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'Over to you': considering the purpose of education through a student-centred sustainability project

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Abstract

The school strikes for climate action that began with Greta Thunberg in 2018 and spread worldwide in 2019, left many young people to ponder 'what is the *point* of education if we have no future?' In this investigation of a student-centred project on sustainability conducted with Year 4 students in Brisbane, the *point* of education was framed by Biesta's three domains of purpose; Qualification, Socialisation and Subjectification. Sustainability education requires attention to each domain, that is, increasing children's knowledge of sustainability (Qualification), facilitating their critical awareness of social practices related to sustainability (Socialisation), and expanding their capacity to act in response to the challenges of living sustainably (Subjectification). The project was designed using an action research model where children co-created the topic (reducing plastic usage) and then decided on how it would be investigated and reported. Interviews during and after the project, and episodes recorded in a research journal revealed changes in each of the three domains, with changes in the Subjectification domain being the focus of this study. The overall positive and multifaceted learning outcomes that occurred highlight what is possible when addressing issues of sustainability and the *point* of education in ways that matter to children.

Introduction

During the 2019 School Strikes for Climate Action inspired by Greta Thunberg, many students justified their decision to strike by noting 'what's the *point* of education if we have no future?' (Thunberg, 2018; Thunberg & Taylor, 2019). At the height of these protests, I was developing my Honours research project and considering how, as a novice teacher, I could engage children with the climate and sustainability crises. I wanted to heighten their sense that education was relevant right now, instead of in the distant (and perhaps nonexistent) future. It was in this context that I designed a research project which focussed on children's sense of themselves as 'subjects' encountering and responding to the urgency of contemporary climate and sustainability challenges. I used Gert Biesta's concept of Subjectification to theorise children as 'subjects' and I adopted an action research (AR) methodology to enlist children as joint decision-makers with me in the classroom. Whilst Education for Sustainability (EfS) projects do generally employ action-based, student-centred pedagogies, there is scant EfS research which is theorised by Biesta's model. Given that today's children have inherited humanity's environmental problems, it is important that education embeds the space to respond to students cries for change and support their capacity for action (Birdsall, 2010; Germein & Vaishnava, 2019; Malone, 2013; Prabawa-Sear & Baudains, 2011).

Biesta (2008, 2015; 2020; 2021) has challenged policymakers and teachers to move beyond a set of narrowly defined goals that can be measured through testing and reductive accountability regimes. As he notes, competitive 'targets and indicators of quality become mistaken for quality itself' (Biesta, 2008, p. 35), resulting in a disconnect between what we actually value (nurturing 'active and informed citizens') and what we can easily measure and display quantitatively (standardised assessment). Biesta argues that instead we should frame the goal of education in relation to three domains of purpose: *Qualification* — knowledge and skill; *Socialisation* — shared social and cultural practices; and *Subjectification* — personal freedom and actions. Using Biesta's three domains of purpose, I sought to enable 'students to attend to the world' and encounter 'what this reality right here and right now, is asking from [them]' (Biesta, 2021, p.99).

Literature review

Biesta's three domains of purpose

The question of purpose has always had a place in education discourse. Education philosophers and researchers have continued to propose different purposes of education relevant to particular time periods. Over the past twenty years, what has continued to dominate education aims are neoliberal policies that privilege academic performance and accountability measures (Biesta, 2008; Glithero, 2018; Hannon & Peterson, 2021). In Australia more specifically, standardised tests, such as the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the worldwide Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), have come to define the education system's underlying purpose (Reid, 2019). However, the current unprecedented ecological and societal challenges demand renewed consideration of the purposes of education (Hannon & Peterson, 2021; Reid, 2019).

According to Biesta (2008), determining the purpose of education is a composite question that should be examined through three functions of education; qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Qualification refers to the knowledge, skills and understanding required to 'do something' — this can be related to a specific field or something more general. Socialisation focuses on how, through education, children become members of society's social, cultural and political orders (Biesta, 2008). Schools and their teachers both directly and indirectly, perpetuate these orders. For example, schools might actively pursue the transmission of certain values through 'school rules' or uphold particular religious traditions. Equally, even if the pursuit of socialisation is not made explicit, schools and their teachers perform particular orders that impact students' ways of thinking, being and acting (sometimes known as the 'hidden curriculum') (Biesta, 2008; Paraskeva & Macedo, 2011). Subjectification then, is almost the opposite of socialisation as it foregrounds attention to students' heightened sense of themselves as agents contributing in distinctive ways to their communities. These interconnected domains provide a transformed view of the complex task of educating children — one that places emphasis on developing learners' sense of themselves as distinctive contributors to the challenges of contemporary life (Bai & Romanycia, 2013; Biesta, 2008; Holdsworth, 2019).

Subjectification in education

Many educators, scholars and policymakers have found Biesta's three domains to be helpful in extending consideration of the purposes of schooling (see Carter, 2019; Safstrom & Ostman, 2020; Sandahl, 2015). However, debate regarding the meaning of the domains has been on-going. Biesta (2020) recently revisited these domains to clarify his ideas, especially concerning subjectification. Subjectification is having the freedom to act, or not act. It means acting as a self, being a subject in one's own life — not in the sense of 'being yourself' and being able to do whatever you want — but acting as a subject in response to the world around you. Biesta (2020) clarifies that

subjectification 'is not the question of who I am but the question of *how* I am, that is to say, the question of how I exist, how I try to lead my life, how I try respond to and engage with what I encounter in my life' (p. 99). Choosing to act (or not) as a subject is not so much about making the 'right' choice or acting out of obligation but choosing to accept personal responsibility for oneself, as Heimans and Biesta (2020, p. 104) note realising that it is now 'over to you'. Therefore, subjectification is about what a person will *do* using their knowledge and skills (qualification) and within their social and cultural practices (socialisation). Biesta's multidimensional framework enabled me to situate the project outcomes within the broader context of education and to recognise students' development as something deeper and more personal than what standardised achievement measures might privilege.

Researching with children

There has been a significant shift in environmental education research towards conducting research *with* children instead of *on* or *about* them (Barratt Hacking, Cutter-Mackenzie & Barratt, 2012; Barratt et al., 2005; Fielding, 2007; Glithero, 2018; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015). For example, Kellett (2010) examined the possibilities of positioning children (age 11 years) as active researchers to design social play areas in a deprived inner-city area. Cutter-Mackenzie & Rousell (2019) also applied a child-framed methodology in their longitudinal study of children as co-researchers as part of the project 'Climate Change + Me'. Other authors have written extensively on environmental education within this emerging paradigm in the hope of empowering and raising the social consciousness of children to make decisions about their own lives (see James & Prout, 2008; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015; Barratt Hacking, Barratt & Scott, 2007; Barratt Hacking & Barratt, 2009).

Barratt Hacking et al. (2012) present a continuum for how children can become more involved in research that is *about* them. The continuum ranges from children as objects in research, to partners in research and then leaders in research. Although the children in this study were not strictly co-researchers who assisted with the research conception and final analysis, their ideas influenced how the research unfolded. By consulting the children about the project and listening to their ideas, I invited them to 'speak for themselves' and 'report authentic experiences' which guided the research process and positioned them as partners in the research (Barratt Hacking et al., 2012, p. 2). Along with Barratt Hacking et al. (2012), Cutter-Mackenzie (2014), Prabawa-Sear and Baudains (2011) and Wake and Eames (2013) challenge environmental education researchers to further consider, discuss and critique children's roles in research. Using Biesta's three domains, I seek to respond to these challenges.

Research aims

This study contributes to the emerging area of literature by researching environmental issues *alongside* children in an innovative way and one that is framed by Biesta's three domains of education. There is also a specific focus on the subjectification domain and if/how students respond to an 'over to you' approach. In order to address these overarching aims, the data presentation and analysis is structured around the following research question; *In what ways can a student-centred project affect students' Subjectification related to sustainability?*

Research context

The research project was established at an independent girls' school in the Brisbane area. For confidentiality reasons, the pseudonym 'Green School' is used throughout the article. The participants (co-researchers) were 23 girls in a Year Four class (about 9 years old). Pseudonyms are also used for the students. The Lunchbox Project, as it became known, was

co-designed to reduce the amount of plastic packaging in the students' lunchboxes — plastic packaging in lunchboxes was identified by the students as a major sustainability problem at their school. Key aspects of the project were conducted over eight classroom sessions (over 8 consecutive weeks) during the first term of 2019, with each session lasting up to one hour. The classroom teacher was present for all of these sessions and although she was not a participant in the project, her advice and assistance were considered during the project's development.

Theoretical framing and methodology

As explained above, Biesta's three domains of purpose in education provide the theoretical framing for this study — all three dimensions are at play when teaching for and about sustainability. I adopted Action Research (AR) as the methodology as it aligned with my goal of researching *with* people (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). AR methodology invites the researcher into the participants' meaning-making process by highlighting the centrality of dialogue and engagement with participants (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Ferrance, 2000). AR also involves *praxis* — it necessarily entails questioning everyday practices so that changes can be considered and adopted. I explicitly named the students as co-researchers and deployed pedagogical approaches that broadened the scope for student decision-making, which added to the richness of the data.

The structure of The Lunchbox Project's eight sessions was based on my adaptation of Kemmis and McTaggart's (2000) AR Spiral. The typical process of AR begins with identifying an issue that matters to the participants and then engaging in cycles of Planning, Acting, Observing, Evaluating and Reflecting. However, AR resides predominantly in two fundamental processes; reflection and action (Altrichter et al., 2002; McTaggart, 1991). Throughout the project the co-researchers and I moved through action-reflection cycles, which allowed for unplanned discoveries to occur.

The Lunchbox Project

To accompany the AR methodology, I was also particular about which student-centred pedagogies I employed. Below, is a brief summary of these pedagogies as they were crucial to providing opportunities and space for the students' subjectification to play out.

Negotiation of the Project (Planning phase): Drawing from Boomer's (1992) principles of negotiation, the students and I negotiated the focus of the project and how it would be carried out. For example, the students conducted brainstorms in groups to open-ended questions about the project focus. Afterwards, I searched their brainstorms for common categories to identify a focus for the project that was based on the students' ideas.

Blanket Role (Acting phase): Each session, the students and I adopted a blanket role as 'co-researchers'. Blanket role originates in drama education and is used to guide students to assume the role of a change agent in an 'imaginary' context, before considering themselves as change makers in real scenarios (Pullenvale Environmental Education Centre, 2014; Renshaw & Tooth, 2016). In preparation for this role, we created a 'Role on the Wall' poster to establish how a researcher *thinks*, *feels* and *acts* and what they *hope* for, so that the students could begin to design the type of researcher they wanted to become.

Role Models (Observing phase): At the beginning of each session, I shared local and international examples of people who are '*Standing Up for Sustainability*' to emphasise the on-going nature of the climate crisis. For example, a TED Talk video of Molly Steer, a nine-year-old girl who started the *Straw No More Project*. I also ensured that I was a role model for the students as I never used any plastic packaging in my own lunchbox.

Inquiry and Critical Reflection (Acting, Observing and Reflecting phases): Taylor et al. (2015) have identified that the pedagogy of inquiry is advantageous to teaching EfS because it is

responsive to students' ideas and has been designed to provide opportunities for students to make decisions about their own learning.

In summary, The Lunchbox Project engaged students in the following ways: (i) collectively decided on a research question (Can we stop kids from having plastic packets in their lunchbox?) and methods of data collection (tallies and bar graphs); (ii) collected data to determine how much plastic packaging was in their class' lunchboxes; (iii) reflected upon what they wanted to do with this data by returning to the original research question — they wanted to 'stop kids' so we decided to test whether it was possible for their class to have a waste-free lunch every day for a whole week; (iv) collected data to determine how many students had a waste-free lunch over 1 week; (v) analysed the results and discussed the challenges of having a waste-free lunch through Padlet (an online post-it board); (vi) shared the results of the project — posters and a presentation on assembly. The class also initiated Waste-Free Wednesday at their school.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews after the project and on-going observations made both during and after the project, were the main sources of data. After the project, the students participated in a 10–15-minute semi-structured interview in focus groups for the purpose of understanding changes in the students' qualification, socialisation and subjectification related to sustainability. Four focus group interviews were conducted, and each group included six students, apart from Group Four which included five students.

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews was based on Lichtman's (2012) Three C's method (Codes, Categories and Concepts). I used an online tool (Otter.ai) to assist me with transcribing the interviews (55.68 minutes in total). Using the Three C's Method, I then read through the transcribed interviews allowing codes and overarching categories to emerge by tracking common words, repeated ideas, actions and emotions expressed by all of the students. This process was recursive and involved back and forth reading, listening, analysing, and interpreting of the data corpus to arrive at the refined categories. The interview responses and observations are presented under two categories — *Question Existing Orders* and *Shift in Agency* — which reflect the development of the students' subjectification more so than the other domains.

Observations were also recorded throughout the project in a digital research journal to document incidents, episodes and actions of the students. When I returned to the school approximately two months later, to complete my final practicum, the students continued to voluntarily inform me about their independent sustainable practices, at school, at home and in their wider community. I treated the observations as narrative events and used a basic story grammar to summarise each one, namely, in terms of: *(i) the context, (ii) the agent(s), (iii) action(s), (iv) evaluation.* This structure is based on Mandler and Johnson's (1977) story grammar, which describes the essential elements of a story or episode.

Finally, I also added a layer of theoretical analysis to the categories and observations using Biesta's three functions of education. Biesta's multidimensional framework enabled me to situate the project outcomes within the broader context of education and to recognise the students' development as something deeper and more personal than what standardised achievement measures might search for and display.

Results and discussion

The data is analysed and discussed below under two categories (1) *Question Existing Orders* and (2) *Shift in Agency* — to answer the research question; ***In what ways can a student-centred project affect students' Subjectification related to sustainability?*** Out of the 23 students who were involved in the research, responses from eight children are shared below as a representation

of the class. Whilst each student in the class did not demonstrate their 'subject-ness' in the same way as these eight students, there was a sense of collective agency among the class as a whole (as demonstrated below in Episode 4).

(1) Question existing orders

This first category presents instances where the students began to query some aspects of their everyday lives in relation to sustainability. The students began to notice, question and critique everyday 'orders' around them, which meant that they were beginning to experience some aspects of subjectification — they were beginning to adopt 'ways of being that hint at independence from such orders' (Biesta, 2008, pp. 21).

When listening to and analysing the students' interview responses, what became apparent were the reoccurring moments of realisation. In a group interview, Claire explained, 'at the start, you don't know how much plastic you have and then now you just see there is so much plastic in my lunch box. I can't believe I've had this much in my lunchbox this whole time!' These realisations also seemed to lead students to question the normality of their everyday practices. When interviewing Amy's group, she shared,

'At first, I didn't know what sustainability meant . . . I just thought that when you saw plastic in lunch boxes it was just a normal day and that it was all normal but now, I realise that, that loads of people have it and we need to stop'.

Amy also spoke further about the 'loads of people' she'd noticed and gave an example of the pervasive use of plastic within her local community,

'Well, I went for a fun run once and at the end people were handing out water in plastic cups and the people that got them just took one sip out of them and then just threw them in the bin'

Charlotte also added to this discussion by saying, 'Oh yes yes I went to the fun run . . . No, I saw what they did, they just chucked it [the plastic cups] on the ground'. Both students were concerned by what they had seen within their local community.

Olivia also shared a change she experienced,

'Sometimes when I go down to the beach, I normally would see a piece of plastic and then just leave it and go 'oh, what could it do?' And then now I'm thinking maybe I should go over and pick it up'.

These responses indicate that the students have begun to question and evaluate the everyday 'normal' orders (socialisation) to which they have previously been accustomed. Within their family homes (where their lunches are prepared), at their school, as part of their community activities and even at the beach, the use and presence of plastic packaging is an accepted practice — it is part of a 'normal day.' However, after the Lunchbox Project, the students share moments of 'realisation' where they contemplate what they have previously accepted as 'normal'. The students are drawing upon their newly acquired knowledge of plastic (qualification) — that it harms wildlife, is unsustainable to produce and isn't adequately recycled — to critique the normal 'order' of a society with a prominent 'culture of convenience' or 'throwaway culture' (socialisation) (Clark & Alford, 2019). Of particular relevance to subjectification, Olivia talks about what she now might 'do' with her new understanding of plastic and its prevalence in her local environment. She would normally 'just leave it', however she now thinks about going to 'pick it up'. Here, Olivia's 'I' is

being called into question as she places herself within a familiar scenario and revaluates how she might act now, after exploring a different world view (Biesta, 2021).

Episode 1 — Is this a sustainable school?
During a session where students were analysing the data from their lunchboxes, I recorded the following episode;

> Session 5
>
> When I was working with Amber, she spontaneously shared how the other day when she was waiting to get picked up at the front of the school, she noticed a small sign saying, 'This is a sustainable school'. She explained how she was concerned about the validity of the sign and commented that she wasn't so sure if her school was in fact sustainable since she hasn't seen any recycling bins around and because there is so much plastic waste in people's lunchboxes.

Amber's observation was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it highlighted her engagement with sustainability across different contexts; from the classroom to her wider school community. Using the sustainability knowledge from the Lunchbox Project (qualification), Amber was able to make her own critical judgment on the sustainable assertions of her school (subjectification). Amber questioned the authenticity of her school's sustainable practices (socialisation) instead of accepting and trusting its declaration, as I imagine most primary students would do. Perhaps the researcher role which Amber took on in the classroom was being adopted as part of her everyday reasoning. Biesta's (2021) revised explanation of subjectification education is relevant here; subjectifying education is 'encouraging an appetite for trying to live one's life in the world' (pp. 50). Amber's independent ability to question her school indicates that she is beginning to exercise her 'subject-ness' by exploring her own contributions to the existing sustainability discourse (Hasslöf & Malmberg, 2015).

Episode 2 — Walking the talk
As shared above, students began to question their everyday practices, local communities and the school itself regarding authentic actions for sustainability. They also focussed on me as their teacher as illustrated in the episode below.

> After teaching a Maths lesson about capacity I threw out the water from one of the jugs into the pot plant outside of the classroom, instead of pouring it down the sink. As I was doing this, the students were going out to morning tea and appeared to be oblivious to what I was doing. However, later in the day Monica came to me and shared, 'Wow Miss Jackson, I saw you recycled the water in the pot plant outside. You're so good at remembering sustainability'.

Monica made a critical observation and remembered to tell me later on in the day. She not only noticed what I was doing, during the busy and distracting time of morning tea, but was able to analyse the situation alone as she did not ask about my intentions. Monica's observation and commentary are particularly relevant to the socialisation function of education. Her fleeting observation of my nondescript action seemed important to her because 'I' as the teacher had performed a sustainable 'order', one that was different to her expectations. Her response is significant because it not only highlights her ability to critique my choice of action, but also the importance of role modelling and consistency as a teacher, or 'prefiguring' sustainable futures as an activist teacher (Ojala, 2016; Oyler, Morvay & Sullivan, 2017; Prince, 2017). In future,

Monica may, or may not, choose to act in a similar way based upon her new knowledge of sustainable practices and how these practices are enacted by others in her everyday environment.

(2) Shift in agency

After the project, the students also spoke about their personal sustainable decisions and actions, as well as how they influenced their families. In the following interviews and episodes students share what they 'do' when their 'subject-ness' comes into play (Biesta, 2021). Concluding this section is a description of what resulted from the students' collective agency and how they acted to influence their school community.

Episode 1 — Conversations with Claire and Kate

In addition to Claire's earlier comments about her realisations, she shared, 'now it's really good because when I told my mom about it, she feels really sad . . . so now, [in] my lunch boxes we usually have bees wax paper and we do not use as much plastic now to wrap our food'. These independent actions go beyond 'picking up litter' (a common action in primary school) to influencing her family members to actively limit the amount of waste initially being produced. Claire's response not only highlights a shift in agency, but also reveals her independent choice to commit to environmental action (subjectification) after investigating plastic pollution during the Lunchbox Project (qualification).

Kate also shared a moment with her mother that exemplified her shift in agency;

> 'So, my mum told me that she opened a drink shop and she used a lot of straws and I was like, no mum straws suck a lot. So, I was like, maybe we can change the straws into bamboo because bamboo is renewable . . . She said yeah after our shop gets rebuilt, she'll just change the straws'.

Kate is using her new knowledge about sustainable practices such as bamboo (qualification), to disrupt (subjectification) her mum's use of plastic straws, which is a typical practice for a restaurant (socialisation). Both Claire's and Kate's accounts revealed that not only are they capable of self-initiated, disruptive action within their families, but that they have chosen to act as subjects within their own spheres of influence (Biesta, 2008; Herranen, Vesterinen & Aksela, 2018).

Episode 2 — Parent feedback

During Science Day, I had an interesting conversation with some of the students' relatives;

> Charlotte's mother asked me how my thesis was going. When discussing what we have been doing she said, 'Well it certainly has inspired Charlotte'.

> Olivia's mother also came and spoke to me and she shared, 'We have started composting again'. Her grandmother also said, 'Oh, it certainly has made a difference. She's always on at me, Nanna that's plastic, this is plastic, watch out for plastic! I can't give her any of those little plastic toys anymore'.

> Later, when I asked Olivia about what she had been doing to influence her family, she said, 'I've asked my mom and dad to stop buying the [Coles] Little Shops and the Woolworths Ooshies'.

Like Claire and Kate, Charlotte and Olivia were also initiating sustainable action at home and it wasn't going unnoticed. According to Charlotte and Olivia's family members, the Lunchbox Project played a significant role in initiating sustainable action in their households. This outcome

is similar to what Armstrong, Sharpley & Malcolm (2004) identified in their study. Armstrong et al. (2004) examined the impact of a Waste Wise Schools programme at two Australian schools and discovered that students can act as catalysts for their family's sustainable behaviour changes. Duvall and Zint (2007) also identified that focussing on local environmental issues with students is a factor that contributes to intergenerational learning.

Episode 3 — The poppers
Charlotte shared an insightful moment which occurred at the supermarket;

> 'And then, Mum, she's like, oh I'll go and get some poppers, and they were all wrapped in plastic. There was plastic everywhere and then I said no, and I came back with this 1 litre carton of juice and then Mum was just like, 'how am I going to put that in your lunch?' And I'm just like don't know, I'll drink it at home . . . so now I've got a 1 litre cardboard carton of juice instead of little plastic poppers.'

Charlotte's active interruption of her mother's 'normal' action was indicative of Charlotte's emerging 'subject-ness' (Biesta, 2021). She took the initiative in an everyday scenario, to seek out an alternative option to the one her mother usually adopted. She was also willing to sacrifice being able to take a popper to school in order to uphold her commitment to acting sustainably. She had also taken her researcher role beyond the classroom and 'acted' in a real-world context. When embarking on the journey of the Lunchbox Project, I did not expect incidents like Charlotte's to occur. Upon reflection, the open-ended, student-centred nature of the project encouraged these moments because students were allowed space to explore their own ways of thinking, being and doing which according to Biesta (2008) 'can be more desirable [for subjectification] than those that effectively proceed towards a pre-specified end' (pp. 36).

This outcome is similar what happened in O'Gorman's (2020) study where activist teacher, Maddy, showed her Preparatory level students images of animals that had been injured by plastic pollution. Maddy explained, 'And, even now, when I walk around the school, kids that I've taught before will dart off and say, "Oh my God, the turtles!" - chasing a bit of plastic' (p. 12). These children, along with Charlotte, were impacted by new knowledge (qualification) and then acted upon it with what they believed to be an appropriate response (subjectification).

Episode 4 — Lasting ripples of change
A final significant outcome of the student-centred project was Green School's long-term adoption of Waste-Free Wednesday. When reflecting upon the challenges of packing a plastic free lunchbox *every* day of the week (since 'all the shops have it', it's convenient and cost effective), the students and I puzzled over how we could realistically reduce plastic packaging in kid's lunchboxes. Amy then explained how for World Environment Day earlier that term, the school had initiated a once-off Waste-Free Wednesday event. She produced the flyer that was sent home and then suggested that this event should occur *every* Wednesday. The class as a whole were in support of Amy's initiative. The Head of Junior school also welcomed the idea and gave the students an opportunity to formally introduce Waste-Free Wednesday (as now being part of the weekly school routine), as well as share the outcomes of the Lunchbox Project at assembly. There was great excitement among the class about this presentation. To help the school prepare for Waste-Free Wednesday the students also split up into groups to conduct a mini presentation for each junior school class where they shared 'tips' for packing a sustainable lunchbox. Amy's initiative and the class's commitment to the presentations and the event revealed to me not only their new understanding of effective sustainable action but also their collective subjectification. The students' expressed a sense of ownership and pride in the Lunchbox Project. Aggie even attributed her future

sustainable actions to the project as she shared, 'When you look back and go, why did I do this? Then you go, oh yeah because of that project that I did in Year 4'.

Conclusion

As a response to children's global and local pleas for climate action, I initiated a student-centred sustainability project using Biesta's (2008) three domains of purpose. The changes that were apparent in students' spoken responses, actions and attitudes after the project suggest that student-centred pedagogies can promote the development of students' qualification, socialisation and subjectification related to sustainability. The use of project negotiation, Blanket Role, role modelling and action-reflection inquiry pedagogies provided room for the students to decide how they wanted to respond and act, both individually and collectively. More specifically, the diversity of the students' responses to the project highlights how this type of 'over to you' approach can unfold in EfS. Although the data presents relatively 'small' moments where students made changes or questioned certain practices in their everyday contexts, these instances illustrate what can occur when children 'turn towards the world' and encounter it in their own way. All of the unexpected ways that the students acted were different because each of the students responded with their own 'I' — Charlotte chose not to drink poppers anymore, Kate convinced her mum to use bamboo straws in her drink shop and Amber has begun to question the sustainable assertions of her school. Then, collectively, the class chose to initiate change in their wider school community through Waste-Free Wednesday. Approaching issues relating to the environmental crisis with young children is complex, however if teachers can 'knock on the door' of their students and 'raise the question whether anyone is *there*' then students can be given the opportunity to develop and grow across all the domains, including their sense of freedom to act as a subject (Biesta, 2021, p. 100).

Although, we (the students and I) did not 'change the world' through this small-scale project, we did sense the power of agency and iterative action (little steps), which was beautifully captured as Rosy, Sarah and Candice talked together at the conclusion of the project;

Rosy: 'I think that we sort of, like'

Sarah: 'Altogether'

Rosy: 'We sort of altogether'

Candice: 'Altogether we saved the world'

Rosy: 'Well like sort of'

Sarah: 'Little steps'

Rosy: 'We are getting there'

What occurred during and after this project was that students 'accepted the challenge' of 'encountering the world'. Through the careful selection and use of different student-centred pedagogies I, as the teacher, 'pointed' towards particular issues of sustainability that we are facing here and now. The act of 'pointing' in education is significant because it 'doesn't force the student into anything, but appeals to his or her freedom and, in a sense, reminds the student of his or her own freedom' (Biesta, 2021, p. 99). Many of the students took up the project's 'challenge' and had a sense that they had done something significant. However, the project could have gone in a less momentous direction. Educators cannot force children to take on and respond to certain challenges, but they may 'stage' certain situations where students have the space to turn towards themselves and decide how they might act as a subject — 'over to you'. Although Candice's claims (altogether we saved

the world) are perhaps a naïve exaggeration, what wasn't an exaggeration were the students' decisions to act, to *do* something when their 'I' was called into play.

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