

Engaging children as ‘agents of change’: The Grahamstown Scout Group

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This article, as a narrative, offers a ‘learning journey’ of the Grahamstown Scout Group, and reveals how ‘the child’s right to participation’ (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC 1989) is actualised in the life and workings of this group. The methodology used by the facilitator of the Scout Group explores different ways of listening and responding to the children, inspired by three different approaches on working with children that overlap and resonate with each other. The article outlines various ways in which the ‘image’ of the child is a historical and social interpretation and explores the meaning of this for theology and children’s ministry. A ‘rights-based approach’ to working with children reveals them as created in the ‘image of God’ and co-constructors with God of a ‘better world for children’, as they become ‘agents of change’.

Keywords: empowerment; children’s rights; hermeneutic justice; theosony; praxeology.

Introduction: In memory of Janet Prest Talbot

This article is presented in the memory of Janet Prest Talbot. Janet was a children’s rights advocate and play activist who lived her Christian praxis through active involvement in various children’s groups, both within her parish church and in the community. Most recently, she lived out this commitment through her involvement in the Scouting Movement. To our great sorrow and loss, she died suddenly of a heart attack in November 2018.

Janet Prest Talbot’s daughter, Anna Lindiwe Prest Talbot, wrote the first draft of this article. Janet became involved in the Scouting Movement through her two daughters, Anna and Alexandro. They both eventually became Springbok Scouts, in the process challenging many of the Scouting Movement’s stereotypes, assumptions and practices. This article is based on the personal reflections of Anna Prest Talbot on the course of action that unfolded whilst she was acting as a facilitator of community work with young children week by week. Her reflections are an attempt to gain the understanding of what happened in this Scout group, to assess the value of the intervention and to ask whether it could be of use to other children’s groups in non-formal contexts. The article also considers the implications of the methodology used for theology.

Through the Scout group, the children of Scotts Farm (a marginalised group in the community) have a chance of participating in creating the ‘kin-dom of God’. Here, the ‘kin’ is referred to as the ‘kinship’ or ‘brotherhood’ the Scouts experience, that is, their sense of belonging to a bigger purpose for their lives, God’s purpose. As Isasi-Díaz (1996) writes in her chapter, ‘Solidarity: Love of Neighbour in the Twenty-First Century’:

From a Christian perspective the goal of solidarity is to participate in the ongoing process of liberation through which we Christians become a significantly positive force in the unfolding of the kin-dom of God. (p. 89)

In this story of Anna’s, where she lived out her mother’s ‘option’ to serve children who could be described as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘disadvantaged’, the ‘image’ of the child is reconceptualised by her to be the child who is strong, capable and rich in potential (even if poor materially).

Anna’s story begins: The children of Scotts Farm

The children of Scotts Farm face many barriers to reach their full potential and well-being. St Mary’s Development and Care Centre (DCC), a partner of Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE), has collaborated with Rhodes University student volunteers in running a

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scouting programme for the underserved boys' group aged between 8 and 12 years. This group of children is selected to be in the St Mary's DCC programme according to criteria of varying degrees related to their experience of poverty. This includes nutritional needs, lack of stimulating environments, family disruption and domestic violence, and neglect and/or substance abuse. As they live in a lower socio-economic area, they also experience inadequate housing and lack of protection and safety.

The children of Scotts Farm are often 'imaged' as problematic children, hardly capable of being agents of change. They themselves absorb a deficient view of themselves and tend to 'act this out' (as 'performance of identity') through presenting challenging behaviour at their usual Scout meetings. Not many adults are sufficiently skilled or robust to take on the challenge (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006). It needs someone who understands that (Rowland 2007):

[P]overty is not only about deficiencies. A poor person is someone brimming over with capacities and possibilities, whose culture has its own values, derived from racial background, history and language. (p. 25)

A different way of seeing children, a different 'image' of the child, creates a 'paradigm shift'. It allows us to see children as 'protagonists' or 'co-creators' in the 'learning story'. We gain new respect for their strengths and capabilities, rather than seeing them as somehow 'deficit', 'vulnerable' or 'weak' in comparison to adults.

In April 2015, the children of Scotts Farm expressed themselves differently, overcoming this 'deficit' view of themselves. They boldly announced their opinions and needs in the community through expressive posters on the community centre wall and involved a number of significant adults to support them. An anti-bullying campaign, and a group photo-documentary project called 'Our Stories', followed on from this action. This was 5 years ago, but became an adopted and established method, and they recently held a multimedia exhibition of the photo-documentary projects undertaken by them over the past 5 years. They stepped up from being receivers of a programme and children managed by adults to self-initiating and expressive participants. The empowering process significantly and positively altered their behaviour, promoting motivation and co-operation amongst group members. This article reflects on how this happened. It considers aspects of non-formal education in the Scouting Movement and rights-based theories that influenced the process of transformation.

Reflecting on the journey with the children of Scotts Farm in the light of three approaches

It seems important at this point to reflect on 'three approaches', which can illuminate the Scott's Farm and/or St Mary's children's 'learning journey' and the methodology used.

The 'three approaches' that inspired Anna Prest Talbot were an intrinsic part of her mother Janet Prest -Talbot's work with children. Anna and her mother had reached a stage where they wanted to explore the Reggio Emilia Approach in particular. They both made a conscious decision to change their methods of working with their Scout groups and adopt the Reggio Emilia Approach in putting the children at the centre of the Scout groups, thereby following the original aim of the Scouting Movement in promoting the agency of the children.

The first approach: The Scouting Movement

The Scouting Movement has an emphasis on practical life skills, community service, 'learning by doing' and the 'project approach' (which resonates with the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey). In the 21st century, the Scouting Movement describes itself as an (World Scout Bureau 2008):

[I]nfluential, value-based educational movement focused on achieving its mission, involving young people working together to develop their full potential, supported by adults who are willing and able to carry out their educational goal. (p. 5)

It strives to be inclusive of gender, although in the case of the Scott's Farm Scout Group, the children consciously decided to be 'boys only', to allow for a deeper level of engagement around issues that specifically concerned them as 'boys'. The Scouting Movement also embraces people of different cultures or religions (and those with no religious affiliation) and 'broader segments of society' and strives to be 'dynamic and innovative' in the 'contribution it makes to society' through developing strong values in its members (World Scout Bureau 2007). It is through the actions of its members that the values of the Scouting Movement are upheld, including the value placed on faith and belief. The Scott's Farm children all have Christian family backgrounds; however, the Scouting Movement upholds inclusivity – the aim is not to proselytise, but to enhance existing faith and belief (World Scout Bureau 1998:3). The Scott's Farm 'Scout Group' (of boys aged 8–12 years) follows and upholds the values and principles of the international Scouting Movement's 'non-formal' educational approach.

The second approach: A Children's Rights Approach (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989)

A children's rights methodology of working with children is inherently participatory as it involves the child's 'right to participate and be heard' (UNCRC 2009, General Comment No. 12), that is, to give an opinion and for adults to listen and take what is said seriously. The 'right to be heard' can be actualised through sharing thoughts and ideas, for example, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way (UNCRC 1989: Article 13).

Children's rights also include the 'right to play' and to enjoy rest and recreation (Article 31).

Lansdowne (2005) speaks of the importance of an adult discerning the 'evolving capacities of the child' in relation to their 'right to participate' and express their thoughts and emotions. Children's participation occurs within the context of *relationships*, which ideally are playful and supportive of the child. Playful interactions can create a strong sense of *belonging* and *identification* with the other person. The participatory, practical and active nature of enquiry and problem-solving within a particular context reveals the importance of giving children a place, space and the means of expression, creating the opportunity to have a 'voice' ('the right to be heard' Article 13, UNCRC 1989). The social and cultural 'image' of the child as an 'interpretation' influences what kinds of opportunities for participation the adult 'gives' the child, and whether the child's initiatives in communicating his or her thoughts, ideas and concerns are heard, understood and responded to. To change how we 'see' the child is to change how we see his or her 'evolving capacities' and provide support for his or her participation.

Janet Prest Talbot worked for the Children's Rights Centre from 2003 until 2013 on various projects around children's 'right to participate' and the 'right to play' and incorporated these into her work in children's ministry in the church and later the Scouting Movement. She involved her daughters in all her work with children, including in the time before she joined the Children's Rights Centre and worked on a play project in Albert Park in an inner city area of Durban.

The third approach: The Reggio Emilia Approach

The philosophy and methodology of the early childhood project of the Italian city of Reggio Emilia, called 'the Reggio Emilia Approach', involves all people in the city aged from 0 to 99 years and is a municipal project in private-public partnership. Janet Prest Talbot and her daughter Anna Prest Talbot became inspired by elements of the educational philosophy of the Italian city of Reggio Emilia and their socio-constructivist approach to early childhood learning (an internationally renowned methodological approach) (Edwards 2002).

The idea of the '100 languages of children' of the Reggio Emilia Approach, which allows children to use different 'modes and means' of expression as they engage in enquiry processes and develop their own 'hypotheses' and 'theories', fascinated Janet. She also admired how they upheld democratic practice in education. The first pre-school was established directly after the end of the Second World War in reaction to the authoritarianism of fascism. In the Reggio Emilia Approach, children's rights are intrinsic to their pedagogical methods and visible in the way they combine theory and practice in their particular interpretation of socio-constructivism. Janet was artistic and creative and had already been using multimodal methods that allow children to explore their rights and express their thoughts and ideas. The concept of the '100 languages' of childhood of the Reggio Emilia Approach and '100 ways of listening to children' was already an intuitive part of Janet's practice.

Two of the key theorists in the Reggio Emilia Approach, amongst others, such as Bruner and Piaget (Edwards 2002), are John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky. Dewey is significant because of the importance he placed on 'lived democracy' (Dewey 1916/2007), 'reflective practice' and 'learning by doing' (which is also one of the mottos of the Scouting Movement). Dewey's ideas are significant because the people of Reggio Emilia desired a 'different' education, one that could provide the opportunity for democracy to be actualised in early childhood practice, and become the means for creating enquiring and questioning minds in their children.

The other theorist of significance is Lev Vygotsky whose inspiration came from Marxist dialectical materialism. He emphasised the social and collaborative nature of learning, the *sociogenesis* of learning *within* actions and activity, what has come to be termed in post-Vygotskian theory, 'socio-constructivist theory', 'cultural historical activity theory' or 'activity theory' (Roth & Jornet 2017). The focus on *action* and *activity* in his dialectical theoretical approach overcomes the dichotomy between body and mind, culture and nature and adult and child (Roth & Jornet 2017). Vygotsky (1931) explains the *ontogenesis* of higher thought processes in humans by saying 'through others we become ourselves' – which resonates with our African philosophy of uBuntu – an onto-ethical and epistemological concept of the 'being' and 'becoming' of humans, which is revealed in the African saying: 'a person is a person through other people' [umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu].

The socio-constructivist approach of Reggio Emilia emphasises the child in relationship with others; therefore, it is a 'co-creator' of knowledge together with other children and adults and has a strong emphasis on collaborative activity. The Reggio Emilia Approach shows deep respect and attentiveness to the children's own expressions through documentation and interpretation of the children's activities. There is ongoing recording, through photograph, video or note taking, of the children's actual words and actions for later reflection. Through viewing emergent possibilities, children and the adults accompanying them undertake further actions in an 'action and/or reflection' cycle.

The 'learning journey' of the Grahamstown Scout Group

In the following account of the Grahamstown Scout Group, an innovative method of 'documentation of learning' (as used by the Reggio Emilia Approach) is adapted to their context. Documentation becomes a means of recording, reviewing and interpreting the children's words and actions with active participation of the children. There are 'three moments' within that 'learning journey'.

Moment 1: From story to conversation to project

The transformation of the St Mary's 'cub-scout' group begins with a simple story. Stories are what children love and are

core to the scouting tradition. 'Yarns'¹ that have value-based lessons are a regular feature around the campfire, at a meeting closure or to emphasise an approach or responsibility. For example, 'cub scouts' is based on the mythical story of the *Jungle Book*, which highlights the 'ideals of service, generosity and selflessness and in a child-friendly way offers tangible form to an ideal' (World Scout Bureau 1997:26). For the St Mary's DCC scouts, value-based stories were found in the *Heartlines* book series (about 20 stories plus questions), which arises from the Soul City organisation and rights-based 'Soul Buddyz' children's movement (Heartlines 2017).

Children immediately engaged and identified with the issues of the story and a great debate and personal story telling was provoked. Specific issues were identified and these were written down to remember what was raised. The following week, these topics were readdressed (of which there were over 30 issues) and the top five topics were voted on using a dotmocracy test: each child was given 10 sticky dots to stick on the issue they considered top priority and the ones with most dots became the group's priority.

The scene above represents a child-centric approach to education. Adult-centric and curriculum-based approaches used in both formal and non-formal education of children can tend to have pre-determined topics, with particular objectives setting out the 'what' by detailing a series of steps to achieve this. The alternative methodology as used in the early childhood educational approach of the Italian city of Reggio Emilia is a powerful, child-centric approach. The goal is to be attuned to the children's interests, to be ever observant, hearing the child's concerns and constantly asking 'is this what they want to pursue and how can we go deeper and wider on their track of interest?' The programme is not pre-set but 'emergent'. By following the child's interests, the child shapes the experience rather than being shaped by adult agendas (Malaguzzi in Edwards et al. 1998:87, 90). Reggio practice represents a way of living and relating that is 'open-ended' (avoiding closure), 'open-minded' (welcoming the unexpected) and 'open-hearted' (valuing difference), according to UNESCO (2010:1). The story was the 'trigger'—an initial motivation that engaged the children's interest and motivated them to start speaking about their own situations and difficulties. The facilitator *heard* the children and recognised the opportunity to give space and place to the children's voice (UNCRC 2009, General Comment No. 12 'the right to be heard').

An important aspect of the Reggio Emilia Approach is attentiveness to the children's own expressions and documentation of what the children say and do for later reflection (Talbot n.d.):

Documenting what children say and do becomes a resource in moving the ideas forward. In the following session, we used this documentation as a reminder to re-value the topics raised and to check in on the children's interests and motivation once again. Reggio 'projects' often continue for weeks and good

1. A term used to describe fables (stories with a value outcome).

documentation provides records for later reflection and revisiting concerns. This cub project and the re-visiting of the issues raised, continued for over a year, with two campaigns following the initial one. (n.p.)

Malaguzzi (1993) points out the value of emergent projects (as a process of enquiry and action) that when carried out over a period of time offer the participants the chance to revisit the learning experiences and reflect on the documentation. Documentation therefore has the potential to give 'narrative and structure to learning experiences' (Malaguzzi 1993).

Underlying this respectful and alert, perhaps even intuitive, 'hearing' process that the facilitator followed are rights-based principles. One strong principle is that of 'child dignity' with its emphasis on no discrimination against children and valuing everyone. A second principle is that of child participation (particularly as expressed in General Comment No. 12 (UNCRC 2009)), stressing the ability of children to express their opinion on matters that affect them, to have it heard and given due weight. These children's rights principles are highly regarded by the Reggio Emilia Approach (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 1998).

Largely unheard up until this moment, the children began to make a commentary on the issues affecting them in a Heartlines story. The story provoked and generated their own related stories, enabling them to identify the connections, and in a conducive, safe environment to express some truths about their own lives. The issues were personalised in the Heartlines stories and enabled the children to share how these things affected their own lives. Rhodes University students translated the original Heartlines stories, written in English, so that they could be accessible to the children and the community.

Moment 2: Children express themselves!

In the instance of the second moment, in a campaign facilitated in 2016 and centred on bullying in the community, children identified bullying as a problem. In the initial phases, they could only see the direct consequences of bullying; for example, 'he took my lunch'. They were yet to see the larger social causes of bullying and violence in their community. The process of deeper analysis as to the causes of such problems was encouraged by reflective listening and questioning by the facilitator, and always in relation to the children and their concerns. The children started to develop their own rich, descriptive story of what was happening to them and eventually they could develop their own theories to explain their situation.

Peter Moss (2010:1) stresses the ways in which children learn, stating: 'Learning for the child is understood to be a cooperative and communicative activity, in which children construct knowledge'. As the facilitator expressed her role: 'An adult with greater experience and knowledge can facilitate a jump in learning that fits the child's quest'

(Anna Talbot). This understanding comes from the Vygotskian term, 'Zone of proximal development' (ZPD) as used in the Reggio Emilia Approach, where adults in support of the children's initiatives can 'loan their judgement and knowledge' to extend the learning process according to the children's emergent capabilities and understandings (Malaguzzi in Edwards 1998:83–84). Children in the Scout Group could then own their learning project for themselves, because of the way their efforts are supported as their engagement with the project progressed, following an action and/or reflection cycle of engagement.

In scouting methodology, child initiative and knowledge construction is always referenced back to the child *and* the team they are working in. An adult does not present himself/herself as the 'expert' to be listened to, with a lesson to be 'done'. Real-life scenarios and problems are presented, and scouts are left to solve the problem and 'learn by doing' (World Scout Bureau 1997:10). An adult leader answers their questions with a question and helps them find the answers within themselves. However, as in the concept of 'ZPD' (as theorised by Vygotsky), useful knowledge that adults have can be shared to create a state of progression to the learning process that the children find themselves in.

The Reggio Emilia Approach sums up the core concept of their approach in the metaphoric expression, 'Children speak in 100 languages' (Edwards et al. 1998:n.p.). This has a special significance for children who are pre-literate or literacy challenged in that there are many ways to communicate 'what's on their mind' or 'what is fascinating them'. Central to a Reggio learning centre is the 'atelier', the art centre with many different materials and media, often reusing waste materials for the purpose of communicating ideas. An 'atelierista' (artist) is ever present to assist with technicalities of materials. In order to support expression, different child-friendly modes and means of 'expression' should be available, such as through drawing, painting, dance, song and so on (Auriat, Miljeteig & Chawla 2001):

Children have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (p. 1)

The children learnt from the example of the protagonists in the Heartlines stories to make posters of their concerns. They saw this as possible and wanted to do the same. They took the initiative to find cardboard boxes, unfold them and prepare them for messages. Other stakeholders of the project provide paintbrushes and paint. To further their cause, they asked adults to help so that they can complete their task well and display them on the St Mary's DCC fences. A special occasion was organised on a Saturday morning to which staff and parents or guardians were invited. Many said that parents or guardians and community members would never be interested in attending such an event; however, 10 parents or guardians attended the festivities. Parent or guardian participation now becomes a regular occurrence at events

organised by the Scouts. Children now own this process as they learnt to motivate strongly for family attendance in support of their cause. This can be contrasted to other events that tend to be more owned by the organisers and, as a result, do not get good attendance.

In order to conclude a meaningful child participation or expression process, according to children's rights practice, children should be heard, understood and action undertaken to support them. Messages should be targeted at relevant 'duty bearers' who can support these statements and quests, and support children by creating a more child-friendly society. The Reggio Emilia Approach as a movement for meaningful education for young children has also encouraged active presentations by the children in public spaces as a means to advocate for children's rights and promote the 'common good' (Edwards et al. 1998). The children of Scott's Farm (in the Grahamstown Scout Group) have started their first journey of drawing attention to their needs and rights.

This seems to be the first wave of a hearing process, the centre's leaders, parents and passing community members have heard, but have they 'listened' to or internalised the message of the children? The question of how 'hearers' and children have been impacted still needs to be explored further. Children who have begun to speak a rights language may perceive themselves differently, as well as experience a change in how others relate to them. Child-adult relationships may perhaps become more respectful of the child's point of view, with more equitable power relationship between a child and an adult. All parents, including those in dire situations with their children, desire more for their children and once a children's rights language is shared between children and parents, they could find themselves sharing hopes and dreams together.

Moment 3: Children as social change agents

The methodology used by the facilitator to engage the children leads to increased awareness of children's potential to engage in enquiry into the concrete problems they face in their lives and take action. Children could start theorising about the *causes* of those problems and identify ways for adults to 'hear' their 'voice' and support them in overcoming some of the difficulties they face in their lives, including the negative 'image' of themselves.

'This experience was in many ways a serendipitous happening' (Talbot n.d.):

After months of struggle to engage with a highly active and challenging group, one activity (the story-telling using the Heartlines (2017) book series) sparked a process that hit at the heart of these children's lives. (n.p.)

It could have passed by as a once-off good experience, but awareness of other possibilities that could emerge and the facilitator's ability to use her knowledge and experience (gained through her involvement in her mother's work) intuitively enabled her to push the process further through

engaging and enlivening the children's interest in the issues involved. Anna Talbot describes this as 'a truly "emergent" process, owned and directed by the children'. She says that through adult support and provocation, two further projects emerged over 2015 and 2016: 'Our stories' book for partners of the project to become aware of the children's realities, and the anti-bullying campaign driven by the children themselves.

The 'learning journey' of the Scott's Farm and/or Scout group reveals the possibilities that can emerge through using a participatory children's rights approach in non-formal education projects, together with an action and/or reflection praxeological methodology (Formosinho & Oliveira Formosinho 2012) of 'reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-to-action', as a means of transformation of practice. Some examples of sites in which a participatory children's rights approach and ways of 'listening to children' could entail a paradigm shift are children's ministry in parish churches, local community children's groups and aftercare 'clubs' in schools as 'third spaces' and through community engagement projects in collaboration with other stakeholders, such as university student community engagement programmes.

Children as change agents: Implications for theology and ministry

Anna reflected on her own involvement in a Scout Troop, from the perspective of three different but complementary approaches. In this section, Nora Saneka reflects on possible theological implications of Anna's narrative. Nora worked for many years with Janet, both in the children's ministry in the church, and in various projects in the community including the Point and Inner City Early Childhood Development Forum, of which she is presently the Chair. (Talbot n.d.:n.p.)

Janet Prest Talbot was committed to challenge the 'place', 'space' and 'voice' given to children in the life and activities of the church- and community-based organisations. She affirmed their 'right' to belong and to participate from birth as citizens and members without exclusion. In the process, she openly challenged rigid beliefs and fossilised practice within the Scouting Movement or church, as well as traditional doctrines of the church (such as the 'image' of the child born in 'original sin'). She worked to transform societal norms and values, so that cities, schools, families and communities (such as the church or the Scouting Movement) could become more 'child-centred' and 'child-friendly'. As a play activist and adult educator, she effectively challenged adults on their 'transmission' approach to teaching and learning in following a 'set' programme or curriculum that does not start from the children's own lives, is not creative and does not uphold 'the rights of the child' (UNCRC 1989). Janet believed in truly listening to children for the purpose of change. Children are often the most marginalised and Janet sought ways of bringing their opinion forward in such a way

that they were taken seriously. Ultimately, this is what happened in the Grahamstown Scout Group that Anna was involved with.

We can therefore see traces of Janet's legacy in this story of Anna's work with the Grahamstown Scout Group.

She and her mother discussed and reflected together extensively on their respective involvements in Scout groups and the innovative methodology they were pioneering in the Scouting Movement (Janet in Durban and Anna in Grahamstown).

The non-conventional methodology (dialogical and emergent) used by Anna and Janet allows children to become protagonists in the story that unfolds in their lives. As Anna describes it, it was a 'journey'. The action and/or reflection cycle is one of 'listening' to children using '100 ways of listening', according to the '100 languages of children' as expressed in the poem written by Loris Malaguzzi of Reggio Emilia (2012:2-3). This 'listening', according to Rinaldi (2006:65-66), entails openness to possibility, change and diverse points of view, and embraces difference. It necessitates growing awareness of the social and historical context and one's own personal values, beliefs and prejudices in relation to children and the situation they face. Listening is 'an interpretation of a particular question', which means a hermeneutical process in which there is the possibility of hermeneutic justice or injustice to the 'question' posed by children - 'who do you say I am?' It seems that it is only through 'listening' and attentiveness to the context of children's lives that we achieve 'response-ability' to the call of God. It seems that theosony, a theology of listening to children, becomes a significant way of 'listening' with the heart and responding with faith to this call (Rm 10:15).

The methodology used upholds children as full persons, made in the 'image' of God, invited to become co-creators with God (Gn 1:27). If children are made in the 'image' of God, this implies that each child has immeasurable value in the eyes of God. They are therefore worthy of 'rights' and capable of action to uphold their rights, as co-creators with God. We see this in how Anna describes the children embracing agency and personhood as they transform their situation for the better. Even the poorest children are 'made in the image of God' and can be co-creators with God of a 'better world for children', starting from their own life situation in living out the values of 'faith, hope and charity' and discovering through love of their brother and sister a means of 'encounter with God' (Gutierrez 2007:29). This is visible in the *Book of Acts*, in the way of life of the Apostles and the early church.

Through the Grahamstown Scout Group's actions in 'speaking up' and 'standing up', shaking off barriers and affirming their personhood (their 'uBuntu' - 'I am because you are' - 'you are because I am') was given a new respect. We also remember the words of Jesus to his closest followers:

'Who do you say I am?' (Mt 16:15). This quality of 'listening' as thought and action, as 'uBuntu-praxis', can give us a new understanding of the 'image of identity' of the child ('who am I?' in relation to 'who do you say I am?'). It seems that uBuntu-praxis is also integral to democratic practice and solidarity with those suffering from poverty, through renewed attentiveness to the other person's point of view, and the child's point of view as a 'bottom-up' view of society, remembering that we are all 'kin', part of God's family.

In this 'learning journey' of the Grahamstown Scout Group, we can see in the 'action and/or reflection' transformative cycle, a lived 'uBuntu-praxis' by Anna. Anna's attentiveness to the children is visible in the way she started with concrete problems in their lives. Praxis, as an action and/or reflection process, leads to phronesis (the ability to act on wise judgement) and therefore holds the emancipatory potential to transform situations (Kemmis 2010:422). The transformative power of praxis is particularly important when living out our commitment to the poor and addressing unequal power relationships and situations of injustice, as 'that is how we find the Lord' (Gutierrez 2007:28–29). 'Reflection on practice in the light of faith' can tell those of insignificance that they are 'sons and daughters of God' (Gutierrez 2007:28).

Through Anna, the situated practice of the Grahamstown Scout Group becomes more participatory as children follow their desires and orientate towards something *they* find meaningful to their lives. *Responsibility* as a value within the Grahamstown Scout Group becomes a matter of the *ability to respond* to the concrete problems they experience, accompanied by Anna as the facilitator. Through her engagement with the children, there is an interrelatedness of practice with the ethical, in this case children's rights values, as informed by her faith.

As Gutierrez (2007:29) points out, 'the life of faith is not only a starting point, it is also the goal of theological reflection'. Janet Prest-Talbot and her daughter Anna's actions in living out their Christian faith through their commitment to a children's rights approach, creates a different way of understanding children as 'agents of change'. In the process, a new and different 'image' of the child emerges. A question for further enquiry can be formulated: 'How does a different 'image' of the child (as a social and historical construction) change our way of working with children, and therefore our understanding of God's purposes?'

In the words of a book co-authored by Janet Prest Talbot (Talbot & Thornton 2009), *A Chance to Play*:

Children tell us most, if not all, of what we need to know in order to help them grow and learn. What we must learn to do is follow them – to follow them where they want to go, and quietly observe them when they get there. And what will we find? Often we will find that they are playing – and their play will speak volumes about who they are, how they feel, what they can do, and who they would like to be. (p. 7)

The following verses, read out at her funeral, were Janet's favourite. They concern the establishment of peace in the reconstructed 'City of Jerusalem' (which she interpreted as a metaphor for all cities) (Zch 8):

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. (vv. 4–5)

Conclusion

Janet's legacy remains and is lived out through her daughter and others of us who loved her as a strong and principled defender of children's rights. As a committed follower of Jesus and in 'putting children's rights first', her own children as well as many others found through her example a value and a higher purpose in life. She showed us a way of living our hope even in the darkness of despair (in the words of the Prayer of Saint Francis, which were written on her funeral programme).

In the words of her daughter Anna (Talbot n.d.):

Janet had an unconventional faith, and placed children at the centre of her work, the church and all her activities. The 'three approaches' fascinated her as a way of unlocking her faith. (n.p.)

Janet practised her own 'kin-dom values' as a non-hierarchical way of practising faith in solidarity with others.

The term 'kin-dom' expresses the fellowship we can experience as 'sons and daughters of God', in doing God's purposes. Anna emphasises that as she and her mother engaged with these methodologies and came to see the implications for practice in their respective children's Scout groups, there was a 'feedback cycle' between them, which helped them both to understand the place of children in society and their personal commitment to social justice. The interaction between the two of them became a way to understand and deepen their involvement in the light of their faith. Anna's commitment to a different methodology of working with children resulted in a 'learning journey' that she travelled with her mother as well as the 'learning journey' of the children themselves. We now see the Grahamstown Scout Group as 'agents of change'. Collaboratively, creatively and in community with others, the Scout group creates bonds of uBuntu-praxis in the face of poverty, prejudice and injustice.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The original article was written up by A.L.P.T. as leader of the Scout Group. The theoretical and methodological basis of that article was strengthened by N.E.S. The theological insights are those of N.E.S., in consultation with A.L.P.T.

Ethical consideration

The work with the Scout Group was part of Anna L. Prest Talbot's work at the student engagement division of Rhodes University and supervised accordingly to ensure ethical considerations were met. No personal, identifying data from the Scout group is used as the focus is on the methodology used. The agreement of the Scout Group, and signed, informed consent from Rhodes University and SA Scouts was obtained.

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Data availability statement

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Disclaimer

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