Learning through play: active citizenship education for young children

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Why active citizenship education?

• Adults expect children to:
  ✓ value democracy
  ✓ uphold and sustain democracy
  ✓ make sacrifices for the good of the ‘nation’
  ✓ act as agents to transform SA in peaceful and prosperous country
  ✓ become active and responsible citizens
• Age group 9-12 strong force in marketplace - branding
However

- children marginalised group in society

- voices about *hard questions* of political nature not often published
Why is active citizenship education important?

- To sustain democracy nation-states need citizens:
  - committed to democratic way of life
  - understand the cost of its potential loss
Kofi Annan (2001):

- “No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society cuts off from its youth severs its life line.”

- “Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.”
South African democracy

- Celebrated 21st anniversary in 2015
- Negotiated democracy is global benchmark
- Yet, post-apartheid democracy is ‘still fragile civil society’
  - high levels of violence
  - lack of tolerance, racism, xenophobia
  - racial insider and outsider dynamics

- Loss of democratic identification may affect democratic society negatively
SA youth are educated through national curriculum to:

- become the ‘good citizen’
- identify with the democratic values
- obtain knowledge about democracy
- acquire skills for active participation
## Constitution

### National Curriculum: CAPS & 0-4

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bill of Rights</th>
<th>Citizenship Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protects the rights of citizens and democratic values</td>
<td>Facilitates democratic values, knowledge &amp; skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foresees SA free of violence, discrimination and prejudice</td>
<td>Foresees new kind of citizen: responsible, productive</td>
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Research
She is a brave president. When I become president I want to be kind, brave, help people who lives in the street, who are sick. I want to stop violence, crime and all the bad things that is happening today in South Africa. When I be president I want to help the people, and children of today. To help those without education. I want to be a president which is a good one. May all these people support me and to be a honest president. I can help those without education by building my own school and those who don't pay school fees it's fine, but as long as they are having education I really want to.
What have I learned from 9-year olds?

- Children: perceptive citizens, powerful actors
  ‘We [the children] have the right to be heard.’ (P47 – Class 4)
- Acknowledged values of democracy without experiencing many in daily lives (crime, street children)
- Revealed understanding of democracy
- Endorsed diversity
- Lacked knowledge of political nature
- Excluded from participatory skills in democratic processes

- Need an improved citizenship to sustain post-apartheid democracy
How to use this knowledge with the young child?

Holistic approach
Facilitation: Citizenship and democracy

Facilitation of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes
Through:
Balanced approach to Early Childhood Education

- Developmental-constructivist activities (play-based)
- Supplement with skills-based activities (facilitate by including direct/explicit teaching)
What can we do?

Ideas for active citizenship and the young child
(Knowledge-understanding, skills-doing, value-emotional)

- Be a role model: live respectfully (value, understanding, skill)
- Use language: verbalise concepts, actions, prompt discussion, stories, rhymes (understanding)
- Inquiry-based teaching: ask questions (understanding)
- Facilitate responsibility: take care of own environment in classroom, by cleaning-up (value, understanding, skill)
- Facilitate sharing: space, toys, food (value, understanding, skill)
- Use play activities: make-belief, construction
- Interact with parents on effective parenting
Democracy in post-apartheid South Africa

• In 30 years?
• In 50 years?
• In 100 years?
S.A. People