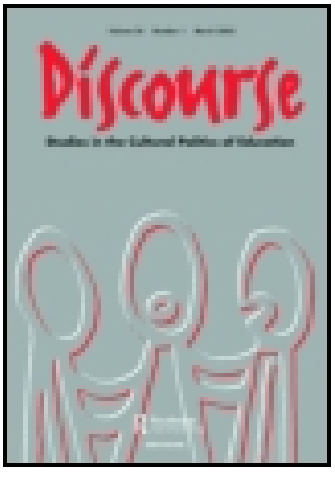

Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cdis20

Social justice storytelling and young children's active citizenship

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Published online: 29 Jun 2010.

To cite this article: Louise G. Phillips (2010) Social justice storytelling and young children's active citizenship, Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 31:3, 363-376, DOI: 10.1080/01596301003786993

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596301003786993

Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education
Vol. 31, No. 3, July 2010, 363–376

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Social justice storytelling and young children's active citizenship

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This paper examines empirical data with regard to recent theorizing and conceptualizing of children's citizenship. It draws on a doctoral study where the author told social justice stories to one class of children aged five to six years to investigate the active citizenship that the stories set in motion. By imagining this action research study rhizomatically, organic and tangent pathways were mapped of what the stories set in motion. Analysis was informed by poststructuralist discourse theory and critical theory on political action, which enabled identification of enablers and constrainers of young children's actual practice of citizenship. A case is argued for acknowledgement of young children's political identities and capacity to act as communitarian citizens.

Keywords: children's citizenship; constructs of children; political; social actions; storytelling; transformative education

Introduction

Many early childhood academics (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Fleet, 2006; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; MacNaughton, 2004; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005) have acknowledged the need for early childhood pedagogical approaches that address diversity and social justice to move towards advocacy of social equity by generating a proactive stance of addressing social inequity. This article discusses a study with a Prep[1] class at a public school in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, Australia. The study adopted a proactive model of addressing social justice issues through storytelling, and examines empirical data of young children's citizenship practices that the stories set in motion. Informed by the large body of literature on how humans make sense of the world through stories (e.g., Arendt, 1958/1998, 1970; Benjamin, 1955/1999; Bruner, 1986, 2003; Estes, 1992; Kristeva, 2001; Nussbaum, 1997; Zipes, 1995, 2003, 2004, 2005) along with my personal experiences as a storyteller, the study's proactive model of investigating social justice issues with young children was built upon the premise that live storytelling can provoke emotional and critical engagement (Nussbaum, 1997; Zipes, 2005).

The young children in this study were positioned as complex beings capable of constructing meanings with adults (MacNaughton, 2004) on social justice issues, such as environmental degradation, child labour, and dislocation. This then saw the children participate as active citizens: social actors who defend equality and justice (Stasiulis, 2002). Typically social justice issues such as child labour and dislocation are considered more 'appropriate' with upper primary classes or above. For example,

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ISSN 0159-6306 print/ISSN 1469-3739 online

DOI: 10.1080/01596301003786993
http://www.informaworld.com

in Queensland, these issues are positioned in syllabus documents for children aged 10 years and older (The State of Queensland, 2001). Young children's participation as active citizens was problematized with regard to the impact of adult lenses (definitions, constructs and discourses) on children's citizenship; and what citizenship can be for young children.

A practice of social justice storytelling

The stories told in this study were purposefully crafted and told to address what Greene (1995) defined as goals of transformative education, that is, to be concerned for one another and understand what social justice actually means and what it might demand. Storytelling in this practice was live, oral and performative. As the storyteller, I invited the child listeners to enter the world of the story, identify with the characters and accompany them on the journey of experience, and then emerge with new insight and understandings. The intent of storytelling in this study was to arouse vivid, reflective and experiential responses from the children within a collaborative context that could enable them to understand what social justice actually means, and to express concern for others in their efforts to address social justice.

The stories shared were folktales, biographical stories and self-authored stories that were crafted on the basis of Lankshear and Peters (1996) definition of counternarratives. To make social justice issues visible, the stories countered the widely known stories and understandings of the modern world that possess oppressive, exclusionary and totalizing effects what Lyotard (1984) referred to as grand narratives or metanarratives, and worked to counter 'massification' (Freire, 1974, p. 34) or blind acceptance of metanarratives. Counternarratives, as small localized narratives of those made invisible through metanarratives, offered a way to cultivate critical awareness and a broader humanitarian outlook.

An understanding of a perspective of another has potential to alter awareness and understandings of humanity, through what Nussbaum (1997) refers to as sympathetic imagination. All arts have a role in nurturing sympathetic imagination, but Nussbaum claims that narrative art (story) offers a particularly rich contribution as we experience the lives of others as if we are involved. Through cultivation of sympathetic imagination, Nussbaum explains that we are then able to comprehend the choices of people different to ourselves. She proposes that the sharing of tragedies with children acquaints them as citizens with understandings of tragedy, but also equips them with understanding of diversity of choice of action. Zipes (2003) also acknowledges great value in storytelling for young citizens in today's climate of globalization, which creates polarization and fractured communities. The capacity of storytelling to nurture identity combats homogenization of behaviour and welcomes diversity and plurality.

Conceptualizing children's citizenship

A concept of children's citizenship has only recently begun to feature in citizenship literature. Models for participation and citizenship have been unilaterally designed for adults (Qvortup, 2001). For example, if it is defined as a legal status, with the right to a passport and the right to vote as symbolic of being legally defined as a

citizen, then children are not positioned as full citizens as they do not have the right to vote (Lister, 2007, 2008). Typically children have been ignored, equating citizenship with adults only, or they are portrayed as citizens of the future, described as 'citizens in waiting' or 'learner citizens' (Lister, 2007). Sociological constructions of children and childhood (Corsaro, 1997; James, Jencks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 1997) challenge these future constructions by positioning children as social actors with agency and arguing that children are citizens of today. This enables children to be active in the here and now. However, it has more often been older children who have had the opportunities to be active decision makers and contributors to society. Only recently has a case been made for the participation of younger children (Alderson, 2008; Lansdown, 2005; MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008), which this study extends and supports.

The articulation of rights as the claim to social and political recognition in the sociological definition of citizenship has historically been the appeal for the ideal of citizenship, what is different today is the social, economic and cultural conditions that enable new claims for citizenship. In Isin and Turner's (2002) comparison of citizenship rights and human rights they explain that due to the historical tie of citizenship rights to nation state, children have been considered better served by human rights rather than social (citizenship) rights. Yet human rights are often critiqued as vague and unenforceable, whereas citizenship rights are distinct and justiciable. This distinction has fuelled the claim for children's citizenship in both policy and practice, by theorists (James, Curtis, & Birch, 2008; Kulnych, 2001; Lister, 2007, 2008) who acknowledge the need for civil and political rights for children in addition to human rights.

Many adults are more inclined to support children's protection rights rather than participation rights, for participation requires reason, rationality and autonomy, attributes that many adults believe children do not possess (Stasiulis, 2002). In industrialized societies, the metanarrative of how children aged five to six years exist, is simply within the private worlds of play, domesticity and school (Roche, 1999), following the guidance of parents, caregivers and teachers. Pre-sociological constructs of children as innocent (shaped by Rousseau's theories), naturally developing (shaped by Piaget's theories), or as obedient student (Foucault, 1977; Luke, 1989) have influenced metanarratives on the existence of children (James et al., 1998). The primary focus of social policies, which concern children, is still protection, with a construct of children as innocent and vulnerable prevailing. When discourses of protection assume hegemonic positioning and are enacted through legislative controls, James et al. (2008) argue that these controls act as a 'red line' limiting the scope for children's participation. Though there has been recent support of children's participation, Kjorholt (1998) and Prout (2002) have found it to be typically high in rhetoric and low in practical application. To support further practical application of children's participation, Prout (2002) and Roche (1999) have strongly suggested that as adults we create space for children to be heard and to listen seriously to what matters to children. There are dangers, Prout warned, if the promise to listen to children is not enacted upon, of risking children's disappointment and 'cynicism of democratic values' (2002, p. 75).

Citizenship is more likely to be a salient component of children's identity when they have experience of being treated respectfully as citizens and the opportunity to actively participate as citizens (Lister, 2007). Kulnych (2001) argues that the crux of children's

citizenship lies in children being understood to possess political identities and if this is not imagined then genuine democratic participation for children is not possible. With political identities, Kulnych claims that children's opinions need to be included into the larger political culture in a comprehensive manner, as genuine enactment of democratic participation rights.

The understanding of political identity that Kulnych refers to is that of active participation and draws from classic Greek and Roman definitions of citizenship and communitarian theorists. Communitarian citizens see themselves as active participatory members of their community, who seek to create a cohesive just society (Delanty, 2002; Janoski, 1998). A communitarian approach nurtures the consideration of others, where the collective entity is the main focus. Support for communitarianism in education is embraced in transformative education where responsive and considerate interactions flourish amidst individuals of a community.

Evaluations of initiatives that enable children to participate, testify to how they strengthen young people's sense of belonging to the community as well as equipping them with skills and capacities for active citizenship (Eden & Roker, 2002; Lansdown, 2001) and have demonstrated that children are capable of much more than adults think (de Winter, 1997; Lansdown, 2005; Stasiulis, 2002). Lansdown (2001) suggests that there needs to be scope for meaningful action so that the children can actually use their citizenship skills to make a difference. However, Lister (2008) notes that not only do children need opportunities to demonstrate their capacity as participatory citizens, but adults are also required to transform the way they relate to children in acknowledging their citizenship identities, so that children's participation can be accommodated. Children need to be engaged with as citizens so they can actively participate as citizens.

Participation for children is defined as an eight-step ladder by Hart (1997) with the highest level of child initiated with shared decisions with adults being proposed as the ideal. This definition of children's participation acknowledges interdependence between children and adults with adults supporting children's autonomy. Further to this, Hart (1997) urges adults to support children's participation in matters that interest children, within their local environment, so they can be directly involved which in turn deepens their understanding and connection with the issue.

This study did not seek a universal understanding of children's citizenship rather it welcomed multiple positions and practices, by viewing citizenship as heterogenous activity as Arvanitakis (2008) proposed. There was no fixing of meaning, but instead windows were opened to view the possibilities and recognize the obstructions. With a heterogenous view of citizenship Arvanitakis identified a typology of four citizenship spaces, which defined a progression of spaces on an axis of disempowered/empowered and disengaged and engaged. Two of the citizenship spaces have relevance for children and the analysis in this article: marginalization and citizenship deficit; and insurgent citizenship – engaged and empowered. The category of marginalization and citizenship deficit is applicable as it recognizes children's impinged access to civic institutions and political avenues; and the category of insurgent citizenship acknowledges children's motivation to take action.

Conceptual framework and methodology

This action research study was conceptualized by drawing from both critical theory and poststructuralism. The commitment of critical theory for social change with just

outcomes worked to promote positive social change within one class community. Social change in the context of this study referred to a growing capacity for: critical awareness of local and global social justice issues, and active citizenship with regards to these issues. In particular, Arendt's (1958/1998) theory of action was applied in readings of social actions that took place in the study. From an Arendtian understanding, action is about beginning something new in the world, public sphere or *polis* (as distinguished from our internal and personal spaces). In this way a child or adult can be seen as an active political being by beginning new social actions in the *polis*. This acknowledges that people do not act in isolation and that through action individuals insert themselves into the *polis* or public sphere, a place in which individuals are both taking a risk and being open to the responses of others.

The action research path of social change was mapped and imagined rhizomatically (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in three nodes rather than neat linear cycles. This is a poststructuralist approach to action research that Amorim and Ryan (2005) proposed. It enabled the interconnectivity of emergent themes to be mapped and welcomed tangent directions across the progress of the study. The organic nature of the rhizome authorized plotting of what the stories told set in motion, following what O'Sullivan (2005) proposed as a way to critique art rhizomatically.

The impact of adult lenses on constructions of children's citizenship was investigated in this study through Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theory of discourse, based on its prior application in research on citizenship (Harvey & Halverson, 2000; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Norval, 1996). Laclau and Mouffe understand discourse as the 'structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice' (1985, p. 105), which is constructed in an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity (the terrain of a constitution of a social practice) and fix meaning. Only partial fixation is achieved, as there are constant struggles to fix meaning between discourses. Multiple discourses are recognized being in play at any one time, exemplified through articulations being influenced by one discourse, then being interrupted by another. In the context of this study, the field of discursivity is young children's practice of citizenship and discourses at play were identified in selected vignettes to reveal the limitations and openings that adult lenses can create in children's practices of citizenship.

Vignettes of young children's practice of citizenship

The data that form these vignettes were taken from transcripts of video recordings of the storytelling workshops that I facilitated in collaboration with the class teacher of the Prep class. The teacher and I collaborated with the children as active citizens, following a communitarian definition of citizenship supporting their participation in acts of responsibility to the wider community. Our readings of the children's responses to the stories saw children practise active citizenship in diverse ways. This paper examines two vignettes of young children's citizenship practice, in both cases initiated by Denmark.[2] It examines the qualities of Denmark's practice and the impact of adult lenses on his practice. These vignettes have been selected for discussion because they offer readings that impact on constructions, scope and possibilities of children's citizenship.

Denmark's list

This vignette begins in week two of the study after I told the Cherokee story *Awi Usdi*, which advocates a practice of hunting only at times of necessity with respect and honour of the spirit of the animal. After this story I shared information with a small group of children, about what some people (through groups such as World Wide Fund for Nature WWF and Animal Club projects) are doing to stop hunting and poaching. This was offered as a platform for discussion in response to what Max asked in the focus group interview after the previous week's story: 'Who protects the animals from the hunters?' (Line 16 W1 CI, 18 July 2007).

When a small group of children gathered to investigate the anti-poaching campaigns they were highly attentive and keen to hear about what the campaigns were actually doing to protect animals. At one point Denmark suddenly interjected with these comments.

> Denmark: I'm going to ask my Dad if he knows the people who are working for that and doing that and I want to make a list of the hunters and make a list of the people who are stopping the hunters.
>
> Researcher: Mmm – I'm not sure if it is a problem here in Australia, but you could ask your Dad, and when I come on Wednesday, you can tell me what you found out.
>
> Denmark: I'll take the lists with me and every time I'll take the lists with me. (Lines 471–475 W2, 23 July 2007)

In five further utterances in the conversation Denmark expressed his intent to 'do the lists'. His frequent expression of his commitment 'to do the lists' seemed indicative of self-motivation and commitment to the action. In my response, I positioned myself as not all knowing (e.g. 'I'm not sure. . .'), and positioned Denmark as a social actor with agency, capable of making his own inquiries. Denmark's comments could be read as political from an Arendtian (1958/1998) understanding, through his initiation of a social action in the polis. Two days later Denmark proudly brought his list to school; it included all his classmates' names as well as names of friends from out-of-school. Denmark's suggestion of making a list seemed to demonstrate an engagement on the issue of hunting and empowerment to take action aligning with insurgent citizenship according to Arvanitakis' (2008) typology of citizenship spaces.

List to petition

To enable the recognition of Denmark's list beyond the classroom as active citizenship practice, I identified a local species that needed protection, as the anti-poaching campaigns that we had discussed focused on endangered animals of Africa and Asia. My intention was to localize their practice of citizenship, as Hart (1997) suggested it provides greater scope for children to directly engage and understand thus having the potential to enable what Lansdown (2001) referred to as meaningful citizenship that makes a difference.

Information on the critically endangered Coxen's fig-parrot, whose habitat is considered to be in forests beyond the local metropolitan area of the school, informed the next story that I shared: *The Lonely Coxen's Fig-parrot*. The story traced one bird's experience of deforestation from colonization to present day, as if

the bird had lived for more than 200 years. The aesthetic imagery and kinaesthetic connection experienced through storytelling and a whole class re-enactment of the decline in the bird's population through deforestation of native fig trees seemed to provoke what Nussbaum (1997) defined as sympathetic imagination of the impact of deforestation and urbanization on the Coxen's fig-parrot population. Juliet captured this with her comment: 'When the people keep chopping down the trees I felt like the parrot was dying' (Line 913 W3, 30 July 2007). The plight of this bird became a major concern for the class with the story setting in motion a number of events and social actions, which included visits from known Coxens' fig-parrot experts, as well as seedling care for reforestation of the birds' known habitat area.

The children's interest in the Coxen's fig-parrot led the class teacher and me to the idea of transforming Denmark's list into a petition to ask the State Government to take further action towards the protection of the Coxen's fig-parrot. Following Prout's (2002) and Roche's (1999) recommendations, we viewed Denmark's list as a valid act of citizenship participation, to be seriously listened to and supported. To enable wide recognition of the list as a practice of citizenship we thought it needed to follow conventional citizenship practice, in this case petition writing, a democratic method of seeking change from governments. We also saw it as an opportunity to support children's political identities as Kulnych (2001) suggested through engagement with the wider political culture. However, our actions could also be viewed as not valuing Denmark's list as a practice of citizenship in its own right, in that we sought to transform it into an adult act of citizenship. Viewed this way, our efforts to support children's participation as citizens seemed to also be interrupted by discourse that constructs the child as developing and the adult as all knowing. Multiple discourses were at play, with varying and conflicting constructs of children. There was a fine line between what might be viewed as honouring their suggestions and supporting their engagement with the wider political culture and what might be viewed as manipulating their suggestions to adult values and discursive constructions of citizenship and children.

When the teacher stated that the class was going to add to Denmark's list in her explanation of the petition-making task, Denmark rebuked:

> Denmark: The whole class is already on it, even you two. (Pointed at teacher and me) (Line 476 W4, 6 August 2007)

His comment presented as a defence of his list. The teacher and I had made the decision to make the petition, not the children. Our decision had enforced hegemonic meaning to an act of citizenship: the petition. Though we positioned the children as citizens, this was influenced by our adult constructions of what citizenship can be.

The teacher wrote the letter and petition statement in consultation with a small group of children including Denmark, who did comment to the videographer when the camera lens was on him: 'We're having fun here. Yeah!' (Line 829 W4, 6 August 2007). Though it was an adult idea, children chose to participate and were actively engaged. They decided to set a goal of 110 signatures, as they planned to ask students in other classes to also add their signatures of support. This was not made possible as the principal stipulated that the study only involve the selected participatory class, so as not to position the participating Prep class as different from other classes. The principal's decision seems suggestive of a discourse of school as an institution with

his decision being supportive of a universalistic view of schooling where sameness is encouraged and difference discouraged (Foucault, 1977; Luke, 1989). His decisions worked to limit the scope of the children's active citizenship. The teacher and the children still felt sufficiently empowered and engaged to seek out others (such as parents and teaching staff) who could sign the petition within the parameters the principal had imposed. They gathered 50 signatures in total. In the weeks after posting the petition to a relevant Minister in State Government, many children frequently asked their class teacher about the progress of the petition.

A reading of this progression from Denmark's suggestion of making a list to the formation of a petition, in terms of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theory of discourse, identified a number of discourses struggling to fix the meaning of participation and children in constructs of children's citizenship. Discourses that position children as social actors seemed to cultivate an opening for Denmark to offer his idea of making a list with a view of participation that can be child-initiated and autonomous. Adding to this, discourses that position the child as developing and the child as political interrupted each other to inform the teacher's and my idea of making a petition defining participation as adult-initiated and controlled and within the wider political culture. The children's motivation to circulate the petition school-wide was then halted by the controlling effects of discourse of school as an institution. A discourse of communitarianism also defined participation as being cohesive group action demonstrated through the teacher and children's will to gather as many signatures as possible from their families and colleagues. The meaning of the petition was shaped by further discourses when it was received and responded to by the Minister.

Minister's reply

When the class received a reply from the Minister, a month later, I was not present. So the teacher relayed to me that the children seemed pleased to have their letter heard and responded to by the Minister. There was no further discussion of the letter as the children's attention had shifted onto other matters. In addition, my capacity to ensure follow-up action in a crowded curriculum as an external researcher visiting once a week was limited. It was not until after I completed data collection that I examined the Minister's letter and noticed that it made no mention of the petition nor the children's requests of support for a publicity campaign and reforestation of fig trees in the known habitat areas of the Coxens' fig-parrot. It simply outlined what the Minister's department had already implemented in pursuit of recovering the Coxen's fig-parrot population. Even though we had transformed Denmark's list into a petition, a conventional citizenship procedure, it was not recognised as a petition, in that it was not tabled in parliament. On inquiring as to why the petition was not tabled, the explanation was that it did not precisely follow the prescribed wording and format for petitions. This information had not been volunteered in the Minister's letter of reply.

This response could be read as not even positioning children as 'citizens in waiting' or 'learner citizens' (Lister, 2007) as no information was provided for children to learn about petition procedures. Within a discourse of citizenship as a legal status, legal documents hold primacy. Petition legislation that dictates precise wording does not allow for children's alternative ways of communication, which Kulnych (2001) welcomed in her view of children's citizenship as political identity.

The children's variation of a petition was not recognized, nor did it appear to be welcomed. The Minister appreciated their interest at such a young age: 'I am encouraged to see that you have such a keen interest in the environment at such a young age – well done!' Yet, their right to a voice in parliament to request government action was not acted upon. There was a gap that impinged the fulfilment or completion of this act of citizenship. It is debatable where the responsibility lay for this. Do children need to learn adult citizenship practices and improve their capacity to follow the established protocols? Or is a shift in approach required from government ministers and their staff, in how they relate with children to enable flexibility and variations to citizenship practices? Either way teachers of young children tread a fine line in supporting young children's practice as citizens that connects them with the wider community, yet still empowers children with agency.

The teacher and I specifically chose to document the children's wording in the petition, to honour their verbal expression. Discourses of citizenship as legal status function inflexibly to variations, as demonstrated in this case through petition legislation. Though the teacher and I had actively sought to acknowledge the children's political identities and make available to them a genuine enactment of democratic participation, through engagement with the larger political culture as Kulnych (2005) suggested, the Minister's reply did not fully support young children's participation. This was the dilemma that Lister (2008) noted of children needing to demonstrate their capacity but adults also needing to position children as participatory citizens. Perhaps the teacher and I were at fault by not ensuring that the petition followed the prescribed petition wording. By honouring children's words scope for children's learning of socio-political practices was reduced.

The challenge then appears to be for adults to locate a balance between enabling children's agency to express their political identities and enabling points of connection between child and adult practices of citizenship. In terms of Arendtian (1958)/1998) understanding, agency occurs when an action is brought into the public sphere and responded to by others, not blocked. When others' actions are deprived in the public sphere, agency is not possible. If the children's petition not being tabled is understood as not being responded to, then the children's agency and that of the Minister is denied. Engagement between the class and the Minister regarding Coxen's fig-parrots ended there.

This experience points to three considerations in adult and child collaborations of citizenship practice. One consideration requires adults to aid navigation of the universalism (e.g., petition protocols) of the public realm. Another requires adults to build children's capacity as citizens to support wider recognition of children as political actors. And the third consideration requires adults to respond to children's initiatives in ways that provide further scope for children's participation.

Activist meeting

During the time that the class waited for a reply from the Minster, the children, the teacher, and I had moved on to the second node of this study. This vignette tells of Denmark's initiated social action that emerged spontaneously without the teacher's or my concerted efforts to enable active citizenship in the wider political culture such as in the case of the petition. By imagining the study rhizomatically, lines of flight were welcomed and acknowledged. Following on from *The Lonely Coxen's Fig-parrot*

I told the West-African folktale *Two Brothers*, which told of a younger brother leaving a life of being forced to work by his brother and being disregarded in his village to a life of learning from animals. In response to this story the children talked mostly about the younger brother's experience of being forced to work and being silenced. To follow this focus the next two stories (*Iqbal's story*[3] and *Craig's story*[4]) were based on real-life experiences of children being silenced and being forced to work, to provoke critical consciousness of children not being valued. The third story was an adapted folk tale that metaphorically explained how a factory owner could come to understand the plight of his workers.

After this third story in the second node of the study, Denmark suggested that there should be a meeting as one of the group experiences that the story set in motion. I interpreted this as an interest in discussing the issue of child labour further with view to devise plans of action. Denmark and I attended the meeting along with two other children, David and Ebony. It began in this way.

> Researcher: So first, would you like to talk about how you feel about how these children are treated?
> Denmark: Oh, I'm not coming up with any ideas.
> Researcher: You're not coming up with any ideas?
> Denmark: (*Shakes head*)
> Researcher: So why did you suggest the meeting?
> Denmark: To listen to what other people have to say. (Lines 373–387 W8, 10 September 2008)

Denmark's reason for a meeting surprised me, as it seemed to indicate genuine interest in what his peers' thoughts were on the matter. Within adult definitions of citizenship, he presented as a communitarian citizen, positioning himself as a member of a community with a commitment to other members of the community. Denmark's suggestion of having a meeting so that he could 'listen to what other people have to say', challenges discourses that position the child as developing (as shaped by Piaget's theories), and in particular position young children as egocentric.

From an Arendtian (1958)/1998) understanding, Denmark was being political in that he expressed agency through initiating the action of a meeting with others. This was a risk, as he did not know how others would respond. Further to this he maintained his agency and supported their agency by not controlling others' responses to his initiated actions, instead he welcomed unpredictable responses through his comment 'to listen to what other people have to say'.

The meeting continued with discussion of possible social actions with regard to child labour. The children's suggestions focused on gathering supplies to build schools. I suggested we could build a model to which Denmark replied: 'I want to do real things' (Line 425 W8, 10 September 2008). This assertion of his right to engage as a citizen in the wider community can be read as an indication of his genuine desire but perhaps also acknowledges the marginalization that children experience in citizenship practice by largely engaging in play as opposed to 'real things'. As Roche (1999) identified, the metanarrative for children aged five to six years is that they exist in worlds of play, domesticity and school. Denmark asserted his right to challenge this with his comment pointing to fluidity between Arvanitakis' (2008) citizenship spaces of marginalization and the desire to act in insurgent citizenship.

In an attempt to listen to Denmark's request for engagement with the real world, I assisted the children to collectively write a letter to the emergency architect who was going to visit the class the next day. The letter sought the architect's assistance in collecting wood from the children's homes to transport to Pakistan to build a school. In addition they devised a plan to collect toys to resource the school. Ebony[5], a girl aged five, volunteered to write and copy a note requesting for toy donations. My experience of the meeting was that the children were engaged and empowered. Denmark initiated the meeting, others chose to attend, and then they were empowered to make suggestions of actions and volunteered to fulfil these actions. Later Denmark offered this account of the meeting:

> The meeting was KIND of like a big meeting – like a BIG adult's meeting – kind of. (Line 804 W8, 10 September 2008)

One way of reading Denmark's desire 'to do real things' and classification of the meeting as 'like a BIG adult's meeting – kind of' is that he had set the meeting up and then he assessed or measured it against his emergent understandings of active citizenship. In this comment, Denmark seemed acutely aware of the demarcation in society between adult and child, to which he placed a meeting in the adult world. He saw that the meeting we had was nearly like an adult meeting, but not quite. Though Denmark was enthusiastic about the meeting experience, he was aware of his marginalization as a child. This raises the issue of young children's access to resources to engage in active citizenship and indicates young children's limited access to avenues for their opinions to be heard. Denmark's comments and actions suggest that children's citizenship for young children can be a desire for real-world experiences, to create real change.

Conclusion

Using storytelling to provoke critical awareness of others' positions offered a way to engage young children as active citizens. In the vignettes shared in this article, Denmark at the age of six was recognized as political from an Arendtian understanding (1958/1998) through his initiation of social actions with others. Others responded to these actions. Fluid interplay of initiated social actions and responding actions that continued the life of a beginning idea was understood as enabling the agency of all participants. Denmark seemed to be open to the unpredictability of others' responses so that opportunities for others to act were not deprived. However, adult discursive constructions of children and citizenship were identified to form barriers or limitations for the scope of children's practice of citizenship. Discourses that construct the child as innocent, and as developing, were seen as limiting the scope for children's participation and influenced the way adults related to children. Even when the teacher and I consciously made decisions to position the children as citizens and as political, we were still interrupted by discourses that construct the child as developing, shaping our attempts to support avenues for children's agency. Further to this, discourse that defines citizenship as a legal status also worked to restrict children's participation as citizens, as noted in the children's petition not being tabled in parliament. With reference to Arvanitakis' (2008) typology of citizenship spaces, Denmark presented as engaged and

empowered, demonstrated through his initiation and enactment of social actions, yet was also aware of his marginalization and therefore deficit in being positioned as a child, as it reduced his access to the 'real world'.

Acknowledgement of the impact of discourses brings realization that it is a fine line that adults tread who wish to welcome and aid children's participation as citizens. Perhaps an Arendtian (1958)/1998) political understanding offers a way to view young children's active citizenship with children's initiated social actions (such as Denmark's initiated social actions of a list and a meeting) and responses to these actions being understood as being political. Balance then needs to be found between noticing and responding to children's initiated social actions in ways that support young children's engagement with the wider political culture, while not manipulating or controlling how others respond to our actions. In a way this is a shift from adults creating opportunities for children's citizenship to adults recognizing when and how children initiate social actions to see what citizenship can be for young children.

Notes

1. Prep is the first year of schooling in Queensland, Australia. It is a non-compulsory year.
2. This is the name this child selected as a pseudonym.
3. This story was based on biographical details of Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani child labourer and activist.
4. This story was based on Craig Kielberger's journey of forming the *Free the Children* network, the world's largest network of children helping children free from war, labour and poverty (Free the Children, 2007; Stasiulis, 2002).
5. This is the name this child selected as a pseudonym.

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