

# Rewired: Scoping National Youth Voice in Music

## Literature Review

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November 2015



WIRED4MUSIC

 National Foundation for  
Youth Music

 Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**  
LOTTERY FUNDED

## Introduction

Before commencing our research into scoping existing youth voice in music nationally, it was important to gain an understanding of what is meant by youth voice, what has already been documented within existing literature and what has been highlighted as good practice. As youth voice within music is a relatively new and burgeoning field, literature around youth voice within the arts specifically is particularly scarce. It is therefore important to look to records of youth voice within different settings and to understand the concept in broader contexts.

## Roger Hart

When researching youth voice, a focal point and strong foundation for further research is Roger Hart's essay, 'Children's Participation – from Tokenism to Citizenship', commissioned by UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in 1992. Hart writes, '*Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship*'.<sup>1</sup>

**Hart uses the word 'Participation' to refer generally to the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives.**

Hart sets a precedent here for literature surrounding youth voice and the term 'participation' has since become commonly acknowledged and embedded into language surrounding youth voice by other authors of such literature. For example, Phil Treseder in his 1997 essay for Save the Children, writes that participation is '*a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change*'.<sup>2</sup>

Hart sets standards for measuring youth participation within a community setting; a model which can be adapted for young people and children involved in specific projects within a musical setting. Based on Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' created in 1969<sup>3</sup>, Hart has devised a tool evaluating and assessing the various levels of youth participation phases that a project may go through, commonly known as Hart's 'Ladder of Children/Youth Participation'. There are eight 'rungs' of the ladder, varying from non-participation (manipulation, decoration and tokenism) to a position where young people and adults share decision-making.

<i>Participation:</i>	
8	Young people and adults share decision-making
7	Young people lead and initiate action
6	Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
5	Young people consulted and informed
4	Young people assigned and informed
<i>Non-participation:</i>	
3	Young people are tokenized
2	Young people are decoration
1	Young people are manipulated

Hart's ladder is now universally known as a tool for measurement of youth participation within varying settings of projects and activities, and although many authors have replicated, revised or created their own versions of this model<sup>4</sup>, it is undoubtedly Hart's ladder that holds precedence as an accessible and comprehensible tool, which is adaptable to different projects in varying settings.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Hart (1992) *Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship* (Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> P. Treseder (1997) *Empowering children and young people* London: Save the Children.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Participation-Models-20110703.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Participation-Models-20110703.pdf>

Hart's essay gives a detailed account of policy surrounding the rights of children, and refers throughout his essay to the 1989 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Whilst for the most part Hart praises the Convention, acknowledging that it *'has significant implications for the improvement of young people's participation in society'*, he also finds elements of the Convention problematic. Hart writes:

*'The Convention, being more concerned with protection, does not emphasize the responsibilities which go along with rights. Children need to learn that with the rights of citizenship come responsibilities. In order to learn these responsibilities children need to engage in collaborative activities with other persons including those who are older and more experienced than themselves. It is for this reason that children's participation in community projects is so important.'*<sup>5</sup>

Hart highlights that whilst policy on the rights of young people is essential to their opportunity for participation, it is essential that young people feel responsible and therefore gain ownership of a project in order for them to fully embrace the rights they are entitled to. It is in this way that Hart trailblazes thinking around youth voice for the following decade, with his thoughts being echoed in more recent literature surrounding youth voice such as that of Luke Dickens and Dougie Lonie.

In one of their most recent articles, yet to be published, Dickens and Lonie use case studies to further emphasize the importance of young people's emotional literacy within youth voice projects: *'...a sense of ownership in the space by the young people was an essential feature in their authentic voices being heard'*.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly prominent in that Dickens and Lonie write specifically about youth participation within a non-formal music education setting. Like Hart, Dickens and Lonie focus on the benefits of young people taking responsibility and collaborating with those older and more experienced than themselves in order to take the lead on their own musical projects. They do acknowledge, however, that non-formal music education as a platform for young people to have a voice and be heard is an idea that is not without critique, as is demonstrated by Mark Rimmer's 2009 essay, *"Instrumental" playing? Cultural policy and young people's community music participation'*:

*'...the governance and funding structures of such projects were often so tightly predetermined that they threatened to stifle precisely the kinds of developmental benefits of music-making that they sought to promote.'*<sup>7</sup>

Here, Rimmer discusses the idea of a complex argument against 'art for art's sake' versus, as described by Dickens and Lonie, *'a more instrumental view of art as providing a 'vehicle' for broader development'*.<sup>8</sup> He pulls our attention to an issue surrounding youth participation policy also discussed widely by Dickens and Lonie, explaining that music-making activities created for young people so often have to 'tick boxes' and align with criteria set out funders and policy makers that it can, as Rimmer states, 'stifle' the true, organic creativity of a music project. This is an argument explored heavily in Lonie and Dickens' soon to be published 'Are you listening?' chapter, where they discuss in detail the concept of what they call 'The Arts Council Dilemma'.

## Ownership

Dickens and Lonie provide a remedy to this issue of policy driven youth led music activity in their 2014 chapter, 'Rehearsal Spaces as Children's Spaces? Considering the Place of Non-Formal Music Education', published in *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth*. They draw our attention to Moss and Petrie's 2002 observation: *'Where children set the agenda, play is a central activity'* (Moss & Petrie 2002, p.131) suggests that the making of music in such contexts can be an important end in itself<sup>9</sup>. With the suggestion that by having ownership over their own activity, children and young people can create spontaneity, Dickens and Lonie provide the antidote to not only the problem of policy driven

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<sup>5</sup> R. Hart, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> D. Lonie & L. Dickens (in press) 'Are you listening? Voicing what matters in non-formal education policy and practice' in Blazek, M. And Kraftl, P. (eds.) *Children's Emotions in Policy and Practice: Mapping and Making Spaces of Childhood*.

<sup>7</sup> M. Rimmer (2009) 'Instrumental' playing? Cultural policy and young people's community music participation', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 15(1)

<sup>8</sup> Lonie, D. & Dickens, L. (in press) 'Are you listening? Voicing what matters in non-formal education policy and practice'

<sup>9</sup> D. Lonie & L. Dickens (2014) 'Rehearsal Spaces as Children's Spaces? Considering the Place of Non-formal Music Education' in Kraftl, P. and Mills, S. (eds.) *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth*, p.168.

youth activity within music, but also within most other contexts. If children and young people take the lead on planning activity that is being created for them, then they can benefit all the more from it. This again, takes us back to Hart's original definition of 'participation'; by sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives, young people can make choices which will allow them to shape their own futures in the best way for themselves, their ambitions and most importantly their enjoyment.

## **A Starting Point**

These various pieces of research are merely a starting point in taking a look at how youth participation has come to exist within music over the last few decades, the issues it faces and how it can be embedded within current practice. What can be taken as a clear starting point from each of these is that there is a real need for a more open dialogue between young people and the people able to support them throughout their musical journeys. In speaking about the development of Sound Connections' youth sector, Wired4Music, former Programme Manager, Lawrence Becko, writes about youth participation in the arts:

*'Sometimes we simply forget to listen to what young people are saying, believing 'adults know best'...Ultimately, the extent to which youth participation, voice and leadership can be encouraged will depend on the abilities, commitment, resources and 'buy in' of each organisation, their staff, and the young people themselves.'*<sup>10</sup>

What must come with this is a strong element of trust from any organisation wanting to help their young participants take the lead. If organisations take this leap of faith and are able to level the playing field within decision making between them and the young people they're working with, they can achieve and gain so much more. By taking ownership over their musical participation, young people can voice their opinions freely, achieve more and get the most out of a project that has been designed specifically to suit their needs. In return, organisations can gain new perspective and understanding of the young people they're working with, save money and resources by creating projects that will be successful for their participants and support young people to create new opportunities for themselves and progress within their own musical journeys.

*"Give us the opportunity and we'll show you the possibilities."*  
- Wired4Music Manifesto (2014)

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<sup>10</sup> L. Becko, p.3.

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