

Possibilities and quandaries for young children's active citizenship

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Abstract

Concepts of children's citizenship are highly contested. Contemporary policy and rhetoric increasingly includes the concept of citizenship in relation to children, yet there is considerable ambiguity as to what children's citizenship actually means. Unlike other marginalised groups it is not children claiming citizenship rights for themselves, but adults claiming rights for children on their behalf. **Practice or Policy** This paper draws from a doctoral study that inquired into possibilities for young children's active citizenship through analysis of the participation of a class of children aged five to six years in a social justice storytelling program. Possibilities and quandaries for young children's active citizenship are proposed from critical and post-structuralist readings of young children's comments and actions in response to unfair treatment of others experienced through live storytelling. Implications of these possibilities and quandaries are suggested for those who work with young children in early childhood education and citizenship contexts.

Introduction

The notion of children's citizenship is a recently theorized concept. Contemporary sociology of childhood sees children as competent and capable citizens of today, whereas what James, Jencks and Prout (1998) categorise as pre-sociological views of children (that is, those informed by early philosophy or psychology) position them as citizens of the future. The United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and its application in social policy have promoted current interest in the concept of children's citizenship. According to Millei and Imre (2009) this interest assumes "a legal-political link between citizenship and rights" (p. 280). The meaning of children's citizenship has been subject to much debate. Many sociologists (e.g.,

Alderson, 2008; Cockburn, 1998; James, Curtis & Birch, 2008; Kulnych, 2001, Lister, 2007, 2008; Prout, 2001, 2002; Roche, 1999) have discussed what children's citizenship might be for young children and proposed various ways to view and address children's citizenship.

Some (e.g., Millei & Imre, 2009) claim that the use of the term *children's citizenship* is problematic since children do not have access to the rights commonly included in definitions of citizenship, such as the freedom to own property or the right to vote for political leadership. The right to vote is the only active participation permitted in a legal definition of citizenship in which citizenship is granted through birthright or naturalisation (Faulks, 1998; Gilbert, 1996). In terms of children's citizenship this view is problematic, as children may in some countries be recognised as citizens (through birthright), yet they cannot participate as they do not have the right to vote, or if they are immigrants they may not be recognised as citizens at all, as they have not yet met the requirements for naturalisation.

This article discusses active citizenship -- not the legal definition citizenship of simply being counted as a citizen (Isin & Turner, 2002). Active citizenship refers to being a social agent expressing opinions, making decisions and enacting social actions as an expression of civic responsibility. This view of active citizenship contributes to the goal of a cohesive and just society as envisioned in communitarian citizenship (Delanty, 2002; Etzioni, 1993). Citizenship viewed as a socio-political practice is a lived citizenship, thus proposing agency through active participation (Lister, 2007). If children's citizenship is viewed as a process of expanding rights, a socio-political definition of citizenship seems to offer the greatest scope for the inclusion of children as citizens of today. Turner (1993) acknowledged that a socio-political definition of citizenship "places the concept squarely in the debate of inequality... because citizenship is necessarily and inevitably bound up with the problem of unequal distribution of resources in society" (p. 32). A socio-political definition of citizenship welcomes acknowledgment and redress of the inequality that children experience in society due to their reduced access to resources, and the goals of

communitarian citizenship offer a way for young children to practice citizenship, through care, concern and responsibility for fellow community members. A communitarian approach to citizenship with young children is what this article examines.

Possibilities for young children's active citizenship are discussed, based on evidence gained from a study that asked: "What possibilities for young children's active citizenship can be provoked through a practice of social justice storytelling?" The stories shared as part of the study were about experiences of unfair treatment or injustice. According to Stephens (1992), characteristic childhood stories in the West tend to be built on certainties, such as happy-ever-after-endings, which support dominant views of children as innocent. Telling stories of unfair treatment or injustice was a conscious decision and an attempt to counter such dominant views of childhood innocence and widen the children's access to knowledge and participation as citizens. The stories were chosen to make visible the plights of others. The participants of the study were a Preparatory¹ class of children aged five to six years who initiated and engaged in active citizenship practices in response to becoming aware of injustices through live storytelling.

Practice, Narrative, and Action

Practice, narrative, and action framed the conceptual framework of the study. The research focussed on my practice as a storytelling teacher. Practice was understood as "real-life theorising" (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p. 32) through a living educational theory approach to practitioner research. An inside and inter-relational view of evolving processes of creation with others inform this approach to action research. In this study, practice involved learning through evolving processes of creation with a class of children and their teacher. The children and the teacher were seen as social actors in the research process.

¹ Preparatory is a full-time early education program offered in primary schools in Queensland, Australia. It is non-compulsory.

Narrative was a focus through social justice stories being told to provoke citizenship action. The idea of counternarratives as small-localised narratives that provide accounts of individual experiences of exploitation offered a means to make visible the dominating and exploitative effects of dominant views (Lankshear & Peters, 1996). The concept of counternarratives informed the intent and content of the social justice stories told.

To explore possibilities for young children's active citizenship, Arendt's (1958/1998) theory of action provided a means to define citizenship action. To Arendt, action is about beginning something new in the world, public realm or *polis* (as distinguished from our internal and personal spaces). The key emphases of Arendt's definition are the initiation of a new action and that it occurs with others. This definition of being political offers scope for children and adults to co-exist politically and learn from these attempts of political co-existence.

According to Arendt (1958/1998) action and speech used together form a life story. Action with speech inserted into the public realm and subjected to unpredictable and uncontrollable responses produces stories. To Arendt, accounts of the actions people initiate tell more about the person than any tangible product produced by the person. Actions and speech show who people are, that is, "the unique and distinct identity of the agent" (p. 180). Hence, action and speech inserted into the public realm offered a means to read young children's initiated actions as stories of their active citizenship.

The above theories of practice, narrative, and action informed the study, articulated through declaration of five core values of the study: agency, interconnectivity, responsiveness, multiplicity, and practice. In a living educational theory approach to practitioner research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), the *agency* of practitioners is portrayed through knowledge creation in *multiple* ways through *practice* with others in an *interconnected* and *responsive* world. To Arendt (1958/1998), *agency* is at the core of people initiating actions (*practice*) that are *responsive* to others in a web of relationships

(*interconnectivity*). Counternarratives challenge structuralist metanarratives by welcoming diversity and *multiplicity* through sharing individual stories of those who have been marginalised so they are visible, heard, and therefore reflect *agency*. According to Whitehead and McNiff (2006), clear statements of the values of the practitioner-researcher provide a way to state what is important to the researcher and are proposed as the standards of judgement of quality. Presence of the core values of agency, interconnectivity, responsiveness, multiplicity, and practice was questioned throughout the study through critical reflection in and on practice as discussed by Schon (1983) in practitioner research

Methodology

The study involved weekly one-and-half-hour storytelling workshops spread across thirteen weeks. The workshops each commenced with a performative telling of a social justice story, and were followed by a whole class critical discussion and small group activities (drawing, sculpting/building, dancing and social actions) inviting further responses to the stories. Ten stories were told that covered a range of genres including folktales (e.g., *The Freedom Bird*, *The Two Brothers*), biographical stories (e.g., of Iqbal Masih, and Craig Kielberger) and self-authored stories. These stories were not selected at the onset of the study, but instead were chosen as counternarratives to predominant thoughts and feelings on injustice expressed by the children to the preceding story. For example, in response to *The Freedom Bird* story that told of a hunter capturing and harming a bird purely because he did not like its song. A resonant comment from one child (Max) was:

“If people kill them and tie them down and so we have to help save the animals.”

(Line 109 W1 16/07/2007)

Two days later I wrote in my journal:

“Strong feelings (esp.) from Max – regarding the cruelty of the hunter – concern about killing animals. Source story that presents a respectful approach to hunting to present an alternative view” (Reflective journal 18/07/2007).

The next story I selected was *Awi Usdi*, which offered the alternative view of Cherokee teachings of hunting only at times of necessity. Throughout the study the stories continued to be employed as a pedagogical tool to shape, guide, navigate and expand children’s emerging understandings of injustice.

The storytelling workshops were audio and video-recorded. Researcher reflections of the workshops were noted when viewing the video recording later that day. Two to three days after each storytelling workshop, feedback on the workshop was sought from the teacher through a follow-up conversation and with a group of five to six self-nominated children. These conversations were audio-recorded. Multiple and diverse data sources worked to diminish the possibility of one perspective shaping the direction of the study and to portray “the complexities and richness of people’s lived experiences” (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p.156).

A living educational theory approach to practitioner research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) provided a systematic form of inquiry to explore a practice of social justice storytelling and the inclusion of young children as active citizens in the public realm. The methodology involved reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as discussed by Schon (1983) in practitioner research. I reflected and amended my practice whilst in action and afterwards on numerous occasions, such as when journaling, when conversing with the teacher and the children, when planning the next workshop, and when transcribing, analysing, and writing up the study. The focus of my reflections was to create and facilitate a practice that provoked possibilities for young children’s active citizenship. Application of a living educational theory approach to practitioner research involved generating explanations of educational influences in my learning from practice, and in the learning of possibilities for young children’s active citizenship. Steps to generating these

explanations included: a) monitoring my and the children's learning and action, b) transcribing and organising data, c) reading data for evidence, d) identifying themes, and e) interpreting data through links with theory and literature.

This article discusses a living educational theory of possibilities for young children's active citizenship created through this method of inquiry. Points of learning regarding possibilities for young children's active citizenship were noted in my reflective journal after the workshops and conversations and when transcribing the data. Analytical memos of hunches and ideas (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009; Creswell, 2005) were recorded using the comments feature of *Microsoft Word™* on the transcription documents for each workshop and conversation. These memos signaled evidence of possibilities for young children's active citizenship. Common key terms in analytical memos were grouped together to identify themes. The four most common themes in children's citizenship practice were, in order of frequency: suggestions of social actions; suggestion of payback ideas; consideration for another; and critical awareness. Based on importance through high frequency, samples of these themes were subjected to more detailed analysis to gain further understandings of possibilities for young children's active citizenship. In accordance with analysis in action research (Dick, 1993) existing literature was applied and new literature sought to confirm or disprove what the data were suggesting. Relating data to theory and literature created a process of what Winter (1998) referred to as "dialectical analysis" (p. 67) through contemplation, speculation, and placing the data in wider contexts.

A Living Theory of Possibilities for Young Children's Active Citizenship

The following provides statements of explanation of a living theory of possibilities for young children's active citizenship. This theory was formed through reflection of practice at a particular time; it is not fixed, nor replicable, rather it is living and open to ongoing intersections with others in accordance with Whitehead and McNiff's (2006) explanations of living theories. Analysis of evidence of young children's active citizenship produced the following statements of

explanation of learning in possibilities for young children's active citizenship formulating a living theory:

1. Different ways of viewing children influence young children's active citizenship.
2. Payback, rebellion, and responsibility have a place and purpose in possibilities for young children's active citizenship.
3. Young children possess complex qualities as active citizens.
4. Young children's active citizenship can be political and authentically active

The following sections extrapolate each of these statements of explanation respectively with suggested implications. Ideas are proposed for early childhood practitioners and those who engage with young children in the public sphere to support the inclusion and participation of young children as active citizens.

Different ways of viewing children influence young children's active citizenship

Dominant views of children as immanent, innocent, developing, and impulsive were recognised as having a hegemonic impact on what was possible and what was available for young children's active citizenship. These dominant views of children cast children as citizens of the future. Even though my intentions in the study were shaped by ideologies and values that welcomed agency and multiplicity, views of children as citizens of the future interfered with the capacity for agency and multiplicity in possibilities for young children's active citizenship in the present.

On close examination of my practice, moments were identified when dominant views of children as immanent, innocent, developing, and impulsive limited possibilities for children's citizenship. At times I privileged my "knowledgeable" adult ideas over the children's ideas, such as in the following example from a group discussion about animal protection campaigns.

Denmark²: I am going to call some people to help me do some lists.

Louise: You want to do the lists. I think Finlay and Carl /

Patrick: (*To Louise*) I'm going to make a list for you.

Louise: Oh you like the idea of lists, because we could get a passport with the World Wildlife Fund and whenever they need help from us they will ask us to write letters and get names of lots of people to make lists, saying stop hurting the animals. (Lines 519-525 W2 23/07/2007)

In the above excerpt, I am responding to Denmark, Molly and Patrick who want to make a list of people who want to stop hunting. I make links between the children's idea and an established campaign blocking the children's ownership and control of their civic action idea thus indicating the influence of a view of children as immanent. Though this was not my intent, well established views of children as 'blank slates' and adults as more knowledgeable shaped my actions to steer the children's idea into an adult conceived and managed strategy.

Broadly in society views of children as immanent, innocent, developing, and impulsive function to legitimate limitations and exclusion for young children's active citizenship, such as the exclusion of children from voting rights. Children seem well aware of the adult view of children as impulsive as indicated by Mali's³ (aged eight) comment as to why children do not have the right to vote: "Adults don't let us vote because they think we will be silly and vote for bumbumhead." The reality is many adults vote for "bumbumheads." Recognition of the pervasive presence of views of children as impulsive, immanent, innocent and developing provides understanding on how such views limit the scope for young children to be active citizens (see Phillips, 2010a)

The above examples suggest that critical awareness of the influence of different ways of viewing children is required when adults and children collaborate in civic engagement.

² Denmark was the name this child chose as a pseudonym

³ Mali consented to use his real name in this article.

Unacceptable practices of power as the outworkings of these views need to be questioned with and by children, and social action to change these practices enabled. These are processes that Freire (1974) advocated to “avoid the danger of massification” (p. 19) in education for social change. To Freire, *massification* defines the process in which people remain susceptible to the magical, mythical, illogical, and irrational practices of power by following such practices blindly. Widespread belief in children as immanent, innocent, developing, and impulsive cultivates taken-for-granted practices of power over children, such as withholding knowledge from them to protect the romantic ideal of the innocent child, which can be seen to be produced through magical and mythical qualities of power. Critical awareness of the influences of these dominant views can identify ways to avoid blindly following practices of power over children.

Awareness of the influence of dominant views of children can guide pedagogical practices that provoke and promote young children’s active citizenship in early childhood education. Reflection on my pedagogical practices (e.g., the WWF passport suggestion example above) identified how different practices shaped by differing ways of viewing children either limited or supported further possibilities for young children’s active citizenship. The teacher and my endeavours to support young children’s active citizenship were messy as dominant views of children as citizens not of today, but of the future, infringed our attempts to promote children’s agency. Learning from this experience alerts one to a need for critical awareness of the influence of such views of children and citizenship in early childhood education, to question practices of power and seek pedagogical practices that promote agency for young children. Pedagogical practices need to challenge accepted limitations perpetuated by dominant deficit views of children, and engage in practices, such as making decisions with children, and seriously listening and responding to children’s ideas, that offer greater scope for young children’s active citizenship in the public sphere.

In citizenship, awareness of the influence of dominant deficit views of children on possibilities for young children's active citizenship is required for public servants, and members of parliament to better understand how to include young children as active citizens in the public sphere. Awareness of how views of children as immanent, innocent, developing, and impulsive limit possibilities for young children's active citizenship can provoke reflection on, and reconsideration of, policies and practices regarding young children's participation in the public sphere. Increased awareness of the influence of different perceptions of children may then provoke social change that increases young children's participation as active citizens in the public sphere.

Payback, rebellion, and responsibility have a place and purpose in possibilities for young children's active citizenship

Payback, rebellion, and responsibility were identified as significant themes amidst the children's comments and actions to the told social justice stories. These three categories offer possibilities for young children's active citizenship that are counternarratives to dominant views of children and citizenship. Each of these emerged from affective responses to the social justice stories told.

Across the study 27 suggestions of payback ideas were identified in the data of the children's comments in the workshops and follow-up conversations. Such suggestions were identified as payback ideas because they suggested ways to punish an inflictor of harm in a story. For example, after hearing a story about the child labour liberationist Iqbal Masih, I posed the following to the group:

Louise: I know you talked about feeling really sad and angry, so perhaps there is something that you think you as an individual or we as a group could do? (Lines 406-408 W6 30/08/2007)

Declan was the first to reply, “Tell the owner of the factory to the police, because he is guilty” (Line 409 W6 30/08/2007). Then Molly spoke slowly and carefully with this suggestion.

Molly: To try and—get him—to set a fire and—put him inside the fire (*with mouth down turned at end of comment*). (Lines 413-414 W6 30/08/2007)

When I asked Molly who she wanted to put into a fire, her reply was Ghullah, the carpet factory owner who subjected Iqbal and his peers to such cruel treatment. Other suggestions of payback ideas included: a) arresting/trapping/jailing antagonists, b) pulverising the antagonist in a blending machine that two children built with blocks, c) stealing what the antagonist treasures, and d) recreating the same experience of injustice for the antagonist as the antagonist inflicted.

Suggestions of payback ideas were seen as an anomaly to the literature of children’s citizenship in that they did not fit with definitions of communitarian citizenship as creating a cohesive and just society. Yet the high occurrence of suggestions of payback ideas signalled importance. By relating these data samples to theory and literature the children’s suggestions of payback ideas were seen to provide evidence of the intensity of these children’s resistance to unfair treatment on others. Young children’s capacity to sympathise with those who experience injustice, and motivation to initiate action to redress the injustice was demonstrated.

Rebellion was identified in the data of a story told by three girls (Molly, Ella, and Fergie) in the last week of data collection. It was themed as a suggestion of payback that took a rebellious approach, and presented a marked difference to other responses from the children throughout the study. Molly, Ella and Fergie played out a story, which began with a factory owner telling three children to make carpets faster, then the three child labourers surrounded the factory owner and told him: “You make carpets! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT!” (W13 30/10/2007). Based on the idea that children act what they desire through play (Davies, 2003), analysis of this story found that rebellion (e.g., forcing factory owner to work) was employed to disempower the oppressor (the

factory owner) and empower the oppressed (the child labourers). Molly, Ella, and Fergie imagined a place where children could defy unfair authority through power reversal, expressing opinions, making decisions, and generally having greater control over their actions. Their story of rebellion portrayed a possibility for young children's active citizenship as defiance of unfairness and injustice, and desire for self-control.

Responsibility to others was identified as another major theme. Violent proposals of payback and rebellion may be read as negative qualities of citizenship that clash with ideals of communitarianism. Responsibility to others is more commonly welcomed in pedagogical ideals for citizenship practice. Evidence that was suggestive of responsibility to another was read as children's commitment to their community members. For example, Denmark suggested having a meeting as one of the post-story activities after my storytelling of *The Rich Factory Owner and the Wise Old Woman*. When we gathered for the meeting I asked Denmark so why did you suggest the meeting, to which he replied:

“To listen to what other people have to say” (Line 387 W8 10/09/2007).

The meeting then progressed onto what the children could do to assist children who are working under poor conditions in factories in Pakistan. Ebony volunteered to writing and duplicating a request for toy donations for a school in Pakistan:

“I'm going to write the note I think at home...My mum can write it down and then photocopy it 20 times” (Lines 601, 612 W8 10/09/2007).

These examples contribute evidence of young children as active communitarian citizens demonstrating purposeful group action with a strong sense of responsibility to others (Delanty, 2002; Etzioni, 1993). Demonstration of young children's capacities for responsibility to others provides evidence to support the acceptance of young children as citizens in wider circles.

Recognition of the place and purpose of payback, rebellion, and responsibility in young children's active citizenship has particular implications for early childhood education. Space can

be provided for children to play out their suggestions of payback, to express their affective responses to social justice stories. By playing, drawing, dancing, building (and so on) their suggestions of payback ideas, children can express the emotional intensity of their affective responses. A forum could also be created to process young children's ideas and build understandings of consequences of payback ideas through dialogue with others. Themes of rebellion in children's suggestions to redress injustice can be recognised not just as defying authority but as a claim for power for the oppressed. Attention to these suggestions of rebellion can cultivate explorations of acceptable ways to be powerful, such as expressing opinions, initiating actions, and making decisions. How claims for power can be played out in active citizenship can be explored, for example, by expressing opinion on an injustice to relevant authorities. Teachers can also cultivate a classroom and school culture that welcomes young children initiating and enacting responsibility to others. This requires attention to young children's ideas and trust in their capacity and commitment to be responsible to others. Using the ideas, thoughts, feelings, and opinions of children can help realise possibilities for young children to be active citizens.

Recognition of the place and purpose of payback, rebellion, and responsibility in young children's active citizenship, offers some insight as to what citizenship can and might be for young children, and how young children might be included as citizens. Suggestions of payback ideas provide evidence of children's passionate resistance to injustice. Ideas of rebellion provide evidence of children playing out defiance of unfairness and injustice, and desire for self-control. Social actions that were initiated and enacted demonstrating responsibility to others provide evidence of young children's desire and capacity for active participation in communitarian citizenship. Collectively, these examples offer insight for those who engage with young children in the public sphere on what young children's citizenship might be, defined by the ways that young children choose to respond to injustices. It is hoped that acknowledgment of the place and

purpose of payback, rebellion, and responsibility in young children's active citizenship will lead to greater inclusion of young children's interest and capacity to engage in communitarian citizenship. To begin this process young children need to be included in dialogue on community issues, listened to, and the ways in which young children want to contribute supported.

Young children possess complex qualities as active citizens

Readings of nine young children's actions and comments were read based on Arendt's (1958/1998) suggestion that people's actions and comments provide stories of a willingness to act and speak. These readings produced interpretations of who young children can be as citizens. They identified: a) what concerned the children, b) what they considered to be just or fair remedies to redress injustices, c) how they acted, and d) possible influences on their ideas and inspiration for action. Portraits of these nine children as citizens were created. These children possessed complex qualities that are often not associated with young children, such as compassion and autonomy. They chose to act and speak in ways that they thought were valid to redress injustice.

The portraits were varied. For example, Declan presented as a citizen who sought to provoke empathy in those who caused harm through equitable repercussions. This was read through his suggestions of reciprocal justice, such as his comment: "Maybe they could put them in a birdcage" (Line 121 W2 CC 25/07/2007) as a repercussion for bird hunters. On another occasion Declan made other contextual suggestions of reciprocal justice, with the justification of "because they will know what it feels like" (Line 89 W10 10/10/2007). These words illustrated intent to cultivate empathy. Some other portraits of young children as active citizens included: Molly, Liam, and Scott who viewed inhumane practices as unforgivable demonstrated through suggestions of payback to the carpet factory owner in the story of Iqbal Masih, and Ebony who autonomously motivated and enabled class participation in a communitarian act, by writing and copying request notes for toy donations.

Analysis of these children's initiated actions and accompanying comments identified possible influences that shaped what the children did and said. Different views and values shaped who each child was seen to be as an active citizen, such as eye-for-an-eye logic, principles of good citizenship, and values of equality, inclusion and pragmatism. The differing complex qualities that young children portrayed as active citizens made visible Arvanitakis' (2008) understanding of citizenship as a fluid and heterogeneous phenomenon. The notion of being heterogeneous was evident across the diverse displays of citizenship. The notion of fluidity was evident in the different ways of being a citizen portrayed by individual children in different circumstances.. The children's actions and words displayed diverse purposeful complexity of who young children might be as active citizens.

Acknowledgment of the complex qualities that young children are capable of portraying as active citizens has implications for early childhood education and citizenship. The multiplicity of complex qualities that these young children portrayed can alert early childhood practitioners to recognise the complexities of who young children can be as active citizens in daily interactions. This acknowledgment can then fuel interactions with young children as complex active citizens, who are active contributors in their learning communities and the public sphere.

Evidence of who young children can be as active citizens contributes rich understandings to the growing body of research on children's citizenship. The portraits of young children as active citizens challenge closed, deficit definitions of young children as irrational, impulsive, and pre-political. They acknowledge the sophistication, heterogeneity and fluidity of young children as active citizens. It is hoped that this evidence improves young children's status as active citizens and opens doors for greater possibilities for young children's active citizenship participation.

Young children's active citizenship as political and authentically active

Young children's active citizenship can be political based on Arendt's (1958/1998) understanding of action in which actions are initiated with others in the public sphere. Young

children can initiate actions and adults can respond by enabling these actions in the public sphere. Young children's active citizenship can be authentically active if adults recognise how, when, and where young children choose to exercise their agency to redress injustices and offer support at these moments. These statements of explanation provide insight to the role of adults in young children's active citizenship. The following discussion explains these statements and their implications for education and citizenship.

By initiating a social action a child inserts both herself and something new into the public sphere (e.g., the classroom, school and community). Action and agency are intertwined. The individual is taking a risk by beginning something new amongst others, who may respond to her action in unexpected and unpredictable ways. For example, Denmark initiated a list of those who want to stop hunting and Declan initiated fig tree planting as a food source for the recovery of a local endangered bird. Both children can be viewed as political because they started new social actions in the public sphere. These children's initiatives were embraced and taken further into the public sphere: the list to stop hunting evolved into a petition to parliament seeking support for the recovery of the critically endangered Coxen's fig-parrot, and fig tree seedlings were nurtured for reforestation of a known habitat location for Coxen's fig-parrots. Agency was recognised and enabled for both the initiator and responder by these initiatives being acted upon by responders.

This explanation of young children's active citizenship as political is particularly relevant to young children in contemporary Western nations where children have reduced or no access to social structures, such as public spaces (Kulnych, 2001), are economically dependent (Lister, 2007), and endure a strong emphasis on care and protection in policy and practices (James et al., 2008). These social factors reduce young children's access to active citizenship. The possibility for young children's active citizenship then requires that adults employ their greater access to resources to bring young children's initiatives on humanitarian

issues into the public sphere. However, adults need to be alert to blocking or manipulating children's initiatives, as this deprives the agency of both parties.

A view of young children's active citizenship as authentically active acknowledges how, when, and where young children choose to exercise their agency to redress injustices, such as their ideas for payback, rebellion, initiative in seeking others' opinions, and autonomy in completing social actions. Reflection of my practice identified that at times my attempts to support children's citizenship participation masked recognition and support of children's self-initiated ways of being active citizens, such as proposing registering for the WWF passport instead of pursuing the children's idea of making a list of those who want to stop hunting. Many models of children's citizenship (e.g., Hart, 1997; Lansdown, 2005) position adults as enablers of children's citizenship practice. In this study I recognised that no matter what I did in my attempts to support children's citizenship, for children to be authentically active as citizens it needed to be driven by them. The challenge is for adults to let go of leading, listen carefully with all our senses to children's ideas and trust in following children's leadership in civic action

Young children's active citizenship as authentically active embraces expression of opinions and decision-making when children choose. Expressing opinions and decision-making are understood as core democratic acts for members of society that enable access to power and liberties (Dahl, Shapiro, & Cheibub, 2003). Yet children do not have the same access to the same control over their lives as adults, nor the same scope for participation in society. A view of young children's active citizenship as authentically active acknowledges and appreciates the ways in which children express agency. This view has potential to increase awareness of the scope and possibilities of children's agency with matters that concern their lives. Although there are limitations in how young children can exercise their agency given that they are economically dependent on adults and they require care from adults to ensure their survival, consideration of

children's citizenship as authentically active offers scope for greater awareness of how children choose to express opinions and make decisions.

These explanations of young children's active citizenship as political and authentically active provide suggestions for pedagogical practice in early childhood education that promotes young children's active citizenship. Practitioners need to notice the social actions young children initiate; and how, when, and where children choose to be active citizens. Well-considered responses that sustain rather than constrain agency are required, ensuring that subsequent actions engage children in decision-making throughout the initiation, planning, and implementation of social actions. Practitioners need to be alert to blocking or manipulating children's initiatives, as this limits the agency of both parties.

A view of young children's active citizenship as political and authentically active sees both children and adults experiment with co-existing in the political realm through interplays of initiating and responding actions. Instead of idealising children's agency for the sake of honouring the child, attention is focused on the interplay of actions between young children and adults learning together to activate real change as citizens. Such a view involves adults listening to children's initiatives and responding to children's initiated actions with further ideas to cultivate social actions that make a difference in the public sphere. Through such a view of young children's active citizenship, unpredictability, emergence, and experimentation are embraced and concern for the other is always present. Two-way learning is cultivated rather than solely supporting children's agency in an adult world, adults also learn to enter, understand, and acknowledge democracy in children's worlds. This reduces emphasis on adults as 'enablers' of children's agency and brings greater recognition of the complex and diverse ways that children choose to exercise their agency. Adults are required to recognise the ways children exercise their agency, paying attention to the purposes underpinning the way children make and enact choices. These implications of viewing young children's active citizenship as political and authentically

active have great potential for child and adult citizenship collaborations in early childhood education and beyond.

Conclusion

This living theory of possibilities for young children's active citizenship provides explanations of learning through an inquiry into young children's active citizenship as provoked through social justice storytelling. The four statements of explanation may be read as possibilities for young children's active citizenship in that they offer considerations about what active citizenship for young children can and might be. However, as much as I endeavoured to provoke and promote young children as active citizens, these are my interpretations as an adult, seen through my understandings of what citizenship can be. I am an adult speaking for young children. Derrida's (1993) concept of the secret is worth considering here. To Derrida, the secret is the singularity of experience that is heterogeneous to the public realm. It never allows itself to be captured, revealed or covered over by the relation to the other. Instead the individual tells her or his own secret. Application of this theory to this analysis of children's experiences of citizenship suggests that young children's experiences may be quite dissimilar to what is generally understood as citizenship in the public realm. Such an understanding alerts us as adults to be open to possibilities for young children's active citizenship beyond generally held definitions. With this understanding we need to listen with all our senses to what young children say and do as active citizens. Such as these six words expressed in the study by Denmark (aged six):

“I want to do real things!” (Line 425 W8 10/09/2007)

Note: All the children's names (except Mali) in this paper are pseudonyms that each child selected for him/ or herself.

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