

# Talking with Kindergartners about Children's Rights: A Research Comic

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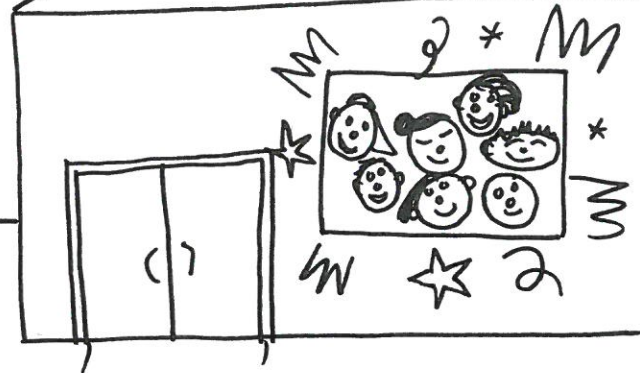
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# talking with Kindergartners about children's rights

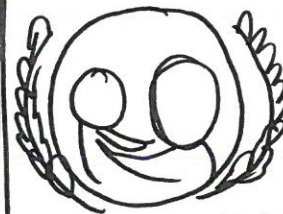
a research comic by noah Kenneally, phd

talking with children  
about children's rights is  
easier than it might  
seem at first.

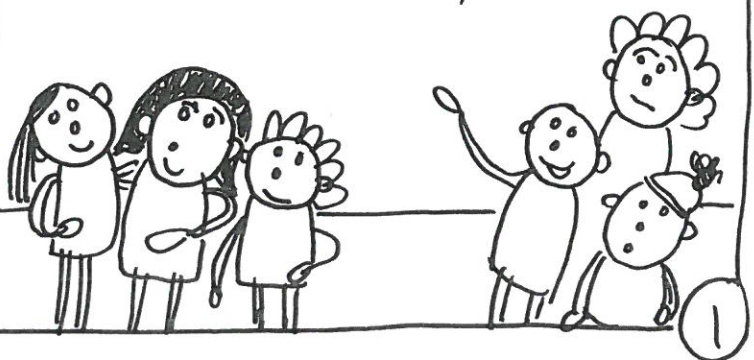


during my dissertation  
research, I did a project  
with 2 Kindergarten classes.

I wanted to think about  
children's experiences and  
children's rights with  
children themselves  
but wasn't sure how to  
do it.

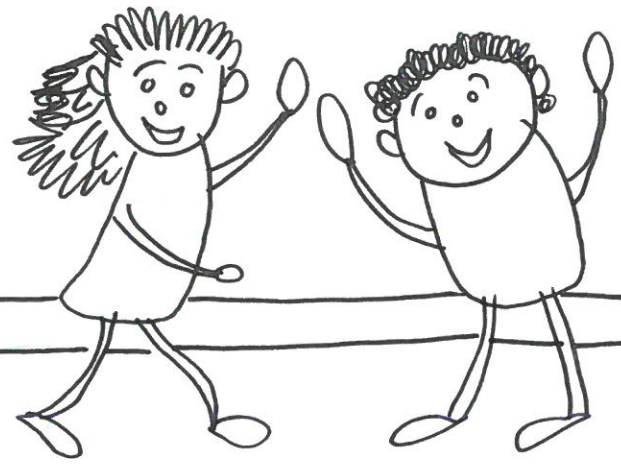


I had already  
written about  
how the inter-  
national treaties  
of children's rights can  
often seem very abstract  
and distant from the  
day-to-day of children's  
lives (Kenneally, 2017).





I wondered about ways to bring children's rights closer to children themselves



While making the ways that they were already present more visible.

The Honourable Landon Pearson noted that "... human rights, properly understood, are about relationships rather than about entitlements. They are about relationships between individuals in society, between individuals - either alone or in groups - and the state.

(Pearson, 2012)



Inspired by Pearson's perspective, I thought by focusing on children's relationships, together children and I might be able to talk about children's rights more easily. Two Kindergarten classes in Toronto, Ontario agreed to host me and the research.





Inspired by the comics research cartoonist Lynda Barry has been experimenting with (2014, 2019), I wondered about making comics with kids to explore their ideas about children's rights.



We could talk and draw comics together!

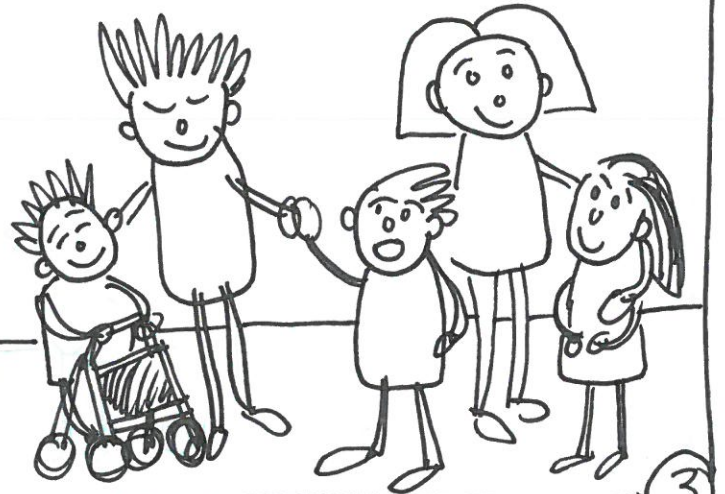


A relational approach to children's rights is also supported by a growing body of literature. For example:

Alderson (2008) encourages adults to rethink the ways they imagine and relate with young children, and to try to restructure their interactions with them in ways that explicitly value their experiences and perspectives

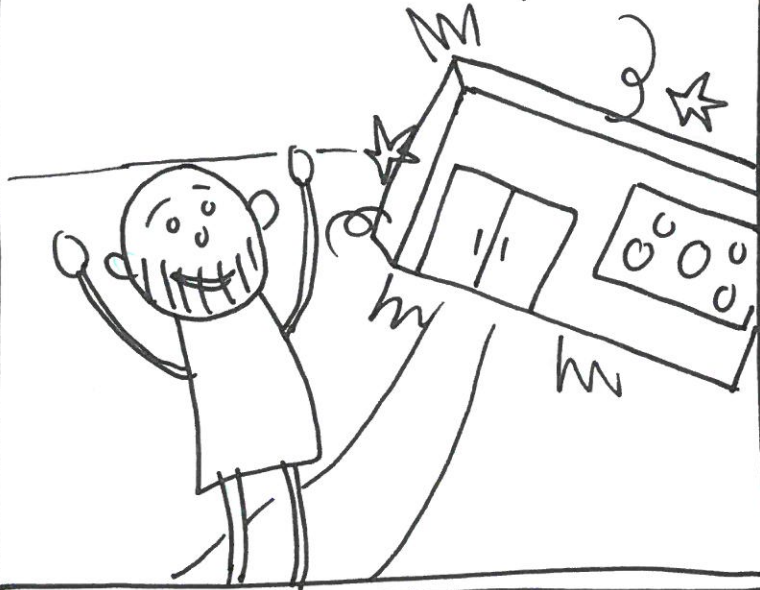


Hall and Rudkin (2011) think carefully about ways that early learning contexts can become laboratories for adults and children to experiment with different ways of relating through rights-based approaches.





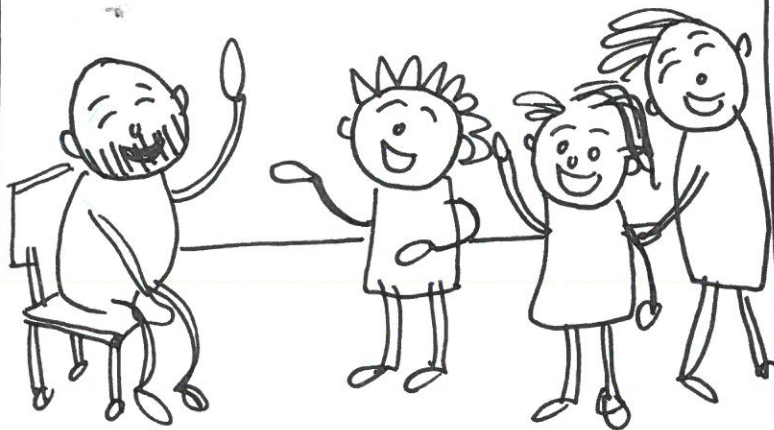
I wanted to follow these recommendations, and work with the children in respectful research relationships.



So, for the first several weeks, I visited the classes and observed as unobtrusively as I could. Children asked me who I was and what I was doing there



and I explained the project and what a researcher was.

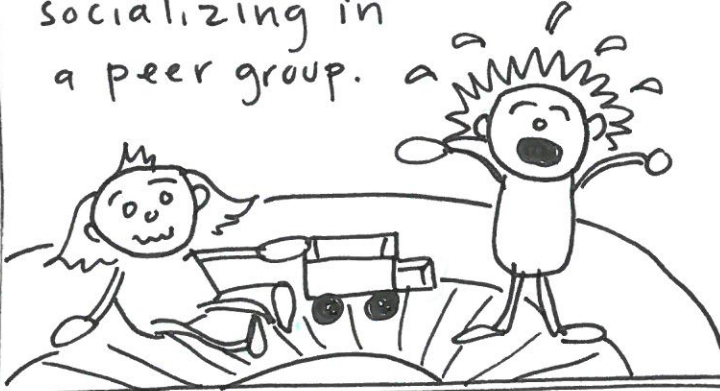


When the children began to tease me gently, I knew that I had become a familiar figure and that they were comfortable with me being there. We were ready to begin to have our research conversations.

Also during this time, because I didn't want the research to disrupt the classroom learning activities too much, I analysed the Kindergarten Program curriculum (OME, 2016) for ways to talk about children's rights that fit with the curricular goals and expectations.



some of the expectations focus on prosocial skills, recognizing that kindergarten might be some children's first experience of socializing in a peer group.



learning about and practicing to communicate with others and to work out how to be in spaces with others is emphasized in the curriculum.

These prosocial skills - communicating ideas; asking questions; developing empathy; taking turns; and using a variety of strategies to solve problems together reflect children's rights ideas in enactable ways. This is an important element of early childhood children's rights education (UNICEF, 2021a; 2021b). In my analysis, I determined that these skills also aligned with some of the fundamental concepts of children's rights



I decided that the children and I would draw comics and talk about two of these fundamental concepts  
LISTENING  
and  
SHARING.



By focusing on those two fundamental concepts, the children and I found it easy to discuss everyday situations – both in their classrooms and in their home lives – that involved children's rights.





the children's ideas were complex and nuanced, and revealed that many of them had very real understandings about how listening and sharing - and children's rights - were important aspects of relationships. Isabelle drew this comic — and then she explained:

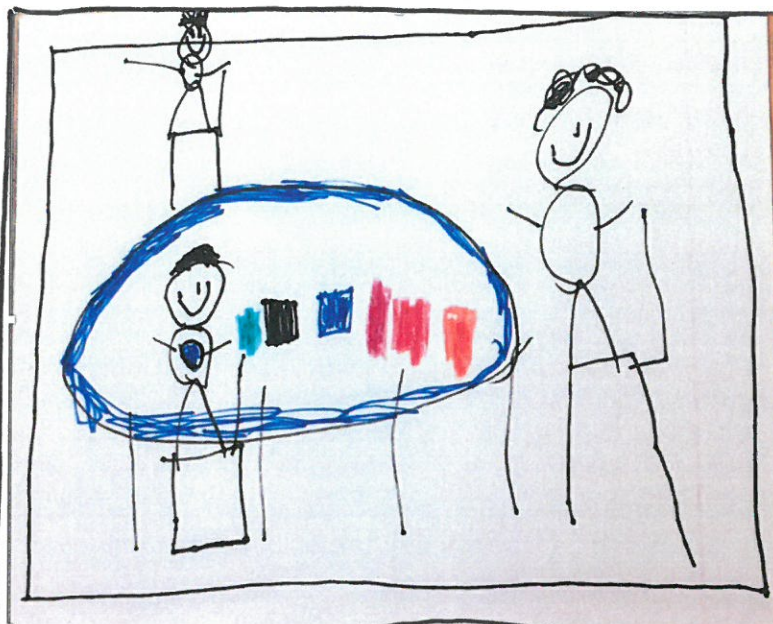


This is a girl and a mom and they love each other. They are listening to their hearts.

Their words start in their hearts and come out of their mouths and go into their ears, and it goes back and forth - you can see the lines I drew of that. That's listening. I also drew two suns.

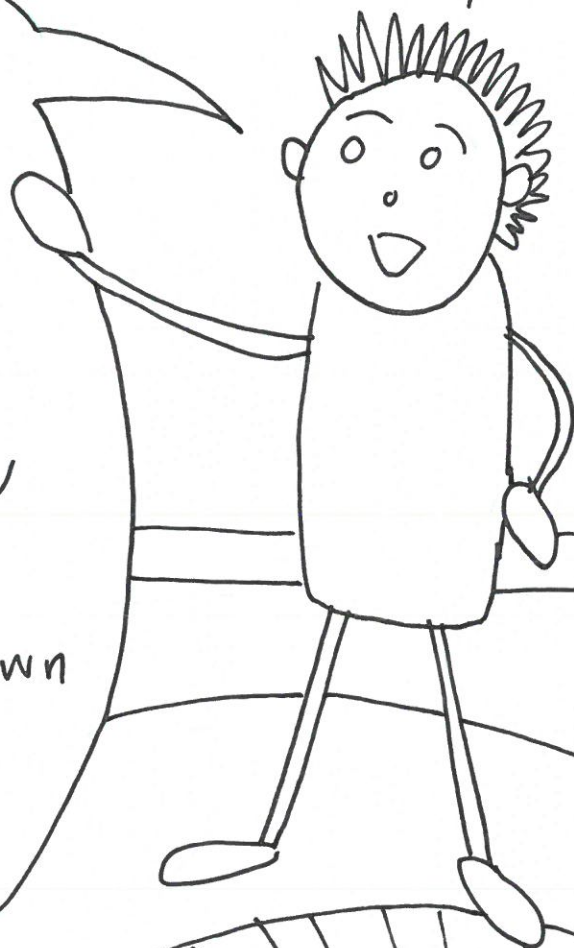






Another example is Adam's comic. Adam wanted to draw a comic about sharing, and explained what he drew in the following way:

This is us at our table, getting ready to make our pictures. We are sharing the colours — you can see them — blue and black, another blue, red, red and orange. We all use them to make our own pictures, sharing the colours. You can see Michael has the blue one.



grounding children's rights in relationships – in concrete every day interactions – helps to make them visible, tangible, and more easily talked about.

By drawing comics and talking about listening and sharing – interactions at the heart of children's rights – these kindergarteners and I were able to have complex conversations about their own experiences – about the ways that children's rights were a part of their lives.

Thank you to the children who contributed their comics, stories, and ideas to this project.



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