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**Young People as Citizens.  
A Case Study of Participation and Change in County Durham.**

**Liam P Cairns**

**M.A. Thesis**

**University of Durham**

**School of Education**

**2003**

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**13 JUL 2004**

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### **Acknowledgements**

A large number of people have contributed to the ongoing debate which has informed this thesis. There are too many to acknowledge by name, but I would like to recognise the central role played by the following groups:

- ◆ The children and young people with whom we have worked, who have participated enthusiastically in the *Investing in Children* project. The lessons we have learned are primarily the results of their efforts.
- ◆ The *Investing in Children* workers and consultants. Their willingness to critically examine new ideas and analyse events has provided the environment within which much of the thinking has been done that lies behind this thesis.
- ◆ Key officers and elected members in the partner agencies, who have been prepared to support *Investing in Children* as a learning organisation.

The one exception to these collective acknowledgements is Professor Bill Williamson, who, by holding a mirror up to the project, has helped us to identify what we have learned.

Having said this, the views contained in this thesis are mine alone, and I accept full responsibility for them.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction.**

In 1995, a group of senior managers from public and voluntary organisations formed a working party to discuss issues concerning the provision of services to children, young people and their families in County Durham, a large, semi-rural local authority in the north east of England.

Although it is not possible to know the motivation of every member of this group, it is clear that key individuals were concerned about the negative stereotypes of children and young people being promoted in the media at this time, and the effect this was having upon children and young people themselves ( Shenton 1999). Their intention was clearly to initiate a new debate, albeit within the narrow confines of local authority policy and services, about our attitude to children and young people. They were seeking to challenge the way we think about children and young people, and to engineer a change in the status of children and young people in society

The outcome of their deliberations was the adoption of a set of values and principles, based upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. They produced the following Statement of Intent:

***Our aim is to work in partnership with children and young people to promote their best interests and enhance their quality of life.***

*We will achieve this by:*

- ***Consulting with children, young people and their families about decisions affecting their lives and the development of services;***
- ***Promoting partnerships between individuals and agencies to address young people's issues;***
- ***Developing accessible children and young people and family-centred services that promote dignity and independence and which do not discriminate or stigmatise;***
- ***Ensuring that, when making decisions on policies and services, consideration is give to their potential impact on the lives of children and young people.***

***The values that underpin our work with children and young people are consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 1989.***

Muscroft sums up the broad vision of the UN Convention thus:

*“Children are seen as full human beings, right-holders who can play an active part in the enjoyment of their rights. They are not – as they have often been presented in the past – mere dependants, the property of their parents. They are not people who only become full human beings when they become adults. They are in need of protection but also have strengths. Every child is seen as important, no matter what its abilities, origins or gender. Their views and opinions are significant. They are not to be seen merely as victims, workers, young offenders, pupils or consumers, but as complex and fully rounded individuals.”* ( Muscroft, 1999, p16 )

In 1997 the working party established a project, *Investing in Children*. The purpose of the project was to explore and address some of the issues thrown up by the adoption of these principles and values. The realisation of the vision of the Convention as described above would require a radical change in the way we think about children, and in the way children and young people are treated, particularly by the key institutions concerned with them.

This thesis is a response to a perceived weakness in the structure of *Investing in Children*. In discussion in the project’s management group, concern was expressed that the lessons we were learning were not being fully explored. Much of what was being discovered was remaining inside the project, the property of the young people, the workers and some of the partner agencies. It was recognised that there was a need to stand back and *reflect* upon the progress being made, and to make the learning available to a wider audience.

*Investing in Children* has been and continues to be an experimental initiative within the field of children’s rights. The purpose of this thesis is to critically examine the potential for social change provided by the children’s rights perspective, and its limitations. By this we mean the extent to which this perspective affords an effective means to analyse the current status of children and young people in society, and to develop an emancipatory discourse, one which “opens new visions and alternative futures” ( Gergen, 1994, p63).

We will use *Investing in Children* as a case study. We will use the data gathered by *Investing in Children* to explore questions about the status of children and young people in the UK at the beginning of the twenty-first

century. In particular, we will consider in detail the opportunities and limitations provided by the current discourse on the citizenship rights of children and young people. We will make an important distinction between approaches to citizenship which present children and young people with the opportunity to participate in the civic life of their community and so achieve change, and approaches which see such participation as an end in itself, as preparation for the time when children become adults and the rights and duties of full citizenship can be assumed.

Children and young people occupy an ambiguous position within society. They are seen as innocent and vulnerable and in need of adult care and attention, and at the same time dangerous and unpredictable and in need of adult control and discipline. They are simultaneously regarded as the focus of adult aspirations for the future, to be nourished and protected, and as a threat to the current order, to be feared and suppressed. ( Brown 1998, Jenks 1996, Rogers 2001) A review of the literature would suggest that this ambiguity has existed, certainly in western societies, for centuries. A number of commentators have proposed that this is becoming more pronounced. For example, Brown notes that children are “constructed through policy not as citizens, but as increasingly repressive modes of governance. As adult anxiety and punitive desire escalate, the (metaphorical) body of the delinquent is carved up to serve popular appetites, and effectiveness and rationality are increasingly subsumed under ideological imperative”. ( Brown, 1998, p116). It is part of the argument being advanced in this thesis that whilst children and young people remain politically voiceless and powerless, there will be little change in their status in society.

In chapter three we will explore these contradictions by examining the dominant discourse on childhood: “the concepts of children and childhood, the language through which these concepts are thought and expressed and the social practices and institutions from which, ultimately, they are inseparable.” ( Pilcher and Wagg, 1996, p1-2)

We will trace the development of some of the conflicting strands of the discourse, with particular reference to events in the UK in the early 1990s. These brought some of the more negative and extreme characteristics of the discourse into sharp focus, and also provided the backdrop and indeed the motivation for the creation of *Investing in Children*..

The concept of children as a separate group, in possession of particular rights, has been around since the nineteenth century. Hammarberg points to the role played by women such as Eglantyne Jebb, in carrying the banner

for children's rights at the beginning of the twentieth century, and sees a connection with their own recent experience of the struggle for emancipation. (Hammarberg, 1995, p19). Following the carnage of the Second World War there was heightened international interest in the need for a universally acceptable definition of human rights. The children's rights debate developed as a related subject for discussion. The debate intensified in the last quarter of the twentieth century, reaching a crescendo of sorts with the publication of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was ratified by the UK in 1991. Every country in the world, with the exception of the US and Somalia, has now ratified the convention.

We will consider the significance of these developments, with particular reference to the political rights of children: "while many of the rights in the UNCRC are not controversial, as they are based upon traditional concerns for the welfare and protection of children, the participation or citizenship rights of the UNCRC are qualitatively different" (Foley, Roche and Tucker, 2001, p5).

In 1973, children's rights were described by Hilary Rodham, (better known latterly as Hilary Clinton), as "A slogan in search of a definition." ( as quoted in Freeman, 2000, p ). We will look critically at how this search has been conducted, and some of the particular steps taken in the UK to translate rhetoric into reality.

We will also examine the most recent discussion about active citizenship, and the introduction of citizenship as a subject in the national curriculum in schools. This presents a particularly interesting example of how contradictory ideas can be accommodated with apparent ease within the same institution. As Jeffs suggests, "No institution impinges upon the daily lives of children more than schools, and none is more contemptuous of their opinions, or the concept of democracy." ( as quoted in Alderson, 1999, p201)

Against this background, in chapters four and five we will examine the creation and trace the development of *Investing in Children*. Drawing on data from the initiative's archives, we will attempt to identify the key learning points from the activities of those associated with the project. We will pay particular attention to the role played by children and young people themselves in this process. It has become more and more apparent as the project developed, that it is the children and young people themselves who have made the most significant contribution, and from

whom we have most to learn. Hendrick observes : “It is important to understand that children neither present themselves, nor are they usually presented by adults, as political figures.” He goes on to add: “If this situation is to be rectified, we have to be extraordinarily sensitive to their *standpoint*, rather than their parents, teachers, social workers and others” (Hendrick, 2000, p55). I would argue that the most significant achievement of *Investing in Children* has been to our sensitivity to this standpoint, and our recognition of the ability of children and young people to be political agents on their own behalf.

*Investing in Children* strives to be a learning organisation. We will reflect upon the strategies that might be seen as effective in that they resulted in some change. We will also look at the (more frequent) attempts to create opportunities for the political voice of children and young people to be heard which have not been effective (or not been effective yet.)

The past ten years has seen a proliferation of children’s rights and children’s participation projects across the UK and elsewhere, which has been well documented. (e.g. CRO, 1995, Treseder, 1997, Chamberlain, 2001, Durham County Council, 2001). Part of the argument presented here is that *Investing in Children* is qualitatively different from other initiatives for three important reasons:

- The emphasis placed upon children and young people (supported by adults) discovering for themselves what they want to say, and how they want to say it. In this respect, adults have nothing to **teach** young people, although there is an opportunity to learn together.
- The crucial importance of dialogue allows us to explore not only how children and young people choose to contribute, but also how the system must change to accommodate their contribution.
- Participation must be understood, not as an end in itself, but as a means to achieving the political end of promoting an emancipatory discourse on childhood.

Over the last five years, *Investing in Children* has built up an archive of documents in which children and young people have commented on issues of significance to them. Using evidence from this archive, in chapter four and five we will sketch out how the discourse on children is actually perceived and experienced by some children and young people in County Durham at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century.

It could be argued that that the picture which emerges lacks balance, as the views of the adults are not as strongly represented , but it is one of the

primary purposes of this thesis to introduce a previously unheard voice – that of young people – and the adult voice – the ‘official position’ – is assumed to be well known.

This evidence represents at least a challenge to the dominant adult perception of the nature of childhood. It is part of the argument being advanced in this thesis, that, as Brown and others have argued, the absence of the authentic voice of children themselves in the public discourse about childhood is one of the main reasons why they occupy such a marginal and vulnerable position within society. ( Brown, 1998) We need to critically examine the potential of *Investing in Children* to support an emancipatory discourse on childhood.

*Investing in Children* is an explicitly political enterprise. It seeks to promote the legitimacy of the rights of children and young people to be participants in dialogue and decisions which effect them. A necessary and central question then is how children and young people perceive *Investing in Children* itself, and included in the material from the Archive is comment from young people about their views on the project itself.

Finally, in chapter six, we attempt to summarise the arguments and draw some conclusions from the evidence presented. At the heart of this thesis is the belief that the dominant discourse on childhood condemns them to a peculiarly vulnerable position within society. The representation of children and young people as objects of adult concern, or works in progress, or naturally unruly and in need of control and socialisation, but never as competent agents and citizens with rights confines them to a state of impotency and at the mercy of adults, some of whose commitment to their welfare, as history sadly teaches us, cannot always be relied upon. The refusal to accept that children and young people are credible witnesses to their own lives has often meant that society has been deaf to their complaints of injustice and their cries of pain.

Evidence from *Investing in Children* clearly demonstrates that this state of affairs is not inevitable, and that, given the opportunity, children and young people are knowledgeable about the world in which they live, and can be powerful participants in political dialogue and persuasive advocates on their own behalf.

....

## Chapter Two: Methodology

This thesis is an attempt to make sense of what has been achieved over the past six years. The evidence upon which our analysis is based is drawn from a number of sources:

- My own role as a *participant observer* is clearly a key factor, and this is explored in greater detail below.
- The role of *young people as researchers* is an important part of how the project works.
- Over the past five years, *Investing in Children* has generated a considerable *archive*, and part of the methodology has been to draw from this rich source of material. Much of the archive is made up of the records of the attempts of children and young people to influence the world around them. This provides data on both how some young people have been able to work with *Investing in Children*, and, in their own words, how they view their world.
- Given the experimental nature of the project, the workers, partners and young people have had to constantly assess and reassess the tactics and strategies adopted in pursuit of our aims. This has provided a degree of *reflexivity*. A crucial ingredient in the process of making sense of what we have learned has been the role played by Bill Williamson, as study supervisor for the thesis. He has provided a further degree of *reflexivity* through our regular meetings.

### *Participant Observation.*

In many ways, I have been more closely associated with *Investing in Children* than anyone else. This thesis consists in large part, of my interpretation of the evidence put forward. But of course I am not an independent dispassionate academic researcher – I have a standpoint, and my role within the project provides a particular perspective. To that extent, this is an insider view of what has been learned in the process of the development of *Investing in Children*.

This does not make my role as researcher invalid. Shenton comments that there “has been a growing recognition, strengthened by the development of feminist approaches in the field of social research, of the need for a broader and more democratic research process”. In relation to participatory action research, she quotes Reason thus: “These approaches to enquiry through participation need to be seen as living processes of *coming to know* [my emphasis] rather than formal academic method” (Shenton, 1999. p12). This

point is expanded by May, who observes: “..the idea of disengagement to produce ‘untainted data’ is something of a myth, and is based upon a particular view of ‘scientific procedure’ challenged by feminists, post-modernists and those who generally emphasize the reflexivity in the research process.” (May, 1997, p153)

I would argue that my position within *Investing in Children* has given me unique access to the learning that has been created. Davis acknowledges that the values of the researcher impact upon their research, and should be made explicit. (Davis and others, 2000. p202) In appendix three, I provide information about the values and professional background which inform my practice, to provide the reader of this thesis with a context within which the validity of my observations and the conclusions drawn can be judged.

### *Young People as Researchers*

An important part of the *Investing in Children* project has been providing support and resources to children and young people to research issues of importance to them. This has been a crucial ingredient in the process of developing the capacity of children and young people to become active partners in political dialogue, and has been important in creating the circumstances where they are in control of the agenda.

Implicit in the dominant discourse on childhood is the assumption that they do not have the knowledge or competence to be active participants in dialogue about decisions which effect their lives. The work of the *Investing in Children* research teams provides evidence that young people can discover what they need to know, and that they have the ability to make use of this knowledge to create coherent and rational arguments for change.

Prout comments: “... far fewer researchers would now want blatantly to contest, or even overlook, that understanding children’s active participation in social life is at least as important as mapping the variables that shape their lives.” (Prout, 2000, p xii). By supporting young people as researchers in their own right, we have both enabled them to discover the information they have identified as being of relevance to them and gained an insight into how they have attempted to make sense of their world.

This has not been a process where children and young people conduct research on behalf of adults, but rather on behalf of themselves. Even where *Investing in Children* has been commissioned by one of the partner

agencies to explore a particular issue identified by them, the direction and focus of the research remains in the control of the young people. We believe that this is one of the main reasons why some young people have been willing and able to sustain their involvement with the project over relatively long periods (some young people have worked with us for five years). As Roberts notes: “ Childhood is not simply a preparation for adulthood, and we cannot assume that those issues we as researchers, or practitioners, or policy-makers find gripping will hold quite the same interest for children and young people” (Roberts, 2000, p238). I would add that experience has taught us that neither is it true that adult researchers, practitioners, or policy-makers have a monopoly on identifying the key questions. Empowering young people to direct their own research has been an important step in opening up new areas for dialogue.

Of particular significance in this process has been the effect that young people in the role of researchers has on the actual quality of the research. Many commentators have drawn attention to the difficulty that adult researchers have in researching the views of children and young people caused by the difference in power between the two. O’Kane observes that “researchers need to find ways of engaging with the child or young person in order to build a relationship where respect, openness and a genuine intent to listen is evident”. She identifies the need to find “strategies to break down the power imbalance between the child participants and adult researchers” ( O’Kane. 2000, p151). To a large extent, this problem is diminished when the researchers themselves are children and young people.

In chapters four and five we will explore in greater detail how the practice of supporting young people as researchers has been developed, and in particular the pivotal role played in this by the *Investing in Children* Consultant.

The data in chapter five is presented as a series of case studies. This is because the **process** here is as least as important as the outcome, Part of our argument is that the dominant discourse on childhood is powerful and entrenched, and the successful challenge to this discourse (the outcome) will be hard-won and infrequent. However, the processes that have been developed (young people as action researchers, the role of the consultants, the membership scheme, the emphasis upon dialogue) are, we believe, notable and transferable to other situations. The use of case studies is intended to make these processes visible and explicit.

*The Investing in Children Archive*

When the three key partner agencies, Durham County Council's Education and Social Services Departments and the County Durham Health Authority committed resources to establish the *Investing in Children* project in 1997, there was an immediate task to be undertaken – the production of a Children's Services Plan. Given the nature of the *Investing in Children* Statement of Intent, it was clear that a priority was to find ways in which children and young people themselves could contribute to the Plan. Using a variety of approaches, some more successful than others, we created opportunities for children and young people to identify issues of importance for them. Right from the start, the young people with whom we worked played a central role in recording their work.

Since then, a central component of the project's work has been in supporting groups of young people to research and campaign on issues of importance to them. Since 1997 we have supported over 70 different young people-led research projects. In most cases, the young people have produced reports on their efforts, and these reports form the heart of the *Investing in Children* archive.

In 1998 we created the *Investing in Children* Membership Scheme, to encourage individual teams and service providers to adopt the principles contained in the Statement of Intent. Membership is awarded on the basis of evidence of dialogue between children and young people and the service provider, and, crucially, evidence of *change* as a consequence of the dialogue. Application for membership is evaluated on the testimony of the children and young people themselves. There are now over 100 members, and a further 60 applicants for membership. Membership is valid for one year, and is then re-evaluated.

The collection of evaluation reports, which contain the assessment of children and young people themselves of the services they use, forms a second key section of the archive.

One of the actions taken by Fizz Shenton when she was working with the original working group to develop the project, was the establishment of the *Investing in Children* Newsletter. This has continued to be published at a rate of around nine editions per year, making a total of 55 issues to February 2003. Contributions to the newsletter come from a variety of sources, and cover a variety of issues. Since February 2001, the Newsletter has been edited by a young person. Mark Tallentire was the first young person editor, and Jenny Cooke succeeded him in the summer of 2002.

Under their editorship, there has been an increase in the number of articles written by young people.

Back copies of the Newsletter form the third key component of the archive.

*Investing in Children* exists largely within the domain of the local authority. The sponsoring agencies are almost all local government organisations. As a matter of accountability, regular reports on the progress of the project have been prepared and presented to the agencies who provide the funds. These documents make up the final part of the archive

### *Reflexivity*

“Reflexivity is achieved through detachment, internal dialogue and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of the process through which researchers construct and question their interpretation of field experiences” (Hertz, as quoted in Davis and others, 2000, p202)

The nature of the development of *Investing in Children* has meant that our practice is constantly being assessed and reassessed. The meaning of what we have learned, the interpretation of key events and the status of this or that strategy has been the subject of animated and often intense debate amongst the principle players within the project.

In part, this debate has taken place through formally-structured opportunities. The core team of permanent *Investing in Children* staff (currently 9 in number) meets regularly to review in detail progress and plan future work. Representatives of the partner agencies meet as a Stakeholders group, to consider issues of broad strategy. In addition, I meet with a small Supervision Group of senior managers, chaired by Peter Kemp, Director of Social Services, where much of the ‘political’ support for the strategies we have pursued is negotiated.

A small group of young people, the ‘Decisions Group’, meet together by themselves, and have a right, which they frequently exercise, to attend any of the above meetings. Thus on a regular basis the meaning and significance of key events and developments are debated and analysed. These are not simply administrative events, the debate is frequently vigorous, and issues are often robustly contested.

Other opportunities for reflection have also been created. Since 1998 we have held occasional seminars where we have brought together groups of key players from partner agencies, and including young people, to review progress. From time to time the freelance 'consultants' come together with the core team to discuss practice.

The cumulative effect of these opportunities is that the development of *Investing in Children* is subjected to regular critical analysis. We are rightly required to explain our interpretation of events and justify our choice of strategies. The ability to reflect is thus born out of necessity.

The debate is not confined to formal meetings. It is in the nature of the project that we are constantly attempting to respond to new issues raised by new groups of children and young people. There is an uncertainty about each new piece of work, and a characteristic of the style of work we have developed is a constant analysis of practice. Ideas and strategies are always under review. The *Investing in Children* office tends to be a busy place with workers, consultants and young people sharing space as they pursue various projects. There is a constant exchange of information, and a continuous debate about what is working well, and what less well. Reflexivity at this level is part of the ethos of the enterprise.

A further aspect of this is that it is a dynamic process, so that the learning being produced affects the activity we are analysing. The very act of capturing the meaning of what has happened, through discussion and reflection with various partners, but in particular with the young people we are working with, is in itself part of process of change. In this respect, this part of the research process is not neutral, but can be seen to be an active variable in the subject being studied. I would argue that the last five years have seen a growing consciousness, to a greater or lesser extent, amongst the key players around *Investing in Children*, and this has influenced the development of the project.

Although I am the author of this study, and accept full responsibility for the views expressed here, the process of learning and reflection has been collective and to a large extent inclusive, certainly of the key players. (By key players I mean the core staff, the consultants, the substantial numbers of young people who have developed a close relationship with the initiative, and the adults from partner agencies who have been active supporters in the development process.) When I use the word 'we' I mean to imply that all of these significant groups have contributed to the learning and reflection. I acknowledge that there has not been the time or space in this study to explore the reflections of the full range of *Investing in*

Children partners, some of whom, as will be clear from the case studies, will have a different analysis to that presented here. This would be the useful subject of future research.

A final crucial part of the methodology behind the production of this thesis has been the role played by Bill Williamson, as my study supervisor. During our regular meetings over the past two years, we have debated in considerable depth the questions thrown up by the project and the meaning of what we have learned. In particular, Bill's contributions have been crucial in creating a theoretical framework within which the work of *Investing in Children* can be interpreted and understood. May comments that " Reflexivity, biography and theory lie at the heart of social research in general...we are part of the world we study; ... we bring to any setting our own experiences... there is a constant interaction between theory and data, and ... these issues cannot be separated from each other" (May, 1997, p154).

...

### Chapter Three: The discourse on childhood

To understand the challenge presented by *Investing in Children*, we must explore the discourse on children and childhood in the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We need to consider what is commonly said and believed about children and childhood and the practices and institutions that reflect these beliefs. Existing institutions carry within their roles and professional traditions the attitudes and beliefs of previous generations. The dominant discourse thus becomes embedded within the institutions.

This is not simply a descriptive exercise. In developing ideas around discourse, Foucault wanted to create “analyses which adequately account for power, domination and resistance in modern societies.” (Layder, 1994, P 95). We need to understand where ideas come from, but also how some ideas flourish and even assume the status of ‘truths’, whilst others fail to gain ground. Understanding the origins and the depth of the roots of some of the dominant ideas about childhood will provide an insight into the strength of resistance to views that challenge and contradict these ideas.

The development of ideas and the development of practice are interdependent. Gittins observes that Foucault provides an “insight into the ways in which information, representations and discourse affect, and interact with, behaviour and practice. There is much in these theories, in conjunction with historical practice and research, to provide important insights into understanding the material circumstances of children and childhoods.” (Gittins, 1998, pp14-15)

Childhood itself, as a stage in the natural order of things, is a good example of an idea that has acquired the status of a ‘truth’. That all human beings experience a process of maturation is a universal, biologically predetermined fact. But the meaning given to this period of physical immaturity and the status afforded to those who are experiencing it is culturally determined and varies between societies and over time. (Franklin, 1995, Cunningham 1995, Jenks 1996, Jans 2002). Indeed, Frost and Stein assert that childhood “is a profoundly political concept.” (Frost and Stein, 1989, p96)

Childhood as a subject of serious study has attracted the attentions of scholars for the past three hundred years. Most commentators trace the beginning of this period to the publication of Jean-Jaques Rousseau’s *Emile* in 1762. Rousseau described childhood as a time of “innocence, simplicity and irrationality” (as quoted in Brown, 1998, p2) and here we find one of

the most powerful and long-lasting notions about childhood. Cunningham comments that the “romantic view of childhood as a special time of life has both sunk deep into and had a remarkable tenacity in western society”. (Cunningham, 1995, p190).

I would suggest that alongside this view of the ‘innocent’ child, two other strands are interwoven into the current discourse on childhood. We can see these reflected in the institutions and practices which have developed around children and which inform and are in turn are informed by our view of childhood.

The second strand is almost the mirror-image of the first. This notion of children sees them as dangerous and in need of discipline and control, rather than innocents to be revered and protected. Jenks describes this dichotomy as the ‘Dionysian’ child – wilful, impish and dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification, and the ‘Appollonian’ child - pure and innocent. (Jenks, 1996, pp70-79)

Goldson discusses what he calls the ‘victim-threat’ dualism, whereby children are seen as “vulnerable and in need of adult protection (the child as victim) and as impulsive/unsocialised and in need of adult control and correction (the child as threat)”. (Goldson, 2001, p34) Stainton Rogers makes a similar distinction between the ‘romantic discourse’ of childhood, with the emphasis on the child’s innate innocence, and the ‘puritan discourse’ which sees the need for children to be controlled and disciplined. (She goes on to observe that the “two discourses mostly co-exist pretty comfortably, since they operate in different spheres of children’s lives and inform different agencies and professional groups” (Stainton Rogers 2001 p30). Its not clear who she believes is comfortable with this, but as we shall see later, the inconsistencies thrown up by the two discourses have not escaped the notice of children and young people themselves.)

The third powerful idea that permeates the discourse on childhood is the child as a ‘work in progress’, and childhood itself as simply a stage in the journey to adulthood. Childhood is characterised as a period of incompetence, where the views of children and young people themselves are of no consequence, and their experiences have validity only insofar as they contribute to the achievement of full responsible adult maturity.

These three strands, the innocent child, the child as a threat, and the incompetent child, are interwoven one with another, and with other related discourses, for example on education and on the family, and their effect is

experienced differently by different children and young people at different times. Most significantly in the context of the stated purpose of *Investing in Children* none of these strands easily accommodates the notion of children as citizens in possession of human rights.

We can trace the development of these ideas about children and childhood by looking at the development of the major institutions concerned with children and young people, including the law, over the past 200 years.

### **Protecting the Welfare of Children**

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, a plethora of measures were developed, through which the state became more and more engaged in activity designed to protect the welfare of children. The provision of compulsory, universal education is perhaps the most significant development of social policy in relation to children, and we shall consider that in more detail below, but there were many other important initiatives which have had a significant impact upon the way we view childhood.

It isn't necessary to explore in detail all of the developments which can be collected under the title of 'welfare legislation'. A few examples will illustrate the point. Throughout the nineteenth century, a range of legislation was introduced which limited the employment of children. The Factory Act of 1833, for instance, outlawed the employment in factories of children under the age of nine. In 1842, employing children underground in mines was prohibited. The 1873 Agricultural Children's Act ruled against the employment of children under eight.

Previously, the employment of children had been seen as unremarkable, both by impoverished parents, for whom it was an important source of income, and for employers, for whom it was an important and cheap source of labour. The motivation behind the legislation was complex and not entirely altruistic. Industrial development often meant that children were not big enough or skilled enough to be of use, and the growing labour movement had a vested interest in protecting adult wages. (Brown, 1998, P8) However, these measures represent a notable intervention by the state into the lives of families, and were to an extent a reflection of the concerns of a growing body of philanthropic and religious groups who were wedded to the romantic view of children and were determined to rescue them from hardship and deprivation.

Many of the advances in the welfare of children during the nineteenth century were not motivated entirely by philanthropy or altruism, but were

the consequences of self-interest and anxieties about the ability of younger generations to vouchsafe the progress of the ruling classes. As Frost and Stein comment, many of the reforms in health and welfare during this period should be considered “against the background of class tensions.... and particularly the ruling class fears of social disorder”. (Frost and Stein, 1989, p28).

Thus we have two powerful ideas coming together – the desire to protect the innocent child, and the need to guard against the perceived threat presented by the unruly and unregulated child – as the drivers of the welfare agenda. There was also the need to maintain the status quo by ensuring that children were properly prepared for the responsibilities of adulthood. There was a perceived need to “tighten control over the next generation, to train them in habits of work discipline so that carefully acquired wealth was not dissipated...and also to train them in the skills required for success in adult life”. (Thanet, as quoted in Frost and Stein, 1989, p13)

Whatever the motivation, it is clear that the physical and material welfare of children and young people steadily improved as a result of welfare legislation and related activity during this period. To look briefly at another area of public policy, Marshall, for example, identifies two particular Acts of Parliament which had a significant impact upon the wellbeing of very young children. The first, in 1915, required the registration of all births, thus providing essential information upon which systematic child health services could be built. The 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act empowered local authorities to develop provision for expectant mothers and the under fives. These two pieces of legislation were the foundations upon which the development of systematic services for maternity and early child welfare were based. (Marshall, 1972, p72)

Progress continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Reporting on a national health survey from 1940 to 1989, Wadsworth notes: “Compared with children born before the 1940s, men and women in this study had better chances of survival in infancy, and of good health in childhood...a reduced chance of getting some kinds of infection...a better chance of a balanced diet...grew taller...mothers and fathers were more likely to be in employment...[and] experienced more education.” (Wadsworth, 1991, p200) He adds the important rider that “these advantages have been much less for children from lower societal class families.” (p200)

This raises a key question about the extent to which it is reasonable or helpful to talk about ‘childhood’ as a universal phenomenon. Lavalette and Cunningham argue that social class remains the primary determinant of the

experience of childhood, and we shall return to this point later. (Lavalette and Cunningham, 2002)

What is undeniable is that the benefits accrued from welfare reforms were not evenly distributed. Alongside what might be called universal measures to promote the welfare of all children, this period also saw the development of a care system designed to look after those children and young people who could no longer be cared for at home. The 1933 Children Act established the power for children in need of care and protection to be brought before a court and placed in the care of a 'fit person'. Within the developing apparatus of public care, the tension between the vulnerable child in need of protection and the unruly child in need of control has resulted in a system which has been plagued by doubt and uncertainty, and where the outcomes for children themselves are consistently negative.

Noting that "the consumers of the care system are likely to be poor and disadvantaged", by 1980 Taylor, Lacey and Braken suggest that the apparatus of public care "is built on confusion which has accumulated and been reinforced by layers of legislation, conflicts of practice and goals, and a steadfast refusal to face facts. Notions of care, treatment and protection have tended to suffocate the principles of natural justice." (Taylor and others, 1980, p5).

This point highlights the inherent flaw in the way the apparatus of child welfare has developed, and the peculiar vulnerability that is a consequence of the dominant discourse. Portraying children as objects of adult concern, or in need of socialisation, or works in progress, but never as competent actors and citizens with rights has effectively meant that they are powerless, and at the mercy of adults, some of whom, sadly were intent on abusing them. The unwillingness to accept that children and young people can be credible witnesses to their own lives has often meant that their cries of pain have gone unheard, with horrendous consequences.

A powerful influence within this discourse is the position of the family, and the maintenance of a 'proper' distance between the state and the independence of parents to raise their children as they see fit. Frost and Stein (1990) make a distinction between "the dominant tradition of social administration which sees welfare as an expression of our collective good will" and child welfare legislation which they describe as a "supervisory regime which monitors family performance" (P9)

This tension between the privacy of the family, and the responsibility of the state to ensure the basic welfare of children can be seen most clearly in the

Children Act of 1989. The Act is sometimes represented (by the Government of the day amongst others) as a charter of children's rights. Indeed, when the UK was preparing to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it was argued by the UK Government that, in the Children Act 1989, British law had actually exceeded the expectations of the Convention. (Freeman, 1995, p70).

The Children Act 1989 was born out of a series of child welfare disasters, from the death of Jasmine Beckford and others to the Cleveland child protection affair, when over one hundred children were removed from their families by social workers and others, suspecting that they had been sexually abused. The Act was intended to bring some balance to a system that some had come to see as too heavily reliant on notions of welfare paternalism. Intervention by the state in pursuit of the welfare of the family was considered inherently benevolent. There was no recognition that the interests of different family members might be different. Within this discourse, as Lord Justice Butler-Schloss remarked in her report on the Cleveland affair, children had come to be seen, not as persons in their own right, but as objects of concern.

The Children Act 1989 was intended to change this. For example, the Act redefined the position of parents and carers in relation to children, as having 'parental responsibilities' rather than 'parental rights'. The corollary of this was that children were no longer to be seen as possessions, in respect of whom parents had rights, but were to be recognised as people to whom parents owed duties. It followed then, that the state should take steps to involve children, as persons in their own right, in decisions that affected them. The Act laid down that courts and various child welfare agencies should take 'due consideration' of the 'ascertainable wishes of the child' when taking decisions about the child.

However, although the Children Act 1989 does endorse the concept of children being in possession of rights more seriously than any other piece of legislation, it was not the 'Children's Charter' as claimed by the Government of the day. As Lyon and Parton show, the Act was more concerned to regulate the practice of welfare officials and ensure the monitoring of parental performance than to promote the rights of individual children. (Lyon, 1995, p40) The Act sought to balance the perceived "awareness of the adverse effects of state intervention, and the need to keep intervention to a minimum" which Fox Harding identifies as a key consideration of family policy, (Fox Harding, 1991, p22) and the undeniable fact that for some children, the family home can be a dangerous place. Parton sums up the dilemma thus: "... how can we devise a legal

basis for the power to intervene into the private family to protect children which does not convert a sizeable proportion of families into clients of the state? Such a problem is posed by the contradictory demands of, on the one hand, ensuring that the family is experienced by its members as autonomous and that it remains the primary sphere for rearing children, while on the other recognising that there is a need for intervention in some families where they are seen to be failing in this primary task". (Parton, 1996, p44).

This dilemma can be seen clearly in the New Labour Government's discomfort over the debate about smacking. Smacking children is legally protected from prosecution in British law, which recognises the right of parents to use 'reasonable chastisement'. This position has come under increasing pressure in recent years, not least from the United Nations, who have criticised the UK position as a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government's concern is about how moves to outlaw smacking will be perceived by parents. Government minister Paul Boateng's comment that "the majority of parents know the difference between smacking and beating" (as quoted in Willow and Hyde, 1999, p18) does not address the central thrust of the anti-smacking lobby (including the UN) that the "fundamental injustice of corporal punishment is the lack of respect for children as people" (Newell, 1989, p15)

Interestingly, although the Children Act 1989 certainly introduced some powerful concepts about the potential of children to be the bearers of rights, as Parton points out, the impact was limited by the fact that key provisions of the Act, and in particular the principle of the paramountcy of the best interests of the child applied to courts of law, but not to other important tribunals involved in decisions which effect children.

The principles which informed the Children Act were not embraced across government. In 1994, the Audit Commission noted: "Children aged under 18 make up a quarter of the population but because of their immaturity they have no voice in matters to do with their well-being. The prime responsibility for this rests with their parents." (Audit Commission, 1994, p5) Significantly, a variety of Education Acts passed since the Children Act was enacted in 1991 continue to describe parents, rather than their children, as the consumers of school services. (Parton, 1995, p72)

### **Children and Education.**

"Compulsory education is one of the defining characteristics of modern childhood; to a degree, therefore, any politics of schooling is also a politics

of childhood, with inevitable implications for the lives that children lead, and for the way childhood is understood.” (Wagg, 1997, P8)

The development of education in the UK has been influenced by a variety of explicit and sometimes implicit priorities, but there is no doubt about the importance of education in shaping, and being shaped by, the dominant discourse on childhood. Arguably, much of what society commonly holds to be true about children and childhood is deeply influenced by our common experience of the education system.

As with the development of social welfare reform, the motivation behind the development of public education in the UK is a mixture of altruistic intentions and hard-edged economic realism. For example, commenting upon the passage of the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893, Toplis remarks: “ It is better for the state to expend its funds on the elementary and technical education of the blind and deaf etc for a few years rather than have it support them through a life of idleness.” (in Frost and Stein, 1989, P26)

Social control was a strong element running through education legislation. It is most explicit in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but as we shall see, it remains a powerful influence on our modern system .The social reformer Mary Carpenter made the distinction between the ‘schooled child’ and the ‘delinquent child’, and the role of education in creating an ordered society has been evident throughout. Brown comments that, although the development of thinking and policy concerning child delinquency and education are separate, they share a common ideological origin. “Both focused upon the special nature of the child; both saw social and physical regulation as integral to the moral health of society; and both were ultimately concerned with the symbolic and practical threat of the unregulated child to the social order” (Brown, 1998, P20) The Audit Commission make the same point even more explicitly : “The role of schools in crime prevention is mainly through general education and socialisation, connecting young people with society, and teaching them how to use information, obey rules, and learn the link between reward and effort.” (Audit Commission, 1998, P55)

Marshall frames this in a more positive light, arguing that a “free society could not be orderly unless it was literate” and that the provision of universal education was of equal benefit to the individual as to society. He also sees a significant change in emphasis between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: “The public elementary education of the nineteenth century was an inferior commodity for an inferior class. The twentieth

century introduced the new and penetrating principle of equal opportunity.” (Marshall, 1972, P17)

Illich, however, sees an important distinction to be made between the principle, and the method chosen to deliver it: “Equal educational opportunity is indeed both a desirable and a feasible goal, but to equate this with obligatory schooling is to confuse salvation with the Church.” (Illich, 1973, p18) This point goes to the heart of the dilemma posed by the UK’s education system. Whilst the benefits of education to children, young people and indeed adults are unquestionable, the process by which education is delivered in the UK should be open to debate. The problem is that challenging the latter is often misinterpreted as questioning the former. There is an assumed inevitability about the current system, which does not encourage critical analysis. Anderson observes “As the British education system has become more uniform and rigid, it is harder to call for greater respect for human rights in school without being dismissed as naively unrealistic.” (Anderson, 1999, p200)

The status of children and young people as ‘a work in progress’ rather than people in their own right is particularly clear within the context of educational provision. The purpose of the education system was to deliver young adults, suitably prepared to make a useful contribution to the community. Education was thus for the future, and the views of children, as users of the service, would not be deemed as relevant until they had achieved adult status.

Indeed, within education legislation, children and young people are not acknowledged as users of the service in their own right. In a report in 1999, the UN Special Rapporteur on Children’s Rights commented “ There is no explicit recognition of the right to education in English law.” She went on: “Schooling is seen as a ‘contract between schools and parents ’ and the child does not have a legal standing; children are thus absent in this process, although it is aimed at their learning.” (Childright 167, (2000) pp3-4)

There is a strong undercurrent here, of children and young people being considered as the property, and therefore the responsibility of their parents. Wagg comments “One of the central axioms of the contemporary politics of British schooling is that providers of education are now beholden to ‘consumers’, these consumers are taken to be, not the children concerned, but the parents.” (Wagg, 1996, p9)

In terms of the discourse on children, there is a powerful message here about the status of children and young people in our community. Commenting on the critique of liberal teaching methods in the '90s, Wagg goes on: "children were not, and should not be, self-determining creatures – they needed firm instruction, 'discipline' and 'standards'...progressive pedagogy had brought school-leavers onto the job market inadequately prepared for work...the school lives of children were judged now in terms of their parents' *aspiration* and education was seen as a means specifically to social mobility...rather than to personal enlightenment or the tools of citizenship." In an acknowledgement of the power of this position, he goes on to comment: "Not to accept this paradigm was seen, increasingly, as failing the nation's children." (Wagg, 1996, p17)

Prout suggests that within this context, children and young people can be seen as 'human capital' and their management and surveillance can best be understood as a means of controlling the future. " Education has, perhaps not unsurprisingly, emerged as a key site for the control of the future, through children...a highly prescriptive national curriculum...a system of national testing, extended to younger and younger children...and the installation of national league tables." (Prout, 2000, p206)

One way or another, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that, within the education system, children are seen and treated as objects either to be kept under proper control, or as the recipients of an appropriate and well-considered investment for the future. It is difficult to recognise children and young people within this system as citizens in their own right. Prout observes "They experience the school environment as one of control and see it as a place where their right to have a say is least respected." (Prout, 2000, p312) A number of authors have commented that, such is the strength of this dominant discourse, to challenge the need for this level of control is seen to be hopelessly unrealistic. (Wagg, 1996, Alderson, 1999) The experience of young people in County Durham, which we will consider in Chapter Five, underlines the difficulty of presenting an alternative analysis.

### **Children in the Justice System.**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, children in the UK were treated no differently to adults within the criminal justice system. Beyond their seventh birthday (the age of criminal responsibility) children in trouble were treated in exactly the same way as adults, and subjected to the same penalties. (Goldson 2002c, p121). The same mixture of benevolent paternalism, philanthropy and fear of disorder which drove the welfare

custody. In 2000, Sir David Ramsbottom, the Government's own Chief Inspector of prisons recommended that the prison system was no place for children and young people. (Roberts, 2000)

Goldson describes how the debate developed over the twentieth century, noting that, within this “ ‘children’, ‘crime’, ‘welfare’ and ‘justice’ are dynamic constructs subject to constant definition and redefinition...influenced (if not determined by) socio-economic and political priorities” (Goldson, 2002c, p134). It is important to recognise the political potency of the dominant representations of children reflected through this debate. It is also important to acknowledge that children and young people themselves were not engaged in the debate –they were merely the subjects of it. It is one of the central arguments of this thesis that our continual denial of the ability of children and young people to be participants in the political dialogue makes them peculiarly vulnerable to changes in political vogue. Inevitably, there is a lack of balance, as all perspectives are not represented. Brown puts it like this: “If we are to be ‘realist’ about the crimes *of* young people, why are we not equally realist about crimes and social injustices *against* young people? In the end, the answer lies within the powers of articulation...since they are non-persons, they are outside the claims of citizenship. Since they are not enfranchised, they stand outside of formal polity. Their ‘powers’ are inarticulated and thereby accorded qualities of danger, without reference to the voices of young people themselves”. (Brown, 1998, p118).

A number of commentators have pointed out that the early 1990's were a particularly difficult time to be promoting a challenge to the dominant discourse on children and childhood. Franklin suggests that by the mid 90's “ideologically, children had become the focus of a moral panic.” (Franklin, 1995, p4) Media coverage of apparently reckless and unfettered car theft, street disturbances in which young people appeared to be centrally involved, the coining of headline-grabbing slogans like ‘bail-bandit’ and ‘persistent young offender’ all stoked the “coals of adult anxiety and ‘amplified’ the construction of the child as a threat.” (Goldson, 2001, p37)

In November 1993, two ten-year-old boys, Robert Thomson and John Venables, stood trial in Preston Crown Court, for the murder of two-year-old James Bulger in Liverpool earlier that year. The media attention was intense, and the commentary verging on hysterical. Goldson quotes this example, from the Sunday Times, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1993: “ We will never be able to look at our children in the same way again...parents everywhere are asking themselves and their friends if the Mark of the Beast might not also be imprinted on their offspring.” (Goldson, 2001, p38)

reforms described above created pressure upon the criminal justice system, so that by the beginning of the twentieth century, children who committed offences were dealt with by a separate juvenile court.

Dean comments that, "in the nineteenth century, welfare reforms sought to rescue the destitute children of the 'perishing classes' while the criminal justice system sought to contain the delinquent children of the 'dangerous classes' (Dean, 1997, p56). The new Juvenile Courts created by the Children Act of 1908 brought both of these objectives together under one roof, and set the scene for a key debate about the position of children in society, which has been termed 'welfare versus justice'.

Put most simply, the 'welfarist' case was that most juvenile delinquency was a consequence of deprivation not depravity. Responses which acknowledge the vulnerability of the young people involved are therefore most appropriate. The justice model, on the other hand, treats juvenile offending as a straightforward failure of the offender (and often his/her family) to distinguish between right and wrong. Punishment is the appropriate response.

From the point of view of the children and young people caught up in the system, neither approach has produced good outcomes. For example, Section 7(7) of the Children and Young People's Act of 1969 allowed the juvenile court to make a care order where a young person had committed an offence, and was deemed to be in need of 'care and control'. In 1976, 11,500 young people were made subject of such orders, removed from home and placed in residential care institutions, where they would remain often for a considerable time. (Taylor and others, 1980, p18) These were not penal establishments, but committal to a community home was experienced by the young people involved as a *de facto* deprivation of liberty. As Taylor and others point out, within the adult justice system, commission of similar offences rarely resulted in imprisonment. (p51) This fundamentally 'welfarist' response resulted in young people experiencing far more drastic interventions in their lives than adults who behaved in the same way

Since the 1990s, the debate has been dominated by a more explicitly 'justice' model, which has resulted in an increase in the number of young people being sent to penal institutions at younger and younger ages. Between 1992 and 2002, the number of under-15s sentenced to detention rose by 800%, and the overall rise in youth custody was 90% (Young People Now, 23-29th April 2003, p3). This is against the background of increasingly urgent concerns about the fate of individual young people in

Brown saw evidence in the response to this case and others of a move away from specific moral panics about discrete groups of young people, to a “total panic surrounding children and young people...a societal anxiety that the last bastions of innocence, purity and hope in society are under siege...only a return to ever stronger authoritarianism...can save the world” (Brown,1998, p51)

It is certainly true that the youth justice system in England has become increasingly punitive over the last ten years. The 1991 Criminal Justice Act saw a slight fall in the numbers of young people in custody, but since then successive Home Secretaries have taken measures which have resulted in more and more young people being incarcerated. As well as locking up more of them, we are also locking them up at an earlier age. England already has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in Europe (it is ten in England, thirteen in France, fourteen in Germany and Italy, and eighteen in Belgium). (Rutter and others, 1998, p26) We also have the highest number of children in custody.

Even though there has been a steady fall in recorded crime, the number of young people in custody has almost doubled in the last ten years. (The Guardian, 22.11.02) This is despite the fact that all of the evidence points to the ineffectiveness of custody in preventing re-offending, and its potentially devastating impact upon vulnerable young people. Since 1995, 14 children have killed themselves in prison. (Willow, 2002, p30)

Brown sums up this phenomenon thus: “Children have been constructed through policy not as citizens, but as objects of increasingly repressive modes of governance. As adult anxiety and punitive desire escalate, the (metaphorical) body of the delinquent is carved up to serve popular appetites, and effectiveness and rationality are increasingly subsumed under ideological imperatives.” (Brown, 1998, p116) Goldson goes further and argues that New Labour, recognising the electoral advantage of appearing to be resolute in the face of the perceived threat of youth crime, has “actively facilitated a process within which larger and younger constituencies of the poorest and most disadvantaged children are being drawn into a criminal justice process which is increasingly being equipped with ever more interventionist and punitive powers”. (Goldson, 2002a, p692)

Muncie notes the susceptibility of youth justice policies to political pressure. He also notes a tendency of governments to ignore the results of (often its own) research, and to veer away from policies that might be

“construed as ‘going soft’”. He goes on “And it will be the most vulnerable sections of society – notably its troubled and troublesome youth – who will find themselves subject to some of the state’s worst excesses”. (Muncie, 1997, p141)

A further aspect of the youth justice discourse can be found in the development, over the last fifteen years, of a broad approach to crime prevention and reduction, known as ‘Community Safety’. This approach acknowledges that offending is not just the concern of the criminal justice agencies. “Community safety embraces both the social and situational aspects of crime prevention. It is concerned with people, communities and organisations, including families, victims and at risk groups, as well as with attempting to reduce particular types of crime and fear of crime”. (Million, 1998, p8)

Within the community safety debate, the behaviour of children and young people is seen to be of particular importance. In the late nineties, a large number of community safety ‘audits’ were conducted across Durham, and in most of them, anti-social behaviour by young people was identified as a significant problem. Interestingly, and perhaps predictably, the majority of the audits canvassed the views of adults in communities, and showed no interest in the opinions of young people. Almost inevitably, the conclusion drawn was that “concerns for community safety in relation to young people are typically based on the assumption that adults need to be protected from young people rather than vice versa”. (Million, p42)

Gradually, a new infrastructure of initiatives has developed within Durham, specifically targeted upon preventing children and young people engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour. This has become inextricably linked with the Government’s social inclusion agenda, and a variety of schemes have been brought together under the banner of an organisation named COSIP (Coordination of Social Inclusion Programmes) These include:

- Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIPs). Activity programme, provided by the Youth Justice Board, and focused on the 50 most at risk young people aged 13-16 in selected areas (Home Office, 2003, p33)
- On Track. “Evidence based services for parents and families for reducing delinquency in children aged 4-12.” (Home Office, p24)
- Positive Futures. Using sport to reduce anti-social behaviour, crime and drug misuse. Targeted on the 50 most vulnerable young people in selected neighbourhoods. (Home Office, p33).

The rationale behind these schemes is made explicit in the Home Office White Paper, “Respect and Responsibility – Taking a Stand Against Anti-Social Behaviour”. It states: “We know that when young people have diversionary activities to keep them occupied anti-social behaviour and crime are often reduced.”(p32)

Whilst the content of the actual activities programmes is uncontroversial, the underpinning logic is extremely problematic. It further emphasises the discourse on children as a threat, but with the refining additional twist that children from poor families are a particular threat. Setting aside the difficulties of identifying children and young people ‘most likely’ to offend, these programmes seek to engage young people in ‘constructive activities’ on the assumption that, left to their own devices, they would engage in anti-social behaviour.

It is worth considering here what might constitute anti-social behaviour. Million notes that, in County Durham “much local concern about the behaviour of young people relates to their use of time and space” She goes on “ ‘Hanging around’ with friends is among the most common ways in which young people spend their time. Such behaviour may be distressing for others and increase fear of crime. For the most part, however, it is not criminal behaviour.” (Million, 1998, p42)

### **Children and Citizenship**

This brings us to one of the most interesting developments in the debate about the status of children. Throughout the UK and also elsewhere, there has been a growing debate about young people and citizenship. As with other developments, this debate was not entirely in response to a concern about how children and young people were experiencing childhood, but more to do with anxieties about the future of adult institutions. There was evidence that the political system was falling into disrepute, especially amongst young people. A study by the British Youth Council in 1993 found that a fifth of eligible young people (under 25) were not registered to vote, a figure which was four times higher than in any other age group. (Hackett, 1997, p81) Research by Professor Ivor Crewe in 1996 revealed that a large proportion (80%) of British students showed no interest in politics. A Demos report commented: “in effect...an entire generation has opted out of politics.” (Lansdown, 1999, p9)

The Government’s response to this was the creation of the Citizenship Advisory Group, chaired by Sir Bernard Crick. In 1998, in its final report, the group recommended that citizenship should be included as a statutory

requirement in the National Curriculum. (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998) The underlying rationale for this was that the political apathy displayed by young people was largely a consequence of their ignorance of how the democratic system worked. Teaching citizenship in schools would equip young people with 'political literacy'. In an earlier work, Crick and Lister explain that "A politically literate person would ... know the kinds of knowledge he or she needs... and how to find them out." (As quoted in Allen and Martin, 1992, p142)

There is little doubt that knowledge is an important prerequisite for participation in political processes. However, it is at least questionable that a lack of technical knowledge of the current political system is sufficient to explain the lack of interest shown by young people. Other commentators suggest that it is the perception that the system is at best irrelevant to children and young people, and often prepared to sacrifice their interests on the altar of political expediency which is at the heart of the problem. Hackett asks whether the reluctance of young people to vote is "a rational response to the negative impact of party and constitutional politics on the lives of young people?" and goes on to observe: "It is perhaps no coincidence that non-voting is also high in the poorest sections of our population who have also been marginalized by social policy." (Hackett, 1998, p81)

Arguably, the focus on voting and interest (or the lack of it) in the formal political system reflects a rather narrow understanding of citizenship. Marshall suggested that "citizenship is a status bestowed upon those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to rights." (Marshall, 1964, p84) He distinguished between different types of citizenship rights. Civil rights refer to individual legal rights; political rights are about democratic participatory rights; and social rights refer "to those post-war economic and social rights embodied in the Keynesian welfare state." (As quoted in King, 1987, p165)

I have argued elsewhere that the key question is the extent to which children and young people are afforded the opportunity to exercise their political rights, and that this has an impact upon the extent to which their civil and social rights are recognised. Citizens in possession of the political rights of citizenship can make their voices heard; they are able to access systems and structures through which decisions affecting the community are made; their opinions are recognised as legitimate and relevant. (Cairns, 2002, p1)

It is ironic that the school is the location in which the narrow conception of citizenship will be taught, as it is probably the institution in the lives of most children and young people, where their rights as citizens are so obviously ignored. As Jeffs suggests “No institution impinges upon the daily lives of children more than schools, and none is more contemptuous of their opinions or the concept of democracy.” (As quoted in Alderson, 1999, p200)

As we have seen above, the development of education in this country has not followed a logical or methodical path, but has reflected a mixture of adult aspiration and anxiety concerning children. Schools are particularly focused upon the task of producing competent, productive citizens when they reach adulthood. The result is a system which is almost completely reliant upon the authority of adults. As Illich observes: “ Only by segregating human beings into the category of childhood could we ever get them to submit to the authority of the schoolteacher.” (Illich, 1973, p35) Alderson notes the particular irony of this situation: “...children are expected to show unquestioning obedience and loyalty, and physical and mental submission to their parents and teachers. Yet...these qualities are not only atypical of all other human relationships, they contradict the liberal qualities adults prize and demonstrate in their own lives.” (Alderson, 2000, p186)

The Crick report acknowledges the potential conflict between what is being taught and what is being practised: “The ethos, organisation, structures and daily practises of school have a considerable impact on the effectiveness of citizenship education. Schools need to consider to what extent their ethos, organisation and daily practises are consistent with the aim and purpose of citizenship education.” (Advisory Group on Citizenship, p55)

Included in the Crick recommendations was the suggestion that schools should consider creating opportunities for greater student participation, but as Lansdown points out, the Report failed to make such measures mandatory, and the suggestion was not in any sense a recognition of the right of children and young people to be involved in the governing of schools, but rather because it would be provide useful experience for when they could take their place as responsible adult citizens. (Lansdown, 1999, p9)

Where schools do attempt to create some opportunities for the student’s voice to be heard, the most common approach is through the creation of school councils. However, this approach has not been entirely successful. As we shall see later on, children and young people in County Durham are

not entirely convinced that the school council is an effective vehicle to influence school policy (although it must be noted that there are some honourable exceptions to this). Most are dependent for their existence upon the commitment of individual members of the school staff, and students report that the same items can be discussed year after year, without significant action being taken. In a study conducted by Priscilla Alderson, only 19% of the students who responded believed that school councils had a positive effect upon the school. Equally, but for presumably different reasons, some staff voiced reservations about their value: "Some teachers told us that school councils were not useful because pupils want to talk only about uniform *and other forbidden questions*"(my emphasis) (Alderson, 2000, p132) How many adults would be interested in membership of a trade union where the meetings were convened and the agenda controlled by the management?

In a study by Wyse into the participation rights of children in school, he reports that "there was a perception that most issues raised by school council members resulted in a lack of action combined with a lack of communication over the reasons for this lack of action." (Wyse. 2001, p211) This perception resonates with the experience of students in Durham, as reported in chapter four. Wyse ends his study by quoting the view of one of the children in his research, that "the most choice we ever get is which felt pen to use." (p217)

Alderson concludes her study with the following comment : " The survey suggests that schools cannot simply ignore democracy; they either promote democratic practices or actively contravene them, there is no neutral ground...It is illogical to expect students to understand lessons about rights and democracy, and at the same time not to realise that their rights are disrespected at school, or not to be sceptical about discrepancies between what teachers practice and preach." (p132)

An alternative vision of how things might be done differently in our schools has been around for some time, but arguably because of the power of the dominant discourse on childhood, has failed to gain ground. The following, described by Wagg as "The most uncompromising and idealistic statement of liberation philosophy ever seen in British educational politics" is the manifesto of the National Union of School Students, from 1972: .

*NUSS Policy Statement as Amended by National Conference 28/29 October 1972*

NUSS exists to protect and advance the interests of school students and in so doing to seek student-teacher co-operation on common issues pertaining to the following:

1. To work for a co-educational comprehensive system of education with the phasing out of all grammar schools, public schools, direct grant and secondary modern schools and the abolition of streaming inside existing comprehensives and end all divisions on the ground of class, sex, race or religion, and physical handicap as far as possible.
2. To promote greater democracy inside schools eventually leading to school committees of teachers, students, parents and non-academic staff subject to instant recall, and representatives of the local community controlling the schools and organising the curriculum; representation of students, teachers, parents and non-academic staff on local education committees.
3. To work towards the abolition of the role of boards of school governors, but *in the short term*, making them more representative of the local community, including staff, students and parents.
4. To work towards the abolition of compulsory religious education and religious assembly, to be replaced by optional discussion periods or unbiased cultural/religious education. Also to work towards the abolition of all compulsory physical education and all forms of military training in schools.
5. To work towards: (a) The speedy abolition of corporal punishment and the prefect system, and to encourage an increase in student responsibility and self discipline in schools. (b) All forms of discipline to be under the control of the school committee and all school rules to be published.
6. To campaign for a greater rate of expansion of expenditure on schools – especially on school buildings and facilities – to meet the increased demand caused by the raising of the school leaving age.
7. To campaign for increases in teachers' salaries and better conditions, with an immediate reduction in class size, to a maximum of 25 in the short term, and with more and better-trained teachers, all attending regular refresher courses.
8. Increased availability of school facilities to the local community developing schools as centres for sport, arts, meetings and youth clubs.
9. To work towards a fair measurement of ability, incorporating a mixture of continuous assessment, oral and course work (open book), project work and an examination, to replace the present

- examinations-based system, and to consider new methods of selection for higher education.
10. To fight for the immediate re-introduction of free school milk for pupils under 16, and to eventually obtain a free school meals service and free public transport to and from school.
  11. A minimum living wage for all students over the age of 16, i.e. to enable life independent of parental support.
  12. To fight unemployment amongst school leavers and to fight for better training conditions for those at work and for an improved Youth Employment Service geared towards *All* school leavers, staffed and employed by the broad Labour Movement.
  13. To fight for free state nursery schools as a right, and the phasing out of private nursery schools.
  14. To fight for freedom of speech, assembly and the end of censorship of school magazines, clubs and societies and the banning of non-academic and confidential fields (*sic*) in schools, and that students be allowed to see any reference about themselves sent to further education establishments or prospective employers.
  15. To defend the rights of any school student (whether or not a member of the union) and teacher against victimisation.
  16. To achieve beneficial relations with teaching unions and all trade union organisations.
  17. To secure the recognition that the basic human rights apply equally to all school students.
  18. To campaign for better sex education and free contraceptives to be available to everyone over the age of consent.
  19. To work towards the abolition of compulsory uniform, but to have suitable alternatives to uniform grants, students having the right to determine their own appearance at school.
  20. To campaign for better conditions for school students in part-time employment including guarantee of tenure and a minimum legal wage.
  21. Higher education should be open to all those who desire it and are prepared to study.
  22. (a) To press for more immediate teaching of English to immigrant children, while retaining their national identity. (b) To press for more bi-lingual teachers.
  23. To fight for the same freedom to be given in boarding schools as to those living at home.
  24. To fight for free movement in and out of the school grounds and buildings during break, lunchtime, and free periods.

25. The Union believes that school students should be encouraged to prepare voluntarily for lessons at home, rather than be forced to do extra work at home to supplement school lessons.
26. To encourage each branch to take active part in local youth councils and similar organisations.
27. To campaign for the right of school students of all ages to have a 'Common Room' and to have facilities of relaxation similar to those enjoyed by teachers and sixth-formers

(Wagg, 1996, p14)

I quote the Statement in full to get across its depth and comprehensive span. It isn't necessary to agree with everything in this impressive document to recognise that it constitutes a serious attempt to engage in a debate about the rights of children and young people in school. It certainly challenges the notion that these things are best left to the (adult) experts, on the assumption that the students have no contribution to make. Indeed a number of the points raised, such as the abolition of corporal punishment and the provision of free state nursery education are now government policy.

However the underlying thrust of the document, that students should be acknowledged as actors and partners in their education and not simply the objects of the educational process represents a profound challenge to the dominant discourse on children, and how that is manifested through the institution of the school. As far as I am aware, the National Union of School Students no longer exists.

This highlights one of the complicating features of this debate. The struggle to gain recognition for the rights of children can be compared to other emancipation movements, such as the women's movement, or the struggle for racial equality. As we shall see in chapter four, children and young people are aware that they suffer a level of discrimination because they are children. But unlike with other emancipation movements, children do not remain children, and this makes the sustainability of an emergent discourse particularly problematic. Women remain women, but the young people who wrote the NUSS Policy Statement in 1972 will have become adults not long after.

If we move outside of the narrow environs of the school, there are indications that, for example, the conclusion of the Demos study cited above, that "an entire generation has opted out of politics" is unduly pessimistic. In a study in Nottinghamshire in 1998, the researchers identified a group of young people with "an interest in political issues if

not the formal institutions associated with them.” (Wring, Henna and Weinstein, 1998, p28)

This has without doubt been the experience of *Investing in Children*, and it again throws into sharp relief the limitations of the current debate on citizenship. It has been our experience that children and young people across a wide age range, from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances, are prepared to engage in what we would describe as political activity, provided that they have a reasonable hope of *achieving change*. What the Demos study and others would seem to reflect is a lack of confidence in the formal political processes, but it would be wrong to conclude that this equates with political apathy. We will return to this issue in greater detail in the next chapter.

### **Children’s rights**

In this chapter, we have attempted to outline how the discourse on childhood and children has developed over the past 200 years, and how its development is inextricably linked with key institutions. We have suggested that the developments in child welfare and education in particular have both been shaped by, and in turn helped to shape what we have come to believe to be the ‘natural state of childhood’. We have suggested that there are three dominant strands within the discourse: the child as innocent and vulnerable, and in need of adult protection; the child as dangerous and unruly, and in need of adult surveillance and control; and the child as a ‘work in progress’, in need of adult attention to be moulded into a competent and productive citizens.

There has, however, been an alternative point of view, what we might optimistically describe as an emergent discourse, which portrays children and young people as individuals in possession of full human rights.

The first signs of this new discourse began to emerge around the end of the First World War. Up until that point, there was little dispute that childhood could be broadly defined as a condition of dependency on adults. They were the property of their parents, and politically silent. (Muscroft, 1999 p26) However, led predominantly by women such as Eglantyne Jebb of the Save the Children International Union, the proposition was advanced that children could be seen as individuals in possession of rights. Interestingly, Hammarberg argues that the significance of the involvement of women at this time was their experience of campaigning for, and achieving a degree of emancipation in their own right. (Hammarberg, 1995, p2)

Jebb drafted the first Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924. This asserted the right of children to receive nurture and protection, and the responsibility of the community as a whole to provide for them.

The ending of the Second World War marked the beginning of a vigorous debate about the need for international agreements about human rights. Within this debate, it was recognised that the particular circumstances of children required special consideration, and in 1959 the United Nations endorsed a revised version of Jebb's original Declaration, but as a statement of principles rather than part of international law.

In 1978, in preparation for the International Year of the Child, Poland called for the creation of a new, binding, convention on the rights of the child. A further 10 years passed, as the text was drafted and redrafted. Finally, in 1989, the General assembly of the United Nations adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

The Convention asserts four key principles, and then goes on to list specific rights. The final part of the Convention lays out the arrangements through which The UN monitors its implementation by member states.

The four key principles are:

- The right to life.
- The best interests of the child to be a primary consideration.
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom from discrimination.

The Convention goes on to list a range of specific rights, including the right to a family life, to social security, to education, and to civic rights such as freedom of association. It also covers specific rights of children in particularly hazardous circumstances – refugees, children involved in armed conflict, children at risk of economic or sexual exploitation, etc. (Hammanberg 1995, Freeman 2000, Muscroft, 2000)

Although a document which was ten years in the writing, and which was intended to attract support from the widest possible audience inevitably contains many compromises, nevertheless the Convention represents a significant step in the development of the discourse on children's rights, and goes some way to address the comment by Hilary Rodham, cited earlier, that children's rights was a "slogan in search of a definition."

The Convention attempted to assert a new status for children. No longer were they to be seen as incompetent, passive, the property of parents, mere citizens-in waiting. Under the Convention, children must be treated as “full human beings, right holders...their views and opinions are significant...(they) are to be seen as active members of their local communities and national societies.” (Muscroft, 2000, p17)

Significantly, describing the wellbeing and protection of children as a *right* which placed a corresponding *duty* upon the community, had the effect of transforming child welfare into “an issue of justice rather than charity.” (Freeman, 2000, p277)

*The impact of the Convention on the lives of children.*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has received greater endorsement than any other international treaty. The United States is one of the few remaining nations who have not ratified the Convention.

The Convention was held up as an opportunity to make respect for children’s rights and welfare truly universal. (Hammarberg, 1999, p1)  
We need to examine the extent to which this aspiration was realised, and to understand the obstacles in its path.

A cursory glance at the international pages of any newspaper provides ample evidence of the failure of the Convention to achieve a universal respect for children’s welfare. Across the globe, famine, disease and poor life expectancy are normal for many children. Education is massively under-resourced. Children are habitually the most vulnerable victims of armed conflict. Many children continue to suffer extreme sexual exploitation. (Freeman, 2000, pp278-279)

It is our argument that the Convention was never likely to be effective in the short term, because it is based upon a discourse on children which is fundamentally at odds with the dominant discourse. In order to gain a better understanding of this, we will consider in detail the impact of the Convention in the UK.

The British Government ratified the UN Convention in 1991, yet it is difficult to discern any major change in the circumstances of children over the past decade. For example, significant numbers of children continue to live in poverty, experience homelessness or are involved in prostitution.

Infants are four times more likely to be killed than any other age group in the population. (Freeman, 2000, p279)

We would suggest that the failure to successfully promote the protection and welfare rights of children is, in least in part, a consequence of our inability to recognise their civic and political rights. History teaches us that rights are not easily acquired, and have to be fought for. The group with the greatest vested interest in this fight, children themselves, remain in a state of disempowerment, despite the Convention.

Progress on the civic and political rights of children is here seen as a necessary precursor to progress on their welfare rights. If this were not so, then action to improve the welfare rights of children would rest exclusively in the hands of adults. This, paradoxically, would further emphasize the dependent status of children and young people, thus making the achievement of their civic rights even more difficult. This is not to argue that only children alone can achieve change, but to acknowledge that efforts to improve the circumstances of children and young people which do not include them as integral partners in the process derive essentially from the same philosophical position as the Victorian child rescue societies.

### *The children's rights lobby*

Paradoxically, this period also saw the growth in what could be described as a "children's rights lobby". The implementation of the 1989 Children Act in 1991, and the UK government's endorsement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the same year stimulated activity in this area.

There had been a growing interest in children's rights, in the public policy debate leading up to the Children Act. In 1987, Leicestershire County Council Social Services Department appointed the Country's first Children's Rights Officer, (Ellis, 1995, p89) and many other Social Services Departments have since followed suit. Most recently, the current government's 'Quality Protects' initiative, designed to improve outcomes for children and young people in public care, has led to a sharp rise in the number of local government staff bearing titles such as Children's Rights, Children's Participation, or Listening to Children Officers.

At the same time, the nineties saw a parallel development of independent advocacy services for children, provided by voluntary sector organisations such as Voice for the Child in Care and more recently, the National Youth Advocacy Service. An umbrella organisation, Children's Rights Officers

and Advocates (CROA) was created in 1992 to “promote high standards among children’s rights and advocacy services.” (Willow, 1997, p18)

I have argued previously (Cairns, 2001) that the overall effect of this development was to sideline the debate about children’s rights, particularly in respect of the right of children to be seen as users of public services. Children’s Rights Officers were generally employed by Social Services Departments. As a consequence their attention tended to be focused upon children in need, and more particularly, children in the care system. Those recruited more recently under the ‘Quality Protects’ initiative often had posts specifically and exclusively concerned with looked-after children. In one of its most recent publications Total Respect, CROA have produced a comprehensive training pack to assist “looked-after children...to participate fully in decision making at all levels of the looked-after system.” (CROA, 2000, p2)

However, just as the Children Act itself was not a measure designed to promote the rights of children per se, so much of the focus of ‘Quality Protects’ and the workers associated with it is the care system rather than the children and young people in it. ‘Quality Protects’ Management Action Plans (MAPS) are focused on the bureaucracy of the care system – statutory planning meetings and reviews, the role of social workers and elected members, the operation of the complaints procedure, etc.

In 1999, I attended a meeting at the Department of Health, to review ‘Quality Protects’. There was a debate about what targets should be set for the coming year’s Management Action Plans. I suggested that a good starting point would be to ask children and young people if they were satisfied with the services they were receiving. The meeting decided instead to set targets around the percentage of planning and review meetings held within the statutory time limits. That there should be a prompt and efficient care planning system is clearly important, but it does not of itself constitute a children’s rights agenda, not least because it represents the priorities of a particular group of (concerned) adults, rather than, necessarily, the priorities of children and young people themselves.

Given the well-publicised and tragic failures of the care system to secure good outcomes for children in public care, it is entirely understandable that attention should be paid to this area of public service. However, because it was only children in the looked-after system, by and large, who received the services of children’s rights officers and advocates, in many authorities the concept of children’s rights has tended to become associated exclusively with children in care. There are, as far as I know, no children’s

rights officers employed by Education Departments. The Children's Legal Centre set up an Education Legal Advocacy Unit in 1997, but it operates within the South-East of England (although it will provide advice to people involved in disputes outside this area). Other than this, I am unaware of any other advocacy services for children and young people unhappy with their treatment at school. The right of children to complain about their treatment in care is clear and the subject of detailed policy and procedures in all local authorities (the effectiveness of such policy and procedures may be arguable). Within the education system, it is unclear whether there is any recognition of the right of children and young people themselves to complain - this right would appear to rest with parents.

A second difficulty with the focus of the rights debate upon the looked-after system is that it has tended to place the emphasis upon the looked-after status of the children and young people, rather than their status as children themselves. It is our experience that this is often picked up and echoed by the young people themselves.

The poor outcomes experienced by children and young people in the looked-after system are assumed to be a consequence of their looked-after status. By and large, the analysis ignores their status as **children** and does not seek to make connections with other children and young people in the population. Poor educational achievements of looked-after children are somehow seen as a consequence of them growing up in public care. Attention is focused upon the technicalities of the care system. We do not consider the possibility that the poor educational outcomes of children in care, along with poor educational outcomes for other groups, might be a manifestation of a wider problem - the general failure to acknowledge and respect the rights of all children. If, as has been argued already, the education system is broadly indifferent to the concept of children's rights (Alderson 2000, Jeffs 1995, Prout, 2000), it is not that surprising that those children who are most resilient and best resourced gain greatest benefit, and those who are most vulnerable struggle to survive.

Returning for a moment to our earlier discussion about the dominant discourse on children, it seems to me that the focus of adult attention upon what children will **become** –successful, productive members of the (adult) community, rather than who they **are** at the moment, offers a possible explanation for the lack of educational achievement of looked-after children and young people as viable as any advanced through the Quality Protects process.

Seeing young people as potential future adults focuses upon their **well-becoming**, at the expense of their **well-being**. School might be an unpleasant experience, but it is worth enduring for the future rewards it will bring. For those children and young people able to draw on other resources to support their well-being, the experience of attending a school which is largely indifferent to their present status may well be manageable, but will be far less easy for young people with more meagre resources, for example young people from the looked-after system, to survive and thrive. (By resources we mean not just financial resources, although poverty is clearly a factor here, but all of the social, emotional and intellectual support upon which many middle-class children can draw.)

If the discourse on children recognised them as citizens in possession of human rights rather than as potential adults, their opinions on the way schools are run would be seen to be legitimate and demanding of attention. However, their status as citizens-in-waiting effectively deprives them of a voice, and so the education system does not recognise the legitimacy of their right to a service which meets their current as well as future needs.

This argument is not to impugn the character or commitment of individual teachers, or to suggest that they are personally indifferent to the welfare of students. However, as we shall see in Chapters Five and Six, many young people experience school, particularly secondary school, as an impersonal and unresponsive institution. The argument being advanced here is that this is a consequence of the focus on the future, which serves to prioritise the achievement of academic success above all other issues. It follows then, that the plight of looked-after children is more likely to be addressed through an analysis of the dominant discourse informing educational attitudes to children and young people as a class, rather than an esoteric and technical deconstruction of the public care system.

### **The Labour Government approach to Children and Young People**

Since its election in 1997, the New Labour Government has embarked upon an ambitious programme of initiatives with the stated intention of creating real improvements in the lives of children and young people. These range across the full gamut of government activity, from economic policy to education, from health to criminal justice. For many of the individual policy initiatives such as Surestart, the Children's Fund or the Connexions Service, it is too early to assess the extent to which they are succeeding, although some commentators see positive signs in the early findings (Kurtz, 2003, Pugh, 2003, Bradshaw 2003). It is not the intention here to go over that ground again, and examine each initiative in detail, but

to consider the overall impact of the approach, and what it says about the status of children and young people in the eyes of those responsible for the New Labour project.

In an attempt to coordinate this activity, in 2000 the Government created the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU). Although based within the Department for Education and Skills, the Unit was intended to cut across departmental boundaries and overcome sectional barriers, to create an "overarching strategy covering all services for children and young people." (CYPU, 2001a, p1)

The rhetoric of the CYPU is impressive. In its Consultation Document "Building a Strategy For Children and Young People" the following vision is laid out:

"We want all of our children and young people to be assured of:

- the opportunity to grow up in a loving, stable environment
- real opportunities to achieve their full potential and contribute to a fast moving, changing, and interdependent world
- opportunities to experience the benefits of living in a diverse multi-cultural society, where all experiences are valued and racism is not tolerated
- the prospect of living in a safe and secure community where they are protected from harm, abuse, harassment, exploitation or neglect and have the chance to enjoy the opportunity to grow up with their peers and friends
- chances to contribute to their local communities – feeling heard and being valued as responsible citizens – shaping their lives and futures
- the opportunity to appreciate their environment and participate in sport, music, art, drama and a variety of cultural activities of the society and community in which they live
- focused support as they pass through the various transitions from birth to adulthood, expanding their capacity to make decisions about their identity, relationships, education, future careers and financial affairs
- excellent joined-up public services, which strive to meet the individual needs of children and young people and their families
- our commitment to work across Government to end child poverty, child deprivation and social exclusion." (CYPU, 2001a, p5)

At the same time, the Unit published a second report: "Learning to Listen. Core principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People." This

was intended to give “all government departments a solid framework on which to base their plans to increase the involvement of children and young people in policy and service design and delivery”. CYPU 2000b p1) So far, so good.

However, it seems to me that there are a number of structural problems about the approach taken by the CYPU, and a major philosophical obstacle at the heart of their project.

The structural problems relate to the difficulty of fashioning a coherent strategy from the different powerful departmental power bases across Whitehall, which, as we illustrate below, makes the maintenance of a consistent position almost impossible. In addition, the distance between policy debates in Whitehall and the lived experience of children and young people creates a significant challenge to meaningful and sustained dialogue. Thirdly, the rhetoric about children is vulnerable to calculations about electoral strategies.

The philosophical obstacle is that, despite the rhetoric of the CYPU, New Labour shows no signs of embracing or promoting a new discourse about children as citizens, and remains locked into the traditional view of children as victims/threats/citizens-in-waiting.

The following example illustrates the difficulty created by the competing priorities of different Departments.

### **The Children’s Fund**

Give its short lifespan so far, it is probably fairest to say that the jury on the CYPU is still out, but the early signs are not positive. One of the responsibilities of the Unit is to exercise oversight of the Children’s Fund. Launched in 2000, the Fund is targeted upon 5-13-year-olds most at risk of social exclusion. Its primary objective is to “provide additional resources over and above those provided through mainstream statutory funding...to engage and support voluntary and community organisations in playing an active part and enable the full range of services to work together to help children overcome poverty and disadvantage” (CYPU, 2001, p6).

The Children’s Fund Guidance places considerable emphasis upon the need to adopt a participative approach by “actively involving children, young people and their families as service users, in planning and delivering services...empowering children, young people, families and communities

to take control of solutions for themselves". The expectation is that this will produce "re-shaped services that focus on what children and young people aged 5-13 and their families say they need". (CYPU, 2001, pp6-8). With a relatively modest budget (£380 million over the first three years) and short lifespan (probably 5-6 years) the idea is that new (and hopefully more effective) ways of working will be developed, which will then influence and 'bend' mainstream practices, so that any progress achieved through the Fund is sustainable.

Katz emphasises the importance of the participation of young people to the Children's Fund, suggesting that it is a matter of principle rather than simply a question of "a pragmatic approach to service delivery". He goes on to observe that "if evaluation found that participation did not lead to service improvement or even if it leads to poorer quality services, it is unlikely to be scrapped...Participation is a moral issue as much as a pragmatic issue for the Fund" (Katz, 2002, p14)

In County Durham and in Darlington, *Investing in Children*, in partnership with The Children's Society, a national independent children's charity, was appointed as 'Lead Agency' for the Children's Fund. We helped to shape the Children's Fund Development Plan for both authorities, around the key principle that not one penny of the Fund would be spent upon projects that had not been positively endorsed by children and young people themselves. We saw this position as a positive reflection of the requirement to create opportunities for children and young people to 'take control for themselves'. Although it was clear that this went further than many other Children Fund Plans, the CYPU accepted our proposals, and across Darlington and Durham workers employed by the Fund began to open up dialogue with children, young people and their families.

Then, in the summer of 2002, the CYPU announced a change in the arrangements. It had been decided that 25% of the Fund must be used "in line with the government's priorities in relation to prevention of youth crime and disorder".(CYPU, 2002, p2) A narrow menu of five potential project areas was produced, and Children's Fund Partnerships were required to negotiate with their local Youth Offending Service and decide which items on the menu would be financed, but the Guidance was perfectly clear – the money was to be "spent on services and activities which have the specific aim of preventing the involvement of children aged 5-13 in crime and anti-social behaviour." (p2)

The problem with this was that crime prevention, or at least the emphasis upon preventing young people from committing crime, had not been a

priority identified by either the young people we had been speaking to, or their parents. The intolerant, unhelpful, and sometimes anti-social behaviour of some adults had come up from time to time (for example, motorists who exceed the speed limit in areas where children play), but not the risk of young people becoming involved in criminal activity. Suddenly, the commitment to “reshape services that focus on what children and young people aged 5-13 and their families say they need” was looking less secure, at least for 25% of the available funding, as was the idea that children’s participation was a “moral issue”.

As far as I know, there has been no official explanation for this fundamental change in direction. From the demeanour of some of the civil servants within the CYPUC, it is clear that it was not a universally popular decision. It would seem that, in a contest over the control of resources, the CYPUC lost out to the Youth Justice Board. Goldson argues that the social justice agenda, which could roughly be described as the driving force behind the government’s anti-poverty strategy, of which the Children’s Fund is a part, is “conditioned by wider political calculations, which limit its scope”. (Goldson, 2002b, p683) He goes on to observe that for New Labour, “crime in general, and juvenile crime in particular, was rich political currency”. (p690)

This is important not only because it demonstrates the vulnerability of initiatives like the CYPUC to the traditional power struggles between the Whitehall departments, but also because of the way that it reinforces the discourse on childhood that portrays children as a threat. As we discussed earlier, in County Durham, crime prevention, community safety and social inclusion have become interlinked through a variety of community based youth initiatives.

Many of the individual programmes and schemes provide opportunities and services to young people in some of the poorest areas of County Durham. The problem with this, it seems to me, is that the close and much publicised association of the community safety agenda and the social inclusion agenda in this way only succeeds in ‘branding’ otherwise legitimate community activities as part of a youth crime prevention campaign. Diverting young people from criminal activity seems a reasonable aspiration of public policy, but allowing this objective to dominate the social inclusion debate only serves to reinforce the idea of children and young people as a threat. In effect, the provision of community services to the young people in the areas of greatest deprivation is based, not upon their rights as citizens, but the assumed threat they may pose if not diverted by the provision of ‘purposeful’ activities.

Commenting on the Labour Government's progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Roberts observes: "The government's campaign against poverty and social exclusion as well as its programme to improve provision for looked-after children and protect them from abuse, welcome as they are, do not represent a departure from a more traditional view of children as recipients of adult help and benevolence. It will involve a more radical change in social attitudes and government policy...to recognise children not simply as recipients but participants". (Roberts, 2001, p64)

I want to end this chapter with a comment upon the apparent chasm between the dominant discourse on childhood, which finds its expression through the practice of the institutions described here, and the emergent discourse, which, as we have seen, is unremittingly critical. A number of authors have commented that such is the distance between the two that even to suggest an alternative to the dominant view is to invite the accusation of being unrealistic or hopelessly idealistic (Wagg, 1996, Alderson, 1999).

It seems to me that this is partly explained by the processes, outlined above, through which the various institutions primarily concerned with childhood (schools, social services, youth justice, etc) have developed in response to a variety of sometimes contradictory political imperatives. By and large there is nothing in the history of these institutions which would have encouraged them to consider the human rights of children and young people.

The emergent children's rights discourse can be seen, then, as shining a light upon these institutions from a new angle, and this has the discomfiting effect of revealing aspects of their practice which have not previously attracted much comment. The emergent discourse poses new questions, and it should not be so surprising that new answers are not so easy to find.

## Chapter Four. *Investing in Children.*

In this chapter I want to present a narrative that describes the sequence of events that have brought Investing in Children to where it is now, and the contribution of the key players. This cannot be a dispassionate, objective narrative, because, as I have previously discussed, I have been, and continue to be a participant, and have a standpoint. However, the narrative is central to making sense of how Investing in Children has developed, and to understanding the case which we seek to make in this thesis.

*Investing in Children* was created in County Durham in the mid nineties. As we noted earlier, the motivation was to counteract the damaging negative stereotypes of children and young people being promoted in the media, particularly after the Jamie Bulger case. Goldston refers to “a burgeoning sense of adult anxiety in relation to childhood” which resulted in children being “conceptualised as both the *cause* and the *product* of wider social disorder and moral malaise” ( Goldston, 2001, pp37-38). A group of chief officers of key local government agencies were concerned to challenge this development by promoting an alternative view of children and young people as citizens and positive contributors to their community.

At the same time, there was also an acknowledged need to find an integrated approach to the provision of local authority services which were becoming increasingly complex. There was a growing overlap of responsibilities between Health, Education, Social services and other agencies which created pressure to improve the ability of these organisations to work together more effectively. “ The potential for duplication, confusion and waste is considerable”. (Durham County Council 1995, P5).

The initial local impetus was reinforced by a technical change in the regulations governing local authority planning for services for children and families. It is the response to this change in Durham, and the subsequent development of the initiative, with the learning that has gone with it, which is of particular interest here.

In 1995, the Chief Executive of the County Council convened a seminar for senior officers of agencies concerned with providing services to children and families. It was expected that central government was about to create a new duty on local authorities to produce a comprehensive Children’s Services Plan, and the purpose of the seminar was to begin discussions about how this should be done. Although the statutory responsibility rested upon the Director of Social Services, the new Plan was intended to bring

together the strategies of the various agencies, including for example, Health, Education and the Police, whose activities had an impact upon children and their families. The intention was to create a framework within which the efforts of these different groups could be understood as providing a coherent and comprehensive range of services.

Although this may seem a perfectly sensible and straightforward undertaking, in fact it presented a considerable challenge. As we explored in Chapter Two the development of the various agencies has not been coherent or strategic, but rather has been characterised by ad hoc reactions to political circumstances and often unvoiced general anxieties about the state of our children. The requirement that these disparate professional groups demonstrate a common purpose was always going to be a tall order.

The most common response to this dilemma was to refuse to accept that it existed. Many of the Children's Services Plans which were written in response to the new requirement are straightforward lists of the various planning requirements made of separate departments and agencies, with little or no attempt to create strategic coherence, or even acknowledge that there might be any conflict between their various aims and priorities.

After a lengthy period of reflection, the response to this dilemma in County Durham was interesting. A working party of senior officers, chaired by the Director of Social Services, sidestepped the difficult issue of the dissonance between agencies by proposing a new approach to the provision of services for children. This was the *Investing in Children Statement of Intent*. Although it could be argued that, implicit in the conclusions of the working party was the acknowledgement, there was a deficit in past practice, by focusing on the intention to behave differently in the future, the need for a difficult analysis of the comparative merits of the efficacy of different agency strategy was avoided, at least in theory. The challenge was to find common ground upon which a new cohesive strategy could be constructed.

The working party acknowledged the difficulty of the exercise: "establishing shared values and principles across agency boundaries which could be agreed as underpinning both joint and separate operating activity presents a daunting task". (Durham County Council, 1996, P6). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was seen to be the only coherent available framework to achieve this, and it became the foundation upon which *Investing in Children Statement of Intent* was built.

### ***Investing in Children: Statement of Intent***

***Our aim is to work in partnership with children and young people to promote their best interests and enhance their quality of life.***

*We will achieve this by:*

- ***Consulting with children, young people and their families about decisions affecting their lives and the development of services;***
- ***Promoting partnerships between individuals and agencies to address young people's issues;***
- ***Developing accessible children and young people and family-centred services that promote dignity and independence and which do not discriminate or stigmatise;***
- ***Ensuring that, when making decisions on policies and services, consideration is given to their potential impact on the lives of children and young people.***

***The values that underpin our work with children and young people are consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 1989.***

*How children and young people see the Statement of Intent.*

The language and format of the Statement of Intent clearly reflects the fact that it was written by a committee of local government officers. It is worth considering here how young people have interpreted the Statement, and the opportunities it might present to them.

In 1999 *Investing in Children* collaborated with the National Children's Bureau, a national children's voluntary organisation, to run a series of conferences on the subject of children's rights. In preparing for the first conference, "*The Emperor's New Clothes*", a group of young people working with *Investing in Children* put forward the following analysis of the key points from the Statement of Intent:

- **Adults don't always know best.** Children and young people have a legitimate, and often revealing perspective of the world in which they live, and adults must learn to listen to them and involve them in decision making effects them. This is one of the most fundamental concepts at the heart of *Investing in Children*. As Jemma Greenely from one of the research teams put it: "Young people have a great deal to say, and a lot of new and interesting ideas, which have scope for a brighter future." ( Benga and others, 2000, p11 )

- **Services must include everyone.** It is relatively easy for some young people to be made to feel that they have not been included in the planning or delivery of a service. A group of parents and young people cited school transport as an example. This group lived in a village in the south of the county. The local secondary school was five miles away, and the children of poorer families were entirely dependent upon the school bus service. This effectively meant that they were unable to take part in extra-curricular activities as the bus always left the school at 3.30. Children from more affluent families, who had the resources to make independent transport arrangements, were therefore included in school life to a greater extent than their poorer peers.
- **A universal approach.** *Investing in Children* is based upon the belief that **all** children and young people are in possession of rights, and the project must be concerned with asking questions about whether partner agencies treat all children and young people with respect and dignity. (Cairns, 2001, pp 349 –350)

Agencies were invited to ‘sign up’ to this Statement of Intent’ and to adopt practices which reflect the principles contained within it. In theory, this allowed for the agencies to face forward together, and to develop new ways of thinking about, and planning and providing services for, children, young people and their families.

Three agencies, the County Council’s Social Services Department and Education Department and County Durham Health Authority, came together to fund an initiative, *Investing in Children*, with the aim of translating “the values and principles into real, tangible changes for children and young people”. (Shenton, 1999, p5)

Over the next five years, almost all of the agencies concerned with providing services to children, young people and their families have endorsed the Statement of Intent. In 2001, Darlington Borough Council, a separate but adjacent local authority, became a stakeholder organisation. (See Appendix I for a full list of partner organisations.)

### *County Durham*

Before we look at the development of the initiative, it is worth pausing to consider the question “Why here, in County Durham, at this time?”

The County is one of the largest local authorities in England, as well as one of the poorest. Situated in the North East of England, between Tyneside to

the north and the Tees Valley to the south, most of the County is rural with over 50% of the population living in settlements of less than 10,000 people. However, because of the particular economic history of the county (principally the decline of the coal and steel industries upon which many of the communities in Durham were dependent), many of the villages in the County suffer from high levels of deprivation, akin to those in urban areas. (Durham County Council, 2001, P5)

Organisationally, the County is a two-tier authority, with the responsibility for the provision of many services divided between the County Council and seven smaller District or Borough Councils. Education and Social Services, for example, are provided by the County Council, while Housing and Leisure Services are the responsibility of the separate smaller authorities.

Politically, like most of the Northeast of England, this is traditional Labour territory, and the Labour Party has an overwhelming majority on the County Council. At the time of the development of *Investing in Children*, I suspect most of the elected members would describe themselves as Old Labour. Links with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) are still strong, as is evidenced by the permanent art display at County Hall, which celebrates the County's mining tradition.

A mixture of communitarianism and benevolent paternalism (there are only a few women members) is probably the most accurate description of the dominant political philosophy. Many members have within their wards mining villages where there has been a long tradition of the community looking after its own, quite often through the offices of the NUM. Although the closure of the coalfields has led to a drastic reduction in the Union's influence, the philosophy has lived on. An analysis that suggested that the children of these communities were not receiving the best possible services was almost bound to receive a sympathetic hearing.

If the political environment provided fertile ground in which the initiative might grow, it was probably the vision of a few key individual officers which provided the seed. Many people contributed to the early discussions, but the leadership of Peter Kemp, Director of Social Services, and latterly John Woodhouse, Director of Public Health, were crucial in creating the initiative and sustaining it over the first three years. Both clearly believed in the principles which underpinned the initiative, and both had sufficient status within their organisations to ensure that action would be taken.

The answer then, to the question: Why here and at this time? is probably the serendipitous combination of a political environment in which a debate

about the welfare of the County's children would be taken seriously, and the presence of two key chief officers with a shared commitment to the rights of children.

### *Early Developments*

Adopting a clear set of principles was an important first step, but nobody was naïve enough to think that this would be sufficient to change the way children and young people were perceived, or the way services were provided to them. The next significant step was the decision by three of the major agencies to fund a project with the aim of translating the rhetoric into reality. In 1997, the County Council's Education and Social Services Departments, in partnership with the County Durham Health Authority, committed resources to create the *Investing in Children* Initiative.

In the early stages, Felicity (Fizz) Shenton, worked on the project on a part time basis. Fizz is an experienced childcare worker, with a background in local authority social work, who now works as a freelance researcher, trainer and consultant. She has a reputation as an independent thinker, and is known for her commitment to the rights of children and young people. Her distinctive approach was important in establishing an ethos. From the very start, she sought to involve children and young people in her work. She had worked closely with the original working party, and she began to lay down some of the important foundations upon which the initiative would be built. She established the *Investing in Children* Newsletter as a means of communicating the principles of the Statement of Intent to as wide an audience as possible, and began the process of drawing together key players who would contribute to the first County Durham Children's Services Plan.

Fizz also managed the process of recruitment of a full-time coordinator for *Investing in Children*. In the spirit of 'start as you mean to continue', she designed into the recruitment process an important role for children and young people themselves. In a first for the County Council, candidates for the post were interviewed by two panels, one of which consisted entirely of young people.

I was the successful candidate, and in November 1997, I took up the post of *Investing in Children* Coordinator. A brief resume of my background is relevant here, and is provided in Appendix 3. This will hopefully shed light upon the reasons why I was appointed, but also, as proposed in chapter 1, provide a context within which the reader can understand my standpoint as participant observer within this thesis.

In the early days, there wasn't too much to coordinate. There was a budget, but no staff or premises – in truth, although the sponsoring agencies were clear about what they hoped the Initiative would achieve, there wasn't too much clarity about how, exactly, this would be done. In many ways, this was (and, I believe, continues to be) one of the great strengths of *Investing in Children*. The approach we have adopted has been very much one of 'finding out by doing'. Of necessity, we have had to develop as a learning organisation, in which, as I hope to demonstrate later, failure has been as informative as success.

The first task in hand was the creation of Children's Services Plan. Assisted by colleagues in the key agencies, Fizz had begun the process of collating the various strategies and policies which were informing the provision of services to children, young people and families across the County. Although by no means a straightforward task, it was possible to discern and describe the various priorities which were being pursued. This could be described as the *official* position.

What we did not know was whether these priorities were shared by children and young people themselves. Given that the Statement of Intent committed us to working in partnership with children and young people, it seemed a logical first step to go out and ask them.

### *Engaging with Children and Young People*

The immediate problem was we were uncertain about the best way to go about engaging children and young people in the discussion. We were able to collect together a substantial number of reports from round Durham and adjoining authorities which purported to identify the key issues facing young people. In the most part, these provided interesting and valid insights into the position of young people. However, they did not provide quite what we thought we needed. Some, like many of the community appraisals we read, relied upon the testimony of parents to represent the views and wishes of their children. Many of the others were consultation exercises about existing services, where the scope of the responses was confined to the areas of interest of the consulting agency, rather than the interests of the consultee. A small number seemed to be mainly concerned with collecting quotes from young people to justify the strategy which the particular agency had already adopted, and often which it was seeking funding to continue. The ability of, for example, substance misuse projects to find young people who appear to agree that the availability of drugs in their

community was the single most important issue in their lives, or community safety initiatives who could establish beyond doubt that the unruly behaviour of (other) young people was the pressing priority for them, was remarkable.

This is not to say that these, and other issues, were **not** important and valid, but we were interested to find out whether, when presented with a more open invitation, children and young people might identify a different agenda.

In the winter of 1997 and the spring and summer of 1998, we attempted to create opportunities for children and young people across the County to comment on issues of importance to them. We were experimenting. We used a variety of techniques, some of which seemed to be effective, and others which were less so.

County Durham Health Authority had divided the County into five separate administrative areas, in which a Joint Commissioning Management Group (JCMG) had been established. (These administrative areas were the forerunners of the current Primary Care Trusts). Although not entirely co-terminus with the District Council boundaries (two of the JCMGs included two District Council areas – Weardale and Teesdale in the South, and Durham City and Chester-le-Street in the centre of the County), they offered the advantage that they already existed – they provided a pre-established network which included all of the key agencies, organised at a more local level than the County Council.

In each of these areas, we set out to create an opportunity for children and young people to make a contribution to the debate about public services. We were very clear that we were making a start, and that by necessity, we would not be able to include everyone. We took care to state that the results of this exercise did not constitute a definitive statement of the state of the County's children and young people. Equally, however, we were aware of the need to create an opportunity for at least **some** children and young people to express their views.

After a series of consultation events with the partners in the JCMGs, we commissioned projects to begin this process. As we have acknowledged, we were uncertain about how this might best be done, and so we were interested in adopting different tactics in different areas.

In **Easington**, we worked with a group of young women from two youth projects run by a voluntary organisations, Groundwork and Pride House. The brief was quite straightforward – identify and explore issues which they considered to be the most important to them.

This was a successful piece of work, in that it appeared to provide a framework within which young people seemed free to develop their own agenda. The group spent time researching the opinions of their peers, before creating an agenda for further development. Access to services, from leisure to health and education, were amongst the issues they raised. For example, the group drew attention to the fact that many youth clubs in the district closed during the school holidays. Transport, or rather the lack of it, was also identified as being of particular importance. The group carefully recorded their findings, which they described in their report '*Perceptions of Public Services for young people in Easington District*'. (Ainsley and others, 1998, *Investing in Children* Archive)

The JCMG in **Durham and Chester-le-Street** took a slightly different tack. They were concerned that our deliberately universal approach would omit children and young people outside of the mainstream. Therefore, we set up a project to elicit the views of disabled children. We commissioned a local community arts and drama company, *Jack Drum Arts*, who made contact with the young people, and during the Easter school holidays spent a week with the group in a community centre in Chester-le-Street. Using a variety of media, they encouraged and supported the young people to express their views.

The product of this week of activity was one of the most striking achievements of this phase of *Investing in Children's* development. The group produced their report, entitled 'The Big Picture'. This was constructed from 2 metre tall sheets of industrial cardboard. On each sheet, members of the group made silhouette portraits of themselves, and through text and art work, expressed their views. Their frustration at always being treated differently, and being unable to access 'normal' services and facilities was powerfully expressed. A summary report, capturing the narratives of the group, was also produced. ( Jack Drum Arts, 1998, *Investing in Children* Archive)

The thinking in **Derwentside** was not dissimilar, although the approach to the task was different. Here, we worked with an established group (the Special Needs Unity Group) who ran an amateur dramatics project for able and disabled young people. The adults who ran the project agreed to be facilitators for the work, and supported the young people to research a

variety of issues which focused on the provision of health services for disabled children and their families.

We were less certain about the validity of this work. Without doubt, the young people involved worked hard, and produced a report which was carefully written, and full of colourful graphs and charts (SNUG, 1998, *Investing in Children* Archive). But we were never sure whether the issues which were explored and discussed were genuinely the young people's agenda, or that of the adults who worked with them.

In the **Dales** in the south of the County, and the most rural of all of the areas, the JCMG was concerned about how young people living in relatively isolated circumstances were able to gain access to information and advice about services available to them. Although this was not an approach which allowed young people to completely determine the agenda, it was clearly an important question, and a group of young people, supported by a facilitator, visited youth clubs and other venues, and conducted focus-group style research into this issue. (Brough and others, 1998, *Investing in Children* Archive)

In **Sedgefield**, we looked at two different approaches. From my previous experience of working for Durham Social Services, I was aware that the Headteacher of Woodham School, in Newton Aycliffe, Steve Harness, was likely to be sympathetic to our approach. We approached Steve, and he quickly agreed to collaborate. This was the start of not only a fascinating piece of work, 'Sour Grapes', described below, but also of a close relationship with the students and staff at the school which has been crucial to the development of *Investing in Children*.

With the assistance of the Headteacher, we were able to establish a group of students who agreed to work with us. We provided them with resources (a budget and a facilitator). Their brief, as with the Easington group, was very simple - to agree an agenda of issues which they saw as the most important, and to spend some time exploring them.

This was a hugely successful piece of work. The young people spent time researching the views of other young people in their community. They identified transport and the way young people were treated by local shopkeepers and by staff at the local leisure centre as of particular importance, and they attempted to engage some of the key adults in a dialogue about this. Their report, 'Sour Grapes' is a perceptive and articulate account of their findings, and formed the basis for some of the future work of *Investing in Children* described in the next chapter.

(Card and others, 1998, *Investing in Children Archive*)

The second piece of work in Sedgfield was an attempt to engage with children of primary school age. Cap-a Pie, a local professional theatre group, were commissioned to run a day-long drama-based workshop for twenty-six 8-10 year olds from various communities in Sedgfield.

Their approach was ingenious. The company created a fictitious family of refugees fleeing oppression, who were considering settling in the Sedgfield area. They needed advice, and very quickly the young people were drawn in to the drama, providing comment on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the area, based upon their 'expert' knowledge as local residents.

The outcome was a very clear account of how the young people perceived their environment. For example, in advising the 'refugee family' about safe play facilities for their children, the group identified parks where they did not feel safe or protected. (Cap-a-pie, 1998, *Investing in Children Archive*)

### **Early lessons.**

As mentioned above, we were very careful not to make ambitious claims about the significance of the work we had commissioned. We were acutely aware that we had made a start, no more than that, and that we had worked with a tiny proportion of the population of children and young people in the County. But we had learned some important lessons, which would stand us in good stead for the future.

First of all, it was apparent that, when given the opportunity, the young people we had worked with were both willing and able to think independently and articulate an agenda of issues based upon their own experiences and that this agenda varied from the priorities being discussed by the main agencies providing services to children and young people.

Significantly, there were common threads running through the reports of most of the groups, which allowed us to suggest that there might be an agenda shared by different groups of young people in different parts of the County. We will return to this point below.

We were also able to reflect upon our approach to the task, and identify those aspects which the young people seemed to be suggesting were the

most helpful. Whilst the piece of work commissioned through Cap-a-pie created some revealing insights into the lives of 8-10 year olds in Sedgefield, it was an *event*, albeit an exciting and imaginative one. The young people who attended the drama workshop did not continue to engage in dialogue about the issues they had identified. The strategy of establishing and resourcing young people's research teams seemed to create a *process*, and judging by the commitment shown by the researchers themselves, one which was sustainable. In an evaluation by the University of Durham, Shenton comments: "The young people led research appears to have been a very successful strategy both for encouraging young people's active and continued involvement, creating a dialogue and in establishing a young person led agenda" (Shenton, 1999, p39).

### *A new agenda*

At the beginning of the work we had no clear idea of what issues would be raised by the young people. The issue of concern to the adult agencies were well rehearsed – attendance and achievement at school, juvenile delinquency and community safety, risky sexual behaviour, drugs, etc. Indeed, as we have remarked before, there were plenty of examples of consultation exercises with young people in which the results echoed the adult concerns.

In some ways this is not surprising. Such is the power differential between adults and young people that there is a certain amount of pressure upon young respondents to surveys to tell the researchers what they (the young people) think they (the adults) want to hear. It is also the case that young people will be well aware of the adult agenda, as they see the negative images of young people portrayed in the media, are instructed about behaviour through Personal Health and Social Education classes at school, and may well hear the anxieties expressed by parents and other family members.

In the absence of any pressure to adopt this agenda, the young people we worked with were free to develop their own ideas, and as we noted above, there was a fair degree of agreement across the different groups.

### *Discrimination.*

Young people commented upon what they perceived to be the casual discrimination which they faced on a daily basis, and which they saw as going largely unnoticed. As an example, they pointed to shops which display signs which limit the number of young people allowed in. In

Newton Aycliffe for example, the research team visited a chemist's shop where a sign by the entrance reads: "No person under the age of sixteen is allowed into the store unless accompanied by an adult" When the researchers challenged the manager about this, she explained that it was because of the threat of theft. (Card and others, 1998, p15, *Investing in Children Archive*)

To treat almost any other group in this way would be unacceptable and even illegal. The young people point out that a sign which said "No women unless accompanied by a man" or "Only two black people allowed in at one time" would not be tolerated. This was seen as a matter of social justice.

Commercial premises were not the only offenders. The young people also questioned the differential way some public servants treat adults and young people. They commented on their experience of regularly being asked to 'move on' by the police when no offence was being committed, and where, in similar circumstances, a group of adults would attract no attention. (Cairns,2001, p352)

### *Access*

Young people suggested that many public services made little or no attempt to understand and accommodate young people. Their suspicion was that services were designed to suit the needs of adults, or even the service providers, but not young people. Sometimes this was about the organisation of the service—for example, the public library which closes just as the school day ends, or the youth clubs which close during the summer holidays..

More often, it was a question of attitude, and young people were able to describe a range of situations in which they were made to feel unwelcome. For example: "Leisure Centres are open to all members of the public. Unfortunately such centres are not as 'open' as they claim. The majority are not friendly to us and stop us going in at certain times" (Bolton and others, 1999, p3, *Investing in Children Archive*)

### *Transport*

Closely related to the question of access was the public transport system. Remember that County Durham is a semi-rural community, with over half the population living in villages of less than 10,000 inhabitants. Such settlements are clearly too small to sustain a full range of services, and therefore many young people have to use public transport to access a whole

range of basic services and activities, from attending school to going shopping or visiting the doctor.

The young people questioned the organisation of the public transport system, and in particular the bus companies. They suggested that bus routes and timetables did not accommodate their lifestyles, they had concerns about safety when travelling, but also when waiting for buses, they thought the cost of transport was unreasonably high, and they raised significant issues about the attitude of some transport staff towards young people.

### *Safety and protection*

The fourth theme running through the research was the safety of children and young people, but the young people presented a different analysis from the debate being conducted within the official community safety network. At around this time, considerable time and energy was being invested in conducting 'community safety audits' of local communities. It has now been accepted that a weakness in this process was the failure to survey the views of children and young people themselves. Indeed, many of the audits identified the behaviour of children and young people themselves as one of, if not the most significant threat to the safety of the community.

From the work of the young people, however, a different picture begins to emerge. Apprehension about personal safety is often a key influence on children and young people's decisions to use, or not to use, services and facilities, including places like parks and leisure centres. Furthermore, they suggested that their anxieties were not taken seriously, causing them to ask whether their feelings of security were less important than other community members. (Durham County Council, 1998, p6)

### *Participation in decision-making.*

Throughout their reports, the researchers comment that opportunities for them or their peers to play any sort of role in decision-making are few and far between. The position was summed up thus "The best that can be said is that *some* adults listen to *some* children *some* of the time." (Durham County Council, 1998, p7)

These issues were included in the County Council's statutory Children's Services Plan for 1998-1999, with a clear acknowledgement that the work we had done was very much the start of a process and that we were feeling our way forward. We described the position in this way:

“Although the research results would seem to pose more questions than answers, these at least have the merit of being the questions that some children and young people think are important. It is crucial that we build upon the start we have made, and that we develop further opportunities for dialogue, so that we can explore some of the questions which have been raised, and perhaps even find some new answers.” (Durham County Council, 1998, p7)

In the next chapter we shall consider how we went about the quest for new answers, examining our few successes and the more frequent occasions when little progress was made, and attempt to identify the key lessons we have learned from the experience.

## Chapter Five. Learning by Doing,

To say that we didn't know what we were doing back in 1997 would be overstating the case, but there was certainly a lack of certainty about the best way forward. As far as we could tell, these were uncharted waters, and we were therefore by necessity committed to a process of 'learning by doing'. Indeed, I believe that the openness of our approach at least in part explains why we seemed to present such an intriguing and attractive proposition to the young people with whom we worked.

Over the first two years, a number of strands began to emerge which have come to constitute the main body of *Investing in Children*. By using the project's archive, we can examine these developments in detail, in an attempt to understand their separate and collective impact. It is part of the argument being presented here that a number of the specific aspects of the initiative can only be fully appreciated when considered within the context of the project as a whole.

As we discussed in Chapter Two, we are presenting the data as case studies because this allows us to look at the processes through which Investing in Children has sought to create opportunities for children and young people to contribute to the dialogue about decisions which effect them. Inevitably, this means that our emphasis throughout is upon the views and opinions of the young people involved – we are primarily concerned with how they attempt to make sense their world. No doubt a different study of the same material, which placed greater emphasis upon the standpoint of the adults involved, would lead to different conclusions.

The work we started in 1997 has remained at the heart of the project. Creating space, and providing resources to support children and young people to contribute to debates and campaign for change on issues which they have identified as important is the foundation upon which much of our other work is built. This has ranged from 'big' issues such as, for example, transport policy, to more local concerns, for example, leisure facilities in particular villages. We have given this the title '**Campaigning Work**'

Closely related to this, but different in a number of significant ways, is work around involving children and young people in debates identified by adults about issues which effect children and young people. Again, this work varies in its scope, from supporting contributions to, for example, the development of the Connexions Service to informing the management of curriculum development in a particular school. We have described this as '**Commissioned Work**'.

After the publication of the first *Investing in Children* Children's Services Plan in 1998, we were challenged by young people to develop opportunities for more immediate change at a local rather than strategic level. Specifically, the question was: "Can you help me change things where I live my life?" Our response was the creation of the **Membership Scheme**.

We have remained involved in the process of creating the Children's Services Plan, which is now called the Strategy for Children and Young People. *Investing in Children* has explored a number of ways in which policy planning mechanisms might genuinely involve children and young people. We have placed this under the heading '**Children's Services Planning**'.

These four areas are explored in greater detail below. In addition, it is worth mentioning two other features of the overall project, which although not as central to the development of *Investing in Children*, have had an influence upon our thinking.

Building on the theme of the importance of local activity, we established the *Investing in Children* Development Fund, in partnership with the County Durham Foundation, to support community-based initiatives, where there was evidence that the voice of children and young people was at their heart. Part of the Development Fund has been used to support the adoption of the Keyfund, a specific youth work technique created on Tyneside.

From an early stage, *Investing in Children* has attracted attention from outside County Durham, at regional, national and international level. This has created opportunities for children, young people and the workers to learn from and engage in debate with others from beyond Durham and Darlington. It has also created opportunities for children and young people to attempt to influence policy beyond local government.

### **Campaigning Work**

It was apparent from a very early stage that simply providing a means of 'consulting' children and young people would not of itself create the sort of change in attitude which some of the creators of *Investing in Children* had in mind. Having asked the young people who took part in the initial research to help us understand where they believed the problems and

challenges lay, it was logical to invite them to help us understand what the solutions might look like.

To start with, this seemed a fairly obvious next step, but it very quickly became clear that having an opinion (and even having an opportunity to voice it) was one thing, but having that opinion taken seriously and having it lead to change was a much more difficult proposition. Although the various partners to *Investing in Children* had 'signed up' to the Statement of Intent, the depth of their commitment was unknown. As we explored in chapter three, the dominant discourse on childhood, confused though it may be, does not easily accommodate the idea that children and young people themselves might have a valuable contribution to make to public policy debate.

Supporting children and young people to campaign for the right, not only to be consulted, but to have a seat at the table when decisions are made is the inevitable logical consequence of the *Investing in Children* Statement of Intent. However, it has to be said that not all of the partner agencies have seen it like this, especially when we were supporting young people who were challenging their practice.

### **Case study 1**

#### **The *Investing in Children* Transport Group.**

Without doubt, one of our biggest learning experiences came through our involvement with the young people in the *Investing in Children* Transport Group. The lessons we learned from the young people in this project have informed much of the work we have done subsequently, and it is worth analysing in some detail the development of the group and the course of the project.

In the work we did in preparation for the Children's Services Plan 1998 – 1999, the issue which appeared most often in our conversations with children and young people was transport. It therefore seemed like a reasonable next step to bring together some of the young people who had raised this issue. This became the *Investing in Children* Transport Group.

Originally, the group were drawn from the research teams from Easington, Derwentside and Newton Aycliffe. This immediately created a group with a variety of skills and abilities, whose members came from different backgrounds and had varied experiences. It would be an inaccurate caricature to suggest that the young people from Newton Aycliffe were

from more affluent families than the young people from Easington. But it is true that between the original ten young women and two young men there was considerable variation in social and family circumstances. (At a later stage, three young people from the Durham Children and Young People's Council also joined the group.)

The issues for the group at the start were fairly straightforward. The public and school transport system in the County did not appear to them to serve their needs, it was too expensive, and transport staff were often disrespectful. Specifically, their opinions were derived from their own experiences. For example:

- The young people from Newton Aycliffe knew that the last bus home from Darlington (the nearest large town with a cinema) left before most films finished. Either you left before the end, or alternative transport arrangements had to be made.
- There was an awareness that taking part in extra-curricular activities after school often depended upon the student's ability to make their own travel arrangements because the school bus always leaves at the end of the school day. This could effectively exclude students from less affluent backgrounds who could neither afford the extra bus fare, nor call upon parents to provide lifts. In some parts of the County, there was no alternative bus service.
- The young people from Easington knew that they had to pay the full fare to visit the Metro Shopping Centre in Gateshead, but that friends of the same age who lived in Sunderland, the adjacent local authority to the north, were able to make the same journey for a much reduced fare, because of the concessionary fare scheme for children and young people operating across the Tyne and Wear metropolitan area.
- All of the young people had personal experiences of being treated badly by transport staff. They described as commonplace buses failing to halt if the only passengers waiting to be collected at a bus stop were young people. There were regular disputes with drivers over age, eligibility for half fares, and even being refused access unless the exact fare was offered. The young people had the distinct impression of being treated in a discriminatory fashion, Helen Swanwick from the Newton Aycliffe group put it this way: "I suppose if you have a bunch of grapes and the first few are sour you expect the rest to be, although the driver really should be open-minded about each and every person that gets onto the bus, as they

are people, not grapes” (Card and others, 1998 p1, *Investing in Children Archive*).

Over a number of months, the group came together, got to know each other and spent time discussing the issues. From *Investing in Children's* point of view, we were interested to explore whether the young people, having identified the problems, had ideas about how these might be overcome. The young people were unequivocal- they were committed to pursuing improvements, although they (like us) were unsure how to go about doing this.

After considerable debate, the group decided that a starting point would be to get all of the relevant transport decision-makers together. The group would then explain the ways in which public transport was failing young people, and from the subsequent discussion solutions would be found.

This was a relatively simple task, primarily because *Investing in Children* was seen within the County Council as an ‘in-house’ initiative, and we were therefore able to call upon the assistance of one of the key agencies. The County Council’s Environment and Technical Services Department have a crucial role to play in the debate about public transport across the authority, as many uneconomic bus routes are subsidised by local government. Members of the Department’s Transport team agreed to make the necessary arrangements.

A meeting was convened in the very formal setting of one of the large Committee Rooms in Durham County Hall. A group of transport officials, from the Environment Department, the school bus service, the railways and the two major bus companies attended. When the young people arrived, the transport officials were seated at one end of a very large table and the young people were invited to occupy the other end. Coffee was served to the adults, and juice and biscuits to the young people. This set the tone for the exchange. The young people saw it like this: “ From our point of view the meeting was disappointing. We all felt that we were patronised and told what **they** wanted us to know, and not what **we** wanted to know” (Card and others, 1999, p3)

I was present at the meeting, and this analysis seems accurate to me . There was very little engagement on the serious nature of the issues raised by the young people. Most of the time was taken up by the professionals providing a rationale in support of the status quo. Timetabling and routing of buses was a matter of commercial judgement, and the bus company managers were responsible to their shareholders to make a profit. Bus

drivers regularly reported intimidation and abuse from young people, and there was a robust complaints system if passengers felt ill-treated. The school bus service was provided on a centrally negotiated contract for reasons of economy, and therefore didn't lend itself to local variation. The fares structure in Durham was necessary to take account of the high cost of providing a transport system in such a semi-rural environment. Sunderland was part of a basically urban transport system on Tyneside, where costs and therefore fares were lower.

The next part of the Transport Group's analysis of their meeting with the transport professionals was the trigger to a process from which we were to learn a great deal. The young people commented : " We realised that information was power and for us to take part in the debate about transport in County Durham we needed, not only to talk about our own experiences, but also to have information about how transport was arranged elsewhere." (Card and others. 1999, p3)

Far from being disheartened by their experience at County Hall, the group resolved to gather information about transport which might allow them to challenge the experts' dismissal of their case. Over the next year, the group met regularly and pursued a systematic research programme.

They wrote to every local authority in England, and requested details about transport policy. They also developed a relationship with the County Council's Local Agenda 21 Team, who were more sympathetic to their cause, and who provided crucial advice and support.

With the information they had gathered from their survey, the group decided to organise research visits to other local authorities. They visited Cumbria, Northumberland and Derbyshire. Some places were more cooperative than others. The visit to Derbyshire was particularly fruitful because of its similarity to County Durham (a ex-mining area with the population scattered across a semi-rural environment, living in relatively small settlements) but also because of the high level of cooperation they received from the officials they met, who were in turn intrigued by the group's approach.

Local Agenda 21 provides an umbrella organisation bringing together a wide range of individuals and agencies with an interest in environmentally sustainable development. The County Council's Local Agenda 21 Team supports a series of 'Roundtable' groups which arrange fora in which environmental issues can be addressed. The Local Agenda 21 Transport

Roundtable took an interest in the work of the group, and provided the resources to finance a study trip to Holland.

For many in the group, this was their first trip abroad. Taking care to travel by the most environmentally-friendly means, the group spent three days in Holland, meeting with Dutch young people's groups and environmentalists. There was a certain amount of learning about the Dutch transport system, but as important if not more so, was the effect upon the self-confidence of group members. They clearly began to believe that they had a legitimate contribution to make to this important area of public policy in County Durham, and they were more determined than ever to make it.

The group produced a report, *Fares Fair*, in which they described their research. They concluded that the public transport system in County Durham was socially unjust, in that it discriminated against the less affluent members of the community, and that it was environmentally unsustainable in that it encouraged over-reliance on private cars. They made a series of recommendations:

- Concessionary fares for more young people would be fairer and more sustainable, by encouraging more journeys by bus.
- More accessible timetabling would improve bus use.
- Attention should be paid to the design and location of bus shelters. Young people felt vulnerable and unsafe in the old, unlit brick-built shelters.
- Customer service training for bus drivers should be improved, and complaints procedures should be made more accessible.
- Greater communication between students and staff at school about safe journeys to and from school could increase the number of young people prepared to walk or cycle to school.
- Improved street lighting round schools would both increase the number of walkers, but also encourage more students to take part in extracurricular activities in the winter.

- More cycle lanes will only be an effective measure to encourage greater bike use if the issue of safe, secure bike storage is addressed, especially in schools. (Card and others, 1999)

The group were not content to simply publish the report. They wanted to reopen the debate with the transport professionals with whom they had had such a disappointing experience the year before. A second meeting was arranged, attended by mostly the same participants.

This time there was an entirely different atmosphere, primarily because the young people felt much more confident about their arguments. The previous year, the professionals had asserted that arrangements in County Durham, in particular the fares structure, were the best that could be provided given the semi-rural nature of the County, and the young people had been unable to challenge this claim. A year later, and they were able to use the results of their research to suggest that, far from being inevitable, a number of alternatives existed to the Durham transport structure, which carried significant benefit to young travellers.

For example, in relation to fares, the young people were able to use the information they had gathered in Derbyshire to show that young people in Durham were paying more for their travel than others. This comparison was more difficult to dismiss than that made with Sunderland the previous year, because of course of the similarities between Durham and Derbyshire. The most important point here was not that the young people could prove beyond doubt that the Derbyshire fare structure was better, but that they were able to challenge the monopoly on knowledge claimed by the professionals. The previous year, they had been told that there was no real alternative to the fare structure in Durham. Through their research, they had demonstrated that this was not the case.

From the outset, *Investing in Children* was always seen as a 'Flagship' project of the County Council, and the elected members had been kept informed of progress through regular reports. It wasn't difficult, therefore to suggest that the Transport Group should present their report to the Leader of the Council, Don Robson. A copy of the report was made available in advance, and it was clear when the meeting took place that Councillor Robson had not just read it, he had had officials in the Environment Department check out the conclusions drawn by the young people. The group had been expecting to have to make their case again, but instead found that the Leader was persuaded by their arguments, particularly concerning the comparatively high level of fares paid by Durham young people.

As a direct result of this meeting, the County Council made available £100,000 to be invested in a new concessionary fare scheme to reduce the cost of travel for all 14 and 15 year olds in the County. 17,000 young people stood to benefit when the scheme was introduced.

Significantly, the process did not end there. The young people were not convinced that all of the adults involved had been listening, and there were concerns that, left to their own devices, the concessionary fare scheme introduced by the transport professionals would not meet the needs of the young people. The *Investing in Children* Transport Group requested a seat at the table when the negotiations over the new scheme between the County Council and the bus companies took place.

Their concerns were proven to be well-founded. The representative of one of the bus companies in particular found the whole process very challenging, and he, supported by some very cautious and conservative local government officers, insisted on the creation of a complicated and overly bureaucratic process. The stated fear was that the new scheme would be vulnerable to fraud, and that young people not entitled to hold a concessionary pass (called, incidentally, an *Investing in Children* Card) would get hold of the pass and claim cheap travel.

To prevent this happening, they insisted that the application forms should be accessed through schools, with the school secretary endorsing the identity of the applicant. The young person then had to attach a passport photo and a cheque or postal order for £2 and send the completed application to the bus company, who would then issue the card.

The young people protested that this was far too onerous, that many young people lived in families without access to cheque books, that the cooperation of schools couldn't be taken for granted, and that, in any event, the actual concession gained by having a card (50% reduction for 14 and 15 year olds travelling by bus after 6pm and at weekends and holidays) was so restricted as to persuade many young people that it wasn't worth the effort. They also pointed out that the card should actually improve relations between drivers and young people, as a constant source of tension was disputes about age and eligibility for half fares.

The scheme went ahead in the format demanded by the bus companies, but after fewer than 100 cards had been issued in the first three months, they were forced to listen to the advice of the young people and simplify the

application process. The take-up rate increased immediately. (*Investing in Children Newsletter 35, June 2000, Investing in Children Archive*)

### *Key learning points*

The creation of the new concessionary fare scheme costing a considerable sum of public money was a major political achievement for a group of young people with no previous experience of political activity. But its significance was potentially far greater than the cheaper fares it introduced for young people. If we could learn from the process, we might be able to replicate the model of practice that had been created and support other groups of young people to achieve change

The work of Jurgen Habermas provides a useful framework within which we can consider the significance of the work of the Transport Group.

Habermas describes the rules by which genuine dialogue takes place. Dialogue is a process through which partners to the dialogue attempt to convince each other that one particular course of action is more logical than another. Participants are persuaded by the “force of the better argument”. Rules are necessary to ensure equality, freedom and fair play

Democratic deliberation of this sort requires that, not only must everyone have the opportunity to have their say, but also that participants adopt an attitude of listening to each other with respect. “To treat one another as equal dialogue partners means that we must start from the assumption that each participant has something potentially worthwhile to contribute to the discourse; that each deserves to have his or her claims considered” (Chambers, 2001, p1)

If we consider the story of the Transport Group within this analysis, it is clear that, at the first meeting with the transport professionals, there was no dialogue. Not only were the professionals unprepared to acknowledge that the young people had a worthwhile contribution to make to the debate, the young people themselves were uncertain about the validity of their case.

The key question, then, is what happened between the two meetings which made the outcome of the second so different to the first. The original analysis of the young people themselves was that knowledge is power, and in order to compete with the professional adults, the young people need to acquire more knowledge. Only by doing so, would they win the right to become participants in the dialogue.

It seems to me that the dynamics are much more complicated than this. At the first meeting, the young people put forward fundamentally the same argument that they advanced at the second meeting i.e. that the bus service in County Durham was unresponsive to their needs, and more expensive than elsewhere. Was this more persuasive the second time simply because the young people had **more** information to support their case?

To an extent, this was the case, but this on its own seems insufficient to explain the change in policy achieved by the group. Much more important, I would suggest, was the **capacity** of the young people to **sustain** their argument. Although there is no doubt that they were better informed, the main difference (which is only partly explained by their increased knowledge) was that they were much more confident that they had a good case **and** a right to make it.

Returning to Habermas, dialogue requires participants to recognise the validity of other contributions, but also the value of their own input. Perhaps the most significant development over the 12 months was the group's growing confidence and belief in what they were doing. There was a developing **consciousness** both of the injustice of a system which was unwilling to take their views seriously, and of their **right** to be heard. Reflecting on the process afterwards, two members of the group, Melissa Haskins and Emily Card, described their "growing political awareness" and stated confidently: "We have been able to show quite clearly that we have a contribution to make to the debate, and that our ideas are worth listening to." (Benga and others, 2001, p11)

It seems to me that there are two important parts to this process. Furlong and Carmel suggest that "for political action to occur, people have to develop an awareness that a group to which they belong is being illegitimately disadvantaged." (Furlong and Carmel, 1997, p104) When we left the first meeting with the transport professionals, after there had been a failure to achieve any dialogue, one of the things that surprised me was how calmly the group responded to the treatment they had received. Unlike me, they had been much more realistic in their expectations. Being patronised and not being listened to by adults was part of their daily existence. It was unremarkable.

The developing of consciousness began with the realisation that the position of the adults was neither reasonable nor legitimate. Up until this point, the members of the group had simply accepted the inevitability of a system in which their views were rarely sought, and their opinions ignored.

But in discussion they began to critically explore both the arguments advanced by the adults in relation to transport issues, and the general status of the adults as 'knowing best' and found both positions wanting.

The second crucial part of this process was a growing belief that this position could be challenged. The Investing in Children Transport Group sustained a high level of activity for over a year in researching and creating their report, "Fare's Fair". Their belief in the possibility of achieving change was fundamental to the group's sustainability. Again, the young people were remarkably realistic about this – when asked about their ambitions to achieve a better transport system, Helen Swanwick, one of the group, replied that it would take time, and they hoped that eventual improvements would be to the benefit of future generations. (In fact by the time the *Investing in Children* Concessionary Fare Card was introduced in April 2000, most of the young people who had campaigned for it were too old to qualify.)

To summarise, I would suggest that the crucial difference between the first and second meetings of the young people and the transport professionals was the development of the capacity of the young people to create and sustain a coherent argument for change. This capacity was partly as a result of increased knowledge, but mainly the consequence of a growing consciousness amongst the young people of their right to be heard, and an awareness of the possibility of change being achieved.

A further factor, parallel to the process of development within the young people's group, was the interest shown in the project by key personnel within the local government system. The first meeting between the young people and the transport professionals attracted very little attention, and passed off without much comment, outside of *Investing in Children*. By the time 'Fares Fair' had been produced, the work of the group had attracted the attention (and support) of senior managers within the County Council's Environment and Technical Services Department. This was important because this Department played a major role in the negotiations over the subsidies awarded to commercial bus companies to sustain a usable transport system within the County.

These professionals, who have a much more strategic than operational view of the transport system, had considerable sympathy with the case presented by the young people. Their argument, that sustained and habitual use of public transport by adults in the long term depended upon young people being encouraged to use the system now, played well within the strategic debate.

Equally important, the Leader of the Council, the pre-eminent local politician, became personally involved. He was persuaded particularly by the argument put by the young people that the fare structure supported by other local authorities was more socially just and that the system in Durham was more expensive and therefore discriminated against less affluent families.

Of course, the crucial support of these key players was not by accident – the young people had been careful in constructing their report to create arguments that would resonate with other issues. Returning to Habermas, this meant that there were now participants in the dialogue who were prepared to listen to and acknowledge the contribution of the young people.

On reflection, the work of Habermas provides a theoretical analysis within which we can examine the dynamics through which the policies of the County Council and the bus companies were changed. Put most simply, we created the circumstances in which a genuine dialogue took place which included the contribution of young people. This was the new dynamic which led to change.

Central to this was the capacity of the young people to participate fully in the dialogue. This capacity was developed over a period of more than a year, and one of the key learning points of this thesis is to understand the factors which might explain this sustained effort on the part of the young people. We identified the following key points:

- Control over the agenda. The young people were researching and campaigning for change over an issue which they had identified as important. Many of the examples of ‘youth consultation’ we looked at as we were beginning the process of engaging with young people were in fact exercises in consultation over issues chosen by adults. The enthusiasm and sustained involvement over such a long period is explained in part at least by the fact that the young people were committed to the issues and clearly believed that they had a good case.
- Lack of pressure on time. We were not working to any deadlines. At various points in the research, members of the group were able to take breaks from the work because they had other priorities. We were able to establish a relaxed atmosphere, where the researchers did not feel under pressure to achieve results by agreed dates. This helped to establish *Investing in Children* as a different and new sort

of experience. To be fair, I think part of the attraction was that the young people were intrigued by this new approach.

- A mixed group. The fact that the group came from varied backgrounds helped to keep the agenda focused on the universal position of young people across the County, which is where the most persuasive argument for political change rested. This was not special pleading for a particular group.
- Adequate resources. The group were supported, but not directed, in their work. Resources were available to them to pursue their research, and to visit other authorities. At various points they were supported by three experienced workers and were able to call upon the Local Agenda 21 team for expert advice.
- Allowances and expenses. From the start of *Investing in Children* we were clear that in part what we were trying to do was to recruit children and young people into the debate about improving public services. An important way of marking the significance of their contribution was to ensure that, like other contributors, they were able to claim an allowance for their time, and out-of-pocket expenses.
- Developing consciousness. In the year between the first and second meeting at County Hall, the capacity of the group to create and sustain a persuasive argument for change was greatly increased. This was partly a matter of knowledge, as they proposed at the start of the campaign, but it was at least as much about their own self-confidence and growing belief in their right to be heard. Through discussion, the group became much more aware of the political issues. This is reflected in the considered nature of their report, 'Fare's Fair'.
- The importance of dialogue as a process. The frustration about the first meeting was that no dialogue had taken place. The young people had no expectation that every one of their points would be accepted, but they did expect to be listened to, and for there to be a process in which both parties adjusted their position to accommodate the opinion of the others. Their determination to pursue this objective led them to insisting that they continue to play

a role in the design of the scheme, after the original political decision to endorse the proposal had been agreed.

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## ***Case Study 2***

### ***School dinners***

A group of young people at a school in the south of the county approached *Investing in Children* and asked for support in their attempt to gain improvements in the school dinner service they received. They were dissatisfied with the way the school organised the lunch break arrangements, and with the quality and value for money of the actual food provided.

The head teacher was broadly sympathetic with their concerns, and expressed support for their intention to campaign for improvements. Indeed, he and his staff echoed some of their criticisms: “ After a promising start, the variety of food on offer has decreased...too expensive for students....you can get much better at Macdonalds...bloody awful!...not particularly good providers of food.” (Edmunds and others, 2000, p13, *Investing in Children* Archive).

We agreed to provide resources to the group (a budget and a consultant) so that they could explore the issues and prepare their arguments. Six young people, aged between 13 and 16 formed a research team.

Their research programme focused on a number of areas and used a number of techniques:

- They surveyed the opinions of other students, and analysed 455 completed questionnaires.
- They conducted a door-to-door survey of the residents of houses adjacent to the school. (The school operates a policy which confines students to school grounds during the lunch break).
- They gathered the opinions of school staff and parents.
- They interviewed local shopkeepers.
- They visited a school of a similar size in the north of the County, for comparison purposes.
- They interviewed the manager of the company that provides the meals service.

The salient facts about school meals, as described by the group, are as follows: The food is provided, under contract, by an outside catering company. Lunchtime lasts for 40 minutes. The canteen is relatively small, and much time is spent queuing. Food must be eaten in the canteen. Students must remain within the school grounds during the lunch break.

After conducting their research, the group produced a report outlining their findings, and making recommendations for change. The key issues they covered were:

- *Price, choice and quality of the food.* 75% of the students who completed the questionnaire expressed dissatisfaction with the food, and felt it was poor value for money. The school in the north of the County, visited by the research team (and served by the same catering company) had a wider range of choice in both food and drink.
- *Discrimination against poor people.* Students in receipt of free school meals were faced with very little choice. (In the interview with the catering company manager, she accepted that the free school meal rate wouldn't pay for a meal *and* a drink. The interviewers voiced their disapproval, to which she retorted: "That's life". ) (Edmunds and others, 2000, p19, *Investing in Children* Archive)
- *The lunchtime regime.* The small canteen and the brief time available meant that queuing was inevitable. The queues form outside, which means that people get cold and wet during the winter. The ban on taking food out of the canteen to eat : "Teachers and nannies guard the canteen doors and pockets are sometimes searched" (Edmunds, p5), exacerbates the overcrowding.
- *The lunchtime confinement.* Insisting that students stay on school premises provides the catering company with a monopoly situation. The school's main argument for this was "the negative impact it would have among the shop keepers...i.e. the increase in shoplifting, overcrowding, smoking, etc" ( Edmunds, p15). This view was not supported by the shopkeepers who were interviewed by the research team. Indeed, the manager of the local bakery stated that when the school introduced the policy, it had caused him such a loss of sales that he had had to make one of his staff redundant. Nor were the local residents in support of this policy.

The group went on to make a series of recommendations. They argued that extending the available time from 40 to 50 minutes, and staggering the lunchtimes so that different year groups stopped for lunch at different times

(the researchers had seen this system in operation at the other school they visited) would go a long way towards relieving the overcrowding issue.

The group also argued that very little improvement in the quality or price of the food could be expected whilst the school maintained the ban on students leaving the grounds at lunchtime. The research team had noticed that services were notably better at the other school they visited, despite the fact that the same company was the supplier. At this school, pupils were free to leave the school and buy lunch in town. It was the presence of this competition, they concluded, which produced the improvement in service.

The group delivered their findings to the school in June, just before the beginning of the summer holidays. They were promised that their research, and the subsequent recommendations, would be considered by the school managers.

The outcome of the work was that very little changed. Whilst continuing to acknowledge that the standard of service provided by the catering company needed to improve, the school managers rejected the two main proposals of the research team, to extend the lunch break and to lift the ban on students leaving the grounds. Furthermore, the researchers believe that there was little or no explanation given. The decision was simply announced.

Significantly, the two most confident and experienced researchers in the group left the school at the summer break. If they had remained at the school, it is conceivable that the research team might have challenged the school management's decision, but in their absence, the remaining researchers felt unable to pursue their case, and the project came to an end.

#### Key learning points.

This example emphasises the inherent powerlessness of the young people's position, and the sheer difficulty of the task of promoting an alternative discourse on children and young people. The most obvious difference between the experience of this group and the *Investing in Children* Transport Group was that no dialogue took place. Despite the fact that he had been generally sympathetic to the complaints of the group, the headteacher did not feel it necessary to debate the recommendations with the group, simply informing them that the school's management had rejected them.

It could be argued here (and indeed in the other case studies) that the other players (in particular in this case, the catering company) would no doubt

present a different argument. However, the purpose here is to demonstrate that the young people went through a rational process, they researched the issues, and based upon the information they gathered, they were entitled to draw the conclusions and make the case which was contained in their report. It is sufficient to accept that their analysis was reasonable and legitimate – we don't have to argue that it was definitive.

This research team had followed a similar process to that of the Transport Group. By gathering information from a variety of sources, they had demonstrated that the services they were receiving were poorer than those received by other young people. They had shown that there was an element of social injustice in the current arrangements (the disadvantaged position of students in receipt of free school meals). They had (successfully, in their view) addressed the arguments put forward by the school in support of the status quo. And they had put forward a coherent and logical case for change. Why, then, was the school unwilling to accept their recommendations?

I believe the answer lies in understanding the location of power within schools, and who determines the priorities. Schools are under enormous pressure from the Department for education and Skills and from the local Education Authority to achieve academic targets. These become the absolute priority of the school management. Whilst there was considerable sympathy here for the proposition that students should have a greater say in school life, this could not be at the expense of jeopardising the academic record of the school. To maintain this record, the authority to decide school policy must rest with the school management.

This view is echoed in the evaluation of *Investing in Children* conducted by the University of Durham. The report notes “disturbing evidence that, even amongst enlightened agencies that claimed to be working within the *Investing in Children* philosophy, young people's views were actively ignored” and goes on to quote a head teacher thus: “They're not going to come between me and my teachers but if I can do what they ask, I will”. (Shenton, 1999, p 26-27).

Although there was an acknowledgement from the head and teachers alike that the school dinner service was inadequate, the changes which the research team proposed would have interfered with the tight management of the school regime. I suspect that the real reason for the ban on students leaving the school at lunch was the danger that some of them would not return in the afternoon, so affecting attendance rates and ultimately exam results. A short lunch break, with the students confined to the school

grounds, provides the minimum possible disruption of the core business of the school.

This goes back to the point made in chapter two, that the dominant discourse which represents children and young people as adults-in-the-making places the focus upon their well-becoming, often at the expense of their well-being. The main purpose of the school is to equip as many students as possible with the academic preparation to become economically useful and successful adults.

The challenge represented by the research team was to argue that the present, as well as the future, was important, and that they had a right to enjoy as good a school dinner service as other young people. To have accepted this would have been to begin to acknowledge that the students were citizens with rights in the present, not simply the raw material for future citizenship.

This case study also illustrates a key difference between the struggle to achieve recognition for the rights of children and young people, and other rights movements. Children grow up. Black people stay black, women remain women, but, self-evidently, the status of children and young people is temporary. One of the crucial events in the research team's campaign to achieve change was the end of the school term, because that meant that the two strongest members of the group left the school, and moved on to college. The other, younger members did not have the confidence to challenge the school's decision to dismiss their proposals.

The fact that young people's involvement is necessarily transient has had a mixed effect upon *Investing in Children*. It has sometimes meant, as in this case, that the objectives of a particular project are difficult to realise. More generally, it has meant that *Investing in Children* as an organisation has had to maintain a constant process of regeneration. Although one of the most striking aspects of the initiative has been the degree to which young people have been prepared to sustain their commitment over time, with some young people working on a variety of projects over periods of up to four years, eventually people move on. New groups of young people identify new issues, and this has meant that *Investing in Children* has had to remain responsive to new ideas.

I would like to make one final point about this case study. It has been our experience over the past five years that achieving significant change in schools is particularly difficult. Organisationally, they are extremely unequal places, with official power resting almost exclusively with the

staff. As we noted in chapter 2, the education system in England does not recognise the right of young people to receive an education – this is a right conferred upon parents – let alone the right to a say in how it should be delivered. The governance of schools is an entirely adult matter. As various authors have suggested, even where school or student councils exist they are rarely effective mechanisms.(Alderson, 2000, Landsdown 1999, previously cited).

This means that any resistance shown by young people is inevitably seen to be subversive, because the system doesn't allow for any legitimate challenge to adult authority, even though, as is demonstrated in this example, there was a reasonable case to be made. It is unsurprising and consistent with our experience in other schools, that the research group were unable to sustain their case after the school had turned them down.

This is not simply a question about a failure to produce an adequate response to a complaint about school meals. School dinners have been famously of dubious quality for generations. However the school management's unwillingness to respond to a case that was reasonably made does not give grounds for optimism when the argument is not so well-constructed or legitimately expressed. For example, as Williamson points out, "Young people who walk away from schooling are communicating something" and there is "importance in listening to them". (Williamson and Cummings, 1999, p6).

This point is made even more forcibly by Lloyd and Munn. In a study of exclusion and excluded pupils, they comment that many of the young people they consulted "felt uninvolved in the major decisions that were taken about their lives. They felt that their voices were not important." and they conclude "Including young people in decision-making about schools...means listening to what young people have to say, even when it is critical". (Lloyd and Munn, 2002, p20).

It is worth noting, finally, that the particular school involved was not an extreme example. On the contrary, the head seemed generally sympathetic to the *Investing in Children* philosophy, and we have continued to support work with students from the school on different issues. It seems clear that if change is to be won, it will not happen quickly in schools.

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### ***Case Study 3***

#### ***Living in Peterlee***

Easington District, which lies to the east of the County, is amongst the most depressed areas in Britain. 21 of the 26 wards in the district are ranked amongst the 10% most deprived wards in the country, according to the government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, making it the most deprived district outside Inner London. (County Durham Economic Partnership, 2001, p8). Life is hard for people living in these conditions, and as Million notes "As a social group, young people are especially vulnerable to disadvantage and deprivation." (Million, 1998, p13)

Peterlee is a new town, created in the 1950s, to resettle workers from the Durham coalfield, when 25,000 people from the district were employed in the coal industry. However, the last coal mine closed in 1993, and despite considerable regeneration activity, the area remains depressed.

Against this background, a group of young people from Peterlee came together to form a research team at the beginning of 2001 because "we thought it would be an opportunity for young people to talk about the things **they** think are important" (Plant, Owen and others, 2002, p6, *Investing in Children* Archive). The group consisted of three young women and four young men aged between 16 and 19. Some of them had previous experience of working with *Investing in Children*. They were aware that the District Community Safety Partnership, a multi-agency group, were conducting research into the position of young people in Easington, with a view to creating a 'Youth Strategy', and they hoped to be able to influence this.

The group started their research by constructing a questionnaire, which they distributed to over a hundred young people. They also conducted 60 interviews. Finally, they held an 'Agenda Day', where the research team met with 24 young people from around the district for a day, to discuss the issues raised in their research, and to agree their findings.

They identified the following key issues:

- There is very little leisure provision for young people in the Peterlee area. Many of the facilities that young people might choose to use (pool hall, bowling alley, cinema, etc) are not available in the district, and travelling outside the district to access them is difficult because of high transport costs. Local facilities (Macdonalds,

Peterlee Leisure Centre, etc) were seen to be inhospitable. Inevitably, many young people spend time socialising in groups, on the street.

- This causes its own problems: “Well over half the young people said they feel safe at the places they socialise. This is due to the fact that they are in large groups and feel safer than they would if they were on their own. However, the police don’t like young people being in groups so they move us on or split us up.” (Plant, Owen and others, 2002, p3)
- Stereotyping of young people. There was a strong feeling that attitudes towards young people were strongly influenced by negative stereotypes. For example, young people hang about outside Bells Store, a local convenience shop which stays open late into the evening. They are aware that their presence there is seen as a problem: “This can cause problems, as some old people feel intimidated by large groups of young people. Old people...seem to think every teenager is a thug.” (Plant and Owen, p1)
- Respect. “We are always hearing about how young people have no respect for adults or for property etc. Well how about a bit of respect for us?” (Plant and Owen, p3) From the police to leisure centre staff to employees of Macdonalds and Boots the Chemist, young people provided examples of how they were treated with suspicion and a lack of respect.

Having completed their research, the group presented their report to the Community Safety Partnership. They felt that the response to their work was fairly unenthusiastic. This feeling was underlined when the Partnership produced their Youth Strategy. As one of the group remarked: “...our report which took us a year to complete was summed up in a few lines of a book of 600 pages. I am unhappy with this and feel that we have wasted our time”. (Owen, Troman and others, 2002, p7, *Investing in Children* Archive)

The group were not prepared to leave it at that, however, and they decided that they would attempt to address some of the problems they had identified for themselves. Friday night was seen to be a particularly troublesome night, so the group decided to organise an activity that they believe would be attractive to young people and give them something to do and somewhere to go. They set about organising ‘Club Idol’.

The group arranged a meeting with the local police, leisure services manager and youth service, at which they proposed running a disco for young people in the Leisure Centre on Friday nights. Everyone agreed that this was a good idea, and the research team began the process of organising ‘Club Idol’, the name they had given to the disco.

From the start, the group were determined that this was something that they would do for themselves, not something they wanted others to do for them. As one of the group observed: "Although Malcom [the head of leisure services] and the police had agreed with our idea, they didn't exactly agree with the way we wanted it done. It took six long months of arguing our points of view before we got most of the things we wanted." (Owen and Troman, p8)

Key areas of debate concerned the pricing of the event and how the disco would be staffed. Malcolm Grinstead, the head of leisure services who was responsible for the venue, was concerned that the venture recovered its costs. He proposed that a one-off membership fee of £10, and a weekly entrance fee of £2.50 be charged. The young people thought that this would be far too expensive. After much debate, they agreed on a membership fee of £2.50, and a £1.50 entrance fee.

The second major contested issue was the proposal that police officers and youth workers should be present on the night. The research team felt that this would be a major disincentive as "no one wants to go somewhere where they have to listen to youth workers and police talking about the things they think are important, for example drugs, drink vandalism etc". Their preference was to employ a local security firm to look after safety, and that this would be sufficient. Eventually, the following compromise was reached: "We succeeded in our argument about not having any police there, but unfortunately there is going to be a youth worker there on condition that she does not give any talks on anything!" (Owen and Troman,p8)

Club Idol has been running successfully for some time now, and is regularly attended by between 100 and 200 young people every week.

### *Key Learning Points.*

The difference between dialogue and consultation is again apparent in this case example. The Community Safety Partnership commissioned a private research company to survey opinion, including that of young people, in the preparation of their Youth Strategy. For this particular group of young people (and I suspect for others as well) being consulted as part of the survey did not persuade them that they were part of the process, and they did not feel that the subsequent Strategy was relevant to them. However, despite the difficulties described above, the young people felt that they

achieved a tangible improvement in the quality of life for young people in Peterlee by the creation of Club Idol.

The young people showed considerable tenacity and commitment. Eighteen months elapsed between the formation of the research team and the first night of Club Idol. This is a long time to sustain support for a process about which the young people harboured significant doubts, right from the start: "We don't have much confidence that things will change because nobody ever listens to what young people have to say.....This will only work if adults are willing to treat young people as equals with things to say." (Plant and Owen, p6)

The protracted negotiations between the young people and in particular the head of leisure services provides a good example of what Habermas described as 'communicative ethics', which suggests that progress becomes possible when "each party is prepared to listen to the other's view on the basis that each would expect the other to listen to its own, that is, both party share an attitude oriented to reach understanding without which communication would not be possible" (Hewitt, 1996, pp207-208). The progress did not come easily, and every step along the way was contested. Often the arguments were robust, and on occasion opinions were expressed in fairly direct language. Dialogue, as opposed to consultation, is not always comfortable, but the difference in outcome in this example is stark. Club Idol is popular and appears to be meeting the needs of a large number of young people. The Youth Strategy is, in the opinion of the young people with whom we worked, distant and irrelevant to the lives of young people.

Two other points are worth considering in relation to this case study. The first is that the learning produced by the process described above is shared, not least by the young people who were involved. Just after Club Idol began, *Investing in Children* was asked to attend an international seminar entitled "Effective Policies to Support Strong Communities and Better Results for Children and Families". Two members of the Peterlee group, Karl Owen and Louise Wright, agreed to be part of the *Investing in Children* delegation, and to report on their experiences. Despite the fact that neither of them had ever spoken in public before, they insisted on writing their presentations unaided. Karl observed: "To sum up. we need more local recreation for young people, we should be represented at local authority meetings. I don't have much confidence that adults in authority will listen and act on our views." (Owen, Troman and others, 2002, p7). In the conclusion of her presentation, Louise states: " although our idea was a success it took a lot of hard work and time to actually get adults to listen to us. Throughout all of the arguments we had with Malcolm [the manager of

the Leisure Centre] he found it very difficult to accept that he didn't know what was best and that we were quite often in a better position than him to make the right decisions" (Owen and Troman, 2002, p8).

As well as achieving what they considered to be a significant improvement in the facilities available to young people in their area, the young people (along with the adults involved in negotiations and *Investing in Children*) had learned useful lessons about the challenges and the potential for using dialogue to achieve change.

The second point I want to make concerns the nature of the group themselves. As noted at the beginning of this section, Easington is a deprived area. The original research team of seven young people were a mixed group. Not all of them had had successful school careers, and some of them had very modest aspirations about their employment prospects. Some public service agencies would consider them to be part of that part of the population labelled 'hard to reach'.

Our experience has been that although all of the groups we work with are different, this group has been as committed, hard working and as able as any other to make use of the resources on offer, and, unlike many other groups, has achieved some change. The model which has developed within *Investing in Children*, and the opportunities for participation it presents, would seem to be accessible to groups from different backgrounds, with different skills and experiences.

There may be a lesson here for the agencies who wish to label groups as 'hard to reach'. It is at least possible that the difficulty doesn't rest with the groups, but with the way services are being offered. Our analysis might be better directed at those doing the reaching, rather than those who are considered difficult to reach.

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### **Commissioned Work**

*Investing in Children* is the creation of a group of adults, and is paid for (and therefore owned by) a group of agencies associated with local government. Inevitably, therefore, a significant proportion of the work undertaken by the project is at the behest of these agencies. This is an important part of the project's work, but it can also be particularly frustrating. The expectation created by the act of commissioning a piece of

work is that the results will have some significance, and influence upon the commissioning agency. However, this is not always the case.

We noted earlier that ‘user involvement’ and more specifically listening to children is part of the rhetoric of the current government, in some (but significantly, not all) areas of public policy. The following examples illustrate the importance of ensuring that we develop the capacity of both children and young people **and** adults to participate fully in the process of dialogue.

#### **Case Study 4**

##### **730+ Bishop Auckland Diabetic Group**

In 2001, Bill Lamb, a paediatrician working in the south of Durham approached *Investing in Children* and asked for our assistance in developing dialogue with the young people who attended his diabetic clinic at Bishop Auckland Hospital. From the outset it was apparent that Bill and the medical staff working with him (in particular, Trish Laing, the clinic nurse) were already committed to a process of dialogue with their young patients. However, they were also acutely aware of the power differential between them, as providers of essential care, and the young people with diabetes who were dependent upon them. The approach to *Investing in Children* was their way of overcoming this obstacle.

After a series of exploratory meetings between the hospital staff and *Investing in Children*, a group of the young people on the Diabetic Clinic’s list were identified, and with their consent, they received a letter from *Investing in Children*. The letter provided some basic information about *Investing in Children* and contained an invitation to attend a meeting to discuss a potential project. This procedure was important, because it meant that patient confidentiality was respected – Dr Lamb supplied the young people with information about *Investing in Children* but he did not supply *Investing in Children* with information about the young people.

Eventually, in April 2001, a meeting was held at Bishop Auckland Hospital. Young people and their parents listened as we explained the purpose of the proposed project, and what it would entail. The notes from the meeting record that we discussed the possibility of the young people working “to find out the best way of providing a particular service, by doing research. This might involve finding out what other children and young people think, and how things are done elsewhere. After the research the group would

then present their findings and negotiate for change to take place.” The notes go on to record the support available from *Investing in Children*:

- “Pippa Bell [a freelance consultant employed by *Investing in Children* ] will work for the Research Team. She will be available to talk about ideas, to help organise transport etc and to generally support the group.
- The Group will have a budget, to pay expenses, like travelling etc.
- The budget also covers an allowance for time given up by the young people.
- The offices of *Investing in Children* can be used by the group”.

Finally, the notes record “it isn’t possible to say how long this will take. *Investing in Children* recognises that young people have very busy lives.” (Bishop Auckland Diabetic Clinic file, *Investing in Children* Archive)

Two weeks later, a group of five young people turned up at the *Investing in Children* office to begin work.

They called themselves the 730+ Group, because 730 is the minimum number of injections a diabetic has to make in a year. During the summer they spent time interviewing other users of the Diabetic Clinic and gradually they began to develop an agenda of issues for exploration. Some of these centred upon the physical arrangements of the Clinic (the Hospital was about to move into new premises, and it was a good time to be suggesting changes in the physical environment) and others were concerned about the support and information available particularly to newly-diagnosed patients.

Towards the end of 2001, they felt that they had learned as much as they could within the local system, and they began to explore the possibility of looking at diabetic clinics in other parts of the country, for comparison purposes. At this point, Dr Lamb intervened, with the suggestion that Sweden was leading the world in diabetic services, and therefore this would be the best place to go in search of new ideas.

In May 2002, the group spent three days in Uddevalla in Sweden, talking to young people who attended the diabetic clinic run by Dr Ragnar Hanas, an internationally-renowned expert in the field of diabetes. They also spent time with Ragnar himself and his nursing team. Their report, which they published in September 2002, is an astonishingly comprehensive and well-considered account of their research, in which they compare the pros

and cons of the various practices in the two countries. (Davy and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

Following the publication of the report, the group have been involved in extensive dialogue with Dr Lamb and staff from Bishop Auckland Hospital, and as a consequence, many of their suggestions have been acted upon. Amongst the changes that have taken place are:

- The physical environment. The old diabetic clinic was run down and described as 'dark and dingy'. There were no facilities in the waiting area, which was shared with adults awaiting blood tests. The new clinic is in a large, airy space, with facilities and age-appropriate games etc so that the inevitable waiting time is more tolerable. The space is exclusively for young people.
- Support systems. One of the features of the Swedish system was the effort put in to creating and maintaining a support network amongst diabetics. Dr Lamb has agreed to ask all the young people who attend the clinic if they would like to be involved supporting other young people with diabetes. From the positive responses, he will support the development of a network.
- Knowledge and communication. The research team were particularly impressed by a reference book written by Ragnar, covering all aspects of diabetes. Copies of this will now be given to all newly diagnosed diabetics. In addition a new magazine, 'go 4 it', written specifically for young diabetics will shortly be available. (*IiC Membership evaluation report, 2002, Investing in Children Archive*)

Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most challenging result of their research has been around the issue of insulin pumps. With very few exceptions, British diabetics manage their condition by injecting themselves with insulin. However, in Sweden almost 20% of diabetics (and 40% of adolescent diabetics in Uddevalla) use an insulin pump. This is permanently attached to the user, and produces a constant supply of insulin. The pump is seen to be a particularly effective tool in the management of diabetes for some adolescents, when hormones can cause insulin levels to vary widely.

However, the insulin pump is not widely available in the UK. This is partly to do with cost – the initial outlay on a pump is estimated at £2,000, and an infrastructure of training and support would need to be developed before it could be offered as a feasible treatment method here.

In May 2003, The Bishop Auckland Diabetic Clinic became an *Investing in Children* Member. At the ceremony where the young people presented the Membership Certificate to Dr Lamb, the research team made an impassioned plea for the provision of insulin pumps to those young people who would benefit from them.

They argued that the initial cost would be offset by future savings to the health service. These would accrue as a consequence of the enhanced ability of diabetics to manage their condition, stay healthy and so place less strain upon health services generally. They also expressed disappointment that, until their visit to Sweden, they had been unaware of the technology, and therefore effectively excluded from any debate about its use in the UK.

It was a powerful presentation, and they were assisted by three young people from Sweden, who had travelled over to support their case, and provide testimony to the benefits of insulin pumps. The audience at the presentation consisted of senior managers from the local health community, who have the discretion to make the pumps available. We await future developments with interest. Certainly, Dr Lamb who is an advocate for the availability of the pumps in appropriate cases, feels that the Research Team have made a strong, and hopefully irresistible case for change.

### *Key Learning Points.*

This case study demonstrates most clearly the potential benefits to be gained when the 'ideal dialogue' conditions are met. From the outset it was clear that Bill Lamb and his colleagues were both committed to the value of dialogue, and aware of the power differential that prevents it from taking place. The Evaluation Report of the Clinic's application for *Investing in Children* membership notes:

"Dr Lamb has always worked with and talked with the young people he has come into contact with. However, he does feel that this has been the most effective way with an independent organisation [*Investing in Children*]. In the past it was felt that the young people were saying what they thought the doctors and nurses wanted to hear.

Dr Lamb believes that giving young people the resources and support gives them the opportunity to have a profound and meaningful input into service delivery". (*IiC Membership Evaluation, 2002, Investing in Children Archive*)

Over the period of almost two years, the *Investing in Children* Research Team developed their capacity to make a significant contribution to the dialogue about the treatment of diabetes in the UK. Their analysis has been welcomed by Dr Lamb at least, and hopefully will be equally warmly received by the commissioning managers in the local health service.

It is also clear that the model we have developed is applicable to the exploration of issues particular to special interest groups, as well as to universal issues of concern to all children and young people. It is worth noting that, having come into contact with *Investing in Children* through their attendance at Bill Lamb's Diabetes Clinic, members of the 730+ Group have joined other *Investing in Children* groups, campaigning on other issues.

It is also worth noting that progress did not come quickly. The Research Team spent almost two years preparing their report, yet their participation and enthusiasm never faltered. This lends some credence to the style of the *Investing in Children* approach. We try to be respectful of the fact that children and young people have full and busy lives, and participating in research work must compete with other important activities. Also, we try to ensure that the experience is positive – we pay an allowance for one, and arranging trips abroad (although not a regular feature of *Investing in Children* work) does our reputation no harm at all.

Finally, it is worth noting that the most powerful aspect of the Research Team's report to the Membership Certificate presentation was their indignation that they, and their parents, had been kept in the dark about the potential benefits of insulin pumps. Their argument was not that young people with diabetes in the south of County Durham should be fitted forthwith with insulin pumps, but rather young people with diabetes in the south of County Durham should know about, and have the option of being fitted with insulin pumps. This, it seems to me, is in itself a powerful validation of the *Investing in Children* approach.

One other key learning point is worth exploring in some detail. This is the role of the *Investing in Children* 'Consultant'.

The Consultant is employed by *Investing in Children* (he or she may be a member of the core team, or may be drawn from a pool of 25 'free-lance' workers) but they work for the young people. The consultant doesn't lead or direct the research process, but works to help the research team acquire the capacity to achieve its goals.

This includes supporting the group as different research methods and avenues of enquiry are explored, even when the consultant suspects that the chosen approach may prove to be fruitless. The consultant will discuss tactics and strategies, but the decisions will rest with the young people. (The only exception to this is where young people wish to pursue a course of action that is potentially hazardous. This has been an issue on very few occasions. An early example was when a group of nine-year-olds proposed to canvas the opinion of random members of the public, in their town centre on a Saturday morning. They insisted that the exercise would only be valid if they were obviously unaccompanied. Because their safety could not be guaranteed, the consultant (who happened to be me on this occasion) persuaded the young people to adopt a different approach.

With this exception, the consultant's role is to support and facilitate the work of the group, but not to 'train' the young people, or to make decisions, or in other ways to 'manage' the process. This sets *Investing in Children* apart from other participation projects, but in a way that young people seem to appreciate: "Then we got to know all the [*Investing in Children*] staff and we found all the staff are really friendly and they don't dictate to us what we should do. They kind of let you lead your own way" "One [young person] thought that they would be told what issues they were to work on, but found that it was the choice of the young people. Another thought IiC would be more adult-led but found that it was young-person led and the young people were much more independent than she had thought" (Card, Cooke and others, 2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

We understand that getting this right is absolutely crucial to the success of *Investing in Children*. We also understand that the role of consultant is extremely uncomfortable for some workers. The current pool of consultants have demonstrated that they are able to maintain the delicate balance between supporting the young people without running the research project. We have also worked with others who have been unable to strike this balance. In part, we believe, this is because the role of consultant is virtually unique. Many of our consultants are drawn from backgrounds in teaching, social work and youth work. Within these fields, the adults are normally expected to be **in charge**, to have a curriculum to deliver or an agenda to pursue. To be able to relinquish this power and work **for** the young people, is, we have discovered, a relatively rare talent, more to do with personal political attitudes to equality and social justice than to professional background or qualification.

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## Case Study 5

### **The Connexions Service.**

The Labour Government came into power with the express intention of finding new solutions to the long-standing problem of what they termed 'social exclusion'. This was understood to be "an inability [of individuals] to participate effectively in economic, social and cultural life...distance and alienation from mainstream life" (Duffy, as quoted in Miller, 1999, p1) Efforts to combat this were concentrated in two key areas – education/employment and community/neighbourhood. (Katz, 2002).

In relation to children and young people, a particular area of concern was the number of young people who, on reaching school-leaving age (16) did not stay in education, or find employment or a place on a training scheme. (Social Exclusion Unit, July 1999).The analysis of the Government's Social Exclusion Unit was that this was in part due to a failure to provide appropriate advice, guidance and support. The response was the creation of a new Service called 'Connexions'.

At the heart of the new Service is the new post of 'Personal Adviser'. The Service is intended to be universal, in that all young people between the ages of 13 and 19 can call upon the services of a Personal Adviser, although young people identified as most at risk of social exclusion will receive a more intense and focused service.

Although many of the new Personal Advisers have been recruited from the old Careers Guidance Service, the scope of Connexions is much broader than careers guidance. The Service is based upon the following eight key principles:

- Raising aspirations –setting high expectations of every individual;
- Meeting individual need –and overcoming barriers to learning;
- Taking account of the views of young people;
- Inclusion – keeping young people in mainstream education and training and preventing them moving to the margins of their community;
- Partnership – agencies working in collaboration;
- Community involvement and neighbourhood renewal – brokering access to local welfare, health, arts sport and guidance networks;

- Extending opportunity and equality of opportunity;
- Evidence based practice.

(Connexions Service Business Planning Guidance, October 2001)

The Durham Connexions Partnership began preparing for the new Service in 2000, and as part of the preparation work the Partnership invited a number of agencies, including *Investing in Children*, to assist in creating opportunities for young people to become involved.

We recruited a research team from a number of ongoing *Investing in Children* projects, and by forging a partnership with End House, a youth project in the city of Durham providing general support and advice to young people on a range of issues, from housing to sexual health. The purpose of the collaboration was to ensure that the research would cover the widest area in the relatively short time available (The group set out to deliver their report to the Connexions Partnership within three months).

The researchers used a loosely structured questionnaire format and conducted group interviews with almost 200 young people. They agreed from the start that there was little point in asking what young people thought of the new Connexions Service, as it had not started to operate, and very few people had heard of it. Instead, they focused on the concept of *advice*.

*“Our idea was to look at where young people go for advice and to find out why young people make the choices they do over who to talk to. Our aim was to build a picture of the sort of person/persons young people turned to for help and advice and compare this to proposals made by Connexions for personal advisors.”* (Abbott and others, 2001, p1, *Investing in Children* Archive)

In their report, the researchers commented upon the following key areas.

- *Choice.* Some of the young people they interviewed made a distinction between seeking information and being offered advice. One young person observed that “advice is something you get whether you want it or not” (Abbott, p4). The researchers therefore saw an important difference between the process whereby young people chose to seek out the information they needed, and adults giving them advice on what they (the adults) think they need to know.

- *Trust*. A crucial factor in determining where young people choose to go for information was the extent to which they were able to trust the source of the advice. Family and friends scored highly on this factor.
- *Confidentiality*. This was the second most important factor influencing the choices made by young people. For example, in relation to health matters, “many young people do not feel comfortable going to Doctors because of attitude and fear that they may tell their parents” (Abbott, p3)

They concluded: “Overall, we feel that choice is the most important issue. Young people make choices about the reasons they seek advice and the people they go to. Young people are not all the same and what is right for one young person may not be right for another”, and they made the following recommendation :

*“The services which Connections will provide should be available from a network of people who young people already trust. The Connexions advisors should be prepared to work through other people and agencies- this will protect young people’s right to make their own choices.”* (Abbott, p5)

The researchers delivered their findings to members of the Durham Connexions Partnership in 2001. They were listened to with courtesy, congratulated on the quality of their work, and thanked for their efforts. However, as the Connexions Service began to develop, it was clear the main thrust of their report, that the service should be delivered through a network of people in whom young people had trust, had not been accepted. It was the view certainly of the *investing in Children* researchers that their opinions had been ignored. Their final recommendation, that *Investing in Children* should be involved in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the developing Connexions Service, was also not accepted.

Again, it needs to be acknowledged here that other parties in this case study would no doubt take a different view, but the young people were entitled to reach the conclusions they reached, and it is the standpoint of the young people which is of particular interest here.

In reality, it would have been very difficult for the Durham Connexions Service to have acted upon the advice of the research team, as many of the decisions about how the service would be delivered had already been made. The role of personal advisers, appointed by the Connexions Service and

then allocated to young people, was central to the creation of the new service, and as such was not up for renegotiation.

Whether or not the advice from the research team should have been taken is not the issue here, although a more recent piece of research by another *Investing in Children* team looking at access to legal advice commented that “many young people...said they didn’t like the idea of personal advisers being imposed upon them, young people should be able to chose where they go to for advice and not be told where to go” (Hewitt and others, 2002, p13).

The interesting point here is the different perspectives of the Connexions Partnership and the *Investing in Children* Research team. The Partnership were very happy with the work that they had commissioned, and in subsequent progress reports they have referred to the fact that the development of the Connexions Service in County Durham was informed, in part at least, by research conducted by young people. The young people, on the other hand, were disappointed that the development of Connexions Service had not, in their opinion, been informed by their research.

I believe the explanation for the difference between the two groups lies in the different expectations of the process. The young people had thought that they were being invited to contribute to the design of a new service. They believed that their opinions would be influential. The priority of the Partnership was to produce evidence that young people were involved in the process of design. By commissioning the research, they were able to do this. The fact that the young people made recommendations that did not fit with the model that had already been agreed, was not seen as an important issue.

This reflects a fundamental, and, I would suggest, common difference in the way that the participation of children and young people is understood. For the Partnership, the work of the research team was an end in itself. Having received their report, the task marked ‘engagement of young people’ was completed, and the serious business of developing the new service could continue. For the young people, their work was a means to an end, and their frustration stemmed from the fact that that end had not even been recognised, let alone realised.

*Key Learning points*

On reflection, our approach to this piece of work could be described as extremely naïve. A number of assumptions were made at the start of the process, which were subsequently proven to be inaccurate. Foremost of these was that there was potential for genuine change, and that a well-argued contribution by the young people might result in a different approach being taken in Durham.

The second assumption concerned the nature of the process. We assumed that, by commissioning our involvement, the Connexions Partnership was choosing to enter into a dialogue with young people. But as the important outcomes had already been determined, there was, in fact, no point, and certainly no possibility of the force of the better argument winning the day.

This is not a particular criticism of the Durham Connexions Partnership. In fact, I would suggest that, as with most public services, the pressure to meet centrally-determined targets leads to a tendency to see the participation of young people as an end in itself. Also, as in many other areas of policy, the guidance issued by the government was so prescriptive that there was little room to manoeuvre. In hindsight it would have been better if we had established this from the outset, although I suspect it would have been difficult on that basis to persuade the young people to take part in the research at all.

This illustrates an area of constant tension for *Investing in Children*. Our position of seeing opportunities for the participation of children and young people in dialogue as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself leads to the conclusion that, in this instance, the exercise was a failure. The young people in the research team failed to persuade the Connexions partnership to make significant changes to their plans. However, the experience of conducting the research, and attempting (unsuccessfully) to engage in dialogue certainly made the young people much more conscious of their position in society, and they remained determined to assert their rights. All of the members of the *Investing in Children* Connections Research Team continued to work with us on other projects. As we learned from the experience of the Transport Group, young people can be remarkably resilient, and the process of exploring their rights and their developing capacity to be active citizens can take time. From this perspective, the work was not a failure, and it could be argued that the benefits of nurturing the creation of self-confident and assertive citizens will be felt well into the future.

The tension lies in the constant debate about *tactics* within *Investing in Children*. To what extent did our involvement in this research mean that we

could be seen to collude with the tokenism inherent in the exercise? Would we have a greater influence upon the development of an emancipatory discourse if we refused to take part in debates about public policy where we are dubious of the commitment of the other partners in the dialogue? The involvement of *Investing in Children* is sometimes used as almost an endorsement of policy, even when (as in this case) the participation of young people is superficial. Do we run the risk of becoming part of the problem, rather than the solution?

These questions are the subject of a constant and lively debate within *Investing in Children*, involving the young people, the workers and consultants, and the key senior officers who have supported the project since the beginning. Tactical calculations about the potential for achieving meaningful change are part of the discussion surrounding each new piece of work, and original assessments are revisited and reviewed as the work progresses. In reality, significant change is not going to be won easily, and as well as the tactical calculations attached to each specific research project, we are also involved in a general assessment about the status of *Investing in Children* as a vehicle through which a new discourse on children might be promoted.

Within the system of local government in Durham, *Investing in Children* has an ambiguous status. We are funded by mainstream agencies (indeed the County Council, who provide the largest contribution to our budget, decided in 2003 to consolidate its funding and make *Investing in Children* a permanent part of its establishment). We are included in some (but by no means all) of the key policy debates affecting children's services. To an extent, therefore we have what Tisdall and Davis refer to as 'insider' status. At the same time, we have the freedom to support young people campaigning on issue which they see as important, whether or not these are seen as important (or even convenient) to the mainstream agencies, and in that respect, our status can be seen 'outsider'. (Tisdall and Davis, 2003)

Tisdall and Davis suggest that there may be a useful distinction to be made between "strategies and status and how these interact with resource exchange between children/young people and policy makers" (p18).

They suggest that what they describe as 'outsider strategies' may have a more radical impact upon policy in the longer term, leading to "attitudinal change that can be harder to trace but considerably more influential if they change how a problem is constructed and indeed the rules of the game itself." (p17)

As is noted above, this is an issue which is constantly under debate, and is not one to which there appears to be an obvious resolution. On the one hand, I suspect that it is our willingness to adopt an 'outsider' approach which makes *Investing in Children* appear relevant to the lives of young people, and in part explains our success in maintaining the sustained involvement of a large number of young people over a relatively long period. On the other hand, if we look at the work of the Transport Group, there seems little doubt that our 'insider' status was influential in persuading the Leader of the Council to commit to expenditure of £100,00 on the *Investing in Children* concessionary fare scheme.

Perhaps 'thresholder' is the most accurate description. "Thresholders can be seen as groups on the border of being insiders and outsiders either by choice (eg using insider and outsider strategies) or by status (on the way in or out of being an insider)." (Tisdall and Davis, p6)

Whatever term is most appropriate, the tension created is, I believe, an important dynamic in *Investing in Children*, which in part explains how the project has maintained a reflective and open and imaginative approach over the last six years.

### **The Membership Scheme.**

In the summer of 1998, *Investing in Children*, working in partnership with the five Joint Commissioning Management Groups (partnerships between Health and the local authorities) created opportunities for groups of children and young people across the County to have their say, and identify and explore issues of importance to them. The purpose of this was two-fold. It was hoped that the results of the research would inform decision-making on a locality basis, and it was intended to influence the shape of the County Durham Children's Services Plan. (Cairns, 1998, *Investing in Children* Archive)

On publication of the research reports, we held a seminar to discuss progress and plan the next steps, to which we invited the partner agencies and also some of the young people who had taken part in the research. The focus of the seminar was very much around the creation of the Children's Services Plan. The most telling contribution came from a young person, who commented: "I'm not interested in your grand plans and strategies. I want to change my life where I live it".



This remark caused us to stand back and consider how we might create opportunities for children and young people to achieve *immediate* change, at a local level, where they ‘lived their lives’. This led to the creation of the *Investing in Children* Membership Scheme.

Up until this point, we had been concerned with influencing policy at an agency level, but it was clear that the link between this and the experience of young people themselves was often difficult to identify, certainly within a timeframe to which young people could relate. Even the Joint Commissioning Management Groups, which were organised around five Localities, were not perceived to be local enough. The challenge was to find ways of working at level where young people might influence the practice of service-providers in the here-and-now.

We had encouraged agencies to become partners in *Investing in Children* by endorsing the Statement of Intent. A statement to this effect was sufficient to join the list of organisations (listed in Appendix 1) who were publicly committed to the values and principles of the project. We acknowledged, however, that making the political gesture of signing up to the Statement of Intent did not, of itself, guarantee that the practice of the agencies would change.

The Membership Scheme was designed to take this a stage further. Membership would be available, not to the agency, but to the local service provider. Thus, the County Council’s Education Department could not apply for membership, but the individual schools which make up the Department could. The Health Authority (more recently, the local Health Trusts) were ineligible for membership, but individual Health providers, such as GP practices or Children’s Wards in hospitals were eligible to apply.

Criteria for membership were kept simple. Applicants had to produce evidence of two things. First, there had to be evidence of *dialogue* between the service provider and the children and young people who were the service users. Second, there had to be evidence that *change* had occurred as a consequence of the dialogue. The process was intended to support young people to “change things where I lead my life”

A further important aspect of the Membership Scheme was that children and young people themselves would be the providers of the evidence. The evaluation of an application for membership would be based upon the opinions of young people themselves about the depth of the dialogue and the significance of the consequent change.

We began a pilot of the Membership Scheme in 1998, with 16 pilot sites, ranging from schools and a GP practice, to a leisure centre and a police station. Almost all of the pilot sites were places where *Investing in Children* was already involved in working with children, young people and the adults involved. Ten of the pilot sites were successfully evaluated and awarded membership in 1999. Four of the remaining sites eventually produced sufficient evidence to persuade their young service users that they should receive the award. The other two sites dropped out.

Membership is valid for one year, after which a further evaluation is conducted, seeking evidence of sustained dialogued and continued change. Of the original ten successful sites, one site lost its membership. The other nine retain membership to this date.

Currently, we have over 100 certified *Investing in Children* members, and around 60 active applicants. (Appendix 2 provides a full list). The following case studies illustrate how the Membership Scheme works.

## **Case Study 6**

### **Murton Library**

Murton is a small former mining community in the east of the County. In common with other communities in this part of Durham, Murton has suffered “severe economic and social problems, as well as the physical effects of decline”. (Co Durham Economic Partnership, 2001, p8)

In 1998, the manager of Murton Library, Angela Stobbart approached *Investing in Children*. She had heard about the pilot of the Membership Scheme, and was keen to become involved. She was committed to making the library an accessible and relevant resource to young people in Murton, and had pursued an active policy of liaising with the local schools. As a consequence, she had established a regular ‘homework club’ at the library.

In November I met with the members of the homework club. There were nine of them, aged between nine and fourteen years, and they were keen to enter into discussion, not just about the homework club, but also about life in Murton. As the librarian remarked afterwards, she was ‘surprised at how eloquent the children were, it was like they had been waiting for an opportunity to speak and have their voices heard’. (Evaluation Report, Murton Library, 1999, *Investing in Children* Archive).

Initially, I was puzzled by the strength of their enthusiasm for the library and the homework club, until they explained that the library was one of the few places in the town where they felt welcome. One member of the group described the town in terms of the doors which were open to her. After school, she could pass through her own front door, or the library door. She explained that the Youth Club had shut down some months previously, and children and young people had been barred from the community centre following an act of vandalism by some young people some years ago. (One of the youngest members of the group observed that this was unfair, as he hadn't even been old enough to go to the centre at the time of the incident). Murton wasn't a big enough town to have a Leisure centre or a Cinema. There were no other facilities available to young people. Visiting friends was an option, but houses in the town were small, and there wasn't much room. The choice was to hang about on the street, or spend time in the library

Over the next six months the young people's group worked with the librarians, with a modest amount of support from *Investing in Children* to make the library as attractive and accessible to the young people of Murton. They looked at the internal working of the library, and developed ideas about how the stock was organised and displayed. They also commissioned the redecoration of the children's section. But probably the most interesting development was their involvement in choosing the books stocked by the library.

The question of who selected the books on the library shelves had come up at one of the early meetings. The librarian had explained that this was one of her duties. The young people made the reasonable case that, as young people who actually read the books in their section, they might have a valuable insight into what should be stocked. At the time, Angela commented "It is hard sometimes not to be defensive when someone is criticising your working methods, especially when you think you are doing a reasonable job. We are overcoming this feeling of needing to qualify what we do and the ideas that are flowing from the young people will help us make Murton library a service which meets the needs of the community" (Murton Library file, February 1999, *Investing in Children* Archive).

When the idea of involving children and young people in choosing the library's stock was first mooted, the response of the County Council was to invite the young people to visit County Hall, where the Arts, Libraries and Museums Department maintained a stock of bulk-purchased books. However, the young people's group had other ideas, and pressed for the budget to be released, so that they could have the widest possible choice.

The outcome was that during the Easter holidays in 1999, a group of young people from Murton spent the day in Waterstones Bookshop in Newcastle, where they spent £520 on books for the library.

There was little debate about whether the library had done enough to earn its *Investing in Children* membership certificate, and the young people were presented with their award in June 1999. Since then they have gone on to successfully renew their membership every year, with initiatives including young people commissioning events such as storytelling sessions, and designing a web site for the homework club.

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## **Case study 7**

### **Aycliffe Secure Services.**

Aycliffe Secure Services consists of a large secure residential children's home where the liberty of young people is restricted for a variety of reasons. Some (a growing number because of changes in youth justice legislation) are locked up because they have committed or have been accused of criminal offences. Others are in security because they are deemed to represent a significant threat, either to themselves or other people. Although administered by Durham County Council Social Services Department, Aycliffe is a regional resource, and accommodates young people from across the north of England. The Secure Unit is organised into four separate 'houses' accommodating roughly 10 young people in each. The majority are young men.

Historically, the Secure Unit had been part of a larger campus, known as Aycliffe Young People's Centre (previously Ayliffe Children's Centre, and before that it had been an Approved School), with an equal number of young people accommodated in 'open' (ie unlocked) conditions. Aycliffe has a chequered history, having been at the centre of a major inquiry into the use of physical restraint. Under an earlier management regime, Aycliffe had actively sought, and acquired a reputation for dealing with the 'most challenging' young people by setting out to exert external control over their behaviour until they learned the lessons of self-control.

That regime was long gone, and almost all of the 'open' accommodation had been closed by the time the Secure Unit expressed an interest in applying for *Investing in Children* membership, in September 1999. I was aware, however, (I had worked at Aycliffe prior to *Investing in Children* – see Appendix 3) that a significant number of the staff employed in the Secure Unit had been part of the old regime. I took the view that if, through the membership scheme progress could be made here, then progress would be possible in most circumstances.

The application for membership was made by Gil Palin, the manager of the Unit, and it is important to acknowledge that she was fully committed to the principles of *Investing in Children* and saw the application for membership as part of an overall strategy to ensure that, as far as was possible, social work practice in the Unit would be responsive to the voices of the young people who lived there.

We agreed that *Investing in Children* would support the application for membership by providing a worker to help the young people develop their agenda for discussion. The worker was Berni Stock, a respected youth worker and experienced member of the *Investing in Children* Team. Berni had also worked, briefly, at Aycliffe before joining *Investing in Children*. He was familiar with the regime in the Secure Unit, and more importantly, already knew and was known to, some of the young people. By the end of January 2000, Berni had held a number of meetings with young people from all four houses, and an agenda was beginning to emerge around issues concerning consistency of treatment between the houses, privacy and family contact, and access to activities.

However the progress was short-lived. Over the next few months contact became difficult to maintain. Pre-arranged meetings were cancelled at short notice, and with one or two noticeable exceptions, little enthusiasm or support for the project was being provided by the Centre staff.

Gil, Berni and I met to review the situation in October 2000, almost a year after the original application was submitted. We accepted that the lack of progress could be down to a number of reasons – not enough staff involved, a lack of understanding amongst some staff about what we are trying to achieve, or the resistance of some staff to the project. (Aycliffe Secure Services file, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2000, *Investing in Children* Archive) Gil agreed to arrange a staff meeting where Berni would make a presentation about the project. She also agreed that she would select staff to work with Berni, who would be 'more capable of moving things on'.

After this, things did indeed move on for a few months, but again it tailed off. A seemingly 'do-able' agenda of issues had been identified and agreed around family contact. Because it is a regional resource, visits by family can be difficult. Contact by phone and by letter is particularly important. The young people had raised issues about the restrictions on their use of the phone, and also about a policy which only allowed them to retain three personal letters from home in their room. On receipt of a new letter, one of the existing three had to be surrendered, to be placed on the young person's file in the office. The young people reported that the justification that was offered for this practice was it was a requirement of the Youth Justice Board, under a policy called 'volumetric control' designed to limit the number of places where young people might secrete forbidden substances such as drugs.

Progress on improving access to telephones had been made relatively quickly, but the issue of retaining personal letters from home was proving a particularly obdurate problem, despite the fact that Gil had personally addressed this issue with the House Managers ( Secure Services file, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2001, *Investing in Children* Archive). Furthermore, some young people were reporting that they were being prevented from attending meetings with Berni, despite previous agreements.

A further review was held in July 2001. Part of the problem, it was agreed, was that Gil was not formally locked into the dialogue with the young people, and outside of the meetings staff who were not convinced of the wisdom of the approach were able to obstruct progress. We agreed that the particular circumstances of the secure unit required us to take a more structured approach than usual. We agreed to assist in the setting up of a Young People's Council, which would have a formal link to the management team chaired by Gil. (Secure Services file, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2001, *Investing in Children* Archive)

The Council was quickly set up, and regular and minuted meetings, attended in the most part by Gil Palin herself, were held throughout the rest of 2001 and into 2002. In February 2002, Gil requested that progress should be evaluated. She also suggested that each House should be evaluated separately. This possibility had been mooted back in 2000, but the young people had advised against it because inconsistency between houses, and the sense of grievance this creates, was one of their biggest sources of unhappiness.

In February of 2002, Helen Mulhearn from *Investing in Children* spent time at the Centre gathering evidence for the evaluation of the Membership

application. She had a copy of the agenda for action constructed by the Young People's Council, and was looking for evidence that change had occurred. Her report highlights the following areas:

- Family visits. Young people had asked for greater flexibility. This had been provided by two houses, but there had been no change on the other houses.
- Telephones. Access has improved across the Unit
- Food. One house, which has its own kitchen, serving superior food to the other three.
- Hats. The wearing of baseball hats had been restricted, but the restrictions have been lifted on all houses.
- Slippers. Two houses insist upon the wearing of slippers (by the young people, not the staff) and two do not.
- Bedtimes. A later bedtime (by 15 minutes, during the week, and a further 15 minutes at the weekend) had been negotiated by the Young People's Council. However, one house had not implemented this.
- Letters. The restriction on the number of letters had been addressed in two of the Houses, but was still in force in the other two.

The young people were happy to acknowledge that the creation of the Council had meant that there was a greater opportunity for dialogue, and that some progress had been made. However they were still concerned with the inconsistencies between the houses, and it was agreed that the award of Membership would be delayed for 2 months, to allow the outstanding issues to be addressed. (Evaluation Report, March 2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

There were further stumbles along the way. In May, young people on one house were told that a meeting with Helen had been cancelled, while she was waiting for them downstairs in the reception area. Helen's subsequent complaint was met by a letter from a member of the management team, (Gil was absent on leave) withdrawing the application for membership and expressing frustration at the futility of explaining "the circumstances in relation to the misperceptions of the young people you interviewed, as you have so succinctly pointed out that it is the young people's perceptions that count." (Secure Services file, June 2002, *Investing in Children* Archive).

Wiser counsel prevailed, the threatened withdrawal was itself withdrawn, the outstanding issues were addressed, and in January 2003, over three years after the original expression of interest, Aycliffe Secure Services finally achieved *Investing in Children* Membership.

### *Key Learning Points*

These two very different case studies illustrate one of the key challenges of creating an accreditation scheme across a wide range of services for children and young people in wildly differing circumstances. We have deliberately kept the criteria simple and straightforward – evidence of dialogue and change. The focus upon the judgement of the young people means that we are looking for change which is deemed significant to them ‘where they lead their lives’.

This means that we are concerned with the internal credibility of each individual application for membership, rather than a comparison of the progress different groups have made to achieve membership. Put another way, we are happy to acknowledge that winning the right to wear a baseball hat is a significant achievement for young people in the Secure Unit, even if it might seem a relatively trivial gain to other young people.

This has led to some criticism of the scheme, particularly that the bar is set too low in some cases, and Membership is acquired too easily. This is a serious problem – the Membership Scheme’s sole merit is its credibility. There are no financial gain or other freedoms to be had from membership – agencies apply presumably because the scheme has some credibility, and membership bestows some acknowledgement of achievement. Similarly, membership must be a credible process for young people.

This is a difficult balance to achieve, and no doubt we get it wrong from time to time. We use the Membership Scheme as an incentive, to encourage the development of greater dialogue, as in the Aycliffe case, or to support and assist an existing process, as in the Murton example. Both cases resulted in change, but the significance of the change doesn’t bear comparison, other than in both cases, it was judged to be sufficiently significant by the young people themselves.

This is both the inherent strength of the Membership Scheme, and in some cases, a weakness. The Aycliffe case study indicates how the process of evaluation allowed the young people themselves to hold out for more progress, particularly in relation to greater consistency of treatment between the four houses, before agreeing to accreditation. Had the process relied upon evidence from adults, it is likely that either Membership would have been agreed much earlier, or the frustration of some staff would have

led to the application being withdrawn. The persistence of the manager, Gil Palin, and commitment of the young people and the *Investing in Children* workers, along with the Secure Unit staff who were supportive of the process, meant that a meaningful start had been made, which holds out the possibility of further progress. As Gil Palin, in a letter acknowledging the successful evaluation, commented: "My main priority now is that we continue with the momentum achieved so far." (Secure Services file, January 2003, *Investing in Children* Archive)

Membership evaluation focuses upon the actions and performance of adults. The inherent weakness of seeking evidence from young people lies in the power differential between them and the adults providing the service. We suspect that there are occasions when the adults have prevailed upon the young people to agree with their (the adult's) assessment of the significance of the change that has occurred. In these circumstances, the reliance on evidence from the young people becomes a double-edged sword. Having agreed that the young people are the ultimate arbiters, we cannot then decide on their behalf that they have, in effect, been 'conned' into endorsing the application.

We do not believe that this was the case in either of the case studies above, but we cannot rule out the possibility that this has occurred in other cases. This is not meant to be a suggestion that some of our members have behaved cynically, but rather to acknowledge the power of the dominant discourse, and the fact that young people themselves are as influenced by it as adults. The dominant discourse promotes the view that, generally, adults know best. This, effectively, is the default position in most discussions between adults and children and young people. Inevitably, the young people who provide the evidence upon which the evaluation is based will be influenced by the views of the adults – it is the extent of that influence which is difficult to ascertain.

A further potential weakness of the Membership Scheme is that the efforts to engage in dialogue may not be consistent across time, and may be concentrated around the period of the evaluation process. Membership is valid for 12 months, and is then subject to re-evaluation. Unless the agency applying for membership is fully committed to the process of dialogue, the possibility of activity tailing off between evaluations exists, and currently we do not have the resources to ensure that it is maintained throughout the year. Generally, we believe that most successful applicants do maintain their level of commitment, and we are considering the possibility of introducing unannounced 'spot checks' to validate this.

Finally, there can be an issue about the resources available to successful applicants to sustain their Membership. A small number of Memberships have lapsed. This seems a particular problem when *Investing in Children* has been active in developing the dialogue. A good example of this is a GP practice, where workers from *Investing in Children* helped to establish the group of young people who became involved with the practice staff. When we returned to re-evaluate a year later, the activity had ceased because the practice had been unable to sustain the effort required to support the process. In amongst all of the competing demands upon their time and resources, the continued dialogue with young people had been lost.

Despite the reservations noted above, I believe it is reasonable to conclude that the Membership Scheme has had an impact and has helped some young people 'change things where they live their lives'. Given that, ultimately what we are trying to achieve is a fundamental change in the discourse on children, it is unlikely that one strategy on its own will be successful. Interestingly, the Membership Scheme attracts considerable interest from other local authorities outside Durham and Darlington, and we are aware of a number of initiatives that have been established, mirrored upon this model. When asked, our consistent advice has been that, on its own, a membership scheme is unlikely to be effective, as it is almost entirely dependent upon the commitment and enthusiasm of adults. The *Investing in Children* Membership Scheme needs to be seen in the context of the whole project. In that respect, we see it as a useful weapon in our arsenal.

### **Children's Services Planning.**

In County Durham and latterly in Darlington, *Investing in Children* has come to be seen as an important asset to the process of creating coherent plans for children's services. In the late nineties, when the project was established, we were heavily involved in the creation of both the County Durham Children's Services Plans for 1998-9 and 2000-2003. Since then the language has changed slightly, so that in both Durham and Darlington we have been engaged with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships. The latest requirement from central government is that local authorities must create 'Preventative Strategies', focused upon children and young people most 'at risk', although there is currently a lack of clarity about the precise meaning of this term. The changes are not simply linguistic, and each new set of guidance represents subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) shifts in current government thinking. However,

fundamentally what is being proposed is that children, young people and their families will be better served if the considerable resources of the state could be better coordinated and more strategically focused.

Various authors have explored the advantages of adopting a strategic approach to children's services provision (CYPU, 2001, Utting, Rose and Pugh, 2001, Painter, 2001, LGA, 2002, ADSS, 2002), and it is not the intention here to go over the ground again. Rather, we will explore the challenge of finding meaningful ways to include children and young people themselves in this debate.

## **Case Study 8**

### **The Promises Group**

In Chapter Three we described how we had attempted to ensure that at least some of the issues identified by some children and young people were included in the Durham Children's Services Plan for 1998-99. When we came to review this plan, one of the criticisms we faced was that the Plan was not action-focused. Although there was a long list of *Investing in Children* partner agencies committed themselves to supporting the plan in principle, there were few concrete promises of action, and no agreement about how partner agencies might be held accountable. (Durham County Council, 1998b)

In the updated version of the Plan for 2000-2003, partner agencies were asked to make specific commitments. Furthermore, we announced that "our intention is to support young people in examining those commitments, and we intend to provide annual reports on progress. In this way, we have tried to create some accountability in the process" (Durham County Council, 2000). This led to the creation of the *Investing in Children* Promises Group.

The idea was relatively simple. A group of young people would go through the Plan for 2000-2003, identifying the promises that the various partner agencies had made. They would then contact the agencies and seek evidence as to whether any action had been taken.

We invited a group of young people with considerable experience of working with *Investing in Children* to develop the project. It immediately became apparent that the work would not be as straightforward as we had hoped. The majority of the young people who came together to discuss the

project found it hard to summon up sufficient enthusiasm for the idea. Although many of them had been involved in the writing of 2000-2003 plan, and had agreed with the principle of holding agencies to account, when it came down to the business of actually going through the plan and matching deeds to promises, there was a general reluctance to get involved.

There isn't any direct evidence which can be produced to explain this, so the following comments are based upon my assessment of the situation, broadly supported by discussions I have had, both within the *Investing In Children* team, and with young people.

The biggest problem is around immediate relevance. The young people struggled to connect statements made in a strategic planning document with the reality of their every day lives. Most of the projects supported by *Investing in Children* concern issues that have a resonance with the young people working on them. It is important that this point is clearly understood. It is not the suggestion here that the young people who have worked with *Investing in Children* are motivated by narrow self-interest (members of the Transport Group predicted (correctly) that they would be too old to benefit directly from the introduction of the concessionary fare scheme for which they campaigned). However it does seem to be the case that at least a realistic chance of change in the here-and-now, or very soon after, is an important ingredient in the motivation of some young people to participate. (This does not seem to be very different from the attitude of many adults to active political participation).

This is partly a question of language. Although an attempt was made to express the Children's Services Plan in plain terms, it was inevitably a bureaucratic document, dealing in agency targets and published priorities. But more importantly, I believe the lack of enthusiasm of most of the young people reflects a basic credibility gap between young people in the real and present world, and local (and central) government managers and strategists who appear to occupy a different world, in a different time-frame. Strategists rarely feel the need to explain in clear and accessible terms, the way in which changes in policy will have a recognisable impact on the ground. Indeed, it may well be the case that the strategist or policy officer does not see it as within his/her remit to ensure the *application* of the policy initiative. Establishing the strategy or policy becomes an end in itself.

The following example illustrates this point. In 1999, I was part of a group who constructed an anti-bullying policy for the County Council. Much thought and effort went into ensuring that we got it right, and that the

policy laid out clear expectations about the way bullying would be managed. We took care to write the policy in such a way that it could be used in a variety of settings from schools to youth clubs to children's homes (the policy defines bullying as child-on child behaviour, despite efforts by some members of the group, myself included, to argue for a broader definition). The Policy was duly completed, and endorsed by the County Council.

Five years later, it is not uncommon to come across young people, parents and employees of the County Council who are unaware of the existence of the policy, let alone its contents. This fact does not mean that the policy is bad, but it is clearly ineffective. In an organisation the size of Durham County Council, the distance between the centre, where policy is devised, and the ground, where practice is experienced, can be enormous. In this context, policy almost takes on the status of aspiration, whereas it seems to me that children and young people deal in the reality of practice on the ground. The invitation to evaluate the Children's Services Plan therefore lacked relevance for most of the young people.

A second anxiety was that the agencies didn't really mean it when they agreed that they should be held to account by young people. There was a feeling that the project would be ineffectual, because the agencies would not take a group of young people seriously. As we describe below, there was some truth in this.

Eventually, a small group of three young women decided that they would have a go. They identified 17 agencies where specific commitments had been made within the 2000-2003 Plan. They decided to write to all of them, seeking written evidence of progress. On receipt of this, they intended to follow up a small number by making appointments and interviewing key managers.

Of the seventeen agencies, only four replied within the proposed deadline. Eventually the others responded. Just as they had feared, not all of the agencies accepted the legitimacy of the project. One District Council Chief Executive wrote to the group: " We are puzzled as to why a group of people who are County-based feel that we owe them some form of accountability when this group is as far as we can see not connected with \*\*\*\* District other than via a Statement of Intent." The young people responded to this by publishing his comments in their final report. (Edmunds and others, 2002, p4, *Investing in Children* Archive)

Another agency, although not refusing to reply, displayed a casual approach which the young people saw as disrespectful. Again, their response was to publish details in their final report: "The first reply from here was very unprofessional; they could not be bothered to construct a simple letter, instead scribbling a few notes on to our letter, and returning it to us. We wonder if a high court judge would have received the same treatment" (p6)

The group continued their research and eventually completed their report. They concluded that some agencies were "succeeding to make their promises come true" and added very reasonably that, as this was a three-year plan, the other agencies "have time to fulfil their promises," (p15) They summed up the project thus:

"We had a broad range of feelings from the interviews, both positive and negative. At some interviews, we had a warm welcome and felt at ease but sometimes we felt quite patronised. There were times when the conversations went off track and the line of discussion was lost. Sometimes we felt out of our depth and afterwards were tired and unsatisfied". (p15)

In line with a previous agreement, we sent the agencies involved a draft of the young people's report. The two organisations noted above, which had been the subject of adverse criticism by the Promises Group, were most unhappy with the way their response was presented, and as a result publication was delayed by six months. To the great credit of Peter Kemp, in his role as the County Council Chief Officer with responsibility for *Investing in Children*, and Kingsley Smith, Chief Executive of the County Council, the report was published uncensored. They took the helpful view that a commitment to listening to children and young people included hearing what they had to say, even when that was critical or politically inconvenient.

Did the Promises Group achieve anything? Rosemary Edmunds, one of the members of the group, reflected upon this in an article for the *Investing in Children* Newsletter. She had attended a meeting of all the partner agencies to discuss the Promises Report, and made the following comments: "The meeting was incredibly boring....it's all very well drawing up complicated strategy plans to include young people, but how does it make the bus run on time? How does it make shopkeepers treat young people with a little respect? How does it provide me with a recreational area? There seems to be an 'ongoing process of negotiation' but predominantly between adults and adults". Later in the article, she comments: "By far the greatest benefit

of conducting this research, for me, was to achieve a greater understanding of how my world is run.” (Edmunds, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

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## Case Study 9

### The Strategy for Children and Young People

As we noted in the introduction to this section, a feature of the discussion around planning services for children has been the need to keep up with changes in government thinking on the matter. Local authorities were under a statutory duty to publish a Children’s Services Plan. Just as the Promises Group were finalising their Report, the CYPU published a consultation document entitled “Building a Strategy for Children and Young People.” This laid out principles which the Government proposed should underpin all services to children and young people, and an outcomes framework against which success would be measured. It was suggested in the document that the development of local strategies could be the task of Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnerships. (CYPU, 2001a)

It soon became apparent that the Strategy for Children and Young People would replace the Children’s Services Plan, and a new group was set up in County Durham to begin the process of creating the Strategy. Right from the start there was an acknowledgement that children and young people themselves must be members of the group. Four of the most experienced young researchers from *Investing in Children* attended the inaugural meeting to set the new process in train. Here is how one of the young people, Mark Tallentire, described the discussion: “The idea, I think, was a brilliant one. Instead of all the different services – education, transport, health etc, producing individual plans on how they’ll serve us, they’d come together and coordinate them all so we can be better served by them” (Tallentire, 2001, *Investing in Children Archive*.) However, he goes on to identify one of the key challenges of this debate “The plans themselves are designed for government. They’re full of language I don’t understand and don’t really have a desire to understand.”

Despite these reservations, the group of four young people agreed to continue to contribute to the development of the strategy, and over the following year, they took part in regular meetings of a small group set up to

move the debate on. They also attempted to involve other young people in the debate, by running 'agenda days' on the work of the Strategy Group. One particular product of this process was the creation of a young people's 'Vision' for County Durham : "Our vision is that all children and young people are listened to; able to play a full part in decision-making; comfortable with the decision-making process; and aware of the opportunities to be involved. We believe that the debate about public services and ultimately the services themselves, will benefit from this. We believe it is possible to create the conditions where adults and young people can live beside each other, not despite each other." (Card and others, 2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

A Conference was held in Durham in April 2002 to review progress. Reporting on the event for the *Investing in Children* Newsletter, Mark Tallentire summed up the process thus : "One of the ways *Investing in Children* looks to change life for the better with young people is in the big, important, top levels of planning." He described the work of the group of agency officials and young peoples as "coming up with 'visions' for what County Durham would look like if 'public services' were 'perfect services', and how this can be judged". (Tallentire 2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

It was clear that the four young people had understood the thinking behind the development of the Strategy, and their contribution to the discussions were as meaningful and perceptive as any of the other parties. However, the inevitable happened, and in the summer of 2002, three of the four left school and moved on to study at universities outside of the County. It has so far proven impossible to interest any of the other young people with whom we work to become involved.

As noted above, part of the problem here is the distance between policy and reality. Many of the professionals involved in the debate have struggled to make the connection, and it is no particular surprise that young people generally have not been persuaded of the relevance of the work.

### *Key Learning Points.*

Habermas suggests that society can be thought of in terms of two key domains: the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'. The 'lifeworld' refers to the everyday world, where people make sense of their experiences. The 'system' on the otherhand consists of the institutions and formal structures of the state. He goes on to argue that a feature of our modern world is that the 'system' has colonised the 'lifeworld' to the extent that "bureaucratic

remedies have replaced reasoned debate in dealing with social and ethical problems occurring in the 'lifeworld.' (Houston, 2003, p61)

This analysis seems to me to have some resonance here. The children and young people, because they are children and young people, have no particular role to play within the 'system' and are therefore not influenced by the search for bureaucratic solutions. Their only frame of reference is their 'lifeworld'. In contrast, the adults involved in the debate are, to a greater or lesser extent, pursuing imperatives which derive from the 'system', and do not necessarily relate to the real experiences of the young people.

Within this analysis, the ability of children and young people to influence the outcome of the debate is unlikely to be significant, because their priorities are considered to be of a lower level of importance than the priorities of the institutions. This leads to a situation where the agenda of issues which can be addressed through strategic approaches to children's services planning are unlikely to include issues of importance to young people.

This dilemma is often expressed in terms of the 'must-do' agenda. Frequently, in discussions about the development of the Strategy in Durham and Darlington, a list of required priorities will be recited. These are the issues which Central Government has decreed must be dealt with. It could be argued that, within a liberal democracy, this is as it should be. However, this rests upon the assumption that Government will always act in the best interests of children and young people.

However, if the distance between policy creation and practice is great within local government, it is even greater for central government. As we have previously explored, government policy initiatives may be motivated by a plethora of concerns and political considerations which have very little to do with the reality of children's lives on the ground. As Seaford notes: "the child moves through Whitehall growing and shrinking like Alice. In the Department of Health she is a small potential victim, at the Treasury and Department of Education a growing but silent unit of investment, but at the Home Office, a huge and threatening job." (As quoted in Goldson, 2002, p689.)

This is not to argue against taking a strategic and coordinated approach to children's services planning, as the old system of ad hoc agency planning within departmental 'silos' had little to recommend it. However, the successful engagement of young people themselves in the process will not

be achieved unless we are able to develop a much more open and genuinely democratic dialogue.

Habermas suggests that citizens have a crucial role in defining their needs, and creating solutions to their problems. According to Houston, this leads to the conclusion that “policies and practices need to be generated from the ‘bottom up’ – from the views of ordinary citizens.” Houston, 2003, p 62) Within our political system, this is a challenge for adults, whose citizenship status, in theory, is relatively clear. As we have discussed previously, the dominant discourse on children makes it a tall order indeed for young people.

This represents a fundamental challenge to the entire debate about the participation of children and young people in the development of policy. It is clearly far too important a discussion to ignore, and yet it is difficult to see how we will make significant progress. It seems to me that the central thrust of this thesis, that significant change will only be achieved by developing an emancipatory discourse within which children and young people are recognised as citizens, remains valid, but even if this is achieved, we should take note of Kennet’s comment that “the attainment of citizenship rights and the opportunity to exercise such rights is a process of constant struggle and negotiation.” (Kennet, 2001)

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The use of case studies was intended to create the opportunity to look in depth at some examples of the work of *Investing in Children*, and to consider the processes as well the outcomes. However, what the case studies cannot convey is the breadth of the project,

We estimate that over four thousand children and young people have been involved with *Investing in Children*, ranging in age from four year olds to young people in their early twenties. Our universal approach has meant that we have worked with children and young people from a variety of circumstances and backgrounds, from looked-after young people to children growing up with their natural parents, from educationally adept young people to young people on the fringes of the education service, from young people in travelling families to young people with learning difficulties.

The range has meant that we have had to adopt different methods in different circumstances. For example, not all of the research teams have expressed themselves in formal written reports like ‘Fares Fair’ in Case

Study 1. Young people have used photography, art, and in one case , a specially purchased computer programme 'writing with symbols'

We understand that there are considerable challenges attached to our 'participative democracy' stance, not least ensuring that all young people are aware of the opportunity which *Investing in Children* represents, but we feel confident that the model we have created is viable with a wide variety of children and young people. This view is supported by some of the young people themselves. Here is Mark Tallentire, Newsletter editor: "I think it [*Investing in Children*] has reached, gone past the sort of group of young people that would usually be open to being involved in things like this and it involves young people on the edges of society." (Card and others,2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

## Chapter 6 Conclusions

The thread which runs throughout *Investing in Children* from the early, experimental work on the first Children's Services Plan to our attempts to influence national policy, is the voice of children and young people. Providing space for children and young people to speak for themselves is fundamental to the whole enterprise. As a consequence, we have within the project's archive an extensive record of children and young people describing their experience of living in County Durham and Darlington.

As part of our attempt to sum up what we have learned over the past six years, it is worth starting by using this material to describe how the discourse on childhood and children has been experienced by the children and young people who have contributed to the project.

Lavalette and Cunningham suggest that the notion that children and young people represent a minority group within society is basically flawed. "In particular we do not accept that all children are oppressed in modern society; to put it at its most crude, we fail to see any oppression affecting the lives of the Royal children of Britain, and we fail to see what they have in common with those who live in inner-city slums." (Lavalette and Cunningham, 2002, p27) Our experience in Durham and Darlington would suggest that it is possible to argue that children and young people, as a group, suffer an identifiable level of discrimination and oppression, although its impact upon individual children and young people is exacerbated or ameliorated by other factors such as class.

To put it another way, the evidence available suggests that all of the young people with whom we have worked have experienced discrimination on the basis of age. The extent and effect of this varies according to circumstances, and those children and young people who are already disadvantaged by other factors, such as poverty or disability, suffer greater oppression than those who are better resourced. However, from policies banning young people from public leisure centres from seven in the evening, to buses refusing to stop to collect young passengers, from the arbitrary authority and discipline of school regimes to the restrictions on the number of young people allowed in some shops, the discrimination is so pervasive as to affect all children and young people.

The following examples, taken from the *Investing in Children* Archive, illustrate how some young people in County Durham and Darlington have chosen to portray aspects of their lives.

School looms large in the life of most young people. As we have already discussed, the nature of education provision is the subject of an often confused but politically potent debate. The following comments were made by young people in Durham and Darlington, reflecting on their experience of being the recipients of the public service provided by schools.

*“Teachers and staff should respect young people as equal”*

*“The majority of the young people said that if they had a problem they would rather talk to a friend rather than teachers or the designated people” (Norris and others, 1999, Investing in Children Archive)*

*“ We also think that the teachers would get through to the students more if they showed more respect. The teachers just always seem to shout instead of seeing what is happening, waiting for an explanation or reasoning with the student”*

*“I think [teachers] treat Guidance and Welfare as a free lesson for the teacher so they can catch up marking books “*

*“Its not the lesson, but the teacher – my book hasn’t been marked since 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2000” (Comment made in May 2001)*

*“I found that hardly any of the teachers actually stick to the homework timetable and just give it out when they want to give it... And if you don’t do it, he or she will give out a detention” (Ferdowsian and others, 2001, Investing in Children Archive)*

*“There is not enough time for lunch. If you are last for lunch then you find that you just get your food and the bell goes –that is if there is any food left at all”*

*“Although the young people acknowledged that the work of a dinner nanny was not easy they felt they were consistently treated badly by them. They spoke of being shouted at and prevented from going about their business even when it was legitimate.”*

*“One boy described feeling physically sick before every lesson with a particular member of staff. Another said a girl in his year was truanting from school rather than attend a particular lesson.” (Davy and others, 2000, Investing in Children Archive)*

*“Over half of the people in our year said they did not like coming to school. Just over a quarter said they did and the remainder said they did sometimes.”* Edwards, Love and others, 1999, *Investing in Children Archive*

*“Teachers and nannies guard the doors and pockets are sometimes searched [to prevent food been taken out from the dining hall].”* (Edmunds and others, 2000, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“I think that you should not be allowed to get shouted at. We are not allowed to shout at them [teachers].”*

*“Teachers threaten you and if you threaten them you get wrong but they don’t get wrong and we do.”*

*“I’m unhappy when I need to go to the toilet and the teacher says no. The teachers are allowed to go to the toilet when they need to.”*

*“There’s nothing positive about school.”*

*“I was frightened of the teacher who excluded me.”* (Ross, Foster and others, 2001, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“How they have to talk to teachers, only being allowed to use their surnames and sir and miss, as long as young people are treated like this by adults then adults are going to be the enemy and are out to get them all through society.”* (Card, Cooke and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

This is clearly a partial view of life in school, and is not intended to provide a detailed analysis of the quality of education in Durham and Darlington. The point that is being made here is that many young people experience the school regime, particularly in secondary schools, not as citizens, members of the public in receipt of a public service, but as the raw material in an impersonal process designed to maintain a steady supply of economically-viable young adults.

What is interesting is that these comments are fairly typical of the views expressed by young people working with *Investing in Children*, particularly about life in secondary school, and yet it would be difficult to find them recorded anywhere else. At least two possible explanations for this occur. The first is that the young people who have worked with *Investing in Children* have a particularly jaundiced view of the world. The second is

that nobody much, apart from *Investing in Children*, actually cares about what young people think of the service they receive at school.

We prefer the second analysis. As we have previously discussed, the consumers of education are seen to be parents rather than young people themselves, and their rights within the education system are uncertain, to say the least. It is no great surprise that many young people experience school as a regime of arbitrary authority, where the concept that they might be citizens with all that that implies about what they might reasonably expect from public servants, is not applicable.

It is worth repeating at this stage that this is not meant to be an attack upon teachers. There were many positive remarks about individual members of school staff amongst the comments recorded in the various *Investing in Children* research reports. It's the education system which is impervious to the views of its students. This leads to a situation, as evidenced by the above quotes, where some young people experience school as an oppressive and unsympathetic institution.

Some of the quotes above are from young people on the margins of the education system, who have been or are at risk of being excluded from mainstream school. As Lloyd and Munn's study showed, young people in this position often expressed feelings of powerlessness, of having no say in what was going on around them (Lloyd and Munn, 2002, p20). This comes across strongly in the conversations we have had with young people. There is a feeling of inevitability about school life, that the authority of the staff is very nearly absolute, and the opinions of the students are unimportant and irrelevant. (This, of course, reflects the legal position, which affords parents but not children, the right to make a complaint, and the right, for example, to appeal against a decision to exclude a student. ( Wadham and others, 1998, p310-311 ) ) There is a mixture of indignation at the perceived arbitrariness and injustice of school policies in relation to issues like uniform, homework and punishments, and fatalism about the fact that there is nothing the young people can do about it.

It is difficult to think of any other public service institution (apart, perhaps, from the Prison Service) where public servants have so much control, and where the views of the service user have so little influence and are treated with such disregard, as in the school system. A particularly perceptive head teacher remarked to me that if he was running a company he would have gone out of business long ago because his workforce (the students) would have walked out in protest at their treatment.

Outside of school, a consistent theme running through the comments made by young people is the level of intolerance they encounter within the community. We cited the example of children and young people in Murton who frequented the local library basically because it was the only place in their village where they felt welcome. This was echoed by others.

*"The obvious place to meet is the community centre. Currently, young people are not allowed in."* (Brown, Harrison and others, 1999, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*"Unfortunately [leisure centres] are not as 'open' as they claim. The majority are not friendly to us, and stop us going in at certain times."* (Bolton, Cant and others, 1999, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*"During the day we can hang out there [the leisure centre] but in the evenings we weren't allowed in and we didn't think this was fair."* (Card, Douthwaite and others, 1999, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*"There is nothing for young people to do in Peterlee, and nowhere for them to go."* (Plant, Owen and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*"The group felt that young people do not have a position in their community at all. They were angry that in their community young people can't go anywhere, for example, they get thrown out of their local leisure centre by the staff, and the police and shopkeepers kick them out of the their local town centre."* (Card, Edmunds and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

Having effectively been locked out of the few public spaces that might have been available to them, like leisure centres and community centres, their very presence on the streets is often seen as problematic, and can bring them into contact, if not conflict, with the police. In the late 90's, when the community safety audits were being carried out, one of the most common reasons given for contacting the police was 'youths causing annoyance'. Senior managers within the police, (who have always been sympathetic to *Investing in Children*) accept that adult intolerance is as likely to be the cause of this as any actual criminal or anti-social behaviour by young people. However, on the street the police are under pressure to respond, and almost all of the young people we have worked with have recounted experiences of being 'moved along' by the police in situations where no crime was being committed, and where, in similar circumstances, adults would be left undisturbed. This inevitably leaves some young people with a sense of grievance.

*“No doubt about it, many of them [the police] treat us with no respect at all.”*

*“No one gives young people the time of day, including the police, adults and higher authorities.”*(Plant, Owen and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“Something they would like to change is the way the police treat young people.”*

*“The police group did quite a lot of research about why relations were that bad between police and young people.”* (Card, Edmunds and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

Other public services have been subject to critical analysis. The Health Service is seen as distant, and concerns were expressed about the extent to which health professionals could be trusted.

*“Young people [in hospital] would like to prevent nurses and doctors bursting into bedrooms without knocking.”* (Wiper, Kane and others, 2001, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“However, in discussion many young people said they do not feel comfortable going to doctors because of attitude and fear that they may tell their parents.”* (Abbott, Cottle and others, *Investing in Children Archive*, 2001)

*“Many young people we talked to did not feel confident that what they said to their doctor would be kept confidential.”* (Bolton, Cant and others, 1999, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“We found people were not happy going to doctors about contraception as they found it embarrassing as well as hard to obtain an appointment. They also felt that confidentiality would be broken.”* (Campbell, Hall and Oswald, 2001, *Investing in Children Archive*)

The idea that things were being ‘done to them’ or perhaps ‘done for them’, but not with them, is reflected in a research report that considered the views of young people who had been through a process of assessment, with health, social services or education.

*“Young people do not want adults carrying out sneaky assessments without permission or a full explanation.”*

*“Young people want to be treated with the same respect as adults in relation to health and education assessments.”* ( Ross, Foster and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

Then there is the overall suspicion that young people are somehow ‘up to no good’.

*“The bus drivers are not as polite to you if you are a young person, they treat you badly if you don’t have the right change, and think we are all trouble-makers.”*

*“No young person under the age of sixteen is allowed in this shop unless accompanied by an adult. We asked if they would consider putting a sign up saying no elderly people unless accompanied by a younger person. She [the shopkeeper] said that older people don’t cause trouble or come in on roller blades.”* (Card, Douthwaite and others, 1999, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“Young people in society that I live in are perceived as thugs and worthless.”* (Card, Edmunds and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“Most local shops in the Peterlee area have signs up which say either you must be accompanied by an adult, or only two teenagers allowed in the shop at one time. In Boots the chemist you are followed around by security, they do not do this with adults.”* (Owen, Troman and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*“This is illustrated by the fact that in many of the shops in Ferryhill, young people under sixteen are not allowed in unless accompanied by an adult, or only two young people are allowed in at the same time.”* (Card, Edmunds and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

And finally, a sense of fatalism that nothing will change.

*“We don’t have much confidence that things will change because nobody ever listens to what young people say.”* (Plant, Owen and others, 2002, *Investing in Children Archive*)

*Investing in Children* has provided some young people the opportunity to speak for themselves about their experiences of living in the Durham and Darlington. The evidence presented above supports the view that many public and private services treat them in an oppressive and discriminatory way which would be totally unacceptable, indeed even illegal, if applied to adults. The pervasiveness and complete mundanity of this phenomenon is best illustrated, not by the young people's research, but by a sign which I saw in a Post Office window in the Yorkshire Dales. It read:

**\*\*\*\*\* Holiday Cottages**

**Reeth, Richmond**

**Spotlessly clean properties to rent. In 2 acres of grounds, maintained by resident owners. Excellent views. Private river frontage. Ample parking."**

The advert for this idyllic holiday location then added the following:

**"No pets/children"**

I think the evidence from the *Investing in Children* Archive is persuasive, and the case has been made, that children and young people are treated differently from adults in a way that fails to respect their human rights. It is part of the argument being advanced in this thesis that this difference is neither rational or socially just, but derived from a dominant discourse that represents children as victims, threats or works in progress, but never citizens in their known right.

Children's rights are still not in the mainstream of political debate in the UK. The present government, like its predecessor, has ignored its responsibility to promote the existence of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Very few of the young people we have worked with over the past six years were aware of the Convention, or indeed the concept that they themselves might have rights, when we first came into contact with them.

The depiction of children and young people as an oppressed minority is sometimes dismissed as an esoteric and extreme analysis, promoted by a small group of academics and political activists who don't live in the real world. After all, the argument goes, there would be anarchy in schools if teachers were unable to exercise authority, groups of young people on the streets are intimidating and the police must have the power to deal with

them, the vast majority of children and young people survive and thrive, and, classically, we adults experienced similar childhoods and it 'never did us any harm'.

The argument presented here is that the dominant discourse on childhood is not generally benign and based upon common sense, but contains within it the seeds of a peculiar vulnerability, with disastrous, and in some cases lethal consequences for some children and young people. The history of child welfare services is littered with examples where our refusal to acknowledge the ability of children and young people to speak for themselves has left them at the mercy of unscrupulous or uncaring adults. Whilst the Children Act of 1989 may have introduced a legislative requirement that children must be heard in judicial proceedings, it had little or no effect on the politically voiceless position of children in society, and it is here that the vulnerability lies.

At a more general level, the Government's much-vaunted crusade against social exclusion would have a greater chance of success if the voice of the excluded actually informed the debate. (I accept that this argument applies equally well to other groups in society, but our focus here is children and young people.) To take one example, over the past six years young people have contributed a number of concrete proposals designed to make schools more accessible and inclusive of all students. These have ranged from improving school meals, providing dignified and decent toilets, creating a flexible school transport system, providing drinking water in class, and suggesting that teachers and students talk to, not shout at, one another. (For example, Davy and others, 2000, Edmunds and others, 2000, Norris and others, 1999, Ross and others, 2001, *Investing in Children* Archive). With one or two noticeable exceptions, the education system has been deaf to these comments. Instead we have seen the introduction of 'truancy sweeps' where the police return reluctant students to school, we have seen the imprisonment of a mother for failing to ensure her daughter's attendance, and the promotion of 'home-school agreements', which seek to define the behavioural obligations of students (and parents), but have little to say about the behaviour students (or parents). We remain committed to an education system designed, as A.S. Neil remarked, to "make the child fit the school" rather than "the school fit the child" (Neil, 1968, p20).

Our argument, then, is that the challenge to the dominant discourse contained in the representation of children and young people as citizens with rights is important because it provides a greater chance of security for vulnerable children and young people, and because it provides an analysis within which mainstream services might become more genuinely inclusive.

And finally, it seems to me, it is important because it holds out the possibility of revitalising ideas about citizenship and democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Prout notes that, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the narrow concept of citizenship (adult, male, white and property-owning) was challenged and expanded by “making visible [the] hidden contribution to the maintenance of social and economic life” made by women. (Prout, 2003,pp31-32) Promoting the citizenship rights of children and young people might have an equally liberating effect.

In Chapter Three we discussed how the discourse on children and childhood developed over time. It is part of our thesis that the representation of children and young people in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain produced by the dominant discourse has less to do with anything which is intrinsic to the nature of childhood per se, but more to do with the coming together of a number of powerful and politically potent notions about children and young people. These ideas are influential in the shaping of the institutions concerned with children and young people, and at the same time shaped by the professional practice and policy of these very same institutions. This has the effect of ensuring that the dominant discourse on children is extremely powerful, protected and promoted as it is by some of the fundamental establishments of our society.

The challenge facing *Investing in Children* is best understood therefore in terms of the extent to which an alternative, emancipatory discourse is promoted. Within this new representation of children and young people the contribution they make to society is recognised, and they are seen as competent and active citizens, in possession of valuable insights into the world in which they live, and able to articulate these insights within constructive political dialogue.

In the main, I would suggest that the evidence presented here from the case studies and the *Investing in Children* Archive support the conclusion that we have been partially successful in meeting this challenge. The children and young people we have worked with over the past six years have, I believe, demonstrated that they have a valid and important contribution to make to political debate, and the ability to make it. What’s more, many of the groups with whom we have worked shown a commitment and resilience which would be the envy of adult political parties.

However, the reason why we must judge this a partial success is because the work of many of the campaigning and research groups has often been without political effect. By this I mean that the changes which they sought to achieve, whether in improvements to school dinners or better access to

community resources, have, more often than not, failed to materialise. This is not to argue, simplistically, that what young people want they should get, but a reflection on our failure to successfully engage in a process of political dialogue.

Put a different way, the evidence supports the conclusion that *Investing in Children* has been relatively successful in engaging a large number of children and young people from a wide range of different backgrounds in a process which has enabled them to make a contribution to political debate. However, we have not always managed to achieve a situation where that contribution has been acknowledged, and dialogue has ensued as a consequence.

We can use the work of Habermas to frame this analysis. The failure to achieve dialogue has been as a result of the refusal of the other potential partners to the dialogue to recognise the legitimacy of the contribution of the young people. (Note that it is the refusal to recognise their right to make a contribution which is problematic here, not a refusal to necessarily be persuaded by that contribution.)

This refusal is manifested in different ways. Occasionally, as with the case of the local authority chief executive cited in the Promises Report, it is expressed directly as righteous indignation. More often, as with the example of the Connexions Service, there is a pretence of engagement, but in fact the decision-making process exists elsewhere. Most commonly, as with the school meals research team, the contribution is simply ignored if it is deemed inconvenient. This strategy has been recognised by young people. Commenting on how *Investing in Children* might be made more effective, Mark Tallentire, the first young editor of the Newsletter noted "I think they need to find some way of stopping adults just waiting until young people get bored or grow up". (Card, Edmunds and others, 2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

This is at the heart of the challenge to *Investing in Children* and the possibility of developing an emancipatory discourse. The dominant discourse defines children and young people as politically powerless. They have no legitimate means to **demand** the right to a seat at the table and a voice in the dialogue.

Much of the last six years could be seen as process in which young people have experimented with different ways of becoming active participants in dialogue. The models which have begun to emerge, and which must be seen as at a very early stage of development, are loosely based upon the

concept of **participative** rather than **representative** democracy. In the most part, we have been involved in supporting and resourcing children and young people to make contributions in their own right to issues which they see to be important, and in ways with which they are comfortable. We have largely avoided a structural approach, where young people are required to demonstrate their representative credentials, and act as spokespersons for a wider group, by joining youth forums or school councils, for example. In general, with a few honourable exceptions, such structural approaches tend to promote participation as an end rather than a means to an end..

However, structural approaches do mirror adult democratic models, and when the legitimacy of the contribution of young people becomes contested, particularly when their contribution is challenging the status quo, there is a tendency to give preference to these approaches, which are by and large more predictable and less challenging. The participative approach promoted by *Investing in Children* tends to be seen as more anarchic and less biddable.

This complicates the issue of achieving **effective** participation in political dialogue, but to an extent this seems to me to be more a reflection on the limited scope for active citizenship provided by the representative democratic institutions in broader society. Thus the participative approach can be seen to be challenging not only to the dominant discourse on childhood, but also to traditional approaches to political processes generally. Prout suggests "Too often children are expected to fit into adult ways of participating when what is needed is institutional and organisational change that encourages and facilitates children's voices." (Prout, 2003, p32)

It is apparent from considering the material presented in the case studies that *Investing in Children* can provide no guarantee of success, and indeed the majority of the campaigning and research groups have not (yet) achieved the changes they are seeking. The question then is to what extent is the *Investing in Children* experience an empowering one, when often little change is achieved? There is some evidence from young people that, despite the frustration of slow (or no) progress, working with the project does have an impact on the way some young people see the world. In the summer of 2002, a young research team interviewed young people about their perceptions of *Investing in Children*:

*“She looked at other young people differently because of IiC and she no longer thought it was ok for young people to sit back and accept adult treatment”*

*“The young people thought they had a better idea of how to change things...through IiC”*

*“I don’t think that young people are aware that they can make decisions with IiC, so I think awareness needs to be raised”*

*“Yeh, young people are a lot more capable than we thought before we became involved with IiC”*

*“I think it’s a good way of getting young people involved in trying to change the community for the good”*

*“It makes you feel important . And people respect you more because you’re working for Investing in Children and trying to change things and trying to work together and stuff”*

*“..things do change, not changing the world obviously, but small things that make you feel that you’re doing something worthwhile”*

*“Its definitely made me think differently about young people now”*(Card and others,2002, *Investing in Children* Archive)

The point is often made that the logic of the claim to be made to effective citizenship rights for children and young people could equally be applied to other groups who are disenfranchised from the formal political process. It seems reasonable to propose that the promotion of an emancipatory discourse on childhood may well involve the reformulation of what we mean by active citizenship, rather than attempting to shoe-horn the children’s rights agenda into the narrow and limited possibilities of the political status quo.

I don’t think that this paper has necessarily provided too many answers, but I hope that I have managed to pose some relevant and pertinent questions. I would suggest that the conclusions of this paper suggest that further research could be fruitfully explored in the following areas:.

- ◆ The potential to learn from young people as researchers is substantial.
- ◆ One obvious topic for analysis is how the current discourse on childhood is being experienced. Much of the material discussed in

Chapter three concerns the historical factors that have contributed to the discourse, but as Prout points out, changes in demography, amongst other things, will bring new pressures to bear. (Prout, 2003)

- ◆ Finally, the potential of the children's rights debate to contribute to a revitalised concept of active, participative citizenship merits further consideration.

## **Appendix I**

### *Investing in Children* Partner Organisations (December 2002)

Durham County Council

: Cultural Services

: Education Department

: Environment and Technical Services Department

: Social Services Department

Darlington Borough Council

Chester-le-Street District Council

Derwentside District Council

Durham City Council

Easington Borough Council

Sedgefield Borough Council

Teesdale Borough Council

Weardale District Council

Darlington Primary Care Trust

Dales Primary Care Trust

Derwentside Primary Care Trust

Durham and Chester-le-St Primary Care Trust

Easington Primary Care Trust

Sedgefield Primary Care Trust

County Durham Learning and Skills Council

County Durham Connexions Service

County Durham Foundation

Durham and Darlington Police Service

Durham and Darlington Police Authority

Durham Youth Offending Service

Darlington Youth Offending Service

Barnardos

The Childrens Society

NSPCC

DISC

Groundwork

Save the Children Fund

NCH Action for Children

National Children's Bureau

## **Appendix 2**

### **Membership Scheme**

*Investing in Children* members, June 2003

Life Skills' (Disc)

1 Orchard Lane

3 P's Project

Auckland Youth and Community Centre

Aycliffe Secure Unit

Aycliffe Village Primary School

Barnard Castle Police Station

Behaviour Support Service

Belmont Library

Bishop Auckland College: Student Support Services

Bishop Auckland Hospital: Children's Ward

Bishop Auckland Nursery Centre

Blackhall Youth Centre

Bowburn Junior School

Bowburn Youth Project

Bowes Museum

Catchgate Children's Home

Chastleton Medical Group

Chester SRB6

Chester-le-Street Library

Chimps

Clarence Day Nursery, Newton Aycliffe

Coffee Bean, Newton Aycliffe

Community Support Service

Copelaw Education and Training Centre

County Durham Anti-Bullying Service

Crook Library

Crook Police

Darlington Blitz Bus

Darlington Memorial Hospital

Dawdon Youth Centre

Derwentside Family Resource Centre

Diabetes Clinic, Bishop Auckland Hospital

Eden Hall Primary School

Education Welfare Service

Educational Psychology Service

Eldon Lane Primary School  
Esh Winning Family Centre  
Fishburn Youth and Community Centre  
Framwellgate Moor Children's Home  
Framwellgate Moor Primary School  
Gainford Primary School, Darlington  
Gilesgate Youth Club  
Glendene School  
Glenholme Youth Centre  
Groundwork East Durham  
Hermitage Comprehensive  
Home and Hospital Support Service  
Horden Youth Centre  
Laurel Avenue Primary School  
Lowhills Day Nursery  
Mid Durham Projects Club  
Middle Chare Surgery  
Moorside Children's Home  
Murton Library  
Music 2000 Project  
Newton Aycliffe Youth Centre  
Newton Hall Library  
Orchard Young Carers – Derwentside and Easington  
Park House, Sherburn  
Parkside Community Centre, Seaham  
Pelton Library  
Peterlee Youth Centre  
PRU (Pupil Referral Unit)  
Roseberry Primary School  
Sacriston Youth Project  
School Inclusion Project  
School Nurses in Derwentside  
School Nursing Service – Durham  
School Nursing Service for Deerness Valley  
Seaham Cyber I  
Seaham Family Centre  
Seaham Police  
Sensory and Communication Support Service  
Skerne Park Primary School, Darlington  
Social Services Information & Communication services  
South Moor Library  
Spennymoor Youth Centre  
St Hild's College C of E Primary School

Staindrip Comprehensive  
 Steps – Therapeutic Services Team  
 Sugarhill Primary School  
 Take Action Programme  
 Tanfield Comprehensive School  
 Teesdale Leisure Services  
 Teesdale Youth Theatre  
 The Chester West Wall Group  
 The Pelton Fellions Group  
 Thornley Young People's Project  
 Tow Law Children's Home  
 Trimdon Community College  
 Ushaw Moor Junior School  
 West Cornforth Medical Practice  
 Woodham Community Technology College  
 Woodhouse Close Church and Community Centre  
 Woodhouse Close Library

*Investing in Children* membership applicants, June 2003

Abbey Leisure Centre  
 Access Service  
 Advisory & Specialist Support Service  
 Aycliffe Learning Shop  
 Belle Vue  
 Bowes Hutchinson V A Primary School  
 Brandon Lane Surgery  
 Bullion Lane School  
 Cestria Primary School  
 Chester-le-Street Youth Centre  
 Children's Families Team Chester-le-Street Social Services  
 Clairmont Family Centre  
 Coffee Bean, Ferryhill  
 Coxhoe Children's Home  
 Darlington – Cross Roads Care  
 Darlington – DASH – DAD  
 Darlington-DISC/Streetwise  
 Darlington – PSK 2000 (Peer Support 2000)  
 Darlington Skerne Park Primary  
 Darlington St Columbus Youth Centre  
 Day Teaching Unit: Inclusion Project

Diabetes Clinic, University Hospital, Durham  
Domestic Violence  
Dryburn A & E  
Durham Community Association, Shakespeare Hall  
Durham and Chester-le-Street CAMHS Team  
Durham Rural Youth Project  
Easington Colliery Welfare Youth Club  
East Durham Youth in Action  
End House  
Ethnic & Minority Travellers Support Service  
Ferryhill Comprehensive School  
F.C.A. – Foster Care Associates North East  
Framwellgate Comprehensive School  
Garden Farm  
Grove Community House  
Include  
Sacriston Library  
School Based Support Service  
Seaham Youth Centre  
Sedgefield Community Rangers  
Sedgefield Library  
S.H.A.I.D. (Single Homeless Action in Derwentside)  
Shotton Hall Comprehensive School  
SLAN (Sedgefield Looked After Network)  
SMASH – (South Moor Library) – Voluntary Organisation  
Spennymoor Library (King Street Kids – Library Committee)  
St John's R C Comprehensive School  
Stanley Child Care Team  
Stanley Library  
Stanley School of Technology  
Student Community Action Office  
Sue Waller Management Team (Residential Care)  
Teesdale Youth Theatre  
Treetops Ward, University Hospital, Durham  
Vane Road, Newton Aycliffe  
Willington Youth Centre  
Wingate Library  
Woodhouse Close Library  
YES, Aykley Heads

## Appendix 3

### *Biography*

All my previous professional experience has been within local authority social work with children, young people and their families. I started as a generic social worker in Strathclyde, dealing with everything from child protection cases to welfare rights advice. From there I moved to Manchester, where I worked as a senior residential social worker in a children's home which accommodated 19 young people aged from 10 to 18. I then moved to Wakefield, where I worked within the juvenile justice system, in an alternative to care and custody project. Following this, I became team manager at a newly created Youth Justice Centre in Newcastle. After a brief interlude working with a Durham-based Voluntary Organisation, (DISC), again in the youth justice domain, I spent a brief spell as a policy officer at the Durham County Council Social Services Headquarters at County Hall. My final post before becoming Investing in Children Coordinator, was as Child Care Coordinator at Aycliffe Young People's Centre.

A number of key threads had been becoming more and more apparent to me as my career developed. Firstly, poverty was a common denominator in almost every job. With few exceptions, up until this point I had spent my entire professional career working with children and young people from poor families. Their plight was often desperate, and in a few cases you could argue that the young people were, at least in part, authors of their own misfortune, but theirs was always an uphill struggle.

This is not to present a simplistic argument that abuse or neglect or delinquency are the inevitable results of poverty, but simply to observe the stark injustice of the situation of many children and young people. Through no fault of their own, their lives, both present and future, were blighted by poverty and inequality.

The second issue that is apparent to me is that although the source of the challenges facing many of the children and young people with whom I have worked could be considered structural in their nature, society's response has been to individualise their plight. Although it is self-evident that children born into affluent families have better life chances than those

born into deprivation, the intervention of the state into the lives of poor children, as represented by the personal social services agencies in which I have worked, is directed at changing them, not the economic and political system that contributes to their difficulties. The effect of this is to hold the excluded responsible for their exclusion.

This analysis is clearly not confined to children, but the impotent status of children creates a peculiar vulnerability. They, more than any other group within the community, are powerless to address their predicament. Their views on their position are deemed neither valid nor relevant.

It is also the case, in my opinion, that many of the interventions of the state into the lives of poor children are not only ineffective, they often exacerbate their difficulties

One particular case illustrates this point. When I was working in Strathclyde, I removed two sisters, both under the age of five, from their parents. They had previously spent two periods in public care, and the latest attempt to reunite them with their parents had failed.

Their removal from home for the third time caused them great distress. They, and their mother were desperately unhappy (possibly their father too, although I never managed to achieve any meaningful dialogue with him).

The family existed on state benefits. The father had been retired on health grounds, following an industrial accident at the local steelworks. There was a profound lack of optimism about them.

The possibility of the mother resuming the care of her children was held out, but only on condition that she moved out of the relationship with her partner. In the first instance, this would have meant moving to a refuge in Glasgow, some twenty miles away. It was clear that this was beyond her in many ways, not all of which I understood, then or now. What was clear was that she could not contemplate a life beyond her relationship with her partner, or her extended family, or her community. Her life (and that of her partner, I suspect) was in many ways comprehensively impoverished.

The point of this example is that, in different circumstances, the options available might have been different. But the resources of the family were exceedingly thin and the resources of the state could not compensate in a way that created a bright future for the children.

Throughout the 80's and early 90's, I worked in the youth justice system, in Wakefield in Yorkshire, then in Newcastle, and for a short period, in Durham. This was in the 'old' youth justice system of minimum intervention, and debates about the negative impact of net-widening. Put most simply, we saw ourselves in the role of protecting children and young people from a criminal court system that was class-ridden and unsympathetic to the plight of working class families.

In many ways, the direct work with children and young people was almost irrelevant. In order to persuade the court to pass sentences which kept the young people 'down tariff' and avoid the imposition of custodial penalties, we invented programmes based upon a mixture of Outward Bound, group work and supervision. We created grand titles such as the 'Compensatory Curriculum', but in fact the main point of our intervention was the justice system, not the lives of the young people.

Again, it is worth emphasising that almost all of the young people we worked with came from the poorest communities. We spoke of developing programmes that would help young people to adopt 'survival strategies', but the truth was that we had little idea what 'survival' meant to them.

The circumstances of one particular young man serve to illustrate my point. I would meet him at his home in the east end of Newcastle, with his mother at her wits end, desperately worried at the effect his offending behaviour might have on his younger sisters and brothers. I would meet him on the street with his mates, looking for stimulation and excitement in a barren environment. I couldn't meet him in school because he had been excluded for over a year, with no alternative provision made for him. And then I would meet him in the cells of Byker Police Station, where I was acting as an Appropriate Adult, and he was being interviewed in relation to his latest incompetent attempt at burglary, and the sheer weight of the odds against him would be apparent.

Much of the remainder of my social work career has been concerned with children and young people in public care, where the poor outcomes have been well documented. It is also in this domain that the consequences of our failure to listen and take seriously what children and young people have to say have been most dramatically revealed in numerous reports about the abuse of children in the care system.

My most recent experience of working in the looked after system was the post I held immediately before I was appointed to *Investing in Children*. For three years, I worked as Child Care Coordinator at Aycliffe Young

People's Centre. This was a large, campus-style children's home, accommodating over eighty young people, with around half of them living in the largest secure unit in England.

The Centre brings together some of the most damaged and vulnerable young people in the north of England (and beyond) because it is economically and administratively convenient to do so, without acknowledging that the environment created by such a concentration can often exacerbate the problems faced by the young people. Paradoxically, extreme behaviour becomes the norm. More worrying, institutionalised responses to extreme behaviour can also become normal. The child care practice in the Centre placed heavy emphasis upon the authority of the staff to maintain order.

I was appointed at the same time as a new General Manager, who was charged with the responsibility of bringing practice into line with the Children Act 1989. My role was to ensure that child protection procedures were effective, and that the voices of the children and young people who lived at the Centre were heard. Perhaps inevitably, this brought me into conflict with many of the staff. I worked at Aycliffe for three uncomfortable years, and during that time I got to know many fascinating young people, but despite the efforts of the new management team and the introduction of a more appropriate childcare philosophy, I do not have the consolation of believing that my contribution made much of a difference. Many of the young people remain locked into a system that has, I believe, little chance of meeting their needs or respecting their rights.

However, during this period I was also involved on the periphery of the Department of Health initiative 'Looking after Children: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes' which was based upon research conducted primarily by Dartington Hall and Bristol University. Put very briefly, the initiative sought to apply what were seen to be the universal aspirations of parents to the looked after system. Good outcomes could be achieved by paying equal attention to all of the things which concern parents. This would help to rectify the tendency of the care system to concentrate on behaviour and protection, at the expense of other key areas of a child's life, such as education or health or having friends.

The concept of universal aspirations, shared by all parents, is closely linked to the concept that there are universal aspects of childhood which shape the experience of all children, to a lesser or greater degree, and this is one of the key concepts that have informed the development of *Investing in Children*.

When the opportunity arose to apply for the post of developing a new project, designed to explore the possibilities of a new approach to children and young people, it seemed like an obvious next step. Although when I was appointed as *Investing in Children* Coordinator it would be fair to say that the thinking behind the project was not as clear as it is now, the potential for achieving change was obvious, and I was delighted to be appointed.

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