

## CHAPTER 5

### SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE INQUIRY:

#### *Enhanced understandings of the voices of the participating children*

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#### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5 I explore the significance of my findings and highlight their implications. I explore the findings in the context of the conceptual framework relevant to citizenship and citizenship education offered in Chapter 2. I base the discussion on the key constructs that were consolidated from the participating learners' life experiences and understandings as child citizens of the democratic dispensation of South Africa. The findings were as follows: the learners were intensely patriotic and identified passionately with the South African democracy, the flag and its symbolism, thus expressing a national and South African identification. They demonstrated fairly high social awareness, understood abstract concepts related to democracy and citizenship such as the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, diversity of cultures within which the unity of South Africa is manifested, and democratic processes like voting to some extent. The learners internalised the democratic values such as democracy, social justice, equality, *ubuntu* (human dignity), accountability, the rule of law and respect. They were critical in terms of the lack of social security. They declared dissatisfaction with their unsafe neighbourhood, including what they perceived as social injustices, held the political leaders responsible for enforcing the law and rectifying social injustices, perceived the future as both 'one day' and 'now' and advocated for change, especially social change in securing their futures. Therefore, I conclude that the participating learners revealed themselves as active and responsible citizens. However, the learners expressed their participation in the democratic dispensation of South Africa only in an imaginative way and as a future vision.

From insights gained from the learners' life experiences and understandings of the democratic

dispensation as disclosed above, I attempt to answer the following research questions in this chapter:

- How do learners perceive their democratic identities?
- How do learners understand their citizenship?
- How can the acquired understandings and identities extend generally held current conceptions of citizenship education?

In the next section I elaborate on answering the research questions by stating the relevant findings from Chapter 4, to support my endeavour in answering the questions as stated above. In addition, I indicate similar research findings as a methodology of offering literature control in an integrated manner. I also indicate how the theories related to key concepts as described in Chapter 2, are associated with my findings. Resulting from this, I also explain what possible contributions to theory, policy and curriculum my findings may have.

## **5.2 Implications of the findings for the inquiry**

The kind of learner that is envisaged by the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2002c:4-6) is one that has accepted the values of social justice, life, equity, democracy and human dignity (*ubuntu*). The internalisation of the democratic values is required for personal development and to participate in society as a critical and active citizen, to ensure that a national South African identity is built in sustaining the 'new' democracy and a still fragile civil society (Moodley & Adam, 2004). The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001:6-7) adds to the expectations set by the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) by stating that the young South Africans have to become effective, productive and responsible citizens with the ability to act in the interests of society and democracy. This has to be achieved through the teaching of citizenship education through knowledge, skills and values (Department of Education, 2002c). The approach to teaching these components as foundational to citizenship education correlates with similar approaches to citizenship education in the international domain (Osler & Starkey, 2005b:3; Smith, 2005:3).

The national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) is clear on its expectation of the future South African citizens: what they should know and be able to do. Against this background I

explored the data generated by this research project and the following questions emerged: How could the learner's life experiences and understandings of the democratic dispensation inform their understandings of their democratic identity and their citizenship? What do the findings mean in terms of the expectations for the future citizen? What are the implications of the findings for this inquiry? How best to sustain a critical and active citizen who will identify with the ideals of democracy? Put another way: How might we better understand citizenship and the identification of young learners with democracy? How can their acquired understandings and identities extend current conceptions of citizenship education?

### 5.2.1 Democratic identity

Learners' understandings of their life experiences as child citizens revealed their perceptions of their democratic identity. The nine-year-old learners of this research project were conscious of their identity and status as citizens in the democratic dispensation of South Africa. Their understandings of their democratic identity emerged explicitly and implicitly in all the themes that became evident:

- Learners' identification as child citizens
- Learners' criticism of living as child citizens in the local community
- Learners' appreciation for living as child citizens in the democratic dispensation of South Africa and
- Learners' desire for change in securing their future.

The Learners articulated a common identity with democratic South Africa, a 'notion of South-Africanness' as described in the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, learners did not use the concept democracy often except for linking democracy with the concept of freedom, with the person of Mr. Nelson Mandela and with the South African flag.

'I like 10 years of democracy' (P5 – Class 1 – *What I like and don't like about South Africa*)

'Dear Mister Mandela, Thank you for teaching me about democracy' (P3 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

'Mr. Mandela, thank you for ten years of freedom' (P61 - Class 4 – *Letters to Madiba*)

'He [Mr. Nelson Mandela] made the country a democratic South Africa' (P5 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

‘I love the flag because it is a democracy country’ (P15 - Class 2 - *The South African Flag*)

I explored the learners' expressions of their democratic identity against the conceptual framework constructed by Banks (2004 – see Chapter 2 Figure 2.1). Castles (2004:17) also identifies three levels of identification in a democracy, which aligns with Banks' framework: cultural or local, national and global. In the context of the diverse South African society, some learners expressed their awareness of a cultural identity. Their cultural identification was related to their identification with their family and their school. When participating in the instrument *What I like and don't like about South Africa*, a learner said: ‘I like my Pedi culture’ (P19 – Class 1); another learner made a drawing of herself and her mother in Indian attire (P36 – Class 1) (see **Addendum 8b**); and a learner articulated appreciation for his/her school: ‘I like my school’ (P49 – Class 1 – *What I like and don't like about South Africa*).

In the context of their cultural or local identity, many learners did not seem to identify entirely with their local community or neighbourhood for they reported overwhelmingly on negative experiences related to crime, violence and an apparent lack of services, especially in securing their safety. Their feelings of vulnerability possibly signify a sense of defencelessness, causing their seeming lack of local identification. The learners' apparent lack of identification with the local community is in contrast with research conducted by Osler and Starkey (2005a) who established that ten-year-old children in the city of Leicester identified more with their local community than with their national community. I propose that the perceived lack of cultural or local identification may affect the learners' democratic and national identity negatively at a later stage of their lives; my statement is affirmed by Osler's (2005) argument that if people do not access services on the basis of equality, they may feel excluded and the sense of belonging and national identity, which is a prerequisite for participative citizenship, may be missing.

The nine-year-old learners' expressions pertaining to their democratic identity emerged in abundance and in various ways on the national level. Most learners identified themselves as South African citizens living in democratic South Africa. Learners encapsulated their feelings of belonging to South Africa as:

‘I am proudly South African’ (P11 – Class 3 – *Letters to Madiba*)<sup>7</sup>

‘South Africa is my best world’ (P1 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

In addition a learner referred to South Africa as:

‘a democratic South Africa’ (P5 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

Many learners identified with the democratic ideal of uniting a diverse population into one nation as learners of Class 3 said when participating in *Letters to Madiba*:

‘Mister Mandela fight for freedom so that all kinds of colour can come together’ (P10 – Class 3)

‘...thank you for making white and black united’ (P13 – Class 3)

Similarly, in the activity *What I like and don't like about South Africa*, learners of Class 1 said:

‘I like my country because it has different people’ (P46)

‘I like different people’ (a heading for a drawing about Indian and Black persons – P25)

In this regard, expressions about unity and diversity were also present in numerous expressions when the learners of Class 2 participated in the instrument about *The South African Flag*. Learners related the symbolism of the flag to the idea of the ‘rainbow nation’ (P5, P20, P30, P40, P41). In *What I like and don't like about South Africa* Participant One (P1) made a drawing of different people standing around the flag, symbolising the diversity and unity in the South African society. The learners' understanding of diverse cultures must be seen against the socio-political change in the post-apartheid South African society where prejudice, often in the form of racism, still exists. The learners' acknowledging that citizens have to find ways in living together in harmony may be related to the learning outcomes included in the Life Orientation Learning Area of the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) (see **Addendum 3**), which may imply that the participating learners, being nine-years-old, have developed socially so as to encourage the acceptance of diversity and the commitment of democratic values such as tolerance.

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<sup>7</sup> This expression could be related to the ‘Made in South Africa’ slogan, which is used in the media as part of a brand name and promotion of South African products.

In contrast with the democratic identification expressed by most of the learners, one learner wrote: ‘I don't like democracy because I am black and don't come from South Africa’. This expression could perhaps be interpreted as a feeling of alienation articulated by immigrants as reported by Moodley and Adam (2004) in the South African context and by Dimitrios, Yiannis and Dimitris (2005) in the Greek context. This observation verifies the statement that feelings of belonging and therefore identification are important aspect of citizenship (Osler, 2005:12-13). This observation may also imply that citizenship education, through the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c), has nourished this feeling in most of the learners, especially those who expressed a shared loyalty to the South African nation-state.

The data revealed limited evidence of global identification, which Castles (2004:17) describes as a component of citizenship. One learner expressed an awareness of global identification as follows:

‘We need TV to see what is happening in the world like war in Iraq, when it happens in South Africa we must know what to do. I don't want war. When it is they brake people's houses and in the end you don't have anything’ (P67 – Class 4 - *Letters to Madiba*)

A few learners articulated ideas about the global world, which may be linked to the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c). The national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) aims to: ‘encourage[s] amongst all learners an awareness ... of world views within which the unity of South Africa is manifested’. In the Learning Area Social Sciences, included in the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) (see **Addendum 3**), learners gain the opportunity to learn about people of interest in South Africa and the wider world. These learning experiences may have promoted global identification and citizenship. However, I did not find any evidence of learners' knowledge about people from the wider world or related activities e.g. writing letters to children in other countries or learners' involvement in a project on helping children in other parts of the world. Reasons for the absence of expressions about global identification or global citizenship may be a lack of the learners' knowledge about this concept, a lack of participation in matters related to this concept or the fact that my instruments were not designed to focus on this specific aspect.

Savage and Armstrong (2004:17) argue for an accent on global awareness as a means of teaching that diversity should be welcomed and not feared given the increasing diversity of nation-states like

America [and South Africa] and the increasing interdependence of all the world's people. According to Rushforth (2004), global citizenship entails knowing about your role in the wider world and how politics and decisions made on global level affect you. Aspects of global interest that could also be relevant to the South African context are keeping peace, promoting democracy, promoting human rights and protecting the environment. Rushforth (2004:88-89) suggests the study of case studies like the lives of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King to broaden learners' perspectives of global citizenship. Gandhi, though born in India, made a significant contribution to South African struggle politics in the almost two decades he spent in the country. Together with Nelson Mandela, he provides South Africans with a unique role model to enhance citizenship and a national identification. Except for Mr. Nelson Mandela, learners could study the lives of other South African who have acted as ambassadors for South Africa such as the Olympic medal winners, or an identified person in their local community who serves the community, like a policewoman, or an institution that provides care for the street children or homeless children. Through research such persons could be identified and included in textbooks employed for citizenship education.

Related to the learners' democratic identification, is the emergence of patriotism in the fourth theme: Learners' appreciation for living in the democratic dispensation of South Africa and the subsequent category: 'South Africa is my best world'. Learners articulated an overwhelmingly patriotism when participating enthusiastically in the instrument *The South African Flag*. They identified with the symbolism of the flag and through the flag they expressed in abundance their sense of belonging to, their loyalty to and their love for South Africa.

'I will do everything for the country that needs to be done' (P1 – Class 2 – *The South African Flag*)

Osler (2005) and Green (2005) describe this sense of belonging, loyalty and being proud of one's country as feeling, an aspect of citizenship and a precondition for citizens to become active in the context of a democracy. As nine-year-olds, the learners of my case study therefore demonstrated the potential to become active citizens.

Banks (2004) states that in order for the democracy to function, citizens have to identify with the democratic ideals. A loss of democratic identification may affect the democratic society as a whole (Ministry of Education, 2001). This concern does not seem to relate to participants of my case study, as they have expressed national consciousness by identifying with the concept of being a

citizen in the South African democracy based on national loyalty and a sense of belonging. The perception of national identity expressed by the participating learners of my case study aligns with children's understanding and perception of national identity in a comparative study by researchers from eight European countries on e.g. what the children (some primary school children) understood about their own nation and Europe (Kuščer & Prosen, 2005:9-24). Most of these young children had a strong sense of their own national identity. Similarly, participating 14-year-old children from the IEA Civic Education Study in Australia demonstrated some very positive attitudes towards their country and expressed patriotism, but not unquestioningly so (Mellor *et al.*, 2002:133). The given examples may imply that young learners seem to have intense patriotic feelings, which may imply that younger children could easily be exploited to identify blindly with unquestioning allegiance to and acceptance of their country's policies and practices.

The feelings of patriotism expressed by the participating learners of my case study have to be balanced with the development of a critical mind in order to equip these learners as future citizens to deal with the challenges to democracy (Kennedy & Mellor, 2005) and to prevent undemocratic behaviour Eaton (2002:47). In the subsequent sections I elaborate on the learners' understandings of their citizenship, which might have been influenced by the learners' democratic identity.

### **5.2.2 Understandings of citizenship**

The participating nine-year-old learners revealed understandings of their citizenship, an abstract concept which can be viewed from various perspectives. Different perspectives exist regarding the notion of 'citizenship'. Osler (2005) states that citizenship comprises status, feelings, and practice. According to the Crick Report (Department for Education and Employment, 1988) citizenship has three dimensions: social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. Mellor *et al.* (2002) focused in the report about the Australian Students' Knowledge and Beliefs as part of the IEA Civic Education Study of fourteen-year-old learners, on civic knowledge, civic engagement and civic attitudes. The South African national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) aims to educate citizenship through knowledge, skills and values (see Chapter 2.3.1). This stance relates to the views on citizenship and citizenship education already studied in Chapters 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 and thus employed in this study. To enable me to understand the learners' perceptions of their citizenship, I report on the nine-year-old learners' expressions pertaining their values, skills (primarily associated with active participation) and their knowledge related to citizenship.



### 5.2.2.1 Values related to citizenship

Most learners expressed a strong awareness of morality and moral responsibility based on the democratic values. Pertaining moral responsibilities, learners related their awareness of moral obligations to values such as respect, social justice, equality and the rule of law concerning themselves and other people. Learners' moral awareness informed their social responsibilities, which can also be related to the values of social justice and equity, equality, *ubuntu* (human dignity) and accountability (Ministry of Education, 2001). These values were identified and promoted as democratic values by the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001). Learners showed an overwhelming social awareness through expressions of compassion for all people, especially vulnerable people in their local community. They were concerned about a diverse group of people like the street kids and homeless people as well as individuals like their family members and friends. Their empathy for the people living in the streets of their neighbourhood 'eating from the dustbin' (P3 - Class 3 – Focus group interview) reflected the learners' responsibility 'not to wasting food and water' (P31 - Class 4 – *Children's rights and responsibilities*) and a willingness to 'share' (P6 – Class 3 – Focus group interview).

Respect and responsibility were the most frequent expressed values. Learners articulated respect for children and for different groups of people in *Slogans written for posters meant for peers* as: 'respect children' (P33), 'respect teachers' (P26), 'respect older people' (P28) and 'respect people' (P31, P36). According to Nieuwenhuis (2003:33) respect is foundational to the consideration of minority interest, the maintenance of human life and the protection of the weak, which can be related to the learners' strong social awareness and their consciousness that they as children form a minority group in society.

Related to the learners' expressions about the value of respect and their social awareness regarding family members and other vulnerable people, was the phrase 'appreciate what you have' (P2, P19, P24, P28, P37 – Class 4 – *Children's rights and responsibilities*). To 'appreciate what you have' indicates a person who is not being selfish or greedy. This expression was also written, as a slogan for posters meant for peers by learners of Class 3 (P19, P23, P24, P28, P37, P38). To appreciate what you have may be one way of showing gratitude especially when feeling compassion for people who have less than you, or it may be a way in which adults patronize children to silence them so

that they do not raise their point of view. The question emerges: did the learners appreciate what they have as a form of gratitude or were they patronized? If so, this attitude is against the vision of the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c:4, 5), which aims to educate a critical citizen.

Learners of Class 3 repeatedly articulated the expression ‘have responsibility’ when writing *Slogans made for posters meant for peers* (P14, P17, P22, P23, P24, P37, P38). Responsibility as a value involves being trustworthy and dependable, being someone others can count on and to be accountable for actions (Schiller & Bryant, 1998:135). In the context of citizenship the learners of my case study seemed to have mostly internalized the value of responsibility. To participate as a responsible citizen in the life of local, national and global communities is a developmental outcome, which the national curriculum envisages for learners (Department of Education, 2002c:4). However, only four learners reported on their responsibility to do chores at home (P7, P16, P17, P19 – Class 4 – *Children's rights and responsibilities*). Grusec (1997) argues that children with regular responsibility for household chores showed greater sensitivity for other people and might make good citizens.

Against this background and the learners' expressions on moral and social responsibilities I argue as follows: The nine-year-old participating learners of my case study seem to have internalized some of the values, also called social values, articulated by the *Constitution* (Republic of South Africa, 1996), promoted by both the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001) and the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c). However, the learners abundantly reported on children living on the streets (termed street children) of their neighbourhood. They perceived this situation as social injustice, an attitude related to the value of ‘social equity’ in a diverse society (Kymlicka, 2004). They also reported on crime and violence affecting their everyday lives, which left them with feelings of powerlessness. Learners experienced this as a contradictory situation in the sense that they knew their rights as citizens (Gomes & Hofisso, 2003), but did not experience the application of these rights. Living in this conflicting situation may have a future negative effect on these learners' identity as citizens of the South African democracy.

With reference to street children, child abandonment, as a worldwide occurrence, has increased dramatically (Williams & Fromberg, 1992; Le Roux, 1996) as is the case with the neighbourhood of

the participating learners of my case study. The Ithumaleng shelter, operating in Sunnyside, receives up to six abandoned children a day. Many others are taken into other shelters in the city (*Tshwane children pay the price...*, 2007)

Regarding the participating learners' experiences of crime, violence and unsafe living conditions affecting their everyday lives, a cross-cultural research report corroborates these experiences. In the overview of the research results, Smith (2005:7) states that the children from the South African sample wished to be protected against dangers like rape and criminal violence, while the dangers of violence were salient amongst youth of Palestine. Smith (2005) argues that it is interpersonal violence in a society with a high rate of crime that is a concern for the South African children. Children need to live and experience 'citizenship' in their daily lives (Hine, 2004:40; Dewey in Mac Naughton & Williams, 2004; Alexander, 2002), which seems to be nearly impossible for the learners of my case study who in fact expressed criticism on the quality of the life they live as child citizens in their local community.

Furthermore, the learners wanted to engage in dialogue about the situation of vulnerable people and they expressed the desire to act and to help them. They also wanted to become engaged in their own safety situation by offering advice to the police and people of authority, as a learner stated:

‘We must advice political leaders to stop crime and violence in South Africa’ (P37 – Class 3 – *Slogans for posters made for peers*).

Waghid quotes Kymlicka (2005:331), who promotes values of commitment and public participation as part of citizenship. Osler (2005:12-13) also agrees that practice is a component of citizenship and that children need to be exposed to participation in the civic context. Waghid (2005) furthers this argument by stating that the notion of compassion and active imagination (placing yourself in the position of another) could have the potential to extend the dimensions of democratic citizenship in South Africa. Therefore, the learners of my case study, who gave evidence of internalizing the democratic value of compassion, have the potential to become a caring, just and participative citizenry in democratic South Africa.

### **5.2.2.2 Participation related to citizenship**

In the context of my study I deal with skills to develop participation as one of the most important

skills of citizenship. In addition to the preceding paragraphs, the learners articulated a commitment to participate in local, national and future matters concerning themselves. This desire may be seen as an outlet for their moral and social responsibilities related to their social awareness. In acting according to these responsibilities many learners claimed not only their own rights but also the rights of vulnerable people. The nine-year-old learners expressed an understanding of human rights and their commitment to applying these rights as active participants in their local community and in the broader context of the South African democratic dispensation. This finding is significant for this study, as Osler (2005:13) states that citizenship is underpinned by universal human rights as included in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

However, what seemed lacking from the database were opportunities for the learners to put human rights to practice, thus to participate in the democratic dispensation. In their discussions about people living in their area, learners often brought up issues of safety, which may be a factor for the lack of opportunities for community involvement. The unsafe area may influence the learners' future commitment to community involvement negatively. Additionally, their perceptions of the inability of the authorities to protect them by dealing with the problems in their area could also lead to negative attitudes about community involvement.

I share the view that participation and engagement in civic society are crucial skills needed for citizenship. Crick (Department for Education and Employment, 1998), Green (2005:viii) and Holden and Clough (2000) distinguish community involvement as a component of citizenship. Mellor *et al.* (2002) refers to action in the civic sphere. Waghid (2005) associates active participation with responsible citizenship in a democracy. Citizenship is also about the skill of working productively and interactively together (Savage & Armstrong, 2004:16). It seems that the nine-year-old learners feel a sense of duty to collaborate with others in their society, a characteristic of a 'good citizen' and a central characteristic of life in a democracy (Robles De Melendez, Beck, & Fletcher, 2000). Learners expressed understanding of this skill by making statements using the plural form:

'We children want to help our country' (P2 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

'We are called the rainbow nation' (P41 – Class 2 – *The South African Flag*)

An apparent 'silence' related to the more 'conventional citizenship' (Mellor *et al.*, 2002:130) is the

learners' commitment to vote one day. By introducing learners to this participative and democratic process as a civic or social responsibility learners may gain interest in procedures and politics of government and gain knowledge that voting can empower citizens.

In the light of the preceding statements I argue as follows: Learners might feel more empowered as citizens if they participated and engaged in community issues related to them. If learners are not afforded the opportunity to practice their moral and social responsibilities through community involvement at a young age when they are compassionate and eager to do so, will they be interested in becoming involved at a later stage in their lives?

In the following section I discuss knowledge related to citizenship or political literacy as the third dimension of citizenship, a concept referred to as democratic education by (Gomes & Hofisso, 2003:56) and social skills by Martorella and Beal (2002).

### **5.2.2.3 Knowledge related to citizenship**

The participating nine-year-old learners of my case study revealed insight about different components of knowledge related to citizenship. They expressed insight into the unique balance of rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Many learners articulated a right with a corresponding responsibility, an interdependent relationship acknowledged by the Constitution, Article 3 (South Africa, 1996). For example learners claimed their right to citizenship (P14 – Class 2 – *The South African Flag*) and acknowledged their responsibility to care for South Africa. A learner said:

‘I will take care of country’ (P2 – Class 2 – *If I were Mbeki ...*)

Osler (2005:12-13) states the importance of the balance of rights and responsibilities in a democracy, a balance the nine-year-old learners seemed to have. Rights and responsibilities are included in the national curriculum as constitutional rights (Department of Education, 2002c). Savage and Armstrong (2004) included rights and responsibilities as part of Citizenship Education. Apart from knowledge about rights and responsibilities, evidence of limited historical knowledge emerged from the data. A small number of learners knew about ‘ten years of freedom’ (P43 – Class 3 – *South African Flag*) and the abolishment of apartheid (P13 – Class 3 – *Letters to Madiba*). On the topic of the establishment of the South African democracy they mostly thanked Mr. Nelson Mandela for his contribution in ‘changing apartheid’ (P34, P31 – Class 4 – *Letters to Madiba*)

without any reference to other role players involved in that process. Historical knowledge and understanding together with the skill of historical interpretation, are included in the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c), yet the learners showed little evidence thereof. This may imply that the effective facilitation of these outcomes has to be examined.

Rushforth (2004) includes key issues of political literacy in her book *Citizenship Studies* like: how local government works, the power of local authority, how democracy works, the power of peoples' protest, how laws are made, the influence of media, etc. Mellor *et al.* (2002:126) argues for 'deep learning', which includes knowledge about key constructs underpinning democratic governance. Kennedy and Mellor (in Wilde, 2005:53) argue that a sound knowledge base relating to democratic values is necessary for the learner to sustain them when those values are under attack. The seeming lack of knowledge related to citizenship revealed by the nine-year-old learners, is significant for this study. If the envisaged learner is expected to be critical it is imperative that the learner has to be informed on concepts and issues related to citizenship and that the facilitation of the required knowledge occur in a constructive, interactive and contextualised way.

Many learners of Class 4, when writing *Letters to Madiba*, linked the concept of democracy with the person of Mr. Nelson Mandela. Learners revealed affection for the role he played in 'giving us freedom' (P40), 'giving children rights' (P47, P49). It seemed that much of the learners' political literacy centred on the figure of Mr. Nelson Mandela. The learners identified characteristics of Mr. Nelson Mandela, which they expressed as important values. In expressions of learners of Class 3 when writing *Letters to Madiba* his influence on the learners was apparent to the extent of icon status. Learners wrote: 'You are a superstar' (P2 – Class 3 – *Letters to Madiba*), 'You are the father of South Africa' (P9), 'You are like a grandfather to me and a role model' (P39) and 'Madiba will be my president for ever, I love Madiba' (P25 – Class 43 - *Letters to Madiba*). The significance of the learners' affection for Mr. Mandela for this study is the confirmation that young children need role models who live the democratic values. They need a role model and a leader who according to them is *truthful, compassionate, friendly, approachable* and *accountable*.

With regard to the democratic value of accountability or responsibility, leaders of a democracy should be accountable to the people who put them there and be receptive to the public opinion (Rushforth, 2004:113), thus being role models for all children learning to become the responsible citizen according to the identified criteria. Jeffreys (2006) argues that South Africa needs

accountable leaders and the spirit of Mr. Nelson Mandela to secure our democracy for the generations to come. Put another way: practice what you preach! Citizenship cannot only be taught to children, they have to experience it (Dewey in Mac Naughton & Williams, 2004; Alexander, 2002). Children learn citizenship by observing the leaders and adults who prescribe the noble but abstract democratic values to them (Alexander, 2002). This may imply an acknowledgement that the nine-year-old learners of my case study are citizens in their own right, activists for some of the democratic values such as social justice, tolerance and responsibility.

### 5.2.3 The future citizen of South Africa

How then do learners see their future in democratic South Africa and their role as future citizens? What can be done to assist the nine-year-old learners as future citizens?

Learners expressed definite ideas about themselves and other people as future citizens in South Africa. Concerning **themselves**, learners expressed the following: ‘learn from the children’ (P2 – Class 3 – *If you were the president*), ‘respect children’ (P33 – Class 3 – *Slogans written for posters meant for peers*); and acknowledged: ‘children have rights’ (P54 – Class 4 – *Children's rights and responsibilities*). Additionally, children ‘should play without being afraid of being hurt or killed’ (P1 – Class 3 – Focus group interview), be ‘happy’ (P5 – Class 1 – *What I like about South Africa and don't like*) and live in a ‘clean and safe neighbourhood’ (P10, P20, P13 – Class 1 – *What I like about South Africa and don't like*). As children they expressed the desire to ‘stop poverty, crime and racism’ (P1 – Class 3 – Focus group interviews), ‘make more schools and more education’ (P1 – Class 2 – *If I were Mr. Mbeki ...*), ‘help our country South Africa’ (P2 – Class 3 – Focus group interviews), ‘advice our leaders ...to make a better nation’ (P7 – Class 3 – *If I were the president ...*). What can the adult citizen learn from these children? Learners expressed the desire to participate as active and significant citizens in securing the future for them and for other citizens (ideas related to responsible citizenship and expanded by Holden and Clough (2000), Waghid (2005) and Revell (2005). These relationships have already been discussed in Chapter 2).

Concerning ideas about the future of other citizens in the democratic dispensation a learner said: ‘I don't want people to cry in our country’ (P60 – Class 3 – *Letters to Madiba*). Learners wished for ‘all live in peace’ (P19 – Class 3 – *Letters to Madiba*) because ‘all of us fits into the South African flag’ (P23 – Class 2 – *The South African Flag*). During a Focus group interview the interviewer

asked the learners of Class 3 to give a message to the people of South Africa and they said the following: 'People in South Africa must come together and talk and be friends, love each other, play and have fun together' (P1), 'pick up papers' (P2) and 'make the country a better place' (P3). The participating learners set the example for citizens caring not only for themselves but also for other people in living peacefully together as one nation. The learners demonstrated their commitment to justice and equity, necessary values and ideals for the enhancement of a democracy (Kymlicka, 2004; Banks, 2004).

Concerning change, they related change to the following: 'better jobs and better lives for everyone' (P1 – Class 3 – Focus group interviews). The learners' requests for change emerged strongly when learners of Class 2 participated in the instrument *If I were Mr. Mbeki...*. The following learners said that if they were Mr. Mbeki they would: 'change the community' (P9), 'change the streets, and the crime and the people' (P39), 'change the country' (P34), 'change the world' (P17) and 'change the future' (P6). One learner integrated the concepts of leadership, power, the nation and change when he/she said: 'If I were the president I would make a better nation' (P7 – Class 3)

The significance of the preceding anecdotes is that the nine-year-old learners wanted to be involved in securing their own as well as other people's future as citizens living in South Africa. Their demonstration of relating change to active participation can be associated with statements made by Wood (2005). Wood argues that children have to be assisted in skills to make choices and decisions but before executing them, they have to think about the possible influence(s) of their choices on other people. Their desire for change in transforming an unequal society relates to the theory of postcolonialism (Viruru, 2005) and transforming society (Mac Naughton, 2003), where the child is seen as part of society. According to this theory: only if citizens become active and participate critically in the democracy, will they be able to transform society, to create the future they want to see (Mac Naughton, 2005). In relation to the participating learners of my case study, their perception of themselves as desiring change aligns with a research study conducted by CiCe members from eight European countries, focusing on how children perceive themselves and others, which established that most participants saw themselves as active citizens in the future: they wanted a future society in which there would be greater social justice (Ross, Papoulia-Tzelepi & Hegstrup, 2005:x).

An involved citizenry is necessary for the South African democracy; a citizenry critically involved



is of paramount importance for the democracy to rise above the euphoria of the ‘rainbow nation’ (Jansen, 2006). Jansen's comment has to be interpreted against the findings of this study, which indicated that the learners had internalized the social values of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996), they expressed their patriotism and identified with democratic South Africa. However, they expressed modest skills of inquiry and higher-level thinking although they revealed signs of this capacity. To facilitate critical involvement in young learners current conceptions of citizenship education have to be extended by researchers, policy makers and educators.

#### 5.2.4 Extending generally held current conceptions of citizenship education

As citizens of South Africa, the participating nine-year-old learners of my case regarded education as an important component for preparing future citizens for the South African democracy. Learners articulated their vision for citizenship education, their insight as to the possible implementation thereof and their views on the responsible authorities for education. During a Focus group interview Participant One (P1) of Class 3 expressed her view on the importance of educating the youth:

‘I believe that we as the youth can make a difference in the future if we are feed the right brain food from an early age. I believe we are learning what we see.’

Learners seemed to see education as an important means to unite the different and diverse people and communities of South Africa. From the learners' expressions it was evident that, except for ‘going to school’ (P31 - Class 4 – *Children's rights and responsibilities*), they saw television as a possible medium to enhance education. During a Focus group interview learners from Class 3 suggested the following:

‘The SABC TV must put on learning shows’ (P5)

‘More learning things on TV, not naked people and rude things’ (P3)

‘Put more education and not violence on TV’ (P3)

Additional to the access to education learners wanted on television, they also expressed their views for education to reach all children by means of free education. When participating in the instrument *If you were the president*, a learner wrote: ‘I want to give all children free education’ (P1 – Class 3).

In writing a *Letter to Madiba* a learner asked him to: ‘...poor children to get free education’ (P64) According to the nine-year-old learners political leaders like Mr. Nelson Mandela and Mr. Thabo Mbeki, the government and the governing bodies of schools were responsible for education.

‘Mr. Mandela take care for education on TV’ (P9 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

‘Mr. Mbeki ... more schools and more education’ (P1 – Class – *If I were Mr. Mbeki ...*)

‘Help the governing body to put more education on TV on Saturdays’ (P3 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

‘Government must support education’ (P9 – Class 3 – Focus group interview)

The significance of the preceding anecdotes for citizenship education seems to be that citizenship education and the extension of the learners' democratic identities may be promoted through education, especially education directed at this age group through the medium of television.

The data from the learners extended my expectations of what I thought a nine-year-old child is capable of thinking, feeling, and constructing in terms of expressions through language and drawings in the context of citizenship. My observation correlates with what the postcolonial theorists argue: that the young child of seven to eight years old is capable of engaging in much deeper levels of meaning than the developmental theories proclaim (Tobin in Viruru, 2005). I compared the learners' expressions about their democratic identity and their understandings of the democratic dispensation of South Africa as citizens, to theories related to young children and citizenship, especially in the domains of their cognitive, moral and social development. It seemed that the learners of my case study excelled in many instances compared to statements made by scholars in the domain of citizenship (Holden & Clough, 2000; Banks, 2005) and scholars promoting the 'developmental stages of the young child' such as Piaget and Kohlberg.

Although the participating learners were only nine years old, they expressed critical thinking about abstract concepts concerning education and values and education and democracy. Nieuwenhuis (2003:28) defines values as ‘abstract internalized conceptions’. Holden and Clough (2000) report that in general, adults view abstract concepts related to politics as too complicated for young learners to grasp. On the contrary, the participating learners of my case study demonstrated abstract thinking about social injustices and recommendation for improvement, a line of thinking that relates

to and may exceed the expectations stated by developmental theorists like Piaget (in Gordon & Brown, 2000:138), who indicated that the child in the age group 6-12 years can understand other points of view in real situations as well as values to a certain extent. Postcolonial theorists' views (Viruru, 2005) of the young child correlate with my observation of the learners' mature level of thinking in the context of citizenship.

Learners expressed a moral responsibility to themselves and to people different from them. In relation to a learner's request for making South Africa a 'better place' a learner asked Mr. Mbeki 'to make more rules' (P3 – Class 3 – Focus group interviews). Their expressions revealed their sense of personal responsibility, indicating their understandings of what appropriate democratic behaviour is. Their acknowledgement of the normative ethics on establishing the moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct in their community indicated that the nine-year-old learners seem to have understandings of the highest level of moral development according to Kohlberg (in Hine, 2004:19).

### 5.3 Conclusion

Expressions of the nine-year-old learners of my case study revealed perceptions of their citizenship, which included understandings of their democratic identity as child citizens in the social context of democratic South Africa. Learning about a democratic identity is concerned with values. The learners expressed an awareness of morality and moral responsibility, understanding that diverse cultures have to live together in harmony and acknowledging the importance of the values of respect and responsibility.

A skill related to citizenship, which the learners articulated, was to participate as active citizens in securing a better future by changing the reality towards action for social justice and equity. From the learners' expressions it was evident that education for citizenship does not consist of a static body of knowledge that can only be transferred to children (Mellor *et al.*, 2002:11); instead, learners indicated that they wanted to experience citizenship and that television could be a medium to promote citizenship and historical knowledge of which learners expressed limited evidence.

The learners' expressions about their social world relates to the theory of postcolonialism (Mac Naughton, 2003:70-92). In accordance to postcolonialism, the learners revealed their own

understandings of their specific cultural and social world. They expressed the desire for change to secure a social just and equal future world, thus relating to a *transforming position* on early childhood education (Mac Naughton, 2003). In the subsequent chapter I offer a synthesis of the inquiry.