NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Young People as Active Citizens:
Placing Youth Participation Structures
in The Republic of Ireland
under Critical Scrutiny

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical investigation into the effectiveness of the youth participation structures created by the Irish State following the passing of the National Children's Strategy (2000). As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the State is obliged to extend citizenship rights, including the right to actively participate in the democratic process, to children and young people. Two structures are under review; the thirty-four youth councils, Comhairle na nÓg, and the annual youth parliament, Dáil na nÓg. Objectives include understanding how these participation structures are operationalised; how issues for participation are identified and dealt with; the background and motivations of members and the level of public awareness in, and impact of, these structures on young people and their communities.

The original contribution to knowledge is the proposition of a new theoretical framework through which the question of the effectiveness of the youth participation structures which exist (in Ireland) might be approached. The philosophical orientation of the study is a commitment to the evaluative approach offered to Children's Geographies by classical pragmatism. A 'hands-on philosophy' of direct inquiry, classical pragmatism favours a practical, applied approach to the theorizing of societal issues over more absolutist abstractions. The critical inquiry presented is guided by the evaluative procedures derived from the key tenets of classical pragmatism such as the acknowledgment that while the researcher's place in inquiry is important, it is not a privileged place; ultimately evaluation must be guided by the criteria of 'what works' in practice.

A mix of qualitative methods comprising of non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews were deployed and analysed using a grounded theory approach; indeed this study wishes to consolidate the status of grounded theory as a key method for Children's Geographies. The analysis revealed practices of participation which although well-intentioned, were often unfocussed and ineffective. Application of the substantive grounded theory generated in this study would see young people and adults participating collaboratively in order that young people's voices are better heard in society.

Abbreviations

CDB	County/City Development Board
CDT	Cross-Departmental Team
CIG	Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group
CRA	Children's Rights Alliance [Ireland]
CRC	Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the Child
CRG	Constitutional Review Group
CYPF	Children and Young People's Forum
CYPPC	Children's and Young People's Partnership Committee
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
ESRI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
FG	Fine Gael
FF	Fianna Fáil
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GT	Grounded theory
HSE	Health Services Executive
IDG	Inter-Departmental Group
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
NCO	National Children's Office
NCS	National Children's Strategy
NESC	National, Economic & Social Council
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSSC	New Social Studies of Childhood
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

SLSS	Student Council Support Service
TY	Transition Year
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
YWI	Youth Work Ireland

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An Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Nuálaíochta
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation

__Dedicated to the memory of Hilary Kendlin__
Gumshoe Gal, Sister, Friend
(1964-2009)

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Republic of Ireland is obliged to extend citizenship rights, including the right to actively participate in the democratic process, to 'children', broadly and variably defined. To date, children have occupied something of an ambivalent position within the Constitution of Ireland; afforded special status on the one hand but positioned as vulnerable and requiring protection on the other. Children's rights have been tied up with the privileged position provided to the family in the Constitution and *de facto*, children have been deprived of distinctive individual rights of their own. A referendum to amend the Irish Constitution to better incorporate and fortify children's rights is to take place in Ireland[1]. However, despite repeated promises by several government administrations, no firm date has been set for this much anticipated referendum. There is at least one other referendum to take place in Ireland in 2012 but the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has indicated that she has endorsed that the Children's Rights referendum be held on a stand-alone basis in the latter part of 2012 (O'Regan, 2012). In the interim, the Republic of Ireland has developed a set of participation structures through which it is supposed children have been able to access the public realm, voice their concerns, and advocate for issues that interest them.

The purpose of this thesis is to undertake a critical inquiry into the effectiveness of the structures which the Irish State has provided to date, in an effort to prompt, foster, and extend youth participation in the political life of the nation. Whilst a number of critical reviews of these structures exist, these have been written either by policy practitioners and/or private consultants, commissioned to undertake analyses of the impacts of

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[1] Throughout this thesis, the terms 'Ireland', 'Republic of Ireland' and 'Irish State' are used when referring to the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland. Article 4 of the Irish Constitution states: "The name of the State is Éire, or, in the English language, Ireland." Irish Statute law (The Republic of Ireland Act, 1948) states that "the description of the State shall be the Republic of Ireland". In the United Kingdom, the Ireland Act 1949 provided that "Republic of Ireland" may be used as a name for the Irish State. However it did not make use of the term mandatory. Since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (major development in the Northern Ireland peace process), the United Kingdom has accepted the name 'Ireland' for the Irish State and uses that name in international agreements with the Dublin government. Throughout this thesis, 'Northern Ireland' is used when referring to the six counties in the North of Ireland that are part of the United Kingdom.

particular schemes. Moreover, whilst (youth) participation structures have been scrutinised within more critical geographical and social scientific analyses, to date no study has evaluated the effectiveness of youth engagement with these structures from the philosophical vantage point of classical pragmatism. Written by a scholar located in the Irish academe[2] and committed to the evaluative approach offered by classical pragmatism, this study is the first to present an independent and scholarly interrogation of the virtues and vices of the Irish approach. This introduction chapter briefly outlines the historical backdrop against which this study is set, identifies the aim and objectives of the project, highlights the contributions the study wishes to make to emerging scholarship in Children's Geographies and introduces the reader to the main body of the thesis.

1.2 Historical Backdrop

1.2.1 In search of a new Constitution

"The children's rights referendum remains a top priority for the Government despite its absence from the first programme of legislation" advised Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Frances Fitzgerald in April 2011 (Burke-Kennedy, 2011). A constitutional referendum to protect the rights of the child was announced by the Taoiseach (prime minister) of Ireland in November 2006. Long considered overdue by many observers, the proposed referendum was broadly welcomed by many public, policy, and political constituencies in Irish society. According to Lalor *et al.* (2007: 13), the holding of a referendum on children's rights is crucial if Ireland is to "tilt the balance of rights towards the child by way of a specific provision protecting their interests". And yet notwithstanding the broad base of support it has secured, the promised referendum has yet to take place, nor has a date been set for it.

The Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann), was enacted in December 1937 following passage by a national plebiscite in July of that year. It can be amended only by referendum. The 1937 Constitution was very much a product of the society which prevailed in Ireland at that time, and must therefore be viewed as a historical document. It replaced the earlier 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State, problematic for many

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[2] Academe: defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the world of learning, universities collectively, a university environment"

Irish people in that it required members of the Irish parliament (Oireachtas) to swear an oath of allegiance to the British Monarchy. Within the new Constitution, 'the family' and therefore 'children' only by association and implication, was afforded special status. However, the special status ascribed to children positioned them not as autonomous individuals, but rather as constituent members of a family unit; vulnerable minors in need of state protection. Parental autonomy and family privacy are deeply embedded in the document, as is the influence of the Catholic Church (Nolan, 2007). The family, according to Article 41.1 (Appendix One), is "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society and as a moral institution possesses inalienable and imprescriptible rights". Not surprisingly, Nolan (2007) notes an excessive focus on family/parent-centric concerns in all subsequent judicial interpretations of the constitutional framework.

Of course the 1937 Constitution predates national and international debate concerning children's rights. Moreover, that Irish society has changed since 1937 is indisputable. Ireland saw large numbers emigrating during the economic downturn of the 1950s and again in the 1980s when economic recession forced many people to leave Ireland in search of work. The 'Celtic Tiger' and economic boom of the 1990s reversed this trend for a time; Ireland became a destination of immigrants. However, recession has returned and since 2007 Ireland has suffered a severe economic depression. Recent data from Eurostat (the statistical office of the EU Commission) indicated that Ireland had the highest net outflow of population in the European Union in 2009 when nine people in every thousand exited the country (Beesley, 2010). This figure was almost twice that of Lithuania, the country with the second highest net outflow in the EU (Beesley, 2010). Moreover, the Constitutional Review Group (CRG, 1996) has noted changing trends in the past six decades, including a significant weakening of the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society, increased urbanisation and changing attitudes to sexual behaviour. There have also been changes in family units with an increase in births outside marriage, cohabitation and single parenthood. Such changes mean that 'the family', as envisaged by the 1937 Constitution, does not truly represent the plurality of family units which exist in Ireland today.

Since 1937, there have been a number of proposals to amend the Constitution with respect to children's rights, many of which have not been implemented. The Kilkenny

Incest Investigation (Kilkenny Incest Investigation, 1993) prompted a recommendation that the Constitution also include a guarantee of rights to the child beyond those which accrue from their place in family life. Barnardos (2007: 5) argue that had children's rights been explicitly protected under the Constitution, the outcomes of several high profile child abuse cases may have been different. The Constitutional Review Group expressly recommended in its 1996 report that the best interests of the child be of paramount concern in all actions undertaken, whether by legislative, judicial or administrative authorities (Nolan, 2007). This recommendation was not implemented. In 2006, an all-party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution recommended the following be inserted into Article 41 [the family]: "All children, irrespective of birth, gender, race or religion, are equal before the law. In all cases where the welfare of the child so requires, regard shall be had to the best interests of the child" (Nolan, 2007: 506). Furthermore, disclosures of child abuse inside and outside of the family, abuse in institutional care settings, and problems with the foster care system have been widely debated in Ireland in recent years. Additionally, the question of extending social welfare protection to the children of migrants who now work in Ireland led to calls, in public and political arenas, to amend the Constitution and to strengthen the individual rights of the child.

Considerable political, legal and media attention has been given to the proposed wording and content of any amendment to children's rights under the Irish Constitution. A new text for the Children's Rights Referendum was published on 16th February 2010 by an Oireachtas cross-party committee. The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) has endorsed this new wording and contends that the proposed changes have been broadly well received across Irish society. Further delay with respect to the proposed referendum have been attributed to a need for new adoption legislation but as yet, no date has been set for this important referendum (Gartland, 2012). Thus the Republic of Ireland's children still wait for their rights to be formally strengthened under the Irish Constitution. For all the furore, Devlin (2005) notes that public discourse and media commentary in Ireland surrounding children and young people continues to position them either as vulnerable, or deviant and criminal; their status as Irish citizens remains ambiguous and ill-defined.

1.2.2 Ireland and the UNCRC

The genesis of the case for extending and fortifying children and young people's right to have a more effective public voice in Ireland can be traced to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989; a global milestone for child-rights policies (Woodhead, 2010). 2009 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Convention. The UNCRC document set out the first legally binding rights legislation, incorporating the extension of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights to children (UNICEF, 2008). Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, the document was subsequently ratified by Ireland in 1992. Included among its fifty-four articles are Article 12, the so-called 'participation article' (Reynaert *et al.*, 2009) and Article 13, also concerned with participation. The text of Articles 12 and 13 are:

Article 12
1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

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.

Article 13
1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary.

    (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
    (b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

The Convention claims its principles are universal, and maintains that they take account of the different social, political, economic and cultural settings of individual countries (United Nations, 1993). The Convention further states that "each State may seek its own means to implement the rights common to all" (United Nations, 2003: 2). The UNCRC may set the rights of the child down in international law but as James *et al.* (1998: 6) note "there are sometimes giant gulfs between the rhetoric and the reality".

States which ratify the treaty are obliged to send regular national reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), advising of progress made with respect to the Convention. This process of self-reporting to the CRC has had real effect with respect to child and youth policy in Ireland (Lalor *et al.*, 2009). Two reports have been submitted to the CRC by the Republic of Ireland thus far, one in 1996 and a second in 2005. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) advise that a third report will be presented to the CRC in 2012.

Ireland's first report was formally examined by the CRC in Geneva on the 12th and 13th of January, 1998. The CRC welcomed Ireland's "constructive, frank and open dialogue" (CRC, 1998: 15) but was equally frank and open in its criticism of efforts by the Irish government, or lack thereof, to afford children their rights. Three of the CRC's observations were positive, eighteen identified areas of concern. For example, Ireland's approach to the rights of the child was deemed to be "fragmented" and the Committee observed "a lack of co-ordination" among those bodies charged with promoting and protecting children's rights. Moreover, the Committee was concerned about the lack of a Children's Ombudsman or a Child Rights Commissioner. With respect to Ireland's implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Committee stated that it was:

> *... concerned that the views of the child are not generally taken into account, including within the family, at schools and in society. The Committee is also concerned that procedures for hearing children are not fully considered in the legislation.*

<div align="right">(CRC, 1998: 16)</div>

Accordingly, the Committee made a number of recommendations; these included that the position of an Ombudsman or Children's Rights Commissioner be established and that a comprehensive national strategy for children be set up. It further advised that Ireland should actively promote and facilitate child and youth participation in society.

1.2.3 Ireland's National Children's Strategy (NCS)

The National Children's Strategy (NCS) (2000) is Ireland's answer to the UNCRC criticism. According to O'Connor (2008), the NCS is best understood as an attempt by the Irish State to articulate a more contemporary view of children and young people,

and to move beyond the paternalistic attitude espoused heretofore, whereby the family was accorded primacy over the individual rights of any child.

An Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) was established to develop the strategy, comprised of senior officials from eight government departments and a legal adviser from the Attorney General's office. A cross-departmental team supported the work of the IDG, with a further two advisory panels established to provide expert advice. The first of these was a Non-Governmental Service Providers' group. This was comprised of representatives from voluntary organisations providing services to children. The second panel was a Research and Information group made up of professional academics from national and international research centres. All had a particular interest in issues relating to children. John Pinkerton of Queen's University Belfast was seconded to the cross-departmental team (CDT) in a full time capacity and was a freelance adviser on the mechanics of public consultation, with a specific brief to ensure children and young people were included and heard (Pinkerton, 2006: 125-126). An extensive consultation programme was undertaken with parents and those working with children, facilitated through invitations carried in the national media. Consultations and discussions were also held with other bodies, including a health board liaison group, county managers, The National, Economic & Social Council (NESC), The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). Two advisory seminars were held as part of the Strategy's development process, in which seven international childcare experts reviewed proposals and offered advice.

The NCS (2000: 10) presents a 'whole-child' perspective which is designed to anchor and shape its goals (Pinkerton, 2006: 128). The Strategy recognises the capacity of children to interact and shape the world around them as they grow and develop while they are simultaneously shaped by the world in which they live. It further acknowledges that "children are active participants in a complex set of relationships within families and with friends and communities" (NCS, 2000: 92). Three aspects of the whole-child perspective must be considered together:

- The extent of children's own capacities,
- The multiple interlinked dimensions of children's development, and
- The complex mix of informal and formal supports that children rely on.

(NCS, 2000: 25)

The ten year National Children's Strategy (2000) pivots around three interlinked goals. Taking its lead from Article 12 of the UNCRC, Goal One of the NCS (2000: 30) states: ***"Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity"***. Goal Two promotes the need to understand children's lives better and Goal Three advocates that children are provided with quality support and services. It is under the NCS that state participatory mechanisms for children and young people were established.

Before 2005, responsibility for child and youth policy in the Republic of Ireland was contained wholly within the Department of Health and Children. At that time, the Minister for Children occupied a non-cabinet position and had cross-departmental responsibility for children's issues. In December 2005, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was created. Although still part of the larger Department of Health and Children, the status of the Minister was elevated to that of a 'Super-Junior Minister'. The Minister was entitled to a seat at the cabinet table, albeit in a non-voting and non-executive capacity. During the majority of this study, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was Barry Andrews of the Fianna Fáil (FF) political party. A change of administration following the February 2011 General Election resulted in Barry Andrews being replaced by Frances Fitzgerald of the Fine Gael (FG) political party[3]. The position was also elevated from a Junior Ministry to a Full Ministry. In addition, the Department formally known as the 'Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs' (OMCYA) was renamed as 'The Department of Children and Youth Affairs' (DCYA). The DCYA states that it is government policy to promote the participation of children and young people in civic society, using seven key structures:

> 1. Comhairle na nÓg
> 2. Dáil na nÓg
> 3. The DCYA Children and Young People's Forum
> 4. Student Councils
> 5. Children and Young People's Participation Support Team
> 6. Inclusion Programme
> 7. National Consultations.

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[3] Fianna Fáil was founded in March 1926 by Éamon deValera. It came into existence following division in Sinn Féin [political party] relating to the Anglo-Irish Treaty which had been formulated after the Irish Civil War (1922-23). Fine Gael was formed from a merger of three groups and came into existence in 1933 (Gallagher, 1985). The legacies of pro and anti-Treaty sentiments are deeply engrained in both parties. Notwithstanding a disastrous general election for Fianna Fáil in 2011, the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael political parties have dominated the Irish political landscape since the foundation of the Irish State

1.2.3.1 Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg are local youth councils established in 2002, "designed to give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies". 'Comhairle' is the Irish word for council and 'óg' the Irish word for youth. There are thirty-four Comhairlí na nÓg in the Republic, at least one in each of the Republic's twenty-six counties and two in counties Galway, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford. Four Comhairlí na nÓg are located in the county of Dublin. Comhairle na nÓg (or simply 'Comhairle' as the organisation has become known among its members), is managed through the City and County Development Boards (CDBs) of each local authority area. These CDBs are led by members of the local authority and were established to bring together key agencies and bodies in order to engage in long term planning for the city or county.

Based on the findings of an independent review of Comhairle na nÓg (Murphy, 2005), commissioned by the then OMCYA, a Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group was established in June 2006. Its remit was to develop a plan to ensure the effective operation of Comhairle na nÓg. Comprised of representatives from a number of bodies, including local authorities, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and various youth organisations, this group produced its first report in 2007, recommending that a number of measures be implemented to improve Comhairle na nÓg's effectiveness. A Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund was established by the DCYA to support the CDBs in each local authority area. Although each Comhairle na nÓg is ostensibly the responsibility of the local authority and managed by the relevant CDB, some CDBs have sub-contracted the day-to-day running of their Comhairle na nÓg to an outside youth agency, such as Foróige or Youth Work Ireland. Thus it means that some Comhairlí na nÓg are co-ordinated and run by a local authority employee, others again by a designated, professional youth worker. The Implementation Group has since been replaced by the Children and Young People's Partnership Committee (CYPPC).

1.2.3.2 Dáil na nÓg

'Dáil' is the Irish word for parliament; thus Dáil na nÓg is the annual youth parliament, incorporating respectively twelve to eighteen year olds in the Republic of Ireland. Delegates are elected to the parliament through their local Comhairle na nÓg. Numbers vary but most Comhairlí na nÓg send three to four young people to Dáil na nÓg

annually; total yearly Dáil na nÓg numbers are generally in the region of 250 attendees. In addition, each Comhairle na nÓg nominates one young person to sit on the Dáil na nÓg Council. This acts on recommendations made at the annual Dáil na nÓg meeting. The lifetime of the Dáil na nÓg Council has previously been one year; the year immediately following the annual Dáil na nÓg. The DCYA advise however that this is to change to a two-year period of office from 2011 onwards. Young people selected to participate in Dáil na nÓg attend regular training sessions in the lead-up to the annual event. Similarly, those part of the Dáil na nÓg Council receive additional training and have the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and also policy and decision makers throughout their term of office. Since 2003, Dáil na nÓg has been supported by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), Foróige (a national youth development organisation) and Youth Work Ireland, the trading name of the National Youth Federation Ltd.[4]

1.2.3.3 Children and Young People's Forum

The Children and Young People's Forum (CYPF) was established in 2004 and is comprised of thirty-five young people from around the country, aged between twelve and eighteen years. The forum's purpose is to advise the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (now Department of Children and Youth Affairs) on issues of concern to young people. Four of its members are from the National Children's Advisory Council, an organisation which also has an independent advisory role to the DCYA. Young people are nominated to the CYPF through their local Comhairle na nÓg and organisations which represent seldom-heard young people.

1.2.3.4 Student Councils

In its final report, the student council working group (2003-2005) recommended that a student council support service be established. Accordingly, this support service was established in 2007. It is overseen by the DCYA in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science. It is not mandatory for a school to have a school council;

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[4] **National Youth Council of Ireland** is the representative body for national voluntary youth work organisations in Ireland. Its role was recognised in legislation through the Youth Work Act (2001) and as a Social Partner in the Community and Voluntary Pillar.
Foróige is a leading youth organisation in Ireland. It works with approximately 50,000 young people aged between 10-18 years each year, through volunteer-led clubs and staff-led youth projects.
Youth Work Ireland is a federation of local youth services in Ireland who work in the interest of young people through the provision of a range of services and who share a common ethos and approach.

nevertheless the DCYA advises that schools are encouraged to consider them positively. *Towards 2016* (a ten year social partnership agreement in Ireland, running from 2006 until 2015), cites effective student councils among its key innovative government measures.

1.2.3.5 Children and Young People's Participation Support Team

The first phase of a Children's and Young People's Support Team was established in March 2009. The DCYA state that its core role will be to:

- Provide support for the development of effective Comhairle na nÓg under all thirty-four CDBs, through driving implementation of actions outlined in the Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group Report and future actions to be developed by a Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee.

- Support the operation and development of the Dáil na nÓg process.

- Support other children and young people's participation initiatives.

Regional Participation Project Officers from Foróige (a youth organisation) and Youth Work Ireland were appointed to this team by the DCYA. Their function is to provide training and support for Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg and other participation initiatives.

1.2.3.6 Inclusion Programme

The Inclusion Programme was established by the OMCYA in 2007; its aim is to develop best practice in the area of youth participation and in particular, to provide new opportunities for 'seldom heard'[5] young people to become involved in decision-making structures. Organisations involved in this programme include Barnardos, the Irish Wheelchair Association, the Irish Association of Young People in Care, Inclusion Ireland and Pavee Point (the national association for the Traveller Community). The DCYA asserts that heretofore 'seldom heard' young people have found it difficult to effectively participate in Comhairle na nÓg and other decision making forums. It is

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[5] The most recent evaluation report on the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund (2011: 13) defines 'seldom heard' young people as "young people who tend not to have many opportunities to have their voices heard, including young people with disabilities, from an economically disadvantaged or culturally different background, young people in care, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, as well as those from more rural backgrounds and ethnic minorities".

intent on increasing the numbers from the 'seldom heard' categories that participate in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg.

1.2.3.7 National Consultations

A number of consultations with children and young people on a range of issues have been conducted under the auspices of the DCYA in recent years. These consultations include:

- Development of the Children's Code of Advertising (2004)
- Development of the National Recreation Policy (2005)
- Development of a national set of child wellbeing indicators (2005)
- Development of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2006)
- The age of consent for sexual activity (2006)
- Development of the Irish Youth Justice Strategy (2007)
- The misuse of alcohol among young people (2007)
- Mental health consultations with teenagers (2008)
- Consultations on the National Paediatric Hospital (2009)
- Consultations with children and young people in the care of the state (2010)

1.2.3.8 Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee

As noted already, the DCYA recently established a Children and Young People's Partnership Committee to replace the Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group set up in 2006. The Committee's remit is to develop strategic plans to ensure the effective development of Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg and other children and young people's participation structures. The Committee is made up of representatives from the DCYA, the Department of Environment and Local Government, the youth sector (NYCI, Foróige, Youth Work Ireland and other youth organisations), City and County Development Boards, the education sector through the SLSS (Student Council Support Service), the Health Service Executive (HSE), young people and other key stakeholders. It meets four times a year.

1.2.4 Second National Children's Strategy, 2012-2017

A consultation process to develop a second National Children's Strategy was launched by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on 28th March 2011. Consultations took

place in the week of 4th April to 8th April. As with the first NCS, the second strategy will be rooted in the principles of the UNCRC. A team of researchers from Trinity College Dublin led the consultation process and will also analyse the collected data. According to the DCYA, questions included in the survey were designed in conjunction with children and young people to "ask about what's good, what's not good and what they would change about being a child or young person in Ireland today." Questionnaires were available in all schools and Youthreach centres during the consultation week (4-8 April, 2011). The Minister concluded a press release on the new strategy by stating "By helping promote this consultation, we are ensuring that children and young people in Ireland will have their voices heard on issues of importance to them". Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg will be part of this Second National Children's Strategy.

1.3 Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to undertake a critical investigation of the effectiveness of the structures of youth participation which the Irish State has created in the wake of the passing of the National Children's Strategy (NCS) (2000). Limitations imposed upon the sole researcher mean that not all seven of the DCYA participation structures can be studied. In this project, specific attention will be given to the two initiatives which lie at the heart of the NCS - the thirty-four youth councils, 'Comhairle na nÓg', and the annual youth parliament, 'Dáil na nÓg'. These are the two structures that the DCYA maintains give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. According to the DCYA, these structures also encourage active citizenship. Notwithstanding this focus however, tangential contact with other participation structures was also made, specifically through some of the interviews conducted with individuals who are also part of the Children and Young People's Forum (CYPF) and the Children and Young People's Participation Support Team.

With specific respect to Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg, the overarching aim of this study is to address the question: ***Are Irish State youth participation structures effective as mechanisms for teenagers in the Republic of Ireland to have their voices heard and to be active participating citizens?*** Therein, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify how Irish State youth participation structures are operationalised, questioning if they are adult-led or youth-led.

2. To identify the types of issues these participation structures engage with and how these issues are identified.

3. To clarify the types of young person involved in these State youth participation structures, and to further consider if those involved are representative of the wider youth population of the Republic of Ireland.

4. To identify the level of public awareness members of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg feel there is of the two organisations.

1.4 Placing this study

This is not the first study to attempt to critically appraise the effectiveness of the structures created by the Irish State in an effort to extend a greater voice to children and young people in the political process. Nevertheless, those assessments which have been undertaken to date have been written under the auspices of DCYA guidance and appear as officially commissioned reports on Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. Twelve reports concerning the two organisations have been undertaken thus far and they are:

- Six Dáil na nÓg Delegate Reports (2008, 2006, 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001)
- *Review of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg* (2005)
- *Report from Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group* (2007)
- *Report from Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2007-2008* (2009)
- *Evaluation Report: Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2008-2009* (2010)
- *Dáil na nÓg Council Final Evaluation 2009-2010* (2010)
- *Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010* (2011)

The most recent DCYA commissioned report on each organisation is compared to this study's findings in Chapter Eight, the penultimate chapter of this thesis. This study represents the first evaluation of the Irish schemes to have been conducted by an independent scholar from within the Irish academe who is not wholly imbricated in the funding regimes, policy making processes and practitioner communities of the Irish State. As such, this study has been conducted under a remit set by the author rather than one negotiated between the author and State institutions responsible for managing the

schemes.   This is not to imply that it necessarily has greater objectivity as a consequence or is without its own inevitable theoretical, political and ideological slant.

This point requires a more sophisticated exposition.   In his somewhat provocatively titled article 'Qualitative methods: touchy, feely, look-see', Crang (2003: 497) confesses to being a little weary of student work "containing a paragraph of apologia (normally for their whiteness and middle-classness) before proceeding with business-as-usual in their dissertation".   However, he also admits to scepticism around work which seeks to divide positionality in two; the rather formulaic 'insider' which Crang denotes as "good but impossible", and the 'outsider' described as "bad but inevitable".   In this thesis, the researcher's positionality is recognised as having inevitably influenced the recruitment of research participants and undoubtedly shaped the conduct of the interviews and observations.   Concurring with Valentine (1997), this author contends that identity and perceptions of identity shape researcher-participant interactions.   Who we are, what we look like, our age, our gender, our ethnicity - all part-influence the approach to research and practice we adopt.   This researcher acknowledges that all of the following must have shaped the results of the research presented between the covers of this thesis: the researcher is white, she is middle-classed, she is a funded postgraduate student, she is a mother, she is in her forties and she is concerned with pragmatist philosophy.

More generally, this project is not the first study to attempt to critically appraise the effectiveness of structures created to amplify children's voices in the democratic process, although it appears to be the first Irish doctorate study to do so.   Any study which offers a serious critical interrogation of the effectiveness of State provided youth participation structures is immediately confronted with the challenge of defining how effectiveness is to be judged.   This in turn begets philosophical contemplation over the vantage point from which judgments might be best made.   To date, many critiques of state constructed participation mechanisms and state-led programmes to foster more active citizens have been offered from the perspectives of Marxism, Feminism, Racial and Ethnic Studies, Children's studies and their associated epistemologies.   These critiques have tended to lament the class, gender, racial, and adult-centric nature of participation mechanisms and their inability to capture the concerns, issues, fears, and frustrations of youth.

Specifically framed for an alternative vantage point, the critical inquiry presented here has been guided by a set of evaluative procedures suggested by, and derived from, classical pragmatism. The philosophy of classical pragmatism is fully explored in Chapter Two. However, for the moment this project argues that classical pragmatism offers a fresh way of looking at the effectiveness of state experiments designed to extend citizenship to hitherto marginalized voices; here attention is given to the idea of evaluation being best achieved by a researcher who considers themselves but one participant among almost a community of participants. The researcher is guided by, and learns from what the community under review maintains is working in practice. It is conceded that such evaluations may well be conditional and specific to particular times and places and 'what works' now no doubt will change over time. Additionally, what was decided as 'working' was the researcher's [possibly] subjective evaluation of same. Candidly, the researcher is comfortable with this and metaphorically holds her hands up; infused as this study is with the principles of classical pragmatism, it presents (at least for the moment) ***what works and what did not*** for those directly involved in Irish State youth participation.

1.4.1 Placing this study within Children's Geographies

This project seeks to make a contribution to the further development of the field of Children's Geographies. The sub-discipline of Children's Geographies is relatively young, particularly in comparison with other branches of critical geography, for example Marxist Geography or Feminist Geography. Tracing the development of Children's Geographies over the last three decades, Holloway and Valentine (2000) begin with the observation that unlike some other social groups, children have not always been a core concern of Human Geography. Whilst Marxist Geography first introduced class as the privileged axis of difference, it is true that the more recent mutation of Marxist Geography into Critical Human Geography has permitted a wider range of social geographies to be undertaken on struggles based upon gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, generation and age. Even so, it seems children and youth have struggled more so than other groups to capture the attention of researchers and have arrived as late entrants onto the research scene. Arguably, teenagers seem to be even more 'neglected' than other child cohorts.

As far back as the 1970s, children's spatial cognition and mapping abilities were investigated by a variety of commentators and across academic disciplines. Valentine and McKendrick (1997), Holloway and Valentine (2000) and McKendrick (2000) cite research by commentators including Aitken (1994), Bunge (1973), Bunge and Bordessa (1975), Blaut and Stea, (1971, 1974) which focused on children's mapping abilities, cognition, attachments children have to place and their access to, and use of space. So innovative was the area of Children's Geographies during the 1970s, that Hart (1979: 9) states that his research did not adopt a single theoretical framework as "to conjure one up … would have been most unrealistic". Hart proceeded with a theoretical framework which he labelled an "eclectic-ecological-field approach" to better understand how children experience place. Nevertheless, as late as 1999, Matthews and Limb (1999: 61) maintained that although there was on-going research at that time into the geography of children, much of it was marred by "narrow disciplinary perspectives" and methodologies not sufficiently engaged with the "lifeworld of children in the here and now". The authors went on to call for an agenda for Children's Geographies that was driven not merely by the desire to conduct research, but which also strived to produce outcomes which actively promoted the empowerment and participation of children in society.

Around this time, Holloway and Valentine (2000) pointed to evidence of a two-fold spilt in Children's Geographies. One body of work drew upon the psychological aspect of children's spatial cognition and mapping abilities, whilst another body of scholarship focused on the sociological aspect of children's lives and efforts to give them a voice. According to Holloway and Valentine (2000), as the twentieth century tipped into the next millennium, the latter was becoming more dominant; childhood was to be approached as a socially constructed stage of the lifecourse and was thoroughly politicized. As the social and political turn within Children's Geographies has gathered pace, a number of new concerns have presented themselves.

In 2003, Matthews (2003: 3) asserted that the [then] new *Children's Geographies* journal would have a strong theoretical focus as there was already "a strong pedigree of studies focusing on the structural circumstances of childhood". Children's Geographies had come of age and would strive to deal with issues germane to children, young people, researchers and academics under theoretical, methodological and policy

headings. However, other commentators, even to this point, appear less sure of the theoretical commitment of some researchers in the Children's Geographies arena. Vanderbeck (2008: 397) argues that if Children's Geographies is to secure a future within the discipline of Geography, its theoretical assumptions and their associated political repercussions must be better articulated. Horton and Kraftl (2005: 134) consider that if Children's Geographies do not engage with issues in more innovative ways, they are in danger of becoming "incrementally less theoretical" and worse, could become "unprogressive … boring …somewhat reactionary, cul-de-sac". The authors also question if the discipline of Children's Geographies has become bounded and normative - there are so many norms as to 'how' research within the Children's Geographies discipline is conducted that this author would argue that what does not fit literally does not fit!

Furthermore, Children's Geographies needs to tackle some 'uncomfortable issues' most specifically in relation to this study, the theoretical, empirical and political cases in relation to adult involvement and authority. This is rarely discussed within Children's Geographies or associated disciplines Vanderbeck (2008) argues. In a field which understandably repeatedly advocates for increased child agency and voice, there is an almost palpable nervousness among scholars to be seen to be challenging theoretical understandings of the competent child. Within the pages of this thesis, the concept of the "overly complete vision of the child" (Vanderbeck, 2008: 397) is bracketed and set aside in order to critique existing youth participation structures. In these structures young people enter pre-existing participatory mechanisms. Such structures have been established by adults and in the main are run by adults, with greater or lesser involvement by youth members, depending on the dynamics of any particular group. This study seeks to uncover 'what works' within these participation structures. Vanderbeck 2008) contends that given the popularity and widespread acceptance of the New Social Studies of Childhood (NSSC) approach to studies involving children and young people and the accompanying child rights discourse, scholars are reluctant to challenge theoretical visions of the competent child, lest they be perceived as anti-child. Studies which do not sufficiently condemn adult involvement in child and youth participation appear to jar with those that do. While this may be something of a [deliberate] overstatement, it takes courage to suggest that what is there may not be so bad. Although undoubtedly it could be improved upon, it could also actually be

working. Ironically the underlying thesis of this study, that is to propose incremental change to existing structures rather than revolutionary rejection, appears quite radical.

Located against the backdrop of the more recent social and political turns within Children's Geographies, and drawing upon the philosophy of classical pragmatism to frame an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Irish State's provision of structures of participation, this project seeks to respond to each of these concerns in a purposeful way. It argues that classical pragmatism offers a distinctive perspective on the question of the effectiveness of structures. It demands a distinctive methodology to answer these questions and offers a distinctive set of policy prescriptions. Classical pragmatism contributes to this thesis in three particular ways. Firstly, the philosophy offers a set of theoretical tools through which a new generation of critical inquiry into participation structures might be undertaken. It encourages researchers to interact with the communities they are researching; it is crucial that any evaluative framework and evaluative judgements are based on actual empirical outcomes. Knowledge that emerges from such a process is not infallible; it is simply the best currently available (Webb, 2000: cited in Shields, 2003: 519) – it works or it does not. In effect practical application is imperative. Under pragmatism, knowledge is considered social in that it constructed by people interacting with one another. For a pragmatist, knowledge needs to be "useful, that is, to enable humans to accomplish their purposes. If it did not there would be no social agreement" (Barnes, 2008: 1545).

Secondly, based on these demands, classical pragmatism *de facto* requires a rigorous child-centric methodology. The recognition that children possess agency and are not merely potential, future adults has been a central tenet of much of the work conducted in Children's Geographies (Hart, 1979; James *et al.*, 1998; McKendrick, 2000; Kelley, 2006 for example). Nevertheless, this recognition has not always been accorded an equivalent status in the research process itself. Inspired by the commitment to reconsider children as active participants and not passive research subjects, many researchers approach their participants almost as co-researchers; their voices are central to the findings of research studies. It is their words which often give rise to the recommendations which flow from research. There remains an on-going challenge nevertheless to ensure that research is conducted with children as opposed to on children. As such, one purpose of the thesis is to develop a grounded theory approach

to the study of youth attitudes to participating in democratic structures provided to them by the State and to consolidate the status of grounded theory as a key method for Children's Geographies.

Thirdly, given classical pragmatism's emphasis upon 'what works', the approach taken within this project was to formulate a critical analysis of participation structures already created by the Irish State with a view to improving these structures, so as to make them as effective as possible for members, young people in Ireland more generally and the communities in which they reside. In this sense, the project adopts a concept of relevance which aspires to produce research which is capable of generating incremental change within the system rather than revolutionary rejection; what it refers to as 'meaningful relevance' or what Staeheli and Mitchell's (2005: 364) call "relevance as application". In summing up pragmatism's usefulness for the practice of humanistic geography, Smith (1984) contends that it is an action-orientated philosophy. Thus there is a responsibility on analysts to formulate concepts in use as opposed to in the abstract where their practical use is not immediately apparent. In line with Smith (1984) this study wishes to speak to audiences inside but crucially also outside academia.

Finally this study wishes to contribute to debates about policy. A recurring theme running through Children's Geographies is the call for high impact and policy relevant research (Smith, 2004; Kelley, 2006). Thus research in Children's Geographies has been conducted with a sense of social justice and injustice. Due to their enforced invisibility in policy, planning and resource allocation processes, the status of children as autonomous citizens has been reduced. Arguably, children are one of society's most marginal groups and have been rendered mute by adult-centric state systems, even when these systems have sought to provide for them. It is not enough to study children from the confines of the ivory tower of the academe; the field of Children's Geographies has a responsibility to contribute to the empowerment of children and to the fortification of their capacities to secure access to the public realm. Children's Geographies need to make a difference to the way the world works. Research needs to be useful and meaningful; it needs to be relevant and make an impact in vital ways. Linked to this concept of 'meaningful relevance' is the potential influence Children's Geographies can have in relation to policy.

"Is there a place for children's geographers in the policy arena?" asks Smith (2004: 157-161). Undoubtedly there is she maintains. Furthermore she stresses that geographers can bring a fresh perspective into the policy reform arena. And yet for some, policy is simply not appealing. Not all academics have an interest in policy or practice (Shields, 2006). However, surely in times of economic recessions, academics are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the 'relevance' of their work and to demonstrate ways in which their research can benefit society. To this researcher, policy formation and reform seems to be a most appropriate vehicle to demonstrate 'what works' to audiences beyond academia. Given that so much of Children's Geographies is concerned with the here and now of children's lives, policy appears an area where children's geographers can have real utility. Furthermore, for those who fully promote and subscribe to the concept of youth voice, surely policy is an area that they *must* contribute to? Where better for children and young people to articulate their public voices than by contributing to the formation and improvement of policy? The DCYA certainly refers to children and young people as being participants in the policy process. This study will attempt to ascertain if they actually are and if the young people involved feel that they are considered active participants.

1.4.2 'Labelling' this study

Defining youth undoubtedly presented one of the greatest challenges encountered in the design of this research project. There are "multiple and conflicting definitions" as to when the temporal division between child and adult in contemporary western societies occurs (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997: 220). According to Article 1 of the UNCRC, a child "means every human being below the age of eighteen years". The UNCRC further delineates its conception of the child into two: the first of which is the understanding of the child as a recipient of adult care and concern. The second UNCRC conception of the child is that of children being contributing participants to decisions which affect their own lives and to their communities and societies (Children's Rights Alliance [Ireland]).

In many jurisdictions, people over eighteen years of age are entitled to vote in national elections, purchase and consume alcohol and are generally considered to have reached adulthood. According to Lalor *et al.* (2007), it is not uncommon for the label 'young people' to include anyone up to twenty five years of age. For example, this is the

threshold age used in the [Irish] Youth Work Act, 2001 and also in the National Development Plan, 2003-2007 (Department of Education and Science, 2003). Referring to the young people involved in this research as 'adolescents' was initially considered but subsequently rejected. It is argued that the word 'adolescence' has to date been imbued with psychological connotations which extend beyond the remit of this study. Might teenager be simpler, the researcher considered? Weller (2006) argues that a more coherent study of teenage geographies needs to take place; not necessarily standalone geographies of teenagers but rather their geographies ought to be considered part of a network of geographical studies linking research with both children and adults. Matthews *et al.* (1998b) found teenage geographies of use of place and place behaviour to be similarly neglected.

Of course, labelling itself can be problematic and fraught with difficulties as is evident in research in areas such as disability studies for example. Who decides the labels – the researcher or the participants? Participants in Weller's study resisted being called 'children' as they felt they had largely moved beyond childhood. Overwhelmingly they preferred the 'label' teenagers. Young people involved in this study had similar views although they alternated between referring to themselves as 'young people' and 'teenagers'. It was the term 'children' they rejected most. Accordingly, this study agrees with Weller when she says that "Placing focus on teenagers' geographies is simply more respectful" given that Children's Geographies as a sub discipline of Human Geography is predicated on the principles of empowerment (Weller, 2006: 104). This research *de facto* presents a critical analysis of participation available to all those aged between twelve and nineteen years of age, that is 'teenagers'. In this way it seeks to add to the field of teenagers' geographies within the broader sub-discipline of Children's Geographies.

1.5 Thesis structure

This chapter introduces the study and establishes its contextual and temporal settings. **Chapter Two** presents a review of the academic literature and outlines respectively the philosophical orientation of the study (classical pragmatism), the concepts of citizenship and active citizenship and finally youth participation. The methodological approach taken in the study is described in **Chapter Three**. In this (two part) chapter the

research design is outlined and the operational details of the qualitative methods employed are fully considered in Part I. Part II of Chapter Three discusses grounded theory (GT) which was the chosen method of data handling and analysis. **Chapters Four** through **Seven** present the principal substantive findings of the study, and focus respectively upon the categories of 'administration of schemes', 'communicating participation', 'senses of ownership', and 'surrogate benefits'. **Chapter Eight** presents the analysis of the study's findings and discusses them in relation to the extant literature. A grounded substantive theory is offered in this chapter and ideal typical examples of what constitutes effective practice and what does not are presented. The thesis is concluded in **Chapter Nine** where the aim and objectives of the work, its theoretical framing, its methodological and analytical approach, and its substantive analysis are drawn together and their widest theoretical meanings and policy implications proposed, ruminated and digested.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Foundation & Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Government youth participation statements and flagship policy documents outline almost a 'participation utopia'; all actors apparently in agreement that the voices of young people must be heard in matters affecting them and that provision of new platforms for youth participation is a valued priority of the government. A more cautious view is evident among some public and academic commentators however. Concerns about slick participation rhetoric, doubts about practices which seem to assume a lack of competency among some groupings, power imbalances and the insensitive managing and shaping of youth participation schemes by adults pervade the literature. Additionally the theoretical perspectives and frameworks through which critical assessments are undertaken remain complex. According to Reid *et al.* (2008: 2) the wide range of theoretical positions and methodological approaches which can be identified in the participation literature, whilst "complicating the field" are undoubtedly also a source of "productive tensions" which may bear fruit.

This chapter seeks to set out the analytical framework through which this project will frame and critique the effectiveness of Irish State structures of youth participation. It also concerns itself with how the concept of active citizenship in relation to children and young people is treated in the literature. Some of the questions raised in political debates are who can be active citizens, how citizens can be active, and to what political and ideological ends is citizenship being directed. These critiques take on a particular urgency in the case of younger people, who often escape or who fall out with citizenship rights and responsibilities assumed to be pertinent to adults. However, before reviewing how the concepts of active citizenship and participation have been theorised and conceptualised in the academic literature, this chapter begins by proposing a theoretical framework through which the question of the effectiveness of the youth participation structures which exist (in Ireland) might be approached, that is through an engagement with the philosophy of classical pragmatism. It offers a novel and valuable framework through which the presumption that Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are working to

give young people in Ireland a meaningful role in the Irish democratic process can be scrutinised.

2.2 Classical pragmatism

Classical pragmatism is a philosophy of action and of practical achievement. In this study classical pragmatism has been used to frame the critical inquiry into the effectiveness of on-going efforts by the Irish State to provide a structure through which the voices of Irish young people could meaningfully impact upon the democratic process. Its key defining principles (discussed in Section 2.2.2) largely mirror those of the researcher - "Ideas were labelled true when they enabled us to get things done, when they coped effectively with the world" (Barnes, 2008: 1544). Thus it is the core tenets of the philosophy and the relatively recent appropriation of pragmatism by some geography scholars that are most pertinent to this study.

The history of pragmatism is interesting, all the more so in that this was a deliberately fashioned philosophy, developed by academic thinkers seeking to 'free' philosophy from the ivory [exclusive] towers of academia and bring it into the minds and consciousness of outside audiences. Emerging from a milieu of social, political and economic upheaval in late nineteenth century America, pragmatism grew out of the different strands of intellectual life at that time. It emerged from theories of cultural pluralism; from political progressivism, from the fascination with pure science and the logic of scientific inquiry. It grew from debates about probability theory which sought to act as a method to cope with uncertainty and randomness, and from spreading historicist approaches to studying culture (Menand, 1997). Darwin's theory of evolution, gradually gaining acceptance at the latter end of the nineteenth century, itself influenced pragmatism's evolution. While none of these strands of thought were essentially pragmatist *per se*, through the prism of pragmatism, they became more sharply defined contends Bernstein (2010) and Menand (1997).

Smith (1999: 2) asserts that although thoughts from abroad undoubtedly shaped American philosophical patterns of development, such philosophical currents were imported and were not indigenous to post Civil War America. America had not yet found "its own philosophical voice" (Smith, 1999: 2). However, towards the end of the

nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century, America was to find its philosophical voice via classical pragmatism. Further, its 'voice' impacted not only on academic philosophy but also on the arts, law, education, religion and political and social theory (Thayer, 1981). Delivering a lecture at the University of California in 1898, William James referred to the ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce. Contained within Peirce's now seminal essay of 1878 is his pragmatic maxim, the essence of which is pragmatism itself; actions and results determined in light of their practical consequences: "*Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object* (Peirce 1878, cited in Menand, 1997: xiii).

Classical pragmatism flourished as an intellectual movement in America in the years following James' 1898 lecture. Bernstein (2010: 11) contends that individuals involved with the movement, although from different backgrounds, were able to converge and debate together, and were freed of intellectual constraints by the very fact that there was no single, dominant philosophical heritage in academic America at that time.

2.2.1 Key figures of classical pragmatism

Many key figures in American history are associated with the philosophy of classical pragmatism but its three main proponents are generally accepted to be Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Box 2.1 contains a brief biography of Peirce and James. A fuller sketch of Dewey then follows. This is not to suggest that Peirce and James are less important to the philosophy than Dewey; merely it was the Deweyan variant with its attendant focus on children, education and philosophy for change that influenced the form of this research most keenly. In outlining what Deweyan pragmatism stands for, Jackson (2009: 60) contends that "it is deeply moral in its entailments and fundamentally humanistic in its orientation". It is this understanding of doing and applying philosophy that connected most intuitively with the desire to produce useful and meaningful research, outlined in Chapter One.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was the son of a Professor of Mathematics at Harvard College, one of the foremost mathematicians in the United States during the nineteenth century. Menand, (1997: 3) describes how Peirce worked as a lecturer in Logic at John Hopkins University from 1879 to 1884. Personal scandals including a public divorce and remarriage meant that his contract at the university was not renewed. Peirce published only one book during his lifetime, *Photometric Researchers* (1878), but his published and unpublished papers ran to the thousands of pages, approximately twelve thousand and eighty thousand respectively. He died in poverty and isolation as a result of alienating friends and failed business ventures.

William James (1842-1910) was born in New York City, the first of five children to Henry and Mary James. He was an older brother of the famous novelist, Henry James. He studied in Harvard, forming a close friendship with Charles Sanders Peirce. He also part financially supported Peirce in Peirce's later life. His only degree was from the Harvard Medical School. He also taught psychology and philosophy at Harvard from 1872 until he retired in 1907.

It is James who is credited with popularizing the concept of pragmatism far more than Peirce (Menand, 1997: xv-xvi). He placed great emphasis on the practical effects of belief and assertion and stressed that debates between philosophers must be drawn from experience – a key defining principle of classical pragmatism. William James outlined the principle of Peirce's pragmatism which was to "attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve - what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare" (James, 1907: 18).

Box 2.1: Charles Sanders Peirce and William James

2.2.1.1 John Dewey (1859-1952)

Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont and in effect was a generation behind Peirce and James. He taught at the University of Michigan (1884-1894) where he formed a friendship with another pragmatist, George Herbert Mead. In 1894 he joined the faculty of the University of Chicago and in 1896 opened the famous Laboratory School, an experiment in progressive education (Menand, 1997). Dewey is nationally (in America), and also internationally respected as an education reformer and published highly influential works such as *Democracy and Education* (1944). He is known for his work on logic and inquiry; the notion that all inquiry is performed by agents, not passive observers. Children, for Dewey, were not empty vessels in which to pour knowledge; rather they are shaped by their environment and should be encouraged to pursue active inquiry with theory added where necessary (Ormerod, 2006: 901). Dewey emphasised the importance of practical problem solving. He favoured moving the emphasis away from the big questions of metaphysics to the 'smaller' questions of everyday life of specific individuals and groups (Ormerod, 2006). He spoke of

democracy as a way of life and he claimed that self-realisation demands community and engagement in the collective life of the community (Menand, 1997).

Dewey is particularly associated with the instrumentalist variant of classical pragmatism and he frequently characterized the philosophy as "instrumentalism, or instrumental experimentalism" (Bernstein, 2010: 11). Ideas do not wait to be discovered but instead are gradually uncovered through experience and social experiments, validity is judged by practical, real-world effects (Smith, 2009). Hildebrand (2008: x) contends that Dewey's motivations were ameliorative; his moral impetus was for humans to learn through experience, and thus grow. Dewey himself explains; "Knowledge as an act is bringing some of our dispositions to consciousness with a view to straightening out a perplexity, by conceiving the connection between ourselves and the world in which we live" (Dewey, 1929 in Menand 1997: 217).

2.2.2 Defining characteristics of classical pragmatism

The original pragmatists never reached a consensus on exactly what their pragmatist philosophy entailed; indeed Menand (1997) points to differences in thought among the original classical pragmatists as being undeniable. Peirce's orientation was metaphysical and logical; James' path was one of psychology and personal experience while Dewey placed an emphasis on the biological and functional structures in individual life and society (Menand, 1997: 3).

Notwithstanding these differences, common themes within the philosophy can be identified. Themes such as its anti-foundationalist nature, its acceptance of fallibilism and its emphasis on community and inquiry are all part of the lexicon of classical pragmatism. It emphasises pluralism and it brackets experience and truth; rooting everything in the practical experiences of everyday life. Each of these themes will now be considered.

2.2.2.1 Pluralism

Smith (2009) maintains that above all else, pragmatism is characterised by a deep-rooted pluralism. Pragmatists believe that there is no one single truth, for ideas are constituted and come about through a variety of experiences and contexts. However, this is not an à la carte philosophy. Classical pragmatism's tradition was one of

"engaged fallibilistic pluralism" (Bernstein, 1988: 397) which means taking one's fallibility seriously. This is not an excuse for when research and work go wrong, but rather this type of fallibilistic pluralism should be used an impetus and a motivation to keep trying. Bernstein (1988) refers to the responsibilities inherent within such pluralism. However much we feel we are correct, we must be willing to listen to the opinions of others. Furthermore, it is normative in the sense that one should engage, listen, and communicate with others, even those seemingly diametrically opposed to oneself in order for a healthy and growing communal life to flourish (Hildebrand, 2008).

William James wrote a series of lectures in 1907 in which he attempted to clarify what pragmatism was, and what it was not. Pragmatism does not claim to be able to produce a single, unified answer to an inquiry. Indeed, an acceptance that there are different ways of doing things, that different values and beliefs can co-exist can actually be liberating and cathartic. James refers to pragmatism as "harmonizing" ancient philosophies, and that it brings strands of nominalism, of utilitarianism and of positivism together for it has a "disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions, and metaphysical abstractions" (1907: 21). In pragmatism, 'truth' is made up of multiple experiences. Two years later James (1909) went on to contrast pragmatic pluralism with monism. For James, pragmatism is akin to a federal republic rather than a kingdom. However we reach a conclusion to a problem or inquiry, there is always something else that can be added or taken away. Monism on the other hand, according to James, insists that everything relates to everything else, for ultimately everything can be telescoped together in "the great total conflux" (James, 1909 cited in Menand, 1997: 132). James puts great emphasis on the word 'may'. The world *may* exist as a complete universe but it also *may* exist as a "universe only strung-along, not rounded in and closed". The pragmatist accepts that either could be true. There are those who cannot accept the premises of pluralism, fallibilism and humanism. To such people, James issued a warning, advising that nobody knows the whole truth or every answer. James' remedy to doubts about pluralism is quite simply more pluralism, just as his answer to doubts over pragmatism is more pragmatism (Stuhr, 1999: 43).

2.2.2.2 Experience and truth

The classical pragmatists were all (in some way) at the forefront of cultural, social, political and educational life in the new progressive America which was emerging at the end of the nineteenth century. Although their opinions often diverged, the value of experience is a thread running through all their work; particularly experience borne out of community, not singular endeavour. Dewey maintained that the only way to achieve individual fulfilment was to engage in the collective life. For Dewey, learning was itself a collaborative activity. There could be no distinction between knowing and actually doing – both are "indivisible aspects of the same process" (Menard, 1997: xxiii). Deweyan pragmatism was committed to change. Hildebrand (2008: 5) contends that Dewey's motives were melioristic – Dewey not only wrote about change but also he wrote for change. He describes Dewey's 'touchstone' as being the need for philosophy to move beyond a priori postulation and engage with "the problems of men" (sic).

The original triangle of classical pragmatists (Peirce, James and Dewey) very often had diverse opinions but for all of them, truth and what constitutes truth was one of the philosophy's key considerations. For Peirce, with a background steeped in mathematics, semiotics and logic, truth was what worked. Nevertheless, Peirce believed that ultimately, intelligent inquirers one day would agree on 'a one truth' (Campbell, 1992: 3-5). William James' interpretation of truth was more fluid. If truth satisfied the litmus test of being workable, ideas or philosophical positions could be deemed as true, Campbell (1992) contends.

Dewey was less concerned with the semantics of truth, considering the actual word 'truth' problematic in that it implies finality, certainty and "a correspondence with real reality" (Hildebrand, 2008: 60). Compelled by his interlocutors to explain what he meant by 'truth', Dewey outlined his concept of truth as being what he referred to as 'warranted assertability'. Attention is directed to the process of inquiry and the event of truth-making (Hildebrand, 2008). Dewey explains; "Experience is not a rigid and closed thing; it is vital, and hence growing. Experience may welcome and assimilate all that the most exact and penetrating thought disorders". Dewey proffers that by using the right methods in education it is possible to eliminate what he refers to as "the waste

that comes from routine and lazy dependence on the past" (Dewey, LW, 1933: 277-278).

2.2.2.3 Anti-foundationalism

The pragmatists did not themselves use the term 'anti-foundationalism' and its meaning here should not be construed in its present day sense, that is, an attack on the very notion of philosophy (Bernstein, 1988: 385). However, Bernstein contends that while the actual phrase was not used, Peirce in particular anticipated anti-foundational arguments in a series of articles in 1868 when he passionately rejected any idea that knowledge is based on fixed foundations. In seeking "to exorcise what Dewey later called 'the quest for certainty'" (Bernstein, 1988: 386), Peirce was asking philosophers to jettison the previously held notion that philosophy had absolute beginnings, endings or certainties. Peirce put it bluntly: "this does not deny that what cannot be conceived today may be conceivable tomorrow... [This] speedily sweeps all metaphysical rubbish out of one's house" (Peirce, 1904 cited in Menand, 1997: 58-59). Ormerod (2006: 897) further outlines Peirce's argument, stating that investigations for Peirce should be co-operative ventures and "ordinary inquiry is impressed by the number and variety of the arguments supporting a conclusion".

Barnes (2008) further delineates the pragmatists' position on pre-existing knowledge. For them, ideas cannot exist in a perfect form but instead emerge as a result of experience, in response to different situations, in different places and at different times. This, Barnes claims, is possibly one of the most important of the classical pragmatists' shared beliefs. James rejected the idea that the truth of an idea must be static; instead truth becomes, truth happens and the truth of an idea is made out of experience and therefore is all the time evolving (James, 1907 cited in Menand, 1997: 114). In pragmatism there can be no fixed, absolute knowledge for it emerges from one's experience[s]. Positing that pragmatism's anti-foundationalism could perhaps be more aptly termed *afoundationalism*, Webb (2004: 484) maintains that dogmatic idealistic ontologies and versions of extreme relativism are reactions to each other and share presuppositions which the classical pragmatists simply found unnecessary.

2.2.2.4 Fallibilism

This term implies a commitment to an acknowledgement that beliefs, even if strongly held could possibly be false. The pragmatist understands that others may hold different, even opposing viewpoints at times. However, the pragmatist can accept this as the pragmatist is open-minded. Nor does the pragmatist claim to be the authority, in other words the final expert on matters. James describes pragmatism as both a 'mediator' and a 'reconciler'; it will entertain any hypothesis, any evidence (1907: 31). Classical pragmatists are acutely aware of the "fragility of knowledge" and how facts can be modified in reaction to experience, (Smith, 2009: 422). Within pragmatism, no question can be completely unanswerable; no answer can go completely unchallenged or be considered completely true. There is no inquiry that cannot be open to further investigation and criticism (Bernstein, 1988).

In essence, fallibilism is the antithesis of foundationalism described already and is the antidote to a priori postulation; the notion of philosophy and the academe being closeted together in an ivory tower. To the classical pragmatists, philosophy itself is inherently fallible, as is humankind itself. There can always be more to do with an inquiry. Failure is not the problem but rather how we deal with failure for even in failure, something can be learned for future inquiries (Peirce, 1877). Clarifying what Peirce meant by 'fallibilism', Dewey maintains that "because we live in a world in process, the future, although continuous with the past, is not its bare repetition ... to those who are naturalistically inclined, the attendant "fallibility" will be but a spur to do better the work which this volume attempts to do" (Dewey, 1938: 40). Dewey's *Logic: The theory of inquiry* was, as Dewey explains, but one approach to problem solving. However, he stresses it should not be considered the definitive publication on how to solve problematic situations. What he was trying to do was create an approach to assist others with their co-operative inquiries although as Dewey reminds us (and thus echoing Peirce's thoughts on inquiry outlined already), as long as an inquiry is continuing, work on it can never truly finished for inquiry is constantly evolving.

2.2.2.5 Community of Inquiry

Pragmatism promotes the notion of individual members of the community working together, as Menand (1997: xxiv) states, "participation in the collective life". Knowledge is social and is fashioned from the top down and the bottom up – the expert

and the community work together to solve problems (Menand, 1997). However, this does not preclude individuality and diversity of thought. Diversity in particular is one of the hallmarks of classical pragmatism. Social knowledge is useful as Barnes puts it (2008: 1545) "to enable humans to accomplish their purposes". Dewey explains: "In opening new avenues to trained intelligence, such a community would fill the gap which now exists between theory and practice, between the intellectual and the executive type, and thereby also promote the integration of the individual" (Dewey, LW, 1933: 71).

Dewey was involved in at least two communities [of inquiry]: his own laboratory school in Chicago which pioneered new teaching methods and asserted that children and young people needed to be equipped with the skills of productive citizenship so that they may lead fulfilled lives (Norton, *et al.*, 1994). A second community inquiry was with his friend and colleague, Jane Addams and the Hull House social settlement (Seigfried, 1999). Seigfried refers to the social dimension of ethics as being of paramount importance to all pragmatists. What this meant for Dewey and Addams in particular was an emphasis on democracy as a way of life. For Dewey, democracy can be likened to a piece of machinery that can be judged on its effectiveness and efficiency, Seigfried (1999) maintains.

Democracy was the middle ground between laissez-faire individualism and a moral system which could act as a panacea for social ills (Smith, 1984). Not democracy in its purely political manifestation contends Smith; Deweyan democracy has a looser and more tolerant interpretation. His democracy shares human experience (collectively) for a practical purpose and inevitably will most likely always involve some sort of compromise. Empirical consequences and not what is popular should control the nature of what is being inquired. Dewey (1938: 490) maintained that "an inquirer in a given special field appeals to the experiences of the community of his fellow workers for confirmation and correction of his results". Evans (2000) points to Deweyan inquiry as not being a means to find the one truth, but rather Deweyan inquiry seeks to reduce doubt and restore balance to a problematic situation.

Considering how to make social science practical, Bohman (2002: 506) explains that the pragmatists socialised and democratised expert knowledge by placing it in its social and political context. There is a place for the expert in pragmatist inquiries, but that place is

not a privileged one. Expert knowledge must be subjected to public scrutiny in relation to how successful it is at problem-solving. Thus the functions of the expert and the politician are merged through a process of critical interaction. Facts and knowledge must be shared and communicated. Dewey (1927: 177) maintained "dissemination is something other than scattering at large ... communication of the results of social inquiry is the same thing as the formation of public opinion." Furthermore, he argued that "the tools of social inquiry be clumsy as long as they are forged in places and under conditions remote from contemporary events" (Dewey, 1927: 181).

2.2.3 Falling out of favour

The burgeoning of linguistic, analytic philosophy in the aftermath of the Second World War saw classical pragmatism relegated to the academic doldrums, according to Bernstein (2010: 12). He cites possible reasons for this which include that it was considered too vague and not philosophically rigorous. Additionally, a significant number of philosophical immigrants, some of whom had been associated with the Vienna Circle, entered the American academic philosophy arena (Bernstein, 2010: 12). The socialist preference of many members of the Vienna Circle, coupled with the rise of Nazism across much of Europe, meant that analytic philosophy spread more quickly in America than might have been the case if these forces were not present (Barnes, 2008). Even today, many philosophy students in some of the most prestigious graduate schools in America do not read the works of the classical pragmatists. Menand (1997: xxv) argues that pragmatism was superseded by other schools of philosophical thought but he warns that to claim it was completely eclipsed by other philosophies is misleading. Bernstein (2010) agrees. Although it was eclipsed by other schools of thought, this was partly because pragmatists themselves were reluctant to ally themselves to a 'school of thought' (Menand, 1997).

2.2.4 Revival of interest

Work by Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty's (1980) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* ignited renewed interest in pragmatism and in the writings of Dewey, James, Peirce and their contemporaries. This re-ignition of interest has occurred among academics and commentators on the left and right of the political divide: on the 'left' in the form of Cornel West who draws on Dewey but also on Marx and on progressive theologians; and on the 'right' by Richard Posner, appointed as Judge on the US Court

of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit (Barnes, 2008) – fascinating examples of the malleable nature of the philosophy already referred to.

2.2.5 Pragmatism and Geography

Interest in tethering geography and pragmatism together have been invigorated of late with commentators including Hilde (2003), Sheppard, (2004), Hepple (2008), Allen (2008), Barnes (2008), Cutchin (2008) and Smith (2005, 2009) all reflecting on its usefulness within different aspects of the discipline. Hepple (2008) in particular traces the links between pragmatism and geography maintaining that the history of the two in the early decades of the twentieth century *is* interwoven although not always explicitly so. Considering if geography was immune to the dominance of pragmatism in American social thought at the end of the nineteenth century, Hepple posits that connections between geography and pragmatism are only beginning to be mapped.

Some of these connections seem to be simple associations of pragmatists with important figures within geography. Many, although not all, are in the physical geography arena; Charles Sanders Peirce and his father before him for example both worked for the United States Coastal Survey. Geologist Nathaniel Shaler was a colleague of William James and Royce while they were at Harvard. Another American geologist, Grove K. Gilbert was a correspondent of Peirce. Similarly geomorphologist Chamberlain's method of multiple working hypotheses was embedded in pragmatic thought. Hepple (2008) identifies links between Dewey and geography in Chicago. For example, Gilbert White's work on natural resources - elements of Dewey's influence are evident in White's research according to Hepple.

Another influential link with geography is that of Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess and their work on urban sociology. Jackson and Smith (1984) discuss Park and his pragmatic heritage through his work on urban sociology. Park, they advise, looked to the work of James and his contention that 'the real world' was borne out of the experience of men and women, and not necessarily in texts of 'knowledge'. Pragmatism's stamp on social science in early twentieth century America was in urban ethnography, Park is generally considered one of its founding fathers. Jackson and Smith contend that that for many intellectuals in America at the close of the nineteenth century (a time of massive social, political and economic change), pragmatism was the

product of optimism, founded on the understanding that society would be changed through the good work of men and women. Conceding that Park's human ecology may now appear anachronistic, Jackson and Smith (1984) point to it being warmly received at that time, offering possible answers to problems of the day. Park, they advise, did not consider urbanization the end of democracy but rather "the beginning of a new spatial pattern and an evolving moral order". More recently Smith (2009: 423-424) has distilled the influence of pragmatism in geography to some key areas, outlined in Box 2.2.

John W. Frazier's work of 1981 is possibly the earliest explicit example of pragmatism in geography. Frazier valued its emphasis on mixing knowledge and error through experience with the result of invigorating applied geography and thus helping promoting human welfare.

The interactionist tradition within the Chicago School and its accompanying emphasis on encounter and engagement were self-consciously inspired by pragmatism.

The non-representational geographies of Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and Nigel Thrift were influenced by the pragmatist tradition. Methods which emphasise the merit of knowing the world through experience, means of creating the future through performance have found expression in pragmatism.

Trevor Barnes' research in economic geography has been inspired by later pragmatists such as Rorty.

Gary Bridge used the ideas of Dewey and Habermas in his urban geography research, rethinking the city and the public realm.

Emotional geographies have found pragmatism accommodating, using the ideas of Mead in particular to connect understandings of the psyche with the practicalities of the body.

A Deweyan understanding of uncertainty has been rediscovered of late in Malcolm Cutchin's work in health geography.

Box 2.2: The influence of pragmatism on discipline of geography
Smith (2009: 423-424)

2.2.6 A note on 'what works'

The pragmatic axiom of 'what works' has been mentioned previously but requires some clarification. At its most stark, within classical pragmatism knowledge is only useful when coupled with action. Essentially nothing is true or false; it either works or it does not. However, such a blunt binary is not particularly 'useful' and seems too harsh for a study which investigates the participation practice of children, young people, their adult gatekeepers and the different experiences each brings to the participation process. How

therefore, can classical pragmatism be used to progress the critique of the structures under review in this study?

Dewey sought to bring 'pragmatic' truth into the very nature of inquiry; in relation to children he believed that they had to experience life in order to gain knowledge. He sought to realise this ideal with his Laboratory School, a deliberately progressive institution founded in 1896. Self-consciously challenging conventional conservative attitudes about childhood education, Dewey wanted his Chicago school to become a cooperative community (Harms and De Pencier, 1996: 1). Thus learning itself becomes a collaborative activity. This then explains the idea of knowledge only being useful if coupled with action. For Dewey, there was no distinction between the two; they are both intrinsic parts of the same process – "we learn in the progressivist phrase, by doing: we take a piece of acquired knowledge into a concrete situation, and the results we get constitute a new piece of knowledge, which we carry over into our next encounter with our environment" (Menand, 1997: xxiii-xxiv).

Thus 'what works' is somewhat arbitrary; 'what works' today may not always work. 'What works' is not static, it can change over time, in different contexts and crucially as a result of experience. The philosophy of classical pragmatism is concerned with considering the possibility that there may be other, more useful ways of knowing and interacting with the world (Wood and Smith, 2008). Indeed Wood and Smith argue that ideas within pragmatism are 'true' if "they are able to cope effectively with the world and enable people to accomplish their aims, hopes and desires" (2008: 1527).

Classical pragmatism is thus brought forward into the remainder of the thesis, its key defining principles (outlined already in Section 2.2.2) frame how the structures of youth participation and active citizenship will be evaluated. This thesis accepts that other positions such as Feminism or Marxism for example might read these structures differently, arguing that far from realising youth participation rights, they do the opposite and suppress young people's public voice by 'forcing' participants into adult-initiated and adult-contrived structures. However, armed with the key principles of classical pragmatism, this study seeks to evaluate how the Irish State's youth participation structures work as adjudicated by those directly involved. At the kernel of

a classical pragmatist evaluation of these structures, lie the concepts of active citizenship and participation themselves.

2.3 Citizenship – Active citizenship

Citizenship is a complex concept which in academic discourse has been dominated by normative political theory (Delanty, 2000). In the twenty-first century, globalisation has been accused of simultaneously diluting citizenship by blurring borders and territorial boundaries and yet conversely intensifying it, as exemplified by debates around the idea of the global citizen for example. Whether being a citizen offers the 'citizen' rights and entitlements or duties and obligations has been the subject of heated debate inside and outside of academia. In academia, Delanty (2000) maintains that heretofore the debate was largely confined to political philosophy and that the social sciences were late entrants to the debate. However, changes in the very nature of society itself have forced a re-think of how citizenship is constructed. Quite where active citizenship can be located within this citizenship discourse is not always clear. Therefore, before turning to a consideration of active citizenship in relation to children and young people, it seems prudent to first briefly inquire into the concept of citizenship itself.

2.3.1 Citizenship

Schugurensky (2004) identifies innumerable philosophical, sociological, political, legal and educational debates which have all attempted to answer the deceptively fraught question of what citizenship actually means. He maintains that this idea denotes at least four different dimensions: status, identity, civic virtues and agency. Which of these takes precedence clearly depends on how the concept is viewed. Schugurensky (2004) maintains that citizenship as status is the common understanding of the term; citizenship equated with nationality, status granted on the basis of a person's birthplace, descent or naturalisation. Citizenship as identity is often conflated with citizenship as status, although there are differences between the two according to Schugurensky (2004). Whereas status refers to rights and duties, identity refers to feelings of belonging and meaning.

Whilst agreeing with Heater (1999) that splitting citizenship into two distinct traditions is somewhat problematic; nevertheless it is instructive to recognise two approaches to

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the question of what citizenship is. These two approaches are: (i) the liberal tradition and (ii) the civic republican tradition. It is the latter which instinctively appeared compatible with the pragmatist approach of this study. Civic republicanism is also associated with ideas and practices of civil society, arguably where the 'active citizenship' of the teenagers who are the subject of this study can best be located, primarily for reasons around their status (or not) as full citizens of the State, discussed previously in Chapter One. It also tallies with Dewey's contention that individuals in society must work together, collectively for the good of all. The State may lay down the law in terms of policies and rules but such policies and rules do not automatically make a community. This thesis broadly aligns itself with the civic republican citizenship tradition. Notwithstanding this, to adhere to one tradition, one must understand how it differs from another.

2.3.2 The liberal tradition of citizenship

In contemporary literature, citizenship is frequently referred to in relation to a set of rights and obligations operating from the state to the citizen, and citizen to state. This liberal form of citizenship, with its attendant focus on the rights of the individual, has been the dominant style for the past two centuries and involves only a loose relationship between the citizen and the state. The citizen has a set of civic rights which are honoured by the state but thereafter the state interferes only marginally in the life of that citizen (Heater, 1999). Explaining that the principles and practices of citizenship were laid down in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Heater further states that the transition from a monarch-subject relationship to one of state-citizen relationship was as a result of the British and American experiences over 150 years before 1789. The English Civil War, the theories of John Locke, the taking of independence by the American colonies; all of these were integral to the evolution of the liberal style of citizenship and its accompanying rights.

T.H. Marshall's 1950 seminal essay *Citizenship and Social Class* charts the development of citizenship in relation to the modern, welfare state that was emerging in Britain after World War II. Marshall divided citizenship into three parts:

(i)   **Civil -** the rights necessary for individual freedom,
(ii)   **Political -** the right to participate in the exercise of political power, and

(iii)   Social - a range of rights from economic welfare and security to the right to share in one's social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being.

Tracing how these rights developed, Marshall maintained they matched the development of the state itself, from the emergence of liberal rights in the eighteenth century, to political rights during the industrial turmoil of the nineteenth century to finally, the emergence of social rights in the twentieth century. There have been many and protracted criticisms of Marshall's conception of citizenship. Heater (1999: 19-22) points to criticisms levelled against the Marshall theory including temporal and geographic short-sightedness, exclusivity, over-optimism, over-simplicity and finally its historical inadequacy. Rigorous arguments can be made against Marshall in each of these categories and yet like all models or plans, his was a product of the particular era in which it emerged.

Eminent citizenship scholars such as Kymlicka and Norman (1994: 354) describe the Marshall essay on citizenship as "the most influential exposition of [this] post-war conception of citizenship-as-rights". Although many commentators today including Painter and Philo (1995) caution against easy acceptance of a linear progression in the extension of the rights involved in citizenship, Marshall's 1950 work is nevertheless extremely useful as an entry point to an examination of liberal forms of citizenship in the latter part of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Kymlicka and Norman (1994) maintain that Marshallian-citizenship is still widely supported. The authors argue that the majority of people when asked what the concept of citizenship means to them are more likely to talk about rights than responsibilities. Painter and Philo (1995) and other commentators have heavily critiqued Marshall's view of citizenship. Criticism can broadly be divided into two groups (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994); (i) the need to supplement or replace Marshall's passive conception of citizenship rights with the active exercise of citizenship responsibilities and (ii) the need to revise constricted definitions of citizenship in order to accommodate increasingly pluralistic societies.

Delanty (2000) argues that the arrival of neo-liberalism in the last two decades of the twentieth century marked the end of the liberal conceptualisation of citizenship in favour of a style of citizenship that was directly related to the market. Neo-liberalism, Delanty argues, appealed to those advocating laissez-faire economic principles and

practices, and sought to strengthen the individual's freedom in the marketplace and worked against purportedly autocratic powers of the state inhibiting that individual. However, Heater (1999) argues that far from leading to minimal state involvement, neo-liberal policies actually strengthened the state's power over, and in, society. "Classical liberalism" Heater claims (1999: 21) "spoke in the name of civil society; neo-liberalism – as in the famous statement of Margaret Thatcher, 'there is no such thing as a society, only individuals' – denies the social in favour of individual consumers." Within a neo-liberal discourse, citizenship becomes highly personal and individual argues Delanty (2000).

2.3.3 Civic republicanism

Delanty (2002) positions civic republicanism within what he refers to as communitarian theories of citizenship which embrace issues surrounding participation and identity. Based upon this understanding of citizenship, civil society is not located in the market as per liberalism, or in the state as per social democracy, but rather in the community; participation and identity are fore grounded as opposed to rights and duties.

Identity does not play a significant role in civic republicanism; the focus is on collegiate commitment to work towards a common goal. Heater (1999: 55) argues that a civic republican outlook dictates that the state and its citizens work together in "an organic society" [a community] rather than as a disparate set of individuals. Honohan (2002: 1) agrees, positing that civic republicanism "may be realised through membership of a political community in which those who are mutually vulnerable and share a common fate may jointly be able to exercise some collective direction over their lives".

In the British (modern-day) context, Crick (2002: 2) maintains that the language of recent citizenship reports was also "that of a revived civic republicanism", although the phrase itself was not used for fear of public mis-understanding. Although Crick acknowledges difficulties with the word 'republicanism', he points to it being perfectly compatible with constitutional monarchies such as those of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and The Netherlands. In Ireland, republicanism is a word heavily imbued with historical significance, its use very often linked directly to armed struggle; thus the antithesis of active citizenship. Heater (1999) expands on the semantics of the two-word term; 'republic' involves a constitutional system of power sharing between the

state and its citizens and 'civic' can be understood as the involvement of the state's citizens in public affairs to benefit the individual and the community.

2.3.3.1 The Civic Republican style of citizenship

Honohan (2002: 5-6) distils its key aspects as it evolved up to the eighteenth century:

- People need a basis on which to form agreements to live together. Accordingly, a mixed government rather than a single, sovereign ruler is required. This ensures that single, vested interests are protected against and also that the common good of all the citizens is provided for. In such a mixed government, there is a requirement for the citizens to be active. In other words they must be committed to the common good.

- The primary political problem to deal with is corruption. A way to handle this is to create citizens who are public-spirited by education, through laws and through training, both religious and military.

- A balance must be struck between citizens who own property and who therefore are independent, and citizens who have excessive wealth. Measures must be introduced to limit the accumulation of wealth.

- Civic republicanism is best suited to small states where it is possible for a large proportion of the population to be actively involved. Up until the eighteenth century, women and those in the lower strata of society were excluded.

Economic prosperity can make many citizens react against the common good and civic virtue. Honohan (2002) maintains that the ideal of extensive responsibility to the wider political community and calls for the common good do not sit easily in contemporary debates. However, the idea that one should be concerned with the common good and take personal responsibility are core tenets of civic republicanism. For Honohan (2002: 154) "common goods should not be thought of as inherently in conflict with the goods of individuals, but as part of the good of individuals". Equally, civic virtue entails "active solidarity with other citizens". Refuting claims that civic virtue can be overly moralistic, Honohan maintains that if a society expects civic virtue from its citizens, they must already have the minimum conditions for a satisfactory life.

2.3.3.2 Civic republicanism revived

Like the philosophy of classical pragmatism, the civic republican style of citizenship has experienced a revival in more recent times. Heater (1999: 69) attributes the revival in part to perceived weaknesses in the liberal style and also to what he refers to as "the

putative intrinsic values of civic republicanism". Honohan's (2002) reason for the renewed interest in civic republicanism is that it is a reaction to traumatic experiences by those on the left and right of totalitarianism, and an overall general distrust in politicians among the citizenry following these experiences. This thesis would agree with Heater and Honohan. Tumultuous political upheavals across Europe, coupled with the demise of communism in many places have seen people [*citizens*] looking for political answers in alternate spheres of influence. The irony is that for many the change they identify with is rooted in an era which precedes those liberal forms of citizenship they no longer consider effective.

Even within the ranks of those who champion civic republicanism there are differences in outlook. In her treatise on civic republicanism, Honohan (2002) identifies three distinct strands. The first of these is the history of political thought; the notion that civic republicanism was put on the 'political map' by theorists such as Pocock and Arendt. Second, in constitutional legal theory (particularly in the United States), civic republicanism has been invoked in debates on the constitution and the functions of its component parts. The third strand is around the idea of political normative theory. Honohan points to theorists who have evaluated the core ideas of civic republicanism in different ways. Some are closer to liberalism, some closer to communitarianism, she maintains. Others, Honohan maintains emphasise civic republicanism's stress on virtue and the shared values of a political community.

2.3.4 Active Citizenship

Before children are brought to this discussion, the overall concept of active citizenship is considered. Is an active citizen somebody who exercises their rights and responsibilities? Not necessarily, for there are differences between being an active citizen and being a good citizen. The latter pays their taxes, most likely votes in elections and generally stays within the laws of the land but is unlikely to do much more. An active citizen on the other hand goes beyond a minimalist approach to citizenship. Possibly active citizenship is as much about the *desire* to do more than 'merely' be a good citizen? After all, not everyone is in a position to go beyond being a good citizen. Not everybody *wants* to be an active citizen. Furthermore, those who would defend minority rights regard the ideal of 'good citizenship' as being akin to a demand that minorities defer to the majorities (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994, 2000).

Kymlicka and Norman (1994) while not referring specifically to 'active citizenship' nevertheless contend that what distinguishes civic republicanism from other 'participationists' (such as left-wing theorists), is it emphasises the value of political participation for those who are doing the participating. Kymlicka and Norman acknowledge that this is at odds with how many people today understand the concept of citizenship. However, it is argued throughout this thesis that events such as the global war on terror and geopolitical conflicts, mediated by new relations between the sacred and the secular and the global economic recession (depression in some places), have forced many people to re-consider their core values. Honohan (2004: 3) contends that the best argument in favour of citizens being prepared to shoulder more responsibility is that a satisfactory society cannot be realised "solely on the basis of exact and narrow adherence to the law". The counter argument is also acknowledged; namely that this type of active citizenship can be "oppressive and conformist and is tantamount to a call for greater obedience or loyalty to the state". Already it is clear, that in an effort to qualify and quantify active citizenship, how remarkably easy it is to get bogged down in a linguistic quagmire.

Underlying the concept of active citizenship is that notion that citizens can participate in the mechanisms of governance and the political process. Logically, one might imagine that enhanced decision-making should result in increased levels of civic participation. This is not universally accepted; for example Jones *et al.* (2004) maintain that there is little evidence of greater levels of participation beyond what occurs in more traditional forms of participation. Indeed, it appears that it is around the area of participation where there is most dissent. Harris (2006: 8) posits that an active citizenry is only possible if citizens are provided with "accessible opportunities and mechanisms for participation". Should voting be made compulsory ponders Honohan (2004). No doubt voter turnout would rise but would compulsory participation result in a dilution of social capital if people were forced to go to the polls, rather than vote through choice?

2.3.4.1 Unease over active citizenship
The strategy of promoting active citizenship has not been universally welcomed, with unease expressed (especially in the British context) by some who see the promotion of the concept as "being a selective, dual and elitist strategy" (Kearns, 1995: 158). In Britain the concept was first promoted during the Thatcher administration of the late

1980s when a singularly individualistic approach to the concept was taken, in keeping with Margaret Thatcher's vision of market and consumer rights.

It seems that much of the active citizenship discourse focuses on how the concept is promoted and brought to society; it is this aspect which seems to provoke heated debate rather than mistrust of the most basic premise of the concept *per se*. Dis-satisfaction with Thatcherite motives for the endorsement of active citizenship gave rise to further misgivings (although for different reasons) in the Blair-led administration. The challenge for Blair *et al.* was to find "a third way" for citizenship among their Third Way Urban Policy agenda (Faulks, 2006: 125), beyond Thatcher-type stress on market rights and also to move beyond a "Marshallian emphasis on state benefits".

Referring more specifically to good citizenship rather than active citizenship, Painter and Philo (1995: 115) express disquiet about how "mental patients" are not listened to as they do not fulfil the good citizen brief of being rational, articulate, coherent and knowledgeable. Such connotations of who is a "worthy, valuable and responsible member of an everyday community of living and working" make the promotion of the concept of active citizenship less appealing to minority communities and groups. However, Lawson (2001) maintains that British New Labour's chief motivation was to lower people's expectations of the state and to encourage citizens to take more personal responsibility. Indeed she further argues that the Blair administration was attempting to engender a paradigm shift from a rights-based citizenship model to one based on mutual obligation.

Much of the education initiatives surrounding active citizenship in the United Kingdom centred around ensuring that understanding of the concept moved away from volunteering and the more ephemeral community spirit ideal to the idea of active citizenship being "a vehicle for expanding democratic participation… and by encouraging state, civil organisations and individuals to work together" (Nelson and Kerr, 2006). Although active citizenship is frequently linked to volunteering and community service (Nelson and Kerr, 2006), unease about the concept prevails. While its supporters see the empowerment of local communities, those against argue that it promotes "a privatisation of responsibility" (Jones *et al.*, 2004: 144). Honohan (2004: 4) contends that the most basic premise of the concept is to bring about deliberative

participation by those who "share a public sphere and common future", even though they may have different backgrounds and perspectives.

2.3.5 Active citizenship and children

The concept of active citizenship as it applies to children is even more complex than in relation to adults. This reverts once again to the problem of defining citizenship itself. If one accepts a legal definition of the citizen, it would appear that one is only a citizen if entitled to vote. Therefore, how does a child become an *active citizen* if legally they are not even a citizen? The academic literature however is littered with reference to 'child citizens'. Perhaps when some authors are referring to child citizens, they actually mean child 'persons'? Some academic articles concerning children with the word 'citizen' in the title go on to claim in the body of the paper that children are not citizens in the constitutional sense (see for example Roche, 1999; Kennedy, 2007). McGinley and Grieve (2010) point to youth participation being part of the active citizenship discourse but further observe that some young people are excluded on the basis of their 'bad reputation'. Kennedy (2007) also refers to the difficulties in this area arguing that attempts to understand active citizenship as a construct in cross-national and cross-cultural contexts are fraught with difficulty, particularly in relation to interpretation. For many, students are not yet full citizens and need to be prepared for citizenship via socialization processes such as school, family and community.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child gave a boost to "the idea of children as citizens in their own right" (Stasiulis, 2002: 508). The UNCRC has been endorsed by virtually all Western nations (the United States being a glaring anomaly) although the rights of children in relation to citizenship have not been universally realised. Roche (1999: 483) contends that the argument about children and citizenship is "part of a symbolic and practical reordering of what it is to be a child, an adult and a citizen". Thus it is argued in this thesis that those who position children as vulnerable and in need of protection are more likely to consider that adults need to protect children rather than accepting that children themselves have individual rights of their own.

A broader understanding of the term 'citizen' than its constitutional definition is required when referring to children. With this in mind, the question is posed: what

does it mean to be an active child citizen? One who participates in their community? Woodhead (2010: xxii) urges commentators to focus on the meaning of participation in everyday life and "how young people can live 'active citizenship'". Hart (1992) considers participation a fundamental right of citizenship but contends that Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child only makes a very general (although strong) call for children's participation. Children who participate in their communities are regarded as active citizens, particularly by the local authorities and organisations providing the participatory structures. However, while this may realise children's active performance in society, it does little to reinforce their rights as citizens Theis (2010: 346-347) argues. A distinction between rights and actual practice has implications for children's participation overall.

Theis (2010) maintains that non-government organisations, youth movements and civil society are better equipped to support children and young people exercise their active citizenry than are government departments and local authorities. Further, he argues that 'citizenship' provides a broader and more definite conceptual and political framework than participation. An ambitious agenda, he admits, but one which will move children's participation "out of obscurity and bring it into the mainstream of political discourse and development practice". Thus, Theis (2010: 344-345) points to four main opportunities for children to exercise and develop their active citizenry as identified by the Children as Active Citizens programme, a publication of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (2008).

1. Citizenship competencies and civic engagement
   Encouragement and opportunities to be given to children to learn the skills of citizenship. This can take many forms from peer education, community service and community mobilization and activism, such as environmental movements.

2. Children as active citizens in the media
   The media can provide access to information and opportunities for expression through radio, newsletters, newspapers, television, film and websites. It can also be used to project positive images of children as active citizens.

3. Children influencing public decisions
   Here children are involved with local government councils, policy making and legislative reform – the focus of this study.

4. Child-led associations
    Through such associations children learn key organisational skills and get support from other children to campaign collectively for their rights.

For a nation's citizenry to be truly active, its people [its citizens], must accept an individual and collective responsibility to the state. In return, the state must provide them with the opportunities, mechanisms and institutions with which to exercise their rights and obligations. Civic republicanism offers a basis for active citizenship today and it is this concept of citizenship, and active citizenship therefore, that is taken into the remainder of this thesis. In the civic republicanism style of citizenship, citizens are expected to play an active part in the 'polis' (Heater, 1999). This is in contrast to liberal forms of citizenship. Kennedy (2007) argues that modern neo-liberal interpretations of active citizenship are most likely to be in relation to service provision such as mental health and education for example; other words it is the 'rights' of citizenship not attendant duties which are important.

Schugurensky (2004: 10) advocates that active citizenship "is the antidote to the democratic deficit … only active citizens can make governments accountable and generate meaningful social change". While citizenship can be construed through its civic, political and social status, the language surrounding active citizenship requires a looser interpretation of how citizenship is understood. Active citizenship requires social capital, civic responsibility and restraint to be present in a community. For active citizenship to flourish among children and young people, it is necessary that the state regard them as full citizens, not merely citizens in waiting. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Child advocates that children are entitled to a voice in decisions which affect their lives. One could presume, therefore, that engaging children in genuine participation before they reach adulthood is a mechanism for increasing the likelihood of children and young people becoming active citizens in the future. Theis (2010) makes a related point. The skills of citizenship must be learned through experience and practice. The more children and young people are afforded opportunities to participate, the more they can learn and develop as citizens.

Arguably the term 'active citizenship' often provokes an almost reflex negative reaction. Could using an alternate, less provocative term make a difference? "The motivation for youth civic engagement" is the sub-heading used by Sherrod *et al.*

(2002); the authors here not referring at all to 'active citizenship' but instead to 'civic engagement'. Perhaps this is simply a matter of context-dependent terminology; Sherrod *et al.*'s research was carried out in the United States. Indeed carried within their paper is reference to the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001. The authors juxtapose their efforts to define the different dimensions of citizenship with a call for the youth of America to be more civically engaged – what we in Europe might term as being 'active citizens'. Civic engagement could well be simply American terminology but it does seem a less contentious label than 'active citizenship'. Arguably this is what many people mean when they refer to active citizenship. In this particular paper the authors focus much of their attention on what they call 'prosocial behavior', positing that "there is interindividual variability in prosocial behavior as there is in political engagement" (Sherrod *et al.*, 2002: 266). The term 'active citizenship' was observed, at times, as being quite loosely used in the academic and policy literature. Participation policy descriptors frequently point to youth participation as evidence of active citizenship in action. By participating, they are being active citizens it would seem. Indeed the word citizen itself frequently requires clarification, although in the (Irish) policy literature, it was observed that it rarely, if ever is.

2.4 Youth Participation

As has already been seen, active citizenship and participation are not mutually exclusive and one frequently finds them conflated in policy descriptors. For example, the European Commission Youth Policy on Participation states that participation and active citizenship were to be key priorities of the Hungarian EU presidency during 2011 (EU Commission, 2011). Clark and Percy-Smith (2006: 1) declare that "participation is also fundamental to the practice of active citizenship". Chapter One highlighted how the DCYA maintain that participatory structures such as Comhairle na nÓg afford young people opportunities to practice active citizenship. Western governments frequently promote youth participation as forming part of the modern citizenship discourse; "a policy cliché" argues Bessant (2004: 387-87) that sells the ideal that youth participation empowers young people. Admitting to having a disposition of "scepticism", Bessant argues that government "enthusiasm" for youth participation is problematic in that it fails to acknowledge the significant obstacles many young people encounter when trying to participate socially, economically and politically. There is also a "failure" to

fully think through what democratic practice for young people entails and finally it "fails" in that the agenda of official youth participation is at odds with the rhetoric of democratic practice.

Of course 'participation' is as applicable to adults as it is to children and young people and scepticism as to its impact and how it is operationalised is evident in adult and youth participation literatures. Participation is a "buzzword" contends Cornwall (2008: 269) and an "infinitely malleable concept, 'participation' can be used to evoke – and to signify – almost anything that involves people". Notwithstanding this, the 'right' to participation can be particularly challenging in relation to children and young people given their often ill-defined citizenship relationship with the state. As John states (2003: 196) "In the case of children, *their* language, whatever its forms, about *their* worlds is rarely recognised by the powerful". Referring to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UCRC), Pinkerton (2004) maintains that Article 12 (the right to participate) is the most challenging aspect of the global agenda set out by the UNCRC. In a similar vein, Shier (2001: 108) observes that while Article 12 is "one of the most radical and far reaching aspects of the United Nations Convention", it is also "one of the most widely violated and disregarded in almost every sphere of children's lives". While Article 12 enshrines the right for children and young people to 'have a voice' and indeed has become known as 'the participation article, other articles in the UNCRC also assist in children in having an (in)formed view as Figure 2.1 illustrates (Lundy and McEvoy, 2011: 13).

Article 12 requires children and young people to be consulted and have a voice in all matters affecting them with other articles of the UNCRC designed to enable them to articulate their public voice – for example Articles 13 and 17 recognise that often children and young people do not have the information they need to form and express their views; Article 5 is a recognition that sometimes they will need adults to assist and enable their voices to be heard (Lundy and McEvoy, 2011: 141).
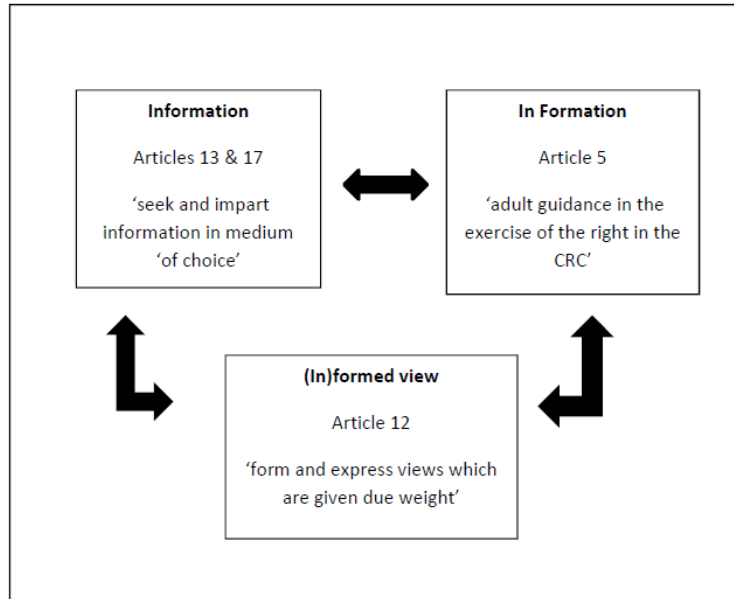
Figure 2.1: Assisting children to an (in)formed view (*after* Lundy & McEvoy, 2011: 141)

Freeman *et al.* (2003) posit that the participation literature is generally sub-divided into three sub-categories: (i) the case for participation as made by many commentators such as Hart (1992) and Driskell (2002); (ii) methods or models of participation such as those formulated by Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) and (iii) on case study specific examples. This section of Chapter Two deals with (i) and (ii) above, followed by an examination of how participatory structures (such as Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg) are discussed in the academic literature.

2.4.1 The case for participation

The right of children and young people to participate in matters affecting them is enshrined in the UNCRC (1989) and most specifically in Article 12 of the UNCRC. The UNCRC celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2009, prompting a flurry of academic activity; see for example the proceedings of an international conference celebrating the anniversary in the University of Ottawa (2009) and Volume 633 of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2011). It has been ratified by most nations in the world apart from Somalia and the United States. Possible reasons for non-ratification by the United States include anxieties in relation to federalism, health care issues and capital punishment (Article 37 of the UNCRC prohibits sentencing children under eighteen years of age to death). Some religious and

political conservatives resist ratification on the grounds that it interferes with parental rights, specifically in relation to home schooling and judicial matters (Earls, 2011). Although the prospect for ratification has gained momentum, Earls notes that the twentieth anniversary of the UNCRC was not a significant event in the United States. He presents a paradox that against a backdrop of a world largely disinterested in the idea of children possessing rights of their own, the concept succeeded in taking hold via the UNCRC and achieving such universal status. While the twentieth anniversary of the UNCRC prompted a flurry of [largely] academic activity to celebrate its achievements, Lundy (2007) posits that there is limited awareness of the provision of Article 12. This acts as a significant obstacle to its widespread implementation. Indeed among some of Lundy's adult interviewees (professionals working with children) few were aware of the scope or even the existence of Article 12 despite acknowledging that consulting with children was good practice.

Children's participation rights in the UNCRC are arguably the most important "in the pursuit of citizenship" posits Earls (2011: 9); such participatory rights mark a radical turn in relation to their position in society, and their capacities and interests. Earls argues that "junior citizenship" matters as much as "senior citizenship". However, in arguing for citizenship rights for the child, he makes an important observation; namely that citizenship is intergenerational and that by focusing on the child, inevitably adults are also brought into the discussion. A concern with child citizenship therefore extends to the environment and the societies children share with adults.

This thesis argues that although Ireland is a signatory of the UNCRC, listening to and acting on children and young people's voices in Ireland has often been reactionary. Hinton (2008: 286) observes that "critical and theoretical reflections on participation were largely eclipsed by the pragmatic concerns that dominate the debate in childhood studies, particularly the tension between participation and protection". The right for children and young people to participate and have a voice in matters affecting them has become so mainstreamed in public policy that it is in danger of becoming empty rhetoric. The jargon of participation can reduce it to it being little more than an empty buzzword (Reid *et al.*, 2008), and for it to continually have élan in real-world youth participation, the concept needs to be constantly reflected upon and re-evaluated. In this vein, Kirby and Bryson (2002: 9) observe that evaluative research into negative

outcomes of participatory practice has not been sufficient, nor has there been serious research into the opinions of those who chose not to participate.

Arguably, simply putting participatory structures in place does not guarantee that the voices of the young people who become involved will be listened to. Lansdown (2001) reflects on repeated failures on the part of many adults to listen to children. This could be for reasons of an abuse of power, observed at its most extreme in situations where physical and sexual abuse of children occurs. Indeed in the Republic of Ireland, arguments such as Lansdown's have been vindicated in light of recent and sustained reports of abuse of children in institutional care settings in Ireland and in the Catholic Church, as mentioned previously in Chapter One. Lansdown (2001) also observes that many adults act in the best interests of the child, or what they consider the best interests of the child. Many adults quite simply are not prepared to listen to the voices of children and young people for they believe that they do know better. This presumption on the part of many adults that what they say, think and feel automatically is sensible and relevant by virtue of them being adults is stubbornly deep-rooted in the cultures of many modern societies, Lansdown maintains.

Disquiet over the value that can be affixed to youth participation projects is not new; similar anxieties have been expressed in the past. The rhetoric of participation juxtaposes a society where children and young people are simultaneously protected and yet also listened to. Whether the reality matches the rhetoric is frequently questioned. Matthews *et al.* (1998a) suggest three primary reasons for the culture of non-participation: a discourse [within the UK] concerning the appropriateness of children's participation; a doubt as to the capability of children and young people to participate; and third, uncertainties (even among supporters of the concept of youth participation) about the form such participation should take. In 2003, Freeman *et al.* suggested that professionals in various areas were confronted with what essentially amounted to an imposed agenda – they were expected to conform and yet had not instituted the youth participation debate themselves. Professionals including architects, planners, engineers and designers generally have no formal training in relation to working alongside young people and yet are often expected to work specifically with the needs of young people in mind. With regard to practices of youth participation the authors observe that "adults

manage the types of participation that are available to young people" (Freeman *et al.*, 2003: 62).

Driskell (2002) notes that heretofore youth participation was quite a revolutionary ideal whereas now it is part of the everyday language of government reports, speeches and project proposals. But youth participation can be misunderstood; deliberately so if it suits the agenda. Thus participation can be controlled and manipulated. Hart (2008) and Carlsson and Sanders (2008) argue that some participatory approaches have been built on naïve interpretations of what youth participation is. Tokenism, the charge most often levelled at state-initiated participatory mechanisms, can succeed in "training young people to become non-participants" (Matthews *et al.*, 1999: 140), the antithesis of what participation should be all about. Commenting on school councils and the 'voices' of young people within, Lewars (2010: 271) strongly maintains that tokenism and limited participation are "dangerous concepts" which need to be "eradicated" in that they produce "cynical, disengaged students, confrontational situations...". Consultation, particularly when it appears to be "cosmetic consultation", is considered to be a disbenefit (sic) to children and young people, sapping one of the few resources they have at least some control over, that is their time (Roberts, 2003: 32). The gap between well-intentioned, meaningful consultation and the implementation of research recommendations can be difficult to justify to a young person for whom time moves quickly.

It is evident therefore that many commentators make a convincing case for youth participation. Notwithstanding the widespread if not total acceptance of the right for young people to have a say in matters affecting them, there is also a case 'against' participation, and this should be acknowledged. Resistance to the concept of youth participation can operate as a significant barrier to young people being afforded opportunities to participate. Reasons not to support increased youth voice in society include according to Hill *et al.* (2004: 82), adults' perceptions of young people's capacities to participate 'correctly' and also their own self-interest in preserving adult authority. Perhaps those who do not support youth participation initiatives see it as a stark binary, if young people are allowed to participate, adults' authority will be eroded as a consequence. There seems no space in this argument for the notion that adults and young people participate collaboratively. A further argument against the idea of

children's rights is that they interfere or undermine the distinction between adulthood and childhood. Essentially, adult civil rights are premised on the notion of adults exercising their rights as rational, independent beings, therefore such a status is only possible when one reaches adulthood (Pupavac, 2003). This is not dissimilar to the current status of children in the Irish Constitution outlined previously in Chapter One whereby children are viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection. The extension of participatory rights for children has the potential to change the relationship between adults and children

2.4.1.2 Participation, policy and the question of HOW

In Chapter One some of the motivations behind this study were laid out, specifically the desire to produce research that is meaningful and that could be described as policy-relevant. In 2004 Smith maintained that apart from a few notable exceptions, children's geographers do not tend to engage in the policy process. While this may be the case, this researcher would maintain that within the realm of participation policy, academic commentators have been active. However, much of their commentary tends to focus on existing participation policies with rather less emphasis on how participation has, or could lead to other youth policy formation and/or reform. A further concern is that when young people are involved in policy (at whatever level) it is policy that is already well underway, rather than it still being in early development.

Considering the purposes of youth participation, Hill *et al.* (2004) contend that it adheres to the important principles of the UNCRC, it improves policy (by making it more sensitive to social needs), it makes a positive contribution to democracy and it enables policy makers to better understand children's lives. Such benefits however, argue Hill and colleagues are largely on the side of the policy makers rather than the children. In this study Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg *are* the Irish State's youth participation policy (alongside the other five mechanisms outlined in Chapter One); inquiring how these organisations influence other youth policies (if at all) will be a feature of the analysis section of this thesis.

With the concept of participation increasingly becoming more widespread and accepted concerns have been voiced as to its effectiveness and purpose in society (Woodhouse, 2003; Sinclair, 2004; Tisdall and Davis, 2004). Woodhouse (2003: 754) maintains that

historically, policy makers give little more than "lip-service" to children's participation, trivialising it by treating it as symbolic rather than important. With the UNCRC recognising the right of children and young people to be heard, adult policy-makers are faced with a challenge to forge true partnerships with children and young people. Woodhouse (2003) articulates plenty of convincing reasons why young people ought to be involved in policy making and reform. However, in common with much of the literature in this area, the benefits Woodhouse sketches could just as easily be read as benefits for youth participation more generally. Although many commentators lament the scarcity of real impact by young people on policy (Tisdall and Davis, 2004; Williams, 2004; Cockburn, 2010; Shier *et al.*, 2012), specifically **how** young people could be included in the policy process is rather more difficult to locate in the literature.

Bessell (2009) and Shier *et al.* (2012) however do delve a little deeper into specifically **how** young people can be included in policy making. For Bessell (2009) the policy framework in the Philippines is valued as a normative principle among policy makers; indeed participation initiatives there predate the UNCRC of 1989. A plethora of initiatives exist for children's and young people's involvement in decision-making ranging from child representatives on high level advisory boards, to national workshops facilitated by children, to youth assemblies. Rather than focussing on the benefits of participation *per se*, Bessell turns to the professionals, that is the adults who are involved. She maintains that in order to translate policy into practice the attitudes of the professionals involved is crucial – they must demonstrate a strong normative commitment to the concept of youth participation. Her research suggests that while organisations which advocate children's participation attach considerable normative value to it, this does not extend beyond a relatively small number of policy makers and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff.

To move the participation [and policy] agenda forward, Bessell returns again to the importance of the attitude of the involved adults. Entangled within the attitude of adults are four key factors: (i) institutional context and procedural requirements; (ii) cultural and social norms; (iii) lack of clarity about children's participation and (iv) concerns about negative consequences. Children's Geographies and the New Social Studies of Childhood understandably foreground the inclusion of children's and young people's experiences; indeed this is necessary if children are genuinely to be citizens in their own

right rather than future citizens. However, agreeing with Bessell (2009: 314) this researcher urges that a greater understanding be acquired of "the complexity and diversity of adults' views and experiences".

Bessell's focus was on the Philippines; Shier *et al.* (2012) concentrate on the situation in Nicaragua. There, children and young people's right to participate has been largely facilitated by NGOs and other elements of organised civil society. In line with other countries, while there is much youth participation activity, there is scant empirical evidence of youth participation specifically influencing policy-makers. Shier and colleagues set out to address this gap in the literature by examining four contrasting case studies in Nicaragua, all of which were deemed to have influenced policy. Interestingly, and in contrast to Bessell (2009), Shier *et al.'s* key finding is the importance of empowering children and young people within the participation process. Furthermore, those involved need to 'feel' that they are empowered. Although Shier *et al.* do acknowledge the presence of supportive adults in successful participation schemes, for them, it is the attitude and empowerment of the children and young people which is most important; "adult trainers or facilitators do not 'empower' children and young people" (Shier *et al.*, 2012: 11). Concluding their examination of successful participation-policy initiatives in Nicaragua, Shier *et al.* ask if it is possible for children and young people to influence policy, and if so, how can this be achieved – by ensuring there are "pre-conditions, spaces, ways of organising, and methods of adult support and intervention" the authors contend (2012: 12).

Shier *et al.* stress the empowerment of young people in the participation process; Bessell (2009) the presence of supportive adults who are willing to collaborate with children and young people. However, much of what all these authors suggest makes a difference are feelings and attitudes among adults and children and young people alike; feelings of empowerment, feelings of support and a culture and society where the views of all stakeholders are respected. Hill *et al.* (2004) articulate a similar point, maintaining that possibly one of the most significant barriers to moving the youth participation agenda forward is adults' perception of children's capacities and the respect accorded to children and young people in the policy process.

2.4.2 Models of youth participation

There are many typologies and theories of youth participation. Participation has been depicted and operationalised via metaphors ranging from ladders, to levels, to pathways, to tables, to wheels (Hart, 2008). Hinton (2008) maintains that the emphasis on adult-centred models results in participation occurring on behalf of children rather than with them. She posits that in order for children and young people to maximise their potential, new theoretical models of childhood are required. Graham *et al.* (2006) observe that a significant feature of existing models of participation is that they examine participation in terms of specific outcomes. This researcher further notes that few of the models appear to attempt to capture or evaluate the less tangible benefits which often emerge during the process of participation such as self-confidence, or public speaking skills. Graham *et al.* (2006) also call for greater scrutiny to be given to differences between what is actually happening in the practice of participation and the participation rhetoric. Three models were selected for discussion in this literature review, although others are occasionally commented upon where necessary. Inevitably, model selection in this review was somewhat subjective on the part of the researcher, but the rationale followed was:

- Two of the models (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001) are widely cited in the literature and considered highly influential in the field. They are also specifically referred to in DCYA participation literature; at the very least therefore there would appear to be tacit endorsement of these two models by the DCYA. Thus it seems appropriate to examine them fully in this section of Chapter Two.

- The third model examined in detail is Percy-Smith's (2006) dialogical "social learning" model of participation. Percy-Smith sees it as appropriate to use when trying to widen the youth participation remit beyond mere consultation. Although not as heavily cited as other models, further investigation of Percy-Smith's (2006) model shows it to be inherently sympathetic to the core tenets of classical pragmatism.

There are many other participation models, many of which appear as close relations of each other. While the academic literature carries arguments for the merits or otherwise of different models and typologies, reference to them in policy documentation can be interpreted as tacit approval of that particular model by an organisation. Arguably,

models and typologies of participation serve as a useful starting point but need to be interrogated alongside the actual participation practiced by different organisations.

2.4.2.1 Hart's (1992) Ladder of participation

Of all models of participation, Hart's (1992) ladder of participation is perhaps the best known, inside and outside of academia; indeed "uniquely influential" suggests Shier (2001: 108). Using Hart's ladder (depicted in Figure 2.2) participation is represented by eight rungs of a ladder, each rung representing an increased level of participation as you move up the ladder. The highest rungs equate with involved and active forms of participation; the lowest three rungs represent tokenistic or manipulative forms of participation. The ladder, adapted from an earlier adult model (Arnstein, 1969), was introduced by Hart in an essay for UNICEF and was to be considered, according to its author, as "a beginning typology for thinking about children's participation in projects" (Hart, 1992: 9).

In his essay for UNICEF, Hart outlines the meaning of the three lowest rungs, the least desirable forms of participation, effectively non-participation. Manipulation lies at the bottom; children are manipulated, essentially used by adults in an 'end justifies the means' scenario. Children may be consulted in the early stages of a project but usually are given no feedback concerning decisions made. Alternatively, while children may carry political placards, they are too young to appreciate what they are 'campaigning' for. Recognising that some instances of manipulation could perhaps benignly be judged as misguided, Hart warns that as the concept of child and youth voice becomes increasingly mainstreamed into an administration's policies, there is a temptation for the manipulation of children and young people by adults, even if those adults are well-intentioned.

The second least desirable form of participation on Hart's ladder is decoration whereby children are used by adults to sing or dance at an event, perhaps wear a tee-shirt with a slogan to bolster the cause of an event but do not understand the premise behind the campaign. Children singing or dancing are not undesirable *per se*, rather their involvement can be considered ambiguous. Tokenism is the most commonly perpetuated form of youth participation. Here children and young people apparently have a voice but have no real choices or opportunities to express their opinions about

matters affecting them. Hart maintains that there are more forms of tokenism than there are genuine participatory projects. Charges of tokenism are frequently levelled against state structured participatory mechanisms.

Rungs four through eight of Hart's ladder represent participation, albeit with different 'degrees' of agency (Hart, 2008: 23). Each successive rung equates to a different level of participation, with rung eight representing child initiated decisions which are shared with adults. In his essay, Hart introduced his ladder but warned that "it should not be considered a measuring stick of the quality of any programme" (1992: 11). Choice is the most important principle of the ladder metaphor, advises Hart, recognising that different children may prefer to opt out of participation, or be content participating with varying levels of responsibility. Additionally, there are cultural contexts which must also be considered.

Hart introduced his adaptation of Arnstein's ladder of participation in his essay for UNICEF in 1992. His own discussion of the ladder occupies only seven pages out of thirty-seven, and yet it seems that it is all many observers take from the essay. He goes through what each rung means, but thereafter discusses participation in relation to schools as a base for community research; the dichotomy between play and work – many non-Western children do not have a choice between the two. Hart also considers participation among children living in difficult circumstances such as street children in the Philippines. Social and emotional development affects participation levels. Self-esteem plays a crucial role in determining a child's successful participation in a project. Hart demonstrates that participation is multi-scalar and determined and affected by a number of different influences. The ladder "is useful for helping one think" about participation (Hart, 1992: 11) but it is by no means the only way to evaluate participation. Nonetheless his ladder is considered hugely influential and has been heavily cited. It has also frequently been critiqued by commentators who maintain it implies participation occurs sequentially, or that there is a hierarchical structure to youth participation. Roberts (2003: 35) describes it as a "splendidly useful heuristic device", [but] "that it can be used to paralyse action". This is because those who do not reach the right rung may feel it is safer to do nothing, than to fail. Such was the interest in Hart's ladder however, that his subsequent qualifications and discussion appears to have

been lost to a large extent. Table 2.1 helps to illustrate this point, indicating some of the resources and websites which appear to advocate using Hart's ladder.

Somewhat reluctantly revisiting his ladder some years later at the behest of the editors of a publication on participation and learning (Reid *et al.*, 2008), Hart (2008) reiterates his contention that the ladder is but a starting point. It is not, nor ever was, a panacea for participation deficits. Hart (2008: 23, 29) has found it difficult to step away from his ladder, to move beyond it and to "look forward to the next season". He mounts a spirited defence of what he states was ever only meant to be a "schema to help bring a critical perspective to a subject that at that time altogether lacked one".

Arguably the ladder metaphor is somewhat unfortunate as it does appear to imply vertical advancement. A cursory examination of the ladder would seem to suggest that rung eight is the level of participation that should to be aspired to. Such has been the ladder's influence is that a visual image of it is often included alongside participation descriptors, but often with no accompanying text such as Figure 2.2 which was taken directly from the [Irish] National Children's Strategy (NCS) (2000: 31). Inclusion of the ladder in the NCS (2000) would seem to imply that youth participation structures in Ireland have been modelled against it. However, no other reference (at all) is made to Hart's ladder in the rest of this publication.

Hart (1992) himself acknowledges others who have sought to develop alternative models of youth participation. Anxious to produce alternatives to the ladder metaphor and the inherent stepwise advancement contained within, commentators refer to levels, realms, circles of participation, even a fountain of participation (Hart, 2008). Hart himself favours 'scaffold' as posited by Gauvain (2001) in that it implies multiple routes to a child's growth in relation to participation. It also allows for the inclusion of adults and children in a two-way relationship, each helping the other where necessary. The crucial point is not necessarily which metaphor is adopted; rather that there is an understanding that participation occurs differently in different places, with different children, and at different times. There can be no default model. Hart points to a success of the ladder being that it stimulated practitioners and teachers to rethink how they work with young people.

Tide global learning project **(www.tidec.org)**	This is a charitable organisation, effectively a network of teachers and educators that promote the idea that young people have an entitlement to global learning. The network encourages engagement with issues around sustainability, human rights and international development. It is located in Birmingham, England. It has many resources for teachers on its website on of which is a one-page document depicting Hart's ladder of participation which the website maintains is a useful model for how people think about children's citizenship.
TeachGlobal **(www.teachandlearn.net)**	This is located within the Open University's Teach and Learn website and offers a comprehensive range of resources and courses to support all aspects of professional development for teachers. The website includes a short explanation of Hart's ladder and also an activity for teachers, asking them to reflect where to place their students on the ladder in relation to issues such the content of lessons, classroom rules and the wearing of school uniform.
NSW Commission for Children and Young People, Australia **(www.kids.nsw.gov.au)**	The NSW Commission is an independent organisation working with the intent to New South Wales a better place for children and young people. It reports directly to the NSW Parliament. The website includes a short discussion in its 'research and resources' link on Hart's ladder, plus four other models of participation. It advises that the model's usefulness is limited as it implies lower level rungs depict less valuable forms of participation than upper levels.
Community Builders **(www.communitybuilders.ro)**	This is an on-line information platform for community workers, public servants and those who support two-way dialogue among different members of a community. The website includes a link to a two-page document that depicts Hart's ladder titled 'Ladder of youth participation. In this short document the upper rungs are labelled "Maximum youth participation" and the lower rungs "Minimum youth participation".

Table 2.1: Organisations which advocate using Hart's (1992) ladder of participation
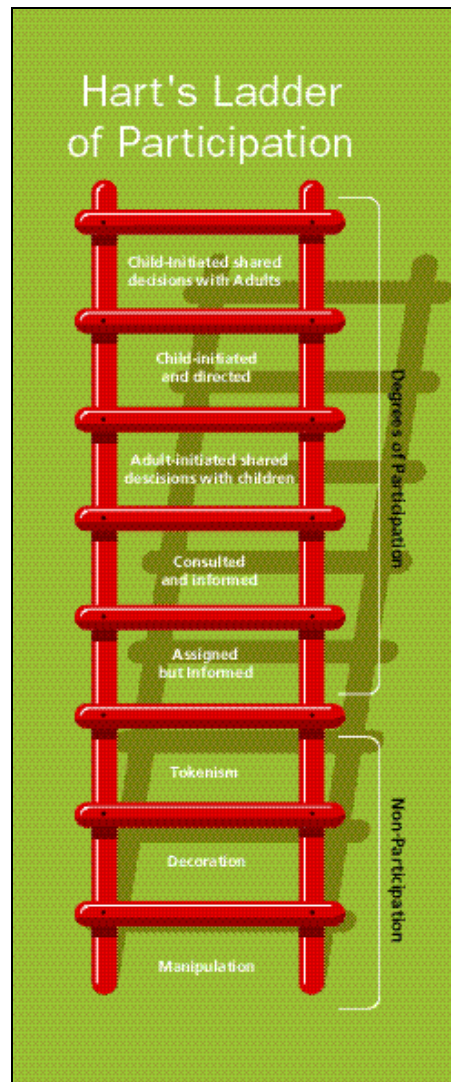
Figure 2.2: Hart's (1992) Ladder of participation

Source of visual image: *National Children's Strategy* (2000: 31)

Malone and Hartung (2010) observe that perceived limitations of the model has led to the emergence of alternative typologies such as Rocha (1997), Shier (2001) and Reddy and Ratna (2002). Shier's model was chosen for an in-depth examination in this literature review and will be discussed shortly. Rocha (1997) engages with the concept of empowerment, positing that similar to citizen participation, empowerment is not always equal. Rocha places empowerment on a ladder of empowerment akin, she maintains, to Arnstein's (1969) participation ladder. Such a ladder allows for multiple theories of empowerment to be discussed and also allows multiple actors to utilise it such as community organisers, local government officials and practitioners in the field.

Reddy and Ratna find Hart's ladder misleading in that they maintain it is actually describing the role of adults in relation to children's participation as opposed to children's participation by children themselves. This is an interesting observation as so often critiques of participatory schemes are made in relation to adult involvement, or perhaps more accurately adult over-involvement. However, this researcher observes that participation in the Western world is unlikely to be ever completely adult free as the reality of life in the West is that children co-exist with adults and do so as part of an adult-controlled society. Reddy and Ratna's 2002 modification of Hart's ladder emerged from their examination of participation among working children in India and although they speak of the need for the empowerment of children in order for real participation to be realised, society in India is still very different from society in the West.

Reddy and Ratna propose two additional rungs, below Hart's lowest rung of manipulation. These two additional rungs are labelled 'Active resistance' and 'Hindrance'. Active resistance refers to adults who actively work against children's participation as they do not feel them capable of participation, or who feel they could be manipulated, or that their childhood need not be burdened by such worries. Such an attitude, although no doubt well-meaning or benign in intent, nevertheless could itself be considered patronizing in that it appears to position children firmly in the role of vulnerable minors in need of protection. Hart (2008) notes some adults in this category work to mobilize support to actively lobby against participation of children. Unfortunately he provides no examples of this.

Hindrance can be identified when adults block opportunities for children to participate, whether intentionally or otherwise. Furthermore, blocking opportunities to participate can undermine children's confidence, making them reluctant to participate in the first instance (Hart, 2008). Hart suggests that Reddy and Ratna's two amendments to his ladder [active resistance and hindrance] do enhance his original ladder typology, wryly noting that perhaps they could be added to the illustration but underground! Others have referred to Reddy and Ratna's 2002 article (Ackermann *et al.*, 2003; Malone and Hartung, 2010) as being a modification of Hart's ladder. However, illustrative depictions of Hart's ladder are largely unchanged from its 1992 formulation when included in youth participation policy documentation. Malone and Hartung (2010)

argue that although there have been useful amendments to Hart's ladder, participation understood via this ladder metaphor is still sequentially and hierarchically constructed, and thus, they contend it to be a flawed and fragmented working concept.

2.4.2.2 Shier's (2001) Pathways to participation

Hart's ladder has frequently been criticised for implying that participation occurs hierarchically. However, it is difficult to find a model which does not refer to some type of levels of participation level, be they vertical or lateral. Shier's (2001) model acknowledges a debt of gratitude to Hart's (1992) ladder of participation; indeed Shier proffers that Hart's ladder has been uniquely influential and is the "seminal text" and "still the best known" (Shier, 2010: 24) in the field. Shier is quick to recognise the influence of Hart's model and stresses that his newer, modified model does not seek to replace Hart's ladder, rather it could serve as an additional tool for practitioners. Shier is thus firmly locating his model in the realm of practice. He goes on to state that his model could help practitioners "to explore different aspects of the participation process" (Shier, 2001: 109).

Shier points out that possibly the most useful function of Hart's ladder for practitioners is its identification of non-participation. He observes a certain irony in that Hart's ladder has had the most practical utility in helping to identify negative forms of participation, rather than it being used as a tool to increase positive measures of participation. While Shier cites Hart's ladder as hugely influential in the child participation realm, Thomas (2007) looks to Shier's model, advocating that it strikes "a real chord with practitioners and managers, who appear to find it useful in helping to think about strategies for developing organisational practice" (Thomas, 2007: 205). Thomas points to academic discourses surrounding participation and consultation – does consultation stem from participation or should it be considered separately? Thomas notes Shier's distinction between the two – children involved in consultation are not usually actively involved at the level where actual decisions are taken, whereas in higher participation levels, they are involved in decision making. Shier also points to his model as consciously effacing Hart's three lowest levels of 'non-participation'.

Levels of participation

Openings >Opportunities >Obligations

5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

| Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children? | Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions? | Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions? |

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.

| Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes? | Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes? |

This point is the minimum you must achieve if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

3. Children's views are taken into account.

| Are you ready to take children's views into account? | Does your decision making process enable you to take children's views into account? | Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making? |

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

| Are you ready to support children in expressing their views? | Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views? |

1. Children are listened to.

START HERE

| Are you ready to listen to children? | Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to? |

Figure 2.3 Shier's (2001) Pathways to participation
Source of visual image: *Children & Society* (2001: 111)

Not a ladder but rather a pathway, Shier's model (see Figure 2.3) nevertheless still refers to levels of participation. Indeed Percy-Smith (2006: 154) refers to Shier's model as a "modification of the ladder of participation"; Percy-Smith therefore does not

necessarily consider it a new model but rather it is an alteration of Hart's 1992 ladder. Shier identifies three stages of commitment to each of the five levels of the model; openings, opportunities and obligations. A question is provided for each stage of each level, equating to fifteen questions in all, which could be used by individuals and organisations working with children. Similar to Hart, Shier (2001: 116) points out that his model could be used as a positive *initial* stage in the development of an action plan to enhance children's participation in different types of organisation. Although not specifically singling out Shier's (2001) model beyond all others, Kirby *et al.* (2003: 21) point to the usefulness of his and Hart's models in that they prompt practitioners to ask questions; questions including 'what is the correct level of participation required for particular activities?'

Furthermore, these models can force an evaluation of the level participation should be operating at in an organisation and the level participation is actually operating at. Similarly, Sinclair (2004) refers to the Shier's (2001) model (and others), as highlighting the necessity of understanding differential levels of empowerment among children. Sinclair positions clarity of purpose with regard to children and youth participation as being imperative; short and long term objectives need to be clear from the outset. In this regard, Sinclair looks to Shier's 2001 model as being useful for clarifying the purpose of participation under review. When using Shier's model, gatekeepers and adults involved in participation are asked to question their motives at the beginning. Thus, the model acts as both a guide and a tool to ensure adults recognise the agency of the children's agenda, argues Sinclair (2004).

2.4.2.3 Percy-Smith's (2006) Dialogical "social learning" model of participation
Central to Percy-Smith's argument is that adults and young people need to be afforded opportunities to come together in spaces that foster dialogue, reflection and social learning in addition to wider decision-making processes. To this researcher, his assertion was instinctively pragmatic in outlook, namely that young people's voices are not the only voices in a community. As such, involving all 'actors' in what he terms "a social learning process" (2010: 117), each are able to better understand the perspective of the other. A further benefit is that all actors are part of decision-making processes. Percy-Smith (2006, 2010) formulated his 'social learning' model using the ideas of

Wildemeersch *et al* (1998: 253). Central to the concept of social learning are what Wildemeersch et al. call "the four axes of social learning which are: action, reflection, communication and cooperation". These four axes, the authors contend, are never simple, nor are they consistent. Instead they are constantly moving to and fro and the goal of social learning is to establish a balance between processes which seem to be in opposition to one another, while at the same time accommodating specific conditions and contexts of the situation at hand.

In many ways Percy-Smith's (2006) model of social learning speaks directly and more immediately to the form of participation studied in this thesis. Referring to this model Percy-Smith (2006: 169) maintains that its focus on "bringing different groups together fosters a sense of collective commitment, accountability and responsibility, itself a beneficial outcome"; Figure 2.4 illustrates the core components of the Percy-Smith model. What he does (2006: 155) is to "develop an interpretation of participation as relational and dialogical processes of collaborative social learning that can be used to enhance the quality of participation within and between community groups". Thus, Percy-Smith argues, a diversity of youth voices can be accommodated and a more socially responsible form of youth participation will result. Collaboration appears to be the key with this model. Incorporating key principles of participatory action inquiry (that include engaging multiple and diverse stakeholders in a participatory project) and collaborative learning, Percy-Smith (2006: 162) maintains that this interpretation of social learning, as a tool for participation, creates a more tolerant form of youth participation and one where multiple actors can come together. Collaboration between different groups will need to face fear, misunderstanding and power dynamics but by using Percy-Smith's (2006) interpretation of social learning, this can be achieved. An additional benefit of this method, Percy-Smith (2006) posits, is that adults and professionals involved in the process of youth participation will become more naturally accountable and more socially responsible.

Four years later, Percy-Smith (2010: 117) still advocated using Wildemeersch *et al.*'s ideas of social learning: Young people co-exist with adults in societies made up of many members. Thus, Percy-Smith contends that the promotion of collaboration between adults and younger society members will dissipate many of the ill-conceived notions and judgments made about young people as a whole. In this way, community

social learning is an outcome of the process as well as being an instigator of the final solution or decision to a problem.

A further use of Percy-Smith's (2006) social learning model is that it can be used in communities as a means of alleviating community tensions and that it can be used to "re-establish a commitment to developing neighbourhoods as inclusive spaces of collective culture rather than conflict" (2006: 155). However, Tisdall (2008) questions if 'conflict' need necessarily always be considered as negative, pointing out that in his paper Percy-Smith himself points to conflict being able to spark new ideas and how it can lead to change and create opportunities. Thus, Tisdall (2008) maintains that approaches to participation, such as Percy-Smith's (2006) model, can help to develop understandings that different people (adults and children) have different opinions. It is how differences and conflict are dealt with that is important.
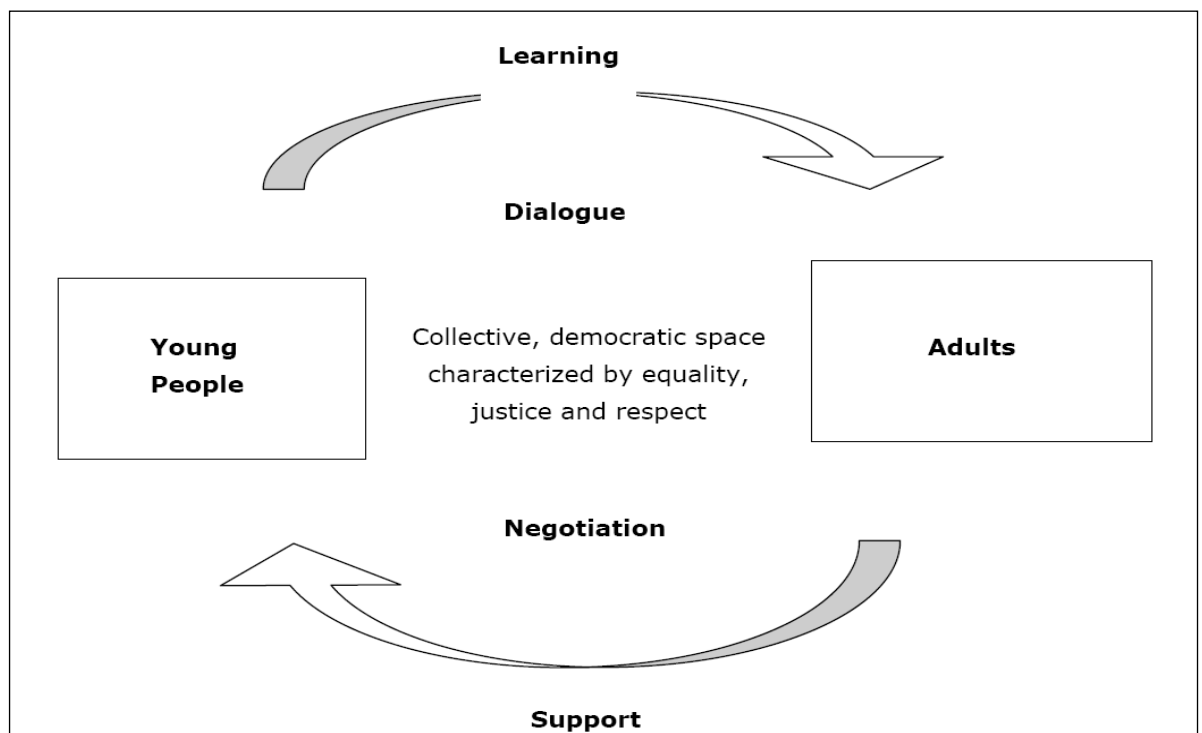
Figure 2.4: Percy-Smith's (2006) Dialogical "social learning" model of participation
Source of visual image: *Children, Youth and Environments* (2006: 169)

2.4.2.4 Model summary

The models selected for discussion in this review are considered among the most influential in the field of youth participation. Further, Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) are specifically mentioned in DCYA literature and thus one could assume their influence on the DCYA structures of participation under review in this thesis. Percy-Smith's was selected for review here (from many more models) because his approach was conciliatory; it appealed to the pragmatist intent of the researcher. It is not necessarily the particular model which is most important. Rather it is the attitude of those involved which most influences the subsequent participation. Nevertheless, in this study, no one model is singled out in this review as superior to another. Each contributes to the participation debate and advocates that adults listen to children and young people in an effort to produce meaningful participation. The findings of this study will be considered in relation to each of the models discussed in depth in this chapter. There are of course other models which could merit inclusion in a discussion regarding of youth participation and brief details of 'some' of the other participation models is located in a table in Appendix Two.

2.4.3 Formal structures of youth participation

Part of the problem with youth participation Percy-Smith (2010) contends, is the [over] reliance on representative structures of participation. In order for democratic participation, inclusion and active citizenship to flourish, the constant emphasis on formal structures of participation must be removed. Percy-Smith (2010) mounts a strong argument for fostering a climate of participation which encourages children and young people to participate in the everyday contexts of their lives, in the places and spaces in which they live, thus realising their own sense of agency.

Western children do not live in an adult free world and much of their lives are dictated to by adults. As such, while Article 12 of the UNCRC articles provides them with the right to be heard, children are nevertheless frequently reliant on adults to operationalise this right. Therefore, not only does Article 12 in theory at least give children and young people the right to have their voices heard, it also imposes an obligation on adults (parents, guardians, professionals and politicians) to enable and encourage them to contribute their views on issues (Lansdown, 2001). A logical extension of this obligation would seem to be that a corresponding onus of responsibility lies on the

government authorities to provide fora through which young people can express their views.

Within such a climate, state youth participation structures, similar to adultist participation structures, are often the response of an administration attempting to fulfil its Article 12 UNCRC obligations (Matthews, 2001a; Crowley and Skeels, 2010; Percy-Smith, 2010). Indeed Percy-Smith (2010) maintains that this relatively narrow focus on consultation and influence in decision making is not surprising, given the wording of Article 12 of the UNCRC where the emphasis is on children and young people expressing their views as opposed to "an active process of involvement in learning and change" (Percy-Smith, 2010: 110). Youth councils, youth parliaments and youth fora are therefore frequently presented by governments and local authorities as the participation answer. Thus young people involved can only help shape structures of participation that adults have provided in the first place (Batsleer, 2010). How then are these formal, *visible* structures of participation viewed in the academic literature?

The answer is frequently unfavourably; criticisms of such structures prevail and many authors label them as 'tokenistic' (see for example Bessant, 2004; Percy-Smith, 2010). Academia's judgement of formal structures often jars with policy descriptors of youth participation appearing on government websites. Positive comments relating to state facilitated participation in the literature are frequently restricted to individual accrued benefits such as increased self-esteem and public speaking skills rather than measurable, tangible outcomes for a young person's community (Percy-Smith, 2009; 2010).

Many professionals in the field are "schooled in the rhetoric of young people's participation" (Freeman *et al.*, 2003), with some admitting that while they may agree with the theory of including young people in decision making, they did so because of obligation. Professionals admitted to Freeman and colleagues that the principles and the practices of youth voice at times sit uneasily with each other. Once again referring to professionals being "schooled", Freeman *et al.* maintain (2003: 59) that while many professionals try to incorporate diversity into how they manage participation, they do so with an adult view of what diversity actually is.

Additionally, the authors question the veracity of the information that emerges from a youth forum. Whom do the members represent? Can their views really be considered representative of their peers, questions Freeman and colleagues (2003)? However, could this accusation not be equally levelled at adult forums and councils? Are members of a forum or council, in any guise, ever fully representative of the greater population? The language and word selection chosen by Freeman *et al.* (2003) less than subtly reflect their opinion of official youth structures of participation, without ever explicitly condemning them. Phrases such as "being schooled", "benevolent intent" and "fortuitous outcome" could be interpreted as demeaning the efforts of the youth co-ordinators and professionals they interviewed for their research. Bessant's (2004: 400) language choice is similar – "members of government roundtables are not elected representatives. Rather they are appointed by bureaucrats and policy makers." Moreover, government youth participation initiatives with adult-dominated agendas may have ulterior motives such as risk management or crime control, Bessant (2004) suggests.

Rather than completely disregard youth councils, Matthews (2001a) observes that formal structures such as these are one type of opportunity for young people to participate but are by no means the only opportunity. Whatever approach is in place, support and structure needs to be afforded to the young people involved if they are to feel a sense of ownership. Surveying in 1998, Matthews *et al.* identified over two hundred youth councils in the United Kingdom which have been developed in different ways depending on the governing local authority. This approach has resulted "in an unevenness of provision" (Matthews *et al.*, 1999: 140). Moving forward three years, Matthews (2001a: 300) further contends that adults often establish youth councils because they are "perceived to provide tangible outcomes ... rather than because of demand from young people themselves". Commenting on a survey in 1999, Matthews reflects that the Centre for Children and Youth identified over four hundred youth councils in the United Kingdom. Matthews (2001a) highlights the strengths as well as the weaknesses and he does this using the voices of young people involved in the four youth councils that took part in his research. Weaknesses the members pointed to included issues of empowerment, particularly when there were no clear objectives set or sense of purpose evident. Charges of tokenism were levelled against their organisers by twenty-seven per cent of Matthews' respondents.

Scottish efforts at providing youth councils were assessed by McGinley and Grieve (2010). Young people who were known to be already interested were hand-picked by the facilitators; thus young people themselves felt the councils did not encourage the voice of the outsider. The authors contend that a key measure of these youth councils is their effectiveness to bring about change in the lives of young people. They point to other examples in Scotland; a youth forum whose members maintained it had helped counter negative youth stereotypes. Another was a group formed to work with other young people, in order to get youth voices heard and to deal with Youth Bank funding. However, the authors point to it being difficult to substantiate such claims. In line with other commentators, McGinley and Grieve maintain that youth councils instigate only limited change, possibly only with regard to a restricted political arena. Similar to members of other youth councils, those involved in McGinley and Grieve's study point to personal benefits gained such as increased confidence, making new contacts and acquiring a broader perspective on their lives. However, agreeing with Matthews *et al.* (1999), the authors argue that as a vehicle of empowerment, youth councils are limited.

Hart's ladder of participation locates tokenism on its bottom rungs that denote non-participation. His ladder is often cited in youth participation policy descriptors and yet Hart himself argues against such a sustained focus on formal structures of participation, calling instead for a greater understanding of children's participation in civil society. Formal changes in governance need to be mapped out "alongside the dramatic changes that have been taking place in children's everyday social lives..." (Hart, 2009: 7). Similarly, Middleton (2006) urges continual evaluation and re-evaluation of participation initiatives to ward off complacency. Nevertheless she maintains that realised, tangible outcomes can give hope and work as a target for young people and professionals to aim for.

Local authorities benefit from establishing formal structures of youth participation in that they are seen to be adhering to Article 12 of the UNCRC. The discourse of participation in the academic literature has been shown to be unconvinced of their merits. However, there are benefits for young people who participate in formal mechanisms of participation such as youth councils. Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) and Serido *et al.* (2009) refer to a growing literature highlighting how increased youth

voice and youth development can be positively correlated. Serido *et al.* (2009) further maintain that youth interaction with adults beyond their family can help them acquire the necessary skills to thrive in adulthood. However, could this understanding of youth participation as a type of induction into the real world of adulthood devalue the actual participation practiced? This preparation and practice element of youth participation has been mentioned by many authors including Alparone and Rissotto (2001); Matthews (2001a); Middleton (2006); Serido *et al.* (2009) and Percy-Smith (2010).

Participation endeavours that are initiated by children and young people and run by children and young people often emerge from the literature as what should be aspired to. However, some commentators have acknowledged the positive aspects of supportive adult relationships. Halpern (2006: 204) and Serido *et al.* (2009) maintain that although many young people demand their own spaces, at the same time they want and need adult-mediated experiences. Whether they actively seek out these supportive relationships is debatable; nevertheless it seems logical that many young people would wish to learn the mechanics of participation from supportive adults who believe and encourage them in their participation. Serido *et al.*'s research produced evidence to support the contention that opportunities for young people to develop supportive participation relationships with adults benefit them in a number of ways. This includes obvious benefits to the youth participation programme underway but there are also benefits for the concept of youth voice itself. Cultivating positive adult-youth relationships have further advantages such as widening the appeal of youth programmes of participation to wider audiences, beyond those directly involved. Furthermore, according to Serido *et al.* (2009) it maximises the benefits for the young people actually involved in participation.

Young people themselves have recognised the impact of participation at a personal level; many point to increases in self-esteem and public speaking for example. Such 'fringe-benefits', while often recognised by adults, are not always fully appreciated (Batsleer, 2010). More positively, Alparone and Rissotto (2001: 425) consider that child [and youth] councils afford those involved the opportunity to extend "their knowledge horizons". A further positive outcome of such participation is that often relatives and friends of the participating young person will likely reappraise and consider their own participation. They conclude their article by saying "On the positive

side there is substantial goodwill on the part of the young people who act as 'participants' in what are clearly initiatives with a very mixed 'success' rate" (Freeman *et al.*, 2003: 67). Quite why the word participant is enclosed in single inverted commas is not clear. Are the young people involved not true participants? Batsleer (2010) makes a different but nevertheless related point. While facilitators may be wary about including certain young people for mental health and safety reasons, Batsleer argues that such young people are likely to be the best judges of the impact of participation on like-minded individuals.

2.4.3.1 Who is participating?

Discussion relating to the type or characteristics of the young people attracted to formal structures of youth participation such as youth councils have been investigated by a number of commentators including Matthews (2001a/b); Alparone & Rissotto (2001); Freeman *et al.* (2003); Wyness (2009a); Percy-Smith (2006, 2010) and Turkie, 2010. Of particular concern is the question of how representative of their peers young people involved in youth councils are.

Turkie's (2010) research on youth parliaments pointed to the lack of representation by socially excluded youth people. First-hand experiences of marginalised young people must be brought into the youth participation arena. Until this is done, Turkie maintains, the process of exclusion of 'others' in effect "dehumanizes us all" (Turkie, 2010: 269). Although reaching out beyond the 'norm' to those not always involved in youth councils may be challenging, it should not be considered too challenging, and not worth the effort. Indeed strengthening the active social commitment of all young people "offers a way forward towards developing active citizenship" (Matthews, 2001b: 158). A further benefit for the involvement of a wide cohort of young people is that it also provides a way out of the problem of problematising the youth of today (Matthews, 2001b: 158 citing de Winter, 1997).

Charges of elitism are frequently levelled at members of youth councils and parliaments. A related charge is that only a certain 'type' of young person is given the opportunity to join. Similar to adults, not all young people will be interested in participating in such structures. Nevertheless the charge that membership is not open to all occurs regularly in the literature. Alparone and Rissotto (2001) point to how

methods of membership selection are often left completely to schools. Freeman *et al.* (2003) observed in their research that many young people felt that membership was not open to all. A majority of the participants in their research project felt that councils deliberately targeted specific groups to which they did not belong. Faulkner (2009: 90) comments on a review of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament carried out by a United Kingdom government department which contained the quite provocative statement that the members were "very bright and articulate and normal young people are not like that". Faulkner observes that the young people involved were an 'insider group' in that they were appointed by the city council. The young people in her study did not feel they were necessarily representative of other young people, despite the council continually being keen to put them forward as such. Faulkner (2009: 94) acknowledges that some of the youth workers involved in this project were equally keen to resist the council's pressure in this area and that the young people needed to be clear that they were under no obligation to be representative of their peers.

A similar issue is raised by Percy-Smith (2010: 111) when he considers young people's participation as part of a model of representative democracy questioning if indeed it should be part of such a model. Participation is not just about influencing decisions; it is equally about the actual participating. "By placing emphasis solely on the instrumentality of decision making the value young people derive by being present and involved is lost" (Percy-Smith: 2010: 111). Locating youth participation along a spectrum of involvement within the public realm ranging from adult advocacy, to participative democracy, to representative democracy to deliberative democracy at the far end of such a spectrum, Wyness (2009a: 549) contends that the dominant form of participation [formal structures of participation] "neglects diversity connecting mainly with the interests and voices of a minority of privileged and advantaged children". Attempts to subvert different approaches beyond formal, adult-imposed systems leaves a local authority open to charges of elitism. However, Wyness concedes that the alternatives to formal structures are charged with difficulties of their own. Alternatives may be less formal but can be less participatory. Establishing a happy medium between different forms of participation seems to be the key. Diversity of youth participants is required but so too is availability of diverse participatory structures.

2.4.3.2 Evaluation – Deciding 'what works'

Given that this is a study infused with the core tenets of classical pragmatism, the pragmatic maxim of 'what works' guided the eventual critique of the participation structures under review. Unfortunately as Lansdown (2006, 2010) observes, there are few, if any agreed indicators of how to measure participation success. Many authors stress that those involved (young people and adults) be part of the reflection and evaluation process. Furthermore, monitoring and reflecting on participation is not a once-off exercise; if it is to be useful and meaningful in the long term, mechanisms for on-going evaluation must be put in place (Driskell, 2002). Evaluation should not only happen at the end of a project but at key points along the way, if goals and actions are to be re-defined and re-considered as necessary.

It is important that indicators and benchmarks of good participation practice be put in [public] place if evaluation of "the cultural climate in which the right of children to be heard and taken seriously is firmly established" (Lansdown, 2010: 20). Nevertheless the question remains of exactly *how* to measure the extent, quality and indeed impact of youth participation. In relation to the extent of children and young people's actual involvement, it can be classified, advises Lansdown (2010: 20-21) on three levels and according to the point at which they become involved. Lansdown's three-level categorisation is:

1. Consultative participation whereby adults seek children's views in order that knowledge and understanding of their lives be increased. While adult-led, it does recognise that essentially children have expertise in their own lives.

2. Collaborative participation has a greater degree of partnership between children and adults. Children are involved in design, research and policy development.

3. Child-led participation entails children and young people being afforded the space and opportunity to identify issues of concern, initiate activities and advocate for themselves.

The quality and impact of the participation are equally important and need to be measured in some way. Lansdown maintains that quality can be assessed against agreed principles or standards for good practice when working with children and young people – Lansdown suggests 'The Save the Children Alliance' is a useful starting point. Participation impact can be gauged against indicators established by the children and

adults involved. These would include skill building and the attitudes of adults including parents and the local community. While the wisdom of Lansdown's argument is readily apparent, it is still difficult to identify exactly *how* to measure or evaluate participation. Much of her suggestions and argument hinge on attitudes, feelings and the willingness of adults to share or transfer power to children and young people.

Interestingly, Pinkerton (2004) identifies the opposite problem. Evaluation criteria were instigated to evaluate the Irish National Children's Strategy (2000), of which participation is a component part. However, Pinkerton maintains that "the quantifiable evaluation schedule approach in the NCO's [National Children's Office] report tips too far to the side of concern for what is measurable and too far away from concern with worth" (2004: 127). Rather than all the focus of evaluation being on what has been and will be done, the difference the participation has made to the lives of those involved needs to be assessed. Thus a blend of Lansdown's (2010) argument for the assessment of the extent, quality and impact of participation with the quantifiable indicators of the Irish National Children's Strategy seems advisable. If participation policy is to be sustained, if it is 'to prove itself', it needs to be evaluated in some way. Deciding on the optimum format to carry out such evaluations is challenging, but should not be considered impossible. Pinkerton (2004: 129) advocates the way forward as being adults, children and young people working alongside one another.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the concepts of youth participation and active citizenship, examining how they are debated in the academic literature. Commentators often query if structured forms of youth participation realise young people's active citizenry, or conversely actually succeed in rendering their public voice mute. Strong critiques have been levelled against these forms of participation by many commentators who argue that they are little more than tokenistic, cynical 'nods' by the authorities to their UNCRC obligations. However, this thesis seeks to bracket such arguments, reminding the reader that the pragmatist intent of this study is to critique structures already in place. Indeed, it is this study's philosophical orientation – classical pragmatism - which dictates how these two concepts will be evaluated throughout the remainder of the thesis. Conceived, fostered and developed in North America by scholars such as Peirce,

James and Dewey, these philosophers argued for philosophy to be used in ways that prompt positive social change in the 'real world' where people live their lives.

Thus, it is with the tools of classical pragmatism that the concepts of youth participation and active citizenship are examined. While there is a place for the expert in inquiry, that place is not a privileged one. The pragmatist accepts that 'truth' can be constituted from multiple experiences. Further, he/she acknowledges the concept of fallibilism and is committed to a deep-seated pluralism; however much we believe in one view, we must accept that others may have a counter-view, or indeed that our ideas may not be correct. Thus the classical pragmatist sets aside the arguments of alternative philosophical positions and asks throughout their research, what is the reality on the ground; what is working and what is not?

Chapter Three: Methodology and Analytical Approach

What can be done, however, is to cultivate those attitudes that are favorable to the use of the best methods of inquiry and testing. Knowledge of the methods alone will not suffice; there must be the desire, the will, to employ them.

<div align="right">(John Dewey, LW, 1933, 136)</div>

3.1 Introduction

The classical pragmatist is concerned with uncovering the experiences of their research participants; no method is unsuitable, rather any particular method may simply be unsuitable for the problem at hand. Adopting a methodological strategy that would most usefully incorporate the plurality of voices in Irish youth participation was a key concern from the outset. Carrying out an early pilot study seemed apposite; perhaps the young people themselves could assist in streamlining the aims and objectives of the study proper? However, the experiences of the pilot study precipitated a discomforting realisation that 'real-world' fieldwork is not always content to follow theory's script. Nevertheless, details of the pilot study are presented herein for the relative 'failure' of the pilot project prompted significant methodological revisions to the early research design. Ultimately, a mix of qualitative methods comprising of non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews were deployed.

This chapter presents the research design and methodological approach taken in this study. The chapter is in two parts; Part I discusses the operational details of the methods employed. It also introduces the research participants. Part II moves to discuss grounded theory (GT) incorporated early on as an organisational and analytical tool. This second part details the analytic processes involved in grounded theory, explaining how initial GT codes were extracted, developed and four categories ultimately identified.   As the fieldwork unfolded, ethical quandaries were encountered, negotiated and reflected upon. Accordingly, ethical thought boxes are sprinkled through this chapter (and beyond), occasionally interrupting the text as ethical issues interrupted the on-going fieldwork. In a study where the bulk of interviews were with young people aged eighteen years or younger, ethical negotiations were iterative, reflexive, omnipresent choices rather than snap, once-off decisions.

3.2
Part I: Research design and operational details

3.2.1 Classical pragmatism in social research

Key defining principles of classical pragmatism such as experience, truth and knowledge, in effect Dewey's *warranted assertability,* percolate this study as it strove to get behind simple numerics and instead capture differential youth participation experiences. Thus the eventual critique will be extrapolated from the experiences of those directly involved. Kitchin and Tate (2000: 13) refer to pragmatism as "rejecting value-free research"; instead knowledge is produced "through experience and a trial-and-error process of activity, based upon the attitudes and beliefs, as we search for truth".

Dewey argued for the primacy of method in his writing. No one type of inquiry is promoted as "the traits of good method are straight-forwardness, flexible intellectual interest or open-minded will to learn, integrity of purpose, and acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of one's activity including thought" (Dewey, 1944: 179). Deweyan pragmatism in particular has attracted criticism for not offering a clear roadmap of possible methods. Thayer (1981: 446) for example accuses Dewey of drawing back "at the crucial point" and certainly Dewey does not provide a methodological checklist in his writings. Ironically however, this perceived weakness could in effect be a methodological strength.

Methodologically, classical pragmatism offers a flexibility of approach which other outlooks do not. Hepple (2008) points to pragmatism as providing opportunities for intellectual communities to coalesce, argue and agree on a common ground. If the expert's place in a pragmatist inquiry is not a privileged one, methods of inquiry are similarly not privileged. Deweyan pragmatism aims to elicit solutions that work to remedy problematic situations. For Dewey, methods that fail are those which produce short-cuts and which leave a lingering uncertainty. Successful methods are those that allay doubt or put doubt itself to productive use "by inquirers who saw the existence of problems to require changes made through a process of social exploration and evaluation" (Campbell, 1992: 45).

Renewed interest in classical pragmatism has been evident in Geography in recent times (for example, see Allen, 2008; Barnes, 2008; Bridge, 2008; Cutchin, 2008; Hepple, 2008; Woods & Smith, 2008 and Smith, 1984 & 2009). However, it is not only

geographers who have begun to appreciate pragmatism's versatility and diversity. Thus it seems appropriate at this juncture to briefly consider classical pragmatism in other disciplines, apart from Geography. In the five studies which follow, the authors suggest pragmatism as a means of inquiry within their area of expertise. All suggest that the methodological versatility of pragmatism be utilised as a vehicle to remedy problematic situations.

3.2.1.1 Study No. 1: Curriculum Studies, Englund (2006)

Englund's suggestion of using deliberative communication in the field of education is developed from the pragmatist tradition of Dewey and Mead. He describes deliberative communication as ensuring each individual takes a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments, and evaluating. While this is on-going, there is a collective effort to uncover values and norms around which all can agree. How can this be achieved?

- By confronting particular views and arguing the advantages and disadvantages of each viewpoint. Time and space should be given for the arguments of the various viewpoints.

- Tolerance and respect for 'the concrete other'; participants should be encouraged to listen to other viewpoints.

- Elements of collective-will formation are evident, that is efforts are made to reach consensus or temporary agreements or to draw attention to differences.

- Traditional or authority viewpoints such as those of parents can be questioned and there are opportunities to challenge assumptions in one's own tradition.

- Opportunities for students to communicate and debate without teacher control with the goal of solving problems or shedding light on them from different viewpoints; thus communication with meaning is created.

Such forms of deliberative communication in education, Englund suggests are a renaissance for progressive activity-based ideas going back to the early pragmatists. Referring specifically to Dewey, this method makes use of the social instincts of the child. Deliberative communication in education will result in teacher-free time but also in students who are motivated.

3.2.1.2 Study No. 2: Intercultural communication studies, Wenshan Jia (2005)

Dewey's consistent emphasis on experience and communication as essential elements of human activity could be used in Intercultural Communication. The author suggests using them as heuristic tools to re-conceptualize the meaning of research, the goals of research and what kind of agenda can be formulated from it. How can this be achieved?

- Researchers should become active in self-interrogating the underlying assumptions about fundamental variables in research such as culture and communication. Researchers should also interrogate 'research discoveries' or 'research findings' and any unintended consequences of findings.

- Researchers should be actively striving to create a new and more nuanced vocabulary which would capture the open-ended nature of culture and communication.

- Those involved in Intercultural Research should spend a significant amount of time interacting with people from different cultures.

Wenshan Jia posits that researchers should move away from the library and integrate with those they are researching. This is in line with pragmatism's rejection of a prioi research. By not mixing with those they are researching, far from improving intercultural communication, they may in fact do just the opposite.

3.2.1.3 Study No. 3: Public Administration, Shields (2003)

Classical pragmatism's community of inquiry should be used as a lens to demonstrate how participatory democracy can nurture a creative public service; an organising principle with a flexibility that allows it to be adapted to a diverse range of public administration contexts. It reconciles some of the key controversies in Public Administration such as the practice/theory dichotomy, the role of expertise and how to incorporate democracy into practice. How can this be achieved?

- By crafting performance measures using the community of inquiry approach. Thus, outcomes or processes measured are tied to a deliberative process defining the problematic situation, accommodating larger and different contexts and goals.

- Negotiated rule making processes – a consensus based approach by which a proposed rule is initially drawn up by a committee made up of representatives of interest groups likely to be affected by the rule. This committee is essentially the community of inquiry. Accordingly, citizen participation would be furthered by citizen and administrator alike.

- Juvenile justice – councils akin to communities of inquiry should be used to grapple with the problem of sentencing youth, non-violent offenders. This model also includes volunteer community members who have received training.

- Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997 – again akin to a community of inquiry. Teachers, parents, counsellors and other specialists working together as a community of inquiry around the issue of disruptive and/or disabled students in the classroom. This community carries out a 'Functional Behaviourial Assessment' by developing and testing causal hypotheses; interventions are suggested, tried and assessed. In other words 'experience' is taken into account.

Shields posits that the community of inquiry places the conversations of Public Administrators in the United States within an experimental context of budgets and deadlines. The focus is placed on problematic situations, ways to collect data and methods of interpretation. The result is a critical optimism and the knowledge that there is the chance to make a difference in relation to the common good.

3.2.1.4 Study No. 4: International Relations (IR) Cochran (2002)

Deweyan pragmatism is presented as a viable and better alternative to positivism within IR. Cochran suggests using Dewey's method of concept formation and his appreciation of the importance of genuinely democratic problem-solving within the arena of IR. How can this be achieved?

- By using Deweyan objectivity and truth in International Relations research as goals of scientific inquiry. Thus, a method of inquiry emerges which is admirably suited to maximizing the democratic inclusion of people from disparate cultural communities, in a mutually compatible problem solving process.

- Cochran contends that Deweyan pragmatism has much more to offer IR than any other post-positivist social sciences in that it provides opportunities to develop inclusive, pluralistic and scientific ways of solving international problems.

3.2.1.5 Study No. 5: Health law/Ethics, Miller et al. (1996-1997)

Pragmatist themes such as the importance of the empirical understanding of clinical contexts allow for an examination of the utility of the Deweyan method as a way to re-orient bioethics. A process model of moral problem solving is adopted. The facts of the case are outlined and assessed in a dynamic process of inquiry, the aim of which is to provide a satisfactory resolution to a morally problematic situation. How can this be achieved?

- This process model involves interactions between clinicians and patients and/or their surrogates. Moral problem solving via a Deweyan theory of inquiry proceeds through a number of steps.

- Case analysis begins by assessing the patient's situation – in other words determining what is going on morally.

- Next, taking into account the existential and clinical dimensions of the situation under review, the appropriate goals of medical care are decided.

- The resolution to the problem is decided by adopting a clinically and ethically appropriate plan.

- Clinical and moral judgments are made along the way and operate as hypothetical directives that guide the process of problem solving.

- A decision is derived at which is understood to be an experimental intervention that aims to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the problem.

The authors contend that clinical pragmatism integrates clinical and ethical thinking by approaching and solving a moral problem using Dewey's conception of scientific method. By doing this, it adopts a 'process' model as opposed to a 'judgment' model which is characteristic of principlism and casuistry. By accepting the concept of working together, one equally must accept the consequences of working together.

Thus, how classical pragmatism has been incorporated into other disciplines has been briefly sketched, illustrated by the five examples offered here. Implicit in each author's argument is the recognition of the wisdom, expertise and knowledge of the research participants. A similar attitude toward participants was adopted in this study and was one of the main motivations for conducting a pilot study.

3.3 The decision to pilot

Before becoming immersed completely in data collection, it seemed prudent to temper any methodological [over]enthusiasm by conducting some preliminary fieldwork via a pilot study. Expending time and resources on an exploratory pilot project is contingent on a number of factors; indeed Van Teijlingen & Hundley (2001) suggest sixteen plausible reasons for carrying out a pilot. Numbers 1-4 of Table 3.1 were particularly apposite in this study.

	Possible reasons for conducting pilot study
1	**Identifying logistical problems which may occur using the proposed methods.**
2	**Developing a research question and research plan.**
3	**Training a researcher in as many elements of the research process as possible.**
4	**Assessing the feasibility of a (full-scale) study/survey.**
5	Assessing whether the research protocol is realistic and workable.
6	Establishing whether the sampling frame and technique are effective.
7	Assessing the likely success of proposed recruitment approaches.
8	Estimating variability in outcomes to help determining sample size.
9	Collecting preliminary data.
10	Determining what resources (finance, staff) are needed for a planned study.
11	Assessing proposed data analysis techniques to uncover potential problems.
12	Convincing funding bodies that the research team is competent and knowledgeable.
13	Convincing funding bodies that the main study is feasible and worth funding.
14	Convincing other stakeholders that the main study is worth supporting.
15	Designing a research protocol.
16	Developing and testing adequacy of research instruments.

Table 3.1: Reasons for conducting pilot study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001)

Compared to quantitative pilot studies, details of qualitative pilot studies are relatively uncommon in the literature. A "haphazard use of pilots" (Sampson, 2004: 385) pervades the qualitative research arena; their use and usefulness not always at the forefront of the mind of the novice researcher. It is argued here that the qualitative pilot slots comfortably into this classical pragmatist study for "an inquirer in a given special field appeals to the experiences of the community of his fellow workers for confirmation and correction of his results" (Dewey, 1938: 490). Agreeing with Campbell (1992), it is argued that such a process generates an equitable interplay of opinion ultimately producing intelligent, collaborative consensus.

At the earliest stages of this study, the research objectives were not fully formed, beyond a desire to examine participation opportunities available to teenagers. Ennew and Plateau (2004: 19) advocate that people whose lives are being studied in participatory research should be actively involved in defining the research questions.

Equally, they should participate in the collection and analysis of the data. Beyond the tangible benefits a pilot study can offer (such as a revision of method choice and/or adjustment of sample size and selection for example), conducting a pilot study would allow current and future methodological choices to be firmly rooted in practical activity.

3.3.1 Pilot study: success and failure

Transition Year (TY) is a one year school based programme in Ireland which runs between the Junior and Senior Cycles; pupils who take part in Transition Year would typically be fifteen or sixteen years old. TY aims to promote the personal, social, vocational and educational development of students and prepares them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society. Transition Year co-ordinators in five community schools in the hinterland of the researcher's university were contacted by email and follow-up telephone calls. Community schools in Ireland have large student numbers of approximately one thousand male and female pupils from diverse demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. The premise of the study (such as it was at that time), was outlined and a request was made for the researcher to visit the school and engage TY pupils in focus group discussions about youth participation in Ireland. Three of the schools contacted declined to take part but two schools expressed a strong interest in the project. Fifty pupils subsequently participated in two separate focus groups. This was a larger number than had been expected and presented difficulties with the discussion in both schools. Ethical Thought Box 1 explains this unexpected difficulty.

In both schools, in advance of the focus groups the researcher discussed with the teachers the approximate number of pupils who might take part in the discussion; both the teachers involved 'promised' no more than twelve potential participants. However, on each occasion far more pupils than twelve were waiting to take part when the researcher arrived. The researcher was put in a difficult position given that it was not feasible to ask some of the pupils to leave. In hindsight, she had ceded too much of the power in the organisation of the focus groups to the gatekeepers involved.

Ethical Thought Box 1: Inadvertently ceding power to the gatekeeper

The location of the pilot study research project is illustrated in Figure 3.1. Despite a lively debate, no viable research questions emerged which could be taken forward into the larger study. Thus, with a remit of establishing the study's research questions, the pilot study was a failure. While asking participants to assist in formulating the research questions appealed in theory; in practice it proved very difficult to realise. Hindsight prompted several uneasy reflections. Pupils whom the researcher had not met previously were unlikely to produce practicable research questions in a single encounter. Accordingly, schools should have been visited a number of times in order for a relationship to build up between the researcher and the TY pupils. Furthermore, the researcher was uneasy about the quality of the informed consent given as Ethical Thought Box 2 explains.

Parental or guardian consent was necessary before speaking to youth participants. Consent letters were forwarded to the schools in good time. TY co-ordinators were spoken to by email and telephone. It was thus disquieting to hear one TY co-ordinator say (when handed the signed consent slips of the participating students), "there you go, they should all be there, I told them to get them signed quickly or there'd be trouble". In the other school a teacher interrupted midway through the discussion - "Don't mind me, I heard what you were doing, was on a break and thought I would listen in"! This teacher was tactfully asked to leave (among much pupil hilarity) but already doubts were forming in the mind of the researcher as to the suitability of the school as a research site.

Ethical Thought Box 2: Informed consent issues

Furthermore, conducting the discussion in a school setting proved counter-intuitive; creative engagement and two-way dialogue between focus group participants and a researcher needs to be fostered. This requires time to develop. This was particularly evident in one of the schools in which there appeared a strict discipline code. The teacher in question warned the pupils that although she would not be part of the discussion, she would remain in close proximity. Ethical Thought Box 3 elaborates further on difficulties encountered with the classroom setting.
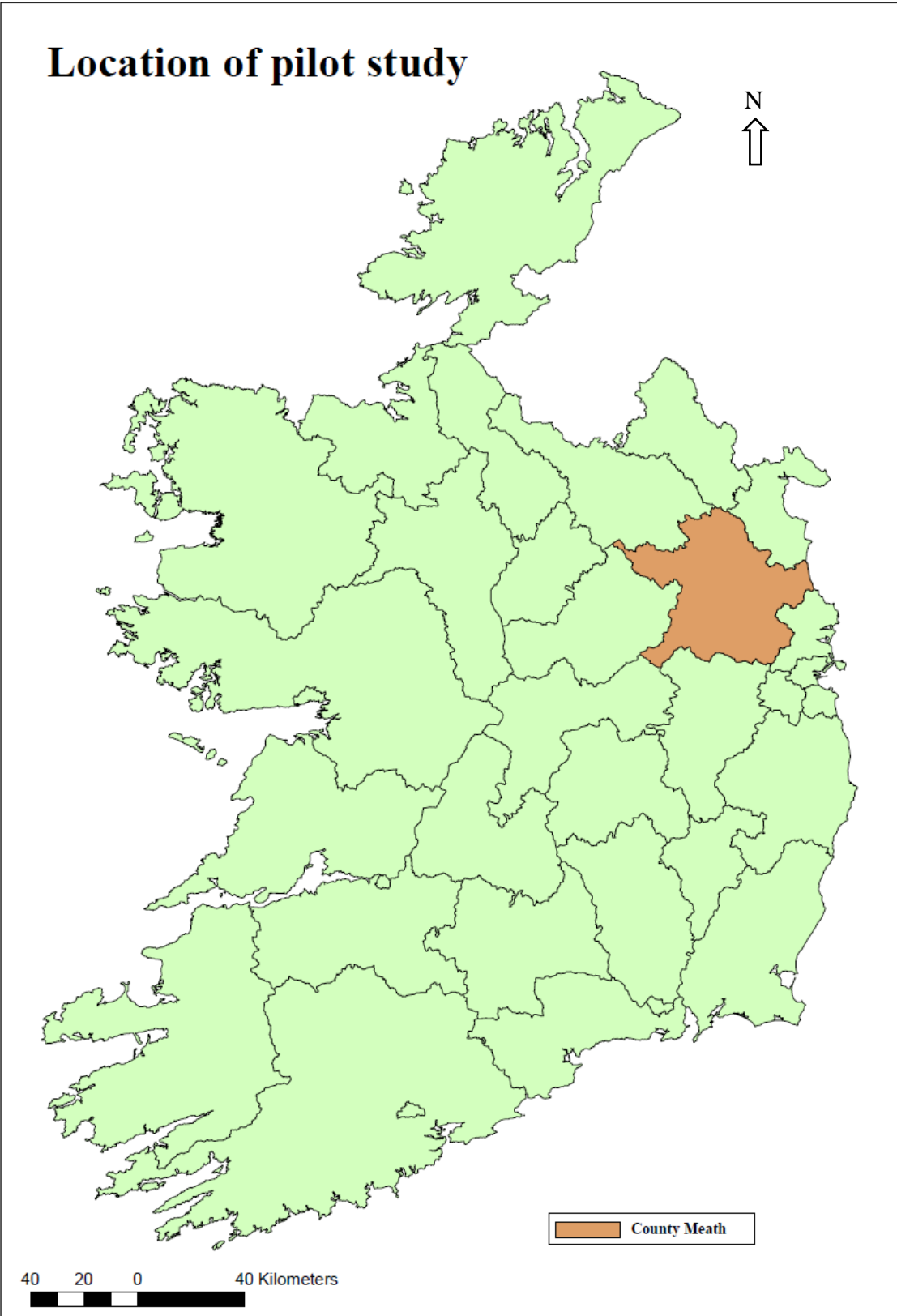
Figure 3.1: Location of pilot study

Notwithstanding the relative 'failure' of the pilot study, it nevertheless prompted significant methodological revisions as a result of lessons learned from it. Much effort had been expended navigating multiple gatekeeper layers. Many schools have only very general email addresses such as 'info@...' and it proved difficult to ascertain if target recipients were ever alerted to the researcher's request. The school secretaries frequently blocked access to pupils and teachers alike. In effect, gatekeepers to the gatekeepers were encountered. Issues relating to access were evident but likely these could have been overcome with time. However, the school setting itself appeared part-responsible for inhibiting spontaneous discussion and exchange of ideas.

Additionally, the pilot study allowed the researcher pre-test herself in the school setting, thus agreeing with Sampson (2004: 399) who maintains that the benefits of a qualitative pilot study are akin to "putting a toe or two in the research waters before diving in". Consequently, school as a research location was removed altogether from the research design as a direct result of the pilot study's experiences.

The classroom setting during the pilot study proved problematic. The very fact that it was a classroom meant that pupils appeared to view the researcher as a sort of substitute teacher. Calls of "Miss, Miss" abounded with some pupils putting up their hands to request permission to join the discussion. An atmosphere conducive to the free flow of discussion was impeded by the teacher warning "now I'll be just across the corridor and will be able to hear what's going on, so no messing". It took some time to lighten the atmosphere in this school.

It was concluded that pupils in the school setting appeared to regard the researcher in a teacher role. Perhaps this was due to personal appearance, age, or perhaps a combination of both but it resulted in the researcher being uneasy proceeding any further in a school setting. This was a contributing factor why schools were not brought forward into the main study.

Ethical Thought Box 3: Classroom setting influence

Given the experiences of the pilot project, the wisdom, and practicality of participant involvement in research design was also questioned, despite the literature on this topic. Kitchin and Tate (2000: 43) maintain that a pilot study should be a full mini-run of the larger project. Likewise, Sampson (2004) contends that pilot studies must be fully coded and analysed in order to yield significant results. However, this thesis maintains that this is not always the case; in certain circumstances *successful pilots* need not

necessarily require full scale analysis. A successful pilot study can be one which determines that the proposed approach and methods are not viable in the long term. Accordingly, the pilot of this study steered the focus away from school and instead placed it on state's structures of participation.

The experience of the pilot study also saw focus groups rejected for the larger study, for a number of reasons. Young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg already participate in a focus group of sorts by virtue of their regular meetings. They are therefore well accustomed to group discussions. Thus, in order to instil in the young people a feeling that this research was not to be 'more of the same', semi-structured interviews were chosen as a more *useful* method. Conducting one to one interviews in a more private setting would perhaps prompt deeper reflection of their participation experiences? Furthermore, it was a deliberate attempt by the researcher to move away from the position of being viewed in the role of a teacher. Reflection on the pilot study had highlighted this as a problem. The young people were also made aware that adult gatekeepers were being interviewed for this research. Thus, speaking to young members and adults through the same method represented a determined effort to address any power inequalities either group may have felt were present. A final, mitigating factor against focus groups was the likelihood that gathering geographically diverse Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators together would be extremely problematic. Co-ordinator co-goodwill was being heavily relied upon as their on-going co-operation was vital to the success of the study. It was only through the co-ordinators that contact could be made with young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. With this in mind, there was a reluctance to over-stretch their continued goodwill.

3.4 Mixed Qualitative methods of this study

A debate occurs in child and youth studies as to whether research with adults should be approached in the same way as research with children (Punch, 2002a; Hill, 2006; Kesby, 2007; Cahill, 2007 and Thomson, 2007 for example). Punch (2002a) reflects on the paradox that often the loudest voices in the quest for innovative research methods come from those who stress children's competencies. Are separate child and adult methods always necessary? Two extremes are evident in this discourse; those who treat children as different from adults and those who consider children the same as adults.

Thomson (2007: 216) has argued that the two positions are based on "conceptualisations of structure and agency". Those who position children as essentially the same as adults rely on agency, not structure. Each stance accepts the "pre-imposition of the social categories of 'child' and 'adult'". Thomson admits to a degree of unease in that by positioning the identity of the child as fixed within the research design, children are "'othered' by, and within our methodology".

A dearth of literature was observed exploring young people's views on research methods (Hill, 2006). In a report commissioned by the Scottish Parliament, Hill faced the irony of selecting which research methods would best research child and youth research methods! Hill used different methods for the adults and young people in his study; group discussions and questionnaires for the children and interviews with the academic and professional experts. Segregating adult and child methods, Hill appears to agree that some methods are more suited to adults, some more suited to children and some more suited to young people. Research carried out by Morrow (1999), Lightfoot and Sloper (2003) and Punch (2002a) indicate a preference among young people for research in a group setting. However, not all children and young people favour speaking to a researcher in the company of others as problematic power issues can occur in group dynamics. Some children feel intimidated by louder and perhaps more articulate young people resulting in them contributing little or nothing to a group discussion (Mitchell, 1999). This thesis contends that reflexivity is required of a researcher to consider not only personal assumptions, but also the choice of research methods. Furthermore, for some children (as with adults), a one to one encounter is preferable, and can produce more useful observations.

Agreeing with Punch (2002b) that some young people prefer an individual interview for issues of privacy and confidentiality, the approach in this study was to consider participants - *all participants* – equally and to use semi-structured interviews as a means of acquiring information. It was felt that this implicitly announced to potential youth participants that their input was of equal value to that of their adult gatekeepers. Before the interviews could begin however, potential interviewees had to be approached. The mechanism used for this purpose was non-participant observation.

3.4.1 Non-participant observation

Observation, defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1991) as "the act or an instance of noticing; the condition of being noticed ... the accurate watching and noting of phenomena as they occur in nature with regard to cause and effect or mutual relations". Two motives underpinned the decision to carry out non-participant observation in this research: first, it provided an opportunity to glean insights into Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg work practices. Robson (2002) contends that it is ideal for getting at 'real-life' in real world situations. As such, a further benefit is that it enables the observer to witness issues to which participants may themselves have become immune or be unaware of; features such as the environment in which the observation takes place and the behaviour and interaction of those taking part. For this study, it provided an opportunity to determine if the reality of participation matched the DCYA rhetoric. The second reason for selecting non-participant observation as a research method was that it could operate as a gateway for the researcher to introduce herself and the study to potential participants.

Robson (2002: 310) delineates two "polar extremes": participant observation (essentially qualitative), and structured observation (a quantitative method, used in fixed designs). There is another form of observation however, although it has been largely eclipsed by the other two. 'Unobtrusive observation' is non-participatory in the sense that it is non-reactive. It has been referred to by various labels; Kitchin and Tate (2000: 220) call it 'straight observation', Robson (2002: 317) 'unobtrusive observation' while Flick (2006: 217) and Gomm (2004: 223) label it 'non-participant observation'. It was this form of observation (whereby the researcher observed as unobtrusively as possible, but played no active part in proceedings) that was employed in this research.

Intuitively, there are limitations to this method, particularly in relation to the degree of disturbance this form of observation can have on proceedings compared to that of participant observation (Robson, 2002). Observer effects must also be acknowledged; how can we be sure that what is observed is the same as if there had been no observation? Possibly one can never know this for certain, although reassurance can be taken if the observed group accept the observer's presence without seeking interaction. There are also strategies which can test the impact of the observer, including asking (at

a later date) those who were observed if it was felt that the observation interfered with the normal conduct of the meeting.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews accounted for the bulk of the qualitative data collected. Widely used in social research projects, interviews were deemed most appropriate for this study, particularly after the relative failure of focus group discussions during the pilot phase. Three types of interview are normally distinguished in the literature: (i) structured, (ii) semi-structured and (iii) unstructured. Choosing between the three depends largely on the depth of material sought and also the type of participants being interviewed. Interviewing a mix of adults and young people demanded increased sensitivity on the part of the interviewer as to the expectations of each.

Most of the young people had not experienced being interviewed prior to this study and so a structured interview was considered overly formal, inflexible and potentially daunting. Furthermore, structured interviews would be too much like a questionnaire survey and thus would be unlikely to provide the thick qualitative description being sought. On the other hand, a completely unstructured format could be inhibiting for some of the less confident young people. It is further argued that unstructured interviews are more suitable for ethnographic studies, where a rapport between interviewer and interviewee has been fostered and grown over time. Semi-structured interviews allow for the use of predetermined questions, but yet they are also flexible in that they can be modified if necessary "based on the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate" (Robson, 2002: 270). They seemed particularly suitable therefore for use in a project involving both adults and young people.

3.4.3 Place and interview

Place can play a role in the efficacy of the research process, particularly in relation to children and young people. Kesby (2007: 196) contends that "young people's responses and accounts are socio-spatially relational"; not only does context count and place matter but parents, gatekeepers and siblings in the vicinity of the interview can influence proceedings. Anderson and Jones (2009) created a private space in a school store cupboard during their research project in an effort to foster a sense of protection. Physically in the school but simultaneously closeted in the cupboard, the interviewees

were physically and emotionally removed from their classroom. Anderson and Jones contend that metaphorical understandings of place have superseded the physical realities of real places and their potential impact on research. Barker and Weller (2003: 211) concur, finding that research in the school setting was conducted in "highly institutionalized and controlled spaces". Not only were there issues relating to access and consent, but Barker and Weller felt that their status as researchers was diluted as they grappled with the ethical politics of the school setting. However, it could be argued that the status of a researcher can actually be elevated in such a scenario. Brought into the classroom by a teacher who then encourages pupils to participate could result in informed consent and refusal being compromised, given that the researcher has the tacit approval of the teacher in question. Similarly, the natural responses of young people can be inhibited if a teacher or principal is in close proximity.

Although focusing on participatory pedagogies within the classroom, Askins (2008) makes a related point and notes pupils' reluctance to perform when asked to speak out in a context in which they may not be comfortable. Additionally, there can be difficulties getting pupils to engage in collective discussion within the classroom; Askins suggests that their silences can be seen as a form of resistance. Bushin (2007) also rejected the school as an interview location, finding it overly restrictive. School brings with it associated experiences and expectations, what Anderson and Jones (2009: 300) refer to as "the lifescape of the school". Such heavily engrained experiences can dampen spontaneous discussion.

Nevertheless, using school as a physical space for conducting interviews can be tempting for an impatient researcher, given the ready-made interview rooms and spaces for group discussion in a school. Kendrick *et al.* (2008: 84) refer to young people in residential care being a "captive audience"; it is argued here that the same is true of young people in a school setting. However, perhaps muted responses could be downplayed in an eagerness to carry out the fieldwork? Furthermore, school can elevate the status of the researcher possibly reducing the likelihood of participant refusal. Consent letters sent home with the tacit approval of a child's teacher stand a greater chance of being signed and returned one presumes. Nevertheless, interviewees inhibited by the place where an interview is conducted are unlikely to fully unburden themselves of the truth of their experiences.

Recognition of the idiosyncrasies of different places nonetheless must be acknowledged (Anderson and Jones, 2008). Thus, selecting a place to conduct an interview is context dependent, and at times also participant dependent. Bushin (2007) found that interviewing young people in their homes was a more flexible process than she had originally envisaged, although she stresses the constant attention that is required in order that ethical best practice be adhered to. In theory, while this may seem straightforward, in reality, it is an on-going process that requires tact and subtlety. This researcher agrees with Bushin who states (2007: 238) that "putting ethical guidelines into practice was sometimes very difficult and involved constant negotiation".

3.4.4 Issues of access

The need for empirical evidence in qualitative youth studies necessitates that children and young people be 'recruited' as active respondents during a researcher's data collection phase. Herein is one of the most sensitive issues to be negotiated. Inevitably, the researcher has to contact parents and guardians in order to gain access to child and youth participants. Bushin (2007) counsels that adult gatekeepers be viewed in a positive light, rather than considered as a presence to be overcome. Notwithstanding this however, a researcher regularly encounters multiple gatekeeping layers before the research itself begins. Gatekeepers frequently hold the power "to situate themselves very directly between children and researchers" (Bushin, 2007: 239).

Kesby (2007), Sime (2008) and Barker and Weller (2003) all grappled with the difficulty of navigating gatekeeper layers before access to child research participants could be secured. Sime (2008), similar to Bushin (2007), observes that even after successfully navigating these multiple layers, only a limited number of children tend to be put forward as participants by the gatekeepers. Thus the power imbalance between gatekeeper and researcher is weighted heavily in favour of the gatekeeper. Gatekeepers control access in the first instance, but also control access to which children are put forward. Well-meaning gatekeepers often suggest children and young people whom they feel are best suited to a study, but in doing so can limit the potential pool of participants. Bushin (2007) reflects that accessing children was one of the most difficult aspects of her migration research project. Not only was it problematic accessing children, it was problematic making contact with the *right* children in her desired sub-category. Research seeking to investigate the strength of the child's voice in response

to Article 12 of the UNCRC increasingly faces a silencing of that voice by gatekeepers, what Hood *et al.* (1996: 121) refer to as "an uncomfortable irony". The emphasis within childhood studies is to reinforce individual child agency. However, the need to obtain parental consent and gatekeepers who block access to potential participants often result in researchers having to effectively collaborate with gatekeepers in order to speak to a child (Gallagher *et al.*, 2010).

Reluctantly, it is likely, perhaps even inevitable that access is also a gendered issue (Horton, 2001; Barker and Weller, 2001; Reeves, 2010). Would access in this study have been even more difficult if the researcher had been male? On reflection, the answer is likely to have been 'yes'. John Barker and Fiona Smith (2001) found 'John's' requests for access were responded to far more cautiously than 'Fiona's'. The authors argue that a woman's arrival into the field is less problematic than a man's. In a society where so often women are less valued than men, ironically the reverse seems true in child and youth studies. Additionally, it is felt in this study that the age and status of the researcher as a female (and as a mother), worked to her advantage, and it is conceded *was worked* to her advantage. Barker and Weller (2001: 146) conclude that "women are accorded a more intimate role of 'insider', and are consequently given greater access to both staff and children than are men". Researchers at the interface of gatekeepers and young people can become embroiled in a delicate powerplay; if one agitates too fervently, consent and access can be denied. Similarly, complete acquiescence to gatekeeper demands could dilute the rigour of one's research findings. Pragmatic decisions have to be taken in order to increase the likelihood of youth participants being allowed to become involved in the research process.

3.4.5 Issues of consent

Institutional ethical guidelines and societal expectations dictate that before any research can be conducted with children or young people, the consent of parents and guardians must be obtained. But what of the consent of the young people themselves, and how can one ensure that the young person understands what they are consenting to? In relation to issues of consent, gatekeepers control the consent process as they also control issues of access. While a researcher may strive to capture the voice of the child in their research, in reality that child's consent can normally only be obtained *after* gatekeeper consent has been granted. Therefore, it seems that both must be viewed as equally

important. Hood *et al.* (1996: 120) refer to the researcher being last "at the end of a long chain of negotiation"; in their research the gatekeeper took it upon herself to decide on the usefulness of the research project, and protected parents if she deemed it necessary. Such a stance disempowered the parents with the children apparently not even considered in the gatekeeper's protectionism. Masson (2004) suggests that a child should be given the maximum opportunity to participate in research even in circumstances when a gatekeeper might have been likely to initially refuse consent. Masson notes that this is especially problematic in socio-economically deprived areas where issues of parental disengagement may be evident.

It is clear therefore that gatekeeper consent must be acquired before a child or young person can be contacted to take part in a research project. Undoubtedly this prompts several ethical dilemmas. Should pressure be exerted on a gatekeeper to actively encourage a child to take part in research? Does such a practice undermine the legitimacy of children who consent to participate, given that their consent has been mediated through the gatekeeper? From whom is a refusal to participate emanating? Bushin (2007) noted her difficulties surrounding consent were as much to do with *informed consent* as with consent itself. Frequently, she observed that the children whose adult gatekeepers had agreed to participate, knew little or nothing about the survey they were about to take part in. This issue arose during the pilot study of this research, despite the best efforts of the researcher. It did however serve to highlight the need for constant vigilance in this area. As Morrow (2008) reports, consent involves far more than simply agreeing to take part. For consent to be informed, it needs to be considered. Very often, while a child may 'consent' to becoming a research participant, it is an ill-informed decision.

3.5 Observations and interviews: operational details

Table 3.2 presents the numbers and geographical locations of the research participants. Ten non-participant observations were carried out in addition to fifty-nine semi-structured interviews with young people (current and past members of Comhairle na nÓg), and adult gatekeepers of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg.

Comhairlí na nÓg	Non-participant Observation	Interviews (Young people)	Interviews (Gatekeepers)
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	√	3	1
Fingal	√	5	1
Cavan	√	5	1
Meath	√	5	2
Roscommon	√	5	2
Sligo	√	7	1
Wexford	√	5	1
Cork City	√	5	1
South Tipperary	√	1	1
Dáil na nÓg (March 2010)	√		
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs			1
Head of Communication and Participation, DCYA			1
Comhairle na nÓg Regional Participation Project Officers			3
NYCI personnel			2
	Total 10	Total 41	Total 18

Table 3.2: Non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews

3.5.1 Dáil na nÓg observation

The youth parliament (Dáil na nÓg) is an annual one-day event, heretofore held in March of each year. The DCYA advise that Dáil na nÓg 2011 was deferred from March 2011 to November 2011. Dáil na nÓg 2010 was held in the Conference Centre in Croke Park (home of the Gaelic Athletic Association) on the 05th March 2010; over two hundred young people attended. Permission to observe the event was obtained from the Head of Communications and Participation at the DCYA in the weeks prior to March 2010. The researcher was asked in a telephone call if Garda (police) clearance had been obtained for this study. Verbal confirmation of Garda clearance was given to the DCYA but no hard-copy evidence of this was ever requested by, or shown to a representative of the Department (see Ethical Thought Box 4).

Dáil na nÓg 2010 commenced at approximately 10.00 and concluded at 16.20 following a closing address by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The researcher was free to roam among participants and observe the roundtable discussions and 'Question and Answer' session conducted during that day.

Full details of Dáil na nÓg 2010 are available in Appendix Three. Handwritten observation notes were made throughout the day at five to ten minute intervals and contributed to the coding and analysis of data undertaken in this study (detailed in the following chapter). It was decided not to audio-record proceedings given that obtaining the prior consent of all those attending, and their parents and guardians, would not have been logistically possible. Accordingly, longhand notes were taken by the researcher and transcribed afterwards.

3.5.2 Comhairle na nÓg observations

Gatekeepers involved with Comhairle na nÓg controlled access to members; without their support and goodwill contact with the young people would not have been possible. The young people were not only powerless in this process as Powell and Smith (2009) contend, but were actually also largely ignorant of the process; the decision to even consider taking part in this research lay wholly with their gatekeepers. An initial email survey was made of Comhairlí na nÓg websites, where it soon became clear that making that all important 'first contact' with the relevant co-ordinator would often be problematic. Up-to-date information was frequently not available and numerous efforts had to be made to source the relevant contact information.

Ultimately, nine Comhairlí na nÓg (from of a total of thirty-four) took part in this study and one meeting from each group was observed by the researcher. Figure 3.2 illustrates the geographical locations of groups who were involved. Initially, seven co-ordinators advised that in principle their group was interested but that they had to *"check with the kids first"*. In the other two Comhairlí na nÓg, the co-ordinators indicated immediately their willingness to take part. However, in the interests of affording young people the chance to refuse to participate, the two co-ordinators were asked to convey the invitation to take part in this study to their respective Comhairle na nÓg group. Ethical Thought Box 5 further elaborates on issues relating to the influence gatekeepers were able to exert on participant recruitment.

By prior agreement, the researcher was afforded an opportunity at each observed meeting to speak to the group for approximately five minutes, to outline the premise of the research to them. Mindful of Robson's (2002) caution of the influence of observer-effects in the field, the researcher informed the group that observation was being

conducted simply to get a feel for what happens at a 'typical' meeting. Observing Comhairle na nÓg meetings also provided the researcher with an opportunity to make an important initial contact with potential interviewees. It was a chance to pitch the request for an interview directly to the members, rather than have it mediated through a gatekeeper. Reassurance was given to the young people that they were under no obligation to participate.

It proved extremely difficult to ascertain if it was necessary to obtain police (Garda) clearance for this study. No relevant application form for this was readily available from the NUIM Ethics Committee. On reflection, the researcher herself felt it was prudent to secure Garda clearance, given that there had been considerable media attention in Ireland surrounding individuals working with children who have not been vetted by the police. The researcher made contact with the Garda Clearance Unit and subsequently received the appropriate form in the post. No further contact was received from the Garda Clearance Unit or from NUIM in relation to this matter until the researcher followed it up herself. Following contact with the Registrar's Office at NUIM, it was confirmed that Garda Clearance had been given to the project although no email or letter was ever received by the researcher to this effect. All gatekeepers were verbally advised that Garda Clearance had been obtained, although a hardcopy of this clearance was not requested by any gatekeeper, or parent.

*Details of the application for ethical approval speak directly to some of the contradictions and empty formalities involved in this process, both institutionally and on the part of adult gatekeepers. An application for ethical approval had been made to the NUIM Ethics Committee during the first year of study, **before** any fieldwork was carried out. A lengthy application (approximately sixteen pages), detailing various aspects of the proposed fieldwork was completed, although it was a generic form for projects involving human subjects and was not tailored specifically to children. For example, some of the questions were based on biological and/or science protocols, similar to Skelton (2008: 21) who describes "a troubling irony in that universities are transferring medical protocols over into research guidelines for social scientists at a time when medical researchers are strenuously critiquing current medical ethical safeguards". A short letter granting institutional approval was received by the researcher. No stipulation was made to resubmit an application for ethical approval if the focus of the project changed, or if fieldwork methods were altered. A copy of the approval letter was included with all consent letters given to the young people of this research.*

All gatekeepers contacted were advised that ethical approval had been received for this project during initial arrangements of the non-participant observations. None asked for hardcopy proof of this approval, nor was a copy requested by the DCYA or by NYCI before non-participant observation was carried out of Dáil na nÓg in March 2010.

Ethical Thought Box 4: Ethical approval considerations

Similar to Dáil na nÓg and for the same reason, longhand observation notes were taken at five to ten minute intervals throughout the observed meeting. Additionally, in all nine observations, personal annotations and interpretations were made immediately afterwards. Sometimes these were scribbled on the actual observation notes, sometimes short memos were written. Observational notes from all meetings attended contributed to the analysis of this study. Only one of the nine Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators asked for a copy of the observation notes; a copy was emailed to her within two days of the observation taking place.

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*In order to observe a meeting and make that crucial first contact with potential participants, various gatekeeper layers had to be navigated. Ethical best practice means that young people need to be fully informed about a research project **before** committing to take part. However, without the consent of the gatekeeper, it was not possible to make direct contact with young people who were members of Comhairle na nÓg. Wiles et al (2005) observe that not only do gatekeepers have the power to control permission to recruit; they also can influence how a study is conveyed to potential participants.*

During the fieldwork of this research, three Comhairlí na nÓg which had initially agreed to take part subsequently withdrew their consent. It was not clear if the withdrawal was on the part of the adult gatekeepers or the youth members. While the researcher suspected that it was the gatekeeper who had made this decision, without contacting the youth members in these three cases, it was not possible to confirm this. Although the researcher was aware of this issue, there seemed no alternative at the time. The benefit of hindsight prompted a reflection that a short 'flyer' could have been distributed to members in advance of the observation of their meeting.

Ethical Thought Box 5: Gatekeeper influence on participant recruitment

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No active part was played in any meeting, although occasionally detached observation was difficult to maintain. Some co-ordinators and/or some of the members deferred to the observer, inviting comment from her. In two of the nine meetings, the researcher found herself sitting in close proximity to the group, while in another, the group asked her to sit in their midst – *"we saved you a seat beside us on the couch!"* To object to such a seating arrangement potentially might have made the researcher appear aloof and thus refusal would not have been conducive to future researcher-participant relations. Some members expressed interest in what was being written down – *"are you writing down everything we say?", "Better mind the language guys, and sound intelligent!"* Clarification was given that it was merely the format and progress of the meeting that

were being noted – *"no, not at all, I'm just writing down how you do things here, and what is happening; otherwise I might forget!"*

3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews

Consent letters were distributed among attendees (Appendix Four) at the observed meetings, with a request that they should be returned to the researcher (in the stamped addressed envelope provided), signed by the parent or guardian (and also the young person) if the young person was interested in being interviewed. This was an effort to afford those present an opportunity to make the decision to take part (or not) a private one, removed from any peer or gatekeeper pressure as advised by Matthews and Tucker (2000). Consent letters were subsequently returned from members in eight of the nine participating Comhairlí na nÓg and one-to-one semi-structured interviews were subsequently arranged by follow-up telephone calls.

Table 3.2 provides a breakdown of those interviewed; forty-one young people and eighteen adults spoke to the researcher individually for the study. Included among the forty-one youth interviewees were past (long term) members from all of the nine participating Comhairlí na nÓg. Interviews with young people generally took place in their own homes, although nine took place elsewhere. Other locations for interview were: public library (1); coffee shop (3) and hotel lobby (5).

The principle of informed consent allows a participant to withdraw from the research after it has begun. Three youth participants subsequently declined to be interviewed, despite returning a consent letter to the researcher. Their wishes were respected in this regard; indeed this development was viewed positively in that it meant efforts by the researcher to cede control of the interview process to the young people involved had been successful. Withdrawing their consent to be involved with the project effectively demonstrated that these young people had been empowered in what Heath (2006) refers to as "process consent", whereby consent is seen as an on-going process rather than a once-off procedure at the beginning of the research.

Interviewees included personnel from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, (including the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs), and from the National Youth Council of Ireland. The three current Regional Participation Project Officers were

interviewed. Interviews with the adult gatekeepers usually took place at their workplace, although three were held elsewhere; two in a hotel, one in a local coffee shop. All interviews were recorded (with the consent of the interviewee), using a digital voice recorder and were transcribed afterwards. Transcription was a time-consuming process which was on-going throughout the life of the study. Original recordings were saved for back-up purposes but also to enable the researcher replay part or entire interviews from time to time.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature. Thus, while the same core questions were asked, the interviews unfolded with no pre-determined question order. In an effort to put the young people at their ease, early questions usually focused on the length of time they had been a member of Comhairle na nÓg, how they had first heard about the organisation, their circumstances of joining and any prior knowledge they may have had about the organisation. Interestingly, answers to these early questions assumed increasing importance during the analysis of this study. Further questions focused on practical, operational details and also on the influence they felt Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg had (if any), in their communities.

Questions asked of adults focused on how young people become involved in Comhairle na nÓg, the interest of schools and youth organisations in Comhairle na nÓg, and guidelines and procedures laid down by the DCYA for Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg co-ordinators and the local authorities and CDBs. A full list of interview questions is available in Appendix Five. Transcriptions from interviews formed the main basis of the codes and categories identified in the following chapter. Some recordings were listened to a number of times for clarity, emphasis and tone. Efforts were made to allow the interviews to unfold naturally, and there was no attempt to enforce a rigid timetable on potential participants, lest they be dissuaded from taking part. The researcher travelled to the interviewees' hometowns at times and dates which best suited the participants, although it should be acknowledged that the young people greatly facilitated her in this.

Interviews with the nine Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators were generally conducted in the weeks following observation of their Comhairle na nÓg observed meeting. Two co-ordinators were interviewed some time before the observed meeting due to difficulties

establishing a mutually convenient interview time. One co-ordinator was interviewed on the day of the observation, two hours before the Comhairle na nÓg meeting took place. This was to facilitate the researcher who had travelled a long distance and also because the co-ordinator herself was going on extended leave immediately afterwards. Interviews with the other adult gatekeepers involved in this study took place over the course of one year, concurrent with the observations and interviews of the young people involved. All fieldwork (interviews and observations) was conducted and fully completed during the course of the second year of this study.

3.6 Introducing the research participants

Forty-one young people were interviewed for this study, all current or past members of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. Eighteen adults were interviewed; all of whom are involved in some way with Comhairle na nÓg and/or Dáil na nÓg.

3.6.1 Comhairle na nÓg

Twenty-six current members of Comhairle na nÓg were interviewed; seventeen males and nine females. One person interviewed was nineteen years of age and two were fourteen years old. All other current members interviewed were aged between sixteen and eighteen years of age. All current members of Comhairle na nÓg, with the exception of one person, were still at school. All current members interviewed lived at home with their parents and came from across the socio-economic spectrum and from a mix of urban and rural locations. None of the current members of Comhairle na nÓg interviewed for this study would be classified as being in the DCYA 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach' category of young person. No member of the Traveller Community made contact with the researcher; nor did any young person from a residential care institution. One consent form was returned by a female from Nigeria but despite repeated efforts, contact could not be made with this girl. During the course of another interview it was learned from her friend that she was no longer a member of Comhairle na nÓg.
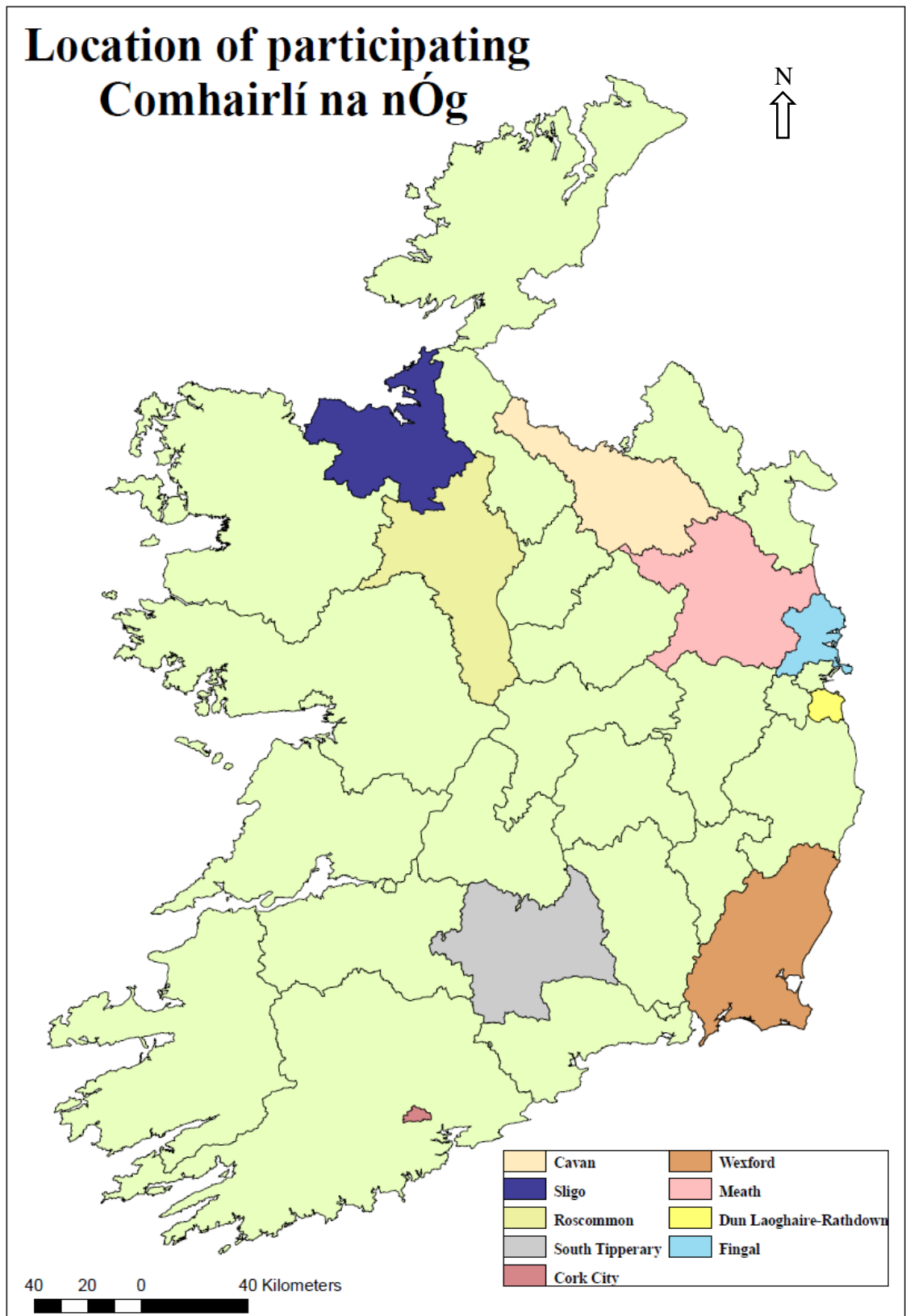
Figure 3.2: Location of participating Comhairlí na nÓg

3.6.1.1 Past members of Comhairle na nÓg

In all but one of the nine participating Comhairlí na nÓg, co-ordinators provided telephone and/or email contact details of previous members. Fifteen previous members were subsequently interviewed; nine males and six females. All had been part of their particular Comhairle na nÓg for at least two years, and all had attended Dáil na nÓg at least once. One person had already finished third level education and was currently employed as a secondary school teacher. All others were in full-time, third level education.

Just one of the nine co-ordinators refused to provide details of past members on the grounds that ethical protocols laid down by her local authority would be breached if she did so. She was also not willing to contact past members herself to advise them of this research study. Various unsuccessful attempts were made by the researcher to contact past members of this Comhairle na nÓg branch. A message was posted on three social networking sites used by young people, inviting past members to contact the researcher. In each case the message was removed by the moderator, as it was deemed 'advertising'. A number of secondary schools were contacted by email and by telephone. In each case, the school secretary claimed to have no knowledge of Comhairle na nÓg, nor of any past pupil who might have been involved with the organisation. Efforts to contact past members of this one Comhairle na nÓg group were thus abandoned.

3.6.2 Gatekeepers

A total of eighteen adults were interviewed; all were gatekeepers in some form of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. The focus of this study is on the voice of young people and as such, the rationale for contacting different gatekeepers was that they all have a role in enabling that voice to be heard, albeit to varying degrees. The adults interviewed for this study were:

- Then Minister for Children at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, TD.

- Ms Anne O'Donnell, Head of Communication and Participation at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

- Three Regional Project Participation Officers who together are responsible for overseeing the thirty-four Comhairlí na nÓg.

- Two staff members of the National Youth Council of Ireland who assisted with the running of Dáil na nÓg 2010 and the lead-up to the event.

- The nine Comhairle na nÓg Co-ordinators of groups taking part in this study were interviewed. One was male, the remaining eight were female. Three assistants (female) to co-ordinators were also interviewed, as was one youth worker (male) who is involved in the youth service overseeing this group.

3.6.3 Identification of interviewees

All interviewees were promised anonymity and accordingly no young people interviewed for this study are identified in the thesis. Allocating numerical codes to each interviewee was considered potentially confusing, given the numbers involved. It was also felt too impersonal a method of identifying interviewees and their quotations. Accordingly, the names of all young people interviewed have been changed. The hundred most popular boys' names and hundred most popular girls' names for 2010, as reported in the most recent census in the Republic of Ireland (2010), were accessed and a straight sideways swap made between these and the names of young people taking part in this research. The only names rejected were those which duplicated with an interviewee name.

While the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at the time of this study is obviously identifiable, he indicated he had no objection to being identified. Other adult gatekeepers are referred to by their job title or by 'DCYA' - for example 'Comhairle Co-ordinator 1'or 'Regional Co-ordinator 1'.

3.6.4 Interpreting participant voices

Before turning to how the collected data was analysed, the issue of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity is re-visited. Throughout the next four chapters, participant voices will continually be heard and it was their words that fuelled the analysis. However, do the participants speak for themselves or have their words being mediated and interpreted by the researcher? The pragmatist concept of the community of inquiry has been presented previously as an ideal vehicle in which to channel the voices of research participants. Working to the community of inquiry ideal, the researcher

considers her participants – ***almost*** - as co-researchers. However, in this study, written by a lone doctoral fellow, the community of inquiry is a lop-sided one. In it the researcher leads the analysis, informed by the participants' answers to what they were asked. In Chapter One the importance of recognising that a researcher's positionality inevitably influences the conduct and form of empirical research was acknowledged. The researcher must demonstrate on-going reflexivity in this regard. A similar recognition of positionality and corresponding reflexivity throughout data analysis and presentation of qualitative findings are required.

Sinclair (2004: 112) refers to the underlying premise of participation being to give young people a voice but questions how do we, as researchers, listen to their voices; "the very stuff of social science research and the kernel of those many texts on social research methodology". Spyrou (2011) asks similar questions – is there so much of a focus on agency that there is less of a focus on cultural and social reproduction for example? Thus, what children say could be interpreted by the researcher according to their adult understanding of what was said as opposed to what the child meant. Indeed one can imagine how easily this could happen. Notwithstanding this however, the process of analysing data and reporting research findings means that "irrespective of the intentions of the researcher", it is a situated and interested representation they present (Spyrou, 2011: 160). Spyrou himself admits his first draft of a report included more voices from children who commented on their lack of participation than those who appeared content with it. Later drafts corrected this uneven reporting but lessons had been learned. Spyrou concludes his paper by identifying some parameters to produce voice research of a better quality. Essentially he stresses the need not just for reflexivity but that the researcher should demonstrate a willingness to be reflexive and transparent. There is no one method where this can be achieved; indeed reflexive research "accepts the messiness, ambiguity, polyvolcality, non-factuality and multi-layered nature of meaning in 'stories' that research produces" (Spyrou, 2011: 158). It is therefore at this point in the story of this research that grounded theory (GT) is introduced.

3.7

Part II:

Grounded theory- analytical approach

3.7.1 Grounded theory

At the beginning of the fieldwork, no firm decision had been taken with regard to the analytical strategy. A thematic approach was considered; so too was a discourse or template analysis of interview transcripts. Analysing the data according to one or more of the participation models outlined in Chapter Two was yet another possible method. Arguably, these analytic strategies could occlude the participants' voices for the vagaries of researcher subjectivity would inevitably become imposed on the data. A form of analysis was required which would dilute subjectivity as much as possible. Grounded theory, instinctively compatible with classical pragmatism, seemed appropriate for this task. Enabling grounded theory to step in at this stage ensured that it was the participants' perspective rather than that of the spectator that informed and directed the analysis.

A *pure* grounded theory (GT) study can be considered a complete package of data collection and analytical techniques. Bryant and Charmaz (2007: 11) refer to GT as "a family of methods"; the authors point to it being akin to a "cookbook" of methods. In the previous chapter the relative failure of the pilot study was described; a frank account of how research deviated from the prescribed plan. A similarly honest account of how GT was used and incorporated in this study is laid out in this chapter. That so much of the fieldwork carried out ultimately did follow a 'typical' GT route was serendipitous but nevertheless serves to reinforce how sympathetic classical pragmatism is to grounded theory.

For Strübing (2007: 586), theory within a pragmatist and GT understanding can be explicated "with the active transformation of experienced aspects of the 'world out there' into conceptual objects and their interrelation". The goal is the formulation of plausible resolutions or propositions which are open to scrutiny. Acknowledging the greater prestige more abstract and formalized theories tend to be accorded, Strübing defends grounded theory; theory is abstracted to just the amount necessary required to fit the particular problem.

3.7.2 Grounded theory: a brief history

Grounded theory's origins lie in the United States of America where it was developed during the 1960s by sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. The two men had

disparate but yet complementary research and philosophical positions. Glaser's and Strauss' practices were shaped and inspired by the theoretical and methodological milieu in which they both worked. Strauss, from the University of Chicago was influenced by interactionist and pragmatist writings and was inspired by men such as Robert E. Park, John Dewey and G.H. Mead. Glaser worked in Columbia University and was motivated by Paul Lazarsfeld, an innovator of quantitative methods at that time. The Columbian tradition emphasized the need for the development of theory in conjunction with empirical research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Thus the context in which grounded theory was formulated also contributed to its development. Charmaz (2006) observes that many students and advocates of GT are largely ignorant of its Chicago School heritage and that its Chicago School antecedents are growing progressively fainter and are in danger of being lost altogether. Strübing (2007: 580) points to "a strong bond between the thoughts of early North American Pragmatism and both the methodological and the socio-theoretical concepts at the core of grounded theory – at least as long as it is the Straussian variant of grounded theory that we are talking about".

The path of collaborative research does not always run smoothly and Glasser and Strauss had a well-publicised spilt. Glaser rejected the direction Strauss and his colleagues were taking GT, directing his criticism at their position on the role of theory and the appropriateness of utilising (or not) prior knowledge (Strübing, (2007: 586-587). The original Glaser and Strauss grounded theory seminal text of 1967 contained more than a hint of what Strübing (2007) refers to as 'tabula rasa', translated from the Latin as 'blank slate'. Strübing contends that the 1967 text explicitly rejects a tabula rasa approach. Instead, the authors argue for the researcher to have "a perspective that will help him [sic] see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 3).

Following *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), both men published individually and collaboratively with other colleagues. Strauss' and Corbin's (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* provoked a pointed critique from Glaser in 1992, who essentially argued that their version of GT constituted an entirely new methodology (Babchuk, 1996). Hallberg (2006) posits that

Glaser's stance is actually closer to the positivistic research paradigm than Strauss' position. For example, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* argues that the researcher should enter the field with as few preconceptions as possible. Compilation of a literature review should be suspended until after data collection; indeed Glaser continues to remain true to this position. Arguably this is unrealistic, if only that research funding bodies demand students produce yearly progress reports which indicate the relevant literature consulted and read. Strauss' and Corbin's GT appears more pragmatically orientated than Glaser's GT; for them, the voice of the participant is paramount.

It is predominantly the Straussian variant of grounded theory that was utilised in this study. For Strauss (and Corbin), theory need not be the sole aim of the research process. Rather any theory produced must be open to scrutiny and be testable in practice. Strauss emphasized action and understood that the nature of experience continually evolves; the person who is experiencing the situation actively shapes the world around them (Charmaz, 2005). Change and process are emphasized and the variability and complexity of life acknowledged. An interrelationship takes place among conditions, meaning, and action. Charmaz (2005) ponders if the intellectual roots of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism in Strauss' GT were reduced in his later collaborative work with Juliet Corbin. She points to technical procedures which make verification an explicit goal. This emphasis on verification, Charmaz contends (2005), brings their version of GT close to positivism, although in a different way. Charmaz argues that the Strauss and Corbin GT derivative draws on objectivist assumptions found in positivism.

Corbin [and Strauss] (2008) however do stress the importance of the Chicago School pragmatists. The 2008 updated *Basics of Qualitative Research*, sole-authored by Corbin (with the now deceased Strauss credited as co-author), has a new introductory first chapter which focuses explicitly on GT's epistemology. Corbin traces GT's evolution from Chicago Interactionism and the philosophy of pragmatism and credits this aspect of GT to Dewey and Mead in particular. She also credits the pragmatists' innovative philosophy of knowledge and maintains (2008: 2) that it is "easily recognizable as the framework for our own methodology". Charmaz (2005) worries if current GT

researchers appreciate its Chicago School heritage; this study aims to provide a vigorous acknowledgment of GT's pragmatist pedigree.

3.7.3 Data collection within a GT study

Together with supplementary secondary data, non-participation observations and semi-structured interviews were the main methods of data collection used throughout this study. In line with classical pragmatism, an attitude of scepticism in relation to the collected data should be retained, caution Strauss and Corbin (1990: 45). All theoretical explanations, categories, possible hypotheses, comparisons and contrasts imported into the study should be considered provisional until such time as they are found to support the data. From time to time it is necessary to stop and query: 'what am I trying to do here?'; 'is what I think I am seeing fitting the reality of the data?' Data collection and analysis are iterative, cyclical processes; alternating between collection and analysis allows for concepts to emerge naturally and which are relevant to a situation as it unfolds. Adhering to this type of analytic work practice promotes the development (and rejection if necessary), of potential hypotheses while they are still in development (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

3.7.4 Data analysis within a GT study

Strauss and Corbin (1990: 57) refer to coding as being at the heart of their treatise of GT; coding is "the central process by which theories are built from data". Since the initial development of GT by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, significant advances have been made in the realm of computer software programmes which can facilitate analysis. Software packages such as NUD*IST were specifically developed for GT (Robson (2002). No computer software was utilised in this study however. As time went on, the researcher reflected that perhaps it might have been useful to have used a software package such as NUD*IST, NVIVO or MAXQDA to expedite the coding process. However, by the time the interviews had been transcribed and the first level of coding applied, the researcher felt comfortable with the data and in her ability to manage it. Furthermore, it was felt that although software programmes are undoubtedly useful (such as when viewing one code at a time or when more than one researcher is coding the data), it is possible to become so immersed in the mechanics of the software programme, that the overall story is lost. An over-reliance on software programmes to fracture the data into codes could produce categories based on frequency and not on

integrative power (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1996). Data in this study were collected and coded by a single researcher and thus it was known intimately. Regardless of whether software is used, or if the coding is performed manually, there are usually three stages to the GT coding process as follows:

3.7.4.1 Open coding

Strauss and Corbin (1990: 65-74) explain this first coding stage: data (such as non-observation notes and interview transcripts), are taken apart into discrete units; whatever logically appears as a unit in the data is chosen. This could be a word, a sentence or a paragraph. Unit after unit is compared in order that similar units can be identified and codes (or labels) assigned. It is possible for data to have several, provisional labels which can be changed as the process unfolds. Invariably, dozens (possibly even hundreds of labels) are noted. Once phenomena or units in the data have been identified, concepts around them are grouped together. Thus the sheer volume of units is reduced to more manageable proportions. This process is called categorizing. Next, categories must be named.

Data are read and re-read. Audio recordings and files are listened to several times if required. What is most important at this stage is to name the various categories; more appropriate category names can be re-assigned at a later stage if necessary (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 67). As before, the researcher questions what is emerging: 'what is this?', 'what is related to?', 'is it related to another piece of the data?'

3.7.4.2 Axial coding

The data, disassembled during the open coding process, begins to be reconstituted into groups or categories. Axial coding does this in ways which forges connections between categories and sub-categories. Importantly, this is an area where Glaser and Strauss diverged (Robson, 2002). Glaser took a purist grounded theory route; axial codes and the subsequent form they take should emerge strictly from the data, rather than being forced into a pre-determined format. Strauss' and Corbin's interpretation worked within an exclusively interactionist regime; axial coding leads to an understanding of the central phenomena of the data, as influenced by the context in which it was formed - "the action and interaction strategies by which it is dealt with, and their consequences" (Robson, 2002: 494). Both inductive and deductive thinking are required throughout

this stage in a constant interplay between the two (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 107, 114). The authors advise that four distinct analytic steps are required in the complex process of axial coding, and they are:

1. Hypothetical relating of sub-categories to a category by means of statements denoting the nature of the relationships between them and the phenomena.

2. Verification of those hypotheses against actual data.

3. A continued search for the properties of categories and sub-categories, and the dimensional locations of data.

4. The beginning exploration of variation in phenomena, by comparing each category and its sub-categories for different patterns discovered by comparing dimensional locations of instances of data.

(Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 107)

Open coding and axial coding, *together*, complete the exploration and description of the data. Although presented here in two separate sub-sections, in reality open and axial coding take place simultaneously (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Axial coding succeeds in extending and conflating the codes identified in the open coding process. To delve deeper and extract meaning, selective coding must now take place.

3.7.4.3 Selective coding

As stated previously, the appeal of GT was its coding, organisational and analytical procedures. Progressing to the selective coding stage normally entails extracting a single core category. A storyline is explicated from the data. The conceptualization of the story ultimately produces a core category (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 116-142). Subsidiary categories are related around this core category or storyline at a dimensional level. Relationships are validated against the data. Finally, categories which require development or refining are filled in and a central focus to the study emerges. It is usually from this core category that a substantive grounded theory is generated. Figure 3.3 illuminates the interrelated processes of data collection, organisation and analysis involved in grounded theory. Notwithstanding this, once again it is stressed that that GT collection and analysis is an iterative, cyclical process.
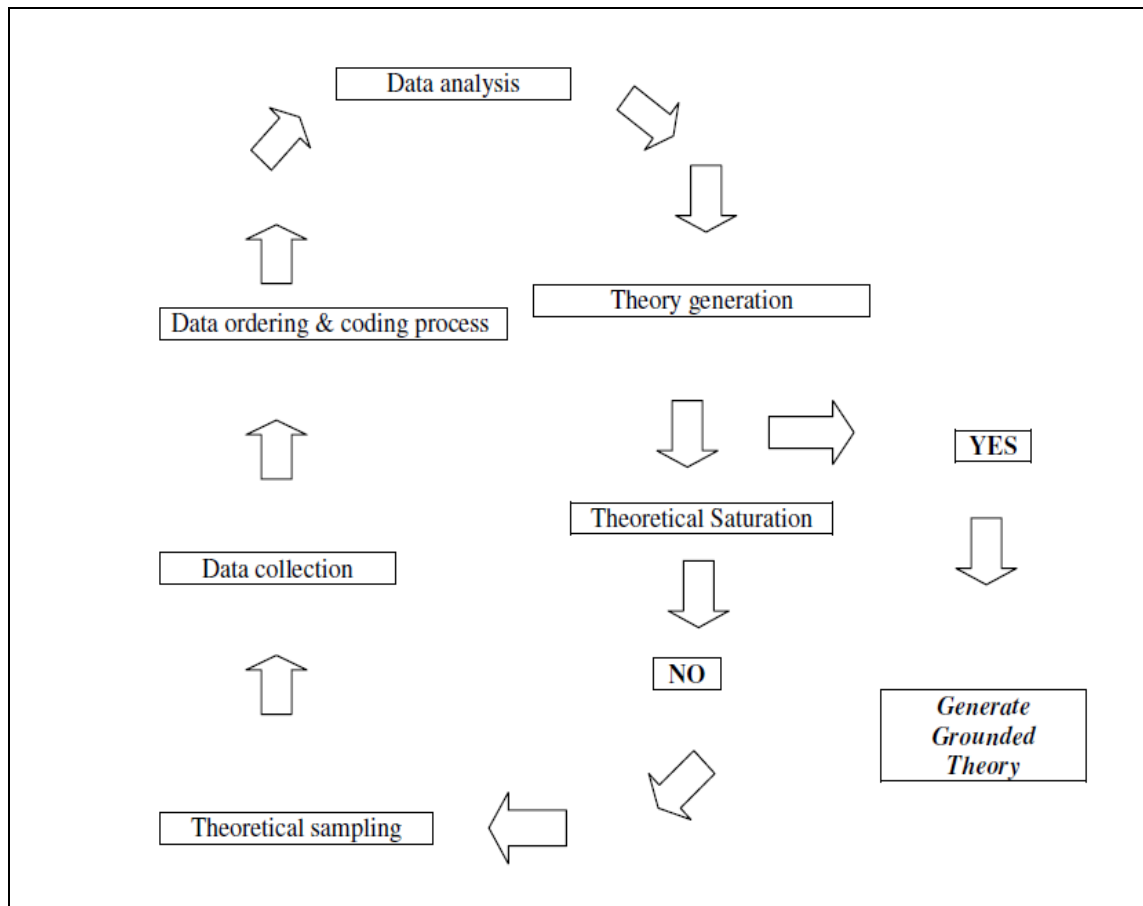
Figure 3.3: Interrelated processes of data collection, data ordering and data analysis involved in building a grounded theory (*after* Pandit, 1996)

3.7.5 Substantive theory generation

Fracturing the data through open coding and reassembling it via axial coding is achieved by means of a process of constant comparison, integration and interpretation of the relationships between, and within categories. The researcher works their way through the analysis, ultimately constructing a grounded theory built on their own interpretation of what has been observed in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 2008).

Two levels of theory can be distinguished: (i) formal grounded theory and (ii) substantive grounded theory; this study sought to develop the latter. Formal level theory is the highest level of abstraction, gleaned from in-depth investigation of phenomena in a variety of contexts. Accordingly, it is applicable across a broad range of social applications (Bex Lambert, 2007). Although formal and substantive theories are grounded in the data, there is a significant difference between the two, primarily in relation to data collection. When building formal theory, not only is one comparing and

contrasting concepts, but crucially comparisons and contrasts are also made *between* different contexts. Thus formal level theory is applicable beyond the immediate context of where the data was collected. Though similarly grounded in the data, a substantive theory applies in one particular area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Of course it is possible to graduate from substantive to formal grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) contend that while many substantive theories apply in a particular setting, theories can be relevant elsewhere. Thus substantive theories can become "a springboard or stepping stone to the development of a grounded formal theory" (1967: 79).

3.7.6 Theoretical Sampling

Corbin and Strauss (2008) admit to difficulty deciding where to locate information in relation to theoretical sampling in their text, finally slotting the discussion on GT sampling between memo and diagram advice and the discussion of coding procedures. Similarly guided, theoretical sampling in this study is discussed at this point. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all stages of GT happen concurrently.

Theoretical sampling differs significantly from other forms of sampling in that it is responsive to the data being collected, as opposed to being established before the research begins. Effectively, it is a process which feeds off itself in that it is flexible, open and supremely reflexive (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Morse (2007: 240) states that "the main principle of theoretical sampling is that the emerging categories, and the researcher's increasing understanding of the developing theory, now direct the sampling". Corbin and Strauss (2008: 144) expand: "At what point in the research does a researcher sample theoretically?" The answer is that it starts after the first analytical session and continues throughout the entire research process. Even as the research is being written, it should still be possible to discover new categories. Data collection ceases when saturation occurs. Determining when this happens can be problematic however. What the researcher is searching for is not necessarily replication of instances but rather if the characteristics of instances are identified as consistently reoccurring (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). If this is deemed to be the case, the decision should be taken to cease data collection.

3.7.7 Memoing

Memo writing is a further part of the GT iterative and cyclical coding process. Holton (2007) describes memos as acting as guides to further the process of data collection, coding and analysis. In essence, memos enable the researcher keep an immediate record of thoughts and ideas. The researcher must evolve a work method that allows for the instant recording of thoughts and ideas; the best thoughts do not necessarily always occur when conveniently seated in front of the computer. Memos should not be just descriptive, however detailed they are. Instead they should "raise that description to the theoretical level through the conceptual rendering of the material" (Holton, 2007: 282).

3.8 Beginning the analysis

Grounded theory is an iterative process and in line with this, early open coding commenced while interviews and observations were still on-going. Initially, these early codes at times, were almost tentative and were written directly on the printed transcribed notes. All interview and observation transcripts were subjected to a line-by-line and paragraph by paragraph inspection; the researcher was all the time endeavouring to let the transcriptions tell her what the first codes would be. The GT literature advises the grounded theorist to continually ask: 'what is this piece of data telling me?' and 'what is this about?' and so on. Perhaps as a direct result of this, many of these first codes tended to be in the form of questions. In reality, perhaps the longest and most difficult part of the coding process was this first open coding stage. The data was constantly re-visited and every sentence and paragraph viewed as potentially valuable. Repeated forays into the data began to yield interesting codes. The open coding process produced a sizeable list of codes. Early codes were transferred into an Excel spreadsheet on an on-going basis for consultation as the additional interviews and observations were taking place. These were printed out from time to time and examined in hardcopy form. Although aware that some codes were very similar, there was a reluctance to break the rhythm of open coding by trying to conflate codes at this early stage.

It was the participants' own words which began to give up their GT codes. Thus it seems fitting that the participants' voices are heard right at the beginning of the presentation of findings. This is a deliberate strategy to make category allocation

decisions transparent. The interpretation extracted was grounded in the data itself. Table 3.3 is a snapshot of the excess of two hundred open codes generated throughout the first stage of coding, together with the codes' informative quotes.

Code / label	Informative quote from interview
How to compile the agenda	**Ques:** *if you had an item you wanted put on the agenda, how would you go about doing that?* **Ruby:** *em well I'm not too sure how the actual system works coz I have never been in that situation but I'm sure it would be fine with our co-ordinator. She's very, em open, do you know, she has no problem with us calling her at home or outside a meeting or whatever.*
Where do they meet?	**Ques:** *you meet in different places, is that right?* **Ben:** *Yea, that's right. I think the council chamber gives it a formality which other places don't and the more formal the venue, the more we seem to get done. We also went to a development centre in the town.*
Connecting and making links	**Ques:** *do you ever meet people from other youth councils?* **Amy:** *we did meet up with a group from, eh, they weren't a Comhairle, they were another group, we met up with them less than a month ago, we went to an adventure centre em, for two days and we met up with them and we were divided into groups like 3 from us and 3 from them and we did different activities and so we got to mix with everybody.*

Table 3.3: Sample early open codes

As already stated, there was awareness that some codes generated were near duplications of each other. To resolve this, once it was felt that theoretical saturation had been achieved (or as near to this as was possible), a printout of all open codes was generated. Codes were compared with each other simply with a view to identifying duplications. Over two hundred initial, open codes were relatively easily conflated to one hundred and forty-two. These were then re-examined numerous times, compared and contrasted with each other in order that emergent categories be teased out.

Early questions in the interviews with young people were designed to put them at their ease. However, in line with good practice in GT research, initial analysis of interview transcripts and emerging codes influenced some of the questions asked in later interviews. Responses to these opening 'easy' interview questions prompted increased reflection around the actual process of first becoming involved with Comhairle na nÓg, beyond what had originally been envisaged. Thus the researcher was brought into some unexpected territory and this was explored in greater detail in later interviews. It became clear that *how* the young person was recruited to Comhairle na nÓg was assuming an importance perhaps equal to the form participation took once a member. Recruitment strategies (or lack thereof) pointed to uneven participation experiences even before participation proper had fully begun. The table below (Table 3.4) is a sample of open codes derived from the first four interviews conducted with young people.

Code / label	Informative quote from interviews
Circumstances of joining	**Katie:** *"eh well a teacher in my school, I was on the student council and he asked us to go to the AGM."* **Luke:** *"um well you see I'm on the student council and they were sending two people and I was on it and em Katie and I got picked and so we went"* **Lucy:** *"well the teacher came in and said she had got a form from Comhairle na nÓg and did anybody want to go for it. Nobody really had any idea what it was – I kinda had a slight idea 'coz I had heard it before so I said that I'd go for and the class voted for me"*

Table 3.4: Open coding of first four interviews with Comhairle na nÓg members

How much of an informed decision was it to join Comhairle na nÓg became an issue worth exploring in greater detail. Table 3.5 presents the open codes generated from interviews at a more advanced stage of the fieldwork. The researcher had been sensitized to this issue and thus asked young people to expand on this aspect during their interviews. Grace was interviewed many weeks after Lucy, Katie and Luke (Table

3.4). The researcher was keen to extract as much information as possible in relation to what Grace had been told, and what she knew of the organisation she was about to join.

Code / label	Informative quote from interview (Grace)
Circumstances of joining	**Grace:** *My teacher came in and said that there's an AGM thing and who wants to do it. So everyone put their hand up but sure nobody knew what it was.* **Ques:** *And do you think your teacher knew what it was?* **Grace:** *Oh, I reckon she did, yea – well, I think she did...* [laughs]. **Ques:** *And then what happened – you went to the AGM?* **Grace:** *So yea, we went to that sure, the girls and myself and then there was the actual, you know you put your name forward to go on the Comhairle and sure we were like 'why not' and my name came out and then I was like 'so what do I do?* [laughs] **Ques:** *And at this stage, you still didn't know what was involved?* **Grace:** *Eh, No!* [laughs]

Table 3.5: Open coding of later interview

3.8.1 Memoing in practice

Throughout this study, the majority of memos were recorded in a hardback notebook, a constant companion throughout the on-going fieldwork and brought along to each interview and observation. Ideas were captured in this notebook and assisted in keeping track of fieldwork progress in a study that was being conducted in multiple geographical sites simultaneously. Additional memos were also kept in a word computer document. From time to time older entries were re-read to rekindle sparks of imagination and interest that occasionally had occurred at inopportune moments. In line with Corbin and Strauss (2008), the memos recorded during the study varied in length and degrees of conceptualization. They were a crucial part of the GT process in that they ensured the researcher stayed close to the experiences interviewees were disclosing.

Grace (of Table 3.5) was not alone in demonstrating an almost complete lack of knowledge of what was involved in being part of Comhairle na nÓg. Nor was she aware of the basic premise of the organisation, or indeed of the implications behind the concept of youth voice. The researcher's records contain other memos to this effect. The following is an example of from two such memos; Box 3.1 presents a memo written early in the coding process, the second (Box 3.2) was a memo written much later on in the data collection phase of the research. Both memos highlight how the lack of knowledge the majority of members had of Comhairle na nÓg before they joined assumed increasing importance as the fieldwork progressed.

A surprising lack of awareness of what Comhairle is all about is apparent - very few of those interviewed so far (perhaps just one or two?] had even heard of Comhairle na nÓg before joining. After interviewing four Comhairlí members I was struck by how little they knew about the whole organisation. This needs further investigation – is this common across Comhairlí? Lucy was the only one of the four who had some idea of what she didn't know [the known unknowns!]. She seemed uncomfortable admitting to not knowing what the organisation was about before becoming involved.

Box 3.1 Example, Early GT Memo

The lack of awareness young people have of what they were getting involved is clear. I had been worrying about getting 'informed consent' but informed consent itself seems to be an issue within Comhairle na nÓg. How fair can it be to ask young people to be youth representatives if they don't understand what they are getting involved with? Ticking the participation box is not enough; they need to understand why Comhairle na nÓg is there.

Box 3.2 Example, Later GT Memo

The analytic trail emerging from the data was followed closely; glimpses of categories were coming into view. These early open codes also prompted ethical questions. Considerable care had been taken in relation to acquiring informed consent from research participants during the research recruitment phase, both for institutional reasons but also because of a personal moral impetus. Questions began to form in the researcher's mind as to the sort of participation being practiced among young people who did not seem to have been briefed about why they were doing what they were doing. Gatekeepers such as teachers and school principals generally came across as

well-meaning but often seemed ill-advised themselves. Some young people seem to drift into the Comhairle na nÓg organisation by happenstance, while others are selected to join. The decision to join appears as something of a misnomer as for many young people, the decision to join is made for them. Repeated forays into the data directed the progress and advancement of the analysis. Awareness and knowledge were assuming significant importance.

3.8.2 The segue from open to axial coding

Axial coding moves analysis beyond a description of what is happening, to an interpretation of what is occurring in the data. There is no definite division between one stage and the other. In this study, open coding segued easily into axial coding. Charmaz (2003: 321) refers to looking at data as "action" and states that by using action codes, the researcher can "remain specific and not take leaps of fancy". It will be seen in the following chapters that many of sub-categories are essentially 'action codes'. Memos, drawn up during the interviews, observations and analysis, further contributed to the axial coding progress. Questions were continually asked of the data in order to further integration and abstraction. To assist in this process, interview transcripts, observational records and occasionally the audio recordings of interviews were re-visited on numerous occasions.

The four categories extracted from the collected data cut across multiple interviews, and were repeated (or versions of them), in interview after interview, observation after observation. Time spent on axial coding was far less than that spent on the open coding stage of the process. Furthermore, re-constituting the data became easier and quicker as the process progressed. Ultimately, it was felt that all open codes could be accommodated within each of these four categories which were named as:

Category 1:	The administration of schemes
Category 2:	Communicating participation
Category 3:	Senses of ownership
Category 4:	Surrogate benefits

It should not be forgotten that theoretical sampling was on-going during the entire data collection and analysis process. Theoretical sampling is responsive to the data being

collected and analysed, and therefore drives further rounds of data collection (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Total saturation can probably never be fully achieved but sufficient sampling had taken place in that new categories were not now emerging. Also, and again in line with Corbin's and Strauss' (2008) advice, there was sufficient depth and breadth to the categories for a full understanding of the type of youth participation under review in this study to be gleaned.

3.8.3 Analysis means interpretation

Earlier the issue of how the voices of the participants were to be interpreted was broached. The researcher 'admits' that ultimately the data was analysed by a sole researcher following interpretation of interviewee answers. To expand this further now that the role of GT within this study has been outlined: all qualitative studies require a researcher to interpret the data. Indeed one presumes that most if not all qualitative researchers are vexed by the issue of validity – what if one misinterprets the data? Could the emergent theory be compromised? Returning to one's participants as a way of verifying the interpretation is described by Elliott and Lazenbatt (2005: 51) "as the gold standard" in qualitative research and indeed the researcher did return (by occasional telephone call) to some of her participants. However, this 'checking' is an integral part of the process of GT itself particularly in relation to the creation of memos and the iterative nature of the coding system.

If verification is the 'gold standard' of qualitative research, a possible 'gold standard' of a research project guided by classical pragmatism is the researcher and participants working collaboratively as 'fully-signed up' members of a community of inquiry. In this study the researcher considered her participants 'almost' her co-researchers in that it was their words that drove the analysis and subsequent interpretation. Ultimately however the study was written by a single researcher. However, looking to Juliet Corbin (2008: 50) almost for reassurance, this researcher states that "more than one story can be derived from the data"; different analysts will focus on different things and what ultimately makes the difference "is the prism through which the analyst viewed the data".

3.8.3.1 Grounded theory deviation

Section *3.7.4.3* outlined what should happen in the selective coding phase whereby the data is fully re-constituted into a single core category – in essence the storyline of the data. Wilson-Scott (2004: 121) speaks of this stage of the analysis being the time to "make an educated guess at what the Core Category might be". It is at this point of the analysis that this study deviates from the prescribed GT coding pathway. The axial coding stage produced four distinct sub-categories, each of which will be fully examined in the following four chapters. Efforts to extract a single core explanatory category proved frustrating. Ultimately it was decided the four sub-categories sufficiently explained what was uncovered from the data; these were the storyline of the youth participation under review in this thesis. It is likely that grounded theory purists would consider such 'leap-frogging' from axial coding to substantive theory generation as a methodological transgression. However, as already stated this is not a pure grounded theory study. To force a core category upon the data would have been contrived, doing so merely to abide by grounded theory 'rules'.

In his renowned paper 'From the editors: what grounded theory is not', Suddaby (2006: 638) admits that grounded theory is "not perfect". Reviewing various grounded theory papers Suddaby detects what he calls "a growing fundamentalism" in GT research with a difference being obvious between those who write about GT and those who practice GT. While a healthy tension between the two undoubtedly stimulates arguments and debate in the GT literature, Suddaby reminds his readers of the pragmatist core of GT whereby GT was founded specifically to help researchers understand complex social processes. GT is inherently a messy process and necessitates that its researchers exercise sound common sense. There will be occasions when all stages of GT are simply not appropriate to their research. While admitting to her 'transgression' of pure GT procedures, the researcher defends herself by maintaining that deviation is not an excuse for slipshod methodological practices. Agreeing with Suddaby, it is only when the rules are fully understood that one can decide to navigate away from them. Uncovering the four GT sub-categories contained within the collected data of this study through a process of constant comparisons enabled the storyline of this study to be told.

3.9 Conclusion

No research design can be considered fool-proof as decisions taken must be constantly reflected upon as a study unfolds. That the pilot study failed to realise this aim was initially dispiriting. Nonetheless, it forced the researcher to re-evaluate and to reflect on the direction and scope of the research. It succeeded in sharpening the focus of the researcher and the on-going research. Qualitative methods require continual reflection and re-evaluation in a process of refinement which Clifford and Valentine (2003: 4) contend "allows the voice of informants to be heard in ways which are non-exploitative or oppressive". At the very early stages of this research no decision had been made in relation to how the collected data were to be analysed. Ultimately, grounded theory (GT) was chosen as the most useful method of analysis. It was incorporated into this study for a number of reasons including that it was felt to be instinctively sympathetic to the philosophy of classical pragmatism and also for its organizational and analytical procedures. Furthermore, using GT ensured that the participants' voices would always be kept to the fore. Detailing the coding techniques ensures the reader is provided with an informed appreciation of the cyclical and iterative processes inherent in GT analysis.

In the chapters that follow, the four categories extricated from the data are considered in depth. GT offered a systemized method of data collection and analysis and provided a scaffold around which research findings could be integrated and synthesized. Without an "adequate method" (Dewey, 1933: 249), a person could "grab, as it were, at the first facts that offer themselves; he does not examine them to see whether they are truly facts or whether, even though they be real facts, they are relevant to the inference that needs to be made". The categories which follow are laid out in such a way that each builds upon the next. Taken together these four categories underpin the substantive grounded theory of this study.

Chapter Four: The Administration of Schemes

4.1 Introduction

The four categories are thoroughly documented one by one; metaphorically "peeling the layers" (Rutherford, 2011: 352), in order to assist the reader navigate and better understand the study's findings. Transparency and openness in the presentation of qualitative results actively involves 'the other' in the research process; be it the reader and/or the participants (Constas, 1992; Chenail, 1995:2). Echoing Chenail (1995), it also allows for findings to be read in a rhythm. Throughout, it is the participants' voices, their experiences and their words that drove the analysis, for in this study, data are 'star'. Those directly involved in youth participation were best placed to recount their own stories. While experiences may be individual to each participant, there were many similarities observed.

The categories are presented in a continuum over four chapters, commencing with 'the administration of schemes'. Each category is constructed from a number of sub-categories, together with its associated properties. While there is no hierarchy to the categories, the first category presents the reality of the experiences of those involved in Irish State youth participation, from the young person's point of entry into these organisations, to when they exit. Although a discussion of the findings in relation to the extant literature is conserved until the four categories have been fully chronicled, sporadic comparisons are interjected where appropriate. As before, ethical thought boxes may occasionally interrupt the text.

4.2 The administration of schemes

'The administration of schemes' seems a logical starting point. Interestingly, when asked about their participation, most young people jumped straight to their day to day experiences; more nuanced reflections emerged only after much probing. Consequently, differential levels of participation intensity quickly became evident. For many, youth participation *is* meetings, AGMs, agendas and so on. For these young people, this represents the totality of their participation experience. So caught up in *what* they are doing, that very few contemplate *why* they are doing it. Rarely had any

member been asked to confront the purpose or impact of their participation before being interviewed for this study.

Category	Sub-categories	Associated properties
The administration of schemes	*Deciding* to join	Thinking, uninformed, accepting, knowledge, told, asked, telling, awareness, selected
	Initiating	Becoming, accepting, deciding, setting, agreeing, understanding, believing
	Participating in communities	Together, difference, similarity, age, background, linking, connecting, forging

Table 4.1: Construction, 'The administration of schemes'

The 'administration of schemes' reveals a discomforting, situated snapshot of participation which was unfocussed and patchy. Often, the integrity of the participation appeared compromised even before it had a chance to properly begin.

4.2.1 *Deciding* to join

Joshua: *One day my CSPE teacher asked me to come up to the top of the room at the end of class and I was like, 'okay, so what have I done?' She said that the principal had got a letter from Comhairle na nÓg and they wanted three students to go to the AGM and would I like to go?*

Ques: *and had you heard about it before this?*

Joshua: *Nope, never heard about it before then. All she had was a letter saying it was on and a consent form thing and that three could go. So she picked three of us.*

Thirty-eight of the forty-one young people interviewed became involved in Comhairle na nÓg through their school. Control of initial recruitment procedures appears largely to have been ceded to the schools, although in truth and according to those interviewed in this study, personnel in the schools themselves knew little about DCYA participation. The scope and opportunities youth participation might offer were rarely discussed between the pupil and the principal, beyond the vague concept of 'young people having a voice'. Not surprisingly, quick and convenient choices appeared to have been made; only those perceived likely to be interested were approached. As a result, many members stumbled upon Comhairle na nÓg almost by happenstance, and became swept along in the initial excitement of being singled out. Nevertheless, they were caught up in a process which many admitted during their interviews that they had only tenuously

understood. The *decision* to join was thus a fallacy, more often than not predicated on a whim or perhaps being made to feel special.

Cillian: *well my teacher in school, my Irish teacher, heard about it and thought it was something to do with Irish* [laughs] *or what she assumed, and I was roped into going along to the open day - the AGM - and because nobody else wanted to join, I was voted in and that's what happened.*

"Nobody else wanted to join..." but nobody else was afforded the chance to consider joining. Cillian's teacher *"roped him into joining"* on the grounds that he was good at Irish and was also a member of other groups and clubs, both in and outside of school. *"I'm one of the people in the school who is pretty much involved in everything".* That Cillian went on to become enamoured with, and committed to Comhairle na nÓg was serendipitous for all concerned.

Young person after young person recounted similar experiences. Callum has been involved in Comhairle na nÓg for two years, and had also served on the Dáil na nÓg Council. Reluctantly, he identified significant flaws in the recruitment process of the organisations he thoroughly enjoys being associated with, and indeed admitted that he will be sorry to leave. What were his circumstances of joining?

Callum: *it was through the student council really, it was when I was in Transition Year, there was maybe three application forms sent to the school and our liaison teacher, well she kinda picked us.*

Ques: *Right, I see – and had you heard of Comhairle before this?*

Callum: *Never heard of it! I don't think the school had ever heard of it either.*

Ques: *and did your TY liaison teacher know what it was?*

Callum: *Eh No!* [laughs] *The thing is that there is a lot of confusion in schools 'coz they don't know what the Comhairle does until they go forward you know, until their delegates go forward, and there's a bit of confusion 'coz the Comhairle would only send maybe three application forms whereas anyone around the city is invited.*

Alex's teacher knew something of the organisation and chose which pupils could attend the AGM.

Alex: *Well there was only four allowed from our school so we were asked. We wrote a letter, or well he put out points, valid points, and we had to write for and against it and he selected the best four. I had never heard of it before though.*

Past members were also asked to reflect on their early involvement with Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. Lily and Lauren both became slightly uncomfortable remembering how uninformed they had been when they had first joined.

Lily: *it started off in school, they asked students who were already involved in organisations in school - students from Transition Year up - so students on the school council, prefects, members of the games committee; they asked people if they wanted to go onto Comhairle na nÓg. I had no idea about it, I mean what Comhairle na nÓg was about at all. So I put up my hand and said 'what the hell'.*

Lauren: *I had heard about it from my Dad, he works in the County Council and I had kinda heard about it and read about it in the newspapers and always thought that's kind of a nice thing, sounds good. I had seen their first newsletter and they had done things and were working properly and I was in Fóroige (a different youth organisation), and was chairperson of that and em, I got onto the student council in school and through that we got to the Election Day. I still didn't really know what it was about though. I had heard about it but didn't really know about it and I just said 'oh sure, I'll run for election' and I got elected.*

Recruitment through schools has been a recurring feature of Comhairle na nÓg membership since the organisation first began in 2002. Harry joined Comhairle na nÓg in that first year. The circumstances of his entry into the organisation were remarkably similar to Cillian, who joined four years later. Harry was singled out by teachers on the basis that it had an Irish name and like Cillian, Harry was good at Irish.

Harry: *the teacher came up to me and asked me if I would like to go to this thing, 'Comhairle na nÓg'; I was told it was an Irish thing but I didn't know much about it...*

Ques: *and why did your teacher think it was to do with Irish, because of the name?*

Harry: *yes, well actually he didn't think it was Irish but the principal thought it was to do with Irish!*

Charlie, another past member, joined through Youthreach (an education and training programme for early school leavers) and was one of only three youth interviewees to hear about the organisation in somewhere other than school. However, similar to the experiences of those who joined through their school, Charlie was approached by his youth leader and asked to consider becoming involved with the organisation.

Charlie: *I was picked by our Youthreach leader and a few of us got picked and we just went over. I enjoyed doing the workshops and realised it was about young people getting a voice – excellent I thought. I hadn't ever heard of it before but went along to the first meeting but wasn't really sure what to expect.*

Targeting only a select few young people as potential members was identified as problematic by several of the co-ordinators interviewed, and also by staff at the DCYA. Although pressure is exerted on co-ordinators to recruit from elsewhere, schools have a readymade, 'captive' audience. Although some of the co-ordinators admitted that they were aware the opportunity to consider joining Comhairle na nÓg was usually not being conveyed to the wider school population, they reported feelings of powerlessness on this issue.

Comhairle co-ordinator (1): *... letters usually go out to the principal so they just basically say 'you' 'you' and 'you' which isn't good. There would be a lot of student council people, a lot on the debating society - we're trying to get away from the hand-picked students but schools don't like letting people out from exam years so sometimes you have a bit, a bit, you know – imbalance.*

Co-ordinator (2): *our members only serve one year, not two; so that's what we do and it's working fine once they're on-board. We find schools are fine letting them out for just one year, not two.*

Ques: *and the schools that are not onboard – what's the reason do you think, is it lack of interest...?*

Co-ordinator (2): *I don't know, we don't know at all. Did they not get the correspondence? I mean we would have rung the school and got a contact person but we just don't hear anymore ... at the end of the day the schools select who they want to select and we have no control over that.*

Co-ordinator frustration with the lack of interest of schools in these youth participation organisations was palpable. More often than not, piquing the interest of staff in schools appears to hinge on *"getting the right teacher on the right day"* (Co-ordinator, 8). One adult interviewee maintained that the DCYA should, and could, do more in this area. It should intervene and compel schools and youth organisations to co-operate with Comhairle na nÓg, she argued.

Co-ordinator (2): *We have rung, we have emailed, we have contacted CSPE teachers, we have contacted TYs and the principals. We have had wonderful posters but unless I ask the young people to check, I have no idea if they were put up ... so it does require*

intervention by the DCYA to say that this is what should happen because I can't make organisations work with me.

While stimulating and maintaining the goodwill and interest of schools has proved challenging for Comhairle na nÓg gatekeepers, more challenging again has been arousing the interest of other youth organisations in these State participation structures. For example, co-ordinator (5) attempted to entice members of the African and Polish communities to join Comhairle na nÓg but had little success, advising that *"it's quite hard to sell it to them."*

One Comhairle na nÓg group revealed that it goes about the recruitment process somewhat differently. The onus of responsibility for attracting new members is put directly onto the current membership. It became clear in interviews that a mutual trust exists between the co-ordinator and members of this group; each seems to respect the other. With average membership numbers of approximately thirty people, it is one of the largest Comhairle na nÓg groups in Ireland, and every secondary school in the county is represented on it.

Co-ordinator (7): *They have to sell the importance of Comhairle to their school; they have to believe in it completely. We had a good debate last year about that, you know expanding that relationship with the schools ... previous to that it would have been letters you know 'this is what Comhairle does'; we would have given them an awful lot of information. The committee looked at barriers to the schools coming and for instance it was transport to the AGM. So prior to this year's AGM, each of the committee members had to set up a meeting with either the principal or whoever the teacher in charge was and our committee chair was available to go to these committee meetings. They explained what Comhairle was about, what they were getting from it. The young people themselves had to get names of people who could attend. One school handed it over completely saying; 'you organise it completely, you organise transport, you do it'.*

Admittedly, even in this most democratic and arguably most successful of the Comhairle na nÓg groups involved in this study, the schools still wield significant power. Nonetheless, this Comhairle na nÓg was the only group part of this study that was seen to be actively trying to work **with** the schools in what was interpreted by the researcher as classical pragmatism's 'community of inquiry' in action.

The DCYA and Regional Participation Project Officers are aware of school [over]-involvement, although the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs appeared surprised at this information during his interview.

Minister: *in other words because it is self-referral, it's basically you're not fixing anything, these are active guys anyway and obviously don't need any interventions. It's an interesting point and something we need to think about.*

The Head of Communication and Participation at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs acknowledged that there was a problem with schools deciding which young people to send to an AGM.

DCYA: *They* [schools] *are sending TY people and they are not sending anybody above or below that so you are getting a bulge of young people from 15 to 16, 17, 18 and that's all that's involved in a lot of Comhairlí. So that's why we have as one of the two criteria this year for funding is that they have to show evidence of involving 12-15 year olds and the other one is that they have to show evidence of sustained and formal links with adult decision makers.*

It is acknowledged that the gatekeepers of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are attempting to expand the membership beyond those in Transition Year and on the school council. However, as illustrated by many of the interviewee quotations, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful thus far. Furthermore, by attempting to attract 'other' young people in Comhairle na nÓg, they need to ensure that they do not practice a different sort of discrimination by excluding those in mainstream education. Referring to members who emanate only from schools, one Regional Participation Project Officer stated: *"you don't really want them; they're maybe at less risk than others."* However, this thesis would argue that a more useful approach would be to encourage all young people (from school and not), to work together with their adult gatekeepers as 'communities of inquiry' in these participation organisations.

4.2.2 Initiating

Once the initial first step has been taken, full membership is realised through attending an Annual General Meeting (hereafter AGM) of a Comhairle na nÓg group. Interestingly, many of those interviewed seemed uneasy when asked to reflect on this process, prompting further realizations of how uninformed they had been when they

first joined, and in some cases, still were. Some young people became members of Comhairle na nÓg by simply attending the AGM, while others had their names picked from a box. In just a few cases, potential members were required to give a short speech, and canvass for votes. Emily remembered her experience.

Emily: *if you wanted to be on the Comhairle you put your name in a box and it was brought up and like you had to go in your region. Yea, it was a box and if your name was picked out, you were the representative of that area.*

Ques: *Okay and you were obviously picked that year. Did you have to make any kind of speech?*

Emily: *No, not that year, you just got picked and put on the Comhairle. But then the following year I was chosen as one of the representatives to give a speech about the Comhairle and everything*

Although Emily gave a speech at a subsequent AGM, this was not part of an election strategy; rather it was to outline to potential members what to expect from the organisation if they became involved. Thus it was an attempt by the co-ordinator to give those attending an opportunity to make an informed decision about joining. Evan, in common with other interviewees, did not have to actively canvass for votes.

Evan: *No, I just, eh the people from your local area vote for you to go on to it and I just went around and said to people that I would do it and there was a good few from my school and eh, local youth club and sure they voted for me and I got onto it.*

There were mixed views expressed about the AGM process. It is normal for current members to assist at the following year's AGM. This would seem an ideal opportunity for the AGM to be youth-led (if not the organisation itself), given that young people already involved would seem more likely to entice new members than a collection of adult gatekeepers overseeing the process. Some members were annoyed and felt that their ideas had been overlooked and had not been respected. Lucy in particular, felt that young people had actually been put off joining the organisation during her group's AGM. Her co-ordinator's approach to the AGM was patronizing and the childish games those attending had to play had cost her Comhairle na nÓg potential members, she maintained.

Lucy: *...it was for the AGM I think, we had our own ideas what we wanted to do but she* [her co-ordinator], *had hers and it clashed and she won! I mean it was good but em,*

there was a lot of the people there, I mean we had to get feedback from everyone, a lot of them felt it was a bit condescending and some of the stuff a bit childish. And I did feel sometimes the meetings, I felt, em, you know treated like a child, em, I know I am a child but you know...

Where more creative recruitment procedures have been tried, they appear to have been well received. Although unaware of the other's efforts, two co-ordinators had invited local radio stations to broadcast at the AGM, resulting in both Comhairlí na nÓg simultaneously advertising the AGM, and also attracting large numbers of potential members from across the county. Both co-ordinators felt that the lure of the radio broadcasts had attracted a more varied cohort of young people than had been the case heretofore.

Co-ordinator (8): *the radio broadcast acted as a type of carrot to encourage more to come, you know?*

Co-ordinator (5): *it's super advertising and do you know they [the radio station] were only too delighted to come up and connect with 160 youth listeners!*

It seems clear that efforts need to be made to enliven the AGMs in order that Comhairle na nÓg makes a crucial positive first impression on potential members. One Regional Participation Project Officer maintained that *"methodologies used in AGMs need to be literacy friendly, multi-cultural ... there needs to be more ways for them to engage"*. Unfortunately, there was little evidence in this study that such innovative recruitment efforts are being utilized across Comhairlí na nÓg.

4.2.3 Participating in community

Once a young person becomes a member of Comhairle na nÓg, the interviews revealed that the participation they practice is largely contained within their own group; contact across Comhairlí na nÓg rarely occurs. It further became clear that Comhairle na nÓg groups linking together is not something which is encouraged by the DCYA. And yet in two of the nine meetings observed in this study, forging links between Comhairlí na nÓg was on the meeting agenda and was enthusiastically discussed by the young people present. Groups in the Republic of Ireland that are geographically close to the border with the North, frequently have the opportunity to connect with youth council groups in Northern Ireland. This practice has been facilitated through initiatives such as the Peace

III Programme which is aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society. Evan's group had been involved in this Peace III initiative.

Evan: *We got to meet the ones in Fermanagh, the youth council. It was actually really successful and we got to know them.*

Amy, from another Comhairle na nÓg border county, had also experienced interacting with a youth council group from Northern Ireland. She had found it both enjoyable and useful.

Amy: *yea, we met up with a group, they weren't a Comhairle, they were from Northern Ireland ... we went to an adventure centre for two days and we met up with them and we were divided into groups, like three from our group and three from theirs and we did different activities and so we got to mix with everybody. You meet friends, you meet these people and you see people from different backgrounds and you get diversity and it's very good.*

Interviewees from various Comhairlí na nÓg expressed a desire to meet with other Comhairlí na nÓg. During one of the observed meetings, a vote was taken whereby the majority of those attending agreed to increase ties and connections with another group. The young people were visibly enthusiastic about the prospect of maintaining sustained links with this group. However, it later emerged in interviews with co-ordinators that the DCYA is not in favour of such fieldtrips, and is reluctant to release funds for same. That this fact had not been communicated to the young people became clear in their interviews. One wonders therefore why the members were 'allowed' go through the charade of a group vote on the issue, given that such trips are not going to be sanctioned by the DCYA.

Co-ordinator (2): *the DCYA didn't like that we put funding into that.*

Ques: *and why didn't they like it?*

Co-ordinator (2): *they didn't like the money going to it. I suppose they thought it was more like youth work which, eh, we weren't doing, though it was in the Comhairle workplan to liaise with other Comhairlí, certainly in our region but also nationally and we went through a lot of effort to get funding but certainly they wouldn't fund it again.*

Ques: *and how do you know the DCYA didn't like it?*

Co-ordinator (2): *sure they told us, officially, in a letter when we were applying for funding the next time.*

To briefly digress: the distinction between youth work and youth participation was mentioned by some of the gatekeepers who were spoken to. One Regional Participation Project Officer spoke of the need to ensure that Comhairle na nÓg was seen to be participatory in structure; *"it is not youth work that it does"*. The DCYA also stressed the distinction between youth participation and youth work. The youth members interviewed however were clearly unaware of any such distinction, nor indeed of the concept of youth work itself. Youth work is a type of non-formal education. In addition to being educational, it is also recreational, happening during a young person's free time, and their involvement being voluntary (Lalor et al, 2000). It is easy to see how a distinction between the two concepts can become blurred. The reality of what was observed in this study is perhaps best described as a blend of youth participation and youth work. That it was not always 'true' participation was not the fault of the youth membership. Rather it behoves the adult gatekeepers to better inform members of differences between the two concepts, and to communicate DCYA guidelines more clearly on this issue to them. Thus, the members might be more understanding of the DCYA's reluctance to sanction fieldtrips and links between groups. Alternatively of course, a better solution again would be for the adults and young people to come together in order to find a means to make collaborations between Comhairlí na nÓg work as an effective participation strategy, and one which could benefit the organisation, and the communities of those involved.

While fieldtrips between Comhairlí na nÓg are not encouraged by the DCYA, it appears the Department is more tolerant of the adult gatekeepers connecting with each other. The co-ordinators came together at Dáil na nÓg 2010 in a pre-arranged meeting; all nine co-ordinators interviewed in this study found this experience both enjoyable and beneficial. Regional Participation Project Officers advised that sporadic feedback sessions between themselves and co-ordinators would likely take place again in the future. Co-ordinators admitted to being curious as to what happens in other groups and how other Comhairlí na nÓg operationalise their participation. A number of co-ordinators took the opportunity in their interviews to ask the researcher how their group compared with others involved in the study. One co-ordinator (5) admitted *"that it would be interesting to hear from you how the others all work!"*

The interviews revealed that the DCYA seems not prepared to listen to the young people in relation to Comhairle na nÓg groups linking and connecting with each other. 'Selective hearing' by the DCYA was also evident in other areas. Two of the Department's main criteria are that members come from different backgrounds and are a range of ages, particularly those in the twelve to fifteen year age bracket. How successful this works in practice was observed in this study to depend on the group dynamic and the enthusiasm and skill of the co-ordinator. Opinions on this issue varied among interviewees. Some of the older members expressed doubts that real debate could take place between a fourteen year old and an eighteen year old for example, although they also admitted that they had not given it much thought prior to their interview – most were unaware of the DCYA age guidelines.

Chloe: *it works but I know that I would be one of the oldest girls there and I wouldn't really interact with a 14 year old, you know the maturity barrier? But I would say that people get on but really they stay in their own age groups. Yea it wouldn't really work 'coz I know myself from going around that they would be a lot of very young people and maturity would be different and you can see it, like the age groups together in that kind of way.*

Amy's opinion was somewhat different and she reflected that although a variety of ages can highlight differences between young people, it can also work to ensure that a group is forced to consider the opinions of others "*and then you come to an agreement between everybody*". Cillian was of a similar mindset; it can be difficult for the younger members at first but they learn to interact and debate with the older members and so ultimately, a spread of age groups is beneficial to the group overall.

Cillian: *you can go in there at 13 and hang out with 18 years olds and there's no problem 'coz we're all there for the same reason, to do the same job so it doesn't make a difference what age we are. Everyone there is equally mature and knows right from wrong ... but at the same time I don't think you should restrict ages you know say 'you have to a certain amount of these 13 year olds and a certain amount of these 18 year olds.*

Leah's Comhairle na nÓg had met up with other groups (from Northern Ireland) in the past. She remembered that one of these groups were more "*the same type of people and all seemed to be the same age. They noticed that we had a mix; and they were like, 'is she not 12 or 13?' and we were 'yeah, yeah, yeah'! We have a complete sweep the whole way down through it. It's great.*"

Members of Leah's Comhairle na nÓg includes young people of all ages, from twelve to eighteen years. This has been achieved by the members themselves speaking about participation and the organisation they are part of in schools across the county. Leah reflected that her school principal was more enthusiastic than the norm about the concept of youth participation. She felt he had been instrumental in so many young people in her area becoming interested in Comhairle na nÓg; evidence once again that schools can operate as a powerful force in relation to who goes forward to join the organisation.

Other groups have found it challenging satisfying the DCYA age guideline, particularly ensuring that younger ages are involved. For a co-ordinator to insist that a range of ages be sent to the AGM from a school could be the difference between that school co-operating or not, one interviewee remarked.

Co-ordinator (8): *I would usually say em, please ideally send one from each year, from different years and from different backgrounds and abilities but it never really happens that way. I suppose it's all about building links first and then maybe trying...*

The greater the input a school has in selecting which young people attend a Comhairle na nÓg AGM, the less likely it seems that there will be a variety of ages and backgrounds involved. Furthermore, some of the co-ordinators indicated that based on their experience, they remain to be convinced of the wisdom of having younger and older teenagers mixing together.

Co-ordinator (2): *in our experience it doesn't really work, absolutely it doesn't 'coz I think in your teenage years you're spending so many years trying to move on from 15, to 16, to 17 that you don't want to ... eh the older people will lose interest if it's all 12 year olds. I think it's up to the schools to decide if there is a leader; I mean we wrote to one school, they have one year which is still primary and then they go on to secondary and they wrote back and just said that their people are too young.*

This co-ordinator felt that a range of ages worked better in youth organisations where there was not as much emphasis placed on producing tangible outcomes. It became increasingly clear throughout the interviews that many of the co-ordinators find this DCYA guideline challenging to implement in practice. Procuring members from different age groups (particularly younger age groups), has proved problematic. Ironically, it appears even more difficult to convince some long term members, who are

now over eighteen years of age, to move on from the organisation, and let younger teenagers in.

Co-ordinator (5): *I have a lot of seventeen year olds who are very, you know, outspoken and 'we're in charge here' and actually one of the problems is that some of them have been on Comhairle since primary school and they are kind of like 'we're the bosses and la la la' so in the next election I'm going to tell them all 'sorry guys, that's your Comhairle stint up!'*

DCYA: *they have other ways of getting their voice heard when they're eighteen so you know we are going to have just kind of, we have worked out a mechanism for some of them to stay on for a while as a peer leader and then they have to gently move on.*

Interviewees (young people and gatekeepers alike), were unsure of what approach to take when trying to attract members from different backgrounds. All those interviewed were questioned on this issue. Many of the young people were anxious that allegations of tokenism could be levelled against Comhairle na nÓg if individuals were invited to join simply on the basis that they had a disability or were from a certain background.

Anna: *There are a lot of varied personalities on our Comhairle but em, we still don't think we're representing the whole of our region's youth, like there is no person from the Traveller community and there is no person from a major different ethnic background. We don't want to take someone and say 'you have to be on it', we don't want to single somebody out. There has to be interest there but we can't push people to be on it if they don't want to be on it.*

Ruby: *I can't speak for people in that situation* [those in residential care] *because people in that situation are not on the council. I can't sit here and talk about the people in any of those care homes 'coz I'm not one of them and I don't know them.*

All interviewees agreed that Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg should be inclusive organisations, and that young people from different backgrounds ought to be involved. However, they were not certain how best to encourage 'seldom heard' individuals to join, and importantly, how to encourage them to **want** to join these participation organisations. Past member Sarah became visibly agitated during her interview when asked about this issue. Ruefully reflecting on her Dáil na nÓg experience, she felt that the panel of experts were not listening to what was being said but *"then a black girl asked a question and there was around ten photographers there and they ran and started taking millions of snaps of her"*. Sarah felt this girl had been exploited and had

been pushed to the front as evidence that there were young people of all backgrounds involved, whereas in fact this is not the case, Sarah contended.

Two co-ordinators acknowledged having particular difficulties in relation to 'seldom heard' young people. One co-ordinator (6) admitted that while her group had managed to attract a handful of 'seldom heard' young people "*it was harder to get them to stay involved because they needed extra support*". With so many of their members being "*the studious type of student*" it can be intimidating for "*different*" young people to take part in the meeting, this co-ordinator argued. Furthermore, she maintained that youth workers should be obliged to attend the Comhairle na nÓg meetings to provide additional support; co-ordinators do not have the time or indeed the necessary training to provide such extra support, she contended. Ultimately, she conceded that her approach had not worked and on reflection she felt she had tackled it incorrectly. By simply 'ticking' the Traveller and disability boxes, potential members had been lost to her group, she reflected.

Another co-ordinator tried a different tactic; rather than recruiting young people from different organisations, she had tried to get Comhairle na nÓg connect with them externally. This approach was also unsuccessful.

Co-ordinator (8): *...maybe just linking with them as an external group you know and getting their issues brought forward that way but still using Comhairle as the voice, you know having the ideas and issues coming forward. Even that's quite tough 'coz I suppose every group, I suppose has their own agenda and they are thinking you know if we have an issue why can't we do something about it ourselves? Why do we have to go through this lot?*

The DCYA places an onus of responsibility onto co-ordinators to ensure they incorporate members from different backgrounds. Co-ordinators admitted to feeling contradictory pressures; satisfying DCYA directives on one hand but working to the best interests of the members on the other. The co-ordinators, and also some of the young people, reflected that deliberately targeting potential members purely on the basis that they are in a particular 'other' category is tokenistic. The challenge for the DCYA, Regional Participation Project Officers, local co-ordinators and youth members is to encourage young people from across society to *want* to join these organisations, to see them as relevant and with something to offer their particular communities.

4.3 Conclusion

'The administration of schemes' disclosed a discomforting picture of DCYA-participation; patchy if well-intentioned at best, to seriously compromised at worst, largely due to a lack of engagement with the young people involved in the organisations. Recruitment procedures were revealed as haphazard with potential members being provided with insufficient information about the organisations they were about to become part of. Decisions relating to who was being encouraged to join were often left to schools, only a select few were being alerted to the possibility of becoming a member. Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are two of the Irish State's main participation structures for teenagers to articulate their public voice. However, within these organisations that voice frequently goes unheard. The ethical principles of informed consent and voluntary participation which are so integral to robust academic research do not seem to receive the same attention within these participatory mechanisms. Occasional flashes of real participation were glimpsed but these glimpses seemed dependent on the skill and commitment of individual co-ordinators and young people rather than by deliberate design. By failing to engage with members at the entry point to state participation, young people are reduced to minor actors in a process which is dominated by adults. The adults are 'the experts'; the young people practice their participation according to adult rules.

The next chapter, 'Communicating participation' continues the data analysis. If young people and adults are to work together as a 'community of inquirers', communication between and among *all* participants is essential. Young people have to be afforded the chance to learn the techniques of participation. Thus, communication itself is educative. Chapter Five considers the practices of communication within Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg as revealed through the participant observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in this study.

Chapter Five: Communicating Participation

5.1 Introduction

'Communicating participation' is the second of the categories which emerged from the GT coding process to be explored. The thread of communication, or lack thereof, runs through all the categories and for a time was contemplated as a likely core, or central category. Ultimately however, it does not represent the totality of what was observed and interpreted throughout the study. Notwithstanding this, it is an important part-instigator of the substantive grounded theory developed. Time and again, a lack of communication was seen to be impairing participation, both in relation to its on-going progress and its future potential. The importance of communication is equally applicable to all the actors involved in youth participation, and at every stage of the participation. The acquisition of fruitful knowledge is promoted by classical pragmatism. Success should be determined by practical outcomes which are life-enhancing - in effect 'what works'. The faithful rendering of the experiences gleaned from the data collected in this study revealed instances of participation which were neither fruitful, nor life-enhancing.

5.2 Communicating participation

Specifically in relation to the young people who are members, communication procedures in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg were observed as poor. The interviews revealed that the young people were frequently at the tail-end of lines of communication which already appeared weak. Table 5.1 displays the sub-categories of 'communicating participation' and its associated properties.

Category	Sub-categories	Associated properties
Communicating participation	Prioritising communication strategies	Informing, understanding, respecting, knowing, appreciating, valuing
	Circulating feedback	Learning, developing, respecting, communicating, hearing, allowing
	Feedback, consultation and respect	Respecting, valuing, understanding, collaborating

Table 5.1: Construction, 'Communicating participation'

5.2.1 Prioritising communication strategies

Adam: *I was told sort of two days before the first team-bonding thing that they* [his school] *were sending two candidates. At first I was told it was a sports bonding day; my year head was a bit vague, he didn't know anything about it.*

Ques: *And you were told you going?*

Adam: *well, yea. I was just told to wear a tracksuit and you're going up a hill to do activities and it turned out, I mean it ended up being a walk over this mountain and they kept saying, eh making these kind of comments, they kept saying things that referred to it being eh when you next meet up and I had no idea what eh...*

Ques: *You were still trying to figure out what was going on?*

Adam: *Yea, and I knew a few people there, just by coincidence, and they all said it was a big deal and that they had been voted and selected and you know, I was thinking 'what have I got myself into?' I mean originally I said I didn't want to do it but my parents kinda made me do it 'coz I was in 4th year and eh, yea, so em there were always kinda letters lying around that I would be given about two days before the next meeting that had been posted a month beforehand and all that ... and that just left me having a really negative attitude.*

Ques: *I can imagine. Were the letters posted to you or to your school?*

Adam: *To the school. I was with a friend from school who was in the same sort of cluelessness I was in!*

To ensure the integrity of youth participation is upheld, Driscoll (2002) urges that the goals and priorities of everyone involved need to be openly and honestly communicated. Thus, participants' rights to make informed choices and to define individual goals and expectations are respected. Practitioners including Driscoll (2002) and Fajerman and Treseder (1997) consistently emphasize the importance of maintaining active and open lines of communication throughout all stages of the participation. It is not being suggested here that the gatekeepers encountered in this study were deliberately withholding information from the young people. Rather while they appeared well-meaning, they seemed largely oblivious of just how poorly informed members frequently were. This observation also connects to Lansdown's (2001) contention that often well-intentioned adults act in what they think is the best interests of the child – they know better, many believe. Ultimately, the researcher's interpretation was that this persistent lack of communication between the gatekeepers and the young people involved in these participation organisations diminished the value of participation outputs.

Adam's words introduced this sub-section. Adam would not be classed as a 'seldom heard' young person. Rather he is middle-classed, articulate and non-rebellious; the typical *type* of young person frequently characterized as over-populating organisations such as Comhairle na nÓg. And yet he has no desire to be part of this organisation; thus his voice is not being heard. Although extreme, one suspects that experiences such as Adam's may not be unique. Furthermore, and to the chagrin of the researcher, he disclosed during his interview that his reason for taking part in this study was that his mother insisted he should. Adam apologised to the researcher and stated "*No offence or anything, but I only returned that consent form thing to you 'coz Mum told me I had to!*" (see Ethical Thought Box 6).

A difficult decision was taken by the researcher to retain Adam's voice in this study. His consent to join Comhairle na nÓg was not an informed one; nor it transpired was his 'consent' to take part in this research process informed. And yet to omit his contribution and comments as to how he had been effectively co-opted onto Comhairle na nÓg ignores the legitimacy of his irritation and powerlessness with the organisation. Thus, his voice has been retained in order that his words are heard and his frustration acknowledged. They also resonate with Kirby and Bryson's (2002: 9) contention that little is heard in research about those who do not wish to participate. Thus Adam's words are included; although the researcher acknowledges that he was effectively 'coerced' into participating both in Comhairle na nÓg and also this research study. Adam's words also serve as a reminder of how easy it can be to traverse ethical boundaries, even if unintentionally.

Ethical Thought Box 6: Informed consent, Adam's story

Michael is from the same Comhairle na nÓg as Adam, although he attends a different school. Within his school he reflected that he had to argue the right for pupils to be involved, as initially the principal was not interested in sending pupils to the Comhairle na nÓg AGM. Similar to Adam, letters regarding the next meeting are sent to his school and not to his home, ensuring a distinction is maintained between adults and young people. While not quite supplicants in the process, young people in this branch of Comhairle na nÓg can only practice their participation at the behest of their school gatekeepers.

Michael: *letters are sent to the school. We would be sent letters to the school and they are given to us.*

Ques: *do you think that worked well, were you always told in plenty of time?*

Michael: *Some of the time, yea. Once though we got a letter and we were told the meeting was on at twelve...and then the meeting had actually been scheduled for ten and so we got there at the very end and we sort of scuttled off so we wouldn't be noticed. Apparently they* [the local authority] *did send out another letter but we never got it so...*

By holding meetings during school hours, the co-ordinator feels an obligation to keep the school authorities informed, in order that the goodwill of this school towards the Comhairle na nÓg organisation be maintained; arguably a further demonstration that schools are significant power brokers in State youth participation in the Republic of Ireland. By this particular Comhairle na nÓg group operationalising its youth participation in this way, the young person effectively has to surrender their individual agency, thus reducing the participation it practices to almost a school activity.

In another group, Matthew had recently become a member of the Dáil na nÓg Council. Similar to many of the interviewees, he was unsure what lay ahead. He seemed content however to wait and be told what to do by his adult gatekeepers.

Matthew: *... and I got elected onto the council as well. They just have to organise it now.*

Ques: *and do you know what's ahead of you with that, what's involved?*

Matthew: *I have a general idea but I wouldn't be 100 per cent on it; I'm just guessing it will be similar to Comhairle but just on a more national scale?*

*"**They** just have to organise it now";* there was no sense in his interview that Matthew anticipates working together with other Council members and the adult gatekeepers. Instead he is satisfied to wait to be informed about what happens next. Such has been his experience of youth participation thus far. He became visibly uneasy (and confused), during his interview as he realised, perhaps for the first time, how little he knew about what was involved.

Matthew: *well, it's kinda difficult with that 'coz em, it's taking like people who have been on two years, maybe five or six, and they were asked to go up but only two of us could go up for election but I'm not sure about the age group or maybe how long they have been on it. But the people who were up with us would have liked to go on the Dáil na nÓg Council if they could have, like last year, but they weren't able to for some reason. I'm not sure...*

Evan, in the same Comhairle na nÓg branch as Matthew, seized the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions. He too seemed content to be led by his co-ordinator. This is what he has been accustomed to.

Evan: *Matthew, and what's his name, the fellow that lives over the road, they both went up to Dáil na nÓg. They were there for the week, wasn't it?*

Interviewer: *eh, no, it was just one day, the 5th March.*

Evan: *Oh! I didn't know that ... I must have missed hearing about it. And you get to ask questions, is that right?*

An aura, almost akin to school, was detected in many of the meetings observed by the researcher. Although the meetings themselves seemed quite relaxed and less formal than school, nevertheless the co-ordinators appeared to be in charge of proceedings and the members sat and followed his or her lead. There was little sense of young people agitating for change or 'demanding' that their voices be heard in the community. Despite many interviewees reporting that they were free to contact their co-ordinator to have an item included on a meeting agenda, most admitted that they never had done this. Communication procedures appeared as such that most simply wait to be told what has been decided for them.

5.2.2 Circulating feedback

Once the young person becomes a member of these participation organisations, group project work dominates their work plans. In this way at least a sense of collegiality and community is being fostered among those involved. But what happens to these projects once they are completed? Is feedback or follow-up information shared with the young people who had worked on these projects? Do members get the opportunity to learn the outcomes (if any) of the work they have been part of? Reflections of interviewees in this study would indicate that feedback and follow-through in relation to past work

happens only intermittently. Reflections from many interviewees revealed that it often appeared dependent on an enthusiastic co-ordinator.

Callum's Dáil na nÓg experience had been *"brilliant"* and he was visibly proud of being a part of the Dáil na nÓg Council. Callum reflected that the Dáil na nÓg Council had *"more say in things"* than Comhairle na nÓg and *"was a step up from Comhairle"*. Once his term of office on the council had finished however, he admitted to feeling cut adrift. Callum's Dáil na nÓg Council had carried out a survey on attitudes to sexual health and relationship advice given in schools, known as the RSE[6] programme. The report had been launched amid much publicity and had been quickly uploaded onto the DCYA website. This report on the RSE programme represented a real chance for members of Dáil na nÓg to speak directly to policy makers in relation to the school curriculum. Beyond the initial flurry of activity however, Callum was unsure if there were plans to implement any of its recommendations or indeed if school principals had been provided with, and obliged to read a copy of the report.

Callum: *I gave a copy to the vice principal and the career guidance teacher and they were both actually very supportive but what I plan to do, and I got permission from* [names two staff members from the NYCI] *the other day, is to lobby schools in the summer to see if they are aware of it.*

Ques: *Good idea and what do you want the schools to do?*

Callum: *what I want them to do is get them to look at their RSE system and the SPHE[7] system and see how they can improve it.*

Ques: *I see. And are there any plans for the group that was involved in it to meet again and talk about how to implement any of your recommendations?*

Callum: *what we found out was that the schools are an empire of their own ... it's up to the schools to do it. So in turn it's up to the Dáil councillor to look after their area. I haven't heard of anyone doing anything about it so I think that most people will just forget about it but I'm not going to let that happen. But see there is absolutely nothing I can do about the other councillors. I'm going to write a letter and send it to them* [schools in his area] *and to TDs and councillors.*

Ques: *and have you been asked to give feedback about this?*

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[6] RSE: Relationships and Sexual Education programme, delivered in second level schools in the Republic of Ireland.

[7] SPHE: Social, Personal and Health Education programme, delivered in second level schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Callum: *well they haven't asked but I would give it to them anyway.*

Other interviewees were asked about this report and if there had much discussion about it in their Comhairle na nÓg regular meetings. Many of the youth interviewees had to be provided with information about the report by the researcher to 'jog' their memories about this report; even then most appeared to be only vaguely aware of it. Some of the youth interviewees had no knowledge of this report at all, the recommendations of which (if implemented), could directly impact on their lives in school. Grace's reply to questions about the report typifies many of the answers received.

Grace: *it was interviews about RSE, the surveys, yea? There was a person on the Dáil na nÓg last year that gave us the surveys to fill out and we gave them back to him and he gave them back to the Dáil na nÓg and then, em something about the Minister doesn't think, eh, I don't know and the findings from Dáil na nÓg contradicted that, something like that anyway.*

Perhaps there are plans to implement some of this report's recommendations. However, if such plans exist, one of the young people who actively contributed to the report has not been made aware of them. The report sits on the DCYA website, a public manifestation of Callum's Dáil na nÓg Council's work. However, there is no additional information in relation to the report's recommendations and plans for their implementation (if any).

It became clear as the interviews progressed that compared to Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg seems operates almost as a DCYA youth participation showcase. It attracts media attention and reports of the event are frequently carried in media outlets. Beyond these brief moments of fame however, young people were questioned in relation to feedback they receive about Dáil na nÓg. Similar to what had been gleaned about procedures within Comhairle na nÓg, communication of information to members about Dáil na nÓg appeared sporadic. Furthermore, communication experiences differed starkly between the nine groups participating in this study; while interviewees in some groups claimed to be satisfied about the level of feedback they had received, others were not. All bar one interviewee who had been involved with Dáil na nÓg claimed to have enjoyed and learned from the experience. However, deeper reflection prompted some youth interviewees to suggest that the relative importance of Dáil na nÓg was not being adequately communicated to Comhairle na nÓg members who had never been

part of the event. This point was subsequently explored with later interviewees when indeed it became apparent that some Comhairle na nÓg members knew very little about Dáil na nÓg, the premise of the parliament, what happens at the yearly event or the projects or work those attending become involved in. For example, interviewees Chloe and Joshua (from different Comhairlí na Óg) had never been part of Dáil na nÓg; both claimed not to have any interest although both admitted to not being sure what actually happens at the yearly parliament.

Ques: *you have never been to Dáil na nÓg - No? Would you be interested in going?*

Chloe: *it wouldn't be my cup of tea. I don't really know much about politics and all that, I wouldn't really be into that sort of stuff. I suppose I should but I don't!*

Joshua: *No, not really, what they've said back is that it's kind of a bit too big and too many people involved and also they're saying that it's really not structured too well and also that people just go for the day off from school and that people aren't really interested in it.*

Dáil na nÓg Council members interviewed for this study (without exception) professed to have enjoyed their experience and all reported feeling that they had been part of something important. However, when asked to reflect further about their experiences, doubts were expressed as to the impact Dáil na nÓg and the Dáil na nÓg Council actually has on youth policy. For Lucy, being part of the Dáil na nÓg Council was *"a massive step up from Comhairle"*. She *"hoped"* it had influenced policy, she *"wanted"* it to have influenced policy but she was unsure if it had. When asked if she had provided her peers with feedback about her Dáil na nÓg Council work, Lucy admitted to feeling that the group's co-ordinator did not appreciate the Council's importance or value.

Lucy: *...she wasn't too keen for me to give feedback or anything and when we were doing the survey, I had to do it on the Comhairle and it was around the time of the eh, AGM but it was pretty much finished and I said 'can I do this now' and it was kinda a nuisance and I had to do it in five minutes and it was a survey and I would have liked the Comhairle to be more supportive.*

Anna was better informed than many of the young people, perhaps in part because she is self-confident and is not afraid to speak out and express her views. She asks questions

and looks for answers. Her group's Dáil na nÓg Council member will *"be a busy boy reporting back to us"* for Anna, at least, stated that she is determined to hold him accountable. Other members less vocal and less outspoken than Anna appeared far less informed. Critically, they were also unaware that they were uninformed.

Feedback in relation to Comhairle na nÓg project work appears more paltry still. Once a project is finished, interviewees reported that all reference to it also finishes, informally and formally. Luke was one of the youngest members interviewed and is therefore only at the start of his participation journey. He stated that he had never been told about anything his group had worked on in the past. He seemed dejected by this realisation.

Luke: *well I actually don't, like when we are with the Comhairle we do sort of different things in the Comhairle, like we made a DVD and stuff. Like I don't know, like how it helps other people really.*

Current members frequently referred to the importance of what they were involved in. In doing so, many of the interviewees conveyed their anxiety that their work matters, that their voices were being listened to and that Comhairle na nÓg was important in society. Older, current members tended to be quite circumspect when asked for their reflections and memories. Doubts began to emerge in relation to the value and impact of these participation organisations on youth policy and on Irish society.

Ruby: *well, I know one of the goals of Comhairle is to help feed into policy but I can't honestly say that I know of any policies that I have influenced. I know the groups higher up than Comhairle are doing excellent work; they lobby quite a bit to get things done...*

Patrick: *well it's hard to say you know. I think it's more of a meeting group.*

Past members interviewed were often critical about the quality of the feedback they had received, or indeed not received, during their involvement with Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. Although they all admitted that they enjoyed being part of Irish State youth participation, mature reflection prompted cynicism as to the impact these organisations have on Irish society. Eoin had been an active member of Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg and also a member of the Dáil na nÓg Council. Along with other

Council members, he had made a presentation to an Oireachtas (government) committee. His memories were tainted by feelings of being patronized and that the presentation his group had given had not been taken seriously by the Oireachtas committee looking on. Afterwards, the presentation was never mentioned again to him. Eoin was annoyed at what he felt was the tokenistic attitude of adults throughout the entire process.

Eoin: *That presentation was done pretty much at the end of our Council term and there wasn't really much we could do about it ... and we basically just went off. Even after, we tried to follow up on it but nothing. I just followed it up myself to see if anything was done but nothing as far as I know...overall good experiences with Dáil na nÓg but that one presentation and the follow up, eh I just think that it needs to be taken more seriously by the higher ups, by the adults.*

Where feedback has been part of their on-going participation experience, members seemed to have a better sense of how Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg fit into the cacophony of competing voices in society. Those who had been in receipt of feedback and information updates about past consultations admitted that they now better understood how slow policy formation can be, how change takes time and often at best, is only incremental. One of the nine co-ordinators interviewed acknowledged the members' frustration in relation to temporal lags between talking about change, and change actually happening. She argued strongly that if feedback and communication strategies across the two participation organisations were more robust, members would be better able to inform their peers about what was happening. Young people in general, not just those *"at the coalface"* would benefit, she contended.

Co-ordinator (1): *but I think they have realised that, I think that what they have learned from this process is that is slow, it's slow for a reason 'coz it is very important to start somewhere ... And if there is a problem or frustration for them it is that the schools are not allowing the rest of their peers to hear from them and for those peers to tell them what it is they want to talk about. That's a reason for developing the website ... Comhairle na nÓg is reported to the full council on a bi-monthly basis. And it's reported to the development board on a tracking system on a quarterly basis ... I write the tracking report based on the minutes of the meeting we had. I think we all learn from these reports and I would hope that even for themselves that it's not just about them being at the table but that they actually represent groups of young people. But their frustration is not being able to feed back to their electorate.*

Interviewees who had been part of a group that did not receive feedback and regular information updates appeared to feel almost betrayed by the organisations which had let them down, after promising so much.

Sarah: *I think Comhairle, the 'idea' of Comhairle is fantastic because it's the only facility that I can see at the moment where young people have an official role within governance but meaningful communication is what is lacking. As Comhairle all we did was produce a booklet, in the three years I was there that was all that was done. It was a complete waste of my time because I was going every Wednesday and I really did try, I put a lot of effort in...*

5.2.3 Feedback, consultation and respect

Percy-Smith (2010: 110) refers to the preoccupation in participation with decision making rather than allowing young people experience a wider range of activities which could better realise their well-being, identity and citizenship status. On Hart's (1997) ladder of participation, 'consulted and informed' is located on the fifth rung of the ladder. Here projects run by adults have participatory value if the children and young people are informed of the purpose of the consultation, and if their contributions to the consultation are treated seriously. Shier's (2001) participation model also allows for consultation, and importantly, consultation where children are taken seriously. In this study consultation without feedback, or indeed prior notification was observed as commonplace. Many of the interviewees referred to guest speakers that consult with them during meetings. However, dialogue between those doing the consulting and those being consulted with appeared to be limited. Certainly the interviewees were unable to point to feedback provided to them once the consultation had finished.

Arguably however, some of the fault for this lack of communication must lie with the members themselves. Few of the current members expressed any irritation or frustration with communication procedures, or lack thereof. Rather interviewees often appeared embarrassed when this issue was discussed. Similar to the easy compliance with gatekeeper authority discussed already, many of the young people in this study accepted that their group was frequently spoken to by a representative of an outside organisation; a guest speaker's name on the meeting agenda often being the first time they were made aware this was to happen. Furthermore, many of those interviewed appeared to view guest speakers as evidence that Comhairle na nÓg was taken seriously

in the community. Two of the nine participating Comhairlí na nÓg in this study had guest speakers at their observed meetings. In one, the guest was the mayor of the town. He addressed the group, invited them to visit the senior council and regaled them with memories of his early political career. The researcher's interpretation of that section of the meeting was that members appeared uninterested. Ruby's memory of this meeting was unclear. Interestingly, the mayor himself appeared to know very little about Comhairle na nÓg.

Ruby: *em, I not too sure who the man was when you were there but I do remember there was a guest. But eh, we kinda, I wasn't there when that was decided, it could have been* [names her co-ordinator], *I'm not too sure but I know if we felt that we needed to speak, well just say the mayor that she would do her very best to get him or whatever.*

While many interviewees demonstrated a stark lack of knowledge in relation to procedures in the organisations they were part of, it is not being suggested that they were manifestly apathetic, rather the researcher interpreted that they seemed unconcerned. However, over the course of the interviews a difference between how young people and adults prefer to communicate information became apparent. The DCYA website carries lengthy descriptions on Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. However, much of this information is not current, particularly in relation to Comhairle na nÓg where quality and quantity varied starkly between groups. Notwithstanding this however, only three of the forty-one young people interviewed claimed to have ever consulted a DCYA website looking for information. Youth communication preferences revealed in the interviews are in line with Geriodimos (2010), who notes that although young people frequently access the internet, they tend to use it as a tool of communication rather than a port of information. Conflicting messages were received from the young people interviewed in relation to this issue. Somewhat ironically, although interviewees admitted to rarely or never consulting a DCYA website, they nevertheless claimed that they expect the Comhairle na nÓg organisation to maintain a strong web and online presence. It is the ideal medium through which the existence of Comhairle na nÓg can be communicated to outside audiences, they argued.

Anna: *well if it was updated and it came up on people's homepages they would click on it and say "oh what's going on here?"*

Evan: *it would be even better if people knew what we actually do.*

Ben: *to be honest all it is, is a nook of many nooks and crannies on the website of the Minister for Children. Among young people my age anyway even a website is obsolete because the real thing that you want to set up if you want to get the word out among young people is to set up a page for the Comhairle on a social network site ... 'coz everyone is on Facebook.*

Lucy: *well I would like there to be an awareness campaign, posters in all the schools ... and tell them about the website and what's going onto that 'coz there is a lot of stuff that's going to be on that.*

Dylan: *...the old one* [website] *was very old, there was nothing updated since 2006 so no one really went on it but they are doing an official website launch and everything soon.*

"'coz there is a lot of stuff that's going to be on that"; Lucy and Dylan were obviously excited at the prospect of the proposed new website. During their meeting, a computer technician from the local authority attended and the website was discussed enthusiastically by all who were present. Over twelve months after this meeting, no website for their group has been launched. Online information is minimal, the co-ordinator email address listed is incorrect and the advertised link to the group's dedicated website returned the reply "the domain name does not exist".

Contrary to members' expectations, the DCYA maintains that its websites are for adults, and not for children or young people. Despite the members' voices on this issue, the Department does not appear to be listening; an aura of the Department being the expert and therefore knowing best was interpreted by the researcher.

DCYA: *oh, our website is for adults really. We did at one stage have a young people's section on it but we just don't have the resources anymore, we are very short-staffed ... We have to decide what's our core business and where are resources and our energy is best spent and I think that allowing young people to have a voice and making a difference in the country is more important than putting our energy into managing a website that isn't necessarily going to be used that much anyway.*

That young people in the Republic of Ireland live in a world of social media and the internet is undeniable. In the nine meetings observed, website management by the young people was discussed at three. Undoubtedly, the issue of online security and protection needs to be handled sensitively. In two of the meetings, it was clear that the

young people were not to be allowed act as moderators despite having been given website training by the local authority. It was observed that a discussion on this issue was quickly 'shut down' by the adults present. Only one local authority was open to discussing the concept of working *with* the young people. Eventually, a mutually acceptable arrangement was agreed. A lively discussion concerning the group's website, led by Mia, a current member, took place at the observed meeting. How could members make their website more attractive and *useful* to potential visitors? A recent competition had only two entries. What had they done wrong? Everyone contributed to the discussion, culminating with the chairperson asking:

Mia: *so are we all agreed that we should re-launch the competition? John, will you be responsible for that then and let us know at our next meeting?*

Editing rights and access to their website was thoroughly debated at this meeting culminating with all present agreeing that a local company would work *with* the group and John, a current member, would act as moderator. He would then liaise with his group and relate relevant information. Both the young people and the co-ordinator appeared satisfied with this compromise demonstrating that it is possible to work with their gatekeepers to resolve a problematic situation. Current and past members frequently visit the website and it appears lively, and current. Mia was demonstrably proud of her group's achievements:

Mia: *well with the website I suppose we can really look at that and go 'that's us' ... Myself and John are getting full training in web design 'coz we are getting full control of the website ourselves 'coz I dunno, 'coz of some legal reason, for so many months it had to be run by an outside company sort of thing, for them to moderate it and everything like that ... like the guy was good but we getting like notices today of something happening in a few days time and we would want it up there but he was like bulk uploading, you know once a month is quite slow for a website. And like people were contacting us saying 'can you put this on, what about this?'*

5.3 Conclusion

Many of the interviewees revealed (often unwittingly) that they were frequently not provided with meaningful information; the young people appeared to be at the end of communication lines of inquiry. Evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the decision to join these participation structures was often an uninformed one; most were selected to join by a teacher or school principal. Often the young person interviewed

indicated that the teacher or principal themselves had little knowledge of these organisations. Once a member of the organisation, they were not kept regularly briefed with up to date information. While outside organisations frequently 'visit' Comhairle na nÓg meetings to consult with the members, they rarely return to offer feedback on the consultations – in effect this form of consultation equates to the lowest rung of Hart's (1992) ladder – manipulation, discussed in Chapter Two. It emerged that many of the interviewees did not have a clear sense of how the work they do within Comhairle na nÓg impacts on their own communities, if indeed at all. This is primarily because they simply have never been told. On-going communication has not been part of their everyday participation experience. Without understanding what they are doing, arguably any participation they practice is compromised, given that it is uninformed and not properly understood.

The previous chapter disclosed how these organisations operate; this chapter elaborated on communication processes. Both chapters exposed the unflattering reality that although these two organisations exist to give young people a voice in matters affecting them, within the organisations themselves their voices are frequently rendered mute. The following chapter explicates the relationships between categories still further, exploring the degrees of ownership members feel they have of their participation, and the degrees of ownership they are *allowed* to have.

Chapter Six: Senses of Ownership

6.1 Introduction

This chapter contemplates ownership of the participation. Throughout the observations and interviews, differential experiences quickly became apparent, and the degree of autonomy members have to self-determine their participation varied significantly across the nine groups. New members get swept up in pre-existing, adult-initiated practices and there seems limited scope for voicing alternative ways of doing things. While the premise of youth voice aims to give young people a say in matters affecting them, what of their voice within their own participation organisation? What was observed throughout this study was predominantly adult-led participation, although there were occasional snatches of shared-participation between the young people and their adult gatekeepers glimpsed. Where this was evident, interviewees expressed feelings of pride and ownership in the work they were involved in.

Facilitating young people to shape their participation, even if mistakes are made along the way, necessitates that the rules governing participation not be embalmed, but instead are allowed evolve according to context and circumstance. The sense of ownership members interviewed had of their participation was interpreted as weak; in general the young people seemed content to follow rather than agitate to lead. As this and the other categories were documented, two of the nine groups participating in this study consistently emerged ahead of the rest in terms of maximizing their participation capacities. Interestingly, both these groups practice their participation quite differently, demonstrating the validity of Dewey's notion of warranted assertability, that is truth being 'what works'.

6.2 Senses of ownership

The DCYA asserts that it is "working to become a centre of excellence for participation by children and young people in decision-making. Central to the success of this participation work is the collaborative interaction between the participation and research teams within the OMCYA. This collaboration ensures that best practice in young people's participation is a priority and that outcomes are robust and evidenced-based."

Such a vision is certainly laudable in intent but where are the young people in this process? Table 6.1 presents a breakdown of the construction of 'senses of ownership', the third of four GT categories extracted from the data.

Category	Sub-categories	Associated properties
Senses of ownership	Giving/receiving responsibility	Understanding, trusting,
	Senses of importance, and place	Valuing, forging links, learning from, learning with

Table 6.1: Construction, 'Senses of ownership'

6.2.1 Giving and receiving responsibility

Throughout the fieldwork, two types of Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinator were encountered; those who work for a local authority and those who are employed directly by a youth service. Local authority co-ordinators disclosed that they frequently have to juggle their obligations to their employer with their responsibilities to the youth members of the organisation. Furthermore, for many, being co-ordinator of Comhairle na nÓg is not their only role.

Ques: *is Comhairle co-ordinator your only role – you probably have other things to do as well?*

Co-ordinator (1): *No, I have a million and one things. I wish it was as I think that there should be a dedicated person. I may be possibly be luckier than other people in that I have also got administrative support from other sections. I had an administrative support person who when she transferred she remained because she was interested but it is in addition to the job that she does. That is not sustainable, just not sustainable. You are relying on champions and that's not the way.*

Co-ordinator (4): *For one and a half days a week I work on Comhairle and for the other three days I work in another office. I try to keep it as much as possible to a block of time but like I could answer a call from the other office in the middle of my Comhairle day, it depends.*

Ques: *and are the members free to contact you any day of the week?*

Co-ordinator (4): *oh yes, they can contact me at any time.*

Ques: *and do they?*

Co-ordinator (4): *eh no, they don't but they could if they wanted to!*

On the other hand, Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators who work for a youth service already have young people as their main foci, even if being co-ordinator is only one of a number of responsibilities they have. The influence a professional qualification in youth work might have on participation was speculated on before, during and after the observations and interviews – Freeman *et al.* (2003) pointed to non-professional youth workers who were effectively jettisoned into working with children and young people. The researcher here considered this issue when observing Comhairle na nÓg meetings and conducting co-ordinator interviews. Might a professional youth worker co-ordinate the day to day running of Comhairle na nÓg differently to a local authority employee for example? Would a youth worker co-ordinator be more willing to hand over, or share, ownership of the group to the current membership than a local authority co-ordinator? Interestingly, and contrary to some of the literature, analysis of the data however disclosed that the answers to questions such as these were nuanced. Ultimately, the personality and individual skills of the co-ordinator seemed to be the most important factor in how the group worked, and the sense of ownership the members had.

At a practical level, the agenda of a meeting dictates what the group focuses on. Who decides the agenda items; the co-ordinator, the members or perhaps a combination of both? Some members were obviously well-informed prior to meetings what items would be on the agenda. Others appeared unused to driving the agenda and seemed content to let the co-ordinator make these decisions. Some interviewees seemed frankly unconcerned about what items were carried on the agenda.

An eclectic range of issues was discussed during the observed meetings. One group was concerned with youth mental health issues and was hoping to engage the interest of local schools in their work. The meeting considered how they might persuade schools in the area to work with Comhairle na nÓg on this issue. While the young people appeared enthused, the co-ordinator later expressed some reservations about how they might go about this. The problem of 'Head Shops' (topical in the media during the fieldwork period of this study) was discussed by three of the groups. Members appeared keen to play a part in ridding their local area of these shops. This issue raised

the most heated debate of all issues discussed at observed meetings. The type of issue raised at other meetings was frequently the administration of the group itself, roles of responsibility, and discussion relating to the internet and the online presence (or not) of Comhairle na nÓg. The acquisition of 'hoodies' with the Comhairle na nÓg logo was discussed by two groups.

While members are free to suggest an agenda item, few admitted to ever having done so. It became clear that many were content to attend a meeting and discuss whatever was put in front of them. The by now familiar *'they'* was invoked regularly in many interviews, particularly when the interviewee became unsure - *'they decided', 'they chose', 'they tell us'* were common responses. What became clear in many of the interviews was that for at least six of the nine groups observed in this study, members were largely removed from decision making processes within their own group. Further, the background direction of co-ordinators was often evident.

Ques: *and the agenda that you have at every meeting; how does that come about?*

Ruby: *em, I'm not too sure that I remember exactly how but they took what was said in the workshop at the AGM ... so they kinda narrowed it down and people decided.*

Oisín: *he gives us a layout if you know what I mean and then it's the secretary and the chairperson who normally decides what goes in and out of it.*

Alex: *well we just get the text about the meeting, we get the agenda before that meeting...we get told what we're going to do.*

The co-ordinator of Grace's group spoke of getting the young people to take ownership of their participation, but that she was encountering resistance and a distinct lack of enthusiasm on the part of the members.

Grace: *well I think she* [co-ordinator] *thinks up the ideas but the last meeting was actually kinda about it making it more about us like doing more stuff.*

Ques: *and how do you feel about that?*

Grace: *it doesn't bother me like, the responsibility.*

Although Grace professed not to be concerned by possible extra responsibility, she admitted to having only attended two meetings in the recent past. Comhairle na nÓg for

Grace is *"great fun"*. Her co-ordinator hopes that by enlisting the assistance of one of the three Regional Participation Project Officers on this matter that the group might be 'kick-started' into taking more ownership and responsibility. Perhaps so, although the Regional Participation Project Officer is also an authority figure, similar to the co-ordinator, and thus the young people will still be little more than passive recipients of participation.

Co-ordinator (3): *We could do it ourselves but we find sometimes the young people take more heed of strangers so hopefully he is going to play a role in that. It's hard for them to, eh, this is going to sound terrible but really they don't have ideas outside of what they know – they make their decision fairly early on, you know this is what we are going to do and then they kinda don't think about other things, they get their work plan and then they do it and that's kind of it really.*

The need to constantly remind members about future meetings was raised by co-ordinators on more than one occasion. Many co-ordinators admitted having to speak to the group about the obligations as well as the benefits of being involved in organisations such as Comhairle na nÓg.

Co-ordinator (5): *...I would send out letters, I would work out a three-pronged communication thing! It's letters, emails, texts and telephone calls but you have to call them and to tell them, you know push them, and then I find that if I phone them all in a one and half hour sweep on a Thursday evening and just kinda remind them!*

One co-ordinator spoke of a hard fought for place on an environmental committee within the local authority that had recently been awarded to her Comhairle na nÓg group. However, the members seemed unaware of its precarious position; unless Comhairle na nÓg was **seen** to be active on this committee, it would lose its place. The mayor was supportive of Comhairle na nÓg's potential within the local authority, but other members of the local authority were less convinced of the merits of Comhairle na nÓg involvement and remained to be convinced.

Co-ordinator (1): *well we nearly lost our seat 'coz I didn't seem to have the interest and I went back to them* [Comhairle na nÓg] *and said 'are you sure you really want this?'*

There was almost a reluctance interpreted across several Comhairlí na nÓg members to take responsibility and ownership of their participation appeared to be primarily for two

reasons. First, and contrary to what one might presume, whether a co-ordinator was a local authority worker or a youth professional did not appear to unduly influence matters. What mattered most (and in line with Driscoll, 2002, Halpern, 2006 and Serido *et al*., 2009) was the attitude and demeanour of the co-ordinator. This is what was interpreted as having the most influence on a group's sense of community, camaraderie and allegiance to one another. Nevertheless, participation success significantly associated with particular personalities can itself be problematic if a change of personnel occurs.

Cillian: *she's absolutely brilliant at what she does, she's like a mother figure and a sister figure.*

An assistant to this co-ordinator agrees stating: *Me personally, I think it's because we've got her ... I mean since she's come on board it's really taken off. I know the remit comes out of the little committees as well but still...*

The co-ordinator appeared uncomfortable with this image of her being solely responsible for the group's success. Reflecting later during the analysis of these findings the researcher considered that perhaps the success of this Comhairle na nÓg (above all others observed in this study) was overly dependent on this particular co-ordinator. Interestingly, while the co-ordinator herself seemed uncomfortable at being singled out for praise, she in turn believed that the group's success could largely be attributed to the interest of the local authority, one contact in particular.

Co-ordinator (7): *'X' in the local authority is wonderful. We have a brilliant relationship and a very trusting relationship too. She has no problem having a say in what happens, nor does she have a problem in us having a say but it all comes down to the young people. They know who she is as well. For the 2009-2010 application for money we got her, myself and the young people available to come in and we did a swot analysis of what they liked, what they didn't like, what their vision would be for the next year – so we all had an equal say what the direction would be.*

The second reason identified for members not taking the responsibility that goes with participation as seriously as their co-ordinator might wish is that many demonstrated an easy compliance with authority. Members of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are not rebels or mavericks but tend to be good natured, well-behaved and as remarked by many interviewees *"into that sort of thing"*. These young people are accustomed to following authority and operating within the rules. In many groups there seemed to be

an atmosphere akin to school where the co-ordinator was clearly in charge and the members waited for instruction. Members have developed a habit of being led by their co-ordinator; a situation which in effect mediates against active participation and empowerment by participating young people. For some, it seemed enough that they were part of a participation organisation and thus were being active citizens by default. Furthermore, some co-ordinators clearly feel under pressure to demonstrate that their group is forging visible and sustained links with decision makers. At times this pressure leads them to mould, direct and even force how the participation is practiced. With the co-ordinator and local authority anxious for visible results, the young people may be said to participate in their meetings, but not to practice true participation.

Co-ordinator (4): *our Director of Services, he's drummed up, em the first three months after the AGM will be really busy because he wants them to do a presentation to the new Joint Policing Committee, he wants them to do a presentation to the County Council, to the em…*

Assistant co-ordinator: *the three town councils*

Co-ordinator (4): *oh yes, the three town councils, the area eh the five areas as well because if they just go to the county council they'll be slotted in at the end but if they go to each area they won't and what he wants them to do is, you know do a presentation of the AGM and what were the outcomes and what they're going to work on and how can they link in with any of the actions that are eh coming up.*

6.2.2 Senses of importance

Some groups meet in their local authority council chambers while others are more informal, often meeting in a youth service's premises. Some alternate between venues, although very often they were unsure why. They go where they are told. Fajerman and Treseder (1997) highlight problems with adults selecting venues in which they are comfortable, but which the young people may not be. Productive consultation meetings are more likely if held in a café or community setting than in formal council chambers, they maintain. Many members referred to how the type of place they meet in can affect the conduct of the meeting itself. Anna's group alternates between meeting in a hotel, their local youth group premises and the local authority council chambers. Meeting in the youth group location in the centre of town suits everyone because of its location, and is more informal. If there was a visitor coming to their meeting *"we would meet somewhere more official; so our first meeting with our offices we met in the chambers*

and that was actually great craic as we were all really excited. We all speak in the mikes and it's very formal" Anna advised.

Lucy's group often meets in the chambers *"which is good 'coz we felt important then!"* Feeling important and that they are making a difference was raised by a number of interviewees. Meeting in the council chambers appeared to make quite a number of the members feel important. Lucy's comments about 'feeling important' were made directly after her earlier remarks about feeling patronized during the AGM. Charlie (a past member of a different group), recalled how occasionally meeting in his council's formal chambers *"was a good feeling, it made you feel good and important and it makes you step up to the mark a wee bit as well, you know".*

Earlier, Callum had demonstrated his astuteness in relation to his co-ordinator restricting invitations to join Comhairle na nÓg to only members of the student council. His comments about the place of his group's meetings were equally astute. His group occasionally meets in the council chambers which he felt was conducive to serious meetings. He also felt that *"it may be heightens the reputation of the Comhairle, you know among the council itself".* This is an interesting observation; interviewees had often been asked what they felt the opinion of the senior local authority council was to Comhairle na nÓg. As with other aspects, it seemed to be marred by a lack of awareness, knowledge and at times, a complete lack of interest. Comhairle na nÓg meetings conducted in the council chambers implicitly raises its importance in the local authority itself.

Of the nine Comhairlí na nÓg involved in this study, those run by the local authority's County Development Board (CDB) normally hold their meetings in a local authority meeting room, and often in the council chambers. Some of the members referred to the council chambers making them 'feel' important although one co-ordinator maintained that holding meetings there constrained proceedings and hampered creativity, fun and spontaneity. Meetings when he had taken over the running of Comhairle na nÓg were *"very boring".* He also felt that he was been 'watched' by his own manager when the meetings are held in the local authority building whereas when the meetings were physically away from the local authority, he was able to instil a sense of fun in them.

Comhairlí na nÓg run by an outside youth agency tended to hold their meetings in more informal settings. A lack of understanding and awareness emerged on the part of many members in relation to why their meetings are held where they are. For most, it appeared as though it had never been explained to them why meetings were moved from place to place. It was as if these members have no sense of ownership of their own meetings; they simply go where they are told in a manner similar to school. For these members, the co-ordinator is very much in charge, however cordial the relations between members and leader. To illustrate: Ben and Chloe (from two different Comhairlí na nÓg) seemed bemused when asked where their Comhairle na nÓg groups meet; the reason behind meeting in different locations did not appear to have occurred to them before their interview.

Ques: *and why do you meet in different places, do you know?*

Ben: *I have no idea; I'm just informed where it is and I go and it doesn't really bother me.*

Chloe: *I 'think' there is a new place in town and I 'think' that's where we are going to be meeting soon.*

As the interviews progressed many of the members referred to *"feeling important"* and 'feeling' that they were making a difference in their communities. When pressed for details on this aspect, some young people became uncomfortable, often turning to the language and rhetoric of participation almost as if such language bolsters the participatory merit of what they were doing. Anna was one of the most confident young people interviewed for this project; she clearly relished the interview experience. Anna fits the convenient stereotype of young person many people assume dominate organisations such as Comhairle na nÓg. She was self-assured, spoke clearly and was confident of her views – until pressed for details. She was one of the few interviewees to point to policy formation as a benefit to being involved in Comhairle, both to her personally, but also to the wider youth population of her area. Anna frequently invoked the language and rhetoric of participation. Exactly how her Comhairle na nÓg influences policy in her region did not emerge during the course of the interview although she mentioned policy several times. Nevertheless, Anna made it clear that she felt she was making a difference.

Anna: *like we're involved in policy making in our area. Like the senior council is always looking towards us for our input into anything that they're at. Then our drugs taskforce and alcohol taskforce we're very involved with them 'coz they [local authority] have a few different projects that they want our input into. Just like, em, helping young people have a voice in* [names area].

Anna obviously feels her Comhairle na nÓg branch is influential in her hometown. Later she again referred to policy and her Comhairle na nÓg's role in it. Comparing her branch to a youth council from another jurisdiction, Anna felt that the other group was more like *"a community group"*. Comhairle na nÓg was a more influential organisation, Anna claimed.

Anna: *Em, they don't, I don't think they are involved in as many projects as we are and they don't seem to get involved in as many policy developments as we are.*

Ques: *you really seem to feel that Comhairle plays a role in policy development.*

Anna: *I think it does, I hope it does. At the moment we are trying to influence policy in our area before influencing policy at a national level. And I think the way we work is different 'coz we all know each other and they* [the other youth council] *don't know each other.*

It was obvious that Anna considers her branch of Comhairle na nÓg more likely to be able to influence policy than the larger, but more nationally focused Dáil na nÓg. Anna's council was more involved with policy development, she felt largely by virtue of the senior council consulting Comhairle na nÓg on a regular basis. The senior council therefore viewed Comhairle na nÓg as important. Matthew is a member of the same Comhairle na nÓg group as Anna. Although more reserved than Anna, he was less sure of how the senior council viewed Comhairle na nÓg.

Matthew: *well we have got a county councillor across the road and I can ask him one or two questions you know.*

Ques: *yes of course, but do you think the council itself is aware of Comhairle na nÓg?*

Matthew: *ah, I don't think so 'coz he hadn't until I told him about it. I'm not too sure but I don't think so.*

Adults and young people alike frequently invoked the language and rhetoric of participation. Further, where the group was co-ordinated by a local authority worker rather than a youth worker phrases such as *"bringing issues to the table"* and *"different*

stakeholders working together" often slipped into the conversation. It became clear that quite a number of the members were well schooled in the language of local government and official meeting etiquette; their consultation skills being honed in such settings as a result. Arguably, this in itself is a useful experience and certainly could be considered a form of training for the future. Whether it has any intrinsic value in relation to youth participation is less certain.

Interestingly, the language of participation was often invoked by the interviewee when probed as to what they felt the purpose of Comhairle na nÓg was. Was it to influence policy? Was it representative of young people in Ireland? What is the point of Comhairle na nÓg? Many interviewees became discomforted with this line of questioning. For some, it seemed to be the first time they had given the matter any thought. For others, it prompted a personal realisation that perhaps what they were doing, although enjoyable, had no impact beyond the personal. This was a difficult, if necessary line of questioning to pursue in interviews. It frequently prompted the young person to reflect on a deeper level than heretofore about Comhairle na nÓg and forced many to question the *value* of what their group was doing. Interestingly, in many such incidences, the young person quickly sought to reassure the interviewer, and themselves, that the situation would improve as Comhairle na nÓg become more well known, and thus by default more effective, some interviewees contended. It was during these moments of the interviews that the language of participation became particularly noticeable.

Ruby: *well just the fact that I didn't really know about it and of course maybe I'm maybe not a fair representative of everyone, but I didn't know about it so I don't know that it has a big voice yet but I'm sure it'll get there. Em yea I know one of the goals of Comhairle is to help feed into policy and that but I can't honestly say that I know of any policies that I have influenced. Yea I think at the start we were really just window dressing and people, you know the DCYA were saying 'okay we are listening to young people here, we have something set up' but I don't know how seriously they are listening.*

Ben's reflexive account of what he perceived as Comhairle na nÓg's lack of influence was similarly downbeat. Nevertheless Ben, as with many of his peers, was hopeful for the future of Comhairle na nÓg. Ben particularly invoked the language of participation and consultation during his interview.

Ben: *I think it's an excellent way for young people my age and younger and older to get involved and it is a forum for expression of views, of our views. It can be difficult to incorporate the view of everybody your age because there is a lack of awareness of the Comhairle. So therefore rather than simply taking a portfolio of what people talk about to the table I have to think 'oh, how would people my age view this subject?'*

At a local level, maybe the individual council could be advertised at a local level but the whole initiative could be advertised at a national level 'coz to be honest all it is a nook and cranny of many nooks and crannies on the website of the Minister for Children.

While Ben was an articulate young person, his answers slipped in confidence the more he was pressed for details. The less confident he became, the more he invoked and took reassurance from the language of participation. Adopting the language of participation seemed to help vindicate his Comhairle na nÓg membership. It was also noticed that Ben (and other interviewees) shifted from using the more personal pronoun 'I' to the detached 'they' when were asked about their opinion of Comhairle na nÓg as an organisation, almost as if to distance themselves from the responsibility as to how the organisation is operationalised. Ben was already quoted in relation to having *"no idea"* why meetings are in different place – he is accustomed to going where he is told. Matthew was another interviewee who frequently used "they". At the time of his interview he was just about to take his place on the Dáil na nÓg Council. However, he had no idea what lay ahead; "they" will tell him what to do.

Matthew: *I got elected onto the Council as well. They just have to organise it now.*

Ques: *and do you know what's ahead of you with that?*

Matthew: *I have a general idea but I wouldn't be 100 per cent on it; I'm just guessing it will be similar to Comhairle na nÓg.*

Older past members were far less likely to invoke the language of participation during their interviews. 'Voice' was used by all past members but often in conjunction with more negative or cynical reflections on the influence their group had. Older past members used the language of rejection and tokenism – something which was notable by its absence among current members of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. This cynicism and negativity was predominantly directed at what they felt was the tokenism of the two organisations. All past members interviewed professed to having enjoyed

(on an individual level) being a part of these participation structures. All felt that they had personally benefited.

Darragh and Liam were past members of the same Comhairle na nÓg branch. Although as reported already both very much enjoyed their time, both felt little had been achieved by their group. Words and phrases such as "PR stunt", "a kind of a lark" and "plamausing" [a colloquial word used in Ireland used to mean false flattery and encouragement] were scattered throughout their interviews. 'Plamausing' was used specifically in reference to politicians who attend the Dáil na nÓg event.

Darragh: *'coz it's* [Dáil na nÓg] *mad expensive and any ministers that are there are just, you know, plamausing you, you know? And in fairness, you would have people in fairness with some decent questions but it's difficult 'coz it's actually just a watered down politician's answer that you get. And then it's just 'well it doesn't really matter'.*

Only one of the past members interviewed used words of anger and resentment. Notwithstanding this anger, Sarah admitted that she had enjoyed her time as a member of Comhairle na nÓg. Her frustration was directed at what she perceived was the tokenistic nature of the organisation. Most of her anger however was focussed on Dáil na nÓg. Her anger at the lack of right to reply at Dáil na nÓg has already been documented in this thesis. When asked to reflect on her experiences, Sarah became irate. The following extract from Sarah's interview demonstrates her almost palpable anger. At times, she found it difficult to articulate exactly what she was trying to say such was her frustration at the organisation she felt falls so short of the young people it seeks to involve. Sarah's interview was loaded with angry words and would make uncomfortable listening to those charged with the running of the two participation organisations.

Sarah: *I think Comhairle, the idea of Comhairle is fantastic because it's the only facility that I can see at the moment where young people have an official role within governance, but meaningful communication is what's lacking...from my experience, I don't, eh even I can't tell you what one Comhairle does from another because there is just that lack of communication. I just feel there is a lack of cohesiveness and actual drive to get things done. It just feels like the whole thing is very complacent.*
The thing about Comhairle is that it's so glossy and so many beautiful booklets, so many things and that's where the money goes – but I want to stress that Comhairle can be so good. I'm sorry I'm coming across as cynical. It's stagnant, it's complacent but it could be so good.

Ques: *and Dáil na nÓg, did you ever go to that?*

Sarah: *I only went once 'coz I thought it was just a sham and I never wanted to go back again.*

Sarah's words and language accurately reflect her obvious anger with the DCYA. It would be easy to seize on her anger and maintain that the DCYA has failed to realise youth participation. However, Sarah was the only past member encountered in this study to use such angry words. Others were more circumspect, their choice of language pointing to a mix of embarrassment at the lack of any real progress and yet enjoyment during their involvement with these structures. Even Sarah, despite her obvious anger remained with Comhairle na nÓg for three years and afterwards as an advisor to Comhairle na nÓg.

Despite the somewhat jaded cynicism he expressed at the Dáil na nÓg process during his interview, Darragh also keeps in contact with some of the gatekeepers he met when a member of Comhairle na nÓg. He has also assisted at Dáil na nÓg on more than one occasion. The DCYA still contacts him occasionally. He also assisted at Dáil na nÓg 2010 and laughed at the incongruity of his presence there when he was observed by the researcher at the annual parliament – *"oops, you've caught me out!"* Therefore, despite his cynicism, he evidently still feels it is worthwhile being involved. Conor, another older past member of a different group, had a similar relationship with the DCYA. His interview was littered with the language of cynicism and tokenism and yet he admitted, somewhat ruefully, that he is still involved and likes to play a part in Dáil na nÓg when he can.

6.3 Conclusion

The concept of youth voice aims to give young people a say in matters affecting them and the DCYA is keen to point to instances where young people have been included in early debates about policy formation. However, within the participation organisations themselves, the voices of the youth members have been rendered strangely mute with young people largely expected to adhere to the 'the DCYA line'. A sense of the department considering itself the quintessential expert in the field was palpable. Arguably, operationalising matters in this manner is unlikely to imbue in members a sense of proprietorship of their participation providence. It would be unfair to accuse

members of frittering away their participation potential; nevertheless until they grasp ownership, even if is shared between themselves and their gatekeepers, they are unlikely to fully emancipate their collective voices.

Chapter Seven: Surrogate Benefits

7.1 Introduction

The emphasis now shifts away from participants' tangible experiences of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg to surrogate benefits acquired through membership of these organisations. Both organisations are promoted as *the* mechanisms for young people to have their voices heard in matters affecting them; in other words they are participation entities in themselves and not the training grounds of future councillors or community activists. Nor is their purpose to equip young people with individual, self-development skills. Quite simply, success is measured in actual outcomes rather than loosely-defined individual benefits. Academia also seems less impressed by tacit self-improvement acquired through membership of these types of structures; fringe-benefits at best but not to be considered as the goals of participation itself. Yet arrayed against this drive for real material affects are the personal derived benefits that were repeatedly cited by interviewees as key merits of their involvement. As already documented, many members slip quite casually into these participation organisations; no urgent participatory trigger impelled them to become involved. Their motivational foci was generally revealed to be personal initially, becoming increasingly so as their membership progresses. Therefore, to disregard what the young people had to say about this aspect of participation disrespects their opinions and goes against the most basic principle of youth voice. With this in mind, this category considers these tacit, 'surrogate' benefits. Harnessing these personal benefits to generate a more empowering youth-centred participation schema than currently exists seems a useful topic to explore in greater depth.

7.2 Surrogate benefits

As far back as 1968, Burke refers to debates (particularly in the planning literature), arguing that citizen self-improvement through participation is secondary to the participation process; not a goal therefore, only a means. Burke (1968: 288) argues for an alternative viewpoint which is "to use participation therapeutically as a means for developing self-confidence, and, indeed, self-reliance ... individuals, according to this logic, will discover that by cooperating with their neighbours they can bring about

changes affecting their community". Table 7.1 breaks down the internal construction of the category 'Surrogate benefits'.

Category	Sub-categories	Associated properties
Surrogate benefits	Fostering derivative skills	Confidence, self-esteem, new skills, public-speaking, openness, understanding, recognising
	Considering training	Acquiring skills, distracting, tokenism, value

Table 7.1: Construction, 'Surrogate benefits'

7.2.1 Fostering derivative skills

Previously, in Chapter Three, methodological decisions made throughout the study were reflected upon. The decision not to conduct a focus group was justified on the grounds that young people already participate in a focus group of sorts by way of their regular Comhairle na nÓg meetings. Accordingly, individual interviews were carried out with gatekeepers and young people, implicitly stating to both groups that all opinions were equally valid and equally valued. Nevertheless, it is conceded that some commentators continue to maintain that young people prefer a group setting and find one to one encounters with an interviewer intimidating. Consequently, much effort was expended trying to neutralise such fears before they arose. Interestingly, a number of those interviewed stated that being involved in this study itself was liberating and that they found the interview an enjoyable experience. Matthew was one such participant and in common with other interviewees, expressed pride in what he has done and how he has personally progressed as a result of his involvement in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg (see also Ethical Thought Box 6).

Matthew: I think like before I went on this [Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg Council] *I wouldn't have been able to speak out, do anything like this even* [points to the digital recorder] *but since I have gone on it I am able to say, to get my point across to people. I have proven to myself that I can say stuff.*

Ques: your opinion counts?

Matthew: yea, exactly – my opinion counts. I think it's a great experience, just to even have the experience of being there, like my friends who went to it said it was a super experience, like going to the council, they said was a brilliant experience. I see it as more to just put on my CV, it's really good.

Matthew's interview raised a number of ethical issues. He was alone in the house for the first fifteen minutes of the interview. Being alone in a house with a young person, even with a signed consent form, is an uncomfortable situation for an interviewer. His mother came home after the interview had started and sat in the room while the interview was on-going. Should she have been asked to leave; it was her house after all? As Mayall (2000) points out, the researcher is as much a guest of the child as of the parent. On reflection, his mother's presence did not seem to influence Matthew's answers as his demeanour did not change while he was speaking.

Most parents did afford their child some privacy while being interviewed. A few interrupted with offers of tea or coffee; perhaps a way to check their son or daughter was in safe hands? Just two young people (Matthew and Luke) were alone in the house when the interviewer arrived. In Matthew's case, as already stated his mother came home mid-interview; in the other, Luke was alone in the house and the interviewer never met either of his parents. Agreeing with Bushin (2007) the acquisition of university approval does not absolve a researcher from the responsibility of continually questioning themselves and their ethical practices. Ethical best practice requires constant, close attention.

Ethical Thought Box 7: Considering consent issues once again

Oisín was equally enthusiastic about the benefits he felt he had gained through being a long term member; he really enjoys the training, although at times he seemed unsure of the reason for so much training. Nevertheless, for Oisín, being part of different training projects has boosted his self-confidence.

Oisín: *oh, I wasn't like this always. I suppose we got a lot of public speaking training and there was a lot, there was media training, there was eh, website training, the committee members' training, public speaking training, there was loads and loads of training. And I'd say that I wouldn't be this confident if I hadn't done all of that.*

Amy, from the same group agrees.

Amy: *At the end of the day in ten or twenty years' time, we will be the majority so it gives people a say and not only a say it helps bring confidence and brings people together. All of these talks and different interviews it gives students team building and confidence and more self-esteem. So it's not just for students to have their say but it also gives students more self-esteem and helps them maybe in their day to day lives. And also a good debate will almost help students' public speaking and helps them develop as an individual.*

Forty-one young people across nine Comhairlí na nÓg were interviewed for this study. Every one of the youth interviewees referred to positive individual benefits they had gained by being a member of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. While some were

more circumspect about the participatory value and effectiveness of the organisations, all maintained that they had benefited personally. Reflections from participants such as Seán and Jack offer an accurate encapsulation of the young people's comments on this issue.

Seán: *you learn a lot from it, like definitely like speaking up in front of people and being able to stand up at Dáil na nÓg, like it's pretty intimidating, you in front of 200 odd people, like there's policy makers, the Minister ... but you notice, well especially some of the younger members, like I was 16 going into it so I was like 'grand', I wasn't shy but some of the younger members I have seen grow.*

Jack: *it's definitely very good. People can be very shy at the start but they can get a little, eh it can give them a boost, like they can talk through the table and like you get to know loads more people. Not everyone is a very confident person and usually a lot of people just grow in confidence the longer they're on the Comhairle. I would recommend it.*

Members of organisation such as Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are often characterized as self-confident, articulate; indeed many interviewees fit this description with many also on their school council or part of a school debating team. However, not all members interviewed fit this convenient stereotype. Some co-ordinators were more adept at recognising this more than others. The enthusiasm and skill of the co-ordinator at promoting a positive group dynamic and sustaining members' interest was observed to be crucial. While young people might casually attend an AGM or an initial Comhairle na nÓg meeting, it can be difficult to sustain their interest unless it is communicated to them from the outset that their input will be valued. One co-ordinator remembered how one shy person was *"like a deer caught in the headlights"* in his first meeting. Nevertheless, he keeps coming, although he rarely contributes to any of the debate his group engages in.

Co-ordinator (2): *we needed an analysis for the newsletter so himself and another lad did that; they are both very quiet and they did that. He is very articulate and extremely able in terms of writing articles, he made sense of what everybody said. And that brought him in a smaller group to the table.*

By working in a smaller group, this member has been allowed contribute to his Comhairle na nÓg group in a way that best suits him. As a result his work has had a positive impact on this group. Other co-ordinators had similar experiences. Co-ordinator (3) referred to an active member of her group who had been involved since

she was twelve years of age; she is now sixteen years of age. She had been involved in Dáil na nÓg as well as Comhairle na nÓg and had confided in her co-ordinator that she had found the Dáil na nÓg experience at aged twelve intimidating but had remained a member, primarily due to her co-ordinator's support and encouragement.

Not all members are so fortunate however and the potential for less forceful members interviewed to participate in their group frequently appeared to have gone unnoticed. Dylan, a current Comhairle na nÓg member, remained completely silent throughout the meeting which was observed for this study. Somewhat unexpectedly therefore, he returned the consent form indicating a willingness to be interviewed. He was reserved during his interview but still managed to convey the impression that he was happy to be a part of Comhairle na nÓg. He did however admit that he was unclear what the purpose of an organisation such as Comhairle na nÓg was. Nevertheless, he remains involved and advised that he attends every meeting.

Dylan: *I don't really know of anything that has been you know concrete as such. I think it's more putting an influence on it rather than doing something. I don't think we actually have the power to say we are going to do this and then do it. I think we just put it forward for the councils and they have to talk about it. I don't think that we can actually physically do anything like that.*

Ques: *and would you like that sort of power?*

Dylan: *well yea, I think that we could do with a small bit more than we have so that we can get things done and so that we can show that we have done things coz there is very little evidence that we have done anything.*

It emerged during a later interview with Dylan's cousin Darragh, that Dylan has advanced computer skills; "*he's absolutely amazing at anything to do with the computer*". After receiving this information, Dylan was telephoned by the researcher and his computer expertise inquired about; had his co-ordinator ever asked for his help or assistance? *"Em, no, never, I've never been asked I suppose"*. As Dylan is reserved and contributes very little [verbally] to his group, he seems to be left in the background while the louder more confident members were continually 'rewarded' with the key roles in his group.

It became clear that trust is extremely important in the co-ordinator-member relationship. In many ways, John is similar to Dylan. He was quiet and hardly spoke during the meeting which was observed for this study. Similar to Dylan, he returned the consent form indicating a willingness to express his views. Also similar to Dylan, John has advanced computer skills but unlike Dylan, John's skills were recognised by his co-ordinator and put to use within his group. He was described by one of his peers as the *"techno whiz-kid"* of their group and has been given the responsibility of maintaining his group's website. John's group was interpreted by the researcher as being the closest to a youth-led group of the nine groups that took part in this study. Interestingly however, when John was asked if he thought his group had a "youth voice" he was unsure. Even in this most 'successful' group, members seem to find it difficult to connect what they are doing with the wider concept of young people having a voice and influencing change in their communities.

John: *I'm going to be in charge of the website this year but eh I don't know, well we're definitely getting known anyways but I can't really see how the work that we're doing being like brought out like I don't really see anything changing.*

Dylan's cousin Darragh and his friend Liam are past members of Comhairle na nÓg and displayed a jaundiced view of the Irish state participation during their interviews. Both had been two of the organisation's first members, when it began in 2002. While their observations were revealing, both admitted that they had very much enjoyed their involvement and had benefited personally from being part of these organisations. They are confident young men and not shy about being forceful in their criticisms of both Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. Darragh singled out Dáil na nÓg in particular for being a public relations exercise, contending that if the local authority is seen to be engaging with young people and providing different forms of training, it will claim that it is fulfilling its obligations to young people and is confirming their position as active citizens. Darragh in particular had plenty to say about what he perceived as blatant tokenism with respect to Dáil na nÓg, although he ruefully acknowledged that he continues to assist as a mentor at the annual event. Despite his stringent criticisms, Darragh still enjoys being part of the State's participation structures. His friend Liam, less blunt and outspoken was more critically reflective and realistic about the process.

Liam: *yea well it looks good on your CV – yea at first I thought it as going to be cool and we can get something done but eh, as you went along it really was more like a PR stunt, especially Dáil na nÓg itself...The press were there and we were all interviewed and quoted in The Irish Times* [national broadsheet newspaper] ... *we didn't really get any feedback, like it was hopeless.*

Liam maintained that the participatory merit of Dáil na nÓg had actually dis-improved over the years, despite changes instigated by the DCYA designed to improve the process. Although its budget has been expanded, Liam felt it was more effective in its earlier days, when it had been less *"glamorous",* echoing another past member [Sarah] who angrily contended that Dáil na nÓg is *"glossy"* (Sarah). When Comhairle na nÓg began as an organisation in 2002, Liam claimed to have felt that he was involved in something worthwhile which was of value to young people. Now he admitted that he doubts its value and usefulness. He particularly doubts the value of Dáil na nÓg to young people in Ireland. Interestingly however, and despite his obvious cynicism, he was unable to hide his pride at what he had been a part of.

Liam: *we got a document about, eh, nearly six months later and it gave feedback on everything that had been talked about and what had changed and what they were planning to implement from it and it was really good stuff actually. And I still have it and it was like a full report, you felt like you had done something and you had accomplished something.*

Many interviewees referred to the importance of ***feeling that*** they are making a difference and that their opinion counts. Mature reflection prompted past members interviewed to speculate if what was achieved ever went beyond just a feeling.

7.2.2 Considering training

Co-ordinator (5): *but we haven't actually had a meeting since 'coz we have so much training.*

Although training for different skills is necessary, some interviewees revealed that training programmes are used as visible manifestations that the local authority takes youth voice seriously. Interviewees all referred to the 'training' they regularly undergo. In some of the interviews, a sense of 'training for training's sake' pervaded some of the interviewees' reflections. For example, when pressed for more details about all this training, Oisín was unable to remember many. His group had attended media training

courses and had made and then presented a DVD to their local authority. While Oisín professed to have enjoyed the experience, he was unable to remember exactly what the DVD was about or why they had made it. He was also unaware which department or section in the local authority his group had presented the DVD to. He was nonetheless anxious to reassure the researcher that the DVD project, and training for same had had participatory merit. Other interviewees adopted similar tactics when pressed for details – many referred to their work as being *"very important"*. In lieu of actual evidence, some of the interviewees appeared to wholly rely on 'feelings' of being part of something worthwhile.

Oisín: *we presented to the county council and the other group presented it to theirs, yea, and that was a really good day. It kind of made it more fun 'coz we were really, eh, we were in some environmental thing going on before and it was so boring so we brought in things like popcorn boxes and eh, everyone was laughing so it was really good and they complimented us highly you know.*

Lucy's group had also made a DVD as part of her group's media training. There had been plans to publicly present this DVD. The idea for the topic of the DVD appears to have come from Lucy's co-ordinator, not the Comhairle na nÓg members themselves. The co-ordinator had heard about a competition and thought they should enter. How had the process of making the DVD worked?

Lucy: *em, we had to do a project on how Europe affects our local community so em, our co-ordinator was really good, she organised a kind of em, a film company to come in and do a DVD with us and we had to meet up a few times during the summer. And it was all day, it was very intense but it wasn't too bad as it was the summer holidays and most people could make it. So it was great as they knew what they were doing, they could show us how to edit and do all that kind of thing and everything was there for us.*

What then had happened to this DVD – was it distributed among the wider youth population in their area, or had the DVD stayed among themselves? Unfortunately it was the latter; further evidence of those involved in Comhairle na nÓg being let down.

Lucy: *we were meant to have this big launch 'coz it was entered in the competition but then the competition only gave two tickets to go to the actual ceremony or whatever so we decided it wasn't fair to send only two people so we said we would just do something on our own. So the plan was that all our parents would come but then that had to be*

scrapped (I can't remember why) and then we just out to dinner with the guys in town but it was good and we all got a copy as well.

"But it was good..." a comment from Lucy although a version of the same comment was echoed by many interviewees; reassuring themselves as much as the interviewer that there was worth in the projects their group had worked on. Lucy, in particular, was pensive when she compared her Comhairle na nÓg to another group. Although unable to provide details, she had heard that another group had secured a student discount for teenagers in their area, and that another group *"do everything"*. Lucy was not quite sure what "everything" was but she felt there was a difference between the projects her group had worked on and those of other groups.

Beyond providing a training function, connecting Comhairle na nÓg with the adult council of the local authority presents a challenge to many of the co-ordinators. Comhairle na nÓg is expected to maintain sustained links with decision makers in its area. A local authority council is not the only body charged with the power to influence local policy but it is a key player, nevertheless. Co-ordinators seemed acutely aware of challenges in this area. Undoubtedly some of the day to day work of a local authority council is dull and change takes time. Schooling the young people in the mechanics of local politics but at the same time keeping them interested has proved testing. Similarly, the senior council often needs to be schooled about Comhairle na nÓg. One co-ordinator was annoyed following a presentation to the senior council by some of her Comhairle na nÓg members when the young people had received a round of applause.

Ques: *would people not normally receive a round of applause?*

Co-ordinator (1): *No. Well it was, in fairness to them I think that they actually did admire that the young person got up and without sort of, you know, 'coz they are very good at presenting, very able and they are very, well they are more able than I certainly was at that age. And if I wasn't taking it so personally it probably would have been okay and it was recognition of the fact that they were very good...yes and I think the person who made the comment in fact is somebody who was in admiration of them and I'm not sure that the young person minded.*

Although impressed with the skills of the young people, the round of applause felt patronizing to the co-ordinator. The attitude of the mayor towards members of another Comhairle na nÓg branch had similarly been interpreted as patronizing by the

researcher. One cannot assume that presentations to a local authority necessarily equates to that local authority taking young people seriously. While some local authorities have made efforts to include Comhairle na nÓg in their work programmes, others seem barely aware of its existence. At best only two groups in this study appear to have local authorities which seem to genuinely value the potential Comhairle na nÓg offers. Ironically the Comhairle na nÓg observed during this study as being the most active are quite reluctant to engage directly with their local authority; interviewees from this group claimed Comhairle na nÓg was not overtly political.

Cillian: *well I suppose that is kinda political but it's fun at the same time and it's where you can actually have fun at the same time as actually getting something done while helping the community and stuff.*

His group was observed as being the most empowered of the nine that were part of this study in terms of having the confidence to do things in their way. The steering group of this Comhairle na nÓg, together with the co-ordinator and personnel from the local authority, meet regularly to discuss future progress. Just one interviewee felt that the group should be speaking directly to politicians. John's view is that *"I think we should definitely meet politicians a bit more often, so we can tell them what we think and stuff"*

Many of the interviews revealed instances where those involved have been excited by the prospect of working on something worthwhile for their communities only for the project to dwindle to nothing. It is understandable therefore why so many of the past members interviewed were so cynical about these organisations. Past members of Comhairle na nÓg Eoin, Sarah, Liam and Darragh have all been quoted over the course of these four chapters which present details of the GT analysis. They exhibited a mixture of anger and cynicism but also frustration. Mature reflection prompted feelings that their experience with DCYA participation had amounted to little more than tokenism. Interestingly, however angry and frustrated they were, all indicated that the 'idea' is good and that Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg 'could' be great.

7.3 Conclusion

Interestingly, the acquisition of derivative skills was the area where the biggest gap was observed between young people and adults. The DCYA almost distances itself from personal benefits; for the department, the priority is the production of tangible

participation outcomes that are evidence based. Conversely, only a handful of interviewees were able to point to anything specific their participation group had influenced. For the young people involved, benefits are highly personal with increased self-esteem and public speaking skills mentioned by all youth participants. Most seemed oblivious of the DCYA drive for outputs primarily because they have not been thus informed. Once again, the potential for participation is marred by a lack of adequate communication. The DCYA's reluctance to embrace the personal benefits acquired through membership of its participation structures represents a missed opportunity; by coupling these personal benefits it could actually empower the young people to take ownership of their participation fortunes. In its drive to provide fora for youth voice in the Republic of Ireland, voices within its own structures have been strangely muffled.

Chapter Eight: Analysis & Discussion

I know from some of the other Comhairles, people in different Comhairles, they do meet with the council, sometimes they're listened to and sometimes they're not and sometimes they just pretend that they're listening but they're actually not. But yea, I think that they should listen to us and it would open their eyes because they think they're doing what young people want; well maybe they are but they're not doing it the way they want it. Just even, not completely change their policies or whatever but just help them to make them more youth friendly.

(Lucy, Current Comhairle na nÓg member)

8.1 Introduction

Through a process of constant comparison and integration, a substantive grounded theory was extracted from the categories detailed in the preceding four chapters. This chapter presents this substantive grounded theory; in essence a theory of the ingredients necessary for effective (structured) youth participation, adjudicated by the researcher following interpretation of the data collected from the research participants. This substantive grounded theory is followed by examples which illuminate this theory in action. The focus then turns to discussion of the analysis, blended through which are comparisons with the extant literature. How the findings uncovered in this thesis relate to the academic participation discourse and how, if at all, they resonate with the models of participation presented in Chapter Two is discussed. Throughout the discussion, the participants' words are retained in order that their voices are continually heard. Before the discussion however, data uncovered in this study are compared with the two most recent reports commissioned by the DCYA on Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg.

8.2 Study findings and DCYA commissioned reports

This thesis is the first by an independent scholar in the Irish academe to undertake a critical analysis of DCYA youth participation structures. However, it is acknowledged that the DCYA has commissioned a number of reports on Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg since the passing of the (first) National Children's Strategy (2000). As previously listed in Chapter One and to recap, the twelve DCYA commissioned reports produced thus far on these two participation structures are:

- Six *Dáil na nÓg Delegate Reports* (2008, 2006, 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001)
- *Review of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg* (2005)
- *Report from Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group* (2007)
- *Report from Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2007-2008* (2009)
- *Evaluation Report: Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2008-2009* (2010)
- *Dáil na nÓg Council Final Evaluation 2009-2010* (2010)
- *Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010* (2011)

It seems useful to halt briefly and to consider the critical inquiry of this study against, and in distinction from, the most recent DCYA report on each organisation. The reports discussed in this section are: *Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010*, published in January 2011 and *Dáil na nÓg Council Final Evaluation 2009-2010*, published in August 2010. Each report was compiled by an independent consultant. The consultant responsible for the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010 (2011) report has carried out a number of prior consultations for the DCYA, and has been the independent evaluator of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund since 2008. The author of *Dáil na nÓg Council Final Evaluation 2009-2010* was appointed as independent evaluator of the Council in 2007. She was also the first evaluator of the Children and Young People's Forum for the DCYA. Both authors are therefore familiar with DCYA structures of participation.

With regard to the *Dáil na nÓg Council Final Evaluation 2009-2010* report, some of the young people interviewed for this study were members of Dáil na nÓg at the time this evaluation was conducted over the course of 2009-2010. Similarly, the *Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010* report was drawn up at a time (2009-2010) when many of the participants of this study were involved with the organisation. Thus these two reports represent the best means available to the researcher to directly compare the results of this doctoral study with official reports commissioned by the DCYA.

This thesis is working with the tools of classical pragmatism, in particular the acknowledgement of fallibilism and the (moral) personal impetus of the expert taking their place among their participants, 'almost' working in collaboration with them in an

effort to ascertain 'what works', acknowledging that they are the experts in their own lives. Thus, issue is not taken with the results of these reports *per se* but rather the process in which they were commissioned. Commissioned by the DCYA, they essentially evaluate the success of these structures *in relation to the DCYA* and in the case of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund, the fund's value for money for the Department.

8.2.1 *Evaluation Report: Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010* (2011)

The Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund was established in 2007 by the DCYA to support the County Development Boards (CDBs) in running the Comhairle na nÓg organisation. Those applying under the scheme are obliged to comply with the criteria that Comhairle na nÓg engages effectively with decision makers and decision making bodies. An independent evaluator was appointed under the scheme to measure success in relation to improving the operation of Comhairle na nÓg and to assess its value for money. In the report, the evaluator acknowledges the assistance of young people and staff in four Comhairlí na nÓg (Cork City, Donegal, Offaly and Dublin City), who contributed to the report. Cork City Comhairle na nÓg was also one of the nine Comhairlí na nÓg that participated in this study. None of those interviewed from Cork City Comhairle na nÓg mentioned the independent evaluator's report at any time to the researcher. The executive summary of the evaluator's report is attached in Appendix Six.

The seven chapters of the evaluator's report focus on structures of the organisation; its working arrangements; Comhairle na nÓg's work programme; its public profile; the participation support team; the impact of funding, and finally conclusions, challenges, key recommendations and next steps for the organisation. This thesis does not dispute the independent evaluator's report. Nevertheless, there are differences in emphasis between the report and this study, most notably in the area of communication of information and how the Comhairle na nÓg organisation is operationalised.

The evaluator's report contends that the main recommendation of the previous evaluation report has largely been implemented; that was, efforts were to be made to address the age imbalance within the organisation. The evaluator notes that not all Comhairlí na nÓg have been successful in this area. The report also acknowledges that

there has been positive feedback in relation to the participation of 'seldom heard' young people. While efforts to include 'seldom heard' young people are acknowledged, this thesis argues that this has proved problematic for the nine groups involved in this study. For example, many interviewees referred to their anxiety that young people not be encouraged to join the organisation purely on the basis that they were of a certain age, or in a 'seldom heard' category. Such a practice, they maintained, could leave the organisation open to charges of tokenism. While interviewees acknowledged that Comhairle na nÓg should be an inclusive organisation, co-ordinators expressed frustration that not enough assistance was being provided by the DCYA in relation to 'seldom heard' young people becoming involved. Young people interviewed stressed that 'seldom heard' young people must want to join the organisation and see it as relevant. Therefore, while this thesis agrees that efforts are being made in relation to the DCYA age and 'seldom heard' criteria, difficulties these criteria are causing 'on the ground' for co-ordinators and current members should be acknowledged.

The researcher agrees that there have been concerted efforts to improve support structures for Comhairle na nÓg. Indeed the appointment of three Regional Participation Project Officers was well received by interviewees in this study. Notwithstanding this however, three co-ordinators pointed to differences in interpretation between themselves and the Regional Participation Project Officers. Interviewees pointed to what they felt was a lack of clarity with respect to distinctions between the concepts of consultation and participation. Co-ordinators indicated that they feel under pressure that their Comhairle na nÓg produce *visible* outputs. One interviewee claimed the *"goalposts were shifting"*. Co-ordinators who took part in this study were keen to argue that while much of the work of Comhairle na nÓg is a blend of consultation and participation, that such a blend is a participation of sorts. Although the evaluator notes instances of consultation, co-ordinator disquiet in this area was not reflected in the report.

The evaluator's report asserts that the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund has had a positive effect on individual Comhairlí na nÓg and this is accepted by the researcher. However, co-ordinators interviewed for this study appeared frustrated over what they perceived was excessive administration and overly strict criteria demanded by the DCYA in order to secure funding. This point is illustrated by the frustration of some co-

ordinators in relation to forging sustained links with other Comhairlí na nÓg. That members wish to make contact and link with other groups was made clear, both to their own co-ordinator and also to the researcher. The DCYA refusing to sanction funds for such fieldtrips between groups could prove counter-productive, one co-ordinator warned.

The evaluator refers (briefly) to how young people are selected to attend an AGM to elect members to Comhairle na nÓg. However, the evaluator's report makes no recommendation in relation to how young people are informed initially about the organisation and of the possibility of becoming involved. Young people interviewed in this study, without exception, were not provided with sufficient information about the organisation when they first contemplated joining. Many were selected to attend an AGM by a teacher or principal and thus it is argued throughout this thesis that their 'decision' to join was not an informed one. This is perhaps the most significant point of departure between this study and the evaluator's report.

With respect to raising the public awareness of Comhairle na nÓg, this study agrees with the evaluator; efforts are being made to raise the public profile of the organisation through various media outlets. Nevertheless, there seemed a gulf between youth interviewees' expectations (and disappointments) in this area and what media the DCYA utilises to promote the organisation. Furthermore, this study notes the desire of many of the young people involved that social networking be used as a key mechanism to (i) target potential members, (ii) inform current members of on-going progress and (iii) connect with other groups. This study has developed evidence to suggest that young people's wishes in this area are not being respected.

The evaluator reports that seventy-nine per cent of Comhairle na nÓg steering committees include youth representatives among their members. Additionally, over half of all Comhairlí na nÓg have young people represented on decision-making bodies. The evaluator further maintains that Comhairle na nÓg is increasingly being seen as the voice of young people and that it is regarded as a consultative forum for young people, as evidenced from submissions received from Comhairlí na nÓg, CDBs and other stakeholders. The evaluator notes the importance of keeping the young person "briefed" (2011: 53) as to on-going developments and argues that young people who are

kept informed and supported by their adult gatekeepers are as likely to influence decisions as are their adult counterparts. The evaluation report includes answers given by Comhairle na nÓg organisers – *that is adults* – to questions asking them to rate the influence of Comhairle na nÓg. Comhairle na nÓg was rated by sixty-one per cent of organisers as "very influential" and "somewhat influential" by thirty-two per cent of organisers. Unlike the adults of the evaluator's report, many youth interviewees in this study were unsure as to Comhairle na nÓg's influence in their community.

The evaluator points to increases in training across a number of areas, both for the co-ordinators and also for the young people. While this study agrees, the young people frequently informed the researcher that they were often unsure as to the purpose of the training they receive. Co-ordinators were also not fully convinced of the value of training; indeed one co-ordinator interviewed for this study claimed that the volume of training has occasionally distracted the group from its participation focus, advising that the group had not met for some time because they had been involved in *"so much training"*.

Finally, the evaluator's report notes that improvements are required in the area of "hearing and heeding the voice of young people" (2011: 53). Notwithstanding any impact an individual Comhairle na nÓg may make in its area, this study observes that in many groups, the young people are simply not kept abreast of how their group impacts (if at all) on the wider community. This thesis has evidence to suggest that communication procedures in relation to follow-up and feedback from past consultations are rarely provided to Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg members. This study notes that strategies for communication are not covered in the evaluator's report.

8.2.2 *Dáil na nÓg Council 2009-2010 Final Evaluation* (2010)

The author of this report has conducted several prior evaluation reports for the DCYA and other organisations. She has also facilitated planning and evaluation sessions for Youthreach and Traveller Training Centres and facilitated consultations with young people in two Dublin local authorities in recent times. The executive summary of the evaluator's report of the Dáil na nÓg Council is attached in Appendix Seven.

The report advises that the evaluator collected data from observations, evaluation sheets, focus groups and telephone interviews. The author attended two Dáil na nÓg Council meetings as an observer and was also present at an Oireachtas (government) sub-committee meeting at which the Dáil na nÓg Council made a presentation. Evaluation sheets (designed by the independent evaluator) were completed by members of the Council at the end of their monthly meetings and returned to her by post. The evaluator "met with" (2010: 5) staff at the DCYA and one person from the National Youth Council of Ireland. She also conducted an interview with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and held two focus group meetings with young people from the Council. Finally, the evaluator telephoned "a small number (3/4) of young people after the meetings" and in April and May 2010 telephoned young people who had stopped attending Council meetings. Advisors to the Council were spoken to on the telephone as were three policy makers. One other policy maker sent a written response to the evaluator following a request for questions.

The twenty-seven page report goes through the work of the Council and refers to the policy makers and key stakeholders it met during its one year term of office. The report lists eighteen organisations which sent letters of support to the Council in respect of their work on mental health. Beyond letters of support, no evidence is provided of any organisation which has directly acted on recommendations made by the Dáil na nÓg Council.

With respect to the Dáil na nÓg Council influencing policy (particularly in relation to the change of policy regarding the availability of a cervical cancer vaccine to teenage girls), the evaluator's report acknowledges that there is always likely to be a multitude of voices involved in policy formation. The report states that "the Dáil na NÓg (sic) Council work undoubtedly contributed to the reaching of this tipping point" (2010: 12). While this may be true, interviewees in this study who were not part of Dáil na nÓg were frequently unaware of the work that the Dáil na nÓg Council (or Dáil na nÓg itself) was involved in. The evaluation report briefly (2010: 23-24) refers to challenges in relation to the Dáil na nÓg Council connecting with Comhairle na nÓg and feeding back information from the Council to young people at a local level. The Dáil na nÓg Council gets the opportunity to speak directly to policy makers and it is agreed that it was one of a number of actors that contributed to changes in the availability of the

cervical cancer vaccine. Council members who were interviewed for this thesis expressed the *hope* that their Council had influenced this policy but some of them seemed unsure if they actually had. Furthermore, interviewees who were not part of the Dáil na nÓg Council frequently seemed hardly aware of its existence, not least whatever part the Council had played in changing policy in relation to this vaccine.

The evaluator's report refers to the Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE) report produced in collaboration with the Dáil na nÓg Council. The report maintains "this publication marks an important step in the development of the Council as it will provide a permanent record of work done that is fully in the public domain. This will provide a useful resource for researchers and others into the future." While this thesis agrees, it seems unfortunate that no reference is made to specific recommendations of the RSE report or any plans to implement same.

The report notes the challenges ahead for future Dáil na nÓg Councils. However, it is noted in this thesis that interviewees were not satisfied in relation to how information is communicated to them, particularly after they leave the Council. Those involved appear to have an action-packed year and Council members interviewed for this study reported that they enjoyed the experience. Nevertheless, once their term of office concludes, there appears to be no system in place for providing these active and enthusiastic youth participants with progress reports in respect of the specific work they were involved with. Such neglect, it is argued here, breeds cynicism in the future.

Thus it is in the area of the communication of information in relation to Dáil na nÓg, the Dáil na nÓg Council and Comhairle na nÓg that this thesis argues procedures within the DCYA need to be improved and strengthened. While efforts to improve the effectiveness of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are acknowledged by the researcher, the DCYA needs to ensure that those directly affected – that is the members themselves – are aware of and support its efforts. Furthermore, it is argued that the DCYA needs to listen to the voices of its members and their co-ordinators. By doing so, a more effective Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg can be realised.

8.3 Grounded substantive theory

Not all grounded theory studies result in theory development but as a doctoral study seeks to make a contribution to knowledge, the production of theory is considered an important component of the final thesis. Open coding splintered the data into multiple units and codes. Axial coding began the process of re-constituting the data by forging connections between categories and sub-categories. Step three of the GT process was the selective coding stage. Corbin and Strauss (2008: 264) describe the development of a grounded theory as "the point of final integration", positing that the development of theory makes analysis complete, pulling together the various threads of research by producing a plausible explanatory framework. Arguably, the type of participation practiced by Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg can never truly be fully youth-led, given that members enter into pre-existing adult-initiated structures. What seems most realistic to aspire to is a form of shared participation through which it is possible to produce integrated youth-adult solutions to problematic situations.

The participants' voices spoke through the four categories extracted from the collected data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) outline various techniques to assist in the [re]presentation of qualitative findings. One such technique is the construction of relational statements which underpin the data storyline. It can assist in moving from a descriptive to a theoretical explanation of what has been synthesized from the collected data. Accordingly, four relational statements are offered. Corbin and Strauss (2008:114) remark that "context and process are necessarily linked and should be part of any explanation of any phenomenon". A number of relational statements, grounded in the data, were produced from the four GT categories. The relational statements epitomise the quintessence of each of the categories presented in Chapters Four through Seven, and assist in making sense of the substantive grounded theory to follow. They are:

1.   Youth state participation, as it is currently operationalised, is frequently stymied by a lack of knowledge, awareness and active engagement before, during and after participation.

2.   Communication procedures within Irish State participation structures appear inconsistent and sporadic. Members are frequently at the end of weak lines of communication.

3.   Youth agency in the various stages of participation appears shallow; participation is practiced by compliant young people, not agitators for change.

4.   Members benefit individually, acquiring tacit, derivative skills which
        are often underutilised within their own organisation.

Many young people entering these participation organisations appear to know virtually nothing about them prior to their membership. Moreover, once a member, many of those interviewed admitted to "*not being sure*" or "*not being 100 per cent certain*" or "*not knowing*" the operational details of the organisations they were members of. With little to no feedback provided about on-going projects being commonplace, many members have no opportunity to self-assess the impact of what they are doing on their communities. Occasionally, interviewees were able to express confidence in this area but generally such comments were made by young people who work collaboratively with an enthusiastic and skilful co-ordinator. However, even in such circumstances, tangible and intangible impacts of their participation remain confined to their own participation group; the wider community appears precluded from benefiting by being left 'ignorant' of the tantalizing promise that empowered youth participation can offer young people in Ireland.

The four GT categories together with the relational statements derived from each of the categories saw a substantive grounded theory for structured youth participation emerging. It is a pragmatist theory of what has been interpreted in this thesis of 'what works' with respect to structured forms of youth participation. For structured youth participation to 'work' each of the four categories extracted from the data must be present – members must be involved in the administration of their own participation; open and active two-way lines of communication between the members and their adult gatekeepers should be prioritised thus ensuring potential and current members of the organisation can make informed choices, before, during and after their participation; a sense of ownership of the participation must be fostered and finally, individual benefits and life-skills accrued by members must be recognised, appreciated and utilised in future participation projects. This type of collaborative active participation requires young people and adults to demonstrate a willingness and a readiness to engage and learn from one another.

No doubt the theory offered in this study is markedly different from one that might be proposed by a Marxist observer for example, who would likely encourage young people

to protest and take action against these adult dominated participation structures. The Marxist commentator may well read these youth participation structures quite differently and contend that far from being effective, such structured youth participation schemes seduce young people into practising participation for the State with members doing little more than mimicking their adult gatekeepers. However, judgements such as these are suspended in this thesis for the barometer of inquiry was quite different. Participation structures already in place were critiqued with a view to evaluating what works, and what does not.

To illustrate this substantive grounded theory in action, the following examples are offered, which are taken directly from what was observed and interpreted by the researcher throughout this study. In effect, the examples demonstrate three levels of structured youth participation: 1. Effective participation, 2. Moderate participation, and 3. Non-effective participation.

8.3.1 Effective participation

Two of the nine groups that participated in this study were considered by the researcher to practise youth participation that was effective. Interestingly, both these groups operate quite differently, demonstrating the validity of truth is what works. Both groups have developed a 'formula' that works for them. While it is not being suggested that these two groups necessarily represent youth participation exemplars, nevertheless young people and adult gatekeepers in both these Comhairlí na nÓg were observed collaborating together and practising active participation which interviewees indicated they felt impacted positively on their communities.

Comhairle na nÓg group (7) meet twice a month in the premises of a local youth organisation. The co-ordinator is a youth work professional and their meeting was observed as quite informal. Interviewees appeared visibly proud of their achievements and equally proud to be associated with Comhairle na nÓg. In relation to the day to day administration of their group, members appeared actively involved. The agenda appeared genuinely to be drawn up collaboratively by the co-ordinator and the members. Members hold positions of responsibility within their group and it was clear during the observed meeting, and the subsequent interviews, that members have a sense of ownership and pride in what they do. Decisions taken as to what issues the group

will work on also appeared to be collaborative, and were agreed through dialogue between the co-ordinator and the members. Communication procedures in this group appeared stronger than in other groups observed in the study; active and open lines of communication exist between the co-ordinator and the members and also between youth members, the co-ordinator and the local authority.

One note of caution is raised however. The success of this group appeared largely attributable to the enthusiasm, skill and commitment of the co-ordinator concerned. It was clear that she had fostered a climate of openness, inclusiveness and collegiality. One wonders if the group's participation would be quite so effective if she were to leave.

In contrast, *Comhairle na nÓg group (1)* is led by a local authority staff member, albeit a person with a background in teaching and thus accustomed to working with young people. This group was more formal than group (7) and although members did not exhibit quite the same high level of ownership of their participation, the success of the group was observed as being less co-ordinator dependent. It was perhaps more akin to the shadow civic council type noted by Wyness (2009b). Meetings are held in the premises of the local authority and occasionally in the council chambers.

The co-ordinator and members interviewed agreed that roles of responsibility are shared between the young people and the adult gatekeepers of the group. Thus, the co-ordinator and the young people share both the administration and the responsibility that goes with participation. The co-ordinator appeared keen to recognise the life and individual skills accrued by the young people through working in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. The group regularly interact with the 'senior' council and youth interviewees (current and past) indicated that they felt their group had influenced policy in their area. Access to information is through the group's regular newsletter and it has a dedicated website that appears current, active and updated regularly.

8.3.2 Moderate participation

Structured youth participation that is moderately effective performs well in no more than two of the four categories highlighted in this study. Examples from one of the groups illustrates this type of participation in action: without exception, members of this

group who were interviewed were enthusiastic about being part of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg and all claimed that they had benefited personally; interviewees spoke of new found self-confidence and public speaking skills. However, while they professed to enjoy being involved with these structures, they all admitted during their interviews that they knew very little about them. With respect to the administration of their group, some members advised that they held positions of responsibility in their group. When this was the case, they appeared to feel a sense of ownership of what they do. Those who were not actively involved in the administration of their group did not demonstrate a similar sense of ownership. The interviews revealed that most of the members are content to wait to be told what will happen next. Ultimately, it appeared that the co-ordinator had 'the final say' in matters; the young people complied easily with her authority. During the observation of their meeting, the group worked on particular projects, focussing on issues such as transport and education. However, when asked to elaborate on this work, the young people were unsure how they might take their work into their local community and make a positive impact there.

8.3.3 Non-effective participation

Non-effective participation occurs when a group does not perform well in any of the categories highlighted in this thesis as necessary for effective participation. Members of such groups who were interviewed seemed largely unaware of the premise underlining youth participation beyond the vague notion of 'young people having a voice'. For example, in one group while some of those interviewed held positions of responsibility (such as Chairperson), in reality what was observed was a youth council in which members follow their co-ordinator's lead completely. None of the decisions taken were observed as collaborative; at all times the co-ordinator appeared to be in charge. For example, members were told what work the group would focus on; they had little to no input into the agendas for meetings; some interviewees expressed irritation that the co-ordinator did not seem prepared to listen to their suggestions; although outside organisations and guests occasionally visit the group, members were not aware of such visitors in advance nor was there feedback provided in relation to past consultations. This type of participation does little to realise the young people's agency and offers them no sense of empowerment or ownership of what they do.

8.4 Discussion

Attention now turns to how what was uncovered in this study tallies (or not) with the extant literature discussed in Chapter Two. Occasional interviewee quotations are interjected in order to further illustrate the comparisons and contrasts made, reminding the reader that as much as possible it was the words of the participants that drove the analysis.

8.4.1 In relation to specific models of participation

In Chapter Two, three models of youth participation were discussed in depth: Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of participation'; Shier's (2001) 'Pathways to participation' and Percy-Smith's (2006) 'Dialogical "social learning" model of participation'. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation is the most heavily cited of the three. Shier's model has been identified by Shier himself and also other commentators (for example, Thomas, 2007) as being useful for practitioners. Percy-Smith's (2006) model resonated instinctively with the pragmatist mindset of the researcher, in that it advocates collaborative practice and learning. A visual depiction of Hart's (1997) ladder of youth participation is included on page thirty one of the Irish National Children's Strategy (2000), although no other mention is made of it throughout the one hundred and twenty-nine page strategy. Presumably however, one can assume tacit endorsement of Hart's ladder typology by the Irish authorities. Hart's ladder of participation has been subjected to rigorous critique for many years. Hart himself (2008: 23) concedes that in some ways the ladder metaphor is unfortunate in that it appears to imply a stepwise progression and that the 'best' type of participation is located on the upper rungs of the ladder. Hart (2008) has made it clear however that this was not his intention.

Reflecting on his ladder over a decade after it was first introduced, Hart maintains that what he was originally trying to express through his ladder was not for 'children to be in charge' but rather for children to be viewed as citizens and full members of their communities. Working in this way promotes more inclusive participation communities that include adults and children. Hart's (2008) clarified vision for the ladder of participation appears realistic. Of the Comhairlí na nÓg observed in this study, only two groups' participation could be described as closely adhering to this vision of the

ladder in action. In these two groups the researcher observed members and their adult gatekeepers collaborating on many aspects of their participation.

Reddy and Ratna's (2002) two additions to Hart's ladder – active resistance and hindrance – were not observed in this study. Rather what was observed was closer to passivity or a lack of real belief among many members that these participation organisations can actually instigate change. A *desire* to effect change and have their voices heard was evident among many interviewees, but not perhaps a *hunger* to articulate their voices. Arguably, and in line with Percy-Smith (2006), instigating mechanisms to hear the voices of young people may not be enough. For effective and meaningful participation to happen, more attention needs to be paid to how DCYA-type participation intersects the lived realities of young people's lives.

O'Donnell and Hanafin (2007) advise that the DCYA follows Shier's (2001) model and indeed one can see how the DCYA participation rhetoric fits neatly inside this model. Shier (2000: 19) himself points to his model as being a tool for practitioners; it constantly prompts practitioners to reflect and ask questions of their organisation as to the type of participation being practiced (Kirby *et al.,* 2003). Sinclair (2004) further notes that the model could be useful to clarifying short and long term objectives. An important distinction exists between the concepts of 'participation' and 'consultation' (Thomas, 2007) and Shier's model can assist an organisation identify and separate incidences of consultation as opposed to participation. The DCYA (and its Regional Participation Project Officers) are clear as to the DCYA's vision for the two participation structures under review in this thesis. Many of the young people interviewed however seemed unaware of the vision, primarily because they have never been informed about it. Furthermore, some co-ordinators argued that the distinction between the two concepts of participation and consultation is not a harsh one but is more blurred in reality. Most of the young people interviewed remembered that their group had been consulted by various outside agencies and organisations in the past. For most of these interviewees, they saw this as evidence that their branch of Comhairle na nÓg was 'participating'. They seemed unaware of any distinction between consultation and participation, again because they have never been informed such a distinction exists. However, consultation makes them *"feel"* that their Comhairle na nÓg group is

important and contributing to their community. For many of those interviewed, this seemed sufficient.

Although the majority of current members of Comhairle na nÓg interviewed seemed largely content with how their group practices its participation, some discontent and unease was evident among responses from co-ordinators who were interviewed. Being pressured for outcomes prompted some to question the long-term value of being part of the Comhairle na nÓg 'product'. Co-ordinator (2) was quoted earlier (in Chapter Two) in relation to what she perceives as excessive criteria for funding. Juggling her commitments to her employer (that is the local authority) and the DCYA prompted a reflection from her that perhaps Comhairle na nÓg is more trouble than it is worth. This chimes with Freeman et al.'s (2003) observation that many professionals find themselves working with young people as part of their work duties, despite not being trained in youth work, or ever having expressed a desire to work with young people. It seems unreasonable to expect gatekeepers to suddenly develop these skills; they take time, commitment and importantly a willingness to acquire these skills. Some of the gatekeepers reflected that there were efforts being made to support them and to bring them together occasionally to share their experiences. Such efforts are as illustrated earlier in this chapter when examples were offered of three levels of participation, the demeanour and personality of the co-ordinator plays a large part in 'effective' participation.

Percy-Smith (2006) maintains that neither Hart's (1992) model nor Shier's (2001) model truly allow for attention to be paid to the way in which adult agendas are pushed through participation networks. Nor do they incorporate methods to ensure that power and responsibilities are shared between members and their adult gatekeepers. Percy-Smith (2006, 2010) contends that his model of social learning can work as a useful alternative to other models. Operationalising participation this way could relieve co-ordinators of some of the pressure they appear to feel to produce 'outcomes'. Further, it would naturally allow for many of the generic skills learned and acquired by the young people – skills the young people all emphasised they value highly – to become part of their participation experience. Percy-Smith's (2006) model brackets negotiation and recognises there is a plurality of voices involved in participation. This thesis agrees with Percy-Smith's assertion that the 'community social learning' ideal makes learning

an important part of the process, in addition to instigating the final solution. Furthermore, it seems inherently pragmatist in intent.

Using Percy-Smith's (2006) model, young people's experiences of participation help and educate their communities, while the young people themselves acquire knowledge. If the DCYA were to operationalise participation according to this model, tangible and more intangible outcomes would both be valued. Some of those interviewed were obviously uncomfortable when asked to identify direct outcomes of the Comhairle na nÓg process. Nevertheless, they appeared anxious to stress that being part of the organisation had benefited them on a personal level, albeit through increased self-esteem and the acquisition of generic skills. It had also taught them how the process of negotiation happens in reality; that is, change usually takes time. This was mentioned by young people and adult gatekeepers. Ruby, for example seemed conflicted. She enjoyed being involved with Comhairle na nÓg, yet was dubious if it has any effect in her area.

Ruby: *I think it's better now than it used to be. But it's still only sort of window dressing, you know, like 'we've got a council set up, like we're listening'. There are still things being done though, just not at the speed we would like.*

Lucy, a member of a different branch, also felt she had learned how to negotiate.

Lucy: *I think it's training for how to listen to other people's opinions and how to get you opinion across during the day because there are something like 300 people there* [in Dáil na nÓg] *so it could be difficult.*

One co-ordinator (1) pointed to her group being involved with the local Joint Policing Committee; members' opinions are being used to shape a programme for trainee guards [police]. While this co-ordinator felt this was influencing policy, she was unsure if the DCYA agree.

Co-ordinator (1): *I would see that as influencing policy you know, whereas I'm not sure as to whether the DCYA see it as that or see it as youth development. But I think it might be a combination of both but it certainly is influencing the way the guards on the ground intervene. I think that's useful.*

This thesis argues that whatever the merits of any particular model used to evaluate and/or practice participation, unless that model reinforces the need for constant and on-

going communication between all actors involved, the resulting participation is compromised. Hart's (1997) ladder incorporates the need to be informed as do the other typologies and models. Notwithstanding this however, it is argued that models of youth participation utilised by organisations in practice refer to being informed once participation has already begun. The need to be fully informed *before* participation begins is not adequately represented in these models. It is against this aspect of DCYA participation current practice that this thesis levels the most critique. It should also be noted that communication as an on-going strategy requires attention. Uploading reports to the department's website is not enough of itself; the existence of reports needs to be communicated to audiences inside and outside these participatory structures. Independent evaluator reports recommend various operational changes be made to these structures; each subsequent report comments on changes made. It was clear from the interviews with the young people (both current and past members) that they were largely unaware of the existence of these reports, and thus associated reasons for any operational changes that have been instigated.

Notwithstanding criticism levelled against Hart's 1992 ladder of participation, Hart's model and Shier's (2001) model are highly regarded by academic commentators and are widely cited; both are frequently referred to in youth participation policy and practice literatures. Thus, it is understandable, and not disputed, that the DCYA looks to these models for guidance in relation to its own structures of youth participation. However, it needs to attend to its communication strategies, before, during and after participation is underway.

8.4.2 In relation to structured participation

Graham *et al.* (2006) note that a significant feature of existing models of participation is that they examine participation in terms of specific outcomes. They also note a difference between the rhetoric of participation and what is happening on the ground. Some of the co-ordinators charged with the day-to-day running of the organisations indicated that they feel under pressure that their group be *seen* by inside and outside audiences to be producing evidence-based outcomes. Thus, there is a marked difference between the rhetoric of participation used by the DCYA and the reality of what the young people are experiencing. Questions about outcomes seemed to embarrass many of the young people interviewed. Similar to many of her peers, Emily frequently

invokes the language of participation but seems unclear as to exactly what her group has achieved. She obviously wanted her Comhairle na nÓg to have influence in her community, and to *feel* that she was part of something worthwhile. Emily was not the only interviewee to feel this way.

Emily: *...I didn't know about it so I don't know that it has a big voice yet but I'm sure it'll get there. Em, they have changed a few things like I'm sure they helped re-vamp our youth service meeting place* [names location], *it's a great building. I'm not 100 per cent sure.*

Academia has frequently robustly critiqued formal structures of participation; Percy-Smith (2010) for example contends that they stifle democratic participation, inclusion and active citizenship. Nonetheless, it was made clear to the researcher through the observations and interviews of this study with personnel at the DCYA that these formal structures of participation are where the young people of Ireland can expect to articulate their public voice. They are therefore a visible manifestation of Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC. Thus, in line with Batsleer (2010), this thesis agrees that young people involved in Irish State participation organisations are practicing participation instigated by adults, not themselves.

Admittedly, current members of these organisations interviewed for this study appeared content with how their participation is being structured; most are not even aware of alternatives that might be available. Only two current members expressed disquiet about the form their participation takes. Lucy was one such interviewee. Through contact with members of other Comhairlí na nÓg and by virtue of being involved in the Dáil na nÓg Council, Lucy was aware of what others were doing.

Lucy: *I suppose I'm probably more aware of, not how little we do but how limited our work has been 'coz I have heard from all the other Comhairles through Dáil na nÓg, like Donegal is amazing, they do everything...I suppose it would be better if we had more of an input into what we actually do at the meetings 'coz we just turn up and we're told oh, somebody is going to talk to you.*

Wyness (2009a) contends that formal structures of participation neglect diversity and connect primarily only with the interests of privileged and advantaged children – the evidence of this study would not fully support Wyness' assertion. While the DCYA requirement that a diversity of backgrounds be included among members has been

problematic for some of the co-ordinators to implement in practice, a membership comprised solely of privileged and advantaged young people was not observed during this study. Interviewing the young people primarily in their own homes made it clear that they came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. They also attend a mix of fee and non-fee paying schools. They were perhaps, a similar 'type' of young person; predominantly outgoing (although not exclusively so), friendly and talkative and willing to engage with the researcher. Many were also members of other groups; interviewees often admitted that they liked *"joining groups"*.

Self-selection, young people being co-opted onto youth councils and the characteristics of those involved is clearly identified in the literature (see for example Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1998; Matthews, 2001a/b; Middleton, 2006; Percy-Smith, 2010). A diversity of membership is required in order that members may be truly representative of their peers. Notwithstanding this however, regardless of the origin of the member an informed decision to join is vital to the veracity of the participation subsequently practiced. A gap in the literature was observed in this area. While many, and valid criticisms can be levelled at lack of membership diversity, little is said about the knowledge of the organisations even the 'elites' have when first becoming involved. A membership largely ignorant of the premise behind participation structures leaves that organisation open to charges of tokenism before participation has even begun.

Those Comhairlí na nÓg interpreted as practising effective participation saw the young people and their adult gatekeepers (generally their co-ordinator) working collaboratively – in line with Halpern (2006) and Serido et al. (2009) who advocate the importance of supportive adult relationships. Among the non-effective participation practised by some groups, the relationship between members and co-ordinator was more akin to teacher-student with the young people being effectively told what to do. Thus they get little opportunity to learn the mechanics of participation. Furthermore, participation practised this way is unlikely to significantly increase membership numbers. Contrast this type of non-effective participation with the two Comhairle na nÓg groups where the participation was interpreted as effective. In both, membership numbers were among the largest of all thirty-four groups; indeed in both groups, past members were keen to remain involved in some way. Membership numbers had grown almost through

'snowballing' – current members enthusiastically convey the benefits of being involved to their friends and peers in school and encourage them to join.

8.4.3 In relation to policy

Structures of youth participation were established in the Republic of Ireland following its ratification of the UNCRC and its obligations under same. Accordingly, children and young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg enter into pre-existing youth participation policy structures. How, if at all, they have influenced other youth policies was difficult to gauge. Given that these participation structures were put in place following the Irish National Children's Strategy (2000), none of the young people interviewed for this study were involved in their formation, although two of the past members interviewed were among Comhairle na nÓg's first members. Thus, those interviewed are part of current Irish youth participation policy. In relation to Comhairle na nÓg, while many interviewees expressed a desire to influence policy, most struggled to articulate how their group had done so. They spoke of wanting to influence policy, they felt that they should be influencing policy but whether their group ever had actually achieved this was moot, interviewees indicated. Dáil na nÓg attracts more media interest and members of the Dáil na nÓg Council get opportunities to meet with the Minister and other policy makers. Gatekeepers from the DCYA were adamant however that Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg do shape policy in the following way:

DCYA: *they have had an influence on things like the development of youth cafes, or recreation policy or heritage plans, em very practical things like roads – safe crossing areas for children – a lot of stuff like that they have been involved in. In some counties they would get involved in some kind of strategic review of facilities or housing or whatever. And in some parts of the country they have a direct link with the local council and they regularly meet with them and put stuff on the agenda.*

During the lifespan of this study, there was considerable media attention on the difficulties surrounding a cervical cancer vaccine and its restricted availability to teenage girls in the Republic of Ireland. Dáil na nÓg (2009) recommended that the vaccine be given to all twelve to eighteen year old girls. The following year it was announced that the vaccine was indeed to be made available to a wider cohort of girls than had first been planned. Members of the 2009 Dáil na nÓg Council (one of whom was interviewed for this study) were publicly credited by the DCYA as being instrumental in having the policy changed. There were obviously a number of 'actors'

involved in this shift in policy, including the Minister for Health at the time. Lucy, a member of that Council expressed her delight at the change in policy but also expressed some doubts:

Lucy: *We were actually told that it was because of us that it was introduced. I hope it was but I don't think it was but eh, it was announced the day before our meeting.*

The participation section of the DCYA website states that "the DCYA takes a lead role under the National Children's Strategy in ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of services and policies that affect their lives, at national and local level" – ***how*** they do this is rarely clarified however. In many ways the literature surrounding policy displays similar difficulties. Much of it is aspirational in intent; many authors mount strong arguments for young people to be involved in policy [re]formation, arguing that if young people's agency is to be truly recognised in line with the principles of the UNCRC, young people must be involved in policy. However, exactly ***how*** can they do this is often not clear, or left unsaid.

Bessell 2009) and Shier *et al*. (2012) have tried to tackle this difficulty by looking at how young people interact and shape policy in the Philippines and Nicaragua respectively. Shier *et al.* (2012) advocate strongly for the empowerment of the young people involved, and importantly that they should feel empowered. Bessell agrees, although she places a stronger emphasis than Shier and colleagues on the presence of supportive adults. This study would agree – where supportive co-ordinators were involved, it appeared that the young people did feel empowered. Contrast how Sarah and Cillian, a current and a past member of Comhairle na nÓg, view their co-ordinators. Both have different opinions of the co-ordinator, but interestingly both seem to conflate the success of their group with their co-ordinator, in effect proving the influence the co-ordinator plays in the process.

Sarah: *and I just think, like what a cushy job; you're not accountable, you just have to organise young people to come to a meeting. It's stagnant, it's complacent but it could be so good.*

Cillian: *'X'* [names co-ordinator], *like she's absolutely brilliant at what she does, she's like a mother figure and a sister figure. She just made us all feel so comfortable. The agenda is set by us and her. I think it's working brilliantly. Like there's absolutely nothing I would change 'coz it's just perfect the way it is.*

8.4.4 Considering 'what works'

This discussion section has reflected on what was uncovered in this study, considering the data and what was interpreted from the data in relation to issues already discussed in Chapter Two; issues such as different models of participation, formal structures of youth participation, the type of young person involved, and young people being involved in policy [re]formation. The question remains however: do Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg work?

8.3.4.1 Individually, what works?

Individually, on a personal basis, for the young people who are members of these organisations, Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg do seem to work. With just one exception (Adam, see Ethical Thought Box 5), all the young people interviewed for this study felt that they had benefitted personally through being involved in Irish State participation. All spoke of increases in their self-esteem and self-confidence, improvements in public speaking and other skills they had acquired through being a member. Even those interviewees who were critical of the impact Comhairle na nÓg and/or Dáil na nÓg have on the wider community spoke of benefitting personally. Sarah, who had grown very angry during her interview, felt that she had gained personally as a direct result of being a member.

Sarah: At the moment from what I have seen it gets very little achieved but the skills it gives to young people who are involved in it are very good. I wouldn't be as confident speaking in public or things like that without Comhairle.

Thus, as a mechanism to foster the surrogate benefits described in Chapter Seven, these organisations are successful – they work for those directly involved. Other research on youth council and formal structures of participation such as Serido *et al.* (2009), McGinley and Grieve (2010), Percy-Smith (2010) also highlight the individual benefits accrued to members. However, the authors are less sure of how effective these organisations are to change the lives of young people.

Furthermore, these individual benefits are not what government and policy literatures are 'selling'. Official descriptors tend to be filled with promises that youth councils and youth parliaments will allow the voices of young people be heard in matters affecting

them and will be able to influence policy. This is, after all what Article 12 of the UNCRC is all about. Therefore, beyond the individual, do these organisations work?

8.3.4.2 Beyond the individual, what works?

It is more difficult to answer if these organisations work beyond the individual benefits they offer to members. Benchmarks and indicators of effectiveness need to be put in place if we are to believe that participation is genuinely taken seriously by an organisation or administration (Lansdown, 2010). While benchmarks and indicators are important, Pinkerton (2004) warns against placing too much emphasis on quantifiable targets at the expense of concern for how the participation makes a difference to the lives of young people. McGinley and Grieve (2010) reached a similar conclusion in their research on youth councils in Scotland. In this study, although being a member of a youth council positively affected the lives of those actually involved, with just a few exceptions, only a scattering of participants felt they had any impact at all on young people who were not part of their organisation.

The DCYA advised that it has several criteria for Comhairle na nÓg branches to secure funding; at the time of the fieldwork of this study each group had to ensure they had a wide range of ages, including those in the younger teens, and also that membership included young people from the 'seldom heard' category. Against these indicators the groups participating in this study partially 'worked' in that there was a wide spread of ages involved but there were not many members from that umbrella 'seldom heard' category of young person. But these are largely quantifiable targets that the different groups must endeavour to meet. However, using Lansdown's three level categorisation of effective participation, only two of the nine Comhairle na nÓg groups involved in this study 'work'.

Groups 7 and 1 were identified earlier in this chapter as practising effective participation. Therefore, they work. Against the quantifiable indicators set by the DCYA they both 'scored' well. Both groups had healthy membership numbers (among the largest of all the groups that participated) and a wide range of age groups was observed. Against Lansdown's three level categorisation of consultative, collaborative and child-led participation, these two groups were also the most successful. Members interviewed indicated that they felt their views were respected and that their local

authority and immediate gatekeepers were genuinely interested in hearing their opinions. Of the nine groups involved in this study, these two groups emerged as the most active in relation to being involved and designing their own participation strategies. They were both also [tangentially] involved with local policy making in that their views had been sought by a number of different actors in their local area. On several occasions, their views had been acted on, some of the interviewees maintained. Finally, these two groups were the most child or youth-led of the nine observed by the researcher. The interviewees, together with their co-ordinator identified issues for discussion at group meeting and projects that they would like to focus on in the future. Therefore these two groups 'work'.

Groups identified earlier as practising moderate or non-effective participation partially work at best, or do not work at worst. Collaboration between adults and members is sporadic; these groups tend to be completely adult-led and although outside organisations consult with them occasionally, little or no feedback in relation to action taken as a result of consultation is ever provided to them. The co-ordinator drives the agenda and the members who were interviewed did not feel Comhairle na nÓg or Dáil na nÓg had any impact on the lives of young people.

8.5 Conclusion

Within the Irish youth policy arena efforts to articulate the voices of young people are acknowledged. However, analyses of findings from this study reveal that the strength of that public voice is weak. Providing fora for youth voice is not enough; strategies also need to be provided to ensure that that voice is being heard and thus enable children and young people to be 'active citizens' in their communities, if they so wish. Young people and their adult gatekeepers must share the rights and responsibilities that go with participation. The four grounded theory categories extracted from the collected data disclosed patchy, shallow participation on the part of many of the Comhairlí na nÓg groups involved in this study. A substantive grounded theory was produced which if implemented, could realise effective participation for all the actors involved in these participation mechanisms. Application of this substantive theory would enable the DCYA 'relieve' itself of the burden of being a youth participation expert. Instead, the DCYA, the Regional Participation Project Officers, the thirty-four Comhairle na nÓg

co-ordinators and the young people who are members could work collaboratively, each learning from the other so that *together* they can forge solutions and effect change in the lives of young people in Ireland. In the following chapter, the study is brought to a conclusion. The original aim and objectives of this study are re-visited and the contribution to knowledge considered as are possible limitations of this study. Finally, the threads running through this thesis are gathered together in concluding remarks.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

If the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective. It cannot be the idle view of an unconcerned spectator.

(John Dewey, 1944: 338)

9.1 Introduction

This chapter draws the thesis to a close. The aim and objectives presented in Chapter One are re-visited and addressed. ***Pure*** grounded theorists, dedicated to following Glaser's methodological approach, would contend that no pre-conceptions or theories be taken into the field during data collection, and that the literature review be delayed until after data has been assembled and coded. This study deviates from this classic approach; indeed it is one of the reasons why it is reluctant to label itself a 'pure' grounded theory investigation. Knowledge of the participation and active citizenship literature inevitably was taken into the data collection phase for it was the literature that lit the initial spark of interest in the topic, although it did not define the progress of the research. Nevertheless, familiarity with the literature enhanced "sensitivity to subtle nuances in data" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 37).

All doctoral theses seek to contribute to knowledge; accordingly how this particular study speaks to both academic and public audiences is considered. While the substantive grounded theory developed in this study is designed to be applicable to state structures of youth participation, arguably it could also reach out and touch other areas. Notwithstanding contributions this thesis makes to practice and theory, it is acknowledged that no research study is without its limitations. Accordingly, possible limitations of this study are conceded. Finally, concluding remarks speak to those, *to all those*, involved in Irish State youth participation urging them to work together as a community, for their communities

9.2 Re-visiting the aim and objectives

The overarching aim of this research study inquired if Irish State youth participation structures are effective mechanisms for teenagers in the Republic of Ireland to have

their voices heard. This aim has been met incrementally in Chapters Four through Seven, building to a full analysis and critique in Chapter Eight. Similar to Jacobs (2011: 336), it is difficult to completely separate objectives from one another. Inevitably, addressing one depended on what had been gleaned from another. Thus, addressing the objectives was considered to have been achieved in layers throughout the thesis; cumulatively these layers address the research objectives.

To recap for the reader, the thesis objectives were:

1. To identify how Irish State youth participation structures are operationalised, questioning if they are adult-led or youth-led.

2. To identify the types of issues these participation structures engage with and how these issues are identified.

3. To clarify the types of young person involved in these youth participation structures, and to further consider if those involved are representative of the wider youth population of the Republic of Ireland.

4. To identify the level of public awareness members of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg feel there is of the two organisations.

Objective Number One was specifically met in Chapter Three which addressed the study's methodological approach and in Chapter Four, 'the administration of schemes'. The participation observed was predominantly adult-led; members enter into pre-defined structures that follow the direction of the DCYA. Occasional instances of shared participation were observed in some groups although even here, the young people initially follow an adult lead, progressing to shared participation over time. No truly autonomous youth-led participation was observed. However, in two of the nine groups the young people and their co-ordinator had an obvious mutual trust in each other and were seen to be working together.

Objective Number Two was addressed specifically in Chapter Four but also in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Although practice differed from group to group, issues for the group to focus on were often identified and drawn up by the adult co-ordinator. While some of the young people interviewed indicated that they were free to suggest issues for the group to work on if they wished, few had ever done so. The majority of young

people interviewed seemed content to defer to their co-ordinator and follow his or her lead in relation to agenda items and issues for group discussion. Occasionally a topical issue was discussed at a group's meeting (such as the contentious topic of 'Head Shops'); most groups however seem to focus inwards with discussion in many of the meetings concentrating on issues relating to the group's own administration.

Objective Three sought clarification of the type of young person involved and this was documented primarily in Chapter Four. The majority of members are selected as likely candidates for membership by their school. Those already involved in school councils and pupils in Transition Year heavily populate these participation structures. The non-participant observations revealed a mix of male and female young people. Those who were interviewed came from across the socio-economic spectrum, from both urban and rural locations. All current members interviewed were in full-time second level education. No group taking part was observed to have any members who belonged to the Traveller Community, or who had an intellectual difficulty. Two of the groups had members from Nigeria; one interviewee had a mild physical disability. Asked if they were representative of the wider youth population, most interviewees were quick to claim that they were not; most felt they were representing themselves. The young people interviewed were aware that sections of the youth population were not involved in their organisation but were unsure how best to encourage such young people to join. Efforts by the DCYA to incorporate young people in 'seldom heard' categories are acknowledged, although success in this area has been limited thus far.

Objective Four was addressed throughout this thesis but specifically in Chapters Four and Five. All the young people interviewed lamented the lack of public awareness they felt there was of their organisation. Beyond coverage of the annual Dáil na nÓg event, there appears to be little reference to either organisation carried in the popular or broadcast media. Each Comhairle na nÓg has a dedicated webpage but many are not current and carry out of date information. During the lifetime of this study neither the Comhairle na nÓg organisation nor Dáil na nÓg had a social network page despite members clamouring for this. Only one of the nine Comhairlí na nÓg that took part in this study had a live and regularly updated social network page.

Members are generally targeted for membership through their schools and most interviewees felt that the schools themselves and other pupils within the school were ignorant of Comhairle na nÓg's existence. Evidence in this study suggests that communication strategies within, and outside Comhairle na nÓg need to be augmented with respect to promoting public awareness of the organisation. Accordingly, the researcher interpreted that the impact of Comhairle na nÓg in particular is largely confined to within the membership itself. Indeed, during early attempts to make contact with Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators, awareness of the organisation within the local authorities (effectively the *home* of Comhairle na nÓg) appeared weak.

Dáil na nÓg has a higher public profile than Comhairle na nÓg. Members of the Dáil na nÓg Council have been involved in debates with actors involved in youth policy issues; issues such as the RSE report (discussed in Chapter Five) and changes in relation to the availability of a cervical cancer vaccine for teenage girls (see Chapter Eight). However, even among interviewees of this study, awareness of the Dáil na nÓg Council's input into these debates was limited to just two or three young people. Therefore, while Dáil na nÓg's public profile is stronger than that of Comhairle na nÓg, evidence in this study suggests that it too has little impact beyond its own members.

9.3 Contribution and significance of this study

Contributions to knowledge have been made in a number of ways that straddle academia, policy and practice. This thesis also contributes to the ethical discourses concerning research with children and young people, discourses that take place inside and outside of academia. The various contributions this study has made now follow, as do reflections for academia, policy and practice.

9.3.1 Disciplinary contributions

There are four particular ways in which this study contributes to academia; *first* in relation to its philosophical orientation, the philosophy of classical pragmatism. Although making somewhat of a resurgence in some areas of Human Geography (as discussed in Chapter Two), classical pragmatism has not been observed in Children's Geographies research prior to this study. Children's geographers frequently carry out research seeking to produce outcomes which will empower children and bolster their

active participation in society. However, as mentioned previously in Chapter One, a certain reticence has been observed in debates within Children's Geographies to 'go against the grain', to challenge the widespread, at times perhaps even naïve acceptance of the overly competent child (Vanderbeck, 2008). This study suggests incremental, auxiliary change to existing youth participation structures that exist in the Republic of Ireland. Thus, it takes up Vanderbeck's (2008) challenge outlined in Chapter One and 'runs with it', bracketing the vision of the complete and competent child and instead positing that if formal structures of youth participation are to work, young people and their adult gatekeepers must collaborate, each gaining and learning from the others' experience. The researcher does not deny that child-led participation is truly autonomous youth voice in action. However, within formal structures of participation (given that they are adult-initiated in the first instance) complete and full child-led participation activity need not be the default model. Classical pragmatism disrupts such ideologically loaded judgements and privileges effectiveness instead.

Adopting a deliberately Deweyan stance to child and youth research, this study agrees that children learn by doing. Additionally, with Dewey metaphorically guiding the research, the researcher takes their place alongside those they are researching, reminding the reader that while there is a place for the expert in social science research, that place is not a privileged one. Equipped with the tools of classical pragmatism (such as fallilibilism, antifoundationalism and pluralism) the pragmatist children's geographer does not approach a 'problematic situation' with preconceived assumptions, beyond the desire to uncover the truth of 'what works'. ***This*** is the barometer of effectiveness. Such a respectful approach to one's research and crucially ones' research subjects can instigate research outcomes that can resonate with practitioners and policy makers.

Critical optimism emerges from a classical pragmatically-orientated research study (Shields, 2003), along with the knowledge that there is the chance to make a difference in relation to the common good. Thus the research is easier to 'sell' to audiences outside academia, its relevance in the 'real world' (Robson, 2002) more immediately apparent. Negotiated rule-making processes that are part of the classical pragmatism repertoire appear ideal for research within youth projects, particularly in organisations claiming to be committed to the principles of the UNCRC. Consensus can be achieved through a committee made up of representatives of interest groups likely to be affected

by rule changes. Young people likely to be affected by rule changes should also be part of these committees. So too should their adult leaders and gatekeepers. Such a committee could ideally be considered a participation community of inquiry described in Chapter Two. Traditional or authority viewpoints such as those of parents and gatekeepers can be questioned within a pragmatist inquiry; young people can be encouraged to express their opinions even at the exploratory stage of a project. In return, young people themselves are asked to listen and to consider and respect alternative viewpoints.

Second, while not developing a new model or typology of youth participation, this study makes it possible to augment models that already are in use. As noted in Chapter Two, the field of youth participation is a relatively crowded one – commentators from many disciplines contribute to youth participation discourses. Accordingly, many participation models have been developed by commentators, particularly since the UNCRC of 1989. Thus, this thesis sees little merit in developing yet one more model of youth participation. Furthermore, this thesis is not arguing for an optimum model; rather how the models are used is the key concern of this study. Three of the existing models were discussed in detail in Chapter Two and Appendix Two contains details of a selection of some of the other models in existence. Many commentators make sure to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Hart's 1992 ladder of participation, a model frequently heavily critiqued but nevertheless repeatedly cited inside, and outside of academia. All youth participation models advocate, in some way, that young people must be considered full participants and not token or bit players in participation projects. All the models argue for genuine consultation and youth participation and ask that adults question their own motives and the motives of their organisation.

Reverting to DCYA communication and information strategies revealed through interview data in Chapters Four through Seven and the analysis thereof in Chapter Eight, it is argued that communication must begin before participation can begin. Thus, whether Hart (1992), or Shier (2001), or Percy-Smith (2006) – no matter which model is utilised by an organisation, potential participants must be fully informed of what lies ahead, in addition to being informed of the purpose and premise of the proposed participation. Participation according to Article 12 of the UNCRC strives to give young people a voice in matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity.

However, their voices must also be heard before the participation process begins. Therefore, before mounting and climbing Hart's 'ladder', before stepping onto Shier's 'pathway', before entering into Percy-Smith's 'social model of learning' potential participants must be enabled to make informed participation choices. Furthermore, those charged with membership recruitment need to be familiar with details of what will happen once participation is underway. This study revealed that the adult gatekeepers who play a role in membership recruitment themselves are very often not furnished with full details and information about these organisations.

Third, this thesis is an addition to the comparatively 'neglected' field of Teenage Geographies referred to in this study's opening chapter. It particularly contributes to the literature surrounding youth participation in relation to the Irish-based nature of this study. The Irish National Children's Strategy has been discussed in the academic literature (see Pinkerton, 2004) and Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are occasionally mentioned as examples of the Irish State's efforts to fulfil its obligations under Article 12 of the UNCRC (Pinkerton 2004, 2006, Lalor *et al.*, 2007 for example). However, this is the first academic study to develop empirical evidence (derived directly from members and their gatekeepers) of how these Irish youth participation structures operate in practice. As such this study brings Irish State structures of youth participation into international academic conversations of youth participation; the data uncovered in this research may now be included in comparative studies within 'Teenage Geographies'.

The *fourth* area of contribution is in relation to grounded theory (GT). GT has been shown to sit comfortably with classical pragmatism and is considered a complete package of research techniques around which research can be organised. Further, it keeps the researcher close to the data and thus by default, close to participants' voices. The substantive theory in this study was generated by what was directly observed, interpreted and extracted from the data. Chapter Eight offered examples of how adhering to the four tenets of this substantive theory can result in youth participation that is effective and youth participation that works. Thus, applying this substantive theory to future DCYA participation has the potential to impact positively on those who participate in these state structures, and the communities they are part of.

The study also contributes to methodological debates within Children's Geographies through its application of GT to the fieldwork and analysis carried out in this study. While not claiming that GT has never been used in Children's Geographies prior to this study, it appears surprisingly under-utilised as a research approach. In the 'excitement' of developing innovative methodologies suitable for children and young people, how easy it can be to overlook what is already there. A simple online academic search highlights how GT is common in the nursing literature where it is used to supplement and uncover ways to enhance the patient experience. GT offers the researcher the opportunity to go into the field without the background chatter of competing theories. Generating theory from collected data ensures a researcher stays close to their data; one cannot help but listen to the voices of those being researched.

9.3.2 Reflections for the academe

This study was approached with a self-imposed remit of producing a critical thesis with real-world recommendations which those in the youth policy arena could consider implementing. Kelley (2006) and Smith (2004) contend that it is within the policy arena that Children's Geographies could have real impact. Other commentators seem not so sure. Reflecting on his own doctoral experience, Ward (2005: 310) remembers coming "face to face with the contempt in which some of those who are involved in 'public policy' hold academics", while Shields (2006) maintains that there are some academics who are simply not interested in policy or practice. Robson (2002) maintains that practice improves theory which in turn improves practice. It is argued in this thesis that academic commentators and policy makers must be receptive to the recommendations of each other. This research takes its cue from Robson (2002) who notes that researchers should be able to 'sell' their research and be able to tailor their message to particular audiences. Conducting research with the remit of assessing 'what works' can demonstrate to policy makers that philosophy can, when coupled with action, be a spur to social change and resonate in situations beyond the academe.

In Chapter Four, the difference between grounded substantive level theory and formal level theory was explained. To reiterate, most grounded theories are at the substantive level and the theory generated from the data analysis of this study is indeed a substantive one. It is recommended therefore that further research be conducted in this area with a view to raising the substantive grounded theory of this study to a formal

theory, thus applicable to areas outside the specific context of this study. For example, would raising the substantive theory generated in this study to a formal level theory make it applicable in alternate forms of participation such new social [youth] movements? Would a formal grounded theory be applicable in a broader participation context, among adults participating in civil society for example? This is line with the original (1967) seminal text by Glaser and Strauss who contend that theory at the conceptual, substantive level is capable of acting as a springboard or a stepping stone to a formal theory. Indeed, the authors argue that although it is possible to generate formal theory from data, it is preferable to start at the lower, substantive level. Generating theory in this manner allows one gauge how the theory is working in reality, what the authors referred to as "as a stimulus to a good idea" (1967: 79).

9.3.3 Recommendations for policy and practice

Arguably the contributions and reflections for the academe already outlined are applicable in many ways to those engaged in policy and practice. Classical pragmatism is a philosophy of action and is ideally placed to bridge any divides (perceived or otherwise) between academia and policy. Accordingly, this study argues for operational changes to be instigated in the DCYA, particularly in the area of communication and information. In light of the imminent second National Children's Strategy and the proposed amendment to the Irish Constitution with respect to children's rights, this study is a timely contribution to public discourses about children's rights and the participation of young people in society.

Recommendation 1: That the DCYA (and its partners) instigate a review of communication and information procedures with respect to Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg.

Many of the young people interviewed for this study had little or no prior knowledge of either Comhairle na nÓg or Dáil na nÓg; thus their decision to join was not an informed one. Furthermore, once a member this lack of information and communication continued. It must also be recognised that many of the young people involved are members of more than one organisation or group, and lead dynamic, busy lives. As such it is not enough to inform members at the beginning of their membership what Comhairle na nÓg entails. Communication must be on-going and to paraphrase Article 12 of the UNCRC, in accordance with the age and maturity of the young person.

It is acknowledged that communication between co-ordinators has been improved in recent years and the establishment of the DCYA participation team and three regional Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators are seen as positive steps. Notwithstanding these improvements however, communication between co-ordinators could still be improved upon. It is also noted that on-going communication to members with respect to outcomes or developments from past projects requires attention. That Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg were established in response to Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC has not been communicated to many of the young people involved. Most of those interviewed seemed unaware of the basic concept underlying youth participation. They spoke of youth voice but were unable to articulate what that actually meant. This cannot be attributed to a lack of development on their part but rather is the result of a paucity of communication strategies within these participation organisations.

Voice implies that someone is listening. The DCYA needs to listen to the voices of the new recruits to Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg, it needs to listen to current members, to listen to past members and it needs to listen to the co-ordinators charged with the day to day running of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. All of these people are experts in youth participation for they have experienced it.

Recommendation 2: Organisations that consult with Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg should be obliged to provide meaningful feedback to those they have consulted with. This should be done on at least one occasion following consultation.

Members interviewed reported that it was normal for *"people"* to come to their meeting and talk to the group. In the more passive groups, it appeared that the co-ordinator sourced the speakers and invited them to talk to, and consult with those present. Other groups, more used to taking the initiative, suggested possible speakers to their co-ordinator. Mayors of local authorities were seen as relatively frequent visitors to Comhairle na nÓg groups. Even in the most effective groups, rarely does a speaker return to the group to give feedback. Have any of their suggestions being taken on-board? If the project did not proceed, why did it not proceed? There often appeared tension between co-ordinators implementing Comhairle na nÓg practice on the ground and the DCYA and Regional Project Participation Officers in relation to consultation as opposed to actual participation. Consultation is not enough according to the DCYA and yet this is what many groups experience. To progress consultation, to make it

meaningful and *useful*, it is suggested in this study that those doing the consulting must report back to those whom they have consulted.

Recommendation 3: The existence of, and premise underlying state structures of youth participation should be communicated more clearly to schools and youth organisations as these are the gatekeepers of potential members.

The potential value of both structures should be conveyed to schools and youth organisations in a more concerted manner than is currently being done. Further, the consideration of joining Comhairle na nÓg must be available to all students at second level, not just those already on the student council, or those whom the principal or teacher consider may be interested. The DCYA should consider involving the assistance of the Department of Education and Science in this matter. The possible incongruity of this is acknowledged given that the school as a research site was abandoned following the pilot study. However, apart from one member who joined through his youth organisation, young people interviewed for this study all claimed to have been approached to join Comhairle na nÓg by a teacher or principal in their school. Thus the reality of the circumstances of joining highlights the importance of schools in the recruitment process. Therefore, more effort is required to ensure gatekeepers in the schools are themselves equipped with the full facts about these state youth participation structures.

In relation to recruitment through schools, a more active role for current members to share their participation experiences with their classmates should also be encouraged. Indeed it emerged from interviews that some members had taken the initiative in this area and felt that when they had done so, it had been worthwhile and prompted more people to think about joining these organisations. Additionally, young people sharing their participation experiences with their peers and teachers will have the added benefit of broadening the appeal and public awareness of the two organisations in the wider community.

9.3.4 Issues of ethics re-visited
The ethical thought boxes sprinkled throughout this thesis were deliberately intended to give pause for thought. Informed consent has been shown to be more complex than simply providing potential participants with details of a project. Issues of consent need

to be re-visited throughout a research study to ensure the integrity of whom and what is being researched is upheld. Researchers who work with children and young people frequently encounter ethical dilemmas; thus it not been suggested that the difficulties encountered in this study were necessarily any different to those in other projects. Nevertheless, despite the best intentions and efforts of the researcher from the outset, ethical issues required constant attention and negotiation. Chiming with the literature concerning issues of ethics, the place where the research is conducted was shown to influence the participants during the pilot study phase of this study, at times inhibiting spontaneous discussion and disclosure. The experiences of this study illustrate clearly how the influence of place on the research process should not be underestimated.

Gatekeepers do indeed have the power to situate themselves very directly between the researcher and potential participants. They wield significant power, having the ability to 'cherry-pick' respondents and control and manipulate the consent process. In this study all participants returned consent forms signed by their parents or guardians. Receiving signed consent forms from pilot study participants from a teacher with the off-hand comment "*they should all be there as I told them to get them signed or there'd be trouble*" was alarming; far from reassuring the researcher it provoked sufficient unease to ensure future consent forms would require the signature of parents, guardians and potential participants. Adam's 'consent' story was told in Ethical Thought Box 5; Adam's consent form was signed by his mother and he had also signed the consent form. Thus all consent issues had been adhered to - *or so the researcher thought*. Adam's disclosures during his interview were startling - not only was he a member of Comhairle na nÓg at his mother's insistence but his 'consent' to be interviewed was also to appease his mother. Despite all the ethical boxes being 'ticked' it was still possible, however unwittingly, for best practice guidelines to be transgressed.

Perhaps the most sobering pause for thought and reflection was prompted by the issue of institutional ethical approval and the acquisition of Garda [police] consent for the research study. Each takes time; the institutional application forms involved are many pages long and require concentrated attention. Researchers must state their research design, their proposed methodological approach, they must outline the questions that will be asked of their participants, they must promise to ensure participants understand that being involved does not constitute counselling of any sort – all necessary one

readily accepts if the researcher and potential participants are to be protected. And yet once consent is granted, that is it. There was no obligation for the researcher to re-visit their ethical consent at later stages of the study, or if the research design changed for any reason. Similarly, once police clearance had been obtained, no other demands were made of the researcher. In a study where the bulk of interviews and observations concerned young people under the age of eighteen, that the researcher was only asked twice for verbal confirmation of police clearance seems almost incredulous. One wonders, for whom is the ethical authorisation and clearance actually intended to protect - the participants or (from the experience of this study) the researcher?

9.4 Acknowledging limitations

The doctoral researcher can be limited in terms of resources and time. Respected grounded theory commentators such as Juliet Corbin and Kathy Charmaz recommend that initial open and axial codes be shared among colleagues. This can prompt new or different interpretations of what is being extracted from the data. Such a sharing of codes and data between researchers obviously resonates with classical pragmatism's community of inquiry approach. In a similar vein, the benefit of hindsight indicated that the researcher could have invited participants to be involved in the data analysis phase. This would truly have been a pragmatist community of inquiry in action. Although some of the interviewees were contacted by follow-up telephone calls, provisional open GT codes could also have been shared with them, perhaps prompting additional insights of the data.

It should be also noted that this was the first time the researcher had used grounded theory. The GT literature can be quite dense and some of it frankly was confusing on occasion. Accordingly, it took some time to become familiar with what was required. Further, while one may read the theory behind GT, it is not until theory is put into practice that its complexities are best understood. To this end, the process of drawing up memos could have been streamlined more efficiently. A simple memo notebook would have been advisable rather than the plethora of notebooks and scraps of paper that was the reality of the GT memos of this study. Nevertheless, what has been learned here can be applied in further studies.

Finally, a possible limitation of this study could be that only a limited number of groups was included with each group only being visited once. If groups had been re-visited, further categories might have been extracted from the data. In retrospect, although many of the actors involved with Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are the same, a separate critique of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg may have allowed for a more in-depth critique of Comhairle na nÓg to emerge. This organisation has the lower public profile of the two DCYA-participation structures and yet it seems to the one with the most potential for real participation which can touch the lives of young people.

9.5 Pulling the threads together: concluding remarks

Collecting and analysing the data using a grounded theory approach meant that a cacophony of voices was continually audible in this study; the researcher had to stay close to the data for it was from the data that codes, categories and a substantive theory would emerge. Beyond investigating the overarching concept of youth voice, no preconceived theories were taken into the field while the data were collected. Those involved were considered by the researcher to be 'the experts' in that these were the people with direct experience of state structures of Irish youth participation. Ultimately, through a constant interplay of inductive and deductive thinking in line with Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 2008) advice, it was possible to develop a substantive grounded theory.

Interestingly, current members interviewed overwhelmingly endorsed Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg, although many of the young people were unable to articulate exactly how the organisations benefit their local communities, or indeed young people more generally in the Republic of Ireland. Past members were more reflective and circumspect; conceding that while they had enjoyed their time with these participation organisations, the benefit of hindsight saw many question their impact beyond what they had accrued personally. All interviewees (past and current) referred to the personal skills they had acquired through membership. Many felt they had developed lifelong friendships. Such benefits are not to be disregarded. However, how, if at all do these participation structures benefit young people who are not members of the organisations? Are they effective as vehicles to prompt change in the lives of young people in the Republic of Ireland? With a few exceptions, it appears that in their present format, they are not. If Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg are the mechanisms through which

young people can voice their opinions and have an impact on the [re]formation of policies and services, their participatory remit needs to be communicated to audiences beyond their own members. Charges of being reactionary are often levelled at governments; administrations are frequently accused of reacting to issues rather than anticipating them. Somewhat ironically, this thesis maintains that DCYA participation is not reactionary enough.

The DCYA advocates that children and young people are active citizens when they participate in society via its participation structures. While the DCYA appear to recognise young people as 'citizens', it is not so clear if the Irish State does the same. Chapter One detailed the position of children within the Irish Constitution, where they are recognised in relation to the family and not as autonomous rights holders. A 'media-watch' was upheld throughout this study in relation to the proposed, but oft postponed Constitutional referendum, intended to strengthen the individual rights of the child. That referendum has still to take place. Thus while the DCYA may refer to youth participation as being a form of active citizenship, arguably what it is actually referring to is youth civic engagement; the idea that young people participate and play an active role in their communities.

The DCYA presents a vision for Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg whereby it maintains that young people will have a voice in affecting policy and services. The participation observed throughout this study was predominantly adult-led. There were glimpses of youth-led participation but they were fleeting and largely confined to two of the nine groups of this study. However, a pragmatist mindset means that it is possible for young people and their adult gatekeepers to work together in a manner that enables their youth voices to be heard. The DCYA provides the official structures for young people to articulate their voices in matters affecting (according to Article 12 of the UNCRC). However, it needs to also ensure that it is listening to what the voices within its own organisation are saying.

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Appendix One: Constitution of Ireland, Article 41

i. The right of the citizens to express freely their convictions and opinions.

The education of public opinion being, however, a matter of such grave import to the common good, the State shall endeavour to ensure that organs of public opinion, such as the radio, the press, the cinema, while preserving their rightful liberty of expression, including criticism of Government policy, shall not be used to undermine public order or morality or the authority of the State.

The publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious, or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law.

ii. The right of the citizens to assemble peaceably and without arms.

Provision may be made by law to prevent or control meetings which are determined in accordance with law to be calculated to cause a breach of the peace or to be a danger or nuisance to the general public and to prevent or control meetings in the vicinity of either House of the Oireachtas.

iii. The right of the citizens to form associations and unions.

Laws, however, may be enacted for the regulation and control in the public interest of the exercise of the foregoing right.

2° Laws regulating the manner in which the right of forming associations and unions and the right of free assembly may be exercised shall contain no political, religious or class discrimination.

The Family

Article 41

1. 1° The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.

2° The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.

2. 1° In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2° The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

3. 1° The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack.

2° A Court designated by law may grant a dissolution of marriage where, but only where, it is satisfied that

     i.   at the date of the institution of the proceedings, the spouses have lived apart from one another for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least four years during the five years,

    ii.   there is no reasonable prospect of a reconciliation between the spouses,

   iii.   such provision as the Court considers proper having regard to the circumstances exists or will be made for the spouses, any children of either or both of them and any other person prescribed by law, and

   iv.   any further conditions prescribed by law are complied with.

3° No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage so dissolved.

Education

Article 42

1. The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.

2. Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State.

3. 1° The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State.

    2° The State shall, however, as guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social.

4. The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.

5. In exceptional cases, where the parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty towards their children, the State as guardian of the common good, by appropriate means shall endeavour to supply the place of the parents, but always with due regard for the natural and imprescriptible rights of the child.

Private Property

Article 43

1. 1° The State acknowledges that man, in virtue of his rational being, has the natural right, antecedent to positive law, to the private ownership of external goods.

    2° The State accordingly guarantees to pass no law attempting to abolish the right of private ownership or

Hart (1992): Adapted from Arnstein, 1969, it has a progressive hierarchy, reading from bottom rungs equate to *Progressive hierarchy, Manipulation, Decoration, Tokenism, Assigned but informed, Consulted and informed, Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children, Child-initiated and directed, Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults*.

Fajerman & Treseder (1997): Adapted from Hart, 1992, circle of participation with 'degrees' of participation each of which are different but equally valid forms of participation. Different forms of participation equate to *Assigned but informed, Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children, Child-initiated and directed, Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults, Consulted and informed*.

Shier (2001): a modification of Hart's ladder, participation denoted along a pathways with 5 levels of commitment. Levels equate to *Children listened to, Children supported in expressing views, Children's views taken into account, Children involved in decision-making processes, Children share power and responsibility.*

Lansdown (2001): no metaphor of participation but suggests practical lessons for promoting participation including that *adults be prepared to Listen, research, Consult, make time available, develop indicators/goals, make necessary resources available, to make mistakes, to be challenged.* All actors should be clear on what they want to achieve with clear boundaries. Argues that children not a homogenous group and that working with adults also an important concept. Warns adults not to underestimate children.

Francis & Lorenzo (2002): after reviewing three decades of research authors refer to realms of participation that are romantic realm (research dating from 1960s and 1970s promoting children as able to create their own environments without adults, *Advocacy realm* (projects where needs of children are planned by adults), *Needs realm* (projects by urban planners and research associated with social science of children), *Rights realm* (projects associated with UNCRC or other similar international child rights movements), *Institutional realm* (projects involving international child advocate organisations), *Proactive realm* (projects which seek to empower children and advocates for child-centred models of participation).

Kirby *et al.* (2003): draws on Hart (1992) and Shier (2001), no participation metaphor but has four-level categorisation of participation. Levels are that *children/young people's views taken into account by adults, children should be involved in decision making together with adults, children should be able to share power and responsibility for decision making with adults and that children should be able to make autonomous decisions.*

Mannion (2003): described by Hart 2008: 23) as being like "a fountain of participation!" (Hart, 2008:23), non-participation labelled as *manipulation, decoration, tokenism*, participation labelled *Assigned but informed, adult-initiated, shared decisions, Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults, Children and adults collaborate as team, Child-initiated and directed, Consulted and informed.*

Percy-Smith (2006): Adapted from Wildemeersch *et al.*, 1998, no metaphor of participation; instead four axes of social learning in a communicative action space. Four axes of social learning are *action, reflection, communication, cooperation.*

Models of youth participation

Appendix Three: Dáil na nÓg 2010 information

Dáil na nÓg 2010 began with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at that time (Barry Andrews, TD), giving a short opening address to delegates. Although light hearted at the beginning, he admitted that successive administrations had failed to listen to young people but counseled that lessons had been learned. The minister urged the young people to have a sense of civic responsibility, advising them that it was not just their right to have a say in matters affecting them, but their duty also. Policy can be changed when young people are listened to, the Minister declared. A youth representative from the Children and Young People's Forum (CYPF) briefly addressed those attending, urging Comhairle na nÓg members to talk about important issues with their peers.

Round table discussions followed with delegates divided into small groups of approximately eleven participants. Debate and discussions were conducted around the broad themes of mental health and access to education. A Dáil na nÓg toolkit[8] with brief details of these themes had been sent to every delegate prior to the event. Each Comhairle na nÓg group was required to nominate two themes for discussion at Dáil na nÓg; the two most popular were then brought forward to the event.

Each round table discussion was facilitated by personnel from Fóroige, NYCI or Youth Work Ireland. Members of the Dáil na nÓg Council updated flipcharts at each discussion. Inevitably, some discussions appeared livelier than others largely dependent on group dynamic and the skills of the facilitator. During this time, the researcher was free to circulate and observe proceedings. A television reporter from the Irish National Broadcaster (RTE) was present and interviewed a small number of delegates over the course of the morning. A short information piece was broadcast later that day on the six o'clock evening television news. Concurrent to the round table discussions, a meeting was held among Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators and the three DCYA Regional Participation Project Officers. The researcher was subsequently informed that this was the first such ensemble of co-ordinators at any Dáil na nÓg. Lunch was followed by a question and answer session; for many, as witnessed by the researcher and gleaned from subsequent interviews, the main highlight of the day. This question and answer (Q&A) session was chaired by Eddie D'Arcy, President of the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI). The majority of the questions were directed directly to the Minister although The Chair attempted to re-direct and deflect some questions to other members of the panel, with limited success. The panel was comprised of:

- Barry Andrews TD, [then] Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- Pat Burke, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education and Science
- Tom Boland, CEO, Higher Education Authority
- Professor Tom Collins, Dean of Teaching and Learning, NUI Maynooth
- Derek West, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
- James Doorley, Assistant Director National Youth Council of Ireland
- Martin Rogan, Assistant National Director with responsibility for Mental Health, HSE
- Geoff Day, Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention, HSE
- Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Director, Office for Disability and Mental Health,

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[8] Dáil na nÓg 2010 toolkit available via the DCYA website at http://www.dailnanog.ie/2006/site/Delegate_Toolkit_2010.php, accessed 02 April 2011.

Department of Health and Children
- Dr. Tony Bates, CEO, Headstrong
- Dr. Brendan Doody, Clinical Director, HSE

The 'right to reply' to an answer was stated by The Chair at the beginning of the 'Q&A' session. However, this was observed as limited, skill and sheer determination being required by the questioner who attempted to exercise this right. During some of these 'replies' encouragement was given in the form of foot stamping, clapping and cheering by the audience. Notwithstanding the stated right to reply, no prolonged, two-way debate was observed for any question and answer. One young person asked a long pre-prepared but well delivered question, catching the attention and enthusiasm of the audience. The minister's reply to this very specific question about Goal Three of the National Children's Strategy (2000) on funding for young people in rural areas was "*there's one every year like that...some of your information is slightly out of date*". This was countered with "*well, it's information I got from your website...*" Support for this questioner was provided in the form of vociferous shouting, cheering and extended foot stomping.

Following the question and answer session, delegates voted (via an individual handheld device), for issues which had been put forward by each round table discussion. The three most popular issues in the two categories (mental health and access to education), were then given to the in-coming Dáil na nÓg council. The recommendations serve as a good indicator of the kind and range of issues debated throughout the day, and they are:

Mental Health

- The Irish Government should enforce a law that all altered advertisements and images must indicate that they have been altered by means of a symbol and text.
- Department of Education should provide adequate funding for a designated person, not directly involved in teaching, to offer confidential advice and supports for young people's positive mental health.
- Government departments should establish and fund an education group to Educate 2nd and 5th year students through schools and youth clubs about depression and suicide.

Access to Education

- The Department of Education should lengthen Leaving Cert cycle to three years and reduce the Junior Cert cycle to two years.
- A national book rental scheme should be available to all secondary schools with a standard fee for all students.

Classes on motivation, confidence-building and exam pressures integrated into the school curriculum which are administered by an outsider

Appendix Four: Parental/guardian consent letter

<div align="right">

ISSP Doctoral Fellow
NIRSA & Dept. of Geography
John Hume Building
NUI Maynooth

adrienne.hobbs@nuim.ie

</div>

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am a second year Geography PhD student studying at the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), located in NUI Maynooth. My research focuses on Comhairle na nÓg, the local youth councils established under the National Children's Strategy (2000) and Dáil na nÓg, the annual youth parliament. I am eager to observe how Comhairle na nÓg functions, how young people are informed of its existence and how young people come to be involved in Comhairle. There are currently 34 Comhairlí na nÓg in the Republic of Ireland and I hope to observe a number of groups across the country over the next few months.

To enhance my research I like to follow up my observations by speaking to members on an individual basis. I have ethical approval from NUI Maynooth (copy enclosed) and have also secured Garda clearance for my research. All teenage participants in my study will be treated in confidence. As part of my funding commitments my findings will be lodged anonymously in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA, www.iqda.ie). However I stress that no names or contact details of any teenage participants will be disclosed at any time. While my research is on-going, the details of the different interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at NUI Maynooth. Participants are welcome to view the notes and transcripts of their discussion group or interview at any time and are equally free to withdraw from my study at any time. Discussion in the individual interviews will centre on how the young person first learnt of Comhairle na nÓg's existence, how they feel it functions and what Comhairle na nÓg has achieved, both on a personal level and in the wider community.

Although my research does not constitute any kind of counselling treatment, it is important that the views and opinions of teenagers be listened to, as the results of my project could help inform future policy decisions which will affect their lives. If your son or daughter would like to take part in my research and if you are agreeable to he/she taking part I would appreciate it if you would sign the consent slip at the end of this letter and return to me in the envelope provided.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter and consider my request.

Yours faithfully

_____
Adrienne Hobbs

Consent slip

I give my consent for my son/daughter _____ to take part in the PhD research study of Ms Adrienne Hobbs, NUI Maynooth and to speak to her individually about Comhairle na nÓg and the civic participation of teenagers in Ireland.

Contact phone: _____ this is in order for follow up interviews to be arranged. The contact details of all participants will not be disclosed to any third party and will be kept in a secure cabinet at NUI Maynooth.

Comhairle na nÓg member name: _____

Signed: _____

Parent/Guardian name: _____

Signed: _____

Appendix Five: Sample interview questions

All interviews were of a semi-structured nature. Although participants were essentially asked the same core questions, the researcher followed the lead of those being interviewed; accordingly there was no pre-determined question order apart from those asked at the beginning of every interview.

Interviews with young people:

- *How long have you been a member of Comhairle na nÓg?*
- *How did you first hear about it?*
- *Describe the circumstances of first becoming a member.*
- *Had you ever heard about Comhairle na nÓg before becoming a member?*
- *The AGM, what happened at that?*
- *Were you all told what being a member of Comhairle na nÓg involved by the anybody at the AGM?*
- *Has the purpose behind Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg been discussed or explained to you during your time as a member?*
- *Cast your mind back to your first meeting: what happened?*
- *And is there a typical meeting?*
- *Where you normally meet?*
- *Do you have a preference for where your group meets?*
- *How do you find meeting in the council chambers?*
- *How are you informed about a forthcoming meeting; by text, email, telephone call?*
- *The agenda for the meeting: how is that compiled?*
- *If you wanted to get something put onto the agenda, what would you do?*
- *Have any of your friends or classmates ever asked you to raise an issue at a Comhairle na nÓg meeting?*
- *What type of work does your Comhairle do?*
- *Do you ever get any feedback about past projects your group has been involved with?*
- *Do you ever link up with other Comhairlí na nÓg? Would you like to? What is like meeting up with other youth council groups?*
- *How are the people for Dáil na nÓg selected?*
- *Have you ever been? Would you like to go?*
- *Do Dáil na nÓg Council members report back to the group on a regular basis?*
- *What happens at Dáil na nÓg?*
- *What did you think of this year's Dáil na nÓg?*
- *How did you find the q&a session?*
- *Do you ever get feedback, or hear about any of the projects Dáil na nÓg has worked on in the past?*
- *Can you think of any way that your Comhairle na nÓg has influenced policy in your area?*
- *Do you think your local authority listens to the voice of Comhairle na nÓg?*

- *Does the local authority act on what Comhairle na nÓg says, or ideas that it has?*
- *Would you recommend joining Comhairle na nÓg to a pal?*
- *What are the benefits of being a member?*
- *Any disadvantages?*
- *Does Comhairle na nÓg benefit the community you live in?*
- *Do any of your friends or classmates ever ask you what is going on at your Comhairle na nÓg meetings?*
- *Do they ever ask you about Dáil na nÓg?*
- *Does it ever come up in discussion in school?*
- *Do you like people knowing you are a member of Comhairle na nÓg; is it cool?*
- *Do your parents ask you about your Comhairle work?*
- *So what do you think Comhairle is all about; why is it there?*
- *And the big question: do you think young people have a voice in Ireland?*

Gatekeepers
- *Is being co-ordinator of Comhairle na nÓg your only role, or do you combine it with other responsibilities?*
- *How do you go about approaching young people to join?*
- *What's involved in the AGM?*
- *A lot of the work is project/group work; how is it decided what projects to focus on?*
- *How is it decided who goes to Dáil na nÓg?*
- *Are there usually more people who want to go than can actually go?*
- *Is the voice of Comhairle na nÓg equal to that of Dáil na nÓg?*
- *Does the DCYA lay down strict guidelines for you to follow?*
- *What do you do if the young people want to focus on something you know the DCYA will not sanction, such as fieldtrips?*
- *Is it easy to 'sell' Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg to young people?*
- *The DCYA want seldom heard young people as members and also a range of ages; has is this guideline working?*
- *How receptive are schools in the area to pupils joining Comhairle na nÓg?*
- *And other youth organisations?*
- *How supportive is your employer, the local authority, to the idea of young people having a voice?*
- *Who decides what outside groups/organisations consult with Comhairle?*
- *Do you have much contact with your regional co-ordinator?*
- *Comhairle co-ordinators met up at this year's Dáil na nÓg; how did you find that, was it useful?*
- *Do you typically have much contact with other Comhairlí or other youth groups?*
- *The members seem to like linking in with other groups; what do you think?*

Executive Summary

This report provides an independent evaluation of 32 Comhairlí na nÓg that are in receipt of funding from the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund provided by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). This fund is now in its third year.

The report is arranged under the following headings:
- support structure for Comhairle na nÓg (*Chapter 1*);
- working arrangements for Comhairle na nÓg (*Chapter 2*);
- work programme of Comhairle na nÓg (*Chapter 3*);
- raising the profile of Comhairle na nÓg (*Chapter 4*);
- work of OMCYA's Children and Young People's Participation Support Team (*Chapter 5*);
- impact of funding (*Chapter 6*);
- conclusions, challenges, key recommendations and next steps (*Chapter 7*).

The evaluation finds that there are a number of supportive local policies and strategies in place that help contextualise and prioritise Comhairle na nÓg as a key area of work. Moreover, some 94% of Comhairlí na nÓg now have steering committees in place, which are considered very useful in providing links to local decision-makers, accessing expertise on issues that young people identify, raising awareness and support for Comhairle na nÓg, and accessing seldom-heard young people. Just over three-quarters of the steering committees had Comhairle na nÓg member representation, with the recommendation that the remaining 21% should follow suit at the earliest opportunity.

The evaluation also finds that the main recommendation of the 2008-09 Evaluation Report in relation to the working arrangements of Comhairle na nÓg has been largely implemented, with evidence of a concerted effort to address the imbalance in age profile of Comhairle na nÓg membership. Although the data are not directly comparable, an average of 41% of the Comhairle na nÓg membership is now aged 12-15 years, while an average of 59% is aged 16-18 years. However, there are a number of Comhairlí that have much work to do to align their membership to this national average, although they will benefit greatly by engaging in some of the numerous strategies used by their Comhairle na nÓg colleagues to attract and maintain the interest of young people in the lower age bracket.

There were also positive reports on the steady participation of seldom-heard young people and the fact that some 84% of Comhairlí are now operating a 2-year term of office for committee membership. Perhaps most significantly, 72% of all Comhairlí are meeting at least once a month – and some more often.

Chapter 3 on the Comhairle's work programme profiles the attendance at the 28 AGMs held during 2009-2010 throughout the country (4 Comhairlí did not stage an AGM during the year). The average number of attendees at each AGM was 81, most of whom came

from schools, with a good age and gender balance as well as significant representation of seldom-heard young people. A great array of issues were discussed under the headings, among others, of health, facilities and local government, education, having a voice, safety issues, attitudes and young people, young people and the workplace. The report outlines the multiplicity of ways issues were chosen for the AGMs before they are prioritised by either the Comhairle na nÓg committee or less often at the AGM itself for pursuit by the Comhairle committee throughout the Comhairle year. (There was only one example where adults were involved in choosing the issues.) The prioritisation process is followed by young people devising a variety of strategies, developing action plans and undergoing training in a bid to achieve their targeted outcomes, many of which are achieved, others that may take longer and some that may never come to fruition. By choosing their own issues and how they will pursue them, the members of the Comhairlí are exerting influence and impact on an agenda set by themselves.

Linking with decision-makers, both on the issues identified by young people as important as well as other issues of importance, is obviously a key way to exert further influence and impact on local decisions. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that young people are represented on a variety of decision-making agencies and bodies in just under half of Comhairle na nÓg areas. Moreover, Comhairlí are increasingly seen as the consultative voice for young people. Many Comhairlí also make regular presentations to the City/County Development Board or its agencies in their area and/or to their local City/County Council. They also support the work of other youth participation structures and are engaged in a variety of other activities. This work has led 61% of Comhairlí to rank their impact as 'very influential' in changes made on the issues they were working on, with a further 32% assessing their impact as 'somewhat influential'.

The report also illustrates how Comhairlí na nÓg have engaged in a number of strategies to raise the profile of the Comhairle work programme, not least their engagement with the local media of radio and press, as well as web-based media. The impact of the OMCYA's Children and Young People's Participation Support Team, established in 2009, is also analysed, outlining the numerous supports and training that Comhairlí availed of during the year, with particular emphasis on the importance of the national Information and Networking Days. The Comhairlí also suggested a number of additional supports for the future, although 66% of them ranked the current support as 'very useful' and a further 28% reckoned the support was 'useful'.

The assessment of the impact of funding finds that the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund has resulted in a more systematic and structurally robust programme, which is gradually becoming more embedded in the Local Authority system and making it less dependent on individuals 'championing' issues. These improved structures, combined with additional training, support from the Children and Young People's Participation Support Team and the sustained funding, have made it possible for Comhairlí na nÓg to develop the Comhairle work programme, which is key to the overall success of the national organisation. While the funding has certainly resulted in an increased number of Comhairlí facilitating young people to identify and pursue issues of importance to them (many of which have achieved their targeted outcomes), there are many other Comhairlí that need to increase their efforts to operate in this fashion. Concentrating one's efforts on this element of the

work programme is, not surprisingly, correlated to the chances of young people having an influence and impact on an agenda that has been set by them, as well as on other local issues of importance. The report does find that the intangibility of some of the outcomes makes it difficult to assess the extent of the impact and influence of Comhairle na nÓg and recommends further improvement in the area. However, the increased effort on the Comhairle work programme, following the criteria for funding, the progress made on the numerous issues outlined, the fact that so many young people are now sitting on local government agencies that make important local decisions, and the fact that Comhairle na nÓg is increasingly seen as the consultative forum for young people by decision-makers – all these outcomes mean that the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund has undoubtedly made a difference and resulted in an increased impact and influence by young people on local decision-making.

The key challenges and next steps for Comhairle na nÓg include:
- maintaining the level of funding and resources of the Comhairle work programme;
- ensuring the Comhairle work programme remains a key area of work in the Local Authorities;
- ensuring the Comhairle work programme is developed in all areas to allow young people to conduct whatever work is necessary to achieve their targeted outcomes on the issues that matter to them;
- maintaining links with the decision-makers that can help them deliver those outcomes.

The report concludes by emphasizing the importance of ensuring that all young people in all areas are afforded the same opportunities to identify issues of importance and influence positive change in their local areas, so that Comhairle na nÓg's overall impact and influence can finally be taken to the next level.

Appendix Seven: Executive Summary (2 pages)
Dáil na nÓg Council 2009-2010 Final Evaluation

Dáil na nÓg

Dail na nÓg is the annual national youth parliament of Ireland -for young people who are 12 to 18 years old. The Dáil is funded and overseen by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). 200 delegates are elected to Dáil na nÓg through their local Comhairle na nÓg and they attend the annual parliament. At the event they choose and vote on a series of statements, which reflect the views of young people nationally. Each of the 34 Comhairle na nÓg elects one delegate to become a member of the Dáil na nÓg Council.

The Council

The Dáil na nÓg Council has a full Council meeting nine times throughout the year - once a month with the exception of the summer months. Sub groups of the Council also meet throughout the year to do work on their research and prepare for presentations. This amounted to approximately 20 meetings in 2009-2010. All of the meetings take place in the offices of the OMCYA in Hawkins House, in central Dublin usually on a Saturday.

The role of the Council is to:

- Follow-up on recommendations from Dáil na nÓg and work to make changes for young people in those areas
- Represent all the young people who took part in Dáil na nÓg and the young people in their Comhairle na nÓg
- Research on the top issues voted at Dáil na nÓg
- Prepare arguments and presentations for adult policy makers

The Evaluation outcomes

This evaluation report documents the progress and outcomes from the Dáil na nÓg Council 2009-2010. The report describes how the Council has aimed to influence pubic policy through conducting research and presenting findings and proposals to key policy makers. It also documents young peoples' reported positive personal outcomes such as increased confidence and ability to speak in public. The structures and supports, which underpin the work of the Council, are then described and analysed. These include the key role of facilitation and the development of positive working relationships between the young councillors and

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the adults that work with them in partnership. For the first time this year the evaluator sought the views of policy makers. The differing ways that they engaged with the council and the evaluator are explored together with their sense of the benefits and challenges of the Council's work. Conclusions follow and the report finishes with the following recommendations:

Recommendations

1. The proposal to increase the term of office of the Council to two years and to change the timeframe so that Dáil na nÓg takes place in the Autumn, should be adopted. In these new circumstances consideration should be given to including a residential early in the term of each Council. At least one of the Council meetings should take place outside of Dublin

2. Future evaluations of the Council should consider it in the context the whole Dáil na nÓg system.

3. The OMCYA should build upon their experience of modelling excellent participation work into future and think about ways this expertise and experience could be replicated within other organisations. Consideration should be given to the development of facilitation training guidelines

4. Consideration should be given to the development of strategies to support policy influencing especially in relation to education. These will include building alliances over time with individuals and organisations who also seek to influence educational policy.