

Educating the youngest citizens – possibilities for early childhood education and care, in England

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Abstract

In this article we explore the notion of young children as citizens and the implications of this for early childhood education and care (ECEC). Citizenship has a place in the National Curriculum, in England, and is compulsory for pupils aged 11–16 years. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, for children aged from 0-5 years, there is no mention of citizenship. This may be attributed to views of childhood as a time of innocence together with a perception that young children lack the ability to cope with complex concepts. This contrasts with research demonstrating young children's capacity and agency to engage with issues that affect them as present and future citizens. Whilst citizenship goes unmentioned, there is a Government requirement to communicate 'British Values'. These values of 'democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' are said to be implicitly embedded in the EYFS and inspection procedures are in place to ensure providers' compliance. Within this context, we draw upon theory and research to advocate and argue for democratic ECEC that shows the youngest citizens respect in six key ways: i) seeing and valuing the whole person and encouraging appreciation of diversity; ii) upholding individual and collective rights and enabling participation; iii) encouraging critical and creative thinking; iv) promoting equity and social justice; v) fostering peace and conflict resolution; and vi) challenging consumerism and encouraging action for sustainability. Each of these is discussed to propose pedagogies of citizenship for ECEC.

Key words: *early childhood; citizenship; rights; democracy; participation*

Introduction

There is no doubt that babies, toddlers and young children rely upon adults and gradually gain independence. There is a risk of characterising children as 'Weak, little, poor, dependent – a citizen-to-be only' (Korczak, 1942/2009: 26) whilst viewing adults as self-sufficient citizens. Yet adult independence is a myth. Human lives are long and complex and every life is intertwined with others in patterns of dependence and interdependence. Citizenship education can be focussed upon the preparation of future independent citizens or upon respect for children and recognition of human

interdependence and our shared responsibilities. With this in mind, in the first part of the paper we explore the concept of citizenship in relation to the youngest children in society, those in the age group from birth to five years. This is discussed with particular focus upon early childhood education and care (ECEC) and, specifically, the principles and requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014) statutory curriculum framework and current policy in England. We provide some discussion of historical concepts of childhood to frame areas of contemporary debate. The second part of the paper then takes the form of a thematic review based upon a set of interlinked themes that propose positive possibilities for a respectful approach to the care and education of the youngest citizens. Whilst this is a national case study, based upon current experiences in England and making reference to practices in other minority world contexts, we intend that it should resonate with critical educators worldwide and serve as a prompt for reflection and action. The exploration of the themes and the associated points of reference are, necessarily, brief selective and partial. Readers are invited to relate the provocations on offer to their own interests, knowledge, experiences and ideological commitments; and to take them further to develop fuller, more hopeful insights to promote the flourishing of our youngest citizens.

Why no ‘citizenship’ in the early years curriculum?

Citizenship education is a statutory subject for all pupils at maintained secondary schools, in England. It was introduced in 2002 following the publication of the ‘Crick Report’ (QCA/Citizenship Advisory Group, 1998), which recommended three strands of citizenship education: social and moral responsibility; community involvement and service; and political literacy. The report proposed citizenship as a school subject that would change the political culture of the country, challenging perceived apathy and ignorance and stimulating informed, democratic debate, critical thinking and active involvement in public life. The Crick Report was criticised on the grounds of failing to problematise the notions of ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘community affairs’. Within the report there is arguably an implicit market agenda, alongside the social welfare agenda, which inadvertently constructs pupils as the consumers of rights, mitigating against the original idea of citizenship and lacking commitment to democratic participatory principles (Davies and Kirkpatrick, 2000; Kay and Bath, 2009).

Most recently, new prescribed programmes of study for citizenship have been introduced as part of the revised National Curriculum (DfE 2015a). There is also a national framework for citizenship available for use in primary schools (DfE 2015b), which is non-statutory. UNESCO (nd) clearly identifies the need for citizenship education to begin from early childhood, for children to become clear-thinkers and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society. Yet there is no

mention at all of citizenship in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum framework that precedes the National Curriculum, although Personal, Social and Emotional Development is one of three ‘prime’ areas of learning and development and one of the ‘specific’ areas is Knowledge of the World (DfE 2014). These two areas of learning, together with the characteristics of effective learning: ‘playing and exploring’; ‘active learning’; and ‘creating and thinking critically’ (DfE, 2014: 9), provide potential for citizenship education, as we argue below.

The purpose of citizenship education in key stages three and four of the National Curriculum (i.e. for eleven to sixteen year olds) is ‘to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society’ (DfE 2015a: 1) with the implication that young people are not yet viewed as full citizens or active social participants. In the earlier key stages, too, this adultist viewpoint prevails with the wording: ‘Preparing to play an active role as citizens’ (DfE 2015b: 1 and 3). The Expert Subject Advisory Group for Citizenship, supported by the Department of Education to offer strategic advice on the implementation of citizenship education in schools, produced a leaflet ‘Citizenship Ready for Secondary School’. This outlines the skills, knowledge and values that should be taught to prepare children to take the next steps in the subject (Citizenship Advisory Group, 2015). With secondary school children preparing for adult society and primary school children preparing for secondary school, it is unsurprising that an emphasis within the Early Years Foundation Stage is to ensure readiness for starting school (DfE 2014).

In the exploration that follows we define the ‘citizenship’ of young children quite broadly taking inspiration from the theoretical underpinnings and practices of ‘BRIC’ (2015); a European project that has a focus upon young children’s democratic engagement in public and civic spaces. Children are viewed as present and future citizens of the cities and communities that they inhabit with opportunities to participate fully and have their views taken into account. Citizenship is viewed as relational and developed in dialogues with peers, parents and family members, educators and others. Citizenship education, therefore, is education that offers opportunities for participation and allows children to exercise rights, recognise responsibilities, and learn to care for themselves, others and the world.

Views of early childhood

Papathodorou (2010) identifies two worldviews of early childhood that each position young children very differently. On the one hand there is a utilitarian view of the child as ‘becoming’ with investment in early childhood provision as preparation for later stages of life and a basis for the future prosperity of both individual and society. In contrast there is the child who is valued for her/his own sake as ‘being’ and

‘belonging’ as an active, agentic member of a community. Here the importance of early childhood education and care is to promote the holistic, harmonious flourishing of children in the here and now. For the child as ‘becoming’ the role of early years education is equipping children with the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they will need for success in the next stage of education and future lives. For the child as ‘being and belonging’ attention must be paid to the young child as a current citizen with the capacity to participate actively in matters that concern them.

In her article Papatheodorou (2010) draws parallels with the early childhood experiences and education of young citizens of Sparta and of Athens. Athenian education allowed time for play and self-expression and promoted open-mindedness, questioning, and debate. The ultimate aim was ‘to develop free thinking citizens, obliged and committed to participate in public life ... - the underlying principles of democracy’ (Papatheodorou, 2010: 11). In Sparta, by contrast, the aim was to raise future soldiers following a regime of exercise, healthy eating and restraints in order to learn obedience and self-reliance. Whilst the utilitarian, technocratic and technical approach of the Spartans was successful for raising citizens to defend their city-state, it is the Athenian model of education that has been influential. Dunne (2006), for example, calls for elements of Athenian citizenship in early childhood education with emphasis upon speech, action, and interdependence.

Dunne (2006) refers to two historical views of childhood (those of ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, and eighteenth century French philosopher, Rousseau) that position children as citizens but in very different ways. He, therefore, problematizes citizenship and childhood and makes the relationship between the two explicit, drawing implications for educational practice. First, he highlights the role of the state, as envisioned by Plato, who argued for children to be raised collectively, without the influence of family. Family, according to Plato, favours its own members, reinforcing prejudices and creating social division and inequality. The role of the collective, state education, therefore, is to instil a care for justice in its youngest citizens. Twenty centuries later, Rousseau, problematized the whole idea of good citizens and good human beings and thus presented conflicting choices with regards to children's education. He argued that the role of state in creating good citizens is not free from flaws. The state creates good citizens by its own corrupt standards, thereby creating flawed human beings; whereas, if we choose to educate children privately and holistically, with the likelihood of forming good human beings, they may end up being misfits, in the future, when they try to integrate as citizens within the existing bad state. Plato, therefore, seems to have abolished childhood for the sake of citizenship whilst Rousseau abolished citizenship for the sake of childhood. The

problems that these two views present still face us as we struggle with the best ways of introducing and according citizenship to young children.

In early childhood, views of children have undergone various constructions and reconstructions: from children, as seen by Rousseau and his followers, as innocent beings, needing protection; to children as rights bearers, who are competent agents of change. Duhn (2012) highlights this in relation to environmental issues whereby the desire to protect childhood innocence and vulnerability leads to reluctance to engage critically with complex issues such as climate change. She argues that educators must challenge this sentimental view and thus enable children to participate as active citizens who contribute in matters that affect their lives now, and in the future. This respect for the views and opinions of the child in matters that concern them is enshrined in policy in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which requires participation in democratic decision making. There are various examples from research that demonstrate young children's participation and their capacity and agency to engage with issues that affect them (see, for example, studies by Crivello, et al, 2009; Clark, 2010; Bae, 2010; and Kanyal and Cooper, 2012).

Moss (2011) argues persuasively for democracy as both a basic value and practice in education and for education as a means to strengthen and support democracy. He draws upon a Deweyian ideal of democracy as an approach characterized by open sharing and negotiation; 'a way of relating to self and others, an ethical, political and educational relationship that can and should pervade all aspects of everyday life' (Moss, 2011: 2). He exemplifies this at every level of early childhood education: from a national obligation to provide the public services to which young citizens are entitled; to local decision making whereby communities take responsibility for early childhood provision; and within early childhood settings and centres where children, families and staff can engage in participatory, democratic practices.

'Fundamental British Values'

Democracy is currently enshrined in early childhood education through the Conservative Government policy that requires state maintained primary and secondary schools and all early years providers to 'promote fundamental British values' (DfE, 2015c). The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects and regulates education and training for learners of all ages, in England, and services that care for children and young people. As part of regular Ofsted inspections schools and early years providers are judged on how well they promote 'the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those

without faith' (Ofsted, 2015: 38). These four values are linked with the 'Prevent duty' (HM Government, 2015) connected to the Counter Terrorism and Security Act, that places a duty on everyone, including the early years providers 'to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (ibid: 2). This development represents an attempt to counter the growth of extremism and radicalisation, within the nation and beyond, by making these moral values explicit within the curriculum and everyday practice in educational institutions. Early years providers are seen to serve 'the most vulnerable and impressionable members of society' (ibid: 10) and to have particular responsibility for protecting children from harm. Sociologist and commentator, Furedi (2015) suggests that such surveillance, with suspicion of certain thoughts and ideas, is likely to undermine freedom and democracy and reduce opportunities for debate.

Educators are reassured that 'fundamental British values ... are already implicitly embedded in the 2014 Early Years Foundation Stage' (Foundation Years, 2015: 1). Examples are given from the Personal, Social and Emotional Development area of learning: shared decision making and turn taking fostering self-confidence; managing feelings and behaviour, including creating and following rules; gaining self-awareness and awareness of the feelings and experiences of others; and developing an ethos of inclusion and tolerance (ibid.). The best place and time to start developing positive values, unarguably, is in the early years as it is during this period that children are likely to develop important beliefs and attitudes, which lay foundations for their later lives. We are, however, uncomfortable with the approach to the promotion of British values for two main reasons: the 'othering' implied by the term; and the way in which the implementation of the policy is enforced.

Moss (2011) suggests that democracy should be characterised by respect for diversity; his view is that early childhood pedagogy should embody the 'ethics of an encounter' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), understanding and appreciating difference rather than attempting to make the 'Other' the same. Attaching the description 'British' to fundamental values can lead to othering and alienation of those children and families who do not identify as 'British' or those for whom being 'British' is not essential to their identity. There is a risk that promoting fundamental British values, rather than broader humanitarian values, will create divisions between communities and reduce social cohesion. British values are strongly linked with the Prevent duty, a policy that could 'sow the seeds of mistrust, division and alienation from an early age' if families feel their beliefs and life styles are being evaluated (Mendick and Verkaik, 2015).

Early childhood education, as the first and most influential stage of learning in the life course (Engle et al, 2007), should start with children observing, as role models, adults

who are trusted to provide care and education to a professional standard and who are not merely subjects of social control via Ofsted inspection procedures. If children join early years communities that are based upon engagement, participation, and shared decision making they will learn values of democracy, liberty and mutual respect (Luff and Webster, 2014). Conversely, children entering institutions where there are high levels of accountability but low levels of trust, and limited participation, receive rather different messages; ones that may contradict the policy that is being implemented. As an alternative, both adults and children need to participate in developing and sharing their own narratives and counter-narratives of British values (Jamieson, 2015). Right from the beginning, when the meaning of these ideals are conceived and constructed, there must be open discussions about the multiple interpretations of ‘democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’ and their meaning and applications constructed democratically, rather than being introduced in more restricted, top-down, Ofsted ‘observable’ ways. British values, ironically, may otherwise only become another powerful authoritarian political concept, not serving its core purpose of promoting democracy and respect.

Conformity to ‘top down’, government prescribed values, aligned with anxieties about terrorism, is likely to result in children and educators feeling voiceless and powerless. As an alternative, we propose early childhood citizenship education that is based upon lived human values. The suggestions that follow propose six ways in which such citizenship can be promoted. For each theme key ideas are set out and linked with an exemplar from what Gammage (2006) refers to as ‘ikonic’ approaches to early childhood education, i.e. curricula that influence ideas about provision for young children on a global scale.

Seeing and valuing the whole person

Two key features of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework in England are the principle of the ‘Unique Child’ and ‘equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported’ (DfE 2014: 5). Seeing diverse groups of children is common in contemporary early years settings. How educators respond to this diversity can frame each unique child’s view of herself/himself as a citizen and how she/he sees the world and her/his place within it. The commitment to inclusive practice within the EYFS can be undermined by an emphasis upon assessment of developmental outcomes via a two year old check and a summative EYFS profile (STA 2015) and consequent risk of early labelling of children and of giving mixed messages to children about how they are seen and about who and what is valued.

The EYFS is underpinned by a rich tradition of holistic education inspired by various philosophers and early childhood pioneers, such as Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Rudolph Steiner, John Dewey and Maria Montessori (Bruce 2015). Holistic understandings of childhood present children not merely as future citizens or employees but as human beings and part of an ‘intricate and delicate web of vital forces and environmental influences’ (Kochhar-Bryant with Heishman, 2010: 7). This holistic approach allows us to see children as full persons and considers their physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, interpersonal, moral and spiritual potential, not just for the sake of the future but also their present.

It is this perspective of holism that encompasses and integrates multiple layers of meaning and experiences that gives a more rounded education to young children and contradicts a narrow, standardised teaching and testing culture (Miller, 2000).

Extending the early childhood pioneers’ views, Miller’s view of wholeness involves the entire community, planet and cosmos. At a community level, people need to be able to relate to one another, operating on the principles of democracy that support pluralism, local control and citizen participation. At planet and cosmos level, Miller (2000) emphasises the value of ecological interdependence and the spiritual values such as compassion and peace, which positions his multi-layered arguments within this citizenship debate.

Applying this to early years practice, there may be moments in children’s lives where one area may need more attention than another. For example, there are various situations and circumstances which may make children highly vulnerable and affect their experiences and learning within the settings. Some examples may include: children living in poverty; exploited and refugee children from other nations; children whose parents are undergoing painful separation or divorce; victims of family or community violence; children with health and mental health disparities; children in families facing financial crises; and children with special learning needs (Kochhar-Bryant with Heishman, 2010). This is where the principles of working on a holistic level, within an inclusive environment, can be comprehended. When diversity among children is identified and valued by the society, it lessens the possibility of discrimination, which can improve children’s confidence and potential success for the development of their communities. Recognition and respect for diversity from professionals also gives a positive message to children, who are then more likely to embrace differences and learn to live together in harmony.

The task may seem overwhelming at times and the position of early childhood educators rather insignificant. It is collaborative work, where the practitioners reach

out for support that enables them to make new relationships with children and families, peers and other professionals. A good example of such holistic practice can be found in the early years curriculum of New Zealand Aotearoa, ‘Te Whāriki’ (NZ Ministry of Education, 1996) which, due to the multicultural nature of its contemporary society, includes a dual perspective. The curriculum is inspired mainly by the indigenous Māori culture, and Pākehā (non-Māori) culture (primarily former European migrants), as well as taking into account the Pacific Islands population and Asian cultures. The choice of the metaphorical term ‘Te Whāriki’ itself reflects inclusivity as it translates from the Māori language as a ‘woven mat for all to stand on’. This allows diverse early childhood services, families, practitioners and children to bring their own perspectives and participate in weaving together of a curriculum pattern which is shaped by their own beliefs, cultural heritage and philosophy.

Te Whāriki is based on principles of empowerment, family and community, relationships, and holistic development interwoven with curriculum strands of belonging, wellbeing, exploration, communication, and contribution (NZ Ministry of Education, 1996). There is a clear aspiration for all young citizens of New Zealand Aotearoa: ‘To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society’ (Ministry of Education, 1996: 9). One of the ways in which children are seen, valued and understood is through a credit-based ‘Learning Stories’ approach to assessment. Children’s learning dispositions and working theories are captured in narrative observations authored by teachers, the children themselves and family members. Portfolios are built up for which the children may dictate stories and/or take photographs, the families contribute comments and the collection of stories can be read, revisited and discussed (Carr, 2001; Mitchell and Carr, 2014). This model of assessment is based upon a relational, democratic process in which children’s strengths are recognised and thus has potential to empower children through celebration of their learning.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) showcased Te Whariki as one of the five foremost innovative approaches to curricula (Smith, 2015). Its grounding in the socio-cultural theoretical framing and the recognition of children’s agency and rights empowers children as social actors (*ibid*), a belief advocated by the United Nations, through its Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Upholding individual and collective rights

There is a close relationship between citizenship education and human rights education. Civil and political rights form a major part of human rights, which relate to the rights and obligations of citizens. Thus a comprehensive view of citizenship

education should take into account the complementary education of human rights (UNESCO, n.d.). In case of young children, this link is made explicit with the UNCRC, 1989, a convention which states the unequivocal rights of children. These rights are universal in nature, and grant children the protection, participation and provision of services rights, enshrined within the 54 articles of the UNCRC.

The key articles, which can help to make the civil and political rights of children explicit, are articles 12 and 13, that ask for increased involvement of children in decision making. Early years practitioners may, however, find themselves grappling with the individualised and the collective nature of rights, which are influenced by the Western and Asian views of childhood and children's rights, respectively. A combined perspective by the society, is however necessary to thrive (IAWGCP, 2008). This combination can be comprehended using the ecological systems theory, which regards the social structures and systems of a society as a key to understanding children's experiences and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interaction, however, can be limited to reaction to the imposition of decisions made by the higher systems on lower systems (Edwards, 2015). There are few cases, for example, of children's agency, where children successfully break through the systems, and

This clearly impacts upon the understanding of citizenship amongst children where they are unable to experience it actively. To overcome the problem of lack of agency, Davis (2014) argues for the revision of children's rights and a need to shift its conception from 'protection' and 'right holders' debate to include children as 'right partakers'. This extension demands a radical extension to children's rights to include collective, intergenerational and rights beyond human rights to our understanding, therefore extending Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems to further eco-socio-cultural-historical and transformative theories. Davis (2014) includes five explicit dimensions to the existing notion of rights, the first two of which are the existing UNCRC version and she refers to them as the foundational rights. The third and fourth dimensions refer to the creation of conditions for common sustainable existence, especially for more marginalised groups, as well as the intergenerational rights, so that we do not compromise the abilities of the future generations to meet their own needs, due to our current actions. The last dimension asks for a shift from 'human-centred' to 'bio-centred' perspective and she urges us to assign the same value to all living as well as non-living things, for example, carbon, air and water. This extension of children's rights to five dimensions certainly contextualises childhood into the 21st century, where the issue facing children, both as 'being' and 'becoming', are different from when the UNCRC was first introduced, in 1989. Citizenship education, therefore, when combined with the children's rights education, creates more critically aware

children, who are likely to be equipped to engage with local, national and international issues, in more creative and inclusive ways.

When considering an example of democracy and children's rights driven education, Sweden stands out amongst economically advanced countries. It was the only country to pass all ten benchmarks set out by Unicef, for early childhood education and care, amongst 25 OECD countries, in 2008. Sweden has a long-lasting history of human rights and democracy, which can be traced back to the World War 1 and 2 times, when Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal published a groundbreaking book, *Crisis in the Population Question, in 1934* (Bremberg, 2009). The book brought to the fore the issue of Sweden's decreasing population and was timely to promote child-bearing whilst allowing for individual liberty. Their ideas influenced the later developments and infrastructure of Sweden, including individuals' rights. Preschool policies, within that continuum, have increasingly been built on children's rights to equal opportunities, regardless of their parents' social position (Bremberg, 2009). Democracy, therefore, has been a basic value and practice in education and the education itself is used as a means to strengthen and sustain democracy, making both intricately interconnected (Moss, 2011).

Democracy and citizenship can be evidenced right from the initial stages of education in Sweden which, unlike some other countries (including England, as above), does not confine it to the later stages of education. The very opening of the Swedish preschool curriculum, begins with the word 'democracy', which then forms the foundation of the education and care of young children. There is an explicit reference to human rights, democracy and equality:

'An important task of the preschool is to impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. Each and every person working in the preschool should promote respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as respect for our shared environment. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the preschool should actively promote in its work with children' (Skolverket, 2010: 3)

All preschool activity subsequently emerges from this ethical attitude, which forms the foundation of Swedish early childhood curriculum.

Encouraging critical and creative thinking

In contrast with Sweden, there are no explicit references to democracy in the EYFS curriculum framework in England; yet one of the key characteristics of effective learning in the EYFS is 'creating and thinking critically' (DfE, 2014: 9). The potential

to explore and develop ideas lies at the heart of this and, importantly, opportunities to express a wide range of opinions and engage in genuine enquiries. Young children excel in being curious about the world and asking questions and so early childhood education can provide a model of citizenship education to other sectors here. Dewey (1916/2007) argued that adults could learn from children:

‘With respect to the development of powers devoted to coping with specific scientific and economic problems we may say the child should be growing in manhood [sic]. With respect to sympathetic curiosity, unbiased responsiveness, and openness of mind, we may say that the adult should be growing into childlikeness’ (pg.42).

This is echoed in the words of Arjen Wals (2006: 45) as he advocates a return to the values and approaches of early childhood education in order to move to a more sustainable world: ‘There are no dumb questions in kindergarten and there’s always time for questions and questioning’.

In a context where there is pressure for children to reach pre-defined learning goals at an early age there is a real risk that children’s curiosity and open-mindedness are curtailed and that questioning becomes something done by the adult, who asks closed questions with set answers. It is more challenging and rewarding for educators to relinquish their power and to be open to children’s questions and to model and support critical and creative thinking. This can be achieved in different ways. Some educators develop critical thinking through enquiries, inspired by Philosophy for Children (Lipman et al, 1980). Children are asked for their ideas and opinions in response to philosophical questions raised by well-known children’s stories or given an imaginative challenge or stimulus to respond to, such as: whether a monster should be allowed to visit their school; or what magical power they would like to have and why. In the ensuing dialogues children present and back up their ideas and are exposed to differences in thinking and gain experience of negotiations and discussion of disagreements. The teacher plays a key role as facilitator clarifying the viewpoints, asking questions where needed and sometimes changing or extending the task. Crucially, children are encouraged to listen and understand the ideas and opinions of their peers.

A ‘pedagogy of listening’ (Rinaldi, 2006) is at the heart of early childhood education in the world renowned pre-schools of Reggio Emilia. They originated immediately after the end of the Second World War and the fall of the Fascist regime of Mussolini. The Reggio Emilia approach was first designed by parents and community members who wished to counter the indoctrination experienced under Fascism through educating young children in a free, democratic and collaborative way. There is no fixed curriculum but, rather, young children are encouraged to explore their

environment and represent their understandings using different means of symbolic representation: the ‘Hundred Languages of Children’ (Malaguzzi 2012). The pedagogy is centred upon dialogues and shared meaning making between children and adults. It has great potential for citizenship as it not just about the creativity and critical thinking of the individual but places emphasis upon hearing, understanding and taking into account the opinions and viewpoints of others. Graziano Delrio (2012: 82), as mayor of Reggio Emilia, summed up the essential elements of the approach as ‘respect, listening and time’.

Promoting equity and social justice

Respect, listening and time can be provided in many different ways and critical approaches can advance beyond shared meaning making to critical pedagogies that support young learners to see and challenge the world, as it is, and to act to increase freedom, resist inequalities and effect social change. In Reggio Emilia there is a commitment to the common good of citizens, to ‘equal dignity and equal rights’ (Delrio, 2012: 82) and to provision of high quality early childhood services with greater access and reduced fees for children from families who are disadvantaged. Children like other human beings have the desire to lead happy and secure lives in the present and future without facing discrimination. Woodhead (2006) argues that equalising opportunities and promoting social justice is widely considered as an underpinning rationale for ECEC. An effective way to construct a just and sustainable world that will provide children with fair opportunities is to pay attention to ECEC and campaign against denial of equity and justice in children’s lives (Kaga, 2008). However, regardless of several pronouncements across the globe condemning the denial of equity and justice to children, there is still considerable evidence indicating that children in their everyday lives are not afforded equity and justice. Research on children’s experiences of discrimination and related intergroup relations reveals that millions of children across the globe are affected by discrimination and prejudice due to their age, ethnicity, gender, and/or disability (Killen, Rutland and Ruck, 2011). These inequities are in contravention of the UNCRC (see above). Articles such as child’s right to a nationality (Article 7), the right to an identity (Article 8) and freedom of religion (Article 14) must be upheld in order to promote equity, tolerance, and justice in childhood (UN, 1989; Holden and Clough, 2003; Killen, Rutland and Ruck, 2011).

At the early childhood stage children experience a range of positive and negative encounters within their environment (home and school), and they can be supported to make sense of these different encounters to identify justice and injustice using their social cognitive skills and previous experience of the world around them (Erdley et al., 2010). Implementation of an effective early childhood curriculum is required to

ensure provision of equity and social justice among children. This is because when a curriculum is designed without considering the children's needs as well as those of the implementers (caregivers) there is tendency that both of them might become, simultaneously, perpetrators and victims of inequity and social injustice (Killen, Rutland and Ruck, 2011). Conversely, well designed curricula may equip child citizens to recognise and reject injustice and can, in itself, be a tool to redress inequality.

A strong example of the positive effects of early education is the HighScope Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart et al, 2005) that tracked the lives of 123 African American children born in poverty in order to examine the effects of the pre-school education that they received in the 1960s. When outcomes are compared, with those for a control group who did not attend a preschool programme, at age 40 the adults who attended preschool had higher educational attainment, more positive family relationships, better and more secure employment and housing and were less likely to be involved with crime. In addition to cognitive skills, HighScope fosters sociability and dispositions to focus upon and persist with tasks and these seem to be the characteristics of the approach that are of particular value.

Fostering peace and conflict resolution

In addition to opportunities that may last throughout life, early childhood education and care can provide young children with experiences that can help them to become tolerant, cooperative and peaceful citizens. Stomfay-Stitz and Wheeler (2003) stated that activities within the classroom environment teach children caring and respect for others, as well as empowering them to take a step forward toward becoming peacemakers. For any country to be peaceful its citizens must learn to accept and treat each other with respect, irrespective of their race, sex and faith, and this can be achieved effectively through teaching about peace education. Fountain, (1999) defines peace education as a holistic process of promoting the awareness, skills, values and ideas needed to bring about change of behaviours that will enable children and adults to prevent conflict and violence and to resolve existing conflict amicably so as to develop peaceful societies.

Contemporary political, cultural and religious activities across the globe have caused discrimination and distrust among the citizens of various nations in the world (Stomfay-Stitz and Wheeler, 2003). Therefore, we believe that in order to end this problem children should be considered as the focal point of building a peaceful nation by teaching them a pedagogy of peace that comprise recognition and rejection of violence, resolving differences through dialogue and social justice. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that: "...the education of the

child shall be directed to...the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples...” (UN, 1989).

Ruddick (2004: 204) expressed the aspiration that ‘people who make the work of caring for children an ongoing and serious part of their working lives, may acquire ways of thinking and acting that help to create and sustain a culture of peace.’ If and when peace and conflict resolution are given priority in the EYFS curriculum and implemented successfully, this could produce a generation of citizens with a vision of peaceful coexistence. Nair and Nath, (2009) propose that peace and conflict resolution can be fostered among young citizens through the following types of activity: displaying posters about peace in settings; expanding children’s global awareness towards respect for other cultures, races and religions; modelling how to resolve conflicts peacefully; and organising events that bring young citizens from different cultural groups together.

Maria Montessori, Nobel Peace prize nominee, believed that a more peaceful world could be brought about through education. She created schools that were places of joy and contentment and, in the aftermath of the Second World War, proposed that focussing upon and understanding qualities of childhood could provide new directions and better ways of life for humanity (Montessori, 1949/1995). Montessori educators today, following her ideals, see great potential in children as agents for social change giving hope for the future. If educated with care and given freedom to develop in prepared environments, children gain a sense of order and develop the self-discipline and self-control that bring about cooperative working and peaceful living. Montessori educators, too, model calm and positive attitudes and aim to provide children with opportunities to experience goodness and trust so that they can, in turn, pass on these qualities. Environmental science and respect and care for the environment are also characteristics of Montessori Method. With this in mind, the final aspect for discussion here is the way in which early childhood education can provide a basis for alternative and more sustainable citizenship and a lighter footprint upon the earth.

Challenging consumerism

Young children may not be afforded respect as citizens yet they are seen as a significant consumer group and are targeted from babyhood by advertisers. The concept of ‘kinderculture’ (Steinberg, 2011) captures the dominance of popular culture upon children’s lives and experiences of childhood for children living and growing up in minority world contexts, where even very young children are exposed to strong, pervasive consumerist messages. Cornwall and McAlister (2015), for example, show the extent to which young children’s food preferences and eating

habits are influenced by marketing; with the appeal of branded packaging and commercial content influencing choices towards foods that are high in salt, fat and sugar both outside and within the home. This evidence resonates with Kincheloe's (2011) description of the seductive commodification of childhood and family life by McDonalds, and similar organisations. In a context where pleasure is for purchase, large corporations assume a quasi-pedagogical role, achieving profits via socialisation of child customers through mass media. This is reinforced in societies where many adults, too, value wealth and luxury and where gaining more and better possessions is seen as a route to happiness and fulfilment.

Providing a critique of consumer capitalism and promoting an alternative more sustainable world-view presents a serious challenge and yet early intervention with the youngest citizens and their families offers great potential for encouraging behaviours that are important for well-being and for reducing degradation of the environment. Pramling-Samuelsson and Kaga (2010) offer inspiration here with the suggestion that 'early childhood education can follow the 7Rs – reduce, reuse, recycle, respect, reflect, repair and responsibility' (p.59). An example of these in practice can be seen in action research reported by Nichols (2012) where sustainable consumption and material culture in early childhood education were explored through a project: 'We love old things'. Children were able to share their views about significant objects (babyhood possessions or items passed down through their families) and the efforts made to value and conserve some of these things.

In each of the sections above we have made links to early childhood curriculum frameworks where insights and inspiration for early childhood citizenship can be found. The example from Nichols (2012), above, and the multi-dimensional, ecological model of children's rights described earlier in the paper are from Australia. Extending the ideals, further inspirations can be drawn from the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) on challenging consumerism. The EYLF contains the outcome: 'Children are connected with and contribute to their world' (Australian Government Department of Education, 2009: 25). This outcome is linked with relationships, participation, and growing respect for others and the environment and, as part of this, there is an expectation that children will be supported to understand social responsibilities and care for the natural world. These aspirations are supported by Australian National Quality Standards that require that each early childhood service takes 'an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future' (NQS Standard 3.3) (ACECQA, 2012: 22).

Taken together the EYLF and NQS provide the basis for some inspirational practice in challenging consumerism and encouraging environmental responsibility (for examples

see Davis, 2015). Challenging consumerism, however, remains difficult when early childhood education itself is a commodity that is on sale to parents. This is in tension with a discourse of quality and standards that regards early childhood education as a technology, ruled by expert-driven norms and delivering rigid predetermined outcomes with conformity expected from both practitioners and children (Moss, 2011). In order for democratic citizenship education to thrive amongst these competing discourses, Moss (2011) argues for the careful consideration of certain material conditions to nurture democracy, for example, adequate public funding, a qualified workforce educated to be reflective professionals, critical support structures and appropriate pedagogical tools.

Conclusion

In this paper we have set out some critical perspectives on citizenship in relation to early childhood education and care. Our aim is to provide ideas and to open up dialogues on this important topic. We believe that citizenship is not just the preserve of enfranchised adults but should be extended to the youngest citizens, too, through enlightened curricula and pedagogies. Whilst the arguments above are located within an English context, and look to other places in the minority world for inspiration, we acknowledge that the topic merits wider attention in order to investigate theory, policy and practice in other places in order to develop meaningful, respectful care and curricula for very young citizens. Early Childhood Education and Care can be an influential tool for reproducing society or for instigating social change. Peter Moss (2011) proposes that change can begin by looking critically at what exists and envisioning possibilities for utopian thought and action. It is in this spirit that we offer the proposals in this paper for a radical rethinking of citizenship education in early childhood to involve every child as a citizen in relation with other citizens and the earth.

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