

Alex Walker

Hi I'm Alex Walker. I'm the director at House of Muchness – I'm going to chat about the notion of child as citizen before introducing Allegra who is a member of The Children's Party, a project that was first commissioned for Melbourne Fringe at ArtsHouse last year.

Child as a citizen is a fact, and yet a really provocative idea that would require extreme perspective shifting.

If we have a current idea of child as citizen, it is child as beneficiary. As recipient. Largely passive. A child has historically been limited to roles within the education and domestic realms – in education a recipient of adult prescribed learning, and in the home, a recipient of care, of values, of rules and structure.

But this neglects the potential of the child to have an effect beyond these realms, and for that effect to be valued by society at large.

As a principle, what the child offers includes a tick list of:

- Guts and risk-taking
- Curiosity, wonderment and enchantment
- Fluidity and spontaneity
- Dogged adherence to fairness
- The ability to hold a duality of ideas at the same time, and for that not to be a dilution of their dedication to a concept,
- Lateral and imaginative problem solving – without a consciousness that it is lateral and imaginative (or sought after in the adult world)
- A natural capacity to be fully present, feel things acutely, show vulnerability
- Immediacy of response. Directness of reflection
- A horror at the idea of nonchalant acceptance or resignation in response to a difficult or complex issue.

And not that these qualities are superior to traits possessed by adults, but that they are an addition to.

These qualities are often perceived as threat, so we respond in a patronizing way - celebrating them, but still containing them to known and restricted contexts. But what would it mean if the qualities of the child can have an effect on their greater environment? If these characteristics are added to the broader collective mix? I think rather than childhood being a lesser state, a state of transition, on its way towards adulthood, that we are a lesser society if we don't embrace what is iconic of the child's approach. Ideally through the insertion of children themselves. And for the child itself, the experience of being included, of being seen, of being endowed with civic duty and responsibility, of having an identity within a democracy, is immeasurable for the constitution of character – that they don't suddenly become people with a say at 18, because the electoral roll deems it so, but that they have been developing and honing these participation skills since the beginning.

And the arts present an exciting field for young people to exercise this citizenship. The arts offer a spectrum of forms through which ideas can be posited, and collaborative, investigative processes of arriving there. Which is a good segue for Allegra to talk from her direct experience:

Allegra

The Children's Party is a group of 12 of us from House of Muchness. We did workshops every Friday to discuss our ideas and thoughts about the world. We worked out what politics are, which basically means what you believe in and what you're passionate about.

I think 'citizen' means being a part of it.

A part of things.

But the world isn't used to having kids a part of things.

So when we started to learn about what's going on, it's like "oh I didn't know that" and, "well this is how I feel about that" and,

"if I feel it shouldn't be that way, then what could it be?" And you get to go deeper.

And it's not like we should know everything but we need to start practicing. So when you're a little kid, like 7, maybe you just need to know the basics. And then it goes little bit by little bit.

And the thing about our age, is that we have hope and we're positive and our thinking is imaginative and we're not gloomy or depressed or hopeless about things.

But I want to have all the feelings. And for me, when I got the chance to think about the world, I became more sure of who I was, and stronger, and I got surprised at myself, for being able to stand up for something.

But we also stand up for different things, because our politics are different from each other as well. But first you start with just children generally, and then you look at all the differences between them.

In the performances of The Children's Party, we said,
We don't want to run the world, to be the big bosses. We don't know everything. We don't know about the same topics as adults. Or all the details. We're just in year 5 and stuff.
Learning about volcanoes and the gold rush. But some adults in charge are letting us down a bit. We think that if you actually have the power to make changes, then make good ones! And if you actually get paid to make decisions for other people, then they have to be kind ones.

It was important for us to explain that we're not *instead* of adults. We're just A group.
A part.

But how we think and how we see things could be useful, it's different.

It's temporary.

Soon we'll be teenagers and then it will be about fitting in and how many likes we have and looking in the mirror a lot. But right now, we have a way of seeing things. And we think it adds something, because the more types of people that are part of the conversation means the conversation gets better. Right?