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From object to subject : including marginalised citizens in policy-making

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Ruth Lister
Professor of Social Policy
Department of Social Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough.
UK.
M.R.Lister@lboro.ac.uk

From object to subject: including marginalised citizens in policy-making.¹

Abstract

The article begins with an account of the values that might underpin an inclusive model of citizenship. It then discusses such a model in terms of participation in policy-making. It does so with particular reference to two groups who are the named objects of policy-making but who are marginalised in the policy-making process: people living in poverty and children. These examples are also used to draw out some general lessons and themes. The article concludes by linking the discussion to the idea of social justice understood as embodying relations of recognition as well as distribution.

Key words: citizenship, participation, children, poverty.

Inclusive policy-making is at heart a matter of citizenship – the inclusion of citizens in the policy-making process. In the civic republican tradition citizenship is above all a practice in which citizens are actively involved in political and civic affairs. This article therefore begins by addressing the theme of inclusivity in policy-making from the perspective of inclusive citizenship and the values which might underpin it. It then draws out the implications of such a model of citizenship for policy-making with particular reference to two groups who are the named objects of policy-making but who are typically marginalised in the policy-making process: people living in poverty and children. These are not two discrete groups. Nor are they homogeneous groups, for the experience of both poverty and childhood is mediated by social divisions such as gender, ‘race’ and ethnicity, disability, sexuality and class. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity the analysis will focus on the two categories of poverty and childhood.

It does so mainly, though not exclusively, within the British context, where public participation has taken on a new salience in policy-making. Indeed, the issues it raises have wider significance at a time when ‘public participation and deliberative democracy has [sic] been viewed as a means of fostering political renewal in the European Union and across national governments in Europe, Australasia and the United States’ (Barnes et al., 2004: 268). Moreover, although it can be dangerous to isolate analysis of citizenship and participation from the context in which they are practised, one theme common to many commentaries on participatory initiatives involving children and people living in poverty is the lessons that industrialised societies such as Britain can learn from developments in the global South (Bennett with Roberts, 2004; Lansdown, 2006).

The article will then reflect on some common themes and lessons of relevance to agencies attempting to develop participatory forms of policy-making. This helps to address Prout et al.’s complaint that ‘the theory that informs research on children’s participation seems relatively uninformed by the wider research on participation, even though the participation of both

adults and children seems to raise many common issues and concerns' (2006: 92). One of these is the implication for notions of social justice and the relationship between the redistributive and recognition paradigms of social justice. This is considered briefly in the conclusion, tying the discussion back to the question of values.

Inclusive citizenship: principles framing participation in inclusive democratic spaces

Inclusive citizenship is usually discussed in terms of the main components of citizenship: membership and belonging; the rights and obligations that flow from that membership; and equality of status (Lister, 2003a). These are important benchmarks for assessing whether policy is inclusionary or exclusionary in its impact.

Another way of thinking about inclusive citizenship is in terms of the values that might underpin it. This more normative stance stands in the tradition of T. H. Marshall's notion of 'an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievements can be measured and towards which aspirations can be directed' (1950: 29). It also resonates with the arguments put by David Taylor in a discussion of policy evaluation where he emphasises the importance of 'a general value-critique of social policy' to balance and complement the 'increasing reliance on the notion of evidence-based knowledge rather than value-commitment' (2006: 253).

Naila Kabeer's formulation of the values of inclusive citizenship, based on accounts 'from below' – the struggles of excluded citizens primarily in the global South – helps 'to shed light on what *inclusive* citizenship might mean when it is viewed from the standpoint of the excluded' (2005: 1, emphasis in original). Despite the very different contexts within which their understandings of citizenship are shaped, Kabeer argues that 'there are certain values that people associate with citizenship which cut across the various boundaries that divide them'. (2005: 3). These are: justice; recognition (of both equal worth and difference); individual self-determination; and solidarity, sometimes expressed as collective self-determination.

The values articulate themes running through many accounts of inclusive citizenship in the global North also and are resonant of the principle of 'participatory parity' enunciated by Nancy Fraser: the ability of 'all (*adult*) members of society to interact with one another as peers' (2003: 36, emphasis added). According to Fraser, this requires a distribution of material resources 'such as to ensure...independence and "voice"' and 'institutionalized patterns of cultural value [which] express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem' (*ibid.*). In other words, participatory parity calls for a social justice politics of both redistribution and recognition.

These values are not necessarily exhaustive. In particular, there may be others that emerge from the viewpoints of particular excluded or marginalised groups (see for example Jenny Morris' (2005) discussion of disabled people's citizenship). And, one that is common to both the case studies in this article,

and also relevant to disabled people, is that of respect for capacities. Nevertheless, the very attempt to articulate a set of values of inclusive citizenship provides a helpful starting point in thinking about 'the image of an ideal citizenship', which might underpin inclusive policy-making. They also imply a broader understanding of inclusion – both in terms of process and outcome – than that typically adopted by policy-makers. It is an approach to inclusion that promotes 'voice and presence within policy processes' (Kabeer, 2005: 20). Indeed, Martin Longoria of the Cry of the Excluded (a decentralised movement of over 12 million in the Americas) asks 'You know what is the opposite of exclusion for us? It is not inclusion, but participation. Active participation is what makes you a full citizen' (Cabannes, 2000: 19).

Active participation within policy-making processes requires genuinely inclusive democratic 'spaces' (Cornwall, 2004). Its effectiveness also requires 'cultures of accountability', which go beyond narrow technocratic understandings of accountability in order to 'challenge the power relations that shield state and other actors from answerability' and make 'citizenship real' (Newell and Wheeler, 2006: 28). A key test of participatory initiatives and processes from the perspective of inclusive citizenship is whether they do challenge traditional power relations or simply reinforce them.

Inclusive policy-making: two test cases

This test is of particular significance in relation to the participation in policy-making of two groups who in different ways lack power and tend to be treated as less than full citizens – people living in poverty and children. In both cases their traditional exclusion from policy-making processes and treatment as mere objects of policy is increasingly being challenged world-wide.

People living in poverty

At the first European Meeting of Citizens Living in Poverty, the European Anti-Poverty Network reports that 'participants stressed that they were first and foremost "citizens" before being "people experiencing poverty"' (EAPN, 2003: 4). A key demand of these citizens is to be able to participate in decision-making, which affects their lives.

Their demands are typically couched in the language of inclusive citizenship and of human rights. UN Guidelines declare that 'a human rights approach to poverty reduction...requires active and informed participation by the poor in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies' (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2002: 2).

The right of participation is a crucial human and citizenship right because it underpins the effective realisation of other rights. It also recognises and strengthens the agency of rights-bearers. To act as a citizen requires a sense of agency, the belief that one can act and effect change; acting as a citizen, especially collectively in solidarity with others, in turn fosters that sense of agency (Lister, 2003a). The experience of organisations like ATD Fourth World² is that, with support, the experience of participation can enhance self-esteem and self-belief in the capacity to act as citizens, among even the most disadvantaged members of society (ATD Fourth World, 2000). ATD Fourth

World members were involved in *Voices of Experience*, an action-research project developed by the Women's Budget Group (WBG). The project worked with women living in poverty to build their capacity to understand and participate in policy debates and engage directly with policy-makers. As reported to the WBG 2006 Annual General Meeting, participation in the project enhanced the women's confidence and sense of making a difference and created relations of mutual respect.

At the heart of both human rights and citizenship is respect for the fundamental dignity of all human beings. The right of participation represents an important means of recognising the dignity of people living in poverty. It is saying that their voices count; that they have something important to contribute to public policy-making - what has been called 'insider expertise' (Richardson and Le Grand, 2002: 513), as provided by 'experiential experts' (European Commission, 2005: 3). This requires recognition of and respect for the understanding and expertise that is born of experience alongside those forms of expertise and knowledge that have traditionally been privileged (Beresford et al., 1999).

Such recognition is crucial in counteracting the disrespect with which many people in poverty feel they are treated by the wider society, part of a process of 'Othering of the "the poor"' (Lister, 2004: Ch. 5). The Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, half of whose members had direct experience of poverty, took as the starting point for its report the observation that:

too often, people experiencing poverty are not treated with respect, either in general or by the people they come into contact with most...The lack of respect for people living in poverty was one of the clearest and most heartfelt messages which came across to us as a Commission (2000: 18).

Voicelessness and the lack of recognition and respect accorded 'the poor' are bound up together. Enabling the voices of people with experience of poverty to be heard is one way of counteracting that lack. However, it has to be acknowledged that the Othering of 'the poor' means that some of those defined as poor may not want to identify with the label (Lister, 2004). This may create difficulties for participatory initiatives, if they are seen as reinforcing such labelling. As David Taylor warns, it is necessary 'to avoid the danger of assigning some totalising identity – in this case "socially excluded" – which further disempowers those in need' (2005: 69). Otherwise, where 'participation is undertaken on what are seen as stigmatising terms' it may reinforce exclusion rather than promote inclusion (*ibid.*).

Voicelessness is also associated with powerlessness. It is both a symptom of the actual political powerlessness of people in poverty and a cause of their *feelings* of powerlessness. The link between voice and power is made by Moraene Roberts, an activist with ATD 4th World: 'No-one asks our views...But we are the real experts of our own hopes and aspirations...We can contribute if you are prepared to give up a little power to allow us to

participate as partners in our own future, and in the future of the country' (cited in Russell, 1996: 4).

Since she made that statement at a National Poverty Hearing in 1996, there have been a number of initiatives in the UK at local and, to a lesser extent, national level designed to 'ask the views' of people experiencing poverty. The main examples at local level in England have been the requirements for resident participation in the New Deal for Communities (NDC), a key element in New Labour's social exclusion and neighbourhood regeneration strategy.³ A recent analysis concludes, however, that the NDC's 'potential as a site for bottom-up participation is limited' and constrained by the priorities set by central government (Wright et al., 2006: 349). The NDC is described as 'a tightly controlled policy space', in which 'government decides how the community will be involved, why they will be involved, what they will do and how they will do it' (*ibid.*: 358).

The main example of a national participatory initiative is Get Heard. This project was initiated by the Social Policy Taskforce, which comprises a number of anti-poverty organisations and networks, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It was prompted by governmental failure to involve those affected in the drawing up of the first of regular National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAP), as required by the European Commission. Using a Get Heard Toolkit to structure discussion, 146 workshops were held throughout the UK between December 2004 and December 2005 to enable people with experience of poverty to feed their views into the 2006-08 NAP.

The final report describes it as 'one of the largest projects undertaken in the UK to involve people with first-hand experience of poverty to give their views on government policies designed to combat poverty – and in doing so to shape those policies which affect their lives' (Get Heard, 2006: 4). The report suggests that, given the breadth of involvement and the project's participatory nature, it 'gives a well-rounded picture of the responses that people in poverty are making to government policy' (*ibid.*).

The project has been a significant step forward in terms of involving people with experience of poverty in policy discussions at national level. However, *responding* to government policy (which is effectively what engagement with the NAP involved) is not necessarily the same as contributing to its *development*. The DWP may have started to listen but there is no long-term mechanism for enabling people with experience of poverty to feed their views into and have influence on on-going policy development. The DWP is certainly not about to 'give up a little power' in Moraene Roberts' words.

There has been no attempt to implement the recommendation of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power that 'the UK government, the devolved administrations, and regional and local authorities should set up a framework to ensure that people living in poverty and their organisations are fully involved in the design and implementation of anti-poverty programmes and strategies' in line with the declaration at the UN World Summit for Social

Development (the Copenhagen Declaration) to which the UK is a signatory (CoPPP, 2000: 46). Disappointingly, the final report of the independent UK POWER Inquiry, although it highlighted the fact that poverty and deprivation lead to 'exclusion from the political life of the nation', made no specific recommendations to address this exclusion (POWER Inquiry, 2006: 101).

Children

The POWER report did make recommendations to strengthen young people's participation but did not discuss children aged under 16's lack of 'real influence over the bread and butter issues which affect their lives' (POWER Inquiry, 2006: 9). Yet, as Hill et al. observe 'children are one of the most governed groups by both the state and civic society' and as 'some of the highest users of state services...[are] a primary focus of state intervention' (Hill et al., 2004: 77). Children are another group who lack power: 'one constant theme in much writing about children's rights is the deep sense of powerlessness and exclusion felt by children and young people' (Roche 1999: 478). Increasingly some children, together with adult advocates and analysts, are promoting an understanding of children as citizens in an attempt to counter that sense of powerlessness and exclusion (Lister, 2007).

An example is a JRF report on young children's citizenship. According to the editor, Bren Neale, it 'sets out a new way of "seeing" children...as young citizens with an active contribution to make to society' (Neale, 2004b: 1). She defines citizenship for children as 'an entitlement to recognition, respect and participation' (*ibid.*). Among the key challenges for the future, she suggests, is 'to find ways to integrate citizenship and welfare for children more effectively in public policy and professional practice' (*ibid.*: 2).

The main obstacles to doing so are dominant assumptions about children's lack of capacity and competence, in particular to be rational, and their dependent status (with echoes of the reasons used in the past to deny women citizenship). However, such assumptions are now being challenged. According to a UNICEF report, while capacities evolve with age, in practice the actual ages at which a child acquires competencies vary according to her life experiences and social and cultural environment on the one hand and the nature of the competencies and the situations in which they are acquired on the other. At every stage, the report argues, regard must be had to 'children's right to respect for their capacities', yet in practice 'adults consistently underestimate' them (Lansdown, 2005: 15). Furthermore, 'one of the most fundamental challenges posed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the need to balance children's rights to adequate and appropriate protection with their right to participate in and take responsibility for the exercise of those decisions and actions they are competent to take themselves' (Lansdown, 2005: 32).

There are countless instances of where children have shown themselves to be competent in the skills and capacities required for participation as citizens, including quite young children. Some British examples are provided in the JRF report (Neale, 2004a). A UNICEF document draws on experience in a wide range of countries to highlight 'the capacity of children to take

responsibility once they are treated with respect and helped to acquire the necessary competence' (Lansdown, 2001: 24). Sheridan Bartlett, editor of a collection of papers reporting on participatory initiatives with children in both the global North and South, including children's participatory budget councils in Latin America, points to 'the truly significant contributions' that they are 'able and eager to make' (Bartlett, 2005: 9). He concludes that 'it is clear from these papers that inclusion, consultation and the delegation of responsibility to children and youth can have very practical benefits, and that young people can contribute a unique and often unexpected and independent perspective' (*ibid.*; see also Boyden and Levison, 2000).

The papers underline the potential value of such initiatives in strengthening children's citizenship. The same is true of other analyses of children and young people's participation, which document how they equip them with the skills and capacities necessary for effective citizenship and strengthen their 'sense of belonging to the community' and 'their sense of citizenship' (Cutler and Frost, 2001: 6; Kirby et al., 2003: 3). Kirby and Bryson document the benefits of 'good participatory work' as 'confidence, self-belief, knowledge, understanding and changed attitudes, skills and education attainment' (Kirby with Bryson, 2002: 5). A group of children and young people who were involved in an ESRC seminar wrote that 'being involved in this project has opened our eyes and we no longer live in our own "little bubbles". We are aware of what goes on around us and how it affects everyone' (www.uwe.ac.uk/solar/ChildParticipationNetwork/Participation.htm).

Kirby and Bryson's reference to 'good participatory work' is qualified by the proviso that 'token involvement may not' have such beneficial effects (Kirby with Bryson, 2002: 5). Elsewhere, Kirby et al. point to a 'mushrooming of participation activity' in recent years (Kirby et al., 2003: 3). Although their study was of 'genuinely participatory practice', they warn that 'there is still much work to be done in ensuring that this participation is meaningful to young people, that it is effective in bringing about change and that it is sustained' (*ibid.*). Other research attests to the breadth of participatory initiatives with children and young people but also the unevenness of their quality and effectiveness and of adult responses to their views (Hill et al., 2004; Neale, 2004a; Oldfield and Fowler, 2004; Tisdall and Davis, 2004; Cockburn, 2005; Cairns, 2006; Tisdall and Bell, 2006). The conclusion reached by many is that despite 'the rhetoric on participation, achieving the goal of meaningful participation of children in policy-making remains as elusive as ever' (Spicer and Evans, 2006: 178).

Some theorists of children's participation have deployed Peter Moss's conception of 'children spaces', which embraces the notion of social, cultural and discursive as well as physical space. Children's spaces:

are spaces for children's own agendas, although not precluding adult agendas, where children are understood as fellow citizens with rights, participating members of social groups in which they find themselves agents of their own lives but also interdependent with others, co-constructors of knowledge, identity and culture (Moss, 2006: 186).

Hills et al. argue that ‘participative relationships are thus fundamental to the idea of children’s spaces’ (Hills et al., 2004: 84). Moreover, adults need to recognise children’s spaces other than those provided by adults themselves: ‘those territories and pathways claimed by children for their own purposes in myriad locations within the areas they inhabit and visit’ (*ibid.*). The distinction between children’s spaces created by adults and those created by children themselves echoes Andrea Cornwall’s categorisation of participatory spaces into ‘invited spaces’, where citizens are invited to participate by statutory or voluntary organisations, and ‘popular spaces, arenas in which people come together at their own instigation’ (Cornwall, 2004: 2). It is harder for children than adults to develop popular participatory spaces. Nevertheless, there are examples such as the international children’s organisation, Free the Children, which, according to Daiva Stasiulis, ‘advances a view of children as empowered, knowledgeable, compassionate and global citizens’ (2002: 507).

Children may not enjoy all the rights associated with citizenship but there needs to be greater recognition that their citizenship practice (where it occurs) constitutes them as *de facto*, even if not complete *de jure* citizens (Lister, 2007). Bartlett underlines the contribution that participatory initiatives make towards this process and ‘towards expressing an authentic commitment to the human dignity and rights of people of all ages’ (Bartlett, 2005: 16). As in the literature on poverty, a recurrent theme is that participation has to be built on recognition and respect on the one hand, while effective participation constitutes tangible expression of such recognition and respect on the other (Lansdown, 2001, 2006; Kirby et al., 2003; Neale, 2004a; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). One of the ‘main things’ that the young people involved in the ESRC seminar wanted was ‘to have our opinions valued and treated with respect’ (www.uwe.ac.uk/solar/ChildParticipationNetwork/Participation.htm).

Some themes and lessons

Looking at the literature on children’s participation and that of people in poverty, as well as that on participation more generally, it is possible to draw out some common themes. These will be presented as a series of propositions. The first set raises a number of issues around the capacity and resources necessary for participation (Lowndes et al., 2006a). The second concerns aspects of the process of participation. In addition, the right not to participate is also acknowledged. While it is important to understand the specificities of the situation of the two groups, the lessons for inclusive policy-making and for agencies committed to developing it are remarkably consistent.

Effective support and capacity-building are usually necessary

While I have argued here that it cannot simply be assumed that children lack the capacity for citizen participation, experience suggests that nevertheless effective support and capacity-building may often be necessary to help children participate effectively (Kirby with Bryson, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003; Cockburn, 2005). As Prout et al. observe in their analysis of the resources children need to participate, ‘recognising existing skills and calling for the

development of new ones is not contradictory, especially for groups that have been stigmatised or excluded' (2006: 90).

This raises a more general issue about the immediate capacity to participate among people who have previously been denied the opportunity to do so and who have been marginalised and 'Othered'. Fung and Wright point out that the capacities to deliberate and participate 'atrophy when left unused' (Fung and Wright, 2003: 28). They suggest that participatory initiatives can function as 'schools of democracy by increasing the deliberative capacities and dispositions of those who participate in them' (*op. cit.* 32). Beresford and Hoban, on the basis of a review of participatory anti-poverty projects in the UK, conclude that 'capacity building to support people's empowerment' can be needed to challenge both a 'history and sense of disempowerment' (2005: 34). They explain that 'it means supporting people to have new confidence, skills and understandings. It frequently involves helping people to learn to work together and with other groups' (*ibid.*).

Personal and practical barriers to participation need to be overcome

Lack of confidence is one of the multiple, over-lapping barriers to participation identified by the Commission on Poverty Participation and Power (2000). Some of these barriers are more personal, deriving from the experience of poverty itself; some are more practical such as lacking the 'tools' that professionals take for granted. Children too face both personal and practical barriers. In both cases, barriers are created by lack of personal, financial and practical resources (Lowndes et al., 2006a; Prout et al., 2006).

Overcoming institutional barriers requires more inclusive organisational cultures, structures and capacity-building.

Other barriers are created by institutions, wittingly or unwittingly. A recent Institute for Public Policy Research report concludes that 'what institutional structures are established, and how political, managerial and civic players behave in the context of these structures, makes a difference to the likelihood that citizens will engage' (Lowndes et al., 2006b: 2, 2006a). Making 'invited spaces' genuinely inclusive citizenship arenas requires inclusive organisational cultures and structures (Cornwall, 2004: 9; Kirby with Bryson, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003). Organisations themselves need to acknowledge that they and their ways of working have to change instead of placing the main onus of change on those they are inviting to participate (Cockburn, 2005; Skidmore et al., 2006; Spicer and Evans, 2006).

This is not necessarily recognised by officials themselves. A study by Newman and colleagues found that they tended to talk more about the public's need for 'capacity building' or 'empowerment' than public services' need for 'fundamental cultural change in order to engage with the public effectively' (Newman et al., 2004: 212-3). Many analysts of participation nevertheless conclude that professionals and officials do indeed need capacity building forms of training so that they are better equipped to engage in participatory ways of working (CoPPP, 2000; Kirby with Bryson, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003). This could be backed up by building participation into appraisal system criteria, targets and performance measurement (CoPPP, 2000). Such

measures would also strengthen the position of those officials and professionals who are supportive of participatory ways of working (Newman et al., 2004; Oldfield and Fowler, 2004).

Effective participation requires time

A key resource for all those involved in participatory ways of working is time (CoPPP, 2000). Participatory decision-making takes time. It is an on-going process that has to be nurtured, not a 'quick fix solution' (Farrell, 2003: 1, Cook, 2002). This can come into conflict with government requirements for quick decisions and implementation so as to show political results. Time constraints erect a further barrier to creating genuinely participatory spaces for marginalised groups (Kirby with Bryson, 2002; Spicer and Evans, 2006). A study of the NDC in the East End of London reported that despite 'much expectation and support amongst local people...the speed of development required is undermining the community development commitment to empowerment at local people's pace and causing a sense of exclusion amongst local people from the programme' (Dinham, 2005: 309).

Exclusionary forms of participation must be avoided: venue, meeting style and modes of communication are important factors.

Dinham's observation echoes a common message: that it is all too easy to engage in participation in ways which are exclusionary rather than inclusionary, particularly when involving groups such as children or people living in poverty. Whether or not participatory spaces are inclusive depends on factors such as the physical venue and the manner in which meetings or other forms of participation are conducted (Spicer and Evans, 2006). So, for example, the East London NDC study found that 'many reported feeling "put off" by styles of meetings and the venues in which they are held and some said they did not feel able to attend meetings and groups ;because they did not know what to expect and felt intimidated by what they might find' (Dinham, 2005: 306). All of the resident members of the elected partnership board who were interviewed 'felt disempowered in board meetings and held back from speaking at meetings for fear of appearing foolish' (op. cit.: 307).

A study of Local Strategic Partnerships also found that 'community members were frequently unfamiliar with and intimidated by the formal language and structures of governance roles' (Maguire and Truscott, 2006). The importance of the kind of language used cannot be underestimated. The Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (2000) found that what particularly angered people was the use of jargonistic language, which is experienced as exclusionary. Drawing on Iris Marion Young's (2000) theoretical exposition of the ways in which form of political communication can either exclude or include marginalised groups, Barnes et al. analysed the 'micropolitics of deliberation'. They observed the way in which 'the types of discourse that are recognized, legitimated and exchanged in these forums, particularly professional and procedural discourse on the part of officials; and lay and experiential discourse on the part of the public create' a space which 'can encourage or discourage participation' (Barnes et al., 2004: 275).

Similarly the JRF report on children's citizenship points to how adults can use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication 'to signal their power and to constrain children's voices' when supposedly involving them (Marchant and Kirby, 2004: 111-2). It argues that 'skills in consulting with and enabling the participation of children should be a required competence for everyone working with children, and the development and safeguarding of participatory cultures should be a priority in all settings' (Marchant and Kirby, 2004: 95; see also Kirby with Bryson, 2002; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006).

Start where people are at and reach out to them

As Beresford and Hoban put it, it is partly about starting where people are at and valuing their perspectives 'rather than assuming (often wrongly) that they will be familiar with "your ways" of doing things and thinking about them' (2005: 34). It also means reaching out to people rather than waiting for them to come forward – particularly those who are most marginalised and least likely to be heard - and developing 'accessible and "user-friendly" structures and processes' (*ibid.*) with clear ground rules that enable the involvement of diverse groups. The need for clarity of purpose and the establishment of explicit ground rules is underlined by those writing about children's participation too (Lansdown, 2001; Spicer and Evans, 2006).

Inclusion of the most marginalised members of any group or community – often described pejoratively as 'hard to reach' – is a particular challenge for ensuring that participatory policy-making engages with all those potentially affected. Dee Cook asserts

the need to avoid the term 'hard-to-reach' which is not only stigmatizing, but falsely assumes homogeneity among the individuals with the groups so labelled. We should, rather, focus on positive attempts to identify and engage those individuals and groups who are not currently or usually participating in consultation (Cook, 2002: 525; see also Spicer and Evans, 2006).

A recent Demos/JRF study concluded that it is perhaps unrealistic to expect everyone to be actively involved in formal participation activities. Thus, reaching out to marginalised groups should also mean taking the participation to them:

changing the structures so they fit people's participation is likely to be more productive than changing people's participation so it fits existing structures. For example, instead of trying to corral the young people who attend a youth club or mothers in a playgroup into getting involved in governance, we should ask how governance can get involved with them (Skidmore et al., 2006: 3).

Two further propositions follow from the observation that not everyone can be expected to engage in participatory activities. These concern the right not to participate and the need to think about the links between those who do and do not do so.

*The right **not** to participate must also be respected*

One response to the kind of arguments developed here is to question the expectation that marginalised groups should participate in policy-making. As the journalist Polly Toynbee put it in relation to residents of disadvantaged estates: 'It is strange that it is always the people with fewest resources, struggling the hardest against the odds, who are the ones who are expected to galvanise themselves into heroic acts of citizenship' (Toynbee, 2003: 129). Of course, participation should not be seen as obligatory – another demand that makes people feel even more inadequate if they are unable to meet it or another mechanism for disciplining people in poverty. Nor in the case of children should their right to be children (as understood in particular cultural contexts) be subordinated to the higher calling of the demands of citizenship in an instrumental way, which mirrors the dominant political construction of children as citizens (indeed citizen-workers) of the future (Lister, 2003b, 2007).

Create and strengthen accountability links

One consequence of acknowledgement of the right not to participate is the need to create better links of accountability between those who do participate and other members of the community (Dinham, 2005; Skidmore et al., 2006). This helps to address accusations that those who do participate are not 'representative' (Taylor, M., 2006) – an issue frequently raised with respect to both children and people living in poverty (Lansdown, 2001, 2006; Maguire and Truscott, 2006). One response is that given by one of the Commissioners on the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power: people do not have to be representative provided they act as 'connectors' (CoPPP, 2000: 17). From the perspective of children, Lansdown underlines the responsibility on adults to ensure that the structures are there to help children who do participate to maintain a dialogue with their peers and 'to encourage the development of child-led initiatives at local level that can serve to generate cohorts of children able and mandated to speak on behalf of their peers' (Lansdown, 2006: 145, 2001).

Redress power imbalances where possible and acknowledge and make transparent those that remain

Accountability mechanisms however may not be sufficient of themselves to ensure that the voices of the most marginalised and isolated get heard. Informal power relations within marginalised groups and communities may serve to exclude some members. Power relations also shape and permeate participatory spaces (Cornwall, 2004). As mentioned earlier, both childhood and poverty are characterised by degrees of powerlessness. The literature on the participation of both groups emphasises the need to address the question of power (for a wider discussion, see Newman, 2001: 132-3; Taylor, 2005). Kirby et al., for instance, write that:

to develop positive relationships with children and young people adults need to redress the power imbalance, although this does not (and cannot) necessarily mean equal power in all situations. Power is displayed in everyday behaviour and language, and it is this that adults

need to change (Kirby et al., 2003: 9; see also Kirby with Bryson, 2002).

Lansdown emphasises the need to make power relations transparent so that 'children understand from the beginning what decisions can be made and by whom' (2001: 10). But true participation, she warns, also involves some ceding of power by adults (see also Lansdown, 2006). In practice, in the UK, 'critics point to the limited extent to which participation tends to empower children whilst serving and legitimising adult/professionally driven agendas' (Spicer and Evans, 2006: 178). Davis and Hill suggest that if participatory processes are to change existing power relations, it will at the very least 'require reflective practice by practitioners to examine assumptions about children' and their capacities (Davis and Hill, 2006: 12).

The self-determined title of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power reflects the significance its members attached to the question of power. Its report underlines that its work and the wider issuer of participation are 'about the shift in power that is needed if people experiencing poverty are to have a real voice in the decisions which affect their lives' (CoPPP, 2000: 6). This conclusion was quoted by Beresford and Hoban in their study of participatory anti-poverty work as typical of the messages from a number of participatory initiatives. 'Any attempt to initiate a participatory process' therefore, they add, 'needs to acknowledge the current realities, the existing power relations and the nature of current forms of representative participation' (Beresford and Hoban, 2005: 25).

Beyond the invited participatory spaces themselves power relations inevitably come into play in determining the response of policy-makers: 'the power of the institutions to then sift out what messages from participation it [sic] will highlight, listen to and actually act on' (Tisdall and Bell, 2006: 115; Cairns, 2006). As David Taylor observes, the views expressed in participatory exercises can 'flounder on the rocks of established practices or the silence of the powerful'. It is necessary therefore 'to address wider power relations and how the voices of marginalised groups can illicit a response which is more than tokenistic' (Taylor, 2005: 616).

Participation must be genuine: open agendas and feedback

This leads into the final lesson, which comes across over and over again: participation must be genuine. 'For people to participate on a sustainable basis they have to believe that their involvement is making a difference' (Lowndes et al., 2006a: 289). Two key issues are the extent to which participation is circumscribed by pre-determined agendas and the presence, or more commonly, absence of feedback.

The literature is critical of instrumental or 'consumerist/managerialist' approaches to participation in which agendas are set from above (Beresford, 2002). Even where attempts are made at local level to create genuinely participatory spaces, as observed earlier with reference to the NDC these can be circumscribed by government priorities and targets (Dinham, 2005; Spicer and Evans, 2006; Wright et al., 2006). The importance of feedback and

follow-up emerges from analysis of participatory initiatives generally as well as those with marginalised groups (Kirby with Bryson, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003; Barnes et al., 2004; Newman et al, 2004; Beresford and Hoban, 2005). The lack of feedback which is typical of many participatory exercises symbolises what is often experienced as phoney participation. It can invalidate the process and leave participants feeling as if they and their views do not count (Cook, 2002). Lowndes et al underline how lack of feedback can deter engagement:

Research shows that one of the biggest deterrents for participation is citizens' perception – or previous experience – of a lack of response. For people to participate they have to believe that they are going to be listened to and, if not always agreed with, at least convinced that their view has been taken into account...Responsiveness is about ensuring feedback, which may not be positive...Feedback involves explaining how the decision was made and the role of participation within that...If something affects you, you should be able to make your case and have it listened to: but you cannot be guaranteed a positive outcome (Lowndes et al., 2006a: 289; see also Maguire and Truscott, 2006).

In this way feedback can clarify divisions among participants: not all people living in poverty or all children will necessarily have the same views about policies, reflecting both the cross-cutting divisions within these groups and personal preferences. At the same time, feedback can nevertheless reassure those whose views do not prevail that the exercise has been genuinely participatory and that their voices have been heard.

A clear message to the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (2000), however, was that all too often this is not the case. Participation was in danger of becoming a dirty word for people with experience of 'token' or 'window-dressing' participation or of superficial consultation exercises, limited to impenetrable questionnaires and/or from which they had seen no positive outcomes or even feedback. Many felt more exploited than empowered by what went for participation. The message the Commission learnt from this was that 'people experiencing poverty see consultation without commitment, and phoney participation without the power to bring about change, as the ultimate disrespect' (CoPPP, 2000: 18).

Similarly, with regard to children, Bartlett cautions against treating participation and voice as a panacea, for 'there is plenty of evidence here that simply establishing participatory structures and opportunities...is no guarantee of their effectiveness' (2005: 9). A critical factor is whether such structures allow 'scope for meaningful action' (*ibid.*). Important too is the quality of the relationships involved. According to Neale 'without due recognition and respect, children's participation may become an empty exercise, at best a token gesture or, at worst, a manipulative or exploitative exercise. "Real" citizenship, then,' she argues, 'involves a search for ways to alter the culture of adult practices and attitudes in order to include children in meaningful ways and to listen and respond to them effectively' Neale, 2004c: 9; Marchant and Kirby, 2004).

Conclusion

Neale's use of a discourse of recognition and respect places the issue of children's participation firmly within the recognition paradigm of social justice. As an edited collection on recognition struggles explains, 'recognition has been grounded in normative political theories of justice, citizenship and democracy in which inclusion, rights, and membership are the cornerstones' (Hobson, 2003: 2). Moreover, 'struggles for recognition are and have been very much struggles for political voice' (Phillips, 2003: 265).

Similarly, although poverty is typically understood within the distributive paradigm of social justice and a politics of redistribution is essential to tackling poverty, the demands of people living in poverty for recognition, respect and voice mean that poverty needs also to be understood and addressed within the recognition paradigm as part of a politics of redistribution and of recognition&respect (Lister, 2004). These two dimensions of justice – the economic and the cultural –, together with the principle of inclusive *political* citizenship, are necessary to achieve Fraser's ideal of participatory parity.⁴ Inclusivity in policy-making is thus an important building block not only of citizenship but of a wider, related, politics of social justice.

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² ATD Fourth World is an international human rights organisation working in partnership with families experiencing long-term poverty, to develop their potential and to enable them to participate fully in the life of their communities.

³ Different schemes have been developed in the devolved administrations.

⁴ In her most recent work, Fraser (2005) has acknowledged the importance of this third, political, dimension to justice (see also Thompson, 2006).