

Dramatizing Deliberation

A method for encouraging young people to think about their rights

The first author was commissioned by a charityⁱ to design a method that would allow 12-to-17 year-olds to outline the kind of digital rights that they would like to possessⁱⁱ. It was decided from the outset that we wanted to encourage reflective judgement rather than snapshot opinions. It was important to understand firstly, how young people form and express opinions about challenges that matter to them in their everyday lives; secondly, how they would express such views when, instead of the discussion being framed in terms of what adults and experts believed was good for them, they focused on their own entitlements as democratically autonomous citizens; and thirdly, how reflections arising from personal experience could be translated into the language of policy.

In seeking to learn about the kind of digital world young people want to inhabit, we were conscious that previous policy discourses about the experience of what has been called ‘the digital generation’ have tended to be limited in two important respects. Firstly, they have been dominated by adults – often ‘experts’ whose research preoccupations shape the line of questioning. To counter this tendency, we were determined to devise a method of inquiry that would place young people’s experiences and concerns at its centre. Secondly, previous debates have tended to be framed by a discourse of fear, with a disproportionate focus upon the need to protect young people against predatory forces that make their online experiences inherently risky. While online protection certainly presents formidable challenges, we were keen to ensure that this adult anxiety would not smother other questions about the kind of Internet that young people want.

In this article we describe and explain our approach to encouraging open-ended and consequential talk among groups of young people about their digital rights. We focus in particular upon two features of our research method: the organisation of deliberative juries, based upon a four-step process for arriving at policy recommendations; and the use of dramatic scenarios, intended to make relatable to personal experience what might otherwise seem like abstract policy principles. We then describe how one aspect of digital rights policy – the right to delete online content – was considered by the youth juries. We conclude with some thoughts about the potential of this method as a means of engaging young people meaningfully in future policy debates.

Creating juries

Nine youth juries, each comprising twelve 12-to-17 year-olds, were established across three major British cities: London, Leeds and Nottingham. Participants were invited to think of themselves as ‘jurors’ who would be ‘putting the Internet on trial’. The 108 participants were recruited to comprise a broad spread of ages between 12 and 17; a more or less equal gender division; and a representative distribution of socio-economic strata, ethnic backgrounds and (dis)abilities. Like members of any jury, the participants arrived with their own experiences and outlooks and proceeded to examine a broad range of claims and evidence. In doing so, they displayed disparate degrees of confidence and a trained facilitator was appointed to encourage them all to make their voices heard and, no less importantly, to listen to their peers. Jury sessions lasted three hours. They were filmed and transcribed, allowing us to analyse both the verbal and embodied dynamics of the event.

While remarkably little work has been done on engaging young people in policy deliberation (see Bulling et al, 2013), we wanted not only to find out what young people thought and felt about their experiences of the digital world, but to discover what shaped their thinking; how they came to define certain experiences as problematic; how they attempted to work together to think through solutions to these problems; the extent to which they were prepared to change their minds in response to discussion with peers or exposure to new information; and how they went about translating their ideas into practical policy recommendations.

It occurred to us that one reason for the dearth of deliberative exercises involving young people might be the rather dry proceduralism that has tended to characterise such processes. We spent considerable time thinking about ways of constructing a deliberative event that could appeal to young people’s sense of playfulness as well as reflection; agonism as well as concord. The idea of building the juries around

performed scenarios emerged out of this desire to ground deliberation within the visceral approach to raw experience often evoked by live drama. By fusing together deliberation, with its promise of open and reflective exchange, and the inherent indeterminacy of drama, we hoped to generate youth juries that could be both judicious and enjoyable.

The deliberative element

Deliberative theorists argue that there should be more to public discourse and decision-making than partisan position-taking and the employment of aggregative mechanisms to determine who ‘won’ the argument. They argue that collective judgements benefit from open discussion in which citizens are encouraged to share and contrast their preferences and values with a view to, at least, understanding why they disagree and, at best, working through their differences and seeking common ground. The theoretical assumption behind deliberation is that people are capable of changing their moral, political or behavioural preferences when they encounter compelling reasons to do so. When it works well, deliberation gives fluidity to democracy. It saves public discourse from derailment by disagreements that have escaped the need for convincing elaboration or intelligent public reflection and reduces the narrow meanness that is so often associated with the sordid politics of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. It opens up a space for people to think about who they are, what they need and want, and how they might act collectively in ways that take all actors into account. As John Stuart Mill (1869, 108) put it, ‘the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind’.

While there now exists a broad and insightful research literature on practices of public deliberation (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Steiner, 2012; Elstob and Mclaverty, 2014; Setälä, 2014; Coleman, Przybylska and Sintomer, 2015), there is not very much published research about the adaptation of such methods to the dispositions and practices of young people. Englund’s (2000; 2006; 2011; 2016) writings on the civic and instrumental value of what he calls ‘deliberative communication’ have been seminal in framing a rationale for seeking to realise Dewey’s (1916:93) conception of democratic education as ‘a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience’, but the absence of systematic research on effective practice confines much of his work to the realm of normativity.

Valuable observational studies have explored how young people talk about political issues (Henn et al, 2005; Blackman, 2007; Ekstrom and Ostman, 2013; Thorson, 2014), but they have not addressed specific examples of young people deliberating; nor have they considered the particular challenges involved in creating spaces for meaningful and inclusive deliberation amongst a generational group that is often dismissed as lacking sufficient maturity to contribute to public policy.

In designing a deliberative exercise that would prove to be engaging for 12-17 year-olds as well as profitable for data-hungry researchers, we needed to be sensitive to the danger of constructing the process in hyper-rationalist terms. Few people (adults or children) have black or white views on most subjects. Opinion formation is messy, often framed by competing and even inconsistent values. Helping young people to think through this messiness was a major aim of the youth jury process.

This entailed being open to modes of expression that are not typically present (or allowed into) the policy sphere. Iris Marion Young (2002:49) has famously lamented the ‘identification of reasonable public debate with polite, orderly, dispassionate, gentlemanly argument’ and argued, in the name of ‘communicative democracy’, that more diverse forms of deliberative practice, such as storytelling, should be taken seriously. The standard deliberative model has tended to downplay the vibrancy of passion and restrict discourse to the arid terrain of sober rationalism (Sanders, 1997; Ruitenberg, 2009; 2010). The last thing that we wanted to do was create a forum in which only the most emotionally-restrained and politically-articulate young people would feel comfortable in expressing their discursively well-bounded opinions. Rather than encouraging young people to deliberate as if they were members of a parliamentary committee or a learned society, we wanted to ensure that the youth juries would be spaces in which unconstrained self-expression could flourish. It was important for the juries to be noisy as well as discursive.

At the same time, we wanted participants to be aware that they were engaged in a process of collective judgement – one that called for both compromise and candour. In seeking to create a space in which young people could exercise their agency by choosing whether, how and of what they would speak, considerable emphasis was placed upon cultivating a flexible, inclusive and open-minded communicative style. It is one thing for researchers to say that they want events to be youth-centred, but quite another to make it feel that way. Sitting young people in front of a tape recorder and firing pre-determined questions at them is a style that can generate lots of data, but little meaning. Formal spaces for policy deliberation, such as council meetings, can be intimidating for young people and incompatible with their everyday experiences of communicating. Cockburn (2010) has suggested that deliberative mechanisms need to be adapted to the spaces where young people feel most comfortable. It was very important, therefore, to ensure that the ‘jury rooms’ were set up in ways that put young people (physically) at the centre, enabling them to see everyone else as they spoke and to interact as freely as possible.

Each session was moderated by a highly experienced facilitator whose brief was to enable all jurors to be heard and all experiences, viewpoints and recommendations to be respected. Group moderation is a vital and sensitive role. Too much intervention and guidance from a facilitator could easily have turned the juries into an exercise in leading young people towards the ‘right’ answers; too little steering could have resulted in some of the quieter, less confident jurors slipping out of the discussion. Looking back at the video archive of the jurors, it became clear that our facilitator performed a really important role in making the discussions fully inclusive, while allowing participants to determine their own agenda, tone and flow of arguments.

From the outset, the idea of being a member of a jury was emphasised. It was a powerful metaphor, suggesting to participants that they were in a position of judgement and that the recommendations they came up with should be thought of as a verdict on the Internet in its present form; that they were both individuals, bound by their own principles of moral commitment, but also members of a group, seeking collective outcomes that might call for degrees of compromise; and that they were collectively responsible not only for their ultimate judgements, but for the principles of fairness they adopted in reaching them.

Jury sessions began with a discussion amongst participants about how important particular digital tools, technologies and services were to them. They were asked to talk about the tools and sites that they couldn’t live without. From the outset, participants were encouraged to speak about how the Internet affected them personally and how rights or their absence impinged on their individual autonomy. This often led on to more generalised observations, but we were keen to root the discussion in the realm of personal experience, only then moving on to claims and speculations about ‘young people’ in general.

Each three-hour jury session was split into five sections, each looking at a particular aspect of digital experience. The deliberative process in each section followed the same five-part structure:

- i) Participants watched a scenario performed live by a group of actors (see next section) and were then encouraged to share their own experiences about the issues that it raised. We refer to this as the storytelling stage. Storytelling took place here in two senses: firstly, by the actors, whose scenarios gave narrative shape to everyday experiences and served as prompts for wider storytelling; and then in the telling of stories by participants, often triggering further stories that reinforced their message, but sometimes prompting counter-narratives that became a basis for debating reality. The stories that invariably followed on from the scenarios offered a picture of a rather complex relationship between young people and digital technologies; one in which communication is both simplified and made potentially complicated by going online.
- ii) As participants shared experience, they came to focus upon particular concerns and anxieties which led them to identify problems that they thought needed to be tackled. We refer to this as the problem definition stage. From a deliberative perspective, the movement from account-giving to problem-definition is vitally important. In non-deliberative qualitative exercises, such as focus groups, the problem to be addressed is pre-defined, usually by sponsors and researchers, leaving participants somewhat adrift if they have their own ideas about what the problem is that they should be discussing.

As participants worked together to articulate and define problems, they were forced to think about crucial questions of responsibility and accountability. If something is a problem, whose problem is it? Who has created the problem? What happens if something is a problem for users, but a benefit for service providers? There is no such thing as a neutral problem. As situations came to be defined as challenges to be overcome, competing values and interests were acknowledged. Problem-solving began to take on a political flavour. Participants often showed that they were capable of adopting sophisticated approaches not only to the formulation of problems, but to the recognition of conflicting values and interests.

iii) Once participants had defined a problem that they wanted to tackle, they were encouraged to move on to consider potential solutions. We refer to this as the policy brainstorm stage. Participants were encouraged to resist a tendency to search for ‘the right answer’, as they might do in the school classroom. The broader the range of ideas that emerged, often characterised by conflicting norms, the more opportunity there would be to debate their competing merits. Expressing and listening to competing solutions is an essential feature of deliberation. It was in this stage that we often observed individual and collective shifts in opinion. Forceful arguments, supported by compelling evidence, changed some minds. Solutions that lacked clear justifications or seemed unfeasible tended to fall by the wayside.

iv) As soon as it became clear to the facilitator that jurors had had sufficient time to define problems and consider solutions, the juries were split into smaller groups to come up with one or more recommendations relating (as broadly as they interpreted it) to the problem under discussion. We refer to this as the policy sifting stage. In doing this work of sifting through potential solutions, young people were no different from adults, often finding themselves in strong disagreement with one another – and sometimes even with themselves - as they prepared the ground for reaching a resolution. In these smaller groups discussion became more intense and the focus shifted to pragmatic and rhetorical considerations. Pragmatically, participants were concerned to develop ideas that seemed to have a chance of being taken up by policy-makers and the digital industry. Rhetorically, they sought to express their proposals in the most persuasive way possible. This was a very important stage of the exercise, for it focused participants’ minds upon the strategic work involved in making an effective difference. It was important to us as researchers to witness young people taking ownership of the process by endeavouring to make potentially meaningful interventions in the policy debate, thereby experiencing a sense of civic agency that is not typically afforded to research subjects.

v) At the end of each section recommendations were written up on a poster. We refer to this as the resolution stage. It might be asked why we did not encourage participants to choose between different recommendations at this concluding point in the exercise. The first reason was politically pragmatic: we wanted the list of policy recommendations to be broad, reflecting the range of experiences and perspectives within the juries. Secondly, we wanted to make it clear that deliberation was not simply a matter of choosing between competing options – many non-deliberative political exercises do precisely that -, but of arriving at a set of potential policy recommendations that had passed the test of inclusive and intensive reflection.

The transcripts and film footage of the jury sessions were then analysed over several weeks, partly with the help of qualitative analysis software (NVivo), but mainly through close reading. Our aim as researchers was not only to explore the relationship between the deliberative process and the final recommendations, but also to consider how, if at all, the experience of deliberating about their rights changed the way that participants thought about themselves and their agency as young people.

The dramatic element

A key methodological concern for us was to encourage styles of deliberation in which no one type of voice or mode of discourse would be privileged over others. It seemed clear to us from the outset that deliberation and storytelling were not at odds, but that the latter was a valuable means of fostering the former. As Fischer and Gottweis (2012:13) have rightly suggested,

The specific role of the story is to furnish communication with particular details that provide the material out of which social meaning is created. They are not arguments as such, but arguments are often included as part of the story. Arguments can also be based on a story or drawn from them. They often are the source of the propositions of arguments and frequently provide evidence for claims.

Arguing for the importance of narrative to policy deliberation, Hajer (2003:104) defines 'story lines' as

... generative statements that bring together previously unrelated elements of reality. The main function of story lines is that these short narratives help people to fit their bit of knowledge, experience or expertise into the larger jigsaw of a policy debate.

How, then, could we design the youth juries so that they both encouraged experiential storytelling and gave sufficient legitimacy to such accounts that they could feed into the deliberative process? We decided to use dramatic scenarios, building upon the methodological research tradition of using vignettes as prompts to elicit reflective responses from research participants. Bloor and Wood (2006:183) define vignettes as

A technique used in structured and depth interviews as well as focus groups, providing sketches of fictional (or fictionalized) scenarios. The respondent is then invited to imagine, drawing on her own experience, how the central character in the scenario will behave. Vignettes thus collect situated data on group values, group beliefs and group norms of behaviour. While in structured interviews respondents must choose from a multiple-choice menu of possible answers to a vignette, as used in depth interviews and focus groups, vignettes act as a stimulus to extended discussion of the scenario question.

Vignettes have been used by researchers from a range of disciplines, including scholars studying public acceptance of mentally ill residents within a community (Aubry et al, 1995), multicultural integration in neighbourhoods (Schuman and Bobo, 1988), the neglect and abuse of elderly people (Rahman, 1996) and early onset dementia (Jenkins et al, 2015). Vignettes have proved to be particularly useful in eliciting reflective responses from groups of young people: Barter and Renold (2000) used them very successfully in their research with young people exploring violence in residential children's homes; Conrad (2004) used vignettes as a way of talking to young rural Canadians about what they considered to be 'risky activity'; Yungblut et al (2012) used them in their work with adolescent girls to explore their lived experiences of physical exercise; and Bradbury-Jones et al (2014) employed vignettes to explore children's experiences of domestic abuse.

Vignettes can take several forms. Usually they are short stories that are read out to participants. Some researchers have used film and music. Others have used interactive web content. The use of live actors is rare, not least because of the resource costs. The value of having live actors performing within the youth juries was that it combined the stimulus of the vignette method with the spontaneity and indeterminacy of the applied drama/theatre-in-education tradition.

A director with experience of applied drama (the third author) was recruited, as were four undergraduate actors. A lengthy devising process was undertaken, part of which involved thinking about an appropriate aesthetic style for the scenarios. We did not want them to seem didactic, but, at the same time, were aware that there were certain 'challenges' facing young Internet users that the commissioning charity had identified and wanted us to raise. Pammenter (1993:62), reflecting upon accusations of bias aimed at some progressive theatre-in-education programmes, argues that drama of this sort should encourage 'a learning process, as opposed to the dogmatic presentation of a perspective which admits no opposites and permits no learning'. We aimed to pitch the scenarios so that they would prompt young people to think about specific issues, without providing definitive accounts of what such issues meant or how to respond to them. This entailed a delicate balance between pedagogy and open discourse.

One way of ensuring that the scenarios performed this function was to conceive of them as distancing tools: dramatic events in which the familiar is made strange and the audience is encouraged to maintain a critical distance between itself and what is being represented. Often regarded in applied drama and drama in education as a protective tool, distancing provides a safe entry for participants to reflect upon

their 'real-life' selves by appearing to refer to 'make-believe' characters and narratives. It is often easier for young people to talk openly about a predicament facing a symbolic character (in a cartoon, example) than to jump straight into a discussion about their own frustrations or embarrassments. By serving as an aesthetic and rhetorical estrangement device, capable of stimulating recognition without exposing painful identification, distancing can 'not only release the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employ and encourage those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself' (Brecht in Willett, 1966:190).

The opening scenario of each session used dramatic distancing to stimulate discussion about the pros and cons of living with digital technologies. In the course of their devising workshops, the actors had improvised what they thought the Internet would be like – look like, sound like – if it were an embodied person. They came to personify the Internet as a troubled being, torn by the extremes of negative and positive reactions s/he invoked. In the first scenario, this became a therapy session, where the character of the Internet, sitting face-to-face with her therapist, was full of angst as a result of being so commonly misunderstood and inconsistently characterised. This symbolic character provided a narrative symbol to which participants could respond safely - as Prendergast and Saxton (2013:14) state, the use of character and role within applied drama is not so much about realistically acting a part, but creating a symbolic form for the purposes of shared investigation'. In talking about the inherent ambiguities of the Internet as a troubled person, participants seemed to find it easier to talk about the troubling consequences they faced as a result of being implicated in its life.

In further scenarios this symbolic form was revived, allowing participants to think about it from a range of perspectives. For example, in one scenario 'the Internet' offered to take one of the actors out shopping. As the actor went from shop to shop, sales people knew about her previous shopping history, had stored her address and credit card details and were aware of other places and brands that she had been browsing previously. The actor expressed horror as she discovered that the shopkeepers possessed so much information about her, but was told by 'the Internet' that this was only a small fraction of her data that third parties kept. This provoked a lively and productive discussion about the right to know what information third parties can access and retain.

Most importantly, the scenarios served to dramatise deliberation by providing a common point of reference for the sharing of experiences and creating an atmosphere in which words had already been spoken before anyone had to face the daunting challenge of breaking the ice. The fact that the actors performing the scenarios were not much older than the jury participants, and were present in the flesh, open to hearing how participants responded to their scenarios, created a sense of vibrant interaction, enlivening the deliberation and giving purpose to the drama. Participants overwhelmingly regarded the scenarios as high-points of the day when they came to evaluate the event, stating that they made it more accessible and inclusive by concretizing the policy issues.

Debating the right to delete

To see how the process of dramatised deliberation worked in practice, we turn now to a description of how participants considered the question of the right to delete content by or about oneself from the Internet. Beginning with the storytelling stage, the actors presented a scenario of a TV game show called 'Delete or Disgrace' in which the presenter began by declaring that 'Today we have three contestants, all coming on to fight for their right to delete one piece of information from the Internet. After each contestant has given us their story, it will be up to you to decide which of them gets to delete their information and which will be disgraced'. The first contestant is trying to get into a film school, but when she was 13 she produced a really embarrassing film which she put online and which attracted lots of really bad feedback. When she was 14, the second contestant had posted some thoughtless comments on a blog about people from other countries. She's now trying to volunteer to work for a charity, but is terribly worried that they might see these comments of which she's now really ashamed. The third contestant fell out with her best friend and wrote some unpleasant comments about her online. She's now made it up with her friend, but knows that the comments she wrote are being passed around between people who know them. In all three cases, the contestants' plea was for the embarrassing content to be removed from the Internet.

This scenario clearly resonated with participants, leading in all of the nine juries to extensive storytelling about incidents in which they or their friends had said or done something online that they subsequently wanted to remove:

I have a friend who had a very like private conversation with someone she knows and they actually screenshot the conversation and she mentioned like a lot of embarrassing private things on there. And once he posted it on his own Facebook she was kind of outcast from school and bullied to the extent that she had to move to another school. So I think people need to be well advised on how dangerous it actually is to post something.

Well, in my school, it's kind of a true story ... a lot of people in my school they are quite stupid and they started sending pictures to boys and that. And ... the teachers have got involved and the police have got involved. And I don't think they think before they do things, because I think you should think before you do things instead of just click, click and send, because once you've clicked you can't turn back.

My class at school has a group chat on WhatsApp, despite us all breaking the age restriction. And ... I've said some things that, you know, you wouldn't possibly want... And you have to consider, especially with group chats, that you know you have about 30 or 40 people in there that could then hold you ... like hold you or really ransom with it.

As participants shared their stories, they began to feel confident about trying to define the problem. Most juries were split between participants who believed that people should take personal responsibility for any content that they put online and those who felt that young people should be protected against leaving permanent traces of their immature selves. The former position was well expressed by these participants:

It comes down to your own personal responsibility. Like, if you're slightly worried that you don't want an employer to see the stuff, don't put it up there in the first place because you're making that stuff accessible to them.

The mentality that people need to have when they go online is 'don't post or say anything online that you wouldn't want like written outside the front of your house or you wouldn't want on a T-shirt while you're walking around, for everyone to see'. Because that's kind of what the internet is. Once it's on there like, somehow, anyone can access it ...

The opposing position was put well by these participants:

Personally, it's like when you're younger, you'll do things, but you'll look back on it and you'll regret it - and if you regret it that much you should be able to delete it and pretend it never happened. It's like ... I can speak from experience on that one. But so if they wanted to delete it because they were younger, they should be able to because obviously ... if they've changed, if they're embarrassed by it, or if they feel like they've improved on something, they should be able to get rid of the previous thing.

Well, who you are online isn't really who you are. Like, it shouldn't prevent you from getting an interview because they've seen something online. Like, if they're looking at your social media, that's not actually who you are. You shouldn't be portrayed by just your social media. You don't know that person until you fully meet them in person. So it shouldn't prevent you from getting an interview or pursuing who you want to be, or what you want to do in the future.

It looked for a while as if the discussion might have been heading for an impasse, with two incompatible moral positions in conflict with one another. However, in searching for a way of defining the problem, participants began to move beyond the idea that managing digital content could be conceived as an individual problem:

We recognised that almost the biggest problem is information that you've shared being moved onto a different medium. So we say... we said the problem you get when you send a message isn't too much of a problem. You don't have to delete that message, as long as it's a message.

We say the problem occurs when this private message you shared is screenshotted and then given to the wider audience which you didn't, um, consent to. So, you know, that can constitute things like private photos being linked and videos of you being shared that you didn't want. And, um, so we said when you're sharing information ... when you're sending a private message or a Snapchat ... a very clear cut sort of criteria should apply to your message, so this can't be screenshotted. This maybe could be timed or this is only going to be viewed by certain people. And so the, um, websites can prevent the messages or images you share being removed from the medium you consented to them being available on.

Screenshooting and the subsequent recirculation of what had started out as personal content turned out to be a huge problem, identified in nearly all of the juries. While some participants argued for the principle of being allowed to remove content by or about oneself, the vast majority came to recognise that the porous nature of the Internet meant that, even if one could remove content from its original site, it could easily circulate beyond that site. It was as a result of the policy brainstorm that participants came to focus on the problem of screenshooting:

Me and my friend have got 600 mutual friends and she posts something really embarrassing like me asleep and I can't delete it. Get my problem. All the people who are friends with both of you are gonna see it. All the people who are friends with the first the person who uploaded it will see it. They might know who you are, they might not. But still they might, I don't know, share it or something.

I know from people at my school, that if you have an argument on Facebook, your best friend's got a screenshot, your friend's got a screenshot, and people you don't even know have a screenshot. And it's gone everywhere. And if it's like a video, then loads of people have saved it and they can lie and they can say, 'oh I haven't got it, I've never seen it' ... And it's something that can never really be deleted, because it's happened. But I think they should still have the right to take it down ...

Now that the rather simple principle of the right to delete had been complicated by an understanding that screenshooting makes it impossible for any one person to control their digital content, the policy sifting stage became rather more sophisticated. Instead of arguing about abstract rights, participants focused on ways of controlling the social circulation of personal content. One jury debated whether people should be notified if material relating to them is screenshotted:

A: If you want to publish something, you are allowed to, but only if it's your own. If it's with someone else ... you need to have a consent from that person to be able to post ... anything.

B: What would be a good idea is if maybe there was some sort of notification when someone screenshotted a photo because ... at least you could see and ... would be able to judge what to do with it.

As juries expressed frustration about the technical obstacles to preventing the unwanted archiving of personal material, several participants offered some quite complex solutions:

We were talking about tracking photos. We were saying before how websites tracking you and following your information can often be negative, but it can be used in positive ways as well. Because if you post a photo on the Internet, or a friend posts a photo of you on the Internet, then they've posted it and that's like an original source. When that's shared, copied, you know, sent to other people, it's all linked. So you've got this one original source and then you've got other sources coming out of it. Then when you go to the original source, or any of the others, you can delete that and it'll delete all the copies. So, it's kind of like ... you have to have some way of tracking or following things to be able to keep them under your control ...

In the final, proposal stage of the process, participants came up with a broad range of recommendations (see Coleman et al, 2017). The key question to be asked about these is whether they would have appeared in as developed a form had they not been preceded by a period of lengthy deliberation. And would the deliberation have been as rich and productive as it was without the original dramatic

stimulus? When asked in a post-jury survey whether they had learned anything new about how the Internet works, 9 out of 10 participants said that they had, with 56% saying that they had learned a lot. When asked whether they had come up with any new ideas during the jury session, 99% stated that they had, with 52% reporting that they had come up with ‘lots of them’.

Conclusion

Most of the participants in these youth juries entered the process with minimal expectations regarding their capacity to exercise significant control over their digital lives and rights. Asked before beginning the jury sessions whether they believed they had ‘any say at all in how the digital world works’, over a third (35%) said that they had ‘no say’. In the same pre-jury survey they were asked whether they ‘should have more say in how the digital world worked’. 14% said that they didn’t know and 22% said they were ‘not bothered’. At the end of each jury, participants were asked whether 12-17 year-olds should have a bigger say on how digital technologies and services are run. 83% said that they should, with 84% stating that they wanted to take more charge of their online activities and experience. This was powerfully summarised by one juror – a fifteen-year-old girl – who, having participated in one of the juries, offered the following thought to her fellow jurors:

I think it’s down to ourselves personally as people. Because, you know, we have a say. It’s our lives and it’s down to us to control that. And sometimes we think the Internet is taking over our lives, but I think we need to take over the Internet and we need to stand up and make that change because we can and ... We’ve spoken a lot about the fact that we know what we’re doing. We know ourselves what our limits are. We know what we want to achieve in life. And the Internet can definitely help us with that. We just need to stand up and stop the Internet from taking us over.

One consequence of this enhanced sense of efficacy was that participants felt comfortable speaking about their rights, defined by one of them as ‘something that you should have and ... no one should take away from you’. Young people are bombarded with messages about their responsibilities, and although they are sometimes taught about what their rights are, they do not spend much time being urged to think about what they should be. Encouraging young people to deliberate together about what they need in order to become the kind of human beings that they want to be enables them to learn a form of civic language that will equip them for future democratic engagement. Rights-talk is not always easy. It often involves having to discover the confidence to speak up in response to bad arguments or cynical interests. One of the significant achievements of the youth juries was that participants left feeling more determined to have a say about how digital technologies and services are run and more confident of a link between their voices and their rights. As one of them put it,

It’s important for young people to have a say in these things because a lot of older people try to think about what it would be like as a young person on the Internet, but they don’t realise how vulnerable young people are, so it’s important that young people get this chance to speak for ourselves.

The method used to encourage this level of confident self-articulation could be applied in many other contexts. For example, student participation in school governance could be enhanced significantly by a combination of in-depth deliberation and dramatic stimulus. Local councils seeking policy input from young people have traditionally relied upon standard survey or qualitative methods, but dramatised deliberation could help to involve young people who might not be reached by purely discursive engagement. Not only is the method we have set out appropriate as a way of bringing qualities of dramatic uncertainty to deliberation, but it also offers an opportunity for applied drama practitioners to engage in real-world policy debates.

The next stage of our research will involve applying the dramatised deliberation method in a range of contexts with a view to understanding how it might illuminate different problems, animate diverse social groups and nurture enduring practices of open-mindedness. In pursuing future research, we shall proceed on the assumption, confirmed by findings reported here, that the design of exercises intended to facilitate public reflection need not involve a stark choice between the solemnity of deliberation and

the thrill of drama. Indeed, for us the most exciting promise of dramatised deliberation is its capacity to infuse policy talk with the pulsating energy of experience.

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ⁱ This was the i-Rights charity, which, in the course of the research, changed its name to 5-rights: <http://5rightsframework.com>

ⁱⁱ Researchers from the University of Nottingham (Dr Elvira Perez and Dr Ansgar Koene) became involved in the research at a later stage.