

Regulating Participation: The Possibilities and Limits of Children and Young People's Councils

Michael Wyness

INTRODUCTION

Dominant sociological theories of change have identified more intensified networks of control within which we find children. Some authors have emphasised a shift towards late or post-modern society as a period of both opportunity and uncertainty with much looser social and moral attachments. Individualisation is the predominant social process with gender, class and community much less potent social frames of reference (Beck, 1992). Whilst children do not figure within these theoretical frameworks, the control of children has become central to adults' attempts to cope with post-modern trends. Other authors, more concerned with the effects of these trends on children, have teased out the contradiction between the post-modern emphasis on self-realisation and the tightening of regulatory frameworks within which we find children (Moss and Petrie, 2002).

At the same time academics and professionals working with and writing about children have started to challenge these regulatory frameworks within which we find children and young people. Various concepts, which imply a loosening of the structures of control such as voice, agency and participation, are invoked when examining the contexts within which we find children (Prout, 2000; Mayall, 2002). Moreover commentators have now started to make links between childhood and citizenship in an attempt to recast the relations that children have with adults (Moss and Petrie, 2002). To this end participatory structures for children in England and Wales have been promoted within civic and educational contexts, local authorities and schools appear to be taking children's opinions more seriously, creating youth councils, which in theory further the interests of children and young people.

In this paper I want to address these contradictory trends by examining the relationship between the regulatory framework and participatory forums which offer a political space for children and young people and by implication a means to some degree of 'self-realisation'. Drawing on illustrative material from recent

empirical research carried out in England, the paper assesses the extent to which the imperative to regulate young people's lives compromises initiatives that aim to strengthen the abilities of children and young people to participate and retain a degree of autonomy.

In the first part of the paper I set out the dominance of control and regulation as key features of relations between adults and children. Drawing on recent theorising on late-modernity I argue that despite the centrality of individualisation as a context for identity formation, children are actually less likely now to have the cultural and political space to explore the boundaries of a late modern society. The illustrative material is drawn from a recently completed piece of research on children and young people's political representation in educational and civic contexts¹. The research concentrated on young people's involvement in school and town councils in three sites in Central and South West England. The project is discussed in more detail in part two. In part three, I address the educational context, first of all, and in particular, the relationship between school councils and the imperative to control within schools in England and Wales. In part four, I adopt a case study approach in illustrating the relationship between control and the civic councils involving children and young people. I assess the extent to which different modes of participation have potentially different effects on this relationship.

Control, Self-realisation and Participation

Whilst control is a key theme within theories of late modernity, the emphasis is on processes of self-control linked to more individualised notions of 'self-realisation' (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Within this broad theoretical framework self-control primarily refers to the adult population, with children paradoxically subject to greater forms of 'external' control. The logic of modernity is the need to take more control of social, political and economic environments. Beck (1992) refers to the expansion of corporate capitalism across national boundaries in the

second half of the 20th century in the pursuit of profit and material growth and the concomitant rise in scientific knowledge. Capitalism makes more demands on welfare systems to produce a more educated workforce. At the same time it produces a reaction or critique to this use of knowledge in the pursuit of profit, in particular, a greater awareness of the environmental costs of economic growth. Whilst the pursuit of economic growth has largely alleviated the worst effects of material scarcity in western societies, it has also generated powerful, but often invisible, risks to health and the quality of life. As a consequence individuals within western cultures have become both more knowledgeable and critical about themselves and their social worlds.

This reflexivity reaches down into the consciousness of the adult individual providing broader, more flexible contexts within which the self can be monitored and refashioned. Conventional (modernist) social frames of reference are weakened producing levels of social fragmentation and flux. Beck (1992) refers to the declining significance of a range of external collective influences: the nation/state, social class, gender, community and the nuclear family no longer provide unambiguous building blocks and life trajectories in the structuring of who we are. Individuals are said to be relatively freer now to pursue a range of moral, professional and social careers.

Children's positions within late modernity are interesting here. Rather than being seen as social actors drawing on a wider range of resources in constructing their identities, they become the projects of adults, to be shaped and moulded. Despite the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that stresses the welfare of children, children's dependence, obedience and their subaltern status become central to adults as they seek to re-centre themselves within a context of moral and social flux. By implication late-modern constructions of childhood become a form of moral rescue, a means by which adults try and recapture a sense of purpose and belonging. Jenks (1996) refers to this as nostalgia: "the child becomes a longing for times past... The trust that was previously anticipated from marriage, partnership, friendship, class solidarity and so on, is now invested more generally in the child" (1996, p. 19).

Concessions are made to children in order to maintain an attachment to them. Children are

granted leeway and much more time is invested by parents in finding the right carers in situations when they cannot look after their children themselves. More significantly adults' feelings of insecurity are projected on to their children through the tightening up of mechanisms for controlling them. Thus parents' fears for their children cover a range of contexts, from playing on the street through to their use of the Internet. This in turn generates a range of strategies for keeping their children close. For example, routine everyday actions such as the marked increase in transporting of children to school has been partially attributed to what Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn (1998) refer to as 'parental risk anxiety', the fear that children are no longer safe walking to school on their own.

If we turn to children in the professional and institutional context, there is a similar emphasis on adults taking fewer risks with children and imposing more stringent controls on their development and movement. For Moss and Petrie (2002) the modernity project is one of control and regulation, dominating policy and professional practice on children and childhood. Education is a good example here: children are increasingly caught within a complex network of demands placed on teachers, administrators and parents to produce childhood as a quality product for future consumption. Policies on homework, curriculum guidance and child care within early years education emphasise work done on children from an early age framed in terms of their 'needs'. Broadly speaking, the notion of needs assumes that childhood is a deficit model of personhood and that children's needs have to be met by adults in order for them to attain personhood (Qvortrup, 1994; Woodhead, 1997). Children here are transitional objects, with adult regulation the means to shaping their futures as citizens and workers. Moss and Petrie (2002, p.101) talk about this model of the child as "private and dependent, needy weak and poor". Moreover, children become objects or projects in the sense that the work done on them by professionals is judged against a balance of inputs and outputs, what is referred to as a "new technology of control" (Moss and Petrie, 2002 p. 79). Here the *performances* of both child professionals and children are being measured. This performativity also characterises schooling for older children. Pressures from policy makers in many Western societies have resulted in schools becoming more

competitive: teachers are more selective and discriminatory, the curriculum more oriented to economic need (Gillborn and Youdell, 2001). Thus adults need to be seen to be taking control and responsibility, erring on the side of keeping children close and restricting their access to 'risky' public and private spaces.

Sharon Stephens (1995) takes a similarly critical line in identifying regulatory processes that compromise any residual autonomy that children may have. She associates childhood with other 'domains of nature' such as the animal world and the physical environment that have now been colonised as protective social spaces and brought within the vocabulary of 'risk' and rights. Paradoxically children have been brought within these social spaces as a way of protecting their status as 'natural' biological entities in need of nurturing and protection. Problems such as child abuse and school disaffection are being tackled through more concerted state action: formerly private arrangements between children and adult authority figures are now under more public scrutiny. These processes have had global implications. Not only are western children and families being exposed to more 'internal' regulatory demands, children in quite different cultural settings, are subject to similar demands with economically active children on the streets and in factories becoming "colonial projects" for international organisations (Stephens, 1995, p. 16). According to this view a form of cultural imperialism is taking place with constructions of childhood in developing countries being subsumed within more dominant models of the welfare child.

Despite, the rise of processes of individualisation, the control of children's lives still dominates our thinking about childhood. The regulation of children is linked to their lack of ontology: they are both investments in the future and the representation of past certainties within an adult world suffused by social and moral flux. If we turn to alternative constructions of childhood we start to identify children as constituent members of society, ontologically established as young citizens with full personhood. By implication we are also referring to the loosening of regulatory structures within which we find children. In locating children as part of the here and now with their own interests and commitments, we are also implying new spaces for children, ways in which children and young

people become part of the process of self-realisation.

One way of starting to think about how children might develop the means for self-realisation is by exploring the idea of children's interests. Here I am referring to a less established set of ideas that assume children have a degree of agency. That is, children are capable of making a difference, having an influence over some aspect of their lives in unison with others (Mayall, 2002, p.21). The idea of interests takes children rather than adults as the primary reference point, treating them as full members of society rather than being on the social periphery as social actors-in-waiting. Children mediate themselves in that there are channels through which children can make claims and hold others accountable for their actions. In effect, children have an audible voice with respect to factors that influence their lives. We might also stretch this idea of agency to include their involvement in local and public matters. Children's 'interests' is thus quite different from the familiar refrain of adults acting in children's best interests, which is difficult to reconcile with the idea of children having a voice or actively expressing an opinion.

In returning to theories of late modernity the emphasis is on the effects of individualisation within the adult population. Prout (2000) argues that if we apply the same analysis to children the opportunities for self-realisation are limited. Adults still dominate children's lives with residual effects on children as agents. Concerns for children's safety, development and welfare are powerful political and social imperatives. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that children are more assertive within the private sphere of family where there are some expectations among the young that parents need to now earn their children's respect. By implication this gives children more space within the home to negotiate through an 'ethic of reciprocity' (Holland and Thomson cited in Prout, 2000, p. 308).

Within the public sphere, particularly in the United Kingdom, this space is still very limited. As I shall argue later, there is the potential for children's self-realisation within the civic and political realms. However, the current situation is more advanced in other European countries (Casman, 1996). There is a well-established system for representing young people at the local political level in France (Matthews and Limb, 1998) and at the national level in the Scandinavian

countries (Prout, 2000). In these countries there is some attempt to collectivise children's interests and take them seriously.

Within an education context Europe again takes the lead. Students are more organised politically and have some access to educational structures at local and national levels (Davies and Kilpatrick, 2000). In England and Wales, as I argued earlier, pupils' lives in school are governed by ideas and discourses that project them into the future as citizens and workers. Given that education is part of a broader public context of intense control of children, how do we reconcile this trend with initiatives that are trying to incorporate children and young people within the public realm as full members of communities with access to decision-making processes? In the following analysis of school and civic councils we examine the tension between structures of control and opportunities for the expression of children and young people's interests.

The Research Sites

Data will be drawn on from a study of young people's participatory and representative structures in educational and civic contexts. We will say more about these contexts and their relationship to children's interests in the following sections. At this stage I merely want to outline

the fieldwork from which the data is drawn. The school and civic councils were located in England within three research sites, chosen for their distinctive social, cultural and geographic characters (See Table 1). Research was in the first place conducted with the civic councils from each of these sites. Local schools from Coronation and Marleybone provided the civic councils with members. These schools also provided us with school councillors. Jubilee was a city youth council, which did not feed directly into schools within the city. Schools councils from within this area were chosen from schools on the basis of knowledge and experience that the adult coordinator working with the city council had of schools within the city.

The fieldwork took place between March 2000 and May 2003 and consisted of:

- Interviews: both individual and group interviews with 110 councillors and 24 relevant adult coordinators from both educational and civic councils.
- Observation: between two and six meetings per civic council and in five of the six schools observation of between two and four school council meetings.

Methodologically, the research was grounded in the understandings that key actors involved with the councils had of their roles and responsibilities. There is no attempt to try and

Table 1: The school and civic councils located in England within three research sites, chosen for their distinctive social, cultural and geographic characters

<i>CIVIC SITES</i> <i>SCHOOLS</i>	<i>Coronation</i>	<i>Jubilee</i>		<i>Marleybone</i>		
		<i>West End</i>	<i>East End</i>	<i>Copper Street</i>	<i>Golden-gate</i>	<i>Silver-side girls</i>
Social Geography	Small town, rural setting, white, mixed social class	Midlands city centre, working class, ethnically diverse	Midlands city centre, working class, ethnically diverse	Small town, white, mixed social class	Medium sized town, white, affluent residential area	Medium sized town, white, residential area
Number of Pupils	1100	955	567	1200	1300	750
Council Structure	Class, key stage* and whole school councils	**Upper, lower and 6 th form councils	Single school council	Single school council	Upper and Lower councils	year councils
Levels of Representation	Elections at class and key stage levels	Elections at class level	Elections at class level-	Elections at class level	Elections at class level	Elections at class level

*The National Curriculum in England and Wales created two key stages within each secondary school. Key stage 3 consists of students aged between 11 and 14 (years 7-9); Key stage 4 consists of students aged between 14 and 16 (years 10 and 11).

**Upper = Key Stage 4 years 10 and 11 (ages 14-16). Lower = Key Stage 3, years 7, 8 and 9 (ages 11-14)

generalise from the following; I merely want to use the data for illustrative purposes.

The Interstitial Status of Pupil Voice

The context within which we find school councils presents us with something of a paradox: children in numerical terms are a majority population in schools but lack any means through which this numerical superiority has any clout politically. Thus, whilst schools are quint-essentially children's places, there is little sense in which children own these places or have any control over how they are organised, run or structured. What we find in English and Welsh schools is that compared to other children's sites such as the home and the peer group, schools are over regulated, children's lives are over-determined by a plethora of formal and informal rules and regulations (Mayall, 2002). What is more, as was mentioned in the first section, dominant conceptualisations of children's positions within the education system, point to greater forms of regulation in schools.

Given this backdrop of regulation, the school council has an ambiguous relationship with staff, students and school structures. In terms of its content, its structure and the timing of meetings, the council occupies an interstitial space between pupil and school. The council is not quite central enough to the main business of education, at the same time it hovers uneasily between a political space that reflects students' interests and the regulatory imperatives of a late modern educational agenda.

Content

The introduction of citizenship education as a compulsory part of the national curriculum in England and Wales was taking place towards the end of the period of data collection. Given the emphasis on 'political literacy', student involvement within the community and to a lesser extent, the issue of student voice in school as key themes within citizenship education, the research schools were revising their assessment of student representation and in some cases resurrecting what had previously been moribund school councils (QCA, 1998). In all six schools members of school management teams were in the process of taking greater control of the form and content of the councils. In each school a citizenship coordinator had been appointed in the previous

12 months and in three of these schools they had been given responsibility to oversee the school councils.

There was no unanimity over the link between school councils and citizenship education. Broadly speaking their importance in the school was couched in terms of the language of inclusion, responsibility and democracy. Whereas two coordinators thought that both these ideas illustrated the possibilities for more democratic representation in school, others emphasised that school councils and citizenship education were vehicles for the heightening of students' sense of personal responsibility. This meant giving the councillors more direct experience of 'taking responsibility' and having the council act as a model of social responsibility in relation to the other pupils. Thus ideas about citizenship and school councils oscillated between pupil democracy and the dominant political discourse with the UK on balancing responsibilities with rights (Roche, 1992).

If we go on and look at the content of the school councils in terms of their agendas, there was a clear tension between what we might call student interests and what the teachers saw as big educational issues such as teaching and learning and behaviour. Students had considerable autonomy in terms of setting the agenda. However, as I mentioned in the previous section, school management was having to respond to a more centralised agenda. In four of the six schools, teaching staff were very critical of the issues and debates generated by the students during council meetings because they could not be easily incorporated within this dominant educational agenda.

We examined 15 sets of council agendas from 5 of the 6 school and along with the observational data we found that the most common items were school dinners, toilets, access to prohibited areas and charities. From the teaching data there was a sense that many of these kinds of issues were seen as being unrealistic and short term, reflecting a limited and parochial understanding of their roles within schools. The following quote from a deputy head at one of the schools illustrates this point:

(W)hen we first started they (the councillors) came to the student council with all sorts of unrealistic requests... we want more chips on our plates, we want a vending machine and we want lockers and we want non uniform days every

other week and less homework and all those sorts of things. And that's how they see their role and slowly as the year went on they've now understood that their role isn't that... Their role is to look at teaching and learning and the whole school education issues as well and they are now far more realistic about the things that they request (Deputy Head, Jubilee, West End)

There were similar attempts at regulating the council agenda at one of the other schools Coronation High. The deputy head had some ambitious ideas about involving the students in almost all aspects of running the school from drafting policy on bullying through to the recruitment of teachers. For him the problem was partly the parochial nature of their interests but also the relatively unadventurous nature of the council agendas. When asked what he thought the students wanted, he responded:

I don't know. It's linked into them not knowing what they want. They're dealing with stuff that doesn't really matter. For the sake of argument I am being provocative. They're dealing with canteen prices. Now I suppose that boils back to the business of their consciousness of what does and doesn't matter but they are involved in very safe areas.

What was effectively happening here was that teachers were positioning pupils as their moral inferiors (Mayall, 2002, p. 99). There was no complete rejection of students' interests: staff were well aware of the advantages of school councils in defusing the problems found in highly undemocratic institutions. It must also be said that these 'narrow and safe', agenda items could easily be interpreted differently as commitments to fairness, social justice and the school as a community (Rudduck et al, 1998; Wyness, 2003). However, for the staff school councils were also an important means of incorporating students into the 'bigger' educational process of socialisation. Ironically, attempts to regulate council agendas were partly about bringing children into the educational centre in schools. Whilst some of the claims to strengthening children's involvement in teaching and learning, behaviour and teacher recruitment were somewhat rhetorical, there was a commitment to making student participation more central within decision-making processes in school. Arguably this was at the cost of commitments students had to what they considered to be their own interests.

Structure

In structural terms there was some lack of clarity in relation to the position of student councils. If we refer back to Table 1, we can see some variation in levels of representation, from the single school council with two representatives from the seven year groups at two of the schools, to the more elaborate network found at Coronation which linked class, key stage and whole school councils together. In the latter case the council structure was relatively new having been rejuvenated after years of what the coordinator referred to as "tokenism". In theory agenda items were generated upwards and downwards from class to whole school levels and back. Whilst whole school meetings at Coronation were lively, busy and good humoured affairs attended by between 40 and 50 councillors from all years, there was a growing commitment among the staff to thinning the council down and making it more manageable. After one of the meetings the coordinator intimated "the meeting went well but was a bit too big to make decisions. The smaller executive group will be important for this".

In the previous section I referred to the way that the school council was sometimes being used by the staff to socialise the younger councillors; advocating sensible adult-centred policies was part of the process of growing up in school. There was a parallel sense in which the new council at Coronation was 'growing up'; the streamlining of the council structure meant fewer but arguably more effective student voices. If we compare Coronation with the two single council schools, then this growing up meant fewer levels of representation and a more direct communication between representatives and students. It would also make it much easier for school management to monitor the agenda. East End and Copper Street schools were contrasting schools in terms of social geography, but they both had much simpler structures, fewer meetings and from the point of view of the staff, a smaller more manageable group of councillors. At Copper Street meetings were determined by the head on an ad hoc basis with the older councillors. The head was relatively new in the school, coming to grips with staff and students, but she had a much more direct involvement in the council making it easier for her to shape the council's agenda. In an interview with the student councillors:

INTERVIEWER: How often do you meet as a

whole group?

ALICE: It's kind of when the Head can see the need²

JANE: Generally we put comments in all the time. She does it around her own needs.

INTERVIEWER: So who sets the agenda?

ALICE: It's kind of a mixture isn't it really.

TOM: It tends to be the Head and her clerk. We put in our complaints, suggestions and comments from a year level and she compiles it³

Age was a significant if complicating factor. On the one hand, it acted as an obstacle to making councils more manageable. Students' interests were variegated usually by age, and the councillors were keen to slow down the centralising process, particularly the younger ones who sometimes felt intimidated by older students in the same forum. On the other hand, the dominant organisational force in schools is developmental, with chronological age acting to segregate students in school. Irrespective of the need to make student representation more manageable, there was a 'natural' tendency to think about the councils in these developmental terms.

Timing

Within schools a distinction is often made between 'class time' and 'pupil time'. Class time is time for the curriculum, teaching and learning, the nub of education and schooling. In one sense class time is school time; real and significant, where social action counts, where children work, where the structures of schooling are geared towards the child as a future worker and citizen. Pupil time, on the other hand, is residual time, quite simply time left over after the work has been done. This distinction is not absolute – pupil time within school is still heavily regulated. However, children still feel that they have some control over how they spend their lunch and break times (Christensen and James. 2001). The question of where we locate council time within this temporal classification is an interesting one. As with the content and structure, the timing of the meetings occupied an ambiguous temporal space in the research schools.

In four out of the six schools council meetings took place during class time. In two of these schools the meetings had been shifted from lunchtime to class time. The councillors interviewed at Goldengate, one of the schools where meetings took place during the lunch

period, were ambivalent about the timing of meetings. They were all committed to their roles as student representatives. At the same time they talked about the difficulties of trying to fit in lunch and lunch time clubs with council meetings. There was the recurring theme of councillors having to 'give up' something to attend meetings. This 'giving up' for the most part was about losing pupil time. In the schools where council time was incorporated into school time, there was much more student support, a stronger sense that they were being taken seriously.

From the teachers' vantage point there was often a struggle in trying to find a time for meetings within 'class' time, which did not compromise the pupils' coverage of the curriculum, the teachers' professional sensibilities and outside pressures from parents. Because of its interstitial status, council time needed to be carefully managed by the coordinator:

it (the council) is taking time out of lessons as well which means they (the pupils) are losing lesson time to do it but we think it's probably a worthwhile compromise. Parents seem to be happy with that at the moment. They would have five lessons out in a term doing school council work, so it would be five lessons they'd miss. Sometimes we do give them two choices, if one really can't go because they've got a really important meeting, there's a deputy that can take responsibility for it (citizenship coordinator, Coronation school).

Time was a scarce commodity in schools and the commitments that teachers made to fitting student voice into the timetable had to be balanced against the interests of more powerful groups inside and outside the school.

The Civic Context: Children as Interlopers

In turning to the civic councils the institutional backdrop is quite different. Whereas the school is familiar to children, the town hall and civic chambers are part of the political realm, part of the adult world from which children have been traditionally excluded. Despite children's historical involvement in political and armed struggle and their continuing involvement in a range of global conflicts, the association of childhood and politics is morally counter-intuitive in western cultures. The political child is seen as an aberrant category of childhood that is at odds with children's subaltern position within the social

structure (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992). Thus what is distinctively different about the civic context as a political space within which we find levels of participation for children, is the quintessentially adult nature of town and city councils. The regulatory context is thus not quite so transparent as the school: there is no clear blue print to follow when structures for representing children are created.

This lack of any pre-existing organisational arrangement has meant greater variation in types of civic forums for children, anything from groups who meet on the street to more formalised arrangements with the local authorities. From the research the councils approximate to the latter but reflect quite distinct modes of representation. There is an electoral accountability model, which follows a formal electoral model, and a more youth oriented approach where civic councillors saw themselves as advocates for young people within a broader network of youth organisations and groups. Of the three councils in this study, one followed the former route to student voice and the other two civic councils approximated to the latter. For the purposes of illustration we will look at Marleybone, a town council that took an electoral line and Jubilee a city council that took a more 'youth' oriented approach.

Marleybone Student Town Council

Marleybone civic council was institutionally distinct from the school councils in two ways: the constituencies of young people go beyond the school gates with civic councillors ostensibly representing a local geographical area, and in terms of content, councillors were concerned with local rather than educational issues. However, the school system was significant in terms of structure and timing. As with the school councils, age influences the shape of the council with the six local schools sending four elected representatives from years eight and nine (ages 13 and 14). There was an electoral process in each of the schools whereby prospective candidates canvas support culminating in an election held on the same day in each school.

As with the schools there was a similar problem timetabling the councillors, with the schools sending the councillors to the council chambers twice a term during the school day. Thus the students were attending council business in school time. The significant difference

here was that the students were physically out of school giving them a stronger sense of ownership of this time. This was reinforced by what both coordinators called an "arms length policy" with regards to the relationship that the civic council had with the 'feeder' schools. This separateness was partly a product of their own positions within the council: they saw themselves as professionals who were there for the students rather than a liaison between the students and the schools. As one coordinator argued "building relations with the student councillors was more important than building links with the schools". She went on to argue that council time was quite distinct from school time despite the overlap between the two. One of her aims was to encourage and support the students in dealing with what she saw as the undemocratic nature of schools. Her aim was to encourage the councillors to deploy their political skills honed within the civic council in confronting things that happened in school rather than relying on the advocacy skills of the coordinators.

Whereas the school teaching staff were trying to feed school council activities into the citizenship curriculum, there was little sense that the content of council meetings tied into any educational agenda. There was some ambiguity in relation to adult influence over the council agenda. Despite attempts to minimise the influence of local school staff, the civic council's agenda was largely dictated by a local context dominated by what the adult council thought the student council should be discussing with some input from the student councillors on the margins. From the data the councillors felt that they could make some contribution to the council agenda, but the overall character and pace of the meetings was carefully managed by the coordinator. This reflected the idea that came through the interviews with the adult coordinators that the 'youth' council was shadowing the adult version in form and content.

There was also some ambiguity around the issue of socialisation articulated by the adult coordinators. Stress was placed on "action rather than just consultation: they ought to be treated as real councillors, giving them a taste of local government". In this sense socialisation was limited to providing them with opportunities to experience local politics at first hand. At the same time assiduous effort was made to protect the councillors from the 'political' nature of their

roles. One issue that came up in interviews with adult coordinators at Marleybone was the idea of 'undue influence', which has historically restricted attempts to politically socialise young people in English and Welsh schools (Wyness, 2003). The civic councils were no exceptions with adults emphasising the 'dangers' of exposing children to ideological or party political ideas. Thus whilst, there were serious attempts to see them as younger versions of the adult councillors, they were also well aware of their 'adult' responsibilities and the kinds of the limits this placed on the work they did with the student councillors.

Jubilee City Youth Council

As with Marleybone there was an 'arms length' policy in relation to the schools at Jubilee city youth council. This was articulated by the councillors as well as the two adult coordinators and underpinned their rejection of an electoral approach to recruiting members. The youth advocacy approach to student representation placed the accent on horizontal links spread across the city's youth organisational network. There were no elections: none of the formal trappings of conventional liberal political structures. Strictly speaking, the councillors were self-appointed advocates of young people rather than elected representatives.

The council was loosely structured with only occasional links with the adult city council. Whilst many of the issues on the council agenda were similar to Marleybone relating to raising the profile of young people locally, there was a much more overtly political and confrontational feel to their activities. The youngsters had a much broader approach to their participation within the city, verging on a form of cosmopolitan citizenship (Delanty, 2000). Among other things, in the first half of 2003 the council was preparing for a visit to Hungary, linking up with other European youth groups, and there was the organisation of city and national demonstrations against the UK government's support of the war that was currently taking place in Iraq. They were also highly critical of what they saw as 'tokenist' attempts by national politicians to connect with the predominantly disenfranchised youth vote. For example, the young councillors had been invited by the local Member of Parliament to a breakfast meeting. One of the councillors commented:

The word pompous always springs to mind because you sit there and you pretend, it's a joke more than anything. It looks good... I don't know if he (Member of Parliament) had a press release but in his first one there was a huge article in the paper. "XX shall be meeting with young people". It's just a means of tokenism (Joe, aged 16).

Apart from some overlap in membership in the civic council and the two city school councils' researched, there were few ties with the schools. The coordinators and councillors were heavily critical of school councils, they were seen as being highly unrepresentative, with membership contingent on social and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Thus school councils were said to be dominated by popular white middle class achievers. Young people on the margins were unlikely to have a voice. James, at 16 had two years experience on the council but had left the council about a year earlier and had only recently rejoined. He talked about his experience in school councils.

The problem with something like that is that disaffected young people, young people who don't abide by the expectations of society, they are still not included. What happens if you're expelled from school or young people that are the rebels at school that nobody is actually going to want to listen to?

Interestingly he was also highly self-critical in relation to the kinds of young people recruited for the civic council.

I think that the disaffected young people are never going to have a seat on the youth council and it's the sad reality of it and therefore we'll never be fulfilling our aims and spending our money on what we say we do as representing the views of all young people. One of the reasons why I stopped coming to meetings was because I was put off by the whole idea that this is really not so much a youth council as a social group for some middle class people and a chance to get opportunities...I think in fairness it probably is but the reason why I came back is that somebody has to try to make a difference and that's all I'm trying to do.

Whilst James' views were not shared by all members of the council, there seemed to be agreement that there was more space on the civic council to shape the agenda than at school. Moreover, there was little criticism of the civic councillors by the adult coordinators: little tension between youth and adult interests. There was no

obvious political or institutional agenda clashing with the civic councillors activities.

Finally, there was much less ambiguity about the ownership of their council time. Students attended meetings in the evenings and their activities took place during the weekends and in the vacations. There were pressures on their time with meetings having to be squeezed between home time and school time. There were also issues relating to the lateness of meetings, particularly during the winter. Notwithstanding these points, students had a much stronger impression of autonomy and a feeling that their time was not so constantly monitored by adults.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that forums for promoting student voice and the interests of children and young people have a complex relationship to dominant social structures and ideas. Late modern society is characterised by the loosening of conventional ties and the broadening of social frames of reference. The emphasis on individualisation, reflexivity and self-realisation implies fewer external controls. However, closer examination of late modern society suggests more rather than less control of children as adults seek to re-centre themselves in social, moral and professional terms. Regulation appears to be an immanent feature of children's lives. That is to say, children are routinely subjected to a range of formal and informal controls that position them as dependents and incomplete persons. School and civic councils, on the other hand, take us in a different direction. For the aims of these forums are to promote greater participation among children and young people and give them greater access to decision-making processes from which they had been hitherto excluded. At one level the data in this paper confirm the latter viewpoint: both adults and children involved advocated giving children a voice on and some influence over matters that affected them. By implication children were being recognised as social agents and young citizens. At one level, then, there is an attempt to break with rigid regulatory relationships between children and adults and incorporate children within settings that reflect the contemporary mood for self-realisation.

However, a closer examination of these forums reveals the tension between control and self-

realisation at a number of other levels. I have argued that the school council and, to a lesser extent, the civic council occupied an interstitial position within their respective institutional contexts. They were structurally ambiguous, neither providing clear political spaces for the expression of children's interests nor being clearly locked into the business of socialisation and education. Within the schools, despite this anomalous status, there was a strong imperative to regulate school councils in terms of space, timing and content. The school councils presented us with something of a paradox: the hierarchical and formalised relationships between students and teachers made it easier to organise a system of democratic student representation and participation. The over-determined nature of schooling provides the organisational grounds for student voice.

Teachers' attempts to locate student voice within the educational mainstream generate questions around the meaning and significance of students' interests, especially where staff sought to undermine the latter. If we compare this with attempts to incorporate council meetings within the timetable, there was more support from the students rather than the staff. Council time as school time was taken as an indicator of the 'grown up' nature of the school council. Whether there is student commitment to these processes or not, the centralising of pupil representation either through the curriculum via citizenship education or by locating meetings in class time risks compromising the extent to which children have any ownership of their voice.

The impetus to control the form and content of political spaces for children and young people was not so intense when we turn to civic councils. Unlike the schools there was no pre-existing structure within which children were tightly located. Civic councillors occupied a different political space, outside of any obvious 'child control' structures. There were, though, significant differences between the two case studies of civic councils referred to in this paper. Marleybone, the town council, fed into the local school structure via the electoral system, but the adult coordinators were committed to maintaining control of the council at a distance from the schools. Jubilee city council, on the other hand, eschewed any formal links with education and rejected a conventional political approach on the

grounds that it was too close to the schooled version of student representation. Interestingly, Jubilee councillors seemed to be saying that elections were too formal and bureaucratic, in short, too adultist. The commitment to more informal and non-representative structures was seen as a means of retaining autonomy and some distance from the administrative centre. There appeared to be more space to be reflexive and critical and given the restrictions on the other civic and school councils, more space to be political. Interestingly, global, social and single issue based forms of political action do not quite square with attempts by policy makers and educationalists to encourage young people to adopt quite specific forms of conventional political action (QCA, 1998).

Whilst there is a general commitment to student voice and by implication the freeing up of space for children and young people, there remains an ambiguity as to the purpose, vision and overall character of school and civic forums. This ambiguity reveals itself through tensions outlined in this paper that feed in to the contradiction discussed earlier between control and self-realisation. In the first place there was a tension between student and school interests with the latter subsuming the former within dominant educational agendas. In the second place the very idea of participation seems to generate conflict with dominant political and educational agendas shaping the form that political participation takes despite the commitment of one of the civic councils to less conventional modes of political action.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank Karen Hedges for the fieldwork.

NOTES

- 1 The project, 'Young people, citizenship and political participation: comparative case studies of young people's councils' was funded by the British Academy, project no: SG31775.
- 2 The names of respondents and schools are fictitious and where possible the confidentiality of the pupils' responses is maintained.

- 3 The 'secretary' was sometimes the designated member of staff, sometimes a school councillor who took notes at the meeting.

REFERENCES

- Beck, U. 1991. *Risk Society*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu P. and Passeron J. 1990. *La Reproduction*, London: Sage
- Casman, P. 1996. "Children's Participation: Children's City Councils", in: E. Verhellen (Ed.) *Understanding Children's Rights*, Ghent: Children Rights Centre: 174-183.
- Christensen, P. and A. James. 2001. "What are Schools for? The Temporal Experience of Children's Learning in Northern England", in: L. Alanen and B. Mayall, (eds.) *Conceptualising Adult-Child Relations*, London: Routledge Falmer: 70-85.
- Davies, L. and G. Kilpatrick. 2000. *The EURIDEM Project: A review of pupil Democracy in Europe*, London: Children's Rights Alliance.
- Delanty, G. 2000. *Citizenship in a Global Age*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Gillborn, D. and S. Youdell. 2001. "The New IQism: Intelligence, 'Ability and the Rationing of Education", in J. Demaine (Ed) *Sociology of Education Today*, Basingstoke: Palgrave: 65-99.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-identity*, Cambridge: Polity
- Jenks, C. 1996. "The Post-modern Child", in: J. Brannan and M. O'Brien (eds.) *Children in Families: Research and Policy*, London: Falmer: 13-25.
- Matthews, H. and M. Limb. 1998. "The right to say: the development of youth councils/forums within the UK", *Area*, 30, 1: 66-78.
- Mayall, B. 2002. *Towards a Sociology of Childhood: Thinking From Children's Lives*, Buckingham: Open University.
- Moss, P. and Petrie, P. 2002. *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Prout, A. 2000. "Children's Participation: Control and Self-Realisation in British Late Modernity", *Children and Society*, 14(4): 304-315
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 1998. *Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools*, London: HMSO.
- Qvortrup, J. 1994. "Childhood Matters: an introduction", in J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G.
- Sgritta and H. Wintersberger (Eds) *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*. Aldershot: Avebury: 1-23.
- Roche, M. 1992. *Rethinking Citizenship*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rudduck, J., G. Wallace and J. Day. 1998. "Consulting Pupils about Teaching, Learning and Schooling", in: H. Horne (Ed.) *The School Management Handbook*, 5th Edn London: Kogan: 97-108.
- Scott, S., S. Jackson. and K. Backett-Millburn. 1998. "Swings and roundabouts: risk anxiety and the everyday worlds of children", *Sociology*, 32, 4: 689-705
- Stainton-Rogers, W. and R. Stainton-Rogers. 1992. *Stories of Childhood*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Stephens, S. 1995. "Children and the Politics of Culture

- in 'Late Capitalism', in S. Stephens (ed.) *Childhood and the Politics of Culture*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 3-48.
- Woodhead, M. 1997. "Psychology and the cultural construction of children's needs", in A. James & A. Prout, (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, second edition, London: Falmer: 63-84.
- Wyness, M. 2003. "Children's Space and Interests: Constructing an Agenda for Student Voice", *Children's Geographies*, 1, 2: 223-239.

KEYWORDS Control; interests; representation; self-realisation; civic and educational realms

ABSTRACT In recent years in the UK the links between childhood and citizenship have been strengthened through the introduction of participatory structures for children and young people. At the same time the extending of children's civic involvement at town and national level and the greater significance attached to student involvement in school affairs has been matched by a growing demand for adults to regulate these new political spaces. These demands arguably reflect a more underlying imperative to control children's lives that flow from broader structural social changes. Drawing on case study material from research into children's representative forums in educational and civic contexts, the paper examines the implications this regulation has for the articulation of children and young people's interests. The paper identifies a commitment among both children and adults to incorporating 'student voice' within existing institutional structures. However, there were competing conceptions of 'children's interests' and existing institutional arrangements tended to have the upper hand in shaping the form and content of these children's forums.

Author's Address: Michael Wyness, University College Northampton, Northampton, NN2 7AL, United Kingdom.

E-mail: mike.wyness@northampton.ac.uk