

Young children as citizens: Learning from practice in the early childhood setting

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Abstract: This paper examines enactments of young children's citizenship in early childhood settings in England, which is an under researched area, in this study young children are positioned as social actors, competent and capable of making decisions and enacting citizenship. Values, child rights and citizenship are interconnected and often inseparable in practice. A mixed methods multiple-case study was conducted in England across several early childhood settings in the private and independent sector. Our findings indicate that young children enact citizenship through micro acts embedded into their day-to-day activities; such acts are often spontaneous in response to events or interactions. These are often pro-social in nature comprised as behaviours such as helping or showing concern for others. Our findings give visibility to the distinctive ways in which young children may enact citizenship including, for example, physical expressions.

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Introduction

This paper aims to extend knowledge of young children's citizenship in the early childhood setting. We understand citizenship as a contested concept that risks positioning children as needing socialising or educating as future citizen (Bath & Karlsson, 2016). Here, citizenship in early childhood settings, arises from children and adults actively constituting a community informed by a range of values including democracy, care and discipline (Johansson, 2018). A focus on achieving a greater understanding of young children's citizenship in the early childhood setting is significant at this time, when their status as citizens is under attack in the public domain. A troubling example of such an attack is the public protest directed at President Donald Trump during his visit to London in 2019. Here protesters appropriate the image of baby in the form of an inflatable balloon depicting the 'Trump Baby'. Robson (2022) critiques the complex ways in which this act of protest diminished young children's status as citizens. Protesters exercise power over the image of the child through degrading insults and acts of the humiliation in both the physical space of public protest and on social media. Robson argues that adults control the baby by imposing the values of hate, greed, authoritarianism, unfairness and anger associated with Trump's authoritarianism. Such portrayals of childhood 'work to denigrate and limit ideas about child/hood within the public imagination' (Osgood et al., 2022, p. 199). This theme of the fragility of young children's citizenship also emerges from recent research into their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Pascal and Bertram (2021) argue that although the pandemic created multiple and complex challenges for children their voices are frequently excluded in public domain. They suggest that young children have an emerging civic awareness and are capable of sharing views and feelings about how the restrictions, imposed by governments, affected their lives. Taking action to ensure young children's voices are heard would, they assert, be consistent with the values of inclusion, democracy and solidarity. Similarly, Dahlberg et al.'s (2013) vision for the early childhood institution brings to the foreground the possibility of democratic relationships, where children as social actors participate fully in the life of the early childhood setting. In this context a specific project for the early childhood setting is 'the establishing and strengthening of social networks of relationships,

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between children, between adults..... and between children and adults.’ (pp. 84-85). They suggest that such an approach would foster the values of trust, cooperation and solidarity that are central to young children’s citizenship. Within the field of Citizenship Studies, the emergence of ‘lived citizenship’ (Kallio et al., 2020) as a conceptual framework prompts consideration, in our study, of two different but connected dimensions of young children’s citizenship. By understanding the early childhood setting as spatial contexts in which citizenship is enacted we also give visibility to the intersubjective relationships between adults and children or between children and their peers. Empirical research (e.g. Puroila et al. (2016) and Palmadotirr (2018)) explores the complex ways in which values based pedagogies in early childhood nurture citizenship for young children aged birth to three. More recently Ryder’s (2021) study, in the context of England, offers a further perspective by shaping new understandings of how an emphasis on pro-social behaviours in early childhood settings may nurture children’s citizenship.

We understand prosocial behaviour as a complex construct, comprised of multiple behaviours and traits. These evolve as children develop cognitive, social, emotional and communication skills and competencies. Such behaviours may include helping, caring, cooperation and empathy (Eisenberg et al., 2015) and are, we assert, an expression of values. The extent to which prosocial behaviours and actions are exhibited are often dependent on factors, such as the child’s temperament and personality, how the child is raised or cultural and social influences. In the context of formal early childhood provision, Ryder (2021) articulates that prosociality constitutes broader actions and systems, notably children’s agency, citizenship and democracy. In this paper we are concerned with the enactments of citizenship by children between birth and three in the early childhood setting as knowledge of this aspect of children’s lives is still forming in the academic literature and in practice contexts.

This paper begins by conceptualising young children’s citizenship in the context of early childhood practice and foregrounds existing knowledge emerging from research of young children’s enactments of citizenship. An account of the methods for the fieldwork follows. Data is presented as a series of vignettes providing insights into children’s enactment of citizenship through their pro-social behaviours. In our discussion we analyse the learning about children’s citizenship as it emerges from the vignettes informed by theoretical perspectives on citizenship, values, rights and prosociality. In our concluding remarks we consider the implications for practice with children aged birth to 3.

In the field of early childhood studies there is a diversity of terminology applied in scholarship which reflects the complexity of provision for education and care of children. In this paper we consistently use the term *early childhood setting* to represent a location in which children experience education or care or both. Similarly, there is a diversity in the way in which young children are described in scholarly writing including for example, babies and toddlers. Here we adopt the term *young children* to represent the birth to three years age group unless other scholars use different terminology in reporting their empirical research.

Citizenship as Informed by Child Rights

In the field of early childhood the conceptualisation of young children as citizens is informed by a sociology of childhood where children are positioned as competent social actors with agency (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997). Such a position places a responsibility on adults to respect children’s social worlds and recognise the diverse ways in which young children may exercise agency in the early childhood setting. Similarly, young children are positioned as rights holders through the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child [UNComRC], 1989). General comment No. 7 (UNComRC, 2005) clarified that ‘young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a critical period for the realisation of these rights’(p. 1). More recently recognition of children’s role as rights defenders has also emphasised their active role as citizens (UNComRC, 2018). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child [hereafter, the *Committee*] encourages those caring for young children to recognise them as social actors from the beginning of their lives and to acknowledge their ‘specific interests and capacities’(UNComRC, 2005, p. 2) In this way adults can realise children’s rights by ‘respecting the distinctive interests, experiences and challenges facing every young child’(UNComRC, 2005, p. 3). From the Committee’s perspective this means young children are

active members of their community where they establish relationships with their peers and adults. It is in the formation of relationships, they assert, that young children begin to realise rights; young children learn to 'negotiate and co-ordinate shared activities, resolve conflicts, keep agreements and accept responsibility for others' (UNComRC, 2005, p. 3). However, Quennerstedt's (2016) findings provide an alternate understanding as to how young children enact human rights. She found that human rights become part of and affect young children's everyday practices in the early childhood setting. Findings from her research indicated that three rights holders' position were visible in children's actions; they were ownership, influence and equal value. In this way complex relationships and positions adopted by children have the potential to shape young children's knowledges of citizenship and affirms their status as citizens.

Values in the Early Childhood Setting and the Development of Young Children's Citizenship

The role of values in the development of children's citizenship in the early childhood setting is an ongoing theme in the literature (e.g. Palmadotirr, 2018; Puroila et al., 2016). Values here are understood as the 'guiding principles in life' (Schwartz, 2012, p. 17); they are the standards or criteria on which humans select or evaluate actions and events (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Values are central in developing children's understandings of citizenship; for example, the values of fairness, empathy, respect and social justice contribute to a sense of belonging to a community and a shared humanity (Osler, 2015; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). They are a 'lived relational phenomena' (Puroila et al., 2016, p. 154) and an 'entangled' (p.154) element within the daily life of the early childhood setting embodied in the actions of practitioners and children. Johansson (2018, p. 4) highlights that early childhood practitioners address 'values and value conflicts' every day in their work with colleagues and children in the early childhood setting. Johansson found a range of values present in early childhood settings that nurture young children's citizenship. She conceptualised these fields as clusters of related values, including for example, the ethics of care and safety, democracy, rights and responsibilities and discipline. Each value field informs actions for both the individual child, adults and the early childhood community. Empirical research in the early childhood setting has revealed the complex ways in which values shape children's enactments of citizenship. For example, Palmadotirr (2018) considers how young children express and make sense of value conflicts in their play. Such conflicts related to rights, belonging and discipline. The findings revealed how young children used physical and verbal communication to express their perspectives and were competent in resolving conflicts in their play. Here conflicts provide valuable learning opportunities relating to the values of democracy and solidarity; she found children asserted their right to influence the rules that governed the setting. Knowledge of children's enactment of values in the early childhood setting provides insights into the sophisticated ways that values inform children's enactments of citizenship.

Nurturing Citizenship in Early Childhood Practice – The Role of Adults

Young children's standing as both holders and defenders of rights has implications for practitioners working with young children. MacNaughton et al. (2007) propose that adults working with young children should question and critique practices that diminish children's agency and rights. This process may lead to the establishment of collaborative and democratic relationships between adults and children that have the potential to advance citizenship. For practitioners in early childhood this is a complex and ongoing task as children's capacity to exercise agency will develop overtime and may be context specific. Lansdown (2005) highlights the challenge for all adults working with children to meet their responsibilities of fulfilling, respecting and protecting children's rights whilst being sensitive to children's evolving capacities. In this way practitioners have a key role in implementing pedagogies that develop children's capacity to exercise agency (Jerome & Starkey, 2022). Recent empirical research by Puroila et al. (2018) found that educators had a critical awareness of the values implicit in early childhood practice, for example the emphasis on the value of effectiveness inhibited the development of dialogical relationships with young children. Practitioners engaged in a pedagogical journey that reframed their relationships with children through an 'armchair pedagogy' (p. 31). Such a pedagogy privileged the practices of 'encountering, co-presence and listening' (p. 31); in this way practitioners engaged with the concerns of children but also

privileged the value of care rather than the function of care. By developing an 'unhurried presence' (p. 33) in the early childhood setting adults were able to realise caring values and in turn provide opportunities for children to exercise citizenship. Similarly, Moxnes and Aslanian's (2022) study in Kindergartens in Norway, considered how young children's ability to enact agency is affected by their teachers' perceptions of toddler's thinking. They found that 'toddler's thinking inspired moments of diffraction and deep thinking' (p. 285) in the Kindergarten that disrupted habitual beliefs in early childhood practice about time, its link to efficiency and assumptions of linear thinking. They emphasise the important role for adults to engage with toddlers thinking time as it opens up possibilities for different ways of 'worlding together' (p. 285).

From our reading of the literature three significant themes arise relating to children's status and experiences as citizens arise in the early childhood setting. The conceptualisation of children as rights holders and rights defenders can position them as exercising agency and competent in making decisions. Similarly, values (including value conflicts) are implicit in early childhood practice and are central to young children's enactment of citizenship. However, young children's citizenship emerges from and is dependent on the complex relationship between children and between adults and children. Each theme is interconnected and raises important questions about the practitioners' understanding of children's citizenship and their role in creating environments that nurture young children as citizens.

Method

For this paper, we are revisiting the data collected as part of a doctoral study by Ryder (2021). Her study aimed to explore how prosocial behaviours are nurtured within formal early childhood provision, with a focus on the birth to three years age group. Her research design was a multiple case study approach across seven early childhood settings in England. While Darke et al. (1998) articulate that multiple case studies allow for cross-case analysis and the comparison of specific phenomenon, Stake (2006) stresses that the aim is to produce a better understanding of phenomena. Here the phenomenon is young children's citizenship in the early childhood setting. Data was collected using a mixed methods approach. During the fieldwork for the doctoral study children were observed participating in their day-to-day activities and routines, which was then analysed alongside documents and artefacts. Data collected during observations provided insight into how setting provision promoted children's prosocial development and citizenship. Semi-structured interviews with early childhood practitioners and teachers were conducted, following the analysis of the observations, documents and artefacts. The purpose of the interviews was to provide further insight into the pedagogy underpinning learning and teaching.

Early childhood settings were identified through purposive sampling and located across England. Each setting subscribed to one or more early childhood curriculum frameworks and / or pedagogical philosophies; including the England's statutory Early Years Foundation Stages (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2017); the Montessori Method, Steiner Waldorf education, the Pikler approach, the Reggio Emilia approach, High-Scope and Forest School. A mix of child and adult participants assented and consented to take part in the study. A total of 110 children across all research settings were observed; consisting of 27 babies, 32 toddlers, 48 pre-schoolers and three children aged between six to nine years. A total of 11 parents consented to being observed in the playgroup settings and 20 practitioners and teachers volunteered to take part in semi-structured interviews.

For this paper, a further phase of analysis involved reviewing the observation and interview data collected during the original doctoral study, across all settings. The aim of this analysis was to provide insights into young children's enactments of citizenship. The data is presented here as a series of vignettes. Here a vignette 'is a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic' (Miles et al., 2014, p. 182) of children's actions or expressions of citizenship. The selection of data for inclusion in the vignettes was informed by four sampling parameters of setting, actors, events and processes (Miles et al., 2014) and is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria for selection of data for inclusion in the Vignettes

Sampling Parameter	Selection criteria
Setting	The enactment of citizenship took place within the early childhood setting.
Actors	The enactment of citizenship involved children or children and adults.
Events	Pro-social behaviours that involve children in the expression of agency, autonomy, values or acts of negotiation.
Process	The enactment of citizenship relates to any aspect of the children's experience at the early childhood setting.

The aim of the vignettes is to convey descriptive detail of children's enactments of citizenship but also provide contextual information.

Interpretation and Analysis of Vignettes

Here we present the vignettes together with an analysis of the knowledge they provide about young children's citizenship in the early childhood setting. The analysis reveals the ways in which pro-social behaviours, child rights and values inform children's citizenship. Each vignette is a micro event involving a child in an everyday expression of citizenship in the early childhood setting. We suggest that valuable learning arises from the interpretation of such micro events that are momentary encounters between children and between children and adults. Each vignette centres around a private early childhood setting which subscribes to more than one curriculum and / or pedagogical approach.

Physical Expression of Values

Vignette 1. Child supporting another child downstairs in a Forest School setting

During a visit to the Forest School setting's Baby Room, the practitioners were observed taking the children downstairs to join their older peers for lunch. Two practitioners led the children down the stairs, with another adult following them down. As the final few children approached the staircase, a 21-month-old child was observed reaching out and taking the hand of a younger child and heard saying "Hold hand." The child began to lead the younger child down the stairs, holding her hand throughout the descent. This observation was discussed during an interview with one of the Baby Room practitioners, to explore how this age group demonstrated helping behaviours. Upon hearing about the child taking the initiative to help their young peer, the practitioner reflected on the practice of the Baby Room staff; responding that she and her colleagues could 'make more' use of the staircase in providing opportunities to promote prosocial behaviours.

This vignette gives insight into the ways in which very young children give a physical expression of their values. In the context of this observation, the child was expressing their values through empathy, care and kindness towards their peer; prompted through her engagement and actions within the physical environment of the early childhood setting. As children move around the early childhood setting, there are opportunities for prosocial actions and behaviours which connect to early citizenship, such as helping, concern for the other and sense of community. This vignette is consistent with findings from the observations in other settings in this study. For example, very young children were observed demonstrating physical affection, such as stroking the hair of another child, hugging or helping another with a task. For example, helping a peer put on their shoes or a coat or offering a comforter if another child was upset. Many of the youngest participants were pre-verbal and beginning to communicate orally through recognisable words and / or 'babbling', hence non-verbal communication presented visual clues about their intentions and needs. This finding suggests that young children can instigate prosocial actions; in this way they exercise agency and implement an ethic of care reflecting their evolving capacities in the social environment of the early childhood setting. Lansdown (2005) emphasises the importance of practitioners being sensitive to children's evolving capacities. However, Farini (2019) stresses that children's experiences are framed by the institutional and pedagogical cultures of the setting which may limit the space for children's agency. In the context of the Forest School setting, practitioners' focus on the functional nature children's physical descent down the stairs had led to a missed opportunity to explore other skills and behaviours initiated by this aspect of the routine.

Caring for the Other

Vignette 2. Toddlers' separation and reunion in a Forest School setting

In the Forest School setting, a young child (Vanessa), was observed becoming upset when her friend (Leanne) was briefly taken out of the playroom as part of her toileting routine. Vanessa had not realised that Leanne had gone and appeared to experience separation anxiety when she could not see her. The practitioners attempted to comfort Vanessa without success. When Leanne returned from the bathroom, Vanessa pointed at her and called out her name, while still crying. A practitioner intervened by asking Leanne if she would like to give Vanessa a 'cuddle'. While hesitant at first, Leanne approached Vanessa and the two embraced, leading to an emotional reunion. Discussions between the researcher and the practitioner after the incident, revealed that Vanessa and Leanne had joined the setting around the same time and formed a close attachment. The importance of this relationship meant that the practitioners were arranging for both children to transition into the preschool room together. This was in recognition of the attachment they had formed with each other.

This vignette demonstrates the ways in which young children form relationships with their peers. In the context of this observation, the adult facilitated the reunion between the two toddlers, encouraging prosocial behaviours, such as care and kindness to be shared between the children. The expression of anxiety by one of the children was a response to the absence of her friend. The acceptance of the situation of anxiety by both the other toddler and the practitioner resulted in action to achieve a positive resolution for all. As an emotional and physical expression of values in response to the child's distress this finding is significant from two perspectives. Firstly, the children took responsibility for the self and the other. Here, relationships with peers and adults provide opportunities for learning the skills and strategies needed to be active members of their communities (UNComRC, 2005). Secondly, the practitioner had a key role in enabling the children to care for each other, in this way the practitioner's actions were not restricted to a function of care but the value of caring for the other. By taking the time to listen to the child's concerns the practitioner was able to facilitate an environment in which the children could express their concern for the other. This resonates with Puroila et al. (2018) findings where practitioners privileged practices of 'encountering, co-presence and listening' (p. 31) within the early childhood setting.

Children Exercising Agency, Autonomy and Solidarity

Vignette 3. Agency and autonomy in a Montessori Toddler Room

During a visit to the Montessori Toddler Room, two children included in this observation, were asked by a practitioner to pick up and tidy away some rhyme cards before going outside to play. The children did not respond to this request and continued to play with the cards. After another attempt to encourage the children to tidy the cards away, the adult appeared to change tactic and acted as a negotiator. She suggested the children take the cards outside to play, but the toddlers remained in the play area. They eventually made the decision to end their game and tidy the cards away, before joining their peers outside. The two toddlers appeared to be exercising their agency by deciding when to end their game and tidy up. The emphasis on children's autonomy was highlighted in the Montessori teacher's interview, who stated that the children had learned that they had some control over their environment. This meant that they could engage with their work for as long as they wanted without disturbance. The intervention of the practitioner had caused some interruption, but the children reclaimed their space and activity.

The complex ways in which children exercise agency and autonomy in their relationships with practitioners and each other is illustrated by this vignette. During the observation, the children exercised their right to play and not conform to the expectations and routine of the playroom, as set out by the adult. The expectation in this context was for children to transition from one routine to another or from one physical space to another. By choosing to continue with the rhyme card game, the toddlers ended their activity on their terms. These children expressed solidarity in their physical action because they sustained their presence in the room. Furthermore, they chose not to engage with the adult's effort to negotiate the end of their game. Prosocial action in this context is a collaborative event between two children. This finding presents an alternative perspective on how young children form relationships and engage collaborative play; it reveals how play creates opportunities for children to establish solidarity in their group and assert their right to autonomy. This correlates with the work of Bath and Karlsson (2016), who argue that children do not accept the predetermined citizenship identities assumed or assigned to them by adults. Additionally, this vignette illustrates that value conflicts are entangled in the daily life of the early childhood setting (Johansson, 2018) and that they provide valuable opportunities to learning about

children's enactments of citizenship.

Children's Participation in Decision Making

Vignette 4. Children's choices in a HighScope setting

The HighScope setting provided children with different methods of choosing what they wished to play with or do. The practitioners at this location enabled children across all age groups to make daily decisions on the activities they wanted to engage with. Opportunities to choose were adapted according to the age group. Preschool children would write and draw the activities they wanted to play with or take part in. Toddlers were presented with a map of their playroom and took practitioners on a tour of the area they wished to play in. The Babies were provided with photographs of different toys, play areas and activities, which they could point to or pick up and show the practitioners. Preschoolers and toddlers also had the opportunity to choose which playroom they wanted to visit. This enabled them to have access to each other's resources, facilities and activities if they chose to play elsewhere.

This vignette highlights how the HighScope setting enabled children's right to participate by adapting methods to enable them to choose activities and play opportunities that were meaningful to them. Prosocial actions of children were central to the realisation of a participatory pedagogy. Practitioners created opportunities for children to express their preferences for activities. Children demonstrated a range of behaviours that indicate their preferences. For the youngest children, the use of non-verbal cues and physical gestures was valued as an expression of agency by the practitioners. Toddlers used the physical environment and space to lead the practitioners on a tour of the room, which enabled them to demonstrate autonomy and choice. This respects the competence and capability of young children to make choices and express their views, which are listened, respected and acted on by adults. Here the actions of practitioners align with Moxnes and Aslanian's (2022) findings that adult's engagement with toddler's thinking time opens up new possibilities for relationships in the early childhood setting but also disrupts assumptions about how children might choose to organise their time.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the early childhood settings studied there were multiple philosophical perspectives that guided pedagogy; it is beyond the scope of this paper to critically examine the diverse ways in which citizenship is conceptualised within such a range of pedagogical approaches and curricular. In this section, we discuss the significance of the knowledge of young children's citizenship as it emerges from the analysis of the vignettes. Our findings are tentative given the context of this small-scale empirical research study; however, empirical research focused on the citizenship experiences of young children in early childhood settings is developing and small scale studies have the potential to extend knowledge in this area.

Essence of Young Children's Citizenship

The findings from this study revealed that the behaviours and actions denoting citizenship were not bounded or derived from adult expectations. Expressions of young children's citizenship are embedded in the everyday life of the early childhood setting. Consequently they may be hard to distinguish from other phenomena in the setting such as expressions of rights or values. They emerge from and are supported by values which are a lived phenomenon, both embodied and 'entangled' in the actions of children (Puroila et al., 2016, p. 154) or the rights holder positions that young children may adopt (Quennerstedt, 2016). In our study, citizenship was demonstrated through momentary micro acts, which were often associated with an event centred around another child or activity. This correlates with the idea of young children being competent social actors, whose actions are a spontaneous response to specific events (James et al., 1998), as evidenced in the vignettes.

This study provided visibility to the complex enactments of citizenship across the birth to three years age group in a range early childhood settings. These settings centred around principles of inclusion and participation, with adults and older children modelling prosocial behaviours. Age groups were mixed to enable children to develop relationships with peers, and adults supported young children in navigating complex situations and emotions as in Vignette 2 (Ryder, 2021). Like Bath and Karlson (2016) we found that young children can shape their environment in complex ways. All four vignettes reveal possibilities

for democratic relationships between children and between adults and children (Dahlberg et al., 2013). It is through the formation of relationships that rights and values are realised (UNComRC, 2005). Values of fairness, respect, care and empathy are visible in children's social actions. It should be noted that value conflicts in play (Palmadottir, 2018) as illustrated in Vignette 3, relate to children asserting their rights. Such conflicts provide valuable learning opportunities for children in relation to democracy and solidarity; this is experiential learning, entangled within day-to-day practice. Although, Robson's (2021) research revealed that citizenship was often seen by practitioners and teachers as a future aspiration, suggesting it to be something attainable as the child matures, we argue that the emphasis should be on the child as an active citizen, who is already contributing to society in line with James and Prout's (1997) construction of children as social actors exercising agency.

Expressions of rights often involve negotiation, conflict resolution and accepting responsibility for others (UNComRC, 2005). However, in the context of the birth to three years age group partaking in our study, we consider these skills to be emerging. The child's developing cognitive, social and emotional development together with their communication and language skills, mean that behaviours, decisions and actions were often physical enactments; such as one child offering a comforter to another child in distress or physically helping another. In Vignette 3 physical enactments included children exercising their right to play through non-verbal means. The vignettes begin to identify the presence of values systems, with children enacting behaviours, gestures and emotions that demonstrate care, empathy, and a willingness to help another child or communicate their wishes and rights. Quennerstedt's (2016) study on children's enactments of human rights found that power structures of dominance and subordination are visible in children's interactions and in this way children 'disregard the value and dignity of others' (p. 16). Whilst relationships of power between children was not a significant from our data analysis Quennerstedt's finding is a reminder that early childhood settings do not exist in isolation from the tensions arising from hierarchical societal structures.

To conclude, our study has highlighted the distinctive ways in which young children enact citizenship in early childhood settings. Our analysis brings to the foreground the key role adults have in acknowledging and exploring their momentary encounters with young children. In this way adults can positively affect young children's citizenship. The knowledge discussed above has implications for pedagogy including, for example, the need for adults to recognise young children as social actors from the beginning of their life and understand the ways in which their evolving capacities enable citizenship. Pedagogy should take into account General Comment Number 7 (UNComRC, 2005), which provides guidance on implementing child rights in early childhood. Recent research by Puroila et al. (2018), Moxnes and Aslanian (2022) and Clarke (2023) provides new possibilities for pedagogy within early childhood. For example, Moxnes and Aslanian (2022) emphasise the important task for adults to engage with toddlers' thinking time and the opportunities this provides to challenge assumptions about how adults work together with very young children.

Our findings recognise young children's citizenship as a complex phenomenon. Like Quennerstedt (2016), we found few studies that have investigated young children's everyday practices and lives within an early childhood setting. However, in this emerging field of research, there is significant knowledge related to the interconnected concepts of rights, values and citizenship and the way in which pedagogies and curriculum nurture children as citizens.

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