

# A typology of youth voice

## For use in UK youth provision

Dr Jo Hickman Dunne, Zunaira Mahmood & Tom Burke

Draft for consultation, April 2022

---



© BBC 2007 Reg. charity England  
& Wales no. 802052 and Scotland  
no. SC039557



# About the Centre for Youth Impact

---

Our vision is for all young people in the UK have access to high quality services that support their social and emotional learning. To achieve this vision, we work collaboratively with partners across the UK youth sector to develop shared approaches to learning, evaluation and continuous improvement.

## **We exist because:**

- It's tough being young in the UK, and outcomes for young people are both poor and inconsistent
- The youth sector lacks a shared understanding of how it can best improve outcomes for young people
- Expensive bespoke responses and increased competition in the evaluation 'industry' is adding to the problem.

By uniting practitioners, funders and policymakers, we can create exceptional services for young people across the UK. The Centre supports this movement by offering:

- Training and coaching for youth sector practitioners
- Resources and information for anyone involved with young people's outcomes
- A place to debate, facilitate and lead the change that will make the youth sector better and better.

**Find out more about our work at [www.youthimpact.uk](http://www.youthimpact.uk) and follow us [@YouthImpactUK](https://twitter.com/YouthImpactUK).**

# Contents

<b><u>1. Introduction: about this project</u></b>	3
<b><u>2. The consultation process</u></b>	4
<b><u>3. What is a typology and how might it be used?</u></b>	6
<b><u>4. What are the benefits of using this typology?</u></b>	7
<b><u>5. What this typology does and does not do</u></b>	8
<b><u>6. The process of typology development</u></b>	9
<b><u>7. Typology overview</u></b>	10
<b><u>7a. Spheres of influence of youth voice</u></b>	12
<b><u>7b. Mechanisms of youth voice</u></b>	13
<b><u>7c. Methods of youth voice</u></b>	17
<b><u>8. Bringing the typology to life</u></b>	20

# 1. Introduction: about this project

---

This typology has been developed as part of a wider project on [\*Maximising Young People's Voice and Power\*](#), collaboratively funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund and BBC Children in Need.

The project seeks to generate data and insight into the types and level of youth voice activity that are happening across the UK, and who engages in this activity.

The project has four key aims:

- **Increase understanding:** Better understand current youth voice activity in the UK in terms of where and how young people have a voice, who accesses these channels and what they are saying
- **Increase reach:** Ensure more young people, particularly those seldom heard (such as excluded or marginalised groups) or groups that are less well known, are able to raise their voices and have influence in decision making processes
- **Enhance equity:** Better understand the barriers to young people engaging in youth voice activities, and highlight priority areas where we need to focus on equitable access for young people to ensure their voices are heard and able to have influence
- **Improve access to information:** Ensure practitioners and young people can access information on national youth voice activity, and the insights it is creating.

We want this typology to provide a standardised way of describing the youth voice practice that sits across the diversity of youth work settings and contexts. Following this consultation, we will be incorporating the typology into a sector-wide survey, the results of which will be published in an interactive heatmap in September 2022.

## 2. The consultation process

---

This document has been produced to inform a consultation with all those working with and for young people to review and refine the current version of the typology.

The aim of the consultation is to ensure that the typology captures the breadth of activity that supports youth voice practice and is fit for purpose.

The consultation process will happen in four steps:

1. Open consultation running until **6 May 2022**
2. Workshops with practitioners
3. Workshops with young people
4. Workshops with the project funders, project Youth Steering Group, and the wider Centre for Youth Impact team

The feedback gathered through these steps will be incorporated into the typology, resulting in the publication of a Typology 2.0 in May 2022, which will have been developed through review of empirical evidence and collective sector knowledge.

# Consultation questions

As you read through this typology, we invite you to consider:

1. What terms do you use to describe your work (and that of your peers and networks) to support young people to be heard (e.g. youth voice, participation), and how would you define these terms?
2. Is the typology clear? Does it include everything it needs to?
3. Does it feel like a useful tool that could aide your practice?
4. What would make it more valuable to you or the sector?
5. Can you see your youth voice practice reflected in the categories? Is there something you do that doesn't easily fit?
6. Do the categories feel clearly distinct, or is there some overlap/lack of clarity in the criteria?
7. Does the introduction clearly describe and explain the typology (and development process), or could it be improved in any way?

## You can participate in the open consultation process by:

1. Completing this [feedback form](#)
2. Emailing your feedback to [youthvoice@youthimpact.uk](mailto:youthvoice@youthimpact.uk)
3. Attending a consultation workshop on **Tuesday 3 May 4-5.30pm** (sign up [here](#))

### 3. What is a typology and how might it be used?

A typology is a systematic categorisation of the types of something according to their common characteristics. A typology provides a framework for description, clarification and comparison.

This typology has been developed to provide a standardised – a shared, or common – way of describing youth voice practice in youth provision, across the UK, for young people aged up to 25.

We anticipate this typology being used in the following ways:

- **Practitioners and organisations** can use this typology to plan and evaluate youth voice activities and to more clearly communicate their ways of working to young people, peers, and external stakeholders
- **Evaluators** can use this typology to develop shared evaluation frameworks, and build a collective understanding of quality and impact
- **Funders** can use the typology to support grantees to develop their youth voice activities, and to assess grant applications
- **Young people** can use this typology to understand how opportunities within provision can be created for their voices to be heard, to request specific types of youth voice opportunities, so increasing their sense of empowerment, agency and influence over decisions that affect their lives.

We provide some vignettes in [Section 8](#) to show how the typology could potentially be used in practice.

## 4. What are the benefits of using this typology?

Typologies are particularly beneficial for service design, research and evaluation. At the most basic level, a shared and consistent approach to language is foundational in supporting all those working with and for young people to define what they are doing, why and how, and to begin to explore its impact.

We expect this typology to provide a *common language* to help practitioners working with young people to more clearly and accurately describe their youth voice activities.

Describing what you are (and are not) doing is the first step towards evaluating your practice, and evaluation is a critical element of learning and improving. We hope this typology will support organisations to consider and answer the questions ‘why do we do what we do’, and ‘what exactly are we doing?’. These questions form the first part of our [Asking Good Questions framework](#); designed to support organisations to reflect and understand the quality of their work, with and for young people.

You also can find further resources to support evaluation of your practice in our [Resource Hub](#).

In addition to helping professionals and practitioners to describe what they are doing in terms of youth voice practice, and do this collectively and consistently, the typology supports:

- **Reduction of complexity** – by capturing and presenting a multidimensional understanding of youth voice practice in a manageable way
- **Clarity** – through teasing out ambiguity that might exist in youth voice practice and providing clearly defined and mutually exclusive categories
- **Comparison and difference** – through the use of clearly defined categories that can be applied to empirical examples to understand what your practice does or doesn't do.

## 5. What this typology does, and *does not* do

This typology:	This typology does not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is based on empirical evidence</li><li>• Is specific to youth provision in the UK for young people up to the age of 25</li><li>• Provides common groupings for: the <i>sphere of influence</i> of youth voice; <i>mechanisms</i> of youth voice; and <i>methods</i> of youth voice</li><li>• Breaks down these common groupings into discrete categories that are objectively verifiable</li><li>• Seeks to represent the diversity of youth work settings and contexts.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a comprehensive categorisation of all young people's voice and influence</li><li>• Make a judgement on the prevalence of groupings and categories</li><li>• Make a judgement on the benefits or drawbacks of particular categories</li><li>• Make a judgement about the quality of youth voice practice based on particular categories</li><li>• Make a judgement on the level of power sharing between adults and young people involved in the youth voice practice.</li></ul>

## 6. The process of typology development

The typology has been primarily developed from a review of 34 local authority youth participation and engagement strategies and 12 organisational youth participation strategies (46 in total).

Strategies were included where they were published in English and by organisations operating in a UK context. All included direct examples of how young people are engaged in youth voice activities. Additional key documents, for example research reports and theoretical models of participation, were drawn upon to guide typology development.

Our process included four steps:

1. A web-based search was conducted to identify potentially relevant youth voice practice articles (n=66)

2. Removal of documents (n=20) that did not include direct examples of youth voice practice (eg. police statements on ethos or particular models of participation lacking details on practice with young people)

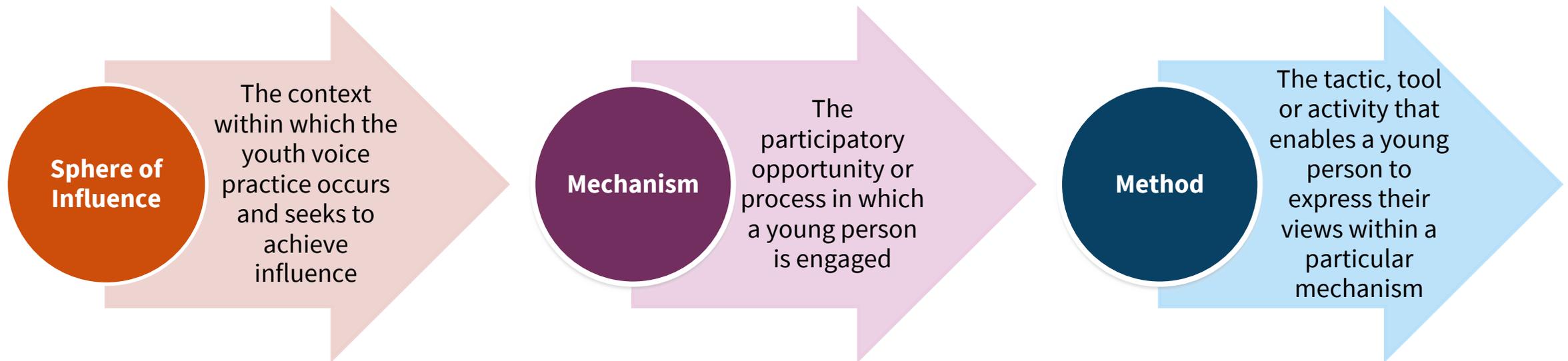
3. Remaining articles (n=46) reviewed and any detail regarding youth voice mechanisms and methods was extracted and logged.

4. Extracted data was grouped according to 'type' in an iterative process, directed by a series of internal reviews to arrive at the development of common groupings and discrete categories within these groupings

## 7. Typology overview

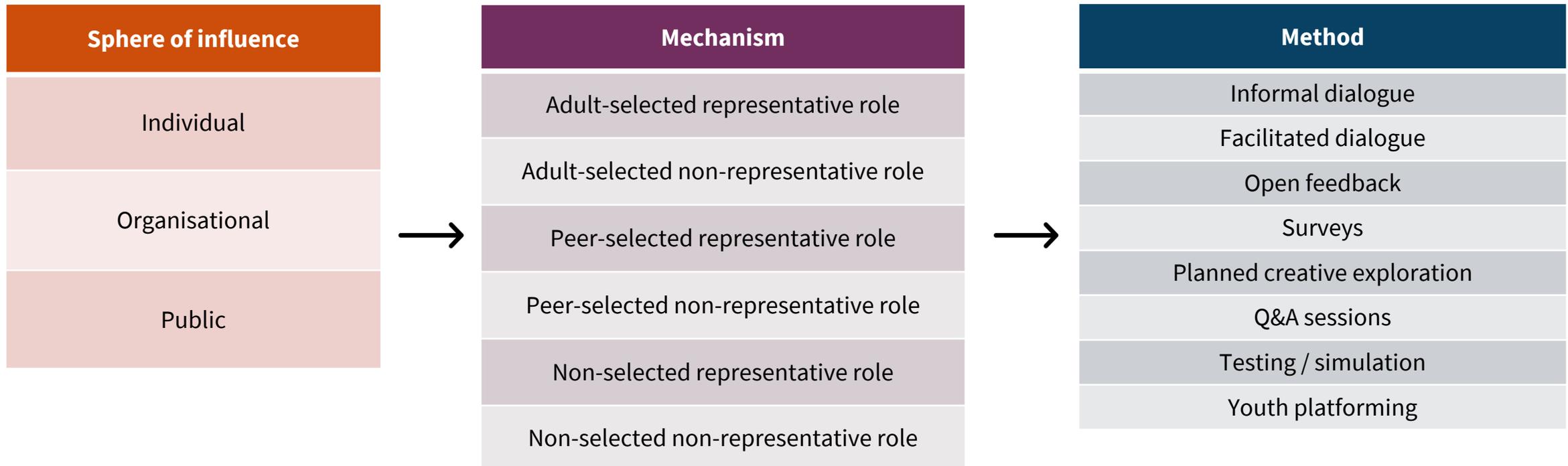
Categories are defined and sit within the three groupings below.

**Sphere of influence of youth voice practice** describes the context within which **mechanisms** sit, which in turn, young people can engage in through a range of **methods**.



# Typology overview

Particular mechanisms and methods are more commonly associated with each other, and more commonly associated with some spheres of influence than others. Following the categorisation of each grouping, we provide some examples of how spheres of influence might be linked with mechanisms and methods in a provision setting.



## 7a. Spheres of influence of youth voice

### The context within which the youth voice practice occurs and seeks to influence

Sphere	Definition	Example	
<b>Individual</b>	Young people are able to share any views, wishes or feelings that they want to.	Feedback on their experience of specific provision, services or relationships with practitioners.	A young person being involved in the planning of their recovery sessions within their local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
<b>Organisational</b>	Young people are involved in shaping the design and delivery of services or provision available to young people.	Involvement in staff recruitment, quality assurance, or building design.	A Youth Steering Group who have been brought together to help plan the layout and design of their youth club's new building.
<b>Public</b>	Young people are involved in sharing their views on and in the public sphere, which may include the opportunity to influence policy and public opinion.	Involvement in social action such as campaigning, advocacy and influencing.	Young people coming together to run a campaign to increase access for wheelchair users to their local facilities.

## 7b. Mechanisms of youth voice

The participatory opportunity or process in which a young person engages

		Method of selection		
		Roles selected by adults	Roles selected by peers	Non-selected roles
Whose voices are represented	Roles representing young people	Adult-selected representative role	Peer-selected representative role	Non-selected representative role
	Non-representative roles	Adult-selected non-representative role	Peer-selected representative role	Non-selected non-representative role

## The participatory opportunity or process in which a young person engages

	Definition	Criteria	Example
<b>Adult-selected representative role</b>	Young people in roles representing the views of their peers. These roles have been selected by adults. This could be individual or as part of a group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals are selected through a transparent process</li> <li>• Individuals are selected by adults</li> <li>• The individual is recognised as a representative voice of young people by adults and peers</li> </ul>	A young person has been selected by their youth worker to work with their youth club Manager to recruit a new youth worker. The young person conducts a survey of young people in the club to find out what their top priorities are for a new youth worker. The young person feeds this information back to the Manager to help write the job description.
<b>Adult-selected non-representative role</b>	Young people in roles where they are representing their own views. These roles have been selected by adults. This could be individually or as part of a group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals are selected through a transparent process</li> <li>• Individuals are selected by adults</li> <li>• Individuals express their own views and these are not representative of young people</li> </ul>	Young people have put their names forward and been selected by the youth workers at their youth club to become Young Advisors and form a Youth Advisory Board, who will be consulted on the youth club's new strategy.

# Mechanisms of youth voice

## The participatory opportunity or process in which a young person engages

	Definition	Criteria	Example
<b>Peer-selected representative role</b>	Young people in roles representing the views of their peers. These roles have been selected by their peers. This could be individual or as part of a group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals are selected through a transparent process</li> <li>Individuals are selected by young people The individual is recognised as a representative voice of young people by adults and peers</li> </ul>	Young people put their names forward to be a MYP – a Member of Youth Parliament. Elections took place over a two-week voting period where young people could elect who they wanted to be their MYP. The successful young people are voted in as MYPs and serve a set term.
<b>Peer-selected non-representative role</b>	Young people in roles where they are representing their own views. These roles have been selected by their peers. This could be individually or as part of a group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals are selected through a transparent process</li> <li>Individuals are selected by young people The individual is recognised as a representative voice of young people by adults and peers</li> </ul>	In preparation for their annual show the community youth group coordinates a Youth Organising Committee. Young people in the group vote for who they think should be on the Committee and these young people work together to plan and deliver rehearsals, managed the show budget and organise local advertising.

## The participatory opportunity or process in which a young person engages

	Definition	Criteria	Example
<b>Non-selected representative role</b>	Young people in roles where they are representing what they consider to be the views of peers, and there is no election/selection process to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals are self-advocating and there is no defined selection process for representing others</li> <li>• They may not be seen as representative but do give insight into their and peers' experience</li> </ul>	A disabled young person self-advocates for the rights of disabled young people. They are invited by the media and local service providers to talk about their and their peers' experience.
<b>Non-selected non-representative role</b>	Young people in roles where they are representing their own, individual point of view, and there is no election/selection process to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals are provided with the space/time to share their views</li> <li>• Individuals express their own views and these are not representative of young people</li> </ul>	The local youth club is running an evening session where young people are invited to come along and share their perspective on the plans for a new community café.

## 7c. Methods of youth voice

**The tactic, tool or activity that enables a young person to express their views within a particular mechanism**

Method	Definition	Criteria	Example
<b>Informal dialogue</b>	Opportunities for adults working directly with young people on a day-to-day basis to listen to their views, e.g. having an open-door hour during a youth club night. Can be 1:1 or group-based.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An unplanned method</li> </ul>	A youth worker chatting to a young person whilst they are playing a game of pool. The young person is talking about what activities they would like to do at evening youth club sessions.
<b>Facilitated dialogue</b>	Structured and intentional conversations with a young person/group of young people where the practitioner has a specific set of questions or lines of enquiry they want to explore, e.g. an interview or feedback session. Can be activity-based, e.g. using prompt/flash cards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A preplanned method for which dedicated time and space has been set aside</li> </ul>	Young people participating in an employability programme are invited to a one to one feedback session with the coach to gather their views on what worked well, and what could have been better
<b>Open feedback</b>	Methods that allow young people to share their views and feedback in their own time, e.g. comment boxes, graffiti walls. Users can be anonymous or identifiable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-determined format for feedback</li> <li>Not facilitated/directed by adults 'in the moment'</li> </ul>	A graffiti wall is set up in the youth club foyer for young people to leave their views and ideas.

**The tactic, tool or activity that enables a young person to express their views within a particular mechanism**

Method	Definition	Criteria	Example
<b>Surveys</b>	A list of questions aimed at eliciting information about young people's attitudes, experiences and feedback. Can include closed and open questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online or paper-based</li> <li>• Runs for a set period of time</li> <li>• Questions are standardised i.e. the same on every survey</li> <li>• Completed individually</li> </ul>	A feedback survey is distributed digitally to all young people who attended a summer camp run by the local Scouts Group.
<b>Planned, creative exploration</b>	Activities that allow young people to express views, ideas and experiences through creative methods, e.g. storyboarding, mind-mapping, collage, photography. Can be 1:1 or group-based.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pre-planned method</li> <li>• Does not necessarily require young people to express their ideas in words</li> </ul>	Young people are provided with magazines, coloured paper and craft material to create a collage that represents what they like and dislike about school.
<b>Q&amp;A sessions</b>	Young people being able to meet with influential individuals to ask questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated time for children and young people to ask questions</li> <li>• Answers are tailored towards children and young people</li> </ul>	A roundtable is hosted by the local MP, and young people from the local youth club are invited to attend to ask questions of the MP.

## The tactic, tool or activity that enables a young person to express their views within a particular mechanism

Method	Definition	Criteria	Example
<b>Testing / simulation</b>	Young people are able to test or assess a service, e.g. as a 'mystery shopper'. Occurs in conjunction with another method to allow them to feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people make use of a service</li> <li>• Young people assess their experience against pre-defined criteria</li> <li>• Young people feedback their assessment to the organisation or agency running the service</li> </ul>	<p>Two young people who regularly attend the local youth club have been asked by the CEO to sign up and attend a new Friday night youth work session and share some feedback, focusing on whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They felt all young people were offered equal opportunity to contribute to the session; and</li> <li>• If young people were given open activity choices in the session.</li> </ul>
<b>Youth platforming</b>	Methods that allow young people to share their views, ideas and experiences around a particular topic or issue determined by young people themselves, e.g. young people giving presentations, young people recording podcasts or videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people decide the topic and content</li> <li>• The sharing of views, ideas or experiences is led by young people (may be supported/facilitated by adults)</li> </ul>	<p>A young person presents at a national youth organisation's annual conference, sharing their experience of setting up a food bank in their local community centre.</p>

## 8. Bringing the typology to life

**The vignettes provided in this section are intended to help practitioners, organisations and young people understand what the spheres of influence, mechanisms and methods look like in practice, and how they relate to each other.**

### **1. Individual → Non-selected representative role → Informal dialogue**

A youth club has received a donation of a selection of games from a local company. There is lots of excitement, and youth workers and young people are getting stuck in trying out the different games that are in the box. There are bat and ball games like table tennis and swing ball, a rounders kit and a cricket set. As the young people start to set up the different games in the sports hall, the youth worker strikes up conversation with one young person who isn't joining in.

The young person explains that he has never really been able to play these games, he has monoplegic Cerebral Palsy, and has never felt very confident to take part because he cannot participate in the same way as his peers. He relays the experiences of other young people with disabilities to help the youth worker understand the range of impacts that disabilities such as his can have. The youth worker recognises that clearly, as they are, these games are not very accessible to everyone. He works with the young person to design some changes into the new games and existing games they have at the youth club to make them accessible to young people with a range of disabilities.

## 2. **Organisational** → **Adult-selected non-representative role** → **Planned creative exploration**

A local funder has been running a Youth Steering Group for six months. The group supports the foundation to design grants for the youth sector and assess grant applications. Young people applied to take part and were selected by the Foundation CEO and Grant Manager, based on their applications.

The Grant Manager wants to run a session with the Steering Group to learn more about their experiences as part of the group. At the start of the session the young people are asked to create a collage to illustrate what they like and what they would like to change. Each young person is then invited to share something that they have written. Following this, they are each asked to create a 'journey map' of the last six months and the next six months, capturing what they think they have learnt during their time in the group and what they would like to learn in the future.

The views that are shared during this session are used to help the organisation learn how the group have progressed, what the focus of future work should be, and how to improve the facilitation of the group.

### 3. **Organisational** → **Non-selected non-representative role** → **Open feedback**

A local youth club has designed a new weekly timetable of evening sessions, and has put together an information pack for young people with details of its new offer. The information pack is available in hard copy from the youth club, and has been emailed to young people and added to their website. There is also an information board in the youth club that shows the new timetable.

The organisation set up a comment box in the youth club, and young people are able to share their thoughts and feedback on the new timetable.

## 4. **Public** → **Peer-selected representative role** → **Survey**

The local council coordinates a group of Youth Councillors who were elected through a secondary school vote to represent the view of the school community. The Youth Councillors have conducted a survey of young people in Key Stage 4 in the local area to explore their views on the national curriculum.

They are sharing the findings from the survey via a series of bi-weekly podcasts which are being published on the local council's website.



The Centre for Youth Impact  
April 2022

---

Contact [youthvoice@youthimpact.uk](mailto:youthvoice@youthimpact.uk) for further information

