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YOUTHFUL ROUTE TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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I don't know about you, but I must confess to feeling slightly uneasy when I hear about the launch of yet one more Youth Parliament or Young People's Panel. It is the same kind of unease that I associate with the Army Cadets, or those Athena posters displaying little girls in "mummy's clothes". It not so much the malevolent intention - although this could be debated in the case of Athena – but, there is something faintly distasteful about the imposition of adult ideals on a kid's world.

The beauty of working with under 18s is that they don't want to form committees, and focus groups. They tune out at the suggestion of surveys and public meetings and best of all they actively challenge just about any "best practice" you can think of in relation to public engagement. By the same token, the energy that they bring to real problem solving would put many a management team to shame.

The launch last week of a new web-based game for 11 – 16 year olds proves what can be done when you work with young people to create a mechanism for both dialogue and empowerment. The game – *'Tike and the Missing Mutt'* – is the brainchild of School Works, a not for profit organisation with a central mission to involve the whole school community in designing effective learning environments.

The beauty of the School Works approach – and Tike for that matter - is that both are about encouraging young people to think about their environment *and* their ability to influence it. Best of all, the game itself leaves many adults in the slow lane, as a generation brought up with computers weave their way at astonishing speed through a virtual school in the search for the ever elusive Mutt. Of course, it isn't a straight forward chase to the finish. And, along the way there are problems to resolve in terms of the fabric and design of the school , as well as an opportunity to draw inspiration from the wider community.



School Works already has a very real example of what can be done when pupil power is successful harnessed. The dramatic physical and educational improvements achieved at Kingsdale School in South London are testament to the team's innovative approach to participatory processes.

By the same token, it is a sorry indictment of our own love affair with public consultation that all too few of the "adult" equivalents result in anything other than hot air and committee papers. So before you sign up to even one more public event take a look at Tike, and ask yourself whether what you are proposing really has that magic ingredient - the potential to change the world. Go check it out! www.school-works.org/game/