

Civic Action and Learning with a Community of Aboriginal Australian Young Children

Abstract

Civics and citizenship are increasingly used in early childhood education policy, but what citizenship and civic learning can be for young children is under-researched and lacking definition. Drawing from the Australian findings of the major study *Civic Action and Learning with Young Children: Comparing Approaches in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States* this article shares evidence of civic capacities that a community of young Aboriginal Australian children demonstrate in an early childhood education and care centre. Communitarian citizenship theory provides a framework for citizenship that is accessible for young children by focussing on families, communities and neighbourhoods. Cultural readings of illustrative examples of how young Aboriginal children express civic identity, collective responsibility, civic agency, civic deliberation and civic participation are discussed highlighting how cultural values shape civic action. Links to state and national early childhood curricula are provided to guide others to further support civic learning in early childhood education.

Keyword list: Aboriginality, children, civics, citizenship, communitarian, rights, collective responsibility

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We are concerned about the lack of support for children as contributing citizens. Not nation state citizenship but “what it means to be a political agent” (Tjisterman, 2014, p. 178), that is, what it means to have rights and responsibilities in the polis – the public sphere. Particularly participatory rights such as, the right to freedom of opinion (Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989), the right to freedom of expression (Article 13 UNCRC), freedom of thought conscience and religion (Article 14 UNCRC), right to access information and media (Article 17 UNCRC), and rights to actively participate in society (Article 29 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) does not include any reference to responsibilities for children, hence the inclusion Article 29 of UN Declaration of Human Rights, which states “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”. Responsibilities are only inferred for parents, custodians, and families for caring for the child in the UNCRC. Paternalistic and protective discourses vehemently guard children from responsibilities, especially in economically rich countries where there is greater scope for ideas of children as innocent to be indulged, so that children are protected/removed from economic and civic responsibilities. Responsibilities in this line of thinking are understood as obligations, so children are not expected to contribute, because they are understood as not fully developed, that is, “citizens-in-waiting” (Lister, 2007).

But what if responsibility is understood as the ability to respond, as Barad (2010) explains in her theory of agential realism, a matter of inviting, welcoming and enabling the response of the Other. Without responsibilities included with rights, children are excluded from social and political decision-making. Public debates are largely an adult domain. Adults make decisions on children’s behalf – in the family, at schools and in broader society. Yet children are aware of social and political issues and are capable of responding to these issues, through discussion and offering workable suggestions. As Louise found when sharing persona doll stories (author, 2005) and later when she shared a broad range of social justice stories with young children (author, 2010) and as have many others in varying studies with

young children (e.g., Bartlett, 2008, Davis, 2010). Throughout her research, Louise has witnessed young children initiating social actions to redress injustices as active citizenship, as active contributors to the social cohesion of society (Phillips, 2010, 2011, 2014).

The word citizen is increasingly used in early childhood education policy, for example the *Supporting young children's rights Statement of intent 2015-2018* (Australian Human Rights Commission, & Early Childhood Australia, 2015), names “Engaged civics and citizenship” as one of its five themes. The document is a landmark document internationally for embedding actions for children to know their rights (author, 2016). The focus of the Statement is on specifying educator roles, for example, to “recognise children as active citizens who have a role in contributing to their broader community whilst respecting and acknowledging each child’s evolving capacity” (2015, p. 12). Though what children as active citizens can be, is not specified, aside from someone who exercises “civic rights and responsibilities” and is “a participant in the digital world” (p. 13). People generally don’t know what citizenship can be for children, potentially due to the pronounced lack of studies in the early years, as noted in the US Spencer Foundation’s commissioned review of empirical research in civic learning and action research in K-12 education (Flanagan, 2012). To date there have been few studies on young children’s citizenship in early childhood settings (e.g., Page, 2008; Bath & Karlsson, 2016). And further these studies largely worked with middle class well-resourced children.

This noticeable gap in research on children’s citizenship for marginalised children in early childhood settings motivated Jenn Keys Adair (University of Texas) and Jenny Ritchie (University of Victoria, Wellington) and Louise to develop a three-year ethnographic study titled *Civic Action and Learning with Young Children: Comparing Approaches in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States* (funded by the US Spencer Foundation). We sought to understand what citizenship could mean in early childhood by identifying: 1) civic actions that young children demonstrate; 2) educational strategies and/or environments that cultivate authentic civic action in young children in kindergarten settings; and 3) national and cultural conceptualisations of young children and their role in mediating children, family and teacher participation in civic action. Australian findings from this study with and Aboriginal early childhood education and care centre are discussed in this article. To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate citizenship for Aboriginal children in early childhood education.

Citizenship theory

To speak to the discipline of citizenship studies, we assessed the main approaches to citizenship of liberalism, republicanism, communitarianism and cosmopolitanism to identify applicability for young children. Children's economic dependency excluded liberalism, as it constructs citizens as independent wage earners (Lister 2007), further it perceives rights as an entitlement for protection of the individual's interests (Dahlgren, 2006). The recent influence of socio-cultural theory has recognised that cultural and social factors are significant contributors to learning, alerting to the limitations of individualism. Republicanism focuses on civic virtue for nationhood, with strong patriotic identity and fundamentalism (Honohan, 2002). As noted earlier a nation-state view of citizenship was not our concern, but rather actualizing rights and responsibilities in the public sphere. Cosmopolitanism and globalism challenge allegiance solely to nationhood and the exclusionary practice of nationhood citizenship, arguing for support for all citizens across the globe: that is, for global justice and democracy (Tijsterman 2014). Cosmopolitanism advocates for citizens to "feel responsible for and act in line with the well-being of the world as a whole" (p. 187). However, universalism is embedded in a cosmopolitan view, in that all people are seen to have equal rights and shared moral principles. Communitarians, such as Miller (2002) oppose such thinking, acknowledging that the world consists of a plurality of cultures and political societies, whose values vary and can be incommensurable. We too recognize such pluralities in the potentialities of children's civic agency across the globe with cultural values shaping civic practices in communities as evidenced in findings of the international study (Adair, Phillips, Ritchie & Sachdeva, 2016).

Communitarianism argues, "citizenship is rooted in a culturally defined community" and aims for a cohesive and just society (Delanty, 2002, p. 161). Communitarian citizenship is about preservation of identity and participation in the political community. The focus is on purposeful group action to create a cohesive just society through a care and concern for fellow community members expressed through responsibility to the community (Delanty, 2002). Recent theorising of a notion of children's citizenship builds on communitarian understandings of citizenship, making a case for children's agency in the public sphere or wider community (Lister, 2007). Though Millei and Imre (2009) argue that a communitarian version of citizenship is problematic for children, because children do not have legal status or administrative capacity for participation in the public sphere. However, there is a growing movement of community initiatives that actively seek and support children's contributions (e.g., see Sabella, MacNaughton & Smith, 2008; City of Port Philip, 2011). We see that it does have applicability in the polis spaces children do have access to – early childhood

settings. We draw from communitarianism because it is not focussed on the state and economy, but rather families, communities, cultural groups – the public sphere that children have access to and are included in, and its attention to group action. Early childhood settings are, for many children, their first entry into the *polis* (a community of unknown others) (MacNaughton, 2007), thereby offering a shared space in which children can explore negotiation of group action.

Two key principles of communitarianism guided our theoretical framing of citizenship: 1. that the main aim of citizenship is social cohesion through care and concern for fellow community members and responsibility to the community; and 2. that the citizen is socially constructed and embedded in a cultural context (Delanty, 2002). In our readings of communitarian citizenship literature, we identified five key concepts.

1. *Civic identity* (who am in the community), attending to the preservation of identity in community participation.
2. *Collective responsibility* (care for others), acknowledging the care and concern for others—responsibility to the community.
3. *Civic agency* (what can I do), recognising the possibilities and parameters of action of members in community participation.
4. *Civic deliberation* (considering different points of view), supporting consideration of varying values in fluid and unfixed communities of the post-modern-world
5. *Civic participation* (inclusion & action), focusses on collective action for the good of all in the community.

These concepts provided a guide for our ethnographic observations of marginalised young children in early childhood education settings in three nations, to explore and define possibilities of what we witnessed these young children demonstrate in their negotiations of sharing spaces with groups of others. The following details the tri-nation research design, and ethical issues of researching with an Aboriginal community, before sharing findings of children's demonstrated civic actions at an Aboriginal child care centre.

Research design

Six months was spent engaging in participant-observation (documented via detailed field notes and video recording) of children's participation at a kindergarten in each respective nation. Video footage was played back to the children, educators and families of each site, to collectively share interpretation, and site-selected video footage was shared with the other sites for tri-nation interpretative dialogues, a methodology referred to as video-cued

ethnography (Tobin & Hsueh, 2007). Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America were selected to compare how these nations' different approaches to cultural marginalisation in early childhood influence citizenship for young children in culturally marginalised communities. We knew that support for young children as citizens was only emerging in these three nations' early childhood education policy, curricula, literature and discourse, with most empirical examples of children as active citizens being located in well-resourced communities (e.g., Bath & Karlsson, 2016; Page, 2008; Phillips, 2010, 2011). We then wondered what was possible for first nations' children, embedded in intergenerational trauma from a legacy of colonisation and institutional racism. This article focuses on learnings from spending six months with an Aboriginal Australian governed early childhood and care centre in a regional Aboriginal community.

Entering Aboriginal community methodology

Scientific research has a legacy of tyranny for colonised peoples across the globe (Smith, 2012). Aboriginal children have been part of the Aboriginal Australian experience of being over-researched, without permission, consultation or involvement of Aboriginal people generating mistrust, animosity and resistance in communities. Researching young children (generally) can and often is a colonising practice, through unequal power structures with adults determining what, how and who are researched, often subjectifying and oversimplifying children for adult knowledge gain (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). With grave concern and sensitivity to these injustices, relationship building was foregrounded over research agendas. In respect for community protocols and cultural safety, Louise discussed the project with Kerryn (a Luritja woman) who had a six-year plus relationship with Buranba¹ child care community as a mentor. Kerryn discussed Louise's story and the project with the community and early childhood leaders at Buranba and they expressed interest in hearing more.

Buranba is a budget-based funded long day care program² that was established by Aboriginal women in the community. It is one of the few Aboriginal governed child care facilities in Australia. We visited a few times across 15 months to talk with staff and community about the centre, community, early childhood education and the project. We explained the project in terms of children having a voice, rights and being active contributors

¹ Community selected pseudonym meaning "westerly winds" in community language.

² A national government funding scheme for operational funding of the service due to the regional community's reduced resources.

to community. This lengthy process of talking and meeting was necessary to build community trust and gain consent from community, before obtaining ethical clearance approval from The University of Queensland's Behavioural and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee. Then we sought individual educator, child and family consent for participation with a kindergarten group of 4-5 year olds. To decolonise conventional research methodologies, in which the researcher must not influence the research context and participants are surveilled as specimens (Smith, 2012), we became involved in the everyday practices of Buranba. We are both early childhood teachers, so we joined in the children's activities and co-played building relationships and getting to know the children. We played with the children and took part in the daily caring activities. We did everything the educators did. This is a core cultural value – if you are there - you are responsible, so you contribute. After a few days, we introduced the video camera – showing the children what it did and asking their verbal consent to be filmed. We also had a consent form with pictures asking the children to tick what they agreed to. The camera's built in projector, enabled footage to easily be played back to the children at group time, so they could see and comment on what we were doing. To nurture the core values of reciprocity and participation in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (NHMRC, 2007; Australian Institute of Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012), we did what they did – so they did what we did – cameras were shared with the children, along with our notebooks. Consultation with children, educators, and community members occurred throughout the design, data collection and dissemination of the project and will continue to occur, as the relationships nurtured are for life.



Figure 1 Children using researcher notebooks



Figure 2 Children using a camera

Observed civic actions

With the defined frame of civic concepts of civic identity, collective responsibility, civic agency, civic deliberation and civic participation we journaled and videoed children's observed civic actions. We were mostly located with the three-to-four-year old class, but as the centre (provides care and education for babies to five year olds) operates as a community, we spent time with each age group. Evidence of each of the five civic concepts, opens with a citizenship theory explanation, then the tabled illustrative data samples are discussed through cultural readings collated from conversations with Aboriginal researchers, educators and community members about observations and video recordings of children's civic actions. These cultural readings offer explanations of how community cultural values permeate children's civic actions. Then key focuses and learning areas in the Foundations for Success³ (The State of Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2016) are identified to illustrate how civic learning is central to early childhood education in Australia, and to support readers to further evidence civic learning and action in their practice. Though each concept is discussed one at a time, as a means of organising and explaining the evidence, each concept does not operate in isolation, many observed actions and curricula references cut across multiple civic concepts. The listed of observed civic actions are not by any means complete lists of what was observed across six months, but instead illustrate an overview of

³ A resource developed to support quality programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that guide achievement of the outcomes of the national Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009).

these children’s main civic actions demonstrated.

Civic identity

Civic identities are personal and group identities formed and negotiated in relation to one’s presence, role, and participation in public life (Troup, 2010). Across the six months of being with the Buranba children they demonstrated their civic identities in varied ways. Table 1 provides a list of the most resonant practices along with data examples. Buranba is in a town populated with just under 2000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When children start at the centre they usually know other children through extended family and kinship ties. Their extended family is their community – who they belong to. As Coco (educator) explains: “we are all one family here in this community”. Children already settled at the centre look after their newly enrolled sibling or cousin, by ensuring they are included in play and sitting with them at meal times (see 30/7/2015 & 18/11/2015 entries). After spending time at Buranba this widens to include all the children in their class group and even the whole centre. The children also frequently referred to key sites (see 11/6/2015, 12/6/2015, 5/10/2015, 7/10/2015 entries) and events in their local community and relished Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultural experiences through stories, songs, and art (see 11/11/2015 entries). Civic identity meant knowing, honouring and celebrating kinship ties, community and Aboriginality. As Sylvia (Elder) proclaimed: “you can’t go forward without knowing where you’re coming from”.

Civic concept	Practices	Data examples
Civic identity	Identifying self and others	<i>Naming self and each other in video clips (11/6/2015)</i> <i>Introducing classmates to researchers (30/7/2015)</i>
	Naming community to which they belong	<i>Jack declares community he lives in (7/10/2015)</i> <i>Jack and Talia proudly point out Aboriginal country where their family members come from on Aboriginal Australia map (5/10/2015)</i>
	Pride in achievements	<i>Jack climbed tree I took photo he then said “Show it to the other kids hey” (7/10/2015)</i>

Naming places in their community	<i>On community walk children pointed out community cultural centre, shop and helicopter landing pad. (11/6/2015)</i>
Honouring cultural responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures	<i>Jedda points at photo of yarning circle⁴ and says “not allowed” (12/06/2015) Aiden’s brother cousin minds chair for him at lunch table (30/7/2015) Jakirra gives two handfuls of new sand to her sister through fence (18/11/2015)</i>
Group identity	<i>Jack, Quincey, Cedric all had headbands tied around their heads and climbed up a tree: “we are turtles” (18/08/2015)</i>
Interest in cultural heritage	<i>Children keenly watch and ask questions on Aboriginal cave painting in First footprints DVD (11/11/2015) Children fascinated when Kerry grinds rock to make ochre paint. Talia proudly tells brother we made paint from rocks (11/11/2015)</i>

Table 1: Evidence of civic identity observed

The cultural nuances of civic identity are supported through the Foundations for Success (The State of Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2016) learning area of “**being proud and strong**”, which is about children developing “pride and strength in personal and cultural identity and sharing a sense of belonging and connectedness”. The children at Buranba demonstrated pride in their culture and connectedness to kin and country.

Collective responsibility

Social responsibility is frequently referred to in citizenship literature, particularly in communitarian citizenship. In recognition of a biocentric world, with multiple living beings (not just humans), we use the term collective responsibility to infer that responsibility is shared, not just for other humans, rather responsibility for all living beings, environments and objects.

The children at Buranba demonstrated a strong sense of collective responsibility for each other, and the environment (see Table 2). Their care for each other was particularly

⁴ The yarning circle is circle of stones in one of the playgrounds, set up to provide space for the Aboriginal cultural practice of yarning, which refers to community talking through issues in a dialogic and collaborative way, following cultural protocols (e.g., of not interrupting an Elder).

resonant, with this by far being the most frequently demonstrated civic concept. As Janelle (educator) shared: “we care in this community”, and [removed], an Elder, in the community explained: “Cos you’re not being a proper black fella, unless you think of others in your mob”. Children, who have barely begun to walk, reach out to comfort crying babies. Older children know it is their responsibility to care and look out for younger children and generally all children know to look out for their mob⁵ (see 11/6/2015). Across our 30 plus visits, we never saw a child left out or being ostracised. Even when a child was really angry, when instincts might suggest it would be safer to stay clear, another child would come by and offer them a play item, food or just watch them from a far until they settled (see 11/6/2015).

There was also a frequent demonstration of collective responsibility for cleaning, especially amongst the girls (see 19/08/2015 & 6/10/2015). Wet wipes were frequently used to wipe down doll beds, clean mirrors, and tables. The most notable was when all ten children (aged 1-5) in the Echidna room followed two 4-year-old girls’ lead in wiping paint off a table with wet wipes (19/08/2015). Kerryn, read the recurrent cleaning practice from her own experiences of child rearing in community and as embodied intergenerational links of Aboriginal people having to prove themselves and be house proud even if the benefits of owning home and land in a government controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community cannot be achieved. The responsibility of looking out for family and the community is vital for survival to ensure families stay together in government monitored environments. The children probably do not fully know the breadth of the intergenerational oppression, it is more likely they are imitating adult carers in their families. The community grew out of a mission history. All houses in the community are public housing, no one owns their own home, so families are regularly subjected to inspections, and Elders in the community readily recall the humiliation of public hygiene inspections and violent subsequent punishments in the dormitories of the mission (e.g., see Hegarty, 1999).

The Buranba children demonstrated diligent care for the shared environment and resources. For example, Ezra carefully used a project camera as per instructions, but also recognizes that he has responsibility to the group to share back with them the footage (see Figure 1). The cameras were not understood as equipment for self-interest, but rather for collective interest. Collective interests, rights and responsibilities were readily demonstrated by the children, nurtured by the community cultural value of ‘thinking of your mob’, as evidenced in frequent examples of children identifying (11/6/2015, 18/8/2015, 11/11/2015)

⁵ Aboriginal Australian term that refers to kin and community.

and removing hazards (1/10/2015) in the environment. They also took collective responsibility in provisioning the environment (10/6/2015) and storing care materials (30/9/2015).

Civic concept	Practices	Data examples
Collective responsibility	Providing comfort to someone hurt	<i>Aiden was crying with sore feet. Jakirra sat next to him and stroked his toes offering a sympathetic look and “aww” (12/06/2015)</i>
	Sharing food	<i>Jo-Kayla shared the last cracker with Jack and Quincey (6/10/2015)</i>
	Cleaning shared spaces	<i>Kylea wet paper towel and cleaned mirror in bathroom (6/10/2015) After painting cardboard shapes, one by one all the children in the Echidna room (mixed age group) get wet wipes to wipe paint off table (19/08/2015)</i>
	Providing for others	<i>Ezra initiated getting a cup of water for his classmates at lunch (7/10/2015) Add more examples</i>
	Looking out for each other	<i>Antony crying – Alisa watched him through him through the whole time he was distressed (11/6/2015)</i>
	Caring for shared equipment	<i>Care for cameras entrusted to them on walk (11/6/2015) Jack scaled fence and collected toy car and all other toys that had been thrown over there (12/6/2015)</i>
	Identifying health concerns/hazards in environment	<i>Ezra pointed out dirt on hospital floor when we went for community visit (11/6/2015) Toddler running around with large stick, when he dropped it, Quincey immediately picked it up and gave it to me. I asked: “what should I do with it?” Quincey and others said throw it over the fence to neighbourhood footpath (18/08/2015) Jo-Kayla quickly yelped “Magpie” alerting others to get away as a magpie swooped in close to the children.</i>

		<i>Tai Tai squealed ants pointing out about 20 ants crawling on Louise's feet. (11/11/15)</i>
	Removing hazard	<i>Tailia accidentally knocked drawing pins on floor Kylea picked them up (1/10/2015)</i>
	Helping locate other's belongings	<i>Tammy located Kylea her hoodie and she helped her put it on (1/10/2015)</i>
	Self-initiate setting up routine care resources	<i>Kylea managing the water set up at the playground, getting out the cups. Jakirra set up the bin without being asked (10/06/15)</i> <i>Saul, Aiden, Jack, Cedric and Jakirra all started to pack away beds. Jack, Cedric and Jakirra worked as a team to carry one bed together. Aiden and Saul carried a bed each on their own. (30/9/15)</i>

Table 2: Evidence of collective responsibility observed

In the Foundations for Success, such acts of collective responsibility are acknowledged in the focus of “**positive relationships**” in the learning area of “**being an active participant**”, which sees children relate to others with care, respect and empathy, and are responsible and respectful of environments.

Civic agency

Civic agency emphasises not only individual capacities and skills but also skilful, imaginative, collective capacity and action to act on common challenges across differences (Boyte, 2008). For young children, we understand civic agency as what they believe they can do as individuals and collectively within their communities for change. How environments enable such is of prominent consideration.

Civic agency at Buranba was demonstrated mostly through physical movement, specifically demonstrated in three out the four observed practices listed in Table 3. We listened to what their bodies were saying what they wanted to do and how they negotiated the environment. The children actively resisted most practices of corralling e.g., group time, sitting on chairs. The children desired to move in, with, over and under the physical environment (see 7/10/2015, 11/6/2015). They were not disembodied, as is often demanded in western education, which privileges theory over practice, on the understanding that the body is not involved in cognition (O’Loughlin, 1998, 2006). The children at Buranba are very

much embodied – as they readily responded to “what can my body do in this space”, as opposed to “what am I meant to do”. The children’s desire to choose how and when and where they move was obstructed by multiple fenced partitioning imposed through building codes (11/06/2015, 4/09/2015) regulating the physical environment and child and educator engagement with the environment. Enabling environments for children’s civic agency in child care requires further attention to flexibility of usage and exploration.

In consideration of place (environment), Gruenewald (2003) offers a critical pedagogy of place to decolonise and reinhabit. That is, to recognise and dislodge externally imposed dominant ideas, assumptions and ideologies (Smith & Katz, 1993), and see legislated fencing and age group segregation as colonising forces that limit and control children’s civic agency to be with family and to move and explore freely the potentialities of the environment. To reinhabit, depends on “identifying, affirming, conserving, and creating those forms of cultural knowledge that nurture and protect people and ecosystems” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 318-319). The children play freely in the street when not at Buranba. From about age three, the children independently walk the community, and by nine to twelve years of age they have a home range of independent mobility of 7.8 sq km (Kreutz, 2014). This is accepted community practice. There is no through traffic in the community of less than two thousand and community looks out for each other.

The children at Buranba demonstrated civic agency through voice, but largely through whole of body movement, as not just being with other humans, but being with animals, trees, and built structures. Embodiment plays a significant role in cultivating understanding and/or explaining understanding of how things relate to each other (see Merleau-Ponty, 2004), so that through embodiment “we are in an open dialogue with the world we inhabit” (Stolz, 2015, p. 485). The legacies of intergenerational colonisation imprinted on young bodies’ motivations for civic agency (e.g., the desire for freedom to wander far and wide).

Civic concept	Practices	Data examples
Civic agency	Seizing available resources/ opportunities	<i>Children run through opening to next door yard when gate open (4/09/2015) Jakirra and Saul get brushes, rollers and chairs for painting for Jacenia, Raina, Talia and Archy (11/11/2015)</i>

	To freely move and interact with the physical environment	<i>Jakirra spots a small dog in neighbouring yard, scales fence, grabs dog then climbs back over fence with the dog (11/6/2015) Running around the back of tool shed, climbing trees, chasing dogs when on community walk (7/10/2015)</i>
	Voicing concern	<i>Tammy cleaning tables and sweeping crumbs with dustpan and brush while Saul and Quincey eating crackers. Saul thumped his fist down on cracker and growled “Tammy go and get that over there”. (5/11/2015) Jedda yelled at boys under tarp: “Get out” – because she wanted to go under there and they were kicking and fighting too much (12/6/2015) Ezra told others to stay back when he spotted beetle to ensure it didn’t get squashed (12/11/2015)</i>
	Seeking adult help on behalf of group	<i>Saul took me over to rope ladder that was wound up pointing for it to come down for he and his friends to use (18/8/2015)</i>

Table 3: Evidence of civic agency observed

In the Foundations for Success, such illustrations of civic agency are reflected in the “**confidence and resilience**” focus of the learning area “**being proud and strong**”, which is about “children making decisions and choices” and having “courage and resilience to persevere and manage change and challenge”. The children at Buranba, largely expressed their confidence and resilience through their strong young bodies.

Civic deliberation

Civic deliberation is an important educative process for building openness to multiple perspectives and negotiation. Englund (2000) advocates civic deliberation in education for the “ongoing meaning-creating processes of will-formation” (p. 312), that is, the process of building collective thought, care and action about an issue.

Though schools and early childhood settings are recognised as sites for building civic deliberation skills, through critical discussions of facts and values, to evaluate and judge in public discussions in Western democratic societies (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995), educator facilitated group discussion and shared decision-making were not prominent at Buranba. In citizenship theory, deliberation implies lengthy discussions and debates about issues,

which was not noticeably evident amidst the children, so at first it seemed civic deliberation was not prevalent. Then on considering the purpose of civic deliberation for cultivating openness to diverse perspectives and negotiating collective will, many occasions were noted in which the children at Buranba could reach consensus through a quick nod to seek agreement on an idea and to communicate agreement (see 11/11/15 & 6/10/15 entries in Table 4). Further, they were swift at shifting dissent to consensus through quick playful offers to shift attention away from conflict (see 11/11/15; 12/06/15 & 30/07/15 entries). Kerry and I marvelled at the efficiency of these young children’s consensus reaching. Civic deliberation for children at Buranba was largely non-verbal, often seamless and exceedingly expeditious.

Civic concept	Practices	Data examples
Civic deliberation	Respond to disagreement with an alternative offer Consider other perspectives	<i>Jacenia and Jakirra at water trough. Jacenia washing containers. Jakirra fishing containers with sieve then splashes Jacenia. Jacenia says: “Nooo” then offers “Hey we jump in here hey?” and nods and they both climb into the water trough (11/11/15)</i> <i>Aiden and Ezra are sitting next to each other building separate block towers. Aiden runs out of blocks and reaches for Ezra’s, who pulls his away saying: “no”. Then Aiden point his tower at Ezra’s making shooting noises. They both ‘play fight’ with block towers. (12/06/15)</i> <i>Aiden pushes a football through a hole in the climbing frame and when it falls to the ground he runs to grab it. Jack then tackles Aiden. Aiden tries to push Jack away, then Jack snuggles his head into Aiden’s belly pretending to be a cat “meow”. Quincey joins in play snuggling and patting Jack the cat. Aiden happily enjoys the cat play. (30/7/15)</i>
	Vary language to support agreement	<i>Jakirra, Jack, Aiden and Tailia are sitting in the tyre covered by a tarpaulin that Jedda carefully places over them. Aiden pokes his head up. “Get under” Jedda instructs, but Aiden says “no”. “Get under please” Jedda then offers and Aiden gets under as asked. (31/07/15)</i>

	Making a collective decision	<p><i>Jo-Kayla and Javonnah work together to cover tarp over large tractor tyre taking time to get position right then give each other the thumbs up (30/7/2015)</i></p> <p><i>Quincey and Jack pointing to different places they want to go for a walk on map of town then point at area that I read “football field”, they both affirm “Yeah let’s go there” with big smiles and nods (6/10/2015)</i></p>
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Table 5: Evidence of civic deliberation observed

In the Foundations for Success, civic deliberation is reflected in the focus of “**listening and negotiation**” in the learning area of “**being an active participant**”, through children “becoming aware of fairness” and “of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation”.

Civic participation

Civic participation in communitarianism refers to genuine civic action in pursuit of the general good of all within a community (see Pateman, 1970); good as in what is agreed and sought after by all, not morally judged. Community participation (a more commonly used term of civic participation) is cultivated through group and community belonging, so that “the more people affect each other, communicate and hold each other accountable, in short, the more people share a common life, the more obligations they have towards each other” (Tijsterman, 2014, p. 189).

The children at Buranba regularly initiated collaborations for the good of all, as evidenced in the examples in Table 5. One child would start an idea, such as, packing away a bed (3/09/2015), tying down a tarp (12/06/2015) or tying bikes together (30/07/2015) then others readily followed, reading body and environment cues for when assistance was needed. An individual would rarely struggle for long before another child would assist. The resilience of the cultural value of collectivism is viscerally felt as noted earlier “You’re not being a proper blackfella if you don’t think of others in your mob”, as Ezra did in immediately sharing his video footage back to the group (11/06/2015). An Aboriginal Australian worldview of shared identity and communal and familial obligations supports community

participation for collective interest or will (Maddison, 2009). The sense of collectivism runs deep.

The children’s acts of civic participation were not adult provoked or encouraged. The educators were present, providing resources and comfort and care as needed, but they did not intervene with suggestions or provocations, only reminders of safety cautions, creating a reassuring space for the children to initiate, negotiate, and act together. In a chapter on Aboriginal children’s play, Veronica Ecenarro (a Bardi woman) (2010) explained that Indigenous adults trust older children to look after younger children and freely permit children to act out real-life situations that involve risks.

Civic concept	Practices	Data examples
Civic participation	Inclusion of others	<i>Ezra filmed class group when we visited hospital then showed them the footage through viewer. (11/6/2015)</i>
	Working collectively to complete community routine tasks	<i>After rest time, Saul, Quincey, Jack, Aiden and Jakirra carry their stretcher beds to storage room to pack away. Jack turned storage room light on. They worked in pairs one at each end to stack them. (3/09/2015)</i>
	Working together to shared goal	<i>Jedda and Jakirra tried to tame a silver tarp by grabbing a corner each and pulling it down to the ground. There was much laughter and offering each other commands: “you get it” “get on top”. They both willingly obliged to each other’s commands. (12/06/15) Mia, Dean, Lea, Tina and Melly worked together to tie skipping rope between 2 bikes and then tie another rope to front of first bike. Mia then pulled the rope to pull the 2 bikes along as train. (30/7/2015)</i>

Table 5: Evidence of civic participation observed

Civic or community participation is the overall purpose of the Foundations for Success, learning area of **being an active participant**, and Learning outcome 2 of the EYLF “**children are connected with and contribute to their world**”. Attention to these curricula goals recognise and support young children’s contributions to agreed community goals.

Civic learning starts from birth

Most of the above examples were from two to four year olds. Buranba educators see civic learning as a life-long continuum for all. Most of the educators are Aboriginal and live in the community, and their children, nieces, nephews, cousins attend the centre. Everyone knows each other in the community and which family each child belongs to. Educators and children visit other rooms to be with family members. Community members visit throughout the day, including Elders and members of the aged care facility next door. Different ages and generations intermingle as part of daily routines with joy and care for each other. If citizenship is about what it means to have rights and responsibilities in the public sphere, then this community provides a space that is just one step beyond family – a community of known others rather than unknown others, where children can enact shared community values.

In seeking to understand what citizenship is for young Aboriginal children, the project team found that community values define civic actions and the Foundations for Success offer framework to keep them alive and growing. For civic identity, it involves “knowing where you’re coming from”, that is, knowing, honouring and celebrating Aboriginality, lore, kinship ties, community – which resonates with the learning area of “**being proud and strong**”. For collective responsibility, it is about “thinking of others in your mob” to enact the “**positive relationships**” focus in the learning area of “**being an active participant**”. For civic agency, it’s about expressing collective capacity and action to act on common challenges for co-existence with all others (people, animals, plants, and environment) through strong young bodies moving freely that reflects the “**confidence and resilience**” focus of the learning area “**being proud and strong**”. For civic deliberation, consensus is largely reached through quick nods and conflicts shifted through playful alternative offers that are seamless, the focus of “**listening and negotiation**” in the learning area of “**being an active participant**” sustains and enhances understandings of different perspectives, fairness and reciprocating rights and responsibilities. For civic participation, it is about readily pitching in for what is collectively agreed upon, as children enact being **active participants** who are **connected to country** and **contribute to community**. Through celebrating these ways of being, the place of cultural knowledge in the meaning making of citizenship for young children is affirmed and conserved.

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