Children’s rights and citizenship studies
Re-theorising child citizenship through transdisciplinarity from the local to the global

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1. Introduction and cultural/historical context

The chapter presents theoretical and empirical analyses of children’s and young people’s citizenship that starts in Canada but is representative of an evolution of citizenship visible throughout the world judging by the significant international literature focused on this contemporary discourse. The chapter had its genesis from recommendations found in a dismal research report from the Canadian Senate entitled *Children: The Silenced Citizens* (Senate of Canada, 2005, 2007), an exhaustive investigation into implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) in Canada, although underlying notions that young people’s views are silenced from relevant discourses is a familiar one throughout the literature. As noted in the Introduction for this Handbook, conceptually children’s rights have grown apart from human rights in general, and this pattern is reflected in discourses to do with the “worldwide resurgence of interest in questions about education and democratic citizenship” noted by Biesta and Lawy (2006, p. 63).

A secondary analysis drawn from a 2008–2010 ethnographic study in southern Ontario, Canada of both adult and child participants’ experience of active citizenship also informs the...
That study anchored an edited volume on critical citizenship pedagogies (Mitchell and Moore, 2012) from which a small portion of the literature herein has been drawn, and is in keeping with at least two of our Handbook themes of a “bottom-up approach to children’s rights” and our collective critique of “dominant paradigms in children’s rights research”. The study’s central research question was: “What are some of the critical issues for young people as they attempt to exercise their rights to participatory citizenship in Canada and beyond?”

The investigation focused on two years of events leading up to a youth rally hosted by international children’s rights activist Craig Kielburger at my university (Brock Press, 2009; see also Kielburger and Kielburger, 2006; Wingrove, 2010). This same question serves as an opening to this chapter although from a globalised perspective and not solely from my own socio-historical context.

The rally drew 350 elementary, secondary and post-secondary students from Ontario’s Niagara Region, which contrasted with the complete abandonment of child soldier Omar Khadr in the American prison camp at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba being reported that day in domestic and international media. I interviewed Mr. Kielburger and discussed Mr. Khadr’s plight on that occasion since the federal government had also initiated the unprecedented step of appealing a Supreme Court of Canada ruling ordering Khadr’s repatriation, the only Western citizen remaining in the prison until 2012 (University of Toronto Bora Laskin Law Library, 2014). While perhaps remote, the application of widely accepted “principles and provisions” of the CRC (Article 42) may have proven a more effective response to unravelling this young person’s citizenship issues – a domestically born “child soldier” under complex international circumstances.

I also emphasize here that politically contentious and contested notions related to inclusive Canadian citizenship for First Nations, Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis first peoples and their children are mired inter-generationally in colonialist structures and struggles. These same structures and struggles are present in regions throughout the world as separate though integrally related discussions, beyond the scope of this chapter. Saul (2010, p. 136, citing Bourgeault, 1988) recounts the historical development of South Africa’s apartheid system using the Canadian approach:

“South Africa turned to Canada in the first decade of the 20th century”, since “Canada was probably the only advanced capitalist state that had an elaborate system of administration and territorial segregation of an internally colonized indigenous population, a possible exception being the United States”. Indeed, Canada’s Dominions Land Act of the 1870s (after which the South African Land Settlement Act of 1912 and 1913 was actually patterned, according to Bourgeault), and related acts including our very own Indian Act, restricted Indians, as they were then termed (now “First Nations” people), from acquiring property or trading their goods off the reserves. They also deprived Indians of the vote, and even established a kind of pass system for exit and re-entry to reserves. Small wonder that apartheid South Africa was interested (see Deer, 2009 and Cambre, 2007 for further historical analysis).

There are at least 370 million Indigenous people throughout the world – many of whom have large and growing populations of children and young people – whose ancestors have faced similar inter-generational colonialis predations over the past five centuries. The processes associated with subjugation and assimilation also gave impetus to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see also Arabena, 2008; Malott, 2008; Blanchet-Cohen, Chapter 21 in this Handbook; United Nations, 2007).
2. Globalisation of child citizenship

Craig and Marc Kielburger, co-founders of *Free the Children* are two leading figures in youth empowerment and child citizenship (Henderson, 2013). Their international non-governmental organisation (INGO) works with more than one million youth every year as the world’s largest network of children helping children through education. The brothers are syndicated columnists and co-authors of the New York Times bestseller *Me to We* (2006), and *The World Needs Your Kid* (Kielburger et al., 2009). Their work has been widely featured on US-based CNN, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *60 Minutes* and *The Today Show*, and in news magazines such as *Time* and the *Economist*, as well as appearances on the *BBC*.

Sociologist Daiva Stasiulis (2002a, 2002b) was one of the first scholars to critically assess Kielburger’s efforts to mobilise young people, and to comment on the truncated political efforts to reconfigure children’s citizenship. She recounted layers of inertia and the “relative failure” of all governments combined with the manner in which state policy, Canadian courts, and children’s politics have responded to “the imaginary of the active child citizen … . The reluctance of adult decision-makers to open up policy-making to the contributions of children has been further hindered by the current anti-democratic cast of neo-liberal governance” (Stasiulis, 2002b, p. 507).

In a doctoral investigation, the capacity of five- and six-year-old elementary students for “active citizenship” was analysed within a group of Australian students through both storytelling and social action (Phillips, 2010, particularly pp. 79–106). She also critically assesses Kielburger’s work, and while young people from economically rich countries speaking for those in economically poor countries “raises potential risks of colonial-like practices … and neo-colonialist appropriations of third world issues”, Phillips observes members of the organisation are “empowered, knowledgeable, compassionate and autonomous” (Phillips, 2010, pp. 37–38). Moreover, she cites Kielburger (1998, p. 75) who recalls “the struggle against child labour did not ‘begin in the west, but rather began with organisations such as CWA (Child Workers of Asia)”’ (Phillips, 2010, p. 38).

Scottish childhood scholars Malcolm Hill and Kay Tisdall (1997, p. 21) observe: “[r]ights, and the related concept of citizenship, constitute one of the most powerful discourses in today’s world … definitions of children’s rights, and debates around them, are reliant on two concepts – of ‘childhood’ and of ‘rights’ – and how these two are combined” (also Tisdall, 1994). Irish educator Dymphna Devine (2002, p. 303) argues that while locating rights within the context of adult–child relations, an education for citizenship based in schools must take into account dynamics of power and control between teachers and pupils, and the impacts on children’s construction of themselves as citizens. As an attribute of such engaged citizenship, the question arises: what is critical thinking and how do children and young people develop those skills? Henry A. Giroux has frequently answered this by recalling Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s approach to pedagogy:

What Freire made clear is that … education is a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills and social relations that enable students to explore for themselves the possibilities of what it means to be engaged citizens, while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy.

*(Giroux, 2010b, para. 5)*

In this chapter, my standpoint includes critically teaching and applying the CRC in a similar pedagogical approach – within and beyond schools – as both a researcher and a practitioner.
(Moore and Mitchell, 2008, 2009; Mitchell and Moore, 2012), and from a “transdisciplinary” conceptual and methodological basis (Mitchell, 2013, p. 514). The pedagogical issue of teaching this nation’s children about the CRC has eluded the majority of Canada’s educators since signing and ratifying the CRC (Senate of Canada, 2005, 2007; also Howe and Covell, 2005, 2007; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1995, 2003). Noted researchers Howe and Covell (2005, p. 63) observe that while “the enjoyment of rights is basic to citizenship”, under the current regime Canadian children’s citizenship is consistent with core human rights principles “only in part”. They further observe (2007, p. ix) that domestic CRC implementation “has neither been as quick nor as comprehensive as we would have liked. In fact, in many ways we have been more successful on the international scene than at home”.

Guantanamo prisoner Omar Khadr is an international exemplar who also represents the fluidity of citizenship and permeability of geopolitical borders. Captured in Afghanistan and held by the American military for war crimes, he is a child of the globe and not solely of a particular nation-state. While local experiences shaped Khadr’s citizenship, these were also global and exemplified by the glare of international legal, political and media reaction to his mistreatment. Child soldiers such as Khadr are victims of war, and singular disciplinary or legal lenses are inadequate to address these complex issues. Both Khadr and Kielburger are Canadians by birth and began their activism as school children in Toronto-area classrooms. By virtue of differentiated power relations, both have now become archetypes for the “‘child in danger’ versus the ‘dangerous child’” noted by our editors in the Introduction, as well as poster boys for the complexity of the current era (see also Bauman, 2000; Sassen, 2008; and Vrasti, 2009 for discussion).

Khadr’s fate stretched to the Afghani war, a US prison camp, and a high court ruling before repatriation (Supreme Court of Canada, 2010 SCC 3) though his lawyers have recently filed a $60 million lawsuit against the government for contributing to his torture (Friscolanti, 2013). Kielburger’s trajectory includes a Nobel nomination and rock star status among children and his peers well beyond his native land. In light of their subsequent emergence to global status, previous theoretical notions of how citizenship rights are constituted and applied appear inadequate. These constructs demonstrate why we can no longer analyse citizenship within the binaries of state or statelessness, citizenship or rights, or even “me to we” as the Kielburgers have written (Kielburger and Kielburger, 2006).

I’m reminded of Bauman’s (2005, p. 1095) observation that we live now in a time of “liquid modernity … among a multitude of competing values, norms, and lifestyles without a firm and reliable guarantee of being in the right [that] is hazardous and commands a high psychological price”. Alan Prout’s (2001, p. 19) analysis on the future of childhood is similar in that “[w]e live with the knowledge that modernity’s project of rational control has limits… The mood is more cautious and reflexive about the status of our understanding, more aware of the complexity of nature and society, more alert to the unintended consequences of our social actions and less sure of our social institutions”. This complexity is evidenced by the flood of images on traditional and social media that continue as grim reminders that millions of children are still being dispossessed of the most basic human rights simply to live and enjoy healthy development. As one of many examples, portions of Syria and its population burn as I write (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2013).

3. Re-theorising adult citizenship through child citizenship

Critical educators Hyslop-Margison and Thayer (2009, p. xv) note: “these are extremely tenuous times for modern democratic states and for democracy more generally”, and students in
advanced capitalist societies are bombarded daily “with ideological messages designed to convince them that self-worth and social status are dependent on appearance, purchasing power and conspicuous consumption”. In Mitchell and Moore (2012, pp. 1–8) we highlight that similar to globalisation, “democracy” is still a highly contested and localized term. Nevertheless, with the apparent “impending neoliberal capitalist collapse” observed by Hyslop-Margison and Thayer (2009), the increasing interdependence of world society points to a “multitude of transformations and challenges across and despite borders” (Vrasti, 2009, p. 4; also Luhmann, 1997). An increasingly complex “global assemblage” (Sassen, 2008, p. 5) of both childhood and adult citizenship is becoming visible though, one that is being crafted on human rights principles – a citizenship no longer solely encompassed by, or understood through, lenses of single disciplines or nation-states. In this local/global nexus, active citizenship continues to become uncoupled from traditional geopolitical borders and traditional frameworks (see Moosa-Mitha, 2005; and Castells, 1999, 2000a, 2000b for theoretical insights).

From a British perspective, Biesta and Lawy (2006) offer important distinctions they have encountered in the teaching of citizenship. “In new and emerging democracies the focus has, understandably, been on how education can contribute to the formation of democratic dispositions and the development of a democratic culture” (p. 63). They note that similar questions are being raised in more mature democratic nations, particularly on how to maintain and nurture both “democracy and democratic culture” (Biesta and Lawy, 2006, p. 63). In a companion paper, Lawy and Biesta (2006, p. 43) further emphasise:

Citizenship-as-practice does not presume that young people move through a pre-specified trajectory into their citizenship statuses or that the role of the education system is to find appropriate strategies and approaches that prepare young people for their transitions into “good” and contributing citizens. Indeed it makes no distinction between what might otherwise be regarded as a status differential between citizens and not-yet-citizens. It is inclusive rather than exclusive because it assumes that everyone in society including young people are citizens who simply move through citizenship-as-practice, “from the cradle to the grave”.

They contend that to conceptualise citizenship as an ongoing practice involves a fundamental change in the way we conceive such practices. “Citizenship is no longer a solely adult experience but is experienced and articulated as a wider shift in social relations common to all age groups” (Lawy and Biesta, 2006, p. 43). Notwithstanding, their analyses underscore an “adult-centric” construction of citizenship lingering in much of the discourse, which while alluding to “youth” nonetheless omits reference to global CRC implementation. Biesta (2008) corrects this omission, though their previous efforts to theorise the teaching of active citizenship are similar to that of Turner (2006), and to Isin and Turner’s (2007, pp. 12–13) notions of “invigorating” this discourse through continued re-theorising of “global citizenship”.

In the Introduction to her 2008 text (p. 5), Sassen acknowledges: “I use the concept assemblage in its most descriptive sense. However, several scholars have developed theoretical constructs around this term. Most significant for the purpose of this [her] book is the work of Deleuze and Guattari, for whom “assemblage” is a contingent ensemble of practices and things that can be differentiated (that is, they are not collections of similar practices and things) and that can be aligned along the axes of territoriality and deterritorialization…” I have also chosen Sassen’s interpretation of “rights” as a global assemblage of “practices and things that can be differentiated”, and as a descriptive construct to allow a re-theorising and reconstruction of relations associated with UNCRC implementation, including the new concept of young people as active citizens in an increasingly networked world society.
3.1. Human rights and child citizenship

A general inquiry using the ubiquitous Google search engine as I write reveals 127 million results (in 0.29 seconds) for “child as citizen”, and nearly 600,000 (in 0.09 seconds) with a more focused search using Google Scholar beginning from the period the CRC was being introduced and implemented in the early 1990s. One such programme is exemplified in a 2006–2009 project initiated by the INGO Childwatch International in collaboration with well-known researchers in six nations (Taylor and Smith, 2009). The initiative was part of an international comparative research project focusing on children’s perspectives on their rights, responsibilities and citizenship at home, in school and in the community. These researchers emphasise that with recent global trends towards democratization in all major regions of the world, economic, political, and social changes are also taking place in dramatic fashion. The widespread acceptance of the CRC offers an unprecedented global consensus on the nature and extent of participation rights of children and youth, they observe.

In the Foreward to Invernizzi and Williams’ (2008) seminal text on child citizenship, former chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Jaap Doek (2008, p. xii) recounts the struggle for nine million stateless humans, but also observes there are no provisions “in any international human rights treaty conferring on an individual the right to citizenship”. However, in the context of children’s rights, he highlights that CRC Article 7 (1) emphasises “every child has the right to acquire a nationality” (Doek, 2008, p. xii).

Similarly, the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science contributed a collection of papers on the “child as citizen” from presentations at the host’s institution marking the 20th anniversary of the CRC (Earls, 2011). In her analysis of Norwegian efforts, Anne Kjørholt (2002, p. 70) argues that the “socialization paradigm emphasizing children’s development towards becoming mature human beings in the future … may… be seen as contradictory to the construction of the child as a right-holder in modernity, stressing children’s rights as citizens here and now”. British educators Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey have amassed a significant scholarship linking the CRC with such a “here and now” style of teaching citizenship within schools (Osler and Starkey, 1998, 2005, 2010; also Carter and Osler, 2000; Trivers and Starkey, 2012; Mejias and Starkey, 2012).

Within the literature there is also disagreement with any notions of children as citizens in any context, and research by Dina Kiwan (2005, p. 37) offers one such analysis. While this paper excludes research directly with children, she argues convincingly that “conflating” the concept of citizenship with human rights is “not only conceptually incoherent, but may actually obstruct the empowerment and active participation of individual citizens in the context of a political community”. She also challenges any notion that the CRC offers the “ideal basis for citizenship education”, and citing Alderson (2000, p. 115) Kiwan claims she has failed to “engage with the conceptual distinction between human rights and citizenship rights” (p. 37). Kiwan’s critique deserves serious consideration if only by virtue of the weight of research contradicting her analysis, a solid cross-section reviewed herein.

Kiwan (2005, p. 45) claims a “theoretical confusion” regarding whether CRC rights refer to human rights which are accorded to all individuals. She contends this arises because of the inclusion of “participation” and civic rights, which are theoretically a different kind of right to other CRC rights “such as the right to life (Article 6), the right to freedom of religion (Article 14) or the right to education (Article 28)”. In this light, she analyses various constructs that provide the basis for adult citizenship (Kiwan, 2005, pp. 38–44) including moral, legal, identity-based, and participatory.
While it may be important to acknowledge the important role of human rights within the practice of active citizenship and to recognize that the practice of human rights occurs within a political community, it is inaccurate to conflate the two concepts. This is because human rights discourses are located within a universalist discourse, in contrast to citizenship, which is located within a more particularist discourse. Underpinning human rights is the notion of common humanity, based on ethical conceptualisations of the individual. In contrast, citizenship rights are underpinned by their relation to a political community, based on political conceptualisations of the individual.

(Kiwan, 2005, p. 47)

US-based political scientist Elizabeth Cohen (2005) takes a similar critical stance towards the construct of “child citizenship” in liberal democracies observing that with the introduction of CRC and globalisation, “new possibilities for membership in political communities that transcend the nation state” are clearly manifest. Nevertheless, she echoes Kiwan’s concern that “without adequate national citizenship, children’s citizenship will remain grounded in abstract guarantees created by well-meaning but powerless groups of adults … that can enforce very little in regard to the political circumstances of children for whose physical safety they claim responsibility” (Cohen, 2005, p. 223). Similar to Biesta and Lawy (2006), these political relations are the crux of both Kiwan’s (2005) and Cohen’s (2005) arguments, and are clearly adult-centric.

There are two similar blind spots in these authors’ analyses, and in the first instance I’ll respond directly to Kiwan’s critique of Alderson and truly “engage with the conceptual distinction between human rights and citizenship rights” (Kiwan, 2005, p. 37). Kiwan’s most glaring omission is to do with the theoretical and methodological distinctions articulated by sociologists of childhood over the past two decades, many of whom are also contributing to the children’s rights discourse (Christensen and James, 2000; Davis, 2011; Davis and Watson, 2000; James and Prout, 1997; James and James, 2004; James et al., 2002; Mayall, 2000, 2002 [also Chapter 5 in this Handbook]; Matthews, 2007; Mitchell, 2003, 2005; Montgomery et al., 2003; Moss and Petrie, 2002; Woodhead, 1999).

Various theoretical analyses into how “participation” works in situ continue to illuminate discourses related to childhood and active citizenship notwithstanding many early CRC critics. Such thinking provided the basis for textbooks by Heather Montgomery, Rachel Burr and Martin Woodhead entitled Childhood: The Series. In their volume “Changing Childhoods: Local and Global” a typical section on child citizenship (Montgomery et al., 2003, pp. 262–270) emphasises once again that “participation is, at root, about extending the goals of democracy to ensure that all citizens – including the youngest – are prepared and able to contribute to shaping their own lives, their community and the wider society” (p. 262). These authors observe that while many initiatives have taken shape in “well-established democracies in the affluent countries of the North”, they cite the Delhi labour campaigns by street children in India and Nepalese children’s clubs for additional evidence that democratic children’s groups organised through CRC teaching are visible throughout all regions of the globe. Sociologist Sara Matthews (2007, p. 329) offers an overview of this childhood literature, but observes most “scholars in the United States are on a somewhat different path than their colleagues in other Western countries”.

A major problem encountered in applying the “new” sociology of childhood perspective in research is that children may have no independent right to participate in research. Although in the United States children must assent to participate, their parents have the
right of first refusal and can withhold consent... In nations where issues related to children's rights are being addressed, researchers may have less difficulty with access. The proliferation of the “new” sociology of childhood can be read as one result of scholars in various countries taking up the challenge of the UN Convention by thinking carefully about how children experience institutions controlled by adults. (Matthews, 2007, p. 329; see Corsaro, 2005, and Thorne, 1993 for contrasts)

In terms of Kiwan’s second omission, James and Prout (1997, p. 8) note the type of reflexive social activity related to adults researching, teaching and engaging with children – in this context within rights-based pedagogies – as illustrative of Giddens’ (1984) “double hermeneutic of the social sciences”. I am positing here that by engaging in research and teaching of the CRC with young social actors, critical pedagogues are at the same time contributing to a “new” dimension of children’s rights studies. Indeed, viewing the concept through the lenses of the double hermeneutic implies neither a uni-disciplinary nor a uni-directional knowledge exchange, but a co-constructed and reflexive experience of citizenship for both adults and young people alike.

Baroness Ruth Lister of Burtersett was appointed to England’s upper house in 2010, and she has investigated and written widely on the construct of children’s citizenship, indeed she remains one of the most widely referenced. She recounts the elements of a substantive citizenship include membership and participation, rights, responsibilities, and equality of status, respect and recognition. She considers the case for recognizing children as citizens is not so much arguing for wholesale extension of adult rights and obligations, “but recognition that children’s citizenship practices constitute them as de facto, even if not complete de jure, citizens”. More broadly, Lister urges, “this position points towards an understanding of citizenship which embraces but goes beyond that of a bundle of rights” (Lister, 2007, p. 693). Doek (2008, p. xii) charts the terrain from a similarly global perspective while articulating the dimensions of adult citizenship as nationality; the right to reside permanently on the territory of a State; the right to be protected by the State; the right to vote, to hold office and to participate in decision making; and the right to social action and to economic rights. He also considers the characteristics for young people in the context of the CRC by noting

the citizenship of the child should not be dealt with only as a nationality issue. Nationality is undoubtedly an important element of citizenship. But I like to take a broader approach from the perspective of the child as a rights holder. Citizen Child may not vote or run for a public office, but is entitled to the enjoyment of all the rights enshrined in the CRC without discrimination of any kind.

(Doek, 2008, p. xii)

This rights-based citizenship is exemplified in the ample literature on “participation” and “engagement” of young people (see Anget et al., 2006, among many).

3.2. Human rights and global citizenship

While citizenship has evolved through historical, social, political and theoretical dimensions, until the current era it has been adapted and viewed mainly as an exclusionary device for gendered and racial binaries, in oppressive conditions exercised upon racialized minorities, women, children, the intellectually and physically challenged, and on those from South Africa’s and Canada’s original inhabitants, along with most other Indigenous populations. Writing from
the Australian context again, Margaret Coady (2008) notes the range of political philosophers from “Aristotle through Aquinas, Augustine, Marsilius, Hobbes, Locke and Kant [who] have closely analysed the idea of citizenship”, though again solely on behalf of adults, and most likely, on behalf of adult males.

Moreover, literally thousands of civil society organisations with consultative status at United Nations sessions in New York, Geneva and Paris have established their legitimacy longer than many contemporary democratic states and the transitory nature of their political and governance structures. As one example, English feminist Eglantyne Jebb’s *Save the Children* established in 1919 is an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) currently at work in 120 nations (Montgomery *et al*., 2003, pp. 196–199). This emergence of trans-national human rights and democratic governance are key features of global citizenship in late modernity theorised by German legal theorist Niklas Luhmann as “world society” (1997). Indeed, many university-based research initiatives and coursework include notions of global citizenship as learning objectives. Australia’s University of New South Wales offers one example with their students becoming “global citizens”:

- Capable of applying their discipline in local, national and international contexts.
- Culturally aware and capable of respecting diversity and acting in socially just/responsible ways.
- Capable of environmental responsibility.

University College London is another institution contributing to the discourse by touting itself as a “world-class, research-led, multi-faculty university, consciously and deliberately global and wide-ranging in its reach and ambition”. University College London (2014) contends their global citizenship pedagogies will produce individuals characterised by the following attributes:

- Critical and Creative Thinkers
- Sensitive to Cultural Difference
- Ambitious, yet Idealistic
- Highly Employable and Ready to Embrace Professional Mobility
- Entrepreneurs with the Ability to Innovate
- Prepared to Assume Leadership Roles

Once again, the assumption that *criticality* in this context is easily understood by corporate educators and the educated needs to be challenged, as our editors have done in the Introduction to this Handbook. I turn here to Giroux’s analysis of American culture (Giroux, 2010a) that could pass for most contemporary industrialised societies around the globe:

Imposed amnesia is the *modus operandi* of the current moment. Not only is historical memory now sacrificed to the spectacles of consumerism, celebrity culture, hyped-up violence and a market-driven obsession with the self, but the very formative culture that makes compassion, justice and an engaged citizenry foundational to democracy has been erased from the language of mainstream politics and the diverse cultural apparatuses that support it. Unbridled individualism along with the gospel of profit and unchecked competition undermine both the importance of democratic public spheres and the necessity for a language that talks about shared responsibilities, the public good and the meaning of a just society (para. 2).
The type of “democratic public spheres” re-imagined here by Giroux offer a fitting description for those being co-constructed by adult mentors in rights-based relationships with young people. A doctoral investigation by Wangbei Ye (2012, pp. 9–34) offers another illustration of this “double hermeneutic” noted by James and Prout (1997, p. 8) in an analysis of school power and democratic citizenship education in Communist China. Drawing on interview, survey and observational data collected from three secondary schools in Shenzhen City, findings from this research indicate (rather counter-intuitively) that some Chinese school practices are congruent with critical pedagogy studies ongoing in other regions of the globe (see Shor and Freire, 1987; Freire, 1970, 1999; Kincheloe, 2010).

The investigator argues that local schools are capable of advancing democratic citizenship education by de-politicizing Communist Party-dominated citizenship education, decentralising curriculum decisions in order to take power from governments, and democratising school culture to better meet the growing needs of Chinese civil society. These practices do not, however, eliminate the CCP’s politically-motivated values, centralised control and non-democratic education management style. Echoing Devine (2002), the study indicates that pedagogical relations even in a communist state may best be understood by viewing power as a semi-emancipatory relationship. It is also worth recalling here that China ratified the CRC in 1992, and submitted its third and fourth reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for review in 2010 (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013).

Writing in Bangkok in 2008 with children across East Asia and the Pacific, the Intergovernmental Working Group on Children’s Participation also tackled the question “Are children citizens?” By observing that all children are born with civil, political, social and economic rights, and these rights enable them to practice their citizenship “at least to some extent”, they claim that children’s entitlement to citizenship does not depend on their future contributions to society since their ability to exercise their rights evolves as they grow and learn (see Article 5 CRC). The researchers also observed that the CRC does not extend many political rights to children, though some countries such as Nicaragua and Iran go beyond to offer the right to vote to some teens. As children’s rights continue to be adapted to the social, political and economic realities of fast-changing societies, they contend, increased demands to extend the right to vote to older youth in the coming decades may be features of regions around the world. “Irrespective of their lack of formal political rights, children are taking part in political actions, movements, campaigns, political and even armed struggles, and are members of political parties” (Interagency Working Group on Children’s Participation, 2008, p. 5; see also Vanobbergen, Chapter 4 in this Handbook).

3.3. What are common dimensions of child citizenship?

Feminist scholar Erica Burman (2001, pp. 14–15) early on explored linkages between women’s and children’s rights by encouraging researchers to engage in a little “cultural and disciplinary tourism and experiment with ideas from outside western psychology”. Lister (2007, p. 693) also claims “lessons may be learned from feminist critiques of mainstream constructions of citizenship, paying particular attention to the question of capacity for citizenship”. Bacon and Frankel (2014) explore meanings of children’s citizenship again from an English context by drawing attention to children’s capacities to generate and negotiate their own and others’ social meanings. They contend that to respect children as contributors, citizenship experiences must be re-configured from structures managed solely by adults in power to include products of personal agency, and involvement in the re-negotiation of norms and values (see also Bacon et al., 2013; Jamieson et al., 2010/2011; MacNaughton et al., 2008; Taylor and Smith, 2009; Tomaševski, 2006; as well as the Intergovernmental Working Group on Child Participation, 2008).
While I acknowledge that concepts such as rights, democracy and citizenship are far from neutral, this section builds on Biesta’s (2008, p. 40) delineation with tendencies he views as problematic within the Scottish national curriculum for citizenship education. He identifies four characteristics – too strong a tendency towards individualism, an all-encompassing concept of citizenship that includes political, economic, social and cultural dimensions, activity with regard to the learning of citizenship through engagement, and finally, their strong emphasis on community. While his final dimension seems to contradict his first, his erudite analysis bears re-emphasising here.

Thus, the Scottish approach is based on what we might call a social rather than an exclusively political conception of citizenship, one which understands citizenship in terms of membership of and concern for the many communities that make up people’s lives. This includes the more narrowly political domain of citizenship, but extends to civil society and potentially includes any community. This is why “active and responsible citizenship” is said to have to do with “individuals having a sense of belonging to, and functioning in, communities”.

(Biesta, 2008, p. 44)

Biesta (2008) further notes the framing of the Scottish curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2004) by CRC texts but the attributes of adult citizenship in stable liberal democracies such as the right to vote, to sign contracts, to serve on juries and the armed forces, and in this case, the need to engage with political parties still seem to hold sway in his analysis. These adult-centric notions have been compared and contrasted in this selection of literature with the following dimensions of active child citizenship most commonly identified:

- Birth registration and the right to acquire a nationality both of which are obliged under CRC Article 7
- The prevention of children from becoming stateless which is a regular problem for children belonging to ethnic minorities, refugee or immigrant children, and for children born in times of conflict and war
- Engagement and application of CRC knowledge in community-based contexts
- Engagement in critical reflection within a local/global nexus through Internet technologies and social media
- Respect for individual and group agency in the exercise of adult power and active participation in decision-making (see also Hart, 2008)
- Access to ever-increasing levels of education
- Finally, the influential role of INGOs and NGOs in adult/child partnerships aimed at democratic, active local/global experiences of citizenship

In the following section, I argue for a relatively untapped framework for making clearer sense of interconnected phenomena within the child rights, human rights and citizenship literature in an effort to create common ground amongst those holding different paradigmatic, philosophical or disciplinary perspectives.

4. Re-theorising child and youth citizenship through transdisciplinarity

Along with Biesta and Lawy (2006), British sociologists O’Byrne (2003) and Turner (1993, 1997, 2006) have gone a considerable distance in re-theorising this discussion with their
contribution of a “sociology of human rights” in the discourse, as has Belgian legal theorist Gert Verschraegen (2002). Nevertheless, viewing any system of interactions associated with “citizenship” or “globalisation” through solely legal, capitalist, environmental, scientific, philosophical, sociological or empirical lenses of any one paradigm obscures the interconnectedness and interdependencies within these discourses (see also Sen, 2004).

This much was clear from investigating contemporary child and youth citizenship in our own community: that the multi-layered phenomena associated with the Kielburger’s Free the Children INGO offer hundreds of thousands of young people critical entry points into inclusive citizenship experiences throughout the world. To understand these phenomena from a perspective that appreciates inherent complexities, I have argued for a “transdisciplinary” standpoint (Mitchell, 2007, 2013; Moore and Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell and Moore, 2012). A similar argument was made by Ang et al. (2006, p. 39) for “transcending disciplines” to fully understand the nature and challenges to young people’s “participation”, among others. In this light, Harvard University’s Steven Pinker (2011, pp. 378–481) has put forth a massive, counter-intuitive thesis contending that the various “rights revolutions” in the latter portion of the twentieth century are playing a pivotal role in the transformation of humanity – a role not yet fully understood.

Transdisciplinarity is defined by Nicolescu (2002) as moving beyond traditional scholarship through a critical way of knowing “that will be essential in the 21st and later centuries” (Koizumi, 2001, p. 219). The call for transdisciplinary research is coming from within and outside the academic machinery, and US-based sociologist Patricia Leavy (2011) has written an introductory text for academics, civil society stakeholders and the general public including chapters on design and evaluation of such projects. She starts by observing how universities and research institutes are hierarchically organized around a disciplinary model of knowledge-building such that different fields are separated from each other – fields such as internet technologies, law, sociology, education, neuro-endocrinology, physics, psychology, biology, business, literature, health studies, history, and so forth. She lists Indigenous, feminist, traditional scientific and social science researchers, along with critical race, queer, postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial theorists, and interdisciplinary fields such as communications, gender, and cultural studies, each having a contemporary view of transdisciplinarity.

Most problems of the twenty-first century are complex systems issues that do not fit into the domain of singular disciplines, Leavy also observes, and trans-global issues such as sustainability, health care, violence against women and children, school-based bullying, and almost any contemporary issue of importance have multiple dimensions that require researchers from different disciplines to come together and share their expertise. It is a problem-centred approach instead of a discipline-centred approach, and thus, generally creates its own criteria and standards because of its unique, emergent qualities including greater legitimisation of knowledge creation by Indigenous stakeholders and other marginalised groups located in non-elite spaces outside the political confines of the increasingly corporate-industrial-academic complex.

Developmental psychologist Jean Piaget along with French sociologist Edgar Morin and Austrian astrophysicist Erich Jantsch are each credited with coining the term simultaneously in the 1970s, but the definition underpinning this section builds upon Romanian quantum physicist Basarab Nicolescu’s elucidation. He observes that the term “retains a certain pristine charm, mostly because it has not yet been corrupted by time” (2002, p. 1), but that time may well be drawing nigh. Nicolescu (1999, p. 4) articulates his view succinctly: “The emergence of a new culture, capable of contributing to the elimination of tensions menacing life on our planet will be impossible without a new type of education which takes into account all the dimensions of the human being”.

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Australian health scientists Albrecht, Freeman and Higginbotham (1998) observe how complexity, change and permanent interrogation are focal points of transdisciplinarity, and while calamity may be nearby, through these lenses we may also observe how human populations are constantly being re-oriented towards interconnectedness. The most critical problems humanity faces today are complex problems, observe Apgar, Argumedo, and Allen (2009, p. 255), and they too observe these times are “characterized by high levels of uncertainty, multiple perspectives and multiple interlinked processes from local to global scales”. These epistemological and methodological shifts can be aimed at resolving such dilemmas, and in an exhaustive review two Canadian health scientists note this definition:

Transdisciplinarity integrates the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context, and transcends their traditional boundaries. The objectives of multiple disciplinary approaches are to resolve real world or complex problems, to provide different perspectives on problems, to create comprehensive research questions, to develop consensus clinical definitions and guidelines, and to provide comprehensive health services. Multiple disciplinary teamwork has both benefits and drawbacks.

(Choi and Pak, 2006, p. 351)

Giroux and Searls Giroux observe that “transdisciplinary work operates at the frontiers of knowledge” (2004, p. 102) prompting teachers and students alike to raise new questions while developing new models of analysis beyond the boundaries of established disciplines. While educators may be forced to work within academic silos, “they can develop transdisciplinary tools to challenge the limits of established fields and contest the broader economic, political, and cultural conditions that reproduce unequal relations of power” (Giroux and Searls Giroux, 2004, p. 102). I contend the CRC has exemplified this challenge since its 1989 ratification through a set of “transdisciplinary tools” for knowledge creation at the borderlands of both childhood and citizenship studies.

5. Some concluding thoughts

In closing, I return to Doek’s (2008, p. xvi) erudite analysis.

The recognition of the child as a citizen requires concrete measures such as an immediate registration at birth and the provision of a nationality. But from the CRC perspective a broader approach is needed. Every child, and not only those with a birth certificate and a nationality, should be treated as a citizen. This means inter alia the full respect for and implementation of the rights of every child in order to allow her/him to live an individual and decent life in society and to facilitate her/his active and constructive participation in the community...

Quite often children are presented as the citizens of tomorrow. It is undoubtedly important that we invest to the maximum extent of our available resources in the implementation of the rights of the child in order – to quote Article 29 CRC – to prepare the child for a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous [sic] people.

But that citizenship starts today and from birth. The Citizen Child is a citizen of today and the full recognition of this fact is one of the fundamental requirements of the CRC.
In light of Doek’s global view of the notion, a critical question for educators throughout the world has been “how to understand and apply the CRC’s interdependent components in the lived experiences of young people?” I have previously characterised these challenges as the what? and so what? phases of implementation, but the question still remains now what? (in Mitchell, 2013, pp. 510, 514). The key dimensions of transdisciplinarity as discussed in the literature – its attempt to manage complexity in local/global contexts; non-academic partnerships; a focus on marginalised populations; application of Indigenous frameworks; and multiple disciplinary, methodological and paradigmatic perspectives on a continuum from positivism to post-modernism – are offered here in response to the final question now what?

The unprecedented electronic evaporation of geopolitical and technological borders has opened up new areas for theorising in a number of related discourses such as childhood, human rights, and citizenship. While the chapter began with an overview of young people’s citizenship with two young archetypes from a particular political and social context, the chapter included contributors to an emergent global assemblage from regions throughout the world. I have also made the case for considering transdisciplinarity in the citizenship debate for both children and adults, and posit at least the potential for the type of critical, democratic post-modernism envisioned by Giroux (2003, 2010a, 2010b), Giroux and Searls-Giroux (2004), Kincheloe (2010), and other critical educators.

The phenomena associated with two different teenaged Nobel nominees, Craig Kielburger and Pakistani student Malala Yousafzai, the latter shot for simply accessing her rights to education as a young woman (Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013), are additional indicators of the ongoing reconstruction of local/global child/adult citizenship and not outliers I would observe. Finally, I would reflect that thinking differently is the genesis of acting differently, and as both Pinker (2011) and Rosling (2006) have observed, it is just as possible that humans may be moving towards interconnectedness, health and well-being, and less violence in this liquid, late modern era of rights revolutions.

Questions for debate and discussion

• What are the opportunities and challenges for adults in any local community to mentor children and young people as active citizens’ within complex, increasingly globalised social, political and economic contexts?
• How do various professional groups – those involved in political systems, physicians, nurses, counsellors, social workers, youth justice authorities, researchers, teachers, and INGO representatives, for example – reflexively engage children and young people in co-constructing experiences of active citizenship?
• What citizenship problems are most suited for CRC research and teaching utilising a transdisciplinary framework?
• What are appropriate indicators for evaluating transdisciplinary human rights projects with and for children?

References


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