Arnstein’s ladder of participation:

- **What’s good about Arnstein’s ladder?**
  - It has been extremely influential and many other academics have built upon concepts. Many studies explored the different barriers to higher levels of participation.

  It makes us consider the complexity of participation and distribution of power.

  It encourages readers to analyse and challenge the ways in which those in power arrange citizens or service user involvement, and to avoid taking participation at face value.

  However, the model is fairly simplified and linear and so has been developed and critiqued by others.

Foucault and involvement

when asked why he looked at the local rather than the structural aspect of political problems, Foucault said:

“the problems which I try to address... which involve daily life, cannot be easily resolved. It takes many, many years decades of work carried out at grass roots level with the people directly involved, and the right to speech and political imagination must be returned to them... the complexity of the problem will be able to appear in connection with people's lives... the object is to proceed a little at a time, to introduce modifications that are capable of, if not finding a solution, then at least changing the givens of a problem.”

(Foucault 1981: 158-159)

Foucault and welfare

His comments can just as easily be seen as prime legitimisation for social workers concern involving service users.

- work with service users is specifically about releasing people’s political imagination so that they can envision an alternative experience, a different way of experiencing and delivering welfare and social work services. It is also about focusing on the particular daily experience of those people most directly involved with services- service users.

- it is particularly concerned with changing the way issues are framed so that the service users are not seen as ‘problems’ or ‘clients’ but are seen as active partners in changing the services they directly experience. This approach means therefore that when examining service user involvement we need to ask whether the involvement we are discussing is real or tokenistic.

AOP and service user involvement

- Wilson and Beresford (2000) have warned against a simplistic attempt to suggest that a commitment to anti-oppressive values in itself ensures that service users’ views are heard and respected. Instead they argue that:

  “*such a theory of AOP is by definition reliant upon service users’ knowledge and ideas. Social work’s adoption of a façade of ‘anti-oppressive practice’ service users’, whilst retaining the power to*