thing as a free lunch...

The litmus test of the Roundtable is, of course, how seriously the Government actually does take its final communiqué (Playle, 1999, p.6).

The preceding chapter examined the various structures and processes in place within the Roundtable that from first glance are not immediately obvious. Upon closer examination these form arrangements which require participants to struggle to have their voices heard. What emerged is that the rhetoric of participation touted by Government in no way matches the participant's experience of being genuinely listened to.

This chapter expands the emerging picture concerning the validity of the methods employed by Government to hear the voices of young people. In particular I scrutinize how the outcomes of the Roundtable impact on Government policy. This will be done through firstly examining the policy development process and then analysis of a range of documents associated with the Roundtable namely; Minister's speeches, media releases, Roundtable reports and other documentary evidence from The Source website. The claims that the Government repeatedly make regarding the opportunity to directly consult with young people appear to be well used language, and similar rhetoric is used throughout all the official Government communiqués. This needs to be critically investigated by tracking the tangible impacts of the Roundtable on Government policy.

The policy development process

The Youth Roundtable might be a means to consult with some young people, but it not a substitute for the ongoing policy role performed by AYPAC (Bridgland, 1999, p.1).

Policy development, at least ideally, is a deliberate, carefully planned and cautiously executed process. As a population, Governments or groups become aware of issues, they consider whether or not existing policies are adequate, or if new policies should be developed (Ralston, Lerner, Mullis, Simerly, & Murray, 2000). Some indicators that a review is necessary are: identification of issues by stakeholders or staff; or legislation changes. This phase can also include policy proposals from other interested parties (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). With regards to the National Youth Roundtable, after the de-funding and dissolution of the peak body representing youth affairs, the Government installed the National Youth Roundtable to replace the peak as the chief consultation mechanism in the development of youth policy (Kemp, 1999a; Sawer, 2002).

Once an issue has been identified, the group begins a research and analysis phase. Depending on the complexity of the issue, research might include broad consultations with a whole range of stakeholders: for instance, youth policy might involve consultation with young people and the youth sector. Based on the research results the group develops an analysis and an initial policy concept (E. Kelly & Becker, 2000).

When the research and analysis is complete and a policy approach developed, then it is important to go back to the populations that may be affected by the policy and seek their advice and input into the information gathered thus far. This is the phase where the credibility of the information collected is checked prior to a draft policy being developed. This is also the stage for Government where submissions are invited from a range of community stakeholders (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002).

Following this a draft policy is developed for consideration by the various stakeholders based on their participation. This draft policy is then checked again with stakeholders and the group may convene a meeting to discuss the draft policy. Any further amendments are made at this point and then the policy is ratified by the

membership and accepted as policy (E. Kelly & Becker, 2000). Ongoing review and evaluation is an integral part of the process and completes the policy development cycle (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004).

What becomes clear in the formulation of policy is that the process has many phases, is time consuming and requires the participation of stakeholders at each step. What emerges is concern that a funded, focused peak body cannot be replaced by a Roundtable structure that has a twelve month term and only meets twice during that time to effectively contribute to policy development. In contrast, AYPAC had been a catalyst for public debate on youth issues through pro-active policy development and deep engagement with young people and the youth sector:

AYPAC's policy development processes encompasses a variety of mechanisms, including an annual Policy Forum, consultations with members, extensive research on issues identified by members and the wider youth sector, and on-going discussions with decision makers. This process results in the development of position papers, program initiative proposals and discussion papers to promote further debate on key issues within the youth sector (AYPAC, 1998, p.6).

Participants had this to say about the processes they experienced in relation to the selection of policy issues. According to Craig:

...participants reported that the Government had preselected the issues that it wanted to use the Roundtable to explore further, and if your issue was one of those it was highly resourced.

It seems that even though the government asked about possible topic areas in the application process, it was clear about the issues that it wanted to target. The fact that participants needed to be realistic about what was achieved was understood by some participants. Simon commented:

We had a discussion, led by the lead facilitator as to what we could get out of roundtable, how it's worked before. Pretty much, he flagged that if we wanted to achieve something, we should look at federal issues, and ones on which we have some chance on effecting change. Although, it must be said, never did he force or coerce us – he just pointed out the pragmatics of what we were doing.

Simon was matter of fact with the selection of issues, and he could see the reasons that the government had this approach. He detailed the process whereby they decided on topic areas.

Then, we each wrote down five issues/areas that we wanted to look at as possible NYR topics. In groups of about five, we grouped these into categories, which then got put on post it notes. Then, all the post it notes from each group (4x5=20) were put up on a board, and as a group, we grouped those into four topic areas.

In groups of about six we went and workshopped ideas and issues to look at for each topic area. Finally, we selected the topic in which we were most interesting in working in.

To supplement this, FaCS asked all departments if they had an area of interest they'd like NYR to look at, and many responded. This information was relayed to us after we'd created the four groups and before we workshopped ideas, and helped us locate which of our ideas would actually generate traction with the government.

The process here is comprehensive and realistic and means that participants have significant input into the development of the topic areas. It needs to be pointed out that this process has taken some years to refine. Other participants from previous years expressed frustration at the process of arriving at topic areas. Craig indicated that the process for him was quite different, and far less empowering:

I nominated my three top issues and from all of the applications six major themes were then brought out. We were only given six options and our project needed to fit in with them. My third priority was the environment. I wanted to be in health and wellbeing. I was really disappointed with DETYA as I had lots of really good stuff I wanted to do and when I tried to express this to them I wasn't listened to. I was frustrated because the environmental group wasn't my first choice, so I had to do a project that I wasn't really into. It was still important issue ie plastic shopping bags....but not really where my passion was.

Other previous participants experienced similar processes, whereby they had clear first preferences and passions, but were told that they needed to adhere to procedures already in place, as was the case for Craig. Tom claimed that all the work he had contributed to the Roundtable did have some impact but not the impact he had expected, "not as much as they could or should...but not to an extent that they'll change policy per se".

Overall the Roundtable seems to fail in the first stage of the process, namely the selection of issues of importance to participants. What is encouraging to see is that more appropriate procedures are developing, as indicated by Simon. Further scrutiny of these methods will follow.

Policy impact: the claims

I hope that you will take away from this National Youth Roundtable a strong sense that your participation in national policy development is genuinely sought, and an expectation that your hard work will be effectively used (Kemp, 1999c).

One of the main menu items of The Source website is a section entitled “Contributing and Changing” (FaCS, 2005b) where the Government has published a document regarding young people’s involvement in Government planning and decision making.

Contributing and Changing: Young People’s Involvement in Government Planning and Decision Making broadly describes the actions Australian governments will take and the principles governments have endorsed to ensure young people’s participation is meaningful and ongoing (FaCS, 2005b).

The Government makes some strong claims about the role and value of young people’s contributions. These claims were not endorsed by my participants. A declaration has been signed by Ministers called ‘Stepping Forward: Improving the Pathways for all young people’ and includes principles such as: young people’s opinions and contributions are sought and valued; and young people are encouraged and supported to take an active role in their local communities and the nation (FaCS, 2005b). In this document the Government makes its strongest claim that the National Youth Roundtable feeds directly into the youth policy process. What adds weight to this is that all Government Ministers, both state and federal, have agreed on these principles and have signed them in a joint statement. This is the first of its kind in Australia. Expectations regarding the implementation of these principles needs to be cautious (H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998). The Government has enshrined its approach in these statements:

Aged between 12 and 25 years, young people are valuable members of the community and make significant contributions to community life. Government policies have a significant impact on young people's lives and, accordingly, young people are entitled to have their voice heard in public policy making. Young people's participation in decision-making provides opportunities for them to influence or have 'their say' on issues of importance to them. Getting involved also means young people will learn new skills along the way.

Actively engaging young people in the design and delivery of public policies, programs and services that impact on their lives is common sense and is critical to their success. Including young people in decision-making also contributes to a balanced, representative and democratic community that ultimately benefits all Australians (FaCS, 2005b).

This document continues with principles concerning how young people will be engaged by them in the policy development process. Their goal in engaging young people is to "have their voice heard in public policy making" (FaCS, 2005b). What must be clearly demarcated is the distinction between engagement and policy development, as this has created confusion for the participants. The government makes statements about the principles it adheres to in all its programs, which include: empowerment; valuing diversity; purposeful engagement; and encouragement. The last two are of the most concern as they indicate:

Purposeful engagement. Participation will be beneficial to young people and be a positive, meaningful experience, which acknowledges young people's input and contributions

Encouragement. The freedom of young people to comment, provide advice and participate is respected and fostered by governments (FaCS, 2005b).

Even though the Government state that this is what they are committed to, the body of evidence collected from participants interviewed seems to contradict this. The participants interviewed repeatedly echoed the same sentiment, that their work had little or no impact on Government policy.

The Government asserts that young people influence policy making processes at every level:

Young people's participation in government decision-making is valued. Accordingly, Australian governments are committed to better assisting young people's engagement and participation by:

- creating more opportunities for engagement in government decision making processes;
- empowering young people to participate through the provision of information, training and support, including clearly defining roles and responsibilities;
- providing a range of user friendly participation mechanisms and options to best engage the diversity of Australia's young people;
- seeking, valuing and recognising young people's contributions;
- providing young people with feedback on decision making outcomes and how all contributions have been taken into account; and
- doing it better: ensuring systems and processes for reviewing and improving young people's active involvement in government decision-making (FaCS, 2005b).

The apparent commitment is there, but where is the evidence of any follow through? It appears from various other documents published by Government that there is a commitment to this process. For instance, the Government claims that "the Roundtable is the centrepiece of the Australian Government's youth consultation mechanisms" (FaCS, 2005b) which suggests to the participants that it will directly contribute to Government plans and decision making. The Government reiterates regularly that the Roundtable is having a significant impact on Government. The Hon Larry Anthony makes claims regarding the importance of the Roundtable in relation to its policy influence:

The 2001 reports have been distributed to Commonwealth and State Government Ministers and departments, youth and community organizations and is published on the Government's youth website *The Source*. I have urged my parliamentary colleagues to consider the recommendations from Roundtable 2001 when developing future policies. I have also asked them to advise me on their Department's responses and actions to these recommendations. The Roundtable gives government a real insight into the issues that directly affect our young people. The ideas that come out of the Roundtable feed directly into policy development across various departments (Anthony, 2002b).

Not only are the reports distributed to state and federal Governments, but Anthony's parliamentary colleagues are advised to utilise the recommendations in policy development and notify Anthony of their various responses to the recommendations. Hence, Anthony claims that this is direct participation in policy development processes across all of Government. What remains is a silence, as there is no evidence to be found that this process is carried through in any documentation on The Source website and there are no mechanisms employed by Government to ensure that their promises are honoured.

Making policy outcomes clear is of utmost importance to the policy development process (E. Kelly & Becker, 2000). It could be assumed that if there were tangible outcomes that they would be clearly documented to strengthen the Government's claims regarding the policy impact of the Roundtable, but this is not the case. What has emerged is that there are cursory responses to recommendations of the Roundtable such as the implementation of more Roundtable structures, for example the National Indigenous Roundtable and the Forum of Australian Youth Organisations. Whilst these are worthwhile outcomes, they are not engaging with policy development processes, but are programmatic and are symbolic representation structures. What becomes evident is that the policy development processes that the Government promised are not delivered. Other politicians are doubtful as to whether any tangible outcomes exist (Lundy, 1999) and a number of the participants are sceptical of the impact also. Tom details his observations:

The Government has picked up a few programs from the Roundtable over the years, such as the register of young people interested in serving on Government boards and the funding of the Enterprise Network for Young Australians (ENYA), but these are all programmatic and not policy-orientated.

Tom observes that in relation to authentic policy development processes, the government falls short of his expectations. What he detects is that the government's responses are focused on processes that improve young people's pathways to becoming economic contributors (Bessant, 2004a; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998).

In addition to this, the participants raised another important question regarding accountability processes. During his time as Minister for Youth, Larry Anthony made various claims regarding how Roundtable recommendations would be implemented and enshrined in government policy, but it appears that no mechanism exists to measure the effectiveness of this. An important aspect of the policy development approach is the ongoing evaluation of policy development processes (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). No evaluation has been carried out on the Roundtable since its inception in 1999 according to Chambers. It would appear that this is a major flaw in the effectiveness of implementation strategies adopted by government. Various participants commented on this concern in statements that were unprompted:

...to measure effectiveness, you need to know what you want to get out of Roundtable, and I'm under the impression that neither the government nor FACS know at the moment. So, even if they were to do a proper evaluation, what would it be evaluating? (Simon)

In this statement Simon expresses concern that there seems to be a degree of confusion surrounding what the government is actually trying to achieve. When other participants were questioned about this, they were also confused, as they assumed that the Government was clear about the outcomes they wanted to achieve. For instance, Craig expressed disappointment at the closure process of the Roundtable and the lack of tangible and meaningful outcomes. This sentiment was also echoed by other participants.

This raises concerns about a number of issues, namely: that the Government is not sure what the Roundtable achieves; the lack of accountability of Government regarding the funds expended on the Roundtable; and whether it represents value for money in terms of policy development. Ben raises disquiet about this issue: "FaCS and the Youth Bureau work really hard but it is a huge waste of money. NYR regularly blows its budget and no one cares...". The problem of no one actually being worried about the money spent on the Roundtable is a live problem. There are many others who have also voiced this concern (Lundy, 2001). As a result of the confusion surrounding the outcomes of the Roundtable, both in policy terms and overall effectiveness, much of the processes avoid scrutiny.

The Government remains adamant about the value of the processes it employs. Anthony continues in his assertions about the influence of the Roundtable on policy:

Previous Roundtables have been highly successful in promoting the views and interests of Australia's young people. Many ideas and initiatives have been picked up by Government and communities (Anthony, 2002b).

These ideas and initiatives will be detailed subsequently. Prior to Larry Anthony's appointment to the office of Youth Minister, David Kemp also made the Government's position clear. Following is an excerpt from a media release hailing the success of the first Roundtable in 1999:

Addressing Roundtable delegates at an official lunch attended by the Prime Minister and senior Ministers...We are here to listen to what they have to say

and congratulate the Roundtable delegates for their support and commitment to the Roundtable process, the Government is ready to listen to what these young people have to say (Kemp, 1999c).

Kemp underlines all the assertions made by Anthony regarding the intention of the Roundtable, namely engagement with policy development processes. It is also important to note that in the first few years of the Roundtable, the Prime Minister and senior Cabinet Ministers attended the Roundtable. Craig claims that by the year following his participation on the Roundtable, the popularity and importance of these politicians attending was waning, as was the importance placed on any policy outcomes (Comrie, 2003). As part of this study, to verify Craig's claim I also examined the documentary evidence. For Roundtable 1999, there was significant evidence to support the claim that it was highly publicised, including the inclusion of the Prime Minister's speech to the Roundtable on his official website. I also attended the closing ceremony of the 1999 Roundtable where the Prime Minister delivered this speech. There are no other year's speeches available on the Prime Minister's website and speeches for subsequent years on The Source website contain brief speeches from Larry Anthony and government bureaucrats, which concurs with the participants' experiences.

Naomi reported her disappointment that the Minister most connected with her topic area was not the Minister with whom she spent time. So not only were senior Ministers not available, Ministers connected with the participant's topic areas were also at times not available. This serves to underline several issues: in the first few years of the Roundtable, the government needed to iron out some teething problems created by a highly publicised event and chose to reign in the profile of the event to make it more manageable.

What also requires examination is the evidence for claims regarding tangible outcomes contained in various speeches from Government Ministers at official proceedings of the Roundtables. It is important to note that the list of outcomes mentioned by Larry Anthony is very similar to that of David Kemp and Mark Sullivan, and has remained largely unchanged since 2001. This begs the question as to significant achievements after 2001. There appear to be eight outcomes that are mentioned.

The first is the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group which emerged as a recommendation of the Roundtable. This is a structure similar to the Roundtable whereby Indigenous young people are selected to discuss their issues with government.

Secondly, a Roundtable member in 1999 suggested that young people need to be kept more informed about young people's issues through a one-stop shop. As a result, The Source website now hosts a directory of organisations working with young people and youth groups. Thirdly, the Government youth website The Source also hosts an email discussion group that provides feedback to the Government on youth issues. This enables Government to communicate information to interested subscribers. Fourthly, a National Code of Good Practice for New Apprenticeships now exists and is a result of recommendations from the Roundtable. The Local Government Youth Category Awards is the fifth area, which included two new categories for young people for the first time. This was a direct response of a Government Minister to recommendations of the Roundtable. The Australian Forum of Youth Organisations (AFYO), the sixth area, now exists and gives select youth organisations input to the Government, as a result of recommendations from the Roundtable. These organisations include Boys and Girls Brigades, St John Ambulance, Royal Surf Lifesaving, Scouting Australia, Guides, YMCA and YWCA. There have been some criticisms of these organisations regarding their representation of a broad cross section of youth population. Criticism has also been leveled at government regarding the regularity of contact with the group and the group's purpose and these have come from members of that group.

Similarly, Tom raised concerns regarding the seventh and eighth documented outcomes:

The Government has picked up a few programs from the Roundtable over the years, such as the register of young people interested in serving on Government boards and the funding of the Enterprise Network for Young Australians (ENYA), but these are all programmatical and not policy-orientated. What's more they all tend to be in similar areas, around entrepreneurship and symbolic representation.

It seems that the focus of the initiatives implemented by Government are as Tom notes "programmatical and not policy-oriented" which for a structure that claims to ensure that young people have a direct impact on policy development is inadequate. All of these areas listed are additions to government programs, but do not necessarily engage with the policy development process whereby an issue is identified, researched, checked back with those it affects, cross checked and then implemented and evaluated (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). What has occurred is that government has implemented a range of initiatives that add to the suite of mechanisms it employs to connect with young

people without having to engage in policy development with them. The breadth of connection may be broader, but the depth is questionable.

FaCS states that: “the opinions expressed within this document are the opinions of the members of the National Youth Roundtable 2004 and may not reflect the policies of the Australian Government or the Department of Family and Community Services” (FaCS, 2005b). Although this statement is routine and is provided for every report provided to Government, it serves to underline the Government’s response to the work of Roundtable members. It necessarily also protects the Government from supporting what may be a raft of inappropriate suggestions. However, the obverse of this argument is that it could be perceived that this discharges them from any liability to follow through and implement recommendations as they directly pertain to youth policy development. For many of the participants this has been their experience. Despite the appearance of engagement with policy issues, the scope of reports done by participants could largely be ignored. This serves to highlight that the process has been inadequately conceived and hence a range of checks and balances have been superimposed to try and temper the process. This is to be explored in depth subsequently.

The scope of Roundtable reports

This section surveys parts of The Source website to detail the scope of topic area reports presented to Government by Roundtable members. The topic area reports are the core of the work done by participants and significant pressure is placed on the participants to complete them, so that they can be included in the official outcomes packages of each Roundtable. These reports strengthen the claims of Government regarding tangible outcomes. What will be explored is how they do this.

An inventory of the reports produced by the members of the 2004 Roundtable included six topic areas: communities; cultural diversity; environment and rural; health; leadership and enterprise development and participation. These topic areas covered issues such as: youth homelessness and parental incarceration; interactions between authorities and youth; equity and harmony for all; remedying issues for Indigenous youth through dramatic arts; multi-religious awareness education; increasing

opportunities for rural youth through technological innovations; sustainable options for rural young people and the environment; sexual health; expanding school based drug and alcohol education programs; leadership and enterprise development; and from graffiti vandalism to a work of art. Similarly comprehensive lists exist for all the Roundtables since 1999, so the resource that is being generated each year by the participants is considerable. A summary report in excess of one hundred pages is produced each year.

In addition to topic area process, listed under the achievement section on The Source website is a section detailing what some participants have achieved after their term on the Roundtable. Entrepreneurship emerges as a major theme. Member achievements for Roundtable 2003 included work by four participants in particular.

Shasheen Jayaweera's topic area was titled "Uncovering Opportunities, Revealing Leaders" and centered on youth leadership. He created a booklet, Youth-LEAP, which aims to bring the best youth enterprise and leadership development programs and resources together in a comprehensive guide. The Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) agreed to publish Youth LEAP in its annual Job Guide, distributed to over 300,000 students around Australia. Also, the Future Leaders Foundation has agreed to distribute copies of Youth LEAP at their conferences of youth leaders held around Australia and attracting thousands of young people. The clear focus of this publication is to promote and support youth leadership and has been strongly encouraged by Government.

Corey Pearson's topic area was "Graffiti: Vandalism or Art?" He coordinated workshops with a professional aerosol artist to teach young people how to conduct their artwork in a professional manner. This covered how to approach local business with their ideas about putting artwork on their premises; how artwork can benefit the business financially and promote the business with an eye catching advertisement; submitting designs; budgeting time and money; and cost of materials. The focus of this project was to engage young people who would ordinarily operate outside the law in relation to their artwork, to connect with processes that promote active employment utilising their talents. The outcome is that young people's skills have been acknowledged as legitimate public art.

Ainsley Gilkes and Will Scully-Power created Enterprise Junction which provides a categorised web resource listing programs, awards, grants and other support services available to young entrepreneurs. A \$45 000 grant from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources has been awarded to develop Enterprise Junction. The aims of this project are to: encourage entrepreneurship as a viable career option for young people; provide an independently-assessed listing of available support initiatives; promote the value of youth enterprise activities to existing service providers; and assist young people access accurate, categorised information on youth enterprise development initiatives. This is another initiative that has been actively supported by Government as it denotes 'pathways' for young people towards employment and independence.

These are all good news stories, stories that can be picked up by the media and listed as achievements of the Roundtable, but in reality they are individual member's accomplishments and have a strong entrepreneurship component. Tom commented on this as an approach that does not require the Government to engage with the policy development process. It provides government with strong examples that contribute to the raft of program based approaches that they utilize. Once again as Tewdwr-Jones (2002) asserts, this detracts from the clarity of the policy development process and the Government has no liability or responsibility to take the ideas and initiatives on board. Several participants have commented on this as an ongoing weakness of the Roundtable structure. This is again emphasised in an excerpt from the Official Opening of Roundtable 2004 by the Secretary for Family and Community Services (FaCS) Mark Sullivan:

Youth Roundtables have made a difference. We know they make a difference. We know that you're accessing more and more people. It is not just the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Shadow Minister who come to see what goes on at Youth Roundtables. Other Ministers, other Shadow Ministers will involve themselves and have involved themselves. Senior members of bureaucracy will and have involved themselves. And I think the message that we take from Youth Roundtable after Youth Roundtable is that youth has a right to engage and that youth has a contribution to make to all aspects of policy development in this country. And I think the Roundtable has been one of the instruments that's ensured that happens.

Despite the repeated rhetoric of Government regarding how instrumental the Roundtable is in influencing Government policy, there is little evidence to support that this actually occurs. What emerges is that Roundtable participants engage in research processes, produce a range of reports on youth related issues, but the Government's

response to this raft of resources is calculated and is focused on predetermined guidelines. What is apparent is that programmatic responses do not translate into policy development. What would be required for this to transform into policy development would be to begin at the grass roots, involve a wide range of stakeholders, develop collaborative draft policy and then re-consult with the populations most affected by the policy (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002).

In order to begin to address the issue of policy development, the Government needs to clarify with Roundtable members the complexity of the policy development process (Mutebi, 2005), so that members have a realistic view of what can be achieved. In his reflections, it is clear that Tom understands the policy development process and is realistic about what is achievable. For some other members this is not as apparent: Craig, Naomi and Ben alluded to this in their interviews. Several participants reported that they felt that they needed to be briefed more fully on the scope of the policy development process so that they could be more realistic in their expectations before embarking on their Roundtable term. This would have helped them become less discouraged at the apparent lack of tangible outcomes and would have assisted them in understanding the limitations of Roundtable processes.

Mutual obligation

Where, then, is the mutuality in this relationship? The Australian Government has adopted a policy of mutual obligation, which is about you giving something back to the community which supports you (Centrelink, 2004). Mutual obligation is based on the principle that in return for society's contribution to individuals, those individuals should make a contribution back to society. It underlines individualized citizenship and in liberal democracies it becomes possible to treat all persons including children as self-determining or autonomous individuals while allowing that not all persons can be economically independent. The problem with this conception is whether independence should be reduced to economic independence or self-reliance (Yeatman, 2000). In terms of the Roundtable, Government has expectations regarding participants' input into the processes of the Roundtable, but what is reciprocated by Government?

Larry Anthony refers to the benefits for the participants of being on the Roundtable and also reminds them of their responsibilities:

The Roundtable is a crucial tool for developing the skills of the young leaders in our community. Many of these young people will take away what they have learned and apply it in their local communities (Anthony, 2003).

As well as Roundtable members providing direct input to Government, many also go on to further influence Government decision-making through their participation in national and international forums and committees, Mr Anthony said (Anthony, 2002a).

So part of the call to action is what you have learnt and what many of you have got, you know, different acquisition of life skills, is to be the mentors in your own communities and to, as, I think it was the group from the Cultural Diversity [Team], is another famous Indian saying is 'be the change you wish to see in the world,' by Ghandi. Be the change you wish to see (Anthony, 2004).

For Anthony, the Roundtable participants receive a number of excellent benefits from the Roundtable. Anthony states that he wants participants to take back skills into their communities, to be mentors and agents of change. This is also emphasised by Ley:

It gives these young people the opportunity to develop their confidence and their communication and consultative skills and I feel sure that this sort of experience will lead to some of these young people eventually returning to Parliament as elected leaders of their communities (Ley, 2005).

What, however, is the equivalent process for Government? Where is the Government's response in terms of policy development? Craig alluded to some form of pseudo reciprocity:

They didn't tend to keep in contact unless you were doing a project that they were particularly interested in. My group had no support...DETYA were interested in projects where they were weak eg boys in education, homelessness, mental illness, Indigenous issues. There were documentaries done on six of the participants...DETYA took footage and went to visit them...these were the well resourced topic areas.

Craig stated that if participants did a topic area that DETYA identified as being one of their priority areas (such as boys in education), then support was available, but if not, support was not forthcoming. Participants wanted to be informed that there were issues that would more likely be considered than others.

Conclusion

There is a lack of reciprocity and mutuality with respect to the expected outcomes of the Roundtable. Much is expected of the participants in terms of accountability, reporting and outcomes; however, there is no corresponding accountability for Government. For Tom:

... the strength of the Roundtable is that it protects the Howard Government politically from charges that it doesn't listen to or show any interest in young people, but I don't really think that's a strength at all.

The participants in this research were clear about the limitations of the Roundtable, and, importantly, how it needs to change to meet the expectations of young people.

CHAPTER 8

Youth led futures

...personally, it's a matter of confidence, having ideas, feeling as though my input will be valued, and having a social support system in place that reinforces the value of being active and participating in the community (Simon).

Our studies show that young people are competent citizens who can create community change. Despite the obstacles, they join together, organise groups, plan programmes and participate in the decisions that affect their lives (Checkoway et al., 2003, p.306).

There are various issues confronting governments regarding meaningful youth participation. What has emerged from this research are several key areas; namely: the components of youth participation (Bessant, 2004a; , 1992; H. Matthews & Limb, 2003; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998; Rocha, 1997; Shier, 2001; Westhorp, 1987); how government claims to listen to young people (Bellamy, 2002; Bessant, 2002, 2004a; Hart, 1992; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; H. Matthews, Limb, Harrison, & Taylor, 1998; Pitkin, 2004; Wilson, 2000) ; the impact of government processes on current practices of participation (Calvert, Zeldin, & Weisenbach, 2002; Crane, 1999; FYA, 2003; Pitkin, 2004; Saggars, Palmer, Royce, Wilson, & Charlton, 2004; Salmon, 2005; Sercombe, 1999); and the implications for young people around issues of citizenship, participation and inclusion (Bessant, 1996, 2004a; Crane, 1999; Fergusson, 2004; Salmon, 2005; Shier, 2001; Sidoti, 1998; UNYA, 2003).

This framework requires some revision and updating. It is no longer adequate to see participation simply in terms of the 'components of participation' repeated in various publications and embraced over the past twenty or so years. Fundamentally, the means and modes of communication of young people have changed. In recent times we have seen exponential growth in new technologies and the section of the population

most readily taking them up is young people (Charron, Cohen, & McHarg, 2005). Email is now becoming outmoded in preference for MMS, SMS, webcams, palm pilots and podcasts, technology with which Baby Boomers and Generation X are racing to catch up (Doherty, 2005). So while it is important to retain the fundamentals regarding youth participation (and, in particular, consideration about citizenship) we need to rethink paradigms regarding ways to communicate with young people. It is now outmoded to run workshops, consultations and performances with young people. “We are seeing a generation of young people for whom technology is not just a nice-to-have; it’s a critical part of their lives” (Charron, Cohen, & McHarg, 2005, p.1). “They are addicted to technology. It is not part of their life; it is their life” (Doherty, 2005, p.65).

What the adult population needs to acknowledge is that young people of this generation are a new breed, they are growing up with GPS and DVD players in cars, video iPods at their fingertips and MMS is the ‘new black’ in terms of communication (Doherty, 2005). A study undertaken on young people in North America in 2005 reported that young people are the first “technology everywhere” generation (Charron, Cohen, & McHarg, 2005, p.1). Young people are online: the average young person aged between twelve and seventeen spends eleven hours online per week, while the youngest in this age group spend twenty or more hours per week online (Charron, Cohen, & McHarg, 2005). Hawkes refers to this generation as the “Millennials” and asserts that today’s young people are so influenced by technology that they learn differently from their parents (Doherty, 2005). The children of this “e-revolution” can do many things at once: after years of technological stimulation they can simultaneously surf the net, text message their mates, listen to music on an iPod and write a ‘blog’ (Doherty, 2005). It is difficult for previous generations to grasp these changes, as young people now use their time to text friends just to say ‘hey’, while keeping a ‘blog’. Called a life journal, it is filled with details of “what I did that day”, and cyber travellers post messages to each other through their blogs (Doherty, 2005). Australian research for governments is urging policy makers to fund more technology and for schools to teach towards “multiple literacies that go beyond the text” (Doherty, 2005, p.65). Instead of embracing these new technologies, schools are banning them, denying that there must be a “shift in culture” so that these devices become tools of the trade (Doherty, 2005, p.65). Life for young people is profoundly different, but we are still seeing previous generations trying to exercise control over them.

This does raise some questions about the equity of young people's access to technology: many young people, especially in regional and remote Australia, do not have access to adequate technology, so the challenge remains about how to connect with these young people. (Bridgland, 2002). What implications does this have for youth participation? In terms of participation, the building that has been constructed needs to be pulled down and we must build new structures on the old foundations. We need to acknowledge that young people's modes of communication are legitimate and should to be utilised more seriously in order for youth participation to change (Bessant, 1998; Doherty, 2005).

If we are going to embrace new forms of communication and participation, we need to consider arenas such as cyber space, where young people are carving out legitimate public, social and political space (Bessant, 1996). Our old paradigms are not adequate: previous generations are speaking a different language to this generation of young people. The process of doing this, however, is critical. Firstly young people's citizenship must be acknowledged and also the role of adults in youth participation processes.

Rethinking citizenship

Fundamental to the inclusion of young people is the issue of citizenship (Bessant, 1996; Checkoway et al., 2003; Sidoti, 1998). An adequate acknowledgement of young people as competent citizens is a critical component of future developments in youth participation. Bessant suggests a framework:

A definition of citizenship inclusive of young people will provide a basis for policy and legislative changes that will improve the quality of many young people's lives, encourage their active social participation, and help create a more democratic and just community life (Bessant, 1996, p.37).

What Bessant asserts is that if an adequate definition was agreed upon, then much would flow from that. If citizenship rights were enshrined in legislation, then perhaps changes would occur. What is important to note is that participation is not only about processes and projects, but needs to also impact on structural and systemic foundations. Sercombe (2003) and Bessant (1993; 2004a) argue that a fundamental precursor to this would be allowing a change in the voting system for young people, as an important symbolic step. While lowering the voting age may not result initially in a large uptake in

young people wishing to vote, it does challenge the “intentional exclusion of a section of the population from participation in public life...[which] undermines any claims to be a modern liberal democracy” (Bessant, 2004a, p.392). Simpson has summarised the issue of young people, voting rights and participation thus:

Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of lowering the voting age is that it would reverse the trend in recent years to scapegoat young people for various social problems. It would redress the power imbalance which makes young people easy targets for politicians who want to make a name for themselves. By giving young people some power they would have to be included in society’s decisions and perhaps better decisions would result. It might just help reduce some of the alienation which the political exclusion of young people currently causes (cited in Sidoti, 1998, p.33).

What is required then is for young people to be granted fundamental rights in order for them to begin the participation process (Sidoti, 1998).

A report published by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme in 2000 also examined the matter of citizenship. The authors investigate the issue of citizenship and how its current manifestations are influenced by “public choice theory and the agenda of the market place” (Carlson, Fitzgerald, & Roche, 2000, p.97). They consider how young people are affected by this approach premised on contractual relationships, the extent to which citizens, particularly young people, are defined as consumers and the implications of this in terms of the imbalance in power between young citizens and government. These findings only serve to underline assertions regarding the inadequacy of current paradigms regarding young people and citizenship (Bessant, 1996; Checkoway et al., 2003; Fergusson, 2004; Sercombe, 2003).

Adultist youth participation frameworks

Another key concern that has emerged from the literature are issues around who initiates youth participation. Several authors voice this as a critique of current participation processes (Bessant, 2004a; Heath, 2006; Westhorp, 1987). Traditionally youth participation has been initiated by organisations that need to ‘do’ youth participation in order to claim legitimacy (Rocha, 1997; Shier, 2001; YACWA, 2003a). This issue needs to be acknowledged for what it is: the potential to erode young people’s citizenship rights, whereby adults continue to claim young people’s citizenship on behalf of them. This connects with previous comments regarding new ways of

approaching traditional tasks. Older generations need to acknowledge that young people are growing up in an extraordinary time where technology creates completely new vistas, particularly in relation to communication.

Additionally, it seems erroneous for me to write about changes I deem are necessary in order for the Roundtable to become a more effective structure. Many young people have suggested changes, and it is my intention to have their voices heard. I have, as a researcher and adult, significant power and my concern is that my recommendations will be another adult initiated process. Hence, what will be recommended and highlighted will be what the participants have suggested and honouring their views is critical to the legitimacy of this research.

If it does not work...try something different

What has emerged from this research is that the young people who have participated in the National Youth Roundtable have ideas on how to improve it, but have never been asked. The evaluations that are done at the conclusion of each Roundtable focus on issues such as the accommodation, food, entertainment and the program. There does not appear to be space for the participants to comment on the structural or broader goals of the Roundtable. Simon has this suggestion for government:

To think before acting, to stop operating as bureaucrats all the time and to start communicating with young people in ways that they can understand.

Craig is openly critical of the evaluation processes and the perception he had of being listened to:

It's quite evident the way I would change the focus of the program to make sure that young people's voices are being heard and that young people feel that they are being included and developing through the process. It would be a slow process. The first step is for the government to recognise that it is a flawed program and I don't think that they are prepared to do that and that a combination of approaches is required. They have to admit that once again they fucked up and they're not going to do that. Even if admitting that benefits young people they don't really care. In terms of suggesting changes towards the end of the Roundtable I was very openly critical of the processes and will continue to be, but in terms of anyone ever taking notice...I don't think anyone ever has.

Craig is clear regarding a number of issues: that the Roundtable should look closely at how young people develop through the processes; that government need to look at a raft

of approaches; and that young people have and will suggest changes that will mean that the Roundtable becomes more effective. He has suggested that the Roundtable look closely at a smaller state based structure that works more closely with the participants, for a longer term, so that they have the chance to be mentored and supported. Craig has experienced this through the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) Youth Parliament structure, where young people nominate and are physically and financially supported at each step of the way, to build a strong sense of 'team', develop their ideas, present them in a parliament structure and are then supported after that to further develop their ideas into action projects. Craig asserts that this process is committed to not only report outcomes, but is also dedicated to seeing young people develop self esteem and leadership skills. If the Roundtable embraced some of these ideas, he is confident that it would become more effective.

Simon has a range of practical responses to criticisms of the Roundtable:

We have a heap of ideas, and the current process of talking to all the stakeholders is about determining what's the most effective, realistic and meaningful. Some that come to mind are reforming the NYR [National Youth Roundtable], helping develop a WOG [whole of government] youth engagement strategy, providing a best practice model for engaging young people in government, having 'scorecards'/awards on youth participation in government, reforming NYW [National Youth Week], doing more to recognise the contribution of young Australians – there are about 40 ideas on the list.

Being a current Roundtable member, Simon has spent the last six months working on relationships with key FaCS staff, and his topic area is about reforming the structures of the National Youth Roundtable and broader structures relating to youth participation. He stated that:

I'd be comfortable suggesting changes, but only because I've worked hard to develop a relationship with the relevant people at FaCS. I think they'd take notice, but not do anything. Our project this year is aiming to address this by pulling together a mass of evidence and ideas, as well as building relationships, so that it's not possible to ignore ☺

One of Simon's main strategies is to develop relationships with key government bureaucrats in order to gain their respect, so that they will listen to the changes he is suggesting.

My personal observation is that the current group of bureaucrats at FACS have their hearts in the right place, and have been incredibly open to suggestions and

improvements, but the structure and broader political atmosphere within which they are working is completely devoid of space for young people to meaningfully engage. Thus, although we've been getting a lot of traction within departments, and had made headway with Sussan Ley (before she was shuttled off to Fisheries and Miscellaneous Industry Interests), we're facing an uphill battle in the current government's thinking when it comes to addressing specific community groups.

What is evident is that although government bureaucrats are willing to listen and incorporate new ideas and strategies, their efforts are stymied by the political environment within which they are operating. Simon's efforts to engage with the Youth Affairs Minister have now been frustrated by her being moved to another portfolio, and hence, the relationship building needs to start again with the new Minister. The changes he is suggesting include: reforming initiatives such as the Young Australian of the Year; changing the way communication forums such as the Roundtable consult with young people; and revolutionising the means by which Government communicate with young people.

Youth futures

What remain to be examined are young people's ideas and responses to changing the way participation happens. Following is an excerpt from the first speech of the Participation and Communication team for Roundtable 2005/2006 (as the Roundtable has been altered from a calendar year to the financial year). These are the words of Simon:

Imagine that you're a government department that has developed a fantastic new initiative designed to benefit young Australians. You launch the project and sit back and wait for the massive response you anticipate, but surprisingly few young people take up on this opportunity. They just don't know about it and it does not suit their needs.

Imagine that this vision could become a reality with our project team, Crank it Up. The group of us here and myself, Simon, are looking to really turn this vision into a reality – turn it into a reality that builds on what we have at the moment, which is fantastic, and make it even better. Make it in Australia where government and young people communicate with and engage each other even better than they do at the moment. To do this, our project team Crank it Up, will research, develop and pilot a best practice model that will take a whole-of-government approach, the same approach that Wayne has already spoken about this morning – to understand where we are now and where we'd like to go in the future.

We're going to be involving all of the federal government departments and working closely with FaCS to consult with and speak to and really listen to a broad range of young Australians, youth organisations and government departments. Crank it Up will help you, as government, bridge the gap with young people while at the same time giving young people a greater voice in the political process.

Beyond this model we're looking at practical initiatives that young people and government can use to really crank it up...

What the rest of the Participation and Communication team explored was the application of these ideas under the banner of the "Crank it Up" project. The Young Australian of the Year award is a prestigious annual initiative, where the government recognises outstanding young people at a state level and then nationally. One of the Roundtable participants was a recipient of this award at a state level and found that: "suddenly I found my voice was being listened to and my ideas were being taken seriously throughout the youth sector, government and the media" (FaCS, 2005b). What participants have identified is that although the initiative provides important recognition for those involved, perhaps the quiet achievers go unnoticed. They suggest that it is imperative that further incentives and acknowledgement are provided for those working tirelessly in their communities. Hence the "Crank it Up" team are suggesting that the Young Australian of the Year award be extended to include more categories, more 'winners' and broader acknowledgement of what 'achievement' constitutes.

Communication forums are the next issue that the Participation and Communication team target for change. Many of the Roundtable participants have contributed to numerous forums, seminars and workshops at a state and federal level. These are forums where young people have been given the opportunity to "communicate directly with government" (FaCS, 2005b). "All week we have been informed that the government wants to improve the way it communicates with young people so the question you probably are asking and want answered is how can we improve the communication with young people" (FaCS, 2005b)? What the young people are criticising is the one-way and one-off nature of these activities. They assert that communication should be ongoing, reciprocal and there needs to be room for a 'feedback loop' to exist. The team suggests:

One of the initiatives as part of the “Crank it Up” program is to look at what has worked here at home and what works abroad. Forums like the one we are at today provide a great framework for communication between young people and the government. However like everything in this world, everything can be built upon. By looking for the best practice around Australia and the world we can improve forums like the National Youth Roundtable and make them an effective resource in which government and its departments can get useful information from young people about decisions and policy which affects them, and in which young people can become more involved in the political process and ‘crank their voice up’ to the government.

Hence, research about models that have worked and can continue to be built on needs to happen. This includes models from Australia and abroad. What this needs to involve is a two-way process, where young people receive information about policy decisions that are made that affect them and can participate in shaping and moulding them to more effectively represent their needs.

There are other suggestions made by the Participation and Communication team:

Another way in which we can improve communications at forums like Roundtable is by creating an alumni program in which current Roundtable members can crank it up with the knowledge from the people before them. The alumni program will enable effective interaction with previous and present Roundtable members in which knowledge and networks can be shared and which will eventually lead to the better practice of consultation between Roundtable and government departments.

A criticism that has been levelled at government regarding the Roundtable is the loss of continuity and knowledge from year to year. A mechanism that would begin to address this issue is an ‘alumni program’ whereby participant’s terms are staggered so that some collective wisdom is retained each year. This has begun to happen, but participants are suggesting it needs to be strengthened and resourced more.

Finally, participants have suggested means by which government need to communicate with young people, heralding a new way of thinking:

Email, Google, MSN, SMS, MMS. Let’s face it; the bush telegraph these days operates at the speed of light. The 21st century has created this whole array of new opportunities for interacting and engaging with young people, for making young people a part of the process of government, for engaging young people in their own communities and for what they could do for Australia.

The participants assert that it is time to embrace these ‘new’ technologies and to use them for connecting with young people. Government needs to reassess their

prioritisation of the use of technology for consulting with young people, and acknowledge that this is where young people do exist: in cyber space, blogging, texting, listening to podcasts and messaging their friends. If government are going to take communication seriously with young people, they need to speak their language and be in the places where young people are: public space for young people is a new frontier. The Participation and Communication team assert that that the Government could create a feedback loop by utilising this technology and get 'live' input into their proposals and initiatives.

Our projects were shaped by important issues raised by your departments and it was also influenced by our personal interests, involvements and passions. We believe in an Australia where young people are genuinely connected to the whole of society, and working together we can do this.

Despite many setbacks, the young people involved with the current Roundtable remain committed to and passionate about seeing change happen. Their challenge to us is: "as you can all see it is a real shift – a paradigm shift, from viewing things from a problem-base to believing in the assets and the potential of youth"(FaCS, 2005b).

Policy development and a peak body

Another issue that participants have raised is how policy development should happen in conjunction with the Roundtable. What is required is for 'peak bodies' to reassess their methods of 'consulting' with young people and act on the advice of their constituencies:

My perspective is that it is that the Roundtable is a good idea, but that it can't work as a replacement for a genuine youth peak body. The Roundtable would work vastly better in conjunction with the youth peak body, with the Roundtable members able to be supported by this organisation, in particular in relation to research support (Tom).

Tom is commenting here that a peak body needs to look closely at supporting young people in the various processes of the Roundtable, particularly research. This could also involve recommendations for change suggested by Craig, where the peak body coordinates the state based activities which then are connected into the national structure. Tom comments further:

I'd make the Roundtable one part of a broader strategy to empower the youth voice in the policy process, with another part being an adequately funded youth peak body. I'd also give the youth members a great say over the issues being covered and the process of reporting and ensure that there is a voting mechanism that accurately reflects the views of the participants (Tom).

Not only should a peak body work closely with young people to ensure that they are comprehensively supported throughout the Roundtable process, but mechanisms to guarantee more democratic procedures need to be developed. This would certainly challenge the current structures of state based youth peak bodies (Sawer, 2002). Just as the challenge is there for Government to embrace technology, it is also there for peak bodies. The old saying used to be: "if it's too loud you're too old", but it also needs revision, as it is clearly outmoded.

The future of the Roundtable

All of the participants had thoughts about the future of the Roundtable. Some of them had lost hope and felt that the Roundtable as a 'legitimate' structure was irretrievable, and some did not care about the future of the Roundtable. Some of the participants did care and are still involved in changing the structures to make them more participatory. What remains to be seen is how the Government respond to changes that are suggested. My hope is that the work of the young people involved in this research will challenge and change things for the better for young people in this country, they certainly deserve it!

As Ryan Heath (2006) says:

...in the face of vociferous Baby Boomers being vocal about their aging needs, they [young people] will simply be ignored or overwhelmed.

We need to focus on providing solutions, not simply listing problems. You can't ever have a total solution, but if your mind is not focused on providing solutions as a start point, you may as well give up.

[so]...Please just F*off it's our turn now!

Conclusion

If we consider factors such as citizenship, adultist youth participation frameworks and policy development through young people's experiences of the National Youth Roundtable, it is easy to become disillusioned. What needs to be thought through is where young people want to go, how they want to participate and on what terms. Radical re-thinking of these processes is required to incorporate new ways of acting, engaging and participating in public life as deemed *by* young people. Adults do not see young people the way young people see themselves, the current generation speak a different language to adults and use diverse frames of reference for communication and participation. We cannot lose hope though; young people need to be included in all aspects of community life if our communities are to be vibrant, sustainable and developing. Hence it is critical to consider alternative means of participation for young people, and perhaps these are methods we are not yet aware of. In this instance being creative, open and receptive to radical new ideas is the key.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

The Foundation for Young Australians – guiding principles for youth participation

1. Youth participation should be beneficial for young people:

Why should young people bother to be involved? What will they get out of it? How will this activity improve their life? Make it more fun? Give them a sense of control? ...and so on!

Informed choice: Young people should be informed about what is involved, but it is unreasonable to expect that all young people will want to or should participate. Partnership is not possible if participation is compulsory.

Enjoyment: Participatory activities should be fun, exciting and challenging.

Relevant: Activities should address those issues and needs that are perceived as real by the young people involved.

Developmental: Activities should raise young people's awareness of the social, political, economic, cultural and personal aspects of the issues affecting them.

Educational: Activities should provide opportunities for both formal training and the informal development of skills.

Relationship focused: Activities should provide opportunities for building active and supportive working relationships between young people and other members of the community.

Support, supervision and monitoring: Young people should be provided with whatever is required to promote success and to handle failures or setbacks.

Resourcing: Activities should be adequately resourced with sufficient time, space, funding, information, etc (include this issue in normal budgeting processes).

Beneficial: Benefits for the young people need to be included. This may be simply that the involvement is enjoyable, educative, etc—or in some cases may involve specific payment (eg. consultation on a specific issue).

2. Youth participation should recognise and respect the needs and contributions of all involved:

Be sensitive to the inherent difference in experience, status, power, control, knowledge of resources, language, etc. How can you acknowledge this, incorporate it and overcome any problems caused by it?

Accountability: Mechanisms need to be included to provide for monitoring, accountability and feedback for activities undertaken by young people.

Goals and strategies: Young people must be given the opportunity to identify and define the problem as they see it, exploring options and alternative strategies.

Ownership: Activities should provide young people with a sense of belonging and ownership.

Value: Young people should be able to recognise that their participation is valued and that they have ownership in the process.

Negotiation: Young people will not necessarily dominate the decision making. The knowledge, responsibilities and commitments of the adults involved need to be acknowledged.

Avoidance of tokenism: Young people must be offered real roles or they will quickly recognise that they are not being taken seriously.

Flexibility and space: options for participation must be sensitive to the particular young people's value systems, availability, commitments, language, skills, culture, financial resources, access to transport, etc.

Diversity: Young people are not a homogenous group, and having some young people participate does not ensure the inclusion of the views of all young people.

Expertise: Some tasks need to be undertaken by trained professionals, either because adequate training is not possible or due to legislative requirements.

Evaluation: Activities should include ongoing critical analysis of experiences, actions taken and outcomes.

Appendix A

Recruitment: Appropriate recruitment and selection processes will ensure the right young person for the job.

Confidentiality: the confidentiality and privacy of any personal or sensitive data held by the project must be preserved.

List of participants

Thomas Monks	1999 Roundtable
Tom Dawkins	1999 Roundtable
Craig Comrie	2000 Roundtable
Linden Brownlea	2002 Roundtable
Ben Whitehouse	2003 Roundtable
Naomi Godden	2003 Roundtable
Simon Moss	2005/2006 Roundtable

**STATEMENT OF DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY**

Constraints to youth participation in the current federal political environment

Hi!

I'm doing research as part of my Masters of Social Science study on how the current Federal Government listens to the voices of young people and am very interested in your opinion.

You are a person who has been identified as having experienced the mechanisms that the government uses for youth participation. It is hoped that this research will help in identifying what the expectations of young people are who participate in the National Youth Roundtable and how effective the mechanisms that the government uses are. It will also look at ways that these mechanisms can be improved and what stands in the way presently.

I think you could make an important contribution to this study and the future of young people and youth participation and hope you will agree to be interviewed. Everything you say to the researcher will be completely confidential and your identity will not be revealed, unless you want it to be. Should you choose not to participate, however, this will not affect your position in any way. You can also withdraw from the interview at any time.

I am requesting that you participate in two (2) things:

1. An individual in-depth interview which should take 1 hour. This will be at a location that is convenient for you.
2. A focus group with other participants from the National Youth Roundtable, which should take approximately 1.5 hours to follow up on your individual interview. This will be situated in a central location to allow ease of access.

Any questions concerning the project entitled "Constraints to youth participation in the current federal political environment" can be directed to:

Jude Bridgland Sorenson

Edith Cowan University

Tel: [REDACTED]

If you have concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact **Dr John Duff** on (08) [REDACTED]

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Constraints to youth participation in the current federal political environment

I (_____) have been informed about all aspects of the above research project and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this project may be published provided I am not identifiable, unless I choose to be.

I understand that I will be interviewed and the interview will be audio-taped. I also understand that the recording will be erased once the interview is transcribed.

I wish/do not wish to be identified (please delete the inapplicable words)

Participant:

Date:

Investigator:

Date:

**DRAFT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS
(Individual Interviews)**

1. How did you get involved in the National Youth Roundtable?
2. How did it come about/what is your understanding of the history of the National Youth Roundtable?
3. What expectations (if any) did you have when you got involved?
4. What do/did you hope to achieve?
5. What were your experiences of the selection process?
6. Tell me a bit about how it works on a daily/weekly basis? What communication mechanisms are you aware of and who decides these?
7. How did the topic area process evolve?
8. What do you think are the strengths of this program? From the participants' points of view? From the government's perspective? From your own perspective?
9. How do you think the effectiveness of the program is measured?
10. Are there things you'd change about it? How comfortable would you be suggesting changes? Would anyone take any notice?
11. What do you think are the factors that encourage the participation of young people in programs such as this?
12. Do you think that the Roundtable is impacting on government? Do you think that *your* views are impacting on government?
13. Have your expectations (question 3) been fulfilled and what do you think has been achieved?
14. Are there questions I've left out that are important? Do you have any questions of me?

National Youth Roundtable 2005

APPLICATIONS CLOSE 5:00pm 11 MARCH 2005

For more information or help with this application:

Website: www.thesource.gov.au/involve/NYR

Email: roundtable@thesource.gov.au

Phone: 1800 624 309 (free call)

What is the National Youth Roundtable?

The National Youth Roundtable is the centrepiece of the Australian Government's youth consultation mechanisms. It brings together young people, aged 15 to 24 years, to discuss issues that have an impact on youth.

The National Youth Roundtable is managed by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS).

Roundtable members include young people from all States and Territories, metropolitan and regional areas and from various cultural backgrounds. The members bring to the Roundtable a wide range of experiences and viewpoints, whether studying, caring for others, looking for work or working. Members' experiences from being involved in local community activities and their knowledge of local youth issues are also an asset to the Roundtable.

When commitment will be expected of Roundtable 2005 members.

Taking part means an ongoing commitment from members for the duration of the Roundtable.

- Successful applicants will be contacted.
- Members may attend workshops and meetings to prepare them for their role in the Roundtable and to share and exchange with the Government their views on issues that have an impact on young people.
- Members will address issues of importance to the Australian Government, relating to Australia's youth. Members will work in collaboration with relevant

Government departments, Members of Parliament and will consult with their communities.

What information is required with the application?

Please provide the following information with your application:

- details of two referees that can support your application; and
- proof of your age (eg. photocopy of birth certificate, driver's licence, student identification).

The selection process

The selection process will ensure that the Roundtable includes young people from regional and metropolitan areas from all States and Territories. Members will reflect the diversity of young Australians in their experiences, education, occupations and backgrounds and will include Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Assessment is also based on:

- your involvement in your community;
- your experience and interest in a range of issues affecting young people;
- your achievements; and
- your ability to effectively consult with other young people.

You may be contacted for more information about your application. Successful applicants are expected to be announced in Mid 2005.

Who will pay?

The Australian Government meets all accommodation and travel costs. Additional assistance is available for members with special needs.

What support and resources will be available to Roundtable members?

Workshops help prepare members for their role in the Roundtable. Group facilitators and FaCS staff will support Roundtable members throughout their term. In addition, support ranging from written materials through to teleconferencing and an Internet site are available to ensure that participants are fully informed and actively involved. If required FaCS will liaise with your school, university or employer explaining involvement in the Roundtable and requesting support for members participation.

How will the Roundtable be conducted?

The Roundtable is designed to encourage the contribution of all members irrespective of their age or experiences. Members will work primarily with other young people interested in similar issues.

Send your application and supporting documents to:

(Only hardcopy applications will be accepted.)

**National Youth Roundtable
Youth Bureau
FaCS
PO Box 7788
Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2610**

Information collected on this form by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) will be used to consider your application to become a member of the National Youth Roundtable 2005. You may authorise the disclosure of your personal information (see section B of the application form). FaCS may pass limited personal information about you to other Commonwealth Government departments and other parties such as the media, however, FaCS will only disclose the information you consent to release. Information will not otherwise be disclosed without your consent, unless authorised or required by law.

National Youth Roundtable 2005

Application Form

Young people aged 15-24 (inclusive) on **1 January 2005** are eligible to take part.
If you need more space please attach additional pages.

A. Personal Details

Last Name: _____ Given Name(s): _____

Preferred Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Female: ☐
Male: ☐

Address:

Home Telephone: (____) _____ Work/School Telephone: (____) _____

Mobile Telephone: (____) _____ Work/School/Home Fax: (____) _____

Email Address:

Were you born in Australia? Yes: ☐ No: ☐

If no, which country were you born?

Are you from a culturally or linguistically diverse background?

What is the main language spoken at your home?

Are you an Australian Citizen / Permanent Resident? Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Are you an Aboriginal? Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Are you a Torres Strait Islander? Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Do you have a disability? Yes: ☐ No: ☐

How did you find out about Roundtable 2005?

What is your highest level of education? (Please tick one)

- Year 10 (or below) ☐
- Year 11 ☐
- Year 12 ☐
- Apprenticeship ☐
- TAFE ☐
- University ☐

List your educational qualifications:

I am now doing: (You can complete more than one)

Secondary education: School: _____

Year: _____

Tertiary education: Institution: _____

Year: _____

Course: _____

Vocational Education Training: Organisation: _____

Year: _____

Industry: _____

Looking for Work?

What type of work are you looking for?

Working?

Name of employer: _____ Full-time: ☐ Part-time: ☐
Casual: ☐

Position: _____ Type of work: _____

Other circumstances? (e.g. caring for a dependent, please specify) _____

B. Release of personal information

National Youth Roundtable is a public event promoted by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and attracts media attention. Members of the Roundtable should expect to be photographed, filmed, interviewed and/or reported on and published by the media and Roundtable organisers (FaCS).

The organisers will receive requests for the personal information of successful applicants, including your name, locality (suburb/town/community), contact details, biographical details and other information provided on this application.

You must indicate what personal information you are prepared to have made available to various parties that may ask, such as (but not limited to) media representatives, other Commonwealth Government departments and Parliamentarians. Please note that organisers will not disclose your contact information to members of the public. If your application is successful, we will talk to you in more detail about releasing personal information.

I consent to the **reasonable** disclosure by the Roundtable organisers of the following personal information about me:

- Name: Yes: ☐ No: ☐
- Telephone Number: Yes: ☐ No: ☐ Telephone Number for release: _____
- Locality: Yes: ☐ No: ☐
(e.g. suburb/town/community)
- I consent to be filmed, photographed, sound recorded and reported
(including on the Internet). Yes: ☐ No: ☐
- Is it okay to contact you at work or school? Yes: ☐ No: ☐

C. Community involvement

In the last three years have you been involved in any government and/or community activities, programmes, events or organisations including volunteer work, forums, consultative or representational activities (e.g. Green corps, JPET, Reconnect, Scouts, Lifeline, Red Cross, RSPCA, Church, school councils, youth groups)?

Year	Organisation/event/activity or programme	Your role

D. Knowledge and interest in youth issues

What are the key issues that you are interested in? We would like to hear about what's important to you as a young Australian. Please make sure you tell us why you are interested in these issues. Hearing from young Indigenous Australians, young people in rural and regional areas, culturally and linguistically diverse young people and young people with disabilities is always a priority for us.

1. Key interests (identify 3 issues that you are interested in)

1.
2.
3.

2. Why are these issues important to you?

--

3. Do you have personal experience of your key interests?

--

4. How will your interests and experience help you to contribute to the Roundtable?

--

5. In the last three years, have you received any recognition or awards for community activities, programmes or participation? Have you faced any significant life challenges?

Year	Award/achievement	Organisation	Reasons for receiving/achieving

E. Consultation with young people and the community

Your community may be the group of people who you work with, play sport with, study with or other clubs and/or councils you may be involved with.

1. How would you make sure that the views you put forward to Government reflect the experiences and issues of young people in your community?

2. Why do you think it is important to consult with other young people?

3. Who in your local community could you consult with about your issues?

4. Do you think your peers and local community would support you in your work for the Roundtable? What sort of support could be provided?

F. Referees

You will need the support of two referees (e.g. school principals, police, community groups, sporting organisations, school bodies, employees, ministers of religion or Members of Parliament).

References must address the selection criteria in Sections C, D and E.

	Referee 1	Referee 2
Name		
Organisation		
Position		
Address		
Contact Numbers		
Email		

G. Medical, dietary and other special requirements details

Emergency contact name:

Phone number: (____) _____ Relationship: _____

List any medical conditions, including allergies, which may affect you during Roundtable events:

List any dietary requirements that you have:

Do you have a disability or condition that requires special arrangements for your travel and/or accommodation?

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Do you give permission for first aid and/or medical treatment to be administered if you are injured or become ill?

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Signature:

H. Parent/Guardian consent

If you are under 18 please have your parent or guardian fill out this section

The applicant is under 18

As the parent/guardian, I consent to the applicant participating in the National Youth Roundtable program. I have read and understood all the information about the NYR program contained in the application form. I am aware that participation in the program will involve flying to and from the NYR meetings unaccompanied, staying several nights in a hotel room unaccompanied. I give permission for first aid and/or medical treatment to be provided if required.

I am aware that the Commonwealth takes no responsibility for any injury or damage suffered by the participant. As the parent/guardian, I am liable for any costs incurred as a result of damage caused by the negligent actions of the participant.

I give permission for the release of information outlined in Section B. I confirm that the information provided in this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Parent/Guardian name printed:

Parent/Guardian signature:

Relationship to applicant: _____ Date: _____

I. Check List

Before posting this application, please make sure that you have done the following:

- I have attached proof of age.
- I have attached two written references which address the selection criteria.
- I have completed Section B – Release of personal information.
- I have signed Section J – Applicant's declaration.
- My parent/guardian has completed and signed Section H – Parent/Guardian's consent
(if under 18 years old).

J. Applicant's declaration

I confirm that the information I have provided in this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

I agree that the National Youth Roundtable is a drug and alcohol free event and I will not consume alcohol or illicit drugs while I am involved in Roundtable events.

I agree to the release of information outlined in Section B.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your interest in the National Youth Roundtable!