

Emerald Studies in
Child Centred Practice



Children as Change Makers

A Resource to
Enhance Child Centred
Practice and Extend
Active Learning
Opportunities

Sam Frankel
Daniella Bendo

CHILDREN AS CHANGE MAKERS

EMERALD STUDIES IN CHILD CENTRED PRACTICE

Series Editor: Sam Frankel, Learning Allowed, UK

Emerald Studies in Child Centred Practice: Voice, Collaboration and Change seeks to reposition the place of childhood studies as a discipline, highlighting its social value. This series explores the application of theories from childhood studies in practice. It highlights the place, purpose and power of these theories to inform practice and seek to shape a child-centred approach across the settings within which children live and experience their everyday lives – schools, families, the law, the care system. Uniquely, books in the series will not only draw on academic insight but also include the perspectives of both practitioners and children. The series makes the case for the need for a shared dialogue as a foundation for re-imagining practice.

This new series offers a new and valuable dimension to childhood studies with relevance for how the wider society comes to engage with it. Indeed, it offers a chance for childhood studies to increase its presence in society – to demonstrate how an awareness of children’s agency and the constructed nature of society can positively influence discourse and debate – with the hope that this can increasingly shape policy and practice and add value to children’s everyday experiences. Proposals are welcome for the series that align to this goal and help us to develop and grow childhood studies. The series is particularly keen to explore multifaceted aspects of children’s lives, such as schooling, home lives, children’s rights, child protection, activism and more.

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A Resource to Enhance Child
Centred Practice and Extend Active
Learning Opportunities

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to our families.

To the Frankel family – as always thank you for your patience, understanding and inspiration – as you remind me on a daily basis of the power of children’s voices and how we [as adults] need you [and all children] to be Change Makers.

To the Bendo family – and to my husband Steve; thank you for always making me feel like I can be the Change I want to see and for continuously supporting my desire to engage in Change Making.

This book is also dedicated to the Honourable Landon Pearson (1930–2023) who dedicated her life to advocating with and for children and their rights.

Thank you for always inspiring and supporting young people in many capacities, to make a difference in the world.

‘Children and youth are experts in their own lives and if we are to find workable solutions to the challenges that confront them, we need to find them together’. – Landon Pearson, 2012

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FOREWORD

As I write, it feels like the world is on fire. Strife explodes in many corners of the globe... Foreboding surrounds dire changes in weather... In liberal democracies, we face an increasing erosion of trust in virtually all institutions meant to hold the promise of the economic and political system.

And then there are the world's children. Living in incredibly different circumstances. Some who can engage with their rights but many who cannot. Thousands upon thousands of children looking at the sky for bombs rather than for sunshine. Thousands upon thousands hoping for, not expecting, a good meal for the day. Yet children, in all their diversity, have at least this in common... Their parents, their communities, their countries, their faiths and their cultures would hold that they are precious.

The book you are about to read is, in my mind, an urgent call to action. Think of our world as a kite. A kite taken by the wind. Careening this way and that, with every gust, wildly out of control. Children have the ability to be the string to that kite. To hold that kite to the ground and guide it.

They cannot do this without the intentional and active support of adults who touch their lives. In terms of rights, children have the 'right to participate', and adults in every country of the world are the 'duty bearers' of this right. This means that adults have the obligation to ensure that children can meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect them. Imagine how taut and firm that string to the world's kite would be if adults chose to focus on listening to children more than they did. How might this shape decisions – such as initiating a war?

Listening to children's voices is possible because, wherever you sit reading this book, I know you have been taught that children are precious. Just by being precious, children can influence and change the adults in their world. 'Influence' to a change maker is an important form of change. Influence is a change in a way of thinking, and isn't this the key factor in what we might call 'fundamental change'?

I remember as the Child Advocate for my Province in Canada, I had the opportunity to sit with a group of 8-year-old First Nation children in their community called Wikwemikong. The community, like many in Canada, was

suffering under the yoke of history and colonialism, including residential schools. I sat with the children as they described their community to me and what they saw. . . Until at one point, one of the little girls spoke up, ‘excuse me’, she said, ‘I think you don’t need to worry about us. You need to worry about the teenagers, because kids like us, we aren’t old enough to know we have no hope’.

Boom!

Years later, I can picture and hear that little girl. Her comment has stayed with me and keeps me stopped dead in my tracks each time I remember her forcing me to reflect. She was a change maker. I will hold her comment in my memory for the rest of my life.

It is absolutely certain that children can practically impact the world.

Paolo Freire, the great educator from Brazil talked about the ‘oppressed’ as being rendered ‘objects’ not ‘subjects’ in the world. He argued that it was the process of ‘voice’ and ‘agency’ that gave human beings their humanity. Janusz Korczak, the Father of children’s rights, wrote that ‘children are people today, not people tomorrow’. Upon these, and so many great thinkers, rests this book. It is a call to action.

We all must support children in participating in their own lives, in their own communities, in their own countries and in their own world. In order for this to happen, we must cease to understand children as property, as objects, but understand them as human beings, as subjects.

We must learn to approach the world with ‘love’. I use the word ‘love’ because I am thinking about how a 15-year-old told me once, she knew her counsellor cared about her. ‘My counsellor is curious about me’ she said, ‘and I think it takes a lot of humility for adults to be curious. Humility, that does not come easily to you all’.

We can all be humble and curious. I believe it is within us. I’m thinking that to find those qualities, we will have to follow the lead of children, who by nature are both humble and curious.

So, read this book. As an Indigenous writer, Thomas King might say, ‘You can reflect upon it. You can write a response. Send the authors a letter or an email. You can give it to a friend or colleague. You can do nothing. But, you can never live your life again as if you have never read the book. You have read it now’.

Irwin Elman

Officer of the Order Of Canada

Senior Fellow, Laidlaw Foundation
 President, Defence for Children International Canada
 Senior Global Advisor, Save Ukraine (Kyiv)
 Strategic Advisor, Abrar Mental health and Trauma Services

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book evolved from our experiences of practice as we have engaged with children, young people, students, parents and professionals. As a result, these ideas have been shaped by many people – and to all of those who have engaged with openness and enthusiasm (when things have worked and when they have not), we say thank you.

It is important to thank our colleagues and students at King’s University College. The Childhood and Youth Studies Department has created a space for creativity and innovation, and we are grateful to have benefitted from that.

We want to thank Sam’s team at Learning Allowed – in particular Caroline Whalley for her mentorship and encouragement. It has been fantastic to look back on previous projects and use those to fuel some of our thinking here – so thanks to the old Act 4 team and to John Fowler.

Thank you to the team at Emerald for their patience. We got there in the end!

A special thank you to Kayla Getty, who has been working away in the background to help us pull the manuscript together. Kayla, you have been amazing!

We want to thank Irwin Elman. I (*Daniella*) remember messaging Irwin on Facebook when I was doing my Master’s in 2014 to tell him that my project would focus on the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates. He responded immediately with support and encouragement and invited me to come visit his office in Toronto. His support enabled me to bring my project to *life*. From this day, Irwin has become a friend and supporter, and for this, I will always be thankful. Irwin – you are an inspiration to so many, and we are grateful for your contribution.

I (*Sam*) remember taking a group of students to Toronto to support Irwin at a time when the provincial government decided to remove funding from his work as Child and Youth Advocate. It was hard to understand. Irwin’s work had been transformative. It sparked a fire in me and in many of those students to ensure children’s voices remained a priority. His passion has been such an encouragement to us on this project, and we thank him for providing a

foreword and hope that in some small way, what we are doing here might add to the foundations he laid in Ontario – with benefits to children around the world.

Finally, Daniella. . .thank you for your resilience as we have made our way through this project and for your willingness to listen to my crazier ideas and help in finding ways to express them. From an ambition shared a long time ago – we have managed to get it down on paper – and hopefully this book can fuel more opportunities for children and adults to make a positive difference. Thank you!

And last but certainly not least, Sam. . .thank you for including me on this project and for sharing your crazy ideas with me! Your leadership and ability to dream big is inspirational, and there's no doubt it's why we were able to pull this project together. You are a *Change Maker* – and through this book, I hope we can support others to engage as *Change Makers* too.

PART 1

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INTRODUCING THE CHANGE MAKER

‘How can I make a difference?’

This book is our response to this question, one that we have both heard repeatedly from children in schools and community settings, undergraduate students who are working towards a career with young people and adult practitioners.

We are writing this book to inspire you, as adults, to:

Part 1: advance your thinking – by reflecting on and revisiting the way you see children as participants.

Part 2: increase your confidence – by engaging with guidance, practical examples and activities to strengthen collaborative opportunities with children.

PRESENTING THE CHANGE MAKER

We recognise that certain terms can carry different meanings to different people. Thus, we aim to present our view of a *Change Maker* here at the beginning, offering a foundation upon which the rest of the text builds.

‘Change Maker’ is a sense of identity.

It is a way to think about ourselves as free to access and maximise opportunities that are meaningful in shaping how we view our participation; contributing to positive change(s) in our communities (micro or macro).

It is a definition that centres around how we make sense of ourselves and form (and re-form) our identities. How we think about ourselves and how we come to think about others influence actions and frames experiences. Identity reflects (1) the view we hold of ourselves but also (2) how that view alternates and is (3) shaped by others and the spaces we are in (Jenkins, 2004). In short, identity formation and re-formation are a constant part of our day to day, informing our actions and reactions (what we do and what we don't do). Consequently, we assume multiple identities as we position ourselves in the varied settings and interactions that form part of daily life. Within the context of participation, this sense of identity then serves as a filter for:

- how we interpret the actions/inactions of others towards us.
- how we make sense of our acts/inactions towards others.¹

Our exploration of the *Change Maker* centres on the relationship between how we see ourselves (our identities) and what we do (our participative engagement). We acknowledge there may be children who do not want to engage in 'change' and we are not seeking to responsabilise these children. Rather, we are opening up a space to unpack possibilities to explore the freedom we (both children and adults) have to be a *Change Maker*. As a result, we have framed three guiding statements to direct our journey:

- (1) Our [children and adults] identity as a Change Maker is informed by how connected we feel to the social world around us.
- (2) Our sense of identity as a Change Maker has implications for the meaning we attach to our participation.
- (3) Our sense of identity as a Change Maker expands with an awareness of our own personal capabilities – freeing us to access and maximise meaningful opportunities.

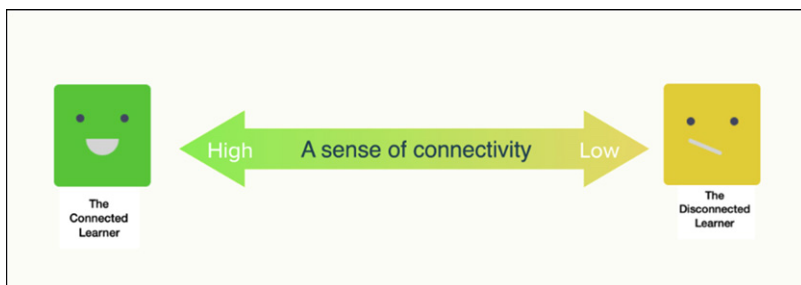
Before we move on to unpack these statements, we want to highlight an observation that is worth mentioning. There seems to be a perception that children 12+ years old can engage as *Change Makers*, but not children under this age due to an assumed lack of competency. We have noticed that young children under the age of 12 years frequently want to be included and engaged but are often silenced because they are deemed 'too young'. We disagree that young children lack competency, and we believe that they too can engage as *Change Makers*. As a result, the messages that we present in this book are unique for various reasons, but especially because they are relevant to young

children (as well as children over the age of 12 years old). Below we begin to unpack our notions about children as *Change Makers*.

Statement 1 – Our Identity as a Change Maker Is Informed by How Connected We Feel to the Social World Around Us

A driving force throughout this text is an ambition to create a paradigm shift that repositions how we view children’s capacity as participants. This is necessary because socially constructed ways of thinking about the child have limited or restricted how we see the role of children in society (both in terms of how some children may see themselves but also, how they are often seen by adults). We mark this in Chapter 2, by contrasting two competing perceptions of participation characterised by the *Muted Citizen* and the *Change Maker*. We explore the landscape for children’s social engagement, looking at some of the narratives that constrain children’s participation, as well as those that can enable it. By exploring these images of children within society, alongside the motivation we have as adults for enabling children’s involvement, we start to get a sense of how children experience opportunities. What becomes clear is that these experiences remain constrained by dominant assumptions, which requires a change in perspective, a paradigm shift, if they are to be unlocked.

This focus, captured in Fig. 1, illustrates the connection between societal attitudes towards children and learning and how this affects individual identity. Having explored this in a separate text, *Learning Allowed* (Frankel & Whalley, 2023) which we will return to below, we realised how the same principle could be applied in relation to participation, see Fig. 2. This continuum, therefore, seemed to offer a useful illustration to help us highlight the fluidity associated with participation, impacted by the context we find ourselves in (both the people we are with and the spaces we are in).

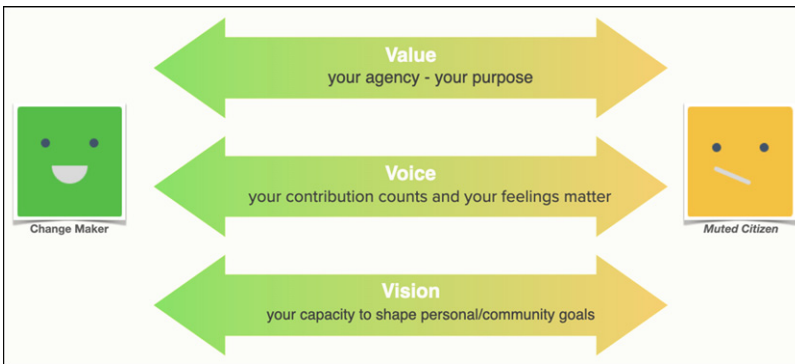


Source: Frankel and Whalley (2023).

Fig. 1. Connected Learner Continuum.



Fig. 2. Participatory Continuum.



Source: See Frankel and Whalley (2023).

Fig. 3. Value, Voice, Vision.

Although our focus in Chapter 2 is on the landscape from which we define our sense of connection, and therefore, our levels of engagement, it forms the foundation for a greater exploration of the continuum in Chapter 4 as we increasingly think about those elements (internal and external) that shape meaning making. We use *value*, *voice* and *vision*, see Fig. 3, as a prism to help make sense of social connection. Here we take thinking applied to learning identities (Frankel & Whalley, 2023) and reflect on this in relation to the participant, showing how *value*, *voice* and *vision* adds to an assessment of meaning making with important implications for the *Change Maker*.

Statement 2 – Our Sense of Identity as a Change Maker Has Implications for the Meaning We Attach to Our Participation

The evolution of perspectives, over a number of years, on children’s participation and their rights demonstrate the dynamic shifts in the emphasis that has

been placed on the child as a participant. Notably, a major change has been a shift in adult ownership of what participation is and what it means to an acceptance that participation is meaningful to children in their own right. This chapter reviews these developments and asks how/where (and if) our view of the *Change Maker* (as defined in Chapter 1 and explored through our three statements) fits in. This highlights the change narrative around participation and how that has interlinked with an understanding of children's rights.

We further outline three key models of participation (Hart (1992), Shier (2001), and Lundy's (2007) models), including their evolution and how they are useful. However, we also address what is missing within debates about children's participation, emphasising the importance of practical application that is relevant to their lives. We explain how a re-conceptualisation of children as change makers (in the way we define it) can further enhance understanding about participation and possibilities. This chapter highlights the importance of children's identities and how they can impact opportunities for participation/change-making.

Statement 3 – Our Sense of Identity as a Change Maker Expands With an Awareness of Our Own Personal Capabilities – Freeing Us to Access and Maximise Meaningful Opportunities

Being a *Change Maker* does not require us to pass an exam or reach a certain stage in our life journey, but it does require us to recognise our potential as participants. Through equipping individual children to expand their own capabilities, it creates a freedom to exploit and expand opportunities to practise 'change making'. To drive this, it is important that children are in touch with knowledge of the capabilities they can bring to a social encounter. We acknowledge that various social lines of difference will impact the opportunities that children have, but the goal here is to focus on awareness around personal capabilities as a starting point.

Recognising the variety of characteristics and skills which contribute to an individual's sense of identity, our focus here centres on four key capabilities. These capabilities are valuable in extending how we view the freedom to 'be' *Change Makers*. Through extending an awareness of these capabilities, it enables (1) the individual to more freely reflect on themselves as a *Change Maker* as they respond to the social context that forms part of their everyday lives and (2) strengthens a focus for those who might facilitate changemaking opportunities.

Our four capabilities, as set out in Fig. 4 and described below are as follows:

- (1) *Being a Learner*: the ability to manage, make sense and take control of a learning journey – as the individual connects with their *value*, *voice*, and *vision*.
- (2) *Being a Pathfinder*: a knowledge creator, passionate about researching and designing ways to explore/share knowledge and understanding – instigating, collaborating, and facilitating innovative expressions of our everyday lives.
- (3) *Being an Influencer*: a deep awareness and practical ‘know how’ to communicate and share their knowledge. This includes an understanding of different platforms for amplifying a message, as well as skills to express, explain, and listen to ideas and opinions.
- (4) *Being a Connector*: Relationships are key to change. Being able to read others and use this as a basis to frame an interaction/encounter is key to being a *Change Maker*. Pathfinder skills allow knowledge to be gathered, the ‘connector’ can then assess that knowledge, empathise with it, and seek to make connections that result in change.

This is summarised here in Table 1. We will come back to this a number of times in coming chapters.

Through highlighting the capabilities discussed above, within the context of the changeable way in which we form, present and re-form our sense of identity, our aim is to increasingly unlock freedom for children to explore what it means to be a *Change Maker* in their communities, maximising the

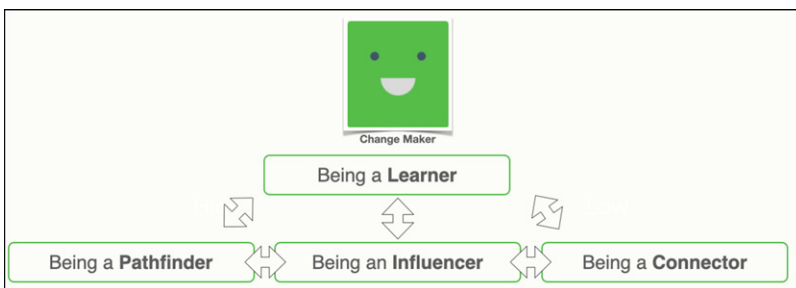


Fig. 4. Capabilities.