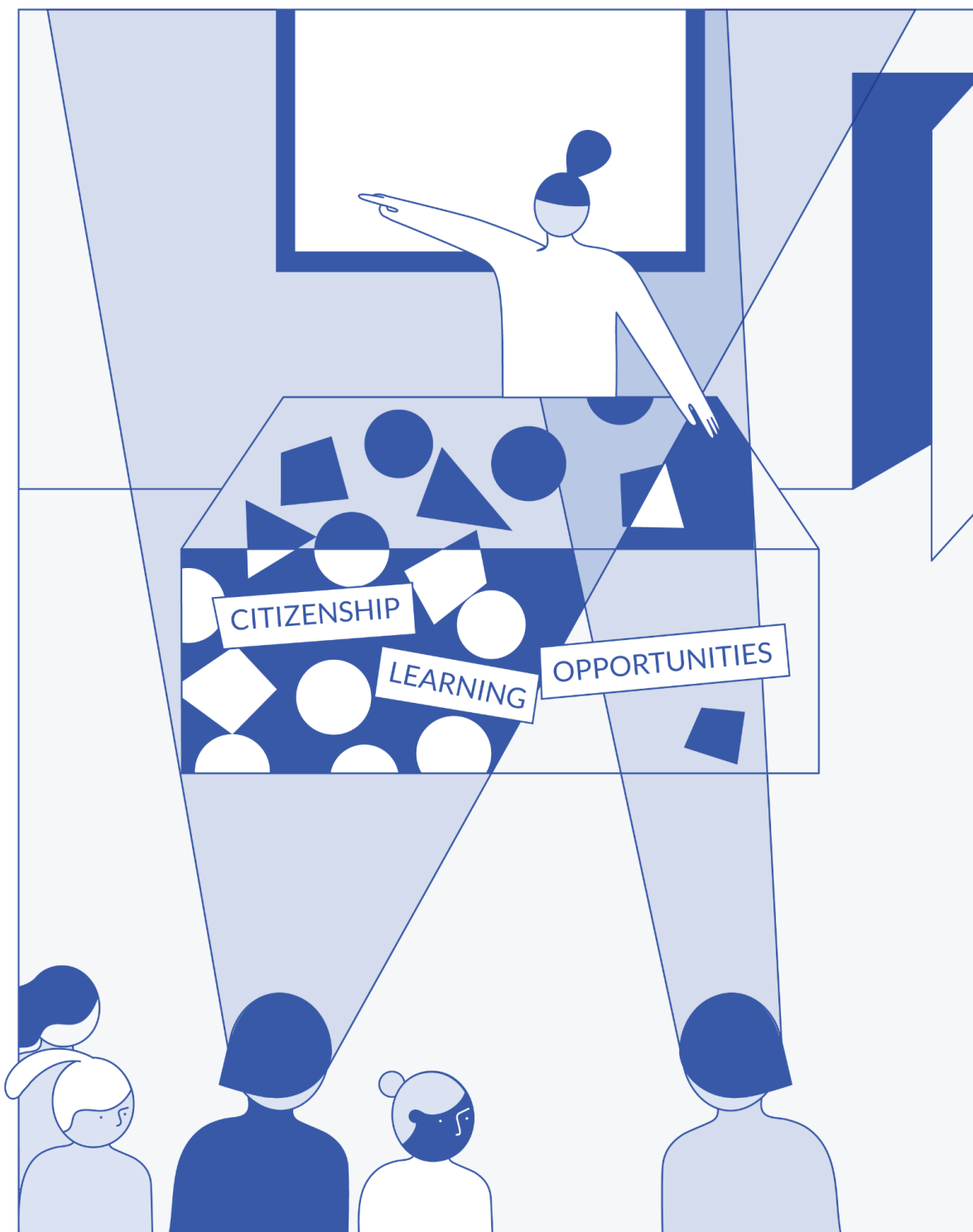


Same classroom, different citizenship learning opportunities

Children's experiences of the disparate workings of the school as a practice place



University of Amsterdam

Thesis MSc Sociology

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*For all the kids
who ever feel
inadequate or
out of place*

Abstract

Research has stressed the need to address inequalities in young people's citizenship learning. However, much remains unknown about how these inequalities develop in practice. This study therefore approaches schools as practice places for citizenship, where a multitude of citizenship learning opportunities are embedded within the interactions in the school community. Following this approach, this study investigates how the school as a practice place for citizenship can benefit some children more than others. To this end, I have conducted a child-centred case study at two Dutch primary schools. Eleven children were interviewed with the use of visual-aided methods, which were designed to allow for children's own perceptions and experiences to emerge.

In this way, children's narratives illustrate the differential workings of the school as a practice place. They demonstrate how citizenship learning opportunities may be distributed in inequitable ways, as they appear to be primarily accessible to children who already occupy more established positions within the school community. Indeed, children's civic self-efficacy and sense of belonging are found to condition their individual access and use of the citizenship learning opportunities presented by the school community. To advance understanding of these conditions, this study proposes a new way of addressing civic self-efficacy, for further research as well as educational practices. This provides a basis for understanding how, why and when children may be bolstered or hindered in specific aspects of their citizenship learning. Based on these findings, this study puts forth recommendations for more equitable citizenship learning in schools.

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1. Introduction

“Half of the youngsters are indifferent to democracy”, reads a Dutch newspaper’s headline (Baars, 2021). The fact that these results of a recent Dutch survey gained widespread attention in the national media (van der Meer et al., 2021) indicates not only scholars, but the public too is concerned with young people’s attachment to democracy. Policymakers generally expect these kinds of concerns to be addressed through what is sometimes presented as a silver bullet: citizenship education (Joris & Agirdag, 2019a). As such, integrating citizenship throughout primary and secondary education has been proposed as a remedy for a myriad of societal issues, ranging from a lack of social cohesion and trust, to extremism and intolerance (e.g. Bron & Thijs, 2011; Joris & Agirdag, 2019b; Sincer et al., 2019). Indeed, in recent decades, “equipping young people with the right set of knowledge, competencies, attitudes and values to become active democratic citizens” has become part of curricula in democratic societies around the world (Eurydice, 2017; Joris & Agirdag, 2019a, p. 288). This includes the Netherlands, where the existing statutory obligation for citizenship – which was regarded as too permissive – has been revised to encompass more as well as more specific goals and will come into effect in August 2021 (Dijkstra et al., 2021; Wet van 2021 — 320, 2021).

However, if citizenship is to contribute to any of these causes, a fundamental aspect of the current state of affairs first demands more attention. That is, the outcomes for citizenship have repeatedly been found to be unequally distributed along the lines of class background, migration background and/or gender of students (e.g. Geijsel et al., 2012; Schulz et al., 2009, 2018; Thijs et al., 2019). With ‘citizenship outcomes’, different scholars refer to different aspects, which include civic knowledge, political behaviour, societal involvement and democratic attitudes. Nonetheless, it is still unclear how these are exactly developed in schools (Neundorf et al., 2016). This sets out both the societal and academic relevance for this thesis: there are inequalities in young people’s citizenship, and there is limited knowledge on the role of schools in their (re)production.

First, the societal implications. For the relationship between education, citizenship and inequality, T.H. Marshall’ seminal essay on what it means to be a citizen provides helpful accounts. He was clear on the role of education: it is not only a fundamental social right to all citizens, it is also a requirement for equal civic and political participation in a democratic society (Marshall & Bottomore, 1996). As people’s democratic dispositions are not inborn, they need to be developed through practice in different communities — such as schools (Flanagan, 2013). This is important, as democratic societies do not solely rely on institutions and laws, but gain their legitimacy from ‘the people’ taking part in civic and political affairs, equally representing the interests of various groups in society. To that end, schools ought to distribute the

foundations for democratic citizenship “against the grain of social inequalities” (Bruch & Soss, 2018, p. 39; Cohen, 2010). The fact that we can instead observe reproduction of social hierarchies in current citizenship outcomes, means there is still much ground to gain on the democratising function of schools. To continue to equip young people with citizenship competences selectively, means to endanger an open and democratic society both in terms of support as well as legitimacy (Bol & van de Werfhorst, 2013; Munniksma et al., 2017; Thijs et al., 2019).

Academic relevance

Understanding inequalities through citizenship practices

In response to these societal implications, a body of literature has been addressing citizenship outcomes. Knowledge of processes that compose these outcomes, is however still limited (Neundorf et al., 2016). Hence, inequalities have been established repeatedly, yet it remains unknown how they come about. Indeed, the actual citizenship practices at school are a much endorsed topic for future research (e.g. Dijkstra et al., 2015; Geboers et al., 2014; Geijsel et al., 2012). For the investigation of such practices, I suggest the following perspective. Rather than studying isolated results of deliberate citizenship *education*, interpreting citizenship as practice means to study citizenship *learning*: an ongoing and relational process (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Investigating citizenship as a practice also allows for a more inclusive conception of who can engage in meaningful citizenship actions, because “as long as citizenship is conceived as outcome, it places young people in the problematic position of not-yet-being-a-citizen” (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p. 72). Therefore, this thesis approaches the school as a so-called practice place, where students come to understand and develop themselves as citizens by actually doing citizenship (Dewey, 1916/1997).

To understand how social hierarchies may be reproduced within that practice place, I turn to developmental psychologist Constance Flanagan (2013). She argues that civic socialisation takes place by participating with others in relational practices throughout the day, building concepts and beliefs about the world and how they fit in. This means that even when schools *formally* teach students from the same books, through *informal* practices, young people may additionally receive implicit messages about their citizenship. More specifically, through practices in the school community, students come to understand how the social contract works for them — that is, which implicit ‘rules’ of society apply for their position in the political-economic order. For example, students’ experiences with school authority and being disciplined are argued to shape their later relationship with government (Bruch & Soss, 2018). In addition to personal experiences, seeing others ‘like them’ following certain routines, feeds

into students' belief that these are "the natural, the proper, and perhaps the *only* way to do things" (Flanagan, 2013, p. 43). It is suggested that political and economic stability are maintained across generations in this manner, as dominant cultural discourses are reinforced through relational practices, even by groups whose interests they may marginalise (Flanagan, 2013). Drawing from this perspective, with this thesis I aim to better understand inequalities in citizenship learning by examining how different students experience the practices their school community comprises.

From the limited available knowledge on this area, I build on two key sets of findings for delineating important aspects of citizenship learning. First, in a recent study, Rinnooy Kan and colleagues have illustrated how Dutch schools can considerably vary in their function as practice places for citizenship (2021a). This variation is not only discernible *between* schools, but *within* them too. That is, opportunities to practice and develop citizenship – e.g. to question rules – are not available to students in the same way or to the same extent: they depend on their social class, secondary school track and age. Similarly, earlier research in the U.S. context has demonstrated inequalities in the civic learning opportunities that students receive – e.g. student voice or classroom discussions – according to their social class, race and academic success (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Therefore, a main way this thesis engages with the school as a practice place is through students' perceptions of the different citizenship learning opportunities they are presented with.

Second, recent studies have pointed out that important aspects of the school culture for citizenship learning – e.g. the classroom climate – may benefit students differently according to their backgrounds (Jugert et al., 2018; Wanders et al., 2020). From this follows a second component of how this thesis operationalises the school as a practice place, viewing the aforementioned learning opportunities as embedded within a certain school culture. This begs the question how students vary in their perceptions and experiences of aspects of the school culture, such as classroom climate and structures for student voice. In this research aim, differences in subjective student experiences and perceptions are central. For that reason, this thesis additionally makes use of two concepts rooted in social psychology to advance understanding of individual differences: students' sense of belonging and their civic self-efficacy.

Children's citizenship learning

For education in general as well as for citizenship specifically, inequalities in the Dutch context are often studied in relation to the exceptional degree of differentiation characterising the secondary school system (Geboers et al., 2015; e.g. Geijsel et al., 2012; Munniksma et al., 2017). For instance, unequal learning opportunities flow from the different types of citizenship that each educational track predominantly promotes. The pre-university tracks are found to practice

a more autonomous, critical-democratic kind of citizenship, while the pre-vocational tracks are limited to a more adapting, discipline-oriented type (Leenders et al., 2008; Nieuwelink et al., 2019; ten Dam & Volman, 2003). In this light, it may not be surprising that large disparities are identified in secondary school students' attachment to democratic values: second year pre-university students are found to value democracy twice as often as their pre-vocational peers do (van der Meer et al., 2021). However, similar differences were found for first year students, who at that time had hardly been exposed to secondary school tracking effects (Thijs et al., 2019). This begs the question: what precedes such disparities found in secondary school? Are differential citizenship learning practices already in place in primary education?

This points to a second knowledge gap. Not only do we know little about differences in young people's citizenship learning in practice, such knowledge is even more limited with regards to primary education. This is remarkable, as the obligation to teach citizenship applies to both primary and secondary education in many European countries, including the Netherlands (Eurydice, 2017). Moreover, reasons to engage with children at the end of their primary school years are provided by several disciplines. Psychological research, for example, predominantly finds increased capacities for children to discuss social problems from several sides between ages 10 and 14 (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011). Political socialisation studies point at ages 10 to 12 for becoming sensitive to societal tensions and democratic dilemmas (Dijkstra et al., 2015). Also from a pedagogical orientation, engagement with democratic citizenship in children from an early age on is promoted (de Winter, 2004). In sum, the period from the age of 10 on has been termed as a developmental phase with great potential for citizenship learning through everyday life experiences (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011).

By contrast, it is argued that in later adolescence, dispositions may already be crystallised, rendering factors like classroom climate less influential (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). For these reasons, I contend that if we want to better understand inequalities in citizenship learning, attention needs to be directed to children at the end of primary school. Specifically, we need to study their own experiences as agents in the social interactions that constitute citizenship learning. Hence, this thesis focuses on children at the age they have not been divided into educational tracks yet, though are susceptible to citizenship learning: 10 and 11-year-olds.

Thesis aim

In relation to the outlined societal relevance and current academic landscape, the contribution of this thesis lies in approaching the school as a practice place and centering children's differential experiences and perceptions thereof. That way, it moves beyond citizenship competences as outcomes, but rather regards them as conditioning the continuous learning

processes that the practices in the school community provides. As doing citizenship equals learning citizenship, this interpretation is instrumental in order to uncover how and when practices advance some children's citizenship learning while it inhibits that of others. This in turn furthers the main aim of this thesis, namely, to provide a better understanding of how and why schools as practice places may not work for every child in the same way. The research questions driving this thesis are:

How and why do children differ in the ways the school works for them as a practice place for citizenship?

Sub question 1. How do children differ in their perceptions and experiences of the school culture as well as their access to and use of citizenship learning opportunities?

Sub question 2. How can we better understand these differences through children's sense of belonging in the school community and their civic self-efficacy?

In order to address these questions, I have conducted a qualitative, child-centred case study involving interviews with eleven children from two Dutch primary schools (Clark, 2011). The methodology for this case study was constructed in keeping with the theoretical approach of the school as a practice place. This implies that children are understood as legitimate social actors and methods were therefore devised accordingly. Specifically, attention was paid to allow the experiences of children in marginalised positions to emerge, as these are indispensable for understanding processes that amount to inequalities. Methods must therefore address power differentials between me as an adult and a researcher, and the children. In order to invite children's own reference frames and own possibly private experiences to emerge, visual-aided interview methods were designed following feminist and relational approaches. That way, I aim to provide a platform for children's (counter)narratives of how the school functions as a practice place for them and how they navigate to belong. All in all, with this thesis, I attempt to make the implicit practices that amount to inequalities in citizenship learning more visible and thereby, contestable (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 13).

Thesis outline

This thesis contains the following chapters: a Theoretical framework on the practice place approach and conceptual framework; my Methodology, including my positions as researcher, my methods and methodological contribution; Findings, which describe children's narratives that answer my research questions; and the Discussion and Conclusion, highlighting this study's contributions, addressing limitations and discussing implications for practice and research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Citizenship in the Dutch context

Over the last few decades, there has been a surge of interest in citizenship education. This has resulted in citizenship being included in national curricula throughout Europe and many other countries worldwide (Eurydice, 2012, 2017; Geboers et al., 2013). However, public understandings of citizenship in schools vary across countries and time: this malleable concept is defined in the slipstream of political and societal developments (Devine, 2002; Dijkstra et al., 2015; Eurydice, 2017). Within national contexts too, conceptions of citizenship education remain disputed, as defining good citizenship is inherently normative (Eidhof, 2016; Verhoeven, 2012).

The complexities in shaping citizenship education are specifically salient in the Dutch context. Of all European countries, the Netherlands were last to introduce citizenship as a statutory obligation for primary and secondary education in 2005 — and only did so in very general terms (Dijkstra et al., 2021). This reluctance stems from the constitutional ‘freedom of education’, which historically afforded Dutch schools an exceptional degree of autonomy. Hence, schools are free to shape their citizenship content, approach and frequency, for instance according to their religious or pedagogical orientation and student context (Bron & Thijs, 2011; Munniksmas et al., 2017; Sincer et al., 2019). Though in practice, many school leaders and teachers struggle to translate this highly ambiguous policy into school reality (Bron & Thijs, 2011). This setup has allowed for continued disappointing results for Dutch citizenship education in comparison to similar countries¹, such as (1) insufficient attention spent on citizenship by schools, (2) lower citizenship competences for students, (3) inequality, in terms of exceptionally high variation between schools coinciding with social backgrounds of student bodies (Dijkstra et al., 2021; Munniksmas et al., 2017).

It is within this context that I explore the experiences of practices that amount to differential citizenship learning in schools. In the first section, I elaborate on the approach that I employ throughout this thesis to relate to citizenship: schools as communities that function as practice places. In the second section, I introduce the conceptual framework with which I operationalise the workings of such practice places: by means of factors that shape children’s experiences in the school community, such as belonging and classroom climate.

¹ Flanders, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. “These countries are comparable to the Netherlands on the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme” (Dijkstra et al., 2021, p. 137).

2.2 Citizenship learning in the school as a practice place

2.2.1 Approach

Throughout this thesis, I approach the school as a community: a small society, in which children² develop and practice citizenship continuously. Such practices take place relationally, in the everyday ways in which children negotiate their rights and responsibilities, as well as their place in the community (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021b; Flanagan, 2013; Lawy & Biesta, 2006). This premise is rooted in the seminal work of philosopher John Dewey, whose century-old propositions are still present in contemporary scholarly work on citizenship education (e.g. Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Verhoeven, 2012; Flanagan, 2013; Maurissen et al., 2018).

Particularly helpful for this study is Dewey's view of education, democracy and society as strongly intertwined and interdependent (Dewey, 1916/1997, 1927/2016; Hildebrand, 2018). This perspective diverges from the way citizenship education is often understood: as additional practices set apart from regular academic learning (van der Ploeg, 2016). By contrast, according to Dewey, democracy and education are two sides of the same coin: both intend to involve *and* cultivate self-determination and self-development, for everyone and anyone (van der Ploeg, 2016). Education and democracy do not exist in a vacuum: they are in turn both informed by *and* contribute to the social realm (Dewey, 1916/1997; Hildebrand, 2018). As Dewey puts the interplay between education and society: "not only does social life demand teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates" (1916/1997, p. 6). Finally, Dewey understands democracy in terms of social life too: democracy is "primarily a mode of associated living", it is "the idea of community life itself" (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 93, 1927/2016, p. 175).

For this case study, this means that in order to understand the ways children experience their school as a practice place for citizenship, there is no need for a narrow focus on specific classes or activities (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021a). Because in line with this approach, aspects of citizenship are deeply embedded in and addressed throughout any of the associations within the school community, both in purposive as well as more unintentional ways.

² As this thesis concerns young teenagers in primary school, who refer to each other as "children" or "kids", I predominantly use the word "children". Nevertheless, much of the cited studies and arguments in this thesis apply to adolescents too. In addition, as most discussed studies speak of students, I sometimes follow that same terminology when it concerns children in their specific capacity as students.

2.2.2 Functioning of the school as a practice place

In understanding such school community-based learning experiences, the Citizenship Competences Questionnaire³ (CCQ; see Ten Dam et al. 2011) provides a useful framework (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021a). The CCQ distinguishes four kinds of citizenship practices for ages 11 through 16: acting democratically, acting in a socially responsible manner, dealing with conflicts and dealing with differences. Examples include children voicing their views and hearing those of others, and taking responsibility in their community, for instance by recognising and standing up to exclusion and discrimination. While such citizenship learning can take place within any community, for many children schools are the first public arena in which they encounter peers and teachers with different values and views than they find in their home environments (Maurissen et al., 2018; Verhoeven, 2012).

Ideally, the school ensures that all children are continuously and frequently presented with such citizenship learning opportunities. In addition, it is deemed crucial schools organise joint reflection on the experiences within the school community as well as those gained outside of the school's context (Daniels, 2001; Dewey, 1916/1997). Indeed, it is argued citizenship learning should be strongly connected to children's actual lives and interests, as well as the social, economic, cultural and political contexts these are implicated in (Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Weller, 2007). In that sense, children can interpret the ways society works for them *through* the relationships and practices at school — a function that developmental psychologist Constance Flanagan attributes to what she terms *mediating institutions* (2013). As children's experiences with society and institutions are often indirect, Flanagan argues that such mediating institutions⁴ function as mini-polities: they provide more direct experiences with community membership, through which children collectively “work out what it means to be a citizen of the larger polity” (p. 229). That way, they can gain trust in societal institutions as well as in their own capacities as citizens (Maurissen et al., 2018). Furthermore, enacting this school community membership is not limited to getting acquainted with society as it is now: it includes exercising the right to challenge and negotiate dominant narratives and practices too (Flanagan, 2013; Biesta & Lawy, 2006).

These accounts illustrate how schools can function as practice places for citizenship. In reality however, schools are often not (en)able(d) to fully harness its potential. If citizenship calls for ‘learning by doing’, school professionals should practice a democratic ethic too (Maurissen et al., 2018; Dewey, 1916/1997): “a credible and successful democracy must not only be the aim of education but also its means” (Claes et al., 2017, p. 28s; Dewey, 1916/1997)

³ This framework, like other major instruments that attempt to measure citizenship competences, can be criticised in terms of measurement validity (e.g. in self-reporting skills) and normativity. However, its categories appear useful for organising types of citizenship learning experiences.

⁴ i.e. schools, as well as extracurricular, religious and other community-based organisations.

Instead, it has been pointed out how school practices can implicitly communicate rather undemocratic norms. Children are subjected to adult control throughout the school day, as part of a system which, scholars argue, encourages them to let themselves be regulated, rather than actively voice their views on the school governance (Thornberg, 2008; Schimmel, 2003). Following the logic of the school as a practice place, the moral construction of 'the good student' that is embedded in school practices – such as school rules – shape children's conception of citizenship (Thornberg, 2009). If there is dissonance between the participation that is often formally promoted in citizenship education and the 'hidden curriculum' taught through practices, this may lead to cynicism and apathy (Schimmel, 2003).

On a related note, studies have pointed out how schools can bolster different types of citizenship through their practices. For instance, within the Dutch context, pre-vocational tracks tend to emphasise behaving appropriately and conforming to norms, whereas pre-university tracks are found to stimulate classroom discussion, critical thinking and political agency (Geijssel et al., 2012; Leenders et al., 2008; Nieuwelink et al., 2019; ten Dam & Volman, 2003). In the various typologies scholars have proposed for citizenship, the latter appears the preferred kind, termed critical-democratic citizenship or social justice-oriented citizenship (Leenders et al., 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). By contrast, the former type – referred to as adapting citizenship or personally responsible citizenship – is considered as limited in terms of the contribution to democracy it enables students to make (Leenders et al., 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In addition, scholars have warned that the adapting kind can thwart the development of a critical-democratic type of citizenship, by transferring values onto children without further reflection (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Leenders & Veugelers, 2004, 2009). In sum, different types of citizenship follow from different school practices (Veugelers, 2007). This calls for attention for the ways the school might function as a practice place unintentionally or disproportionately, thereby limiting citizenship learning opportunities now, and potentially leading to disengaged citizens in the future (Schimmel, 2003).

These unintentional workings have been illustrated by a recent study by Rinooy Kan and colleagues (2021). Their multiple case study demonstrates the value of the practice place approach for investigating the citizenship learning opportunities that school communities can offer students. Not only did they identify a large variation among schools in their functioning as a practice place. Their study also illustrates how many learning opportunities readily available within the school context can go untapped, such as the ones stemming from differences between students. Because opportunities are frequently not recognised and reflected upon as such by school professionals, much of schools' role in students' developing their citizenship remains unintentional. Moreover, citizenship learning opportunities appeared to be distributed unevenly

among different groups of students. These observations urge us to look at how and why students experience their school differently in terms of its practice place function.

To conclude, approaching schools as practice places in this case study allows me to move beyond citizenship as formal subject matter and recognise many more citizenship learning opportunities embedded into the school community. Engaging with citizenship learning as an ongoing and relational process enables me to shed light on the ways in which different types of citizenship are implicitly and/or unintentionally promoted throughout everyday practices. By contrast, focusing on formal and deliberate teaching of citizenship will likely give a much more limited understanding of how inequalities in citizenship come about, as these may well be more or less equal to all children.

2.3 Factors shaping children's citizenship learning

2.3.1 Conceptual framework

Approaching the school as a practice place uncovers a multitude of learning opportunities already present within the school community, through which children can experience and develop their identities as citizens (Geboers et al., 2014). These learning experiences are shaped by the particular school contexts into which they are embedded (Scheerens, 2011). In order to operationalise the school as a practice place and provide an outline of how those school contexts may influence citizenship learning, I have devised a conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1). This framework is informed by previously suggested citizenship models (e.g. Dijkstra et al., 2014; Scheerens, 2011) as well as empirical studies. As empirical studies on the citizenship learning processes behind the outcomes are limited in number and vary in their conceptualisations, scope and outcomes, this schematic framework should be understood as a heuristic device (Dijkstra et al., 2014; Scheerens, 2011). To delineate the scope of this child-centred case study, it is constructed in order to highlight factors in which children are main actors. Therefore, some factors conditioning the school culture are not included in this scheme, such as the professional community, school leadership style and parental involvement.

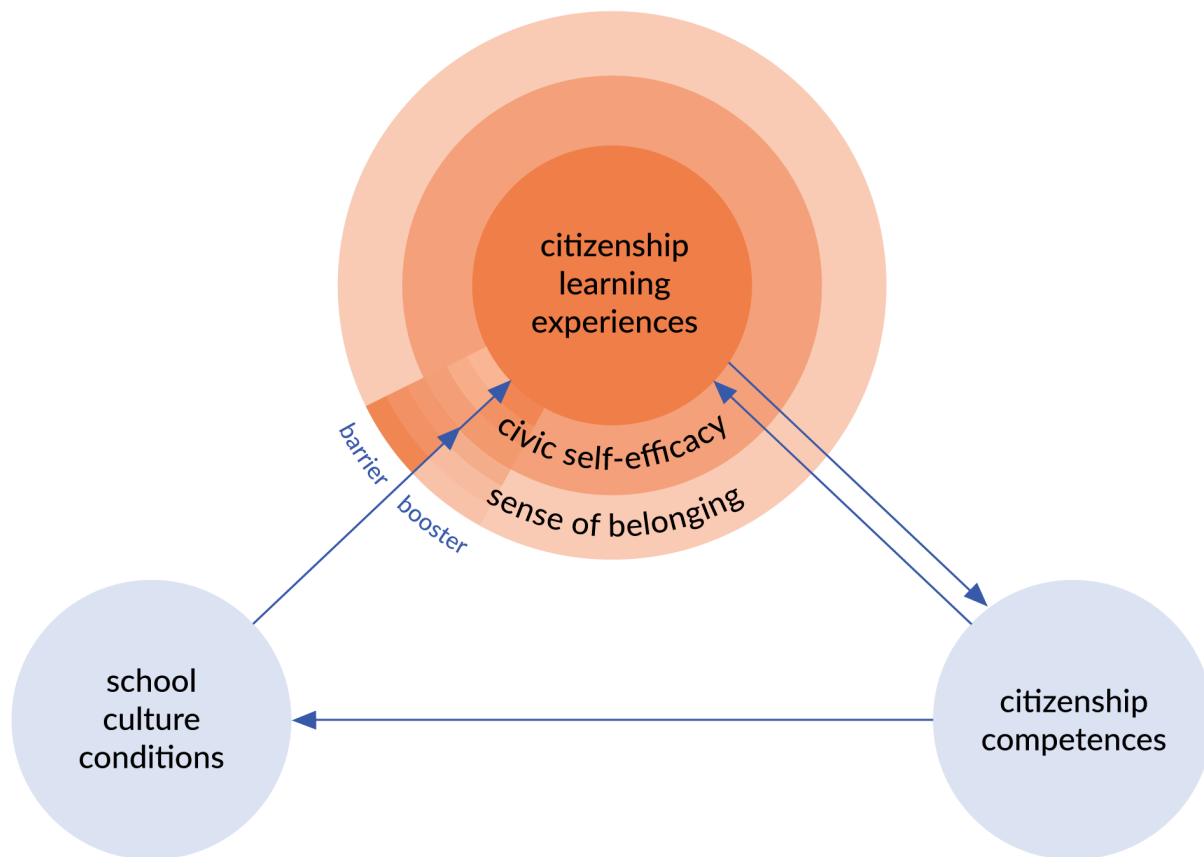


Figure 2.1 - Conceptual framework

Dissecting citizenship learning into separate factors and outcomes may initially seem like an artificial exercise, since I approach citizenship as a continuous process rather than as an outcome (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). However, I argue that such a schematic overview is helpful in understanding how and why children may differ in their experience of that process.

This framework distinguishes three dimensions: (1) the context, i.e. the school culture (2), the learning experiences embedded therein and (3) the outcomes, such as citizenship competences (Scheerens, 2011). As I will discuss in the next section, the school culture shapes children's citizenship learning opportunities and is understood as defined by the following main factors: an open discussion climate, which includes student-student and student-teacher relationships, and student voice. In the subsequent section, I will argue that these factors do not benefit each child's citizenship learning in the same way. Instead, I contend that two individually conditioning factors, *sense of belonging* and *civic self-efficacy*, mediate the advantageous aspects of the school culture on citizenship learning opportunities. Hence, through this conceptual framework, I propose a way to understand how the same school culture may affect different children in different ways.

Finally, this framework sees the three dimensions not only as a one-way process from context, via learning experiences, to competences. Instead, it is acknowledged that with these acquired competences, children can perceive different opportunities and also have an influence on the school culture themselves (Scheerens, 2011). That way, I understand the relations between these dimensions in my framework as reciprocal rather than unidirectional.

2.3.2 School culture: classroom climate and student voice

Open classroom climate

The values, norms and expectations that make up the school culture provide children with a practice place for citizenship. The most researched aspect of school culture is the classroom climate (e.g. Campbell, 2008; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Hoskins et al., 2017; Maurissen et al., 2018). An *open classroom climate* describes students' perception of the classroom as a space for introducing and discussing issues, exploring various opinions as well as their own, in addition to feeling safe to disagree with their teachers and fellow students (Hoskins et al., 2017; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Such a climate in the classroom⁵ – as well as in less structured spaces throughout the school, for example hallways and playgrounds (Jagers et al., 2017) – has repeatedly been reported as positively related to the development of citizenship competences (Geboers et al., 2013). Much remains unknown with regards to how such a climate exactly comes about and how it works for whom (Claes et al., 2017; Wanders, Dijkstra, Maslowski, & van der Veen, 2020). Yet two general components are clear: relationships with peers and with school professionals are crucial, because an open climate requires students to feel that their opinions are appreciated by both (Claes et al., 2017).

Positive relationships among students have been suggested to advance participation in class as well as societal engagement (Wanders, van der Veen, et al., 2020; Wanders, Dijkstra, Maslowski, & van der Veen, 2020). However, it should be noted that these positive peer relationships do not automatically feed into a more open climate, as they could also be disruptive or decrease motivation (Wanders, van der Veen, et al., 2020).

Positive relationships between students and teachers are more unequivocal: students who feel respected and get along well with their teachers feel encouraged to engage in class discussions, also with others who think differently (Maurissen et al., 2018). Teachers and other school professionals thus play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining an open school and classroom climate. In addition, for developing societal involvement, teachers have been found to be more influential socialising agents to secondary school students than their parents or friends are (Wanders, Dijkstra, Maslowski, van der Veen, et al., 2020). Arguably, teachers play an even

⁵ At least up until age 12, most students in the Netherlands are situated in their own fixed classroom with one or two fixed teachers.

more important role in primary school, where students have only one or two teachers with whom they spend all their time at school and the teachers' degree of authority is still relatively high compared to that of peers. Indeed, within the school community, teachers represent authority. In that capacity, teachers do not only – intentionally and unintentionally – model certain moral constructs of citizenship through their own behaviour and beliefs (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021b). In keeping with a practice place approach, scholars have also contended that children may construct their concepts of authority and institutions, as well as their efficacy, through dealing with more *proximate authority figures* — such as teachers (Bandura, 1997; Flanagan, 2013). In this way, in their relationships with their teacher, children gain a sense of their broader relationship to authority (Flanagan, 2013) — and in the case of an open climate, they get to negotiate it too.

Student voice

Another main factor influencing children's citizenship learning experiences is *student voice*. It includes students' formal and informal involvement in school governance, for example by participating in rule-making, sharing views on improving school affairs, or being a member of a student council (Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Mitra, 2004; Schimmel, 2003). It encompasses *having* a voice, being given the opportunity to *express* it, having the right to be *heard* and responded to, and to be able to *influence* decision-making (Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Lundy, 2007).

Such elements contribute to the improvement of the school and classroom climate (Maurissen et al., 2018; Voight, 2015). However, as opposed to the classroom climate, opportunities to experience voice are often not an integral part of children's school day. Although student voice can provide children with valuable learning experiences, three hurdles arise that this study should take into account. First, the impact of student voice efforts may be thwarted by teachers who view the children as inherently not mature or experienced enough to make a valid contribution (Thornberg, 2009). Second, even when school management does value student voice, students themselves may not perceive their voices as being invited (Reichert et al., 2018). Finally, many activities for student involvement are voluntary (Hoskins et al., 2017) and only selectively available. This leads to inequitable access, which I will discuss in this chapter's final section. To conclude, taking seriously how children themselves perceive the citizenship learning opportunities available to them is key to gain understanding of the differential workings of the school as a practice place.

2.3.3 Children's individual experiences: belonging and efficacy

In order to investigate how and why children might vary in their experience of the school as practice place, we need to know how the previously discussed school culture factors may work

for individual students. For that purpose, two concepts rooted in social psychology are of use: *sense of belonging* and *civic self-efficacy*.

Sense of belonging

Students' sense of belonging in school has been defined as "the extent to which they feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, pp. 60–61). Because citizenship learning cannot be understood separately from the relationships and social interactions in which it is embedded, a sense of belonging is considered a prerequisite for citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Indeed, longitudinal studies have indicated that students' sense of belonging in school is an important predictor of civic and political engagement in young adulthood (Flanagan, 2013; Flanagan & Stout, 2010). Even though the wider importance of belonging has been established, for example in relation to academic achievement, motivation and self-esteem, students still struggle to belong in their schools (Allen et al., 2018; OECD, 2017, 2019). Moreover, belonging appears highly significant to students themselves too, given the observation that the 1 out of 10 Dutch students who feel like an outsider at school, are 4.2 times more likely to be unsatisfied with their lives (OECD, 2017).

For these reasons, belonging has a central place in my conceptual framework. If citizenship learning takes place through experiences in the school community, then children's perceptions of their psychological membership in that community envelops all learning opportunities. In that capacity, belonging can be understood to mediate the influence that the previously discussed school cultural factors – classroom climate and student voice – have on citizenship learning. Although research on school belonging has been termed fragmented and lacking a clear framework (Allen et al., 2018), I find reasonable support for this interpretation in empirical work. Next to voice (Mitra, 2004), notably classroom climate – which included the nature of students' relationships with peers and teachers – has been strongly related to belonging. Although relations between students throughout adolescence are known to play an increasing role in how students perceive school, teacher support remains the major predictor of school belonging across studies (Allen et al., 2018; OECD, 2017). When a teacher creates a certain classroom climate, this does more than simply enable students to 'unleash' their citizenship skills. Moreover, the ways teachers use their authority sends students messages on who belongs, whose narratives count and by which standards on respect and fairness community members should treat one another (Flanagan, 2013; Maurissen et al., 2018). Through this everyday modelling by their teachers and others in school, children arguably construct conceptions of their membership and thus their belonging in the school community (Flanagan et al., 2007). This, in turn, appears likely to condition how learning opportunities within that community are experienced.

In this light, the question arises how individual children's learning might be supported or thwarted by their sense of belonging. Certain children may feel their membership is strongly contingent upon certain dispositions that they do not embody, such as enacting 'school-appropriate' behaviour or speaking 'the right way' (El Hadioui et al., 2019). From this perspective, sense of belonging is not just a factor associated with higher well-being, academic outcomes or citizenship competences. It is what each child internalises from what the daily interactions in the school community tell them about their membership; their identity as emerging citizens. As this may shape young people's perceptions and actions as members of the greater society outside school too, from a practice place perspective, sense of belonging at school is critical to citizenship learning and should be taken into account to understand differences.

Civic self-efficacy

The second concept that furthers comprehension of how school characteristics work differently for different children's citizenship learning is *civic self-efficacy*. It stems from the more established and more general notion of self-efficacy, which denotes one's belief in their ability to succeed in certain situations (Bandura, 1997). This is in turn considered to shape individual choices, efforts and perseverance in those situations (Schulz et al., 2016). Two of the major suggested sources for building efficacy are mastery – personal experiences of success – and social modelling — seeing others succeed (Bandura, 1997). These underline the previously discussed importance of citizenship learning opportunities as well as the modelling of citizenship by teachers in everyday school practices. Upon reviewing literature, the definitions of *civic self-efficacy* appear inconsistent. In broad terms, civic self-efficacy concerns students' belief in their capacity as citizens. Given the previously discussed critical-democratic aspect of citizenship, that capacity arguably includes effecting change within (semi-)public arenas such as the school (Serriere, 2014). Civic self-efficacy can thus be understood as encompassing the more prevalent concept of (socio)political efficacy, making the definition used throughout this thesis as follows: children's perceptions of their abilities to act as a citizen and of whether their actions can make a difference (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Serriere, 2014).

There are two main reasons for taking civic self-efficacy into account when attempting to understand inequalities in workings of the school as a practice place. First, research suggests that voice (Mitra, 2004) and an open classroom climate (Blasko et al., 2018; Flanagan et al., 2007; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2017) contribute to the development of civic efficacy, while civic efficacy is in turn also found to determine students' perception of

such a climate (Claes et al., 2017)⁶. This implies a self-reinforcing relationship between civic efficacy and the way learning opportunities available in the school culture are experienced. Second, civic efficacy does not only seem to interact with perceptions, but also with citizenship outcomes. Correlations have consistently been found between students' belief in their civic capabilities and their citizenship knowledge and attitudes — also efficacy and competences are suggested to reinforce one another (Blasko et al., 2018). Indeed, civic efficacy is deemed a requirement for being engaged as citizen, as without such confidence one tends to avoid citizenship interactions — and thereby citizenship learning (Claes et al., 2017). For these two reasons, civic self-efficacy takes a central position in my conceptual framework: based on its relationship to school characteristics, it appears likely that after belonging, also self-efficacy may condition the access to and use of citizenship learning opportunities. The relevance of taking civic self-efficacy into account is further emphasised from a practice place perspective, as the civic efficacy children develop in school may serve as foundation for their efficacy in larger communities and arenas (Flanagan, 2013; Maurissen et al., 2018).

Implications for this study

The ways children engage in learning experiences likely depends on their sense of belonging in the school community as well as their civic self-efficacy. This provides a possible way to approach variation in experienced learning opportunities within one and the same classroom. It implies the following. Even if classmates generally regard the school climate as fair, democratic or full of possibilities for voice, learning opportunities will remain out of reach for a child who does not feel they belong to the community that provides these opportunities, or feels they lack the capacity to recognise, access or act on them.

Understanding belonging and civic efficacy as central to citizenship learning further delineates the focus of this case study in the following way. Both belonging and civic efficacy seem strongly related to children's perceptions of how they and their peers are treated by their teacher (Allen et al., 2018; Flanagan, 2013). Children are argued to develop a sense of themselves as capable civic actors in the school community by means of their teachers – as proximate authority figures – taking them seriously in that capacity (Flanagan et al., 2007). This includes the feeling that they are treated fairly, such as not being offered less learning opportunities or disciplined more harshly than (high achieving) others (Flanagan et al., 2007; OECD, 2017). However, it has been found that teachers do (unintentionally) differentiate in the

⁶ It must be noted that Claes and colleagues use the operationalisation of citizenship self-efficacy as set out by the ICCS (International Civic and Citizenship Education Study — the world's largest international study of citizenship education). It is limited to the component of students' "self-confidence in their ability to handle different situations and take actions related to civic issues and civic participation" (Blasko et al., 2018, p. 19) and thus does not include whether students feel their efforts can make a difference.

standards they maintain for students and that students indeed experience this as unfair (Denessen, 2017; OECD, 2017). This is also relevant in terms of inequalities, as negative experiences with school authority are correlated with disadvantaged positions in social hierarchies in intersectional ways (Bruch & Soss, 2018; OECD, 2017). Therefore, as a way to understand belonging and civic efficacy in a more contextualised way, this study examines how they are manifested in children's relationship to authority figures. For instance, I explore in which ways they feel they meet their teachers' standards and whether they feel capable and warranted to question these.

Furthermore, in relation to inequalities, children's differential accounts of sense of belonging and civic self-efficacy can serve as a way to understand how symbolic resources are distributed among children within the classroom. Paulle and Kalir have described how understanding dynamics in terms of *the established* and *the outsiders* can help to uncover how relevant resources function as constraints to various interactions and position takings (2014). In this study, those interactions and position takings concern citizenship learning experiences. Paulle and Kalir have proposed this alternative to traditional categories of power such as class or ethnicity, as they emphasise how researchers can miss out on other strongly distinguishing factors for inequalities when focusing solely on essentialist categories. Following my conceptual framework, belonging and civic efficacy are the relevant resources in terms of access to and benefit of citizenship learning opportunities. Therefore, belonging and efficacy can be understood as what shapes children's positions of established (or dominant) and outsider (or marginalised) in the opportunity structure for citizenship within the school community.

In sum, with this conceptual framework, I contend that each child's sense of belonging and civic self-efficacy may be mediating possible advantageous aspects of the school culture, such as open climate and voice. For this case study, I believe it would be analytically limited to approach civic efficacy and belonging as final destinations in function and as discrete and uniform in nature. Rather, I argue that in the school as practice place, children's efficacy and belonging continuously interact with the citizenship practices present in the school, defining their action perspectives towards learning opportunities. Again, as *doing* citizenship is *learning* citizenship, this interaction may result in differential citizenship learning for each child. This plausibly self-reinforcing cycle of doing and learning can be understood as producing dominant and marginalised positions in relation to a school's citizenship opportunity structure. Therefore, this case study employs civic efficacy and belonging as lenses instead: as tools to explore *when* and *how* citizenship learning may be bolstered or constrained for *whom*.

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach

Ontological and epistemological position

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the theoretical approach I employ to understand citizenship in schools: the school as a practice place. This approach entails certain methodological presumptions too. First, in terms of ontology, approaching schools as practice places involves constructivist principles. For instance, viewing citizenship as an ongoing and relational practice implies it gains its meaning to social actors in interaction and is consequently constantly reworked there. Therefore, in investigating citizenship learning, I centre social interaction, and I presume citizenship processes are highly dependent on who is involved as well as in which context. As a result, epistemologically speaking, I value subjective perceptions of social realities. Specifically, I value the experiences of children, as they are (or should be) the primary social actors within citizenship learning practices (Clark, 2011). Consequently, how a school functions as a practice place cannot be understood without the meanings and messages that each child takes away from citizenship learning opportunities. In addition, assuming children base their action perspective on their perceptions, these perceptions are also vital in understanding disparities in access to and use of learning opportunities.

A sociological approach

Much of what is known about citizenship education stems from pedagogical and educational sciences or is provided by quantitative sociological and political sciences studies. Such studies frequently revolve around either goals and/or methods for teaching citizenship, or student outcomes. From a sociological perspective, my interest lies in the ways social structures are reproduced in individual interactions. While inequalities certainly play a significant role in the dominant body of work, I find such research is usually geared at demonstrating the existence of inequalities rather than better understanding what constitutes them. As a result, much about citizenship learning practices and inequalities remains unknown. Qualitative sociological inquiry can make a useful contribution here, for which I believe understanding schools as practice places is an appropriate approach. Although this approach is often discussed in relation to pedagogical objectives (e.g. (Dewey, 1916/1997; Veugelers, 2007)), I consider its value as sociological too, in the sense that it provides a lens to understand how young people may develop themselves in relation to broader social structures. Through that lens, I mean to engage with the interplay of individual children and society, of biography and history, in a way that adds to the current body of research (Mills, 1959/2000).

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Research design

In order to study children's experiences and perspectives of their school as a practice place, and moreover how this differs across children, I have conducted a qualitative, child-centred case study (Clark, 2011). This study revolves around 11 semi-structured one-on-one interviews with children, with a duration of on average one hour, which were conducted at two primary schools in the Netherlands. I have designed, tested and applied a visually-aided interview approach appropriate to the age group of 10 to 11-year-olds, as well as to the purpose – to elicit (possibly private) feelings and experiences regarding abstract notions such as belonging, class climate and civic efficacy.

The interviews took place in April 2021, during which the Netherlands was in a COVID-19 induced lockdown, requiring adjustment to prevailing measures⁷. In order to better situate children's accounts, I additionally performed four video calls with the children's teachers of on average one hour, in April and June 2021 – before and after conducting the children's interviews. Furthermore, I made use of memos on short observations throughout the three days I was present at the schools and each of the schools' websites and school plans. Together, the teacher conversations, observations and school documents serve as support for my interpretations of the interviews and are therefore not systematically analysed. In the pages that follow, I will discuss my approach towards interviewing and the methods I devised in line with that approach.

3.2.2 Approach to methods

Approach to interviewing

Interviews can be a useful way to access children's ideas and memories in their own words and language structure (Josselson, 2013; Reinhartz, 1992). However, children's accounts will always be entangled with my elicitation and interpretation of them. A major concern here are power differentials. Next to those connected to the roles of researcher and participant, children additionally are implicated in inherent adult-child power differences (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Two approaches have broadly informed me in how to attend to these issues of intersubjectivity and power in interviews: a relational and a feminist approach.

A relational approach to interviewing urges me to recognise that participants will shape the narratives they agree to share with me, according to their assessments of who I am and how I respond to them (Josselson, 2013). Whatever forms of data I collect, these will always be mediated by my positioned presence. This underscores the need to make conscious design

⁷ Such as working around uncertainties in relation to school lockdowns, testing before and after each school visit, using face masks, keeping distance and disinfecting the interview room.

decisions with regards to how my methods might nudge participants to relate to me. To further contemplate my relationship with children as research participants, feminist perspectives prove useful. For example, these perspectives guide me to avoid enforcing essentialist frameworks of objectivity on the children's accounts and instead aim to understand each of their statements and expressions as situated in their social reality (Reinharz, 1992). In addition, different forms of feminism underline the importance of reciprocity. By means of truly listening and being concerned with contributing to children's – and by extension, the teachers and school leaders who enable their participation – sense-making and legitimation of lived experience, I attempt to establish reciprocity (Bassel & Emejulu, 2017; Beuving & Vries, 2015). In the 'Data collections process' section, I look back on the extent to which I believe reciprocity was indeed in place.

Considerations on interviewing as research method

An approach informed by relational and feminist perspectives brings into view certain facets of interviewing, which should be taken into account. First, expectations ought to be appropriate in terms of what interviews may be used as 'evidence' for. For instance, insights gained from interviews may be regarded as a single still image of a reality that is actually in constant flux (Beuving & Vries, 2015; Josselson, 2013). I include this concern in my approach, by relating to the stories that children share with me as 'in-between stories', or *internarratives*: bits of an untamed and heterogeneous collection of stories that are ever changing (Kaulingfreks, 2019). In this way, I mean to acknowledge that the internarratives children choose to share with me are not all-encompassing representations of their experiences: some will emerge during my visits, while others remain unaddressed.

Another consideration for interpreting interviews regards the previously mentioned situatedness of children's accounts. People's expressions are relative to their own reference frame shaped by social situatedness and previous experiences. Hence, I should be cautious about portraying their accounts as general truths or comparing them across children in a way that disconnects statements from the child. Instead, I therefore strive to harness the qualitative research principle of emphasising subjectivity (Clark, 2011). In approaching the school as practice place, I intend to illustrate that although learning opportunities might formally be equal for all, within each child's individual reference frame they may actually be experienced in very different ways, thereby constituting different practices for them. However, to avoid relativism, I map differently situated accounts of the same practices within the same school onto each other. That way, by understanding internarratives in relation to each other, I aim to shed light on the co-construction of citizenship learning practices (Clark, 2011). In this regard, children's varying realities are not so much a limitation to research aims, but rather a vital aspect.

Finally, I should also pay attention to what those subjective accounts exactly indicate. Because verbal statements have been argued to be poor predictors of actual situated behaviour (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014), I should primarily relate to children's accounts as carriers of perceptions, understandings and feelings about practices and their discourses. The notion of narratives is helpful here too: what children express during the interviews is a blend of the stories that they tell about themselves as well as stories they *are told* about themselves (Kaulingfreks, 2019). Although these stories provide an image of how children relate to certain practices, they should not be taken as actual proof of behaviour, considering the complex and dynamic relationships their actual interactions are embedded in.

3.2.3 Methods designed

Rationale for designing interview methods

With the above considerations in mind, I formulate two major criteria for designing child-centred interview methods in this study. My first criterion dictates that interviews ought to be grounded in the discourses, activities and frameworks that are relevant to children themselves (Clark, 2011; Eder & Fingerson, 2002). This is necessary, because I argue some of the principal methods to investigate young people's citizenship primarily focus on how accustomed they are to the channels of dominant age groups and social classes⁸. Instead, if the aim is to learn more about children's actual citizenship learning, methods should give way to children's own concerns and ways of civic, social and political engagement (see Kaulingfreks, 2015). For my interview methods, this means that they should provide children with the experience of at least some degree of control. For instance, when I initiate certain topics, they should be open enough for children to interpret and redirect them, so their own norms can emerge in conversation (Eder & Fingerson, 2002)

This leads to the second criterion: my interviews should amplify children's voices and make them feel safe to resist dominant narratives (Clark, 2011; Kaulingfreks, 2019). Because in a world controlled by adults, children often occupy a subordinate and marginalised position — in daily life as well as social science research (Clark, 2011; Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Children are surrounded by adults – authority figures – who have the power to command their actions (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Though when it comes to social interaction, children are increasingly acknowledged as active agents in the social dynamics they are involved in, shaping their life worlds and those of others (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Thornberg, 2008; Weller, 2007). All the more reason to take children's accounts seriously when it comes to understanding the school as

⁸ For instance, in the International Civic and Citizenship Education (ICCS) study, teenagers' civic self-efficacy is amongst indicators measured in terms of how well they believe they could "write a letter to a newspaper giving your view on a current issue" or "follow a television debate about a controversial issue" (Claes et al., 2017, p. 30S; Munniksma et al., 2017).

practice place for citizenship. However, since I am an adult, children may feel the need to reproduce certain dominant discourses – for instance, about what constitutes a ‘good child’ – and adjust their accounts towards me accordingly (Kaulingfreks, 2019). This would hamper the validity of their accounts. Therefore, it is vital the children feel from the start that they are free to contest me. In addition, my questions should encourage them to discuss ways in which they feel they deviate from certain norms, so as to distinguish more between internalised dominant narratives and their own. Besides improving the quality of the data, such *counternarratives* allow me to understand if and how children experience marginalisation in school. They can shed light on the dominant narratives we have come to understand as ‘normal’ (Kaulingfreks, 2019) and gain insight into the ways this affects the citizenship learning of children who do not effortlessly embody those norms.

Methods: children’s drawn context

In an attempt to root the interviews within the children’s own contexts and invite them to resist my approach as researcher as well as dominant narratives in society and school, I designed the following methods. At the start of the interview, I explain to children there are no right or wrong answers. I then hand them three blue cards that say ‘What do you mean exactly?’, ‘I have a question/idea’ and ‘I’d rather not say’, and ask them to lay them wherever they like (see Figure 3.1). Placing these cards within children’s direct reach supports and legitimises them in pushing back throughout the interview. Next, I ask children to draw their classroom and everyone in it on a large sheet of paper. This way, I seek to contextualise the interview questions (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). In addition, drawing-aided interviews have been demonstrated to open up communication, as they provide children with control and means of expression (Clark, 2011). I then hand children a large 3-minute hourglass which they can turn whenever they are ready to draw, again making sure they have a share of process control and insight. When they finish drawing, I drag yellow image cards into their drawn classroom context, as a way to introduce a topic into their contexts. For instance, while dragging cards with a speech bubble and a cross to their picture of themselves, I ask about moments where they wanted to speak up in class, but decided not to⁹. Naturally, children are invited to drag cards onto their drawings too, continuing the storyline, or make new image cards out of the blank ones I bring. For the second part of the interview, they draw their homes. Overall, I try to avoid reminding children of traditional classroom settings that revolve around ‘the single correct answer’ and encourage them to introduce their own topics (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). With these tools, I aim to provide a format that allows for flexibility and that takes children seriously as actors.

⁹ All the interview questions combined with image card actions available upon request.

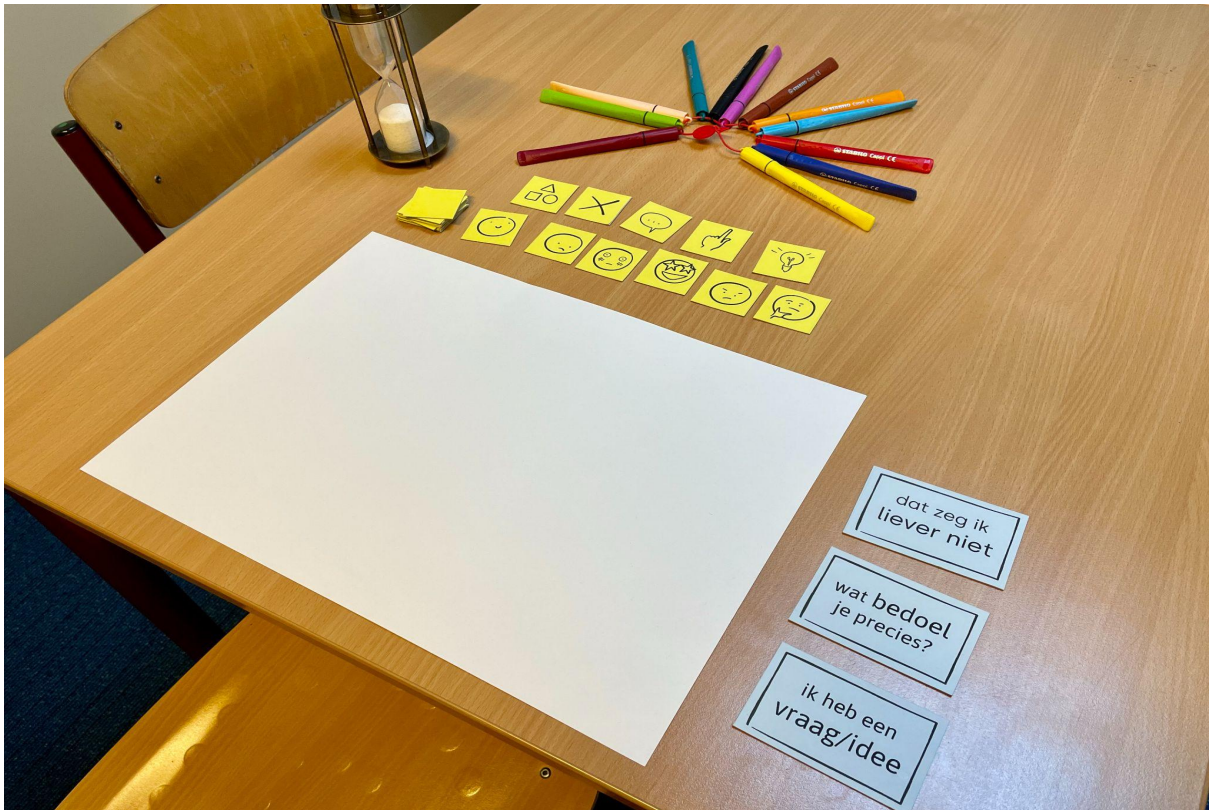


Figure 3.1 - Setup of drawing-aided interview materials

Interview guide

Although children are informally engaged with citizenship learning on an everyday basis, the term ‘citizenship’ in itself will plausibly carry limited meaning to children. Therefore, I translated relevant concepts from my theoretical framework into topics that 10 and 11-year-olds can relate to. I gathered examples of classroom situations and emic terms to refer to through pilot interviews with a 10-year-old and a primary school teacher, as well as the introductory conversations with the participating teachers. In broad terms, the interview existed of approximately 30 to 60 minutes of discussing the children’s school experiences – part 1 – and 10 to 15 minutes on their home life – part 2¹⁰. Part 1a situates the child in their classroom and is geared at the children’s perceptions of the norms their teachers hold for them and their classmates. Part 1b revolves around classroom climate and relationships, relating to authority and rules, opportunities for voice and agency, and civic self-efficacy. Part 1c concerns the children’s sense of belonging, differences between children, messages they get in school about who they are, and belonging at school in relation to who they are at home. Part 2 then addresses their home life, cultural background, relationships with relatives, responsibilities and activities, and what is important to them personally.

¹⁰ The interview guide is available upon request.

3.3 Participants and sampling

In this case study, 11 students from 2 Dutch primary schools and their teachers participated. I have focused on *groep 7*¹¹: the last year before students are divided into tracks while not preoccupied with final exams. I have recruited the participating schools by means of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012). My aim was to investigate variation in experiences within schools, with special attention to experiences of marginalisation. Therefore, the main selection criterion for schools was a student population that is heterogenous in terms of ethnoracialised and class status backgrounds. In addition, a soft criterion was to be allowed to physically visit the schools for the interviews. Complicating factors in finding schools willing to participate were the demanding circumstances for primary school teachers due to COVID-19 measures and absenteeism, on top of regular high workload. In order to increase chances of participation, I recorded a short video introducing myself and my research objectives and placed a call through my personal and professional¹² network. This way, two *groep 7* teachers and their schools were selected, whom I both got in contact with via their school leaders. The schools' main characteristics are listed in Figure 3.2.

	Public Montessori	Christian Primary School the Bridge
Denomination	Pedagogical concept: Montessori ¹³	Religious denomination: Protestant Christian ¹⁴
Location	Larger city Located between working class and middle class neighbourhoods ¹⁵	Larger city Located in a working class neighborhood ¹⁶
Students - school population	Size: approximately 500 Population weight: 35,39 ¹⁷ (scale 20-40) From low as well as middle class neighbourhoods ¹⁸	Size: approximately 250 Population weight: 32,76 From predominantly low class neighbourhoods, small share of (upper-)middle class neighbourhoods ¹⁹

¹¹ Dutch term, comparable to fifth grade in the U.S. system and Year 6 in England and Wales.

¹² I work with(in) the field of education. However, I deliberately selected schools I do not work with and had not been in contact with before.

¹³ Teacher: "We are not even strict Montessori, because we still have quite a few books"

¹⁴ Teacher: "We have more or less let that go".

¹⁵ (RIVM, 2021).

¹⁶ (RIVM, 2021).

¹⁷ Three-year average of school years 2017-2020. Student population weights are devised by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) in order to predict risk of educational disadvantage: "the higher the school weighting, the more complex the student population and the lower the expected learning outcomes for this school" (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2019).

¹⁸ (PO-raad, 2021).

¹⁹ (PO-raad, 2021).

	Teacher: “half half: prosperous parents who choose Montessori deliberately and neighbourhood parents”	
Students - class visited	Size: 24 students Type: mixed <i>groep</i> 6/7/8 Ethnoracial backgrounds: Teacher: “24 kids, from which 7 really Dutch”, 13 non-western and 4 western backgrounds	Size: 27 students Type: <i>groep</i> 7 Ethnoracial backgrounds: Teacher: “4 very White kids of which 2 Christian, many Muslims”
Students - interviewed	6 students: 3 girls, 3 boys Ethnoracial backgrounds ²⁰ : 2 (White) Dutch, 2 Moroccan, 1 Polish and 1 Colombian	6 students: 3 girls, 2 boys Ethnoracial backgrounds: 1 Turkish, 1 Syrian, 2 (White) Dutch, 1 Somalian-Arabic, 1 Berber
Teachers	2 part-time teachers: Karin 4 days, Hans 1 day ²¹ Ethnoracial backgrounds: Teacher: “Mostly Dutch educated women”, teaching assistants and lunch break parents have non-western backgrounds	2 part-time teachers: Aniek 2 days, Charlotte 3 days Ethnoracial backgrounds: Teacher: “60/40 from which 60% White”

Figure 3.2 – Main characteristics of participating schools (pseudonymised)

As the main aim of this case study is to understand differences within and between schools rather than generalise them one-on-one to a wider population, representativeness is of secondary importance (Beuving & Vries, 2015; Gerring, 2017). However, it is still relevant to discuss representativeness, as I do wish to relate this study to a larger context (Gerring, 2017). In terms of participating teachers and their schools, two main considerations arise. First, schools with heterogeneous populations such as the ones selected are not average, due to segregation in Dutch primary education (Boterman et al., 2019). Therefore, many schools will not be as diverse in terms of different backgrounds as the schools in this study. Second, school professionals' response to my call was probably selective, only attracting those who are interested in citizenship. I have attempted to minimise this selection bias by stressing in my call that in my view, all schools unconsciously already practice citizenship, and that no substantive preparation is required. Indeed, I believe either school still presents highly relatable examples despite their above-average interest: at the Public Montessori, citizenship learning has no formal

²⁰ Based on self-identifications of students in most cases, otherwise based on accounts of classmates, and otherwise on teachers' identifications. Note: the children I spoke to do not use the term White and also do not refer to themselves as ‘...-Dutch’ (e.g. they say ‘I am Moroccan’, not ‘I am Moroccan-Dutch’).

²¹ Teaching part time is regular in Dutch primary education: only 1 out of 4 teachers work full time (Traag, 2018).

place in school, but is instead practiced informally and more ad hoc²². Meanwhile, Christian Primary School the Bridge has a more formalised infrastructure for citizenship, by use of a school wide program that the majority of schools in their city work with: the *Vreedzame School*.

With regards to the children's representativeness to other students in that school, both teachers indicated that they consider the children I spoke with to be representative for classmates and other classes, except that my sample does not include anyone with so-called behavioural problems, such as autism. This study thus lacks their experiences. At the Montessori school, this was not a deliberate exclusion, as the sample includes all *groep 7* students present in this mixed class. At the Bridge, the teacher indicated she did make a deliberate selection out of her students, on the basis of variation in backgrounds, gender, talkativeness and more withdrawn or present classroom behaviour. As for response among students, all approached parents gave permission for their children to participate²³. Lastly, samples could have been unrepresentative in terms of containing little friction between children and their teacher. Therefore, I checked my data whether a majority of the sampled children at each school appeared uncritical in general, or less critical of the participating teacher than their second teacher – this was not the case. In sum, the cases in this study are not representative of all schools and children, especially not of rural or homogeneous schools. However, they are not extremes either and plausibly form relatable examples due to the variety these cases present.

3.4 Data collection process and reflections

In this section, I will discuss the data collection process and reflections on that process, in order to enable replication as well as critical assessment.

3.4.1 Process

Preparations

As preparation is key for more natural and valid responses (Eder & Fingerson, 2002), I have dedicated time to familiarise myself with the school contexts children are embedded in. For instance, through video calls, I received details on what teachers and their students were currently preoccupied with, what characterises their school and class in terms of approach, social dynamics and challenges. Further, I prepared and tested different versions of methods

²² Citizenship is not mentioned in the school plan. The relevant teacher indicates she strongly values aspects related to citizenship, such as class discussions, cooperation and helping each other, but does not work with a formal citizenship curriculum.

²³ Initially, one mother declined, but came around after the teacher reached out and explained what it was about.

before fine-tuning one approach. That way I became more aware of ambiguities and better accustomed to my role, getting a sense of when to provide which cues in conversation.

Process

On interview days, I started by setting up the interview room and noting down observations in the school. I requested their most secluded room in order to ensure a private atmosphere for the children. Some shortcomings in terms of privacy were the glass entrance doors and audible sounds from the hallway. I countered these distractions by facing the childrens' chairs away from the door. At one point, a teacher walked in unannounced during an interview. Fortunately, the particular child did not appear affected in their demeanor after the event. Another aspect of interview quality I paid attention to was building rapport, for instance by means of attentive listening. For example, I set up a clock behind the children, so I could check the time without having to turn my head away from them. Further, I started off each interaction with nondirected conversation when picking them up from their classrooms. This gave me a sense of how to approach them. For instance, one boy was extremely nervous: he remained completely silent in response to a smalltalk question of mine. He was anxious to know what my questions would be about — he wanted to prepare his answers. This urged me to stress this was no test and no answer could be wrong, and to give insight into the process, after which he was more at ease.

While some kids were quite talkative from the start, most loosened up throughout the interview. This meant that during the final part, on their home lives, a lot of children seemed quite comfortable discussing intimate topics, such as parents fighting, the desire to be supported or appreciated more by parents or what makes them feel sad or angry at home. In that sense, discussing the home part last seemed appropriate. Also because it was of secondary importance to the study and I wanted to be flexible towards children's varying needs to tell their stories.

Indeed, there was quite some variation in the topics that the children talked about, as well as the total duration of each interview. While a few conversations felt saturated after 40 minutes, others had to be cut off at 60 or 75 minutes to avoid scheduling conflicts. While I had originally estimated the duration at 40 minutes, I learned from this that the interviews should be planned with ample time to run long – provided the teacher and child agreed – and with a maximum of three interviews per school day to allow for flexibility. The importance of avoiding time pressure was further underlined when I noticed the effect in audio recordings: my formulations got more rushed when one school's schedule unexpectedly changed, cutting my time with one child short. As children's perceptions of whether there is space for their stories strongly depends on my attitude, I must safeguard the necessary conditions.

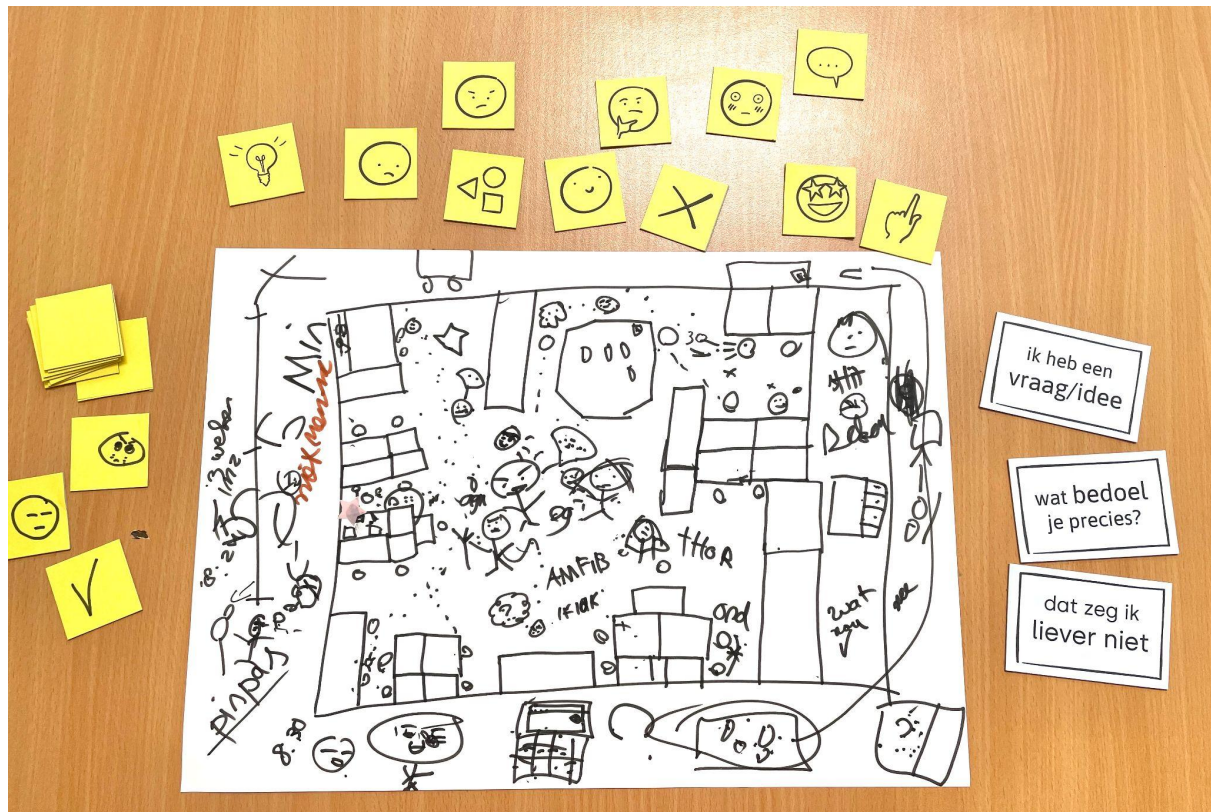


Figure 3.3 - 'Ongoing' classroom drawing by Jaylena, including 3 image cards drawn by her on the left

The use of visual and physical aids seemed to positively impact the quality of the interviews. Having the children draw provided an opportunity to observe their approach and provided insight into how children picture their environments. The relevance of these methods are illustrated by a girl for whom they seemed to form a game-changing outlet: Jaylena.²⁴ Her teacher had described her as “silent” and “not so bright cognitively”. Indeed, when observing their class, I noted she came across as absent minded. By contrast, one-on-one in the interview room Jaylena turned out to be the most talkative child I would speak to throughout this study. Interestingly, she used drawing as a way to illustrate important elements and chronology of anecdotes and feelings, ending up using four sheets instead of one to express her perceptions of school experiences. Furthermore, she referred to the existing image cards, but also seized the opportunity to create new ones. As Jaylena did not fit the image of someone who speaks in a schoolish correct way, by confusing similar words and using incorrect syntax, her ongoing drawings enabled me to better understand her sometimes incoherent stories and better represent her experiences with marginalisation in this case study.

Overall, the visual methods were used differently by different kids. A few finished their pictures in a minute, while others begged for more drawing time. Most used only one or two colours, which often included black, which I interpret as them approaching drawing more as a

²⁴ Names are pseudonymised, see '3.6 Ethical considerations'.

practical exercise than doing art – which suits the research aims. On average, the yellow image cards were used more by me than by the children. A few did not attend to them at all. The ones who did, mostly used them by pointing at the cards to express themselves. For instance, when one girl, Imane, was asked how she thinks other kids think of her, she picked the light bulb and the raised finger. Interestingly, the image card that was used most frequently was the one with the embarrassed smiley (see Figure 3.4), indicating visual aids are especially helpful when discussing more sensitive topics.

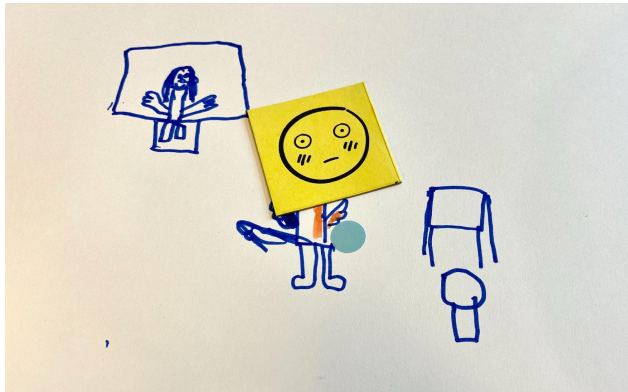


Figure 3.4 - The most used image card: embarrassed

The three blue cards, meant to remind children of their right to question or resist me throughout the interview, were not actively employed by most kids. Some used them by repeating the phrases stated on the card, predominantly the ‘what do you mean exactly?’ one. For one girl, Hira, the blue ‘rights’ cards seemed to work highly supportive. She used them throughout the interview by tapping them, for instance to point out that she would rather not say which things she felt she could not discuss in school, or how she differs from other children. While in most other interviews such topics seemed to be discussed with ease, Hira using these cards made me realise how some questions could be experienced as intrusive or confronting. I therefore adjusted my phrasing and approach towards her, in addition to explicitly praising her for telling me when she did not want to discuss something. I worried whether she might think I was asking too much of her. I therefore felt relieved when she asked me questions back at the end, and by her feedback: “I liked it very much. And that I just let my feelings out and say what I could say during the interview. [...] We could trust each other”.

3.4.2 Reflections and limitations

In the limitations of my methods, I distinguish between limitations by design and limitations as a result of my positionality and personal traits. First, in terms of the designed methods, it is important to consider that like verbalising, visualising is a means of expression that will suit some more than others. While several children indicated they enjoyed drawing during the

interview, one boy seemed somewhat anxious about it because of the three minute timeframe. One way this limitation could be addressed, is by offering two different means of expression to choose from²⁵. Nonetheless, several kids who stated they were “bad at drawing” seemed to enjoy making their drawings and using it as a conversation tool anyway, indicating the suitability of this method is not limited to visually oriented kids. Further, I see a clear point of improvement for the interview guide. It is currently set up with quite some breadth, as a result of which I sometimes had to go on to the next question. After hearing back the audio recordings, I find a lot of attention is paid on how certain events transpire, but not so much how that makes them feel. Thus, some of the breadth in the interview guide could be replaced for depth.

A second conditioning factor to the quality of the data is my role as co-constructor of the data I study. A clear example of how my positionality has influenced the quality of the interview comes from Rami. Relative to some of the children whom I experienced as extremely candid and vulnerable, Rami was a bit more withdrawn and took less initiative in conversation. For instance, his answers were rather short and he did not have any questions for me at first. Then, at the very end, he asked: “what descent are you actually?”. Because when Rami earlier told me about not understanding the language of his parents so well, I affirmed in passing “Yes, that’s difficult sometimes right?”, plausibly signaling to him I had similar experiences. Once I had shared a bit about my migration background – Chinese – in response to his question, I had the sense we were much more in sync. He even finished my sentences:

Lisa: I can't really hold a conversation.

Rami: I can't do that either.

Lisa: Yes, I have that too with- with my family from- from my father's side. Then they think I understand something, but I actually don't.

Rami: Yes, that's the same on my father's side. From my mother's side they usually just speak Dutch. But on my father's side, almost everyone speaks Moroccan, and then I really don't understand it all anymore. Yeah, then they want you to talk back, but then you don't know what to say.

Lisa: Yes, it's always a bit uncomfortable, because I do want to-

Rami: -say something, but you don't know exactly what they say, or something.

I savoured moments like these, especially when more reserved children opened up. However, the other side of the coin of my positionality contributing to rapport is that there will be children who feel inhibited because of it too. This is something to be attentive to: my positionality proved to be a factor in the internarratives that emerged. That does not make these narratives any less truthful or valuable, it only makes them more particular. The same goes for other personal traits²⁶. For instance, with some of the more extroverted children, conversations seemed more

²⁵ Such as reorganising existing visual or physical elements (e.g. Lego pieces), so as not to put too much pressure on creating something new.

²⁶ The reason I do not engage with gender or class background here, is because I do not have clear support for how that played out for the children.

fluent to me, as I witnessed children initiate one topic after the other. More laughing occurred on both sides. These differences in atmosphere will likely affect how comfortable children feel and what they choose to share with me, which in turn translates into differences in the amount of insight I gain in each child's reference frame and therefore a bias in my analyses on them. This is especially a limitation with short studies like the one at hand, as recurring conversations could compensate for the amount of time each child initially needs to get comfortable. Indeed, recurring interviews allow for better data quality, as previous assumptions can be corrected or expanded, and it becomes more clear how accounts are situated in specific circumstances (Reinharz, 1992).

3.5 Methodological contribution

In approaching the school as a practice place for citizenship, children are understood as legitimate social actors. I have attempted to design my methods in keeping with this principle. Earlier, I have formulated criteria that I believe a methodological contribution to this area should meet. In this section, I reflect on what my methods have to offer to future research in terms of these criteria.

The first criterion dictates that the interview approach amplifies children's voices and makes them feel safe to resist dominant narratives. Although not all kids benefited in the same way, I argue that a visual-aided and child-centred interview approach like the one I employed, strongly contributes to the quality of the data. Using visual tools can support especially those children who are less comfortable with words (Clark, 2011). Bolstering the ones who do not effortlessly voice themselves will arguably reveal more new insights than using channels with usual suspects. While image cards seem to primarily enrich interaction and support discussion of more sensitive or abstract topics, the 'rights' cards may have an important role in empowering children throughout the interview. Even if not all kids use the rights cards actively themselves, I believe having them at the table sets the tone for child and researcher on how to relate to each other, or as Hira says, "trust each other". On the basis of that trust, I argue sensitive or complex topics can be addressed in the interview, as children know they only need to tap a card in order for them to gain more control. As this is explicitly authorised by the researcher introducing these methods, using these 'rights' cards could constitute an affirming experience for children with standing up for their rights towards authority figures. In sum, with child-centred and visual interview tools, aimed at supporting children in expressing themselves as well as providing them with a means of control throughout the interview, data is more likely to include relevant (counter)narratives that would otherwise remain unheard.

Another criterion concerned the groundedness of the interview in children's own reference frames. To situate interview questions within the classroom or home environment that children draw themselves likely promotes a more contextualised understanding. Indeed, in the methods I employed, drawing served primarily to provide context to the conversation. However for future research, I would recommend expanding that role and allow for a more explorative function for drawing too. For instance, to ask children to draw a situation at school that represents how they feel there, followed by discussing and interpreting what we see there. Another way to ensure children's own norms and reference frames emerge in interviews is by making use of a specific kind of question: imagination questions. Researchers risk directing the conversation too much and thereby miss out on what is important to participants themselves (Beuving & Vries, 2015). In that respect, it appears valuable to ask questions that explicitly elicit what children long for. For instance, questions that activated most children included who in their classroom they would want to be, and which three things they would like to change at home. In addition to allowing children to introduce their own discourses, asking about their desires outside of the constraints of reality can shed light on how that (social) reality is currently limiting them. Such situatedness can in turn advance a more contextualised understanding of experiences at school.

A last criterion prescribes the attentiveness to reciprocity. Besides the aforementioned tools, another element to the child-centred methods I employed that turned out valuable in this respect, was explicitly inviting children to ask questions (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). I argue this contributes both to rapport as well as feelings of reciprocity. If and how children indeed make use of that opportunity can be taken as an indicator of how accustomed a child feels within the method of interviewing. In terms of these three criteria – amplifying marginalised voices and counternarratives, situating questions in children's own reference frames and establishing reciprocity –, I have illustrated how the methods I applied can improve the quality of data. To conclude, I will specify how I think the use of these methods advanced my own research objectives.

In this case study, I aspired to learn from children about their sense of belonging and civic self-efficacy. These are likely related to deeply personal experiences. Therefore, it is the extent to which children feel comfortable to be honest and let me in on those personal perceptions, which in the end defines the quality of the data. The usefulness of my methods is confirmed by the feedback children provided at the end of each interview, some more pronounced than others:

First of all, I thought it was a very nice interview, because I could also like, express myself well. And I liked that **I could also tell anything I wanted**. [...] And I also **felt very free**, because I also told about uh, my group of friends and about my home and **I don't do that very often with people**. But I do find that nice, that I could just do that here.

The value of these child-centred methods is further undergirded by several children expressing that reflecting like this is not something they usually do: “I liked it, honestly. Because the teacher never talks about such things” and “No, actually not, no. So it was nice to finally talk about it sometime”. Despite this being new to them, each child I spoke to proved able to provide rich accounts of aspects constituting and conditioning their citizenship in school. If the aim is to understand how citizenship learning works for different children and how inequalities come about, I posit it is crucial to get insight into the experiences of these children themselves, and especially of the ones who pull the short straw in that learning process. To that end, visual-aided and child-centred methods like these can make a valuable contribution.

3.6 Data analysis

In order to process and analyse the data I used the following approach. All interviews have been audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim²⁷, coded and analysed. I employed an iterative process of coding and analysing, meaning I went back and forth from my data, via (emic) interpretations, to (etic) explanations (Beuving & Vries, 2015). Throughout this process, I made use of data analysis software called ATLAS.ti, in which I organised my transcripts, pictures and memos. I opted for this software because it allows for continuous reformulation and rearranging.

Building on the principles of grounded theory, I followed the dual approach of open coding and constant comparison (Beuving & Vries, 2015). I started first cycle coding with provisional thematic codes foreshadowed by my theoretical framework, followed by the inductive adding and adjusting of new codes. Such new codes included in vivo (IV) codes, new thematic codes based on additional reading, and magnitude codes (subcodes indicating direction and intensity)(Saldaña, 2016). With each transcript I (re-)coded, the coding scheme²⁸ up until that point proved to contain limitations, overlaps or inconsistencies, requiring adjustments throughout the process. While coding, I employed a documented approach, which consisted of writing comments with reflections on the quality or context quotations when relevant, and memos with more integrated contemplations of each interview (Contreras, 2016). In addition, I kept notes on similarities and contrasts throughout the data collection and analysis processes. These descriptions informed the process of analysis.

Throughout the coding process, I compared patterns within codes as well as between codes (Beuving & Vries, 2015). I displayed codes in code co-occurrence tables and

²⁷ Transcriptions were substantially performed by my intern Maud Keunen, who followed the same strict ethical guidelines. The transcriptions were reimbursed. We have discussed each transcript.

²⁸ The coding scheme can be found in Appendix I.

code-document tables in ATLAS.ti. In addition, I devised my own tables to organise keywords, quotes and indicators for each child's experiences and positions. That way, I have analysed data within-case (between children in general, and between children from the same school) and cross-case (between schools) (Gerring, 2017). The latter is of secondary importance, as it mainly serves to better understand within-case patterns. In relation to my research questions, analysis included the following three steps. First, I explored the differences and similarities in the ways children experience their school as citizenship practice place – also within the same class. To understand how those differences are embedded in the school culture, a secondary aim was to examine differences between the two schools, in terms of how children perceive aspects such as class climate and infrastructure for voice. Finally, in order to gain a more contextualised understanding of children's internarratives, I looked at them in relation to accounts of their sense of belonging and home lives.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Conducting research with children requires the utmost attentiveness to my ethical responsibilities. I attended to these by obtaining written informed consent of the adults representing the participating children²⁹ as well as respecting and protecting their privacy and confidentiality. I did so by using pseudonyms in all written processing, including memos and transcripts, and omitting details that could lead to identification of children or their schools. Recorded audio and the pseudonym list were stored securely and separately from the other files. In addition, I was concerned with teachers being able to identify individual children in the Findings chapter on the basis of their characteristics. Although teachers evidently know which children participate in general, ideally they cannot identify who has said what. However, the data would become too decontextualised to use if every detail that could potentially lead to identification by their teachers would be either erased or disconnected from previous statement, and still, they may recognise who is for instance a student council member. Therefore, I agreed with the teachers on the importance of the children not experiencing any effects of what they have said during the interviews.

With regards to data collection, I have discussed ways to address inherent power differentials between researcher and participant, and moreover between *adult*-researcher and *child*-participant. However, also after data collection has been completed, these power differentials require attention: as a researcher, I have control over the interpretation, selection and presentation of findings (Reinharz, 1992). To strive for conscientious handling of such

²⁹ The consent forms are available upon request.

interpretative authority (Josselson, 2013), I will keep two things in mind. First, among all the ethic terms, I pay attention to representing participants in their own terms too. In the data, children should speak for themselves as much as possible, as “their language and speech are often marginalised in adult cultures” (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 198). Second, rather than presenting myself as a detached other, I have put attention to providing transparency about my approach as researcher for this thesis, acknowledging my role in co-constructing and interpreting the data (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). That way, I hope to be true to the data, and moreover, to the ones whose accounts constitute the data.

On a final note, in terms of reciprocity and public value, I will tend to at least two things after completion of this study. First, I have so far agreed with one of the schools to visit again and give a class on doing research. Second, I will provide each of the schools with insights that may be useful or pleasant to them individually. In addition, I will provide a publicly available, short and practice-oriented report for schools with relevant findings and applicable takeaways in Dutch. That way, I hope to sustain a flow of learnings from practice, back into practice.

4. Findings

Kids: *Can you please fail your studies so you will need to come back here?*

Me: *I will try.*

In this chapter, I will discuss findings from qualitatively investigating the internarratives of *groep 7* students in two Dutch primary schools. Although context is provided by conversations with teachers as well as observations, these findings are first and foremost rooted in interviews with children themselves and thus centre (my interpretation of) *their* narratives. It is worth noting that these children's accounts may deviate strongly from their teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of the same school situations, as well as other classmates' experiences. Yet in attempting to understand how the school as practice place works differently for different children, the fact that these experiences are subjective and possibly unique to these children individually, is also what defines their value.

In order to introduce and contextualise my findings, I will first provide an impression of each school based on my observations.

4.1 Impression of two school climates

When I enter the Public Montessori school early in the morning, I see teachers hanging out on couches, chatting with a cup of tea. Kids take off their shoes and put on comfy slippers. The school building is somewhat older and a bit dim too, but the colourful crafts on walls and ceilings and the children moving in all directions make for a lively atmosphere. When the school day officially starts, the classroom doors stay open. Upstairs I find 'my' classroom: one of the seven elder classes in this school, made up of 9- to 12-year-olds, with mixed perceptible migration backgrounds. Here, the day starts with a class chat about the day ahead, while children are seated in their groups of four or five (see Figure 4.1). After that, they alternately work autonomously, or they get up to help out a classmate at one of the 'collaboration tables' or get instructions from teacher Karin at the large table in the centre of the classroom. One of the times I enter the room to fetch another student for the interview downstairs, I walk into the teacher speaking sternly, disciplining children for not paying attention. Another day, I happen upon a lively class discussion on variations in abilities to concentrate, informed by a boy who recently learned more about his ADHD and medication. I leave with the impression that in this school, a lot happens relatively organically and non-hierarchically.

Another morning, I walk up to a second school: Christian Primary School the Bridge. Their building and school yard is quite modern and spacious. The glass front of the entrance is hung with colouring pictures, wishing people a blessed Ramadan. The hallways are quiet and clean. Before entering the classroom of this school's single *groep 7*, I knock: here, the classroom doors are closed. Children sit calmly in rows of two or three (see Figure 4.2). It strikes me that the handful of white children that this class houses are seated next to each other. At the front of the class, a girl – whom we will get to know as Hira – is standing on a chair, carefully ticking off names on a large white whiteboard: she checks whether her classmates have completed their weekly tasks. Simultaneously, teacher Aniek goes through the schedule of the day with the children and asks if there is anything that *they* would like to add to the planning on the board. Each time I return to the classroom after an interview, teacher Aniek is explaining something in front of the class, or a child is at her desk for a question while others work individually. By the end of the school day, almost half of the class is not allowed to leave yet: some have to stay a few minutes longer as a form of disciplining, one girl is still finishing correcting her classmates' work and a boy, who goes by the name of Özkan, still has a conflict to resolve with another kid under teacher Aniek's guidance. In this school, the atmosphere appears to me as relatively organised and purposive.

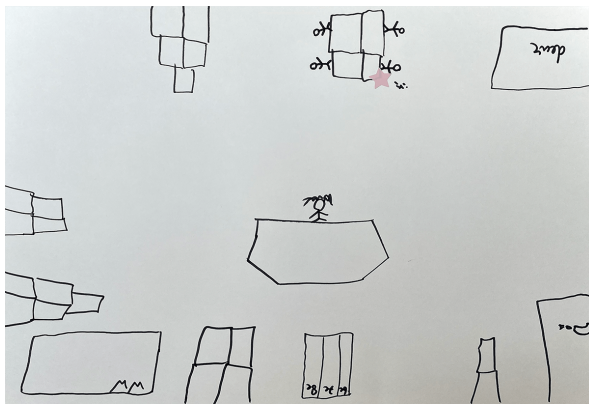


Figure 4.1 - Public Montessori - classroom by Nour
(names omitted)

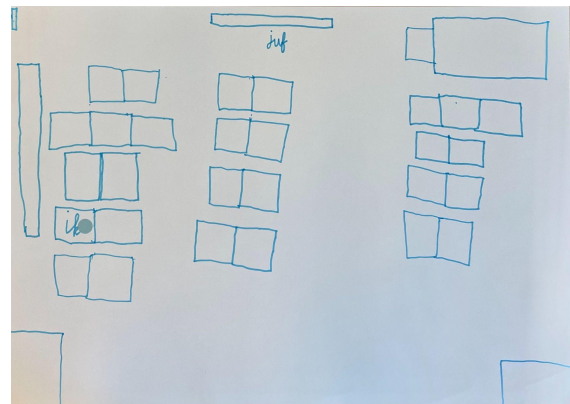


Figure 4.2 - the Bridge - classroom by Özkan

Public Montessori	Christian Primary School the Bridge
Teachers Karin and Hans	Teachers Aniek and Charlotte
Bo (11) Jaylena (10) Julia (10) Nour (11) Pepijn (11) Rami (11)	Özkan (11) Evie (10) Hira (11) Imane (12) Massin (10)

4.2 School culture: classroom climate and voice

4.2.1 Christian Primary School the Bridge

Children's accounts are instrumental in situating the school and classroom climate. For instance, Evie, who speaks in a fast and decided manner, makes clear that the classroom I witnessed at the Bridge has not always been this quiet:

Before the lockdown [...], my first teacher got ill and then we needed a substitute. And **no one wanted to teach us**, because our class was way too busy. And then this other teacher came, ... the most strict teacher of the school. Since [...] [she] has come, we are much more calm.³⁰

The image of “the busy class” however, has remained: “we are still called that way. [...] And that is not really nice to hear all the time”. After “all kinds of substitutes we didn't know at all”, the class of Evie and her classmates Özkan, Imane, Hira and Massin has settled down, with part time teachers Aniek and Charlotte. In terms of a classroom climate open for discussion and structures for voice, there is one weekly activity with teacher Aniek that stands out in the children's accounts. Aniek leads classes on the *Vreedzame School*, or ‘Peaceable School’, a program for “social competence and democratic citizenship” (CED-Groep, n.d.) that is implemented schoolwide. Class assemblies are one part of the program, to which several children refer as ‘the circle’. Özkan, speaking in a soft and careful voice, explains to me:

A circle is kind of like that we can uh, change things and discuss what is going well and what isn't. And uh how- how we treat the class. Then we just talk for an hour or so and then see how the class is doing and everything. [...] I kind of like it, because you can just say whatever you want, whatever comes to mind. And after I have said that, the teacher says, who agrees with Özkan? And then really kind a lot of kids raise their fingers. And then the teacher says: ‘a new rule’, for example.

His classmate Hira, who comes across as gentle and cheerful, appreciates an element of these circles that is meant to include voices outside of the usual suspects: “If we don't dare to- dare to tell the whole class, [...] then we look at Glenn the giraffe³¹. And then we talk like nobody's there, [...] like we're talking to him”. Other measures to ensure a safe climate are mentioned by others too. Indeed, taking part in class discussions appears to be a challenge for some children. Despite his detailed hypothetical account of the circle process, Özkan indicates that he himself actually does not always dare to speak up in class, “because the whole class will listen to what I am going to say”. His classmate Massin feels the same way, pointing out he gets especially shy when he wants to say something that diverges from what others just said. By the same token, Evie sometimes feels restrained when thinking of what others might say: “For example, ‘hey, look, that's incorrect’. Or they will look- look at you with weird faces the rest of the day”. Indeed, a strong sense of needing to get it right can be found among the children at the Bridge. It is

³⁰ All quotations have been translated from Dutch to English.

³¹ Glenn is a stuffed animal.

conceivable that this is related to their history as “the busy class”, as a result of which the disciplinary gaze of authority towards themselves may be internalised.

Conversely, one girl at the Bridge seems to experience little inhibitions in terms of voice: Imane, who comes across as well-versed and determined. She is a member of the *children’s neighbourhood council*, a group of forty kids from different schools who meet up and try to improve the city. Although several classmates sometimes disagree with teacher decisions that impact them directly – like not getting a turn or being disciplined –, Imane stands out by critically questioning some of the teachers’ ways beyond her own interest:

That the teachers better understand [...] that **children sometimes want to say things too**. For example, Rayan [...] is often mad at teacher Aniek. Because she doesn’t understand him, [...] and he doesn’t understand her. The teacher for instance says, ‘yeah, we’re going to do this and that. And we’re no longer going to discuss that other thing’, whereas he wants to talk about that. [...] And then he gets mad at her. Then he has to sit over there again [points at the cool down spot in her drawing]. **Sometimes you just need to discuss things, even if it takes like two minutes of school time.**

Remarkably, Imane describes how she effortlessly takes part in the weekly circles, but nonetheless has not told anyone about ideas like these yet. This indicates that even during situations that explicitly invite children’s voice such as the circles, it is not that evident to openly contest dominant manners for any of the children.

Also, it is worth noting that the kind of citizenship learning opportunities Imane seizes is not available to everyone. This is exemplified by Hira, who is very enthusiastic about the two councils that the Bridge has, but explains why she did not sign up herself: “Because I thought like, I guess **I-I’m not going to be ch-chosen anyway**. Or [...] then I think, **I actually can’t do this at all**. Because, yes. [silence] I- I can’t stand up for myself very well”. By contrast, she had just used a blue ‘rights’ card in our conversation in order to bring this topic up in the first place. Hira further stresses the selectiveness of this learning opportunity: “I would *very* much like to join. But only two are chosen”. Later, Hira mentions something that forms a barrier for her: “I can’t very well speak my language [sic]”.

Taken together, the internarratives of children at the Bridge paint a picture of an extensive infrastructure for citizenship learning opportunities, some of which are geared towards including everyone, while others are experienced as high-threshold. In addition, measures are in place to ensure an open and safe classroom climate, however, several children do experience some degree of inhibitions to speak up.

4.2.2 The Public Montessori

At the Montessori school, where Bo, Nour, Rami, Julia, Pepijn and Jaylena go to, there is no formal program that specifically fosters open and democratic climates such as the *Vreedzame School*.

Instead, it appears to be a combination of the ubiquitous Montessori pedagogical philosophy – helping one another in order to foster independence – and teacher Karin’s approach that promote student voice and an open climate. Several children mention how they sometimes “just talk” in class when Karin teaches, “about other things [than study tasks]” and “then everyone just talks along”. Bo, a boy who speaks with ease, describes the climate:

Everyone is allowed to say everything, anything. You can say the teacher is stupid [...]. And it doesn't matter, ‘as long as it's not with swear words’, teacher Karin always says– then it's allowed. You're allowed to express any idea.

This is further illustrated when Bo tells about some children – including himself – having their own opinion and “very often” disagreeing with Karin and part time substitute Hans. Also in terms of interactions with peers, he experiences an open climate: “I’m never that afraid to say something. Because, well, **I just know that- that it’s just okay**. Yet some people think that they will be laughed at, but that doesn’t really happen in this class”. Nour, an upbeat looking girl who speaks as easily as Bo, mentions this on her own initiative too: “In our class, if someone says something [...] that's quite pleasant. Everyone just says, ‘well, that's not correct’, or something. But they won’t laugh or anything”.

None of the children at the Bridge described such an open climate. But also classmates at the Montessori experience the climate differently from Bo and Nour. Julia, who speaks in a deliberate and concise manner and who is assessed as gifted, describes a different kind of peer reaction that may occur when kids speak up in class: “sometimes [...] [other kids], they just say, **that kid is dumb. You are dumb**”. While Bo and Nour think anyone can say anything, Julia demonstrates that in reality not everyone feels that way: “**I hardly ever raise my finger**. [...] I don’t say that much”. Important in terms of citizenship learning, she notes it has to do with the nature of speaking up: Julia is comfortable with answering factual questions when she is sure she is correct, but opinions are off limits to her. She explains to me:

Probably that’s because **I’m just scared that others won’t think the same way**. [...] Then usually I just think about it in my mind, but I’m not going to say it. So I do kind of participate, I’m just not voicing it.

Thus it seems Julia is situated in a classroom in which open class discussions do take place, yet which her voice is never a part of. She does not get to add to her classmates’ and teachers’ views and experience her influence, nor does she get to experience critical reactions or reflections on her opinions – because she tends to avoid the potential situation of disagreement altogether. This way, Julia self-eliminates from learning opportunities for critical-democratic citizenship.

Pepijn, who speaks in a composed voice, takes a similar position: “I am quite silent in the classroom” and “sometimes I don’t really like that there are differences, because then sometimes there’s also a discussion”. Disagreement does not seem to be experienced as a potential learning

opportunity by either Julia or Pepijn. As outlined earlier, citizenship learning is enabled through an open climate, by feeling safe to explore, discuss and question a multiplicity of views. While Bo and Nour experience the climate as such and thrive in it too, others in the very same classroom do not.

Interestingly, some children at the Montessori school do seem aware of differences in which voices are represented in class. Bo tells me:

I think teacher Karin does see [...] that some people dare to express themselves more. [...] And that they have more, like, good ideas and many ideas, just like me. And then you express those more. Sometimes in sign language [non-verbally], sometimes normally. **And then there's like more chance that [that idea] will be chosen**, [whereas there are] other kids who don't dare to say it, but who *do* have that idea. So there are children in our class who don't really often have ideas, but they do have them in their heads I think, but don't dare to say. I do regret that actually.

Likewise, Rami, a boy who comes across as modest, self-aware and slightly aloof, remarks: "Karin also says: [...] 'the loud mouths talk super much, but that's only possible because the quiet kids do not'".

To conclude, at both schools, the children's accounts illustrate various rich experiences of their schools as practice places. Opportunities for citizenship learning range from more directed forms of acting democratically and taking responsibility for the school community, such as the weekly circles and children's council, to more ad hoc class discussions and informal opportunities for voice. However, these learning opportunities do not seem to be within reach for everyone. Large differences can be discerned in the extent to which children experience the conditions necessary to engage in such learning experiences, for instance perceiving the climate as open and safe. For some children, their engagement with especially critical-democratic types of citizenship seems obstructed by the fear of judgement or disagreement. In addition, even for children who seem notably comfortable with using their voice and experience an open climate, there appear to be thresholds to openly challenging dominant principles.

4.3 Relationships among children

4.3.1 Peer support

Children's internarratives demonstrate that an open class climate may not benefit everyone equally. Peer support is one of the factors that seem to influence how they each experience the climate: children appear to strongly adapt the way they manifest themselves according to their relationships. For instance, at the Montessori school, Jaylena, who speaks in a spirited way, often making use of sarcasm and theatrical voices, recounts:

So when I gave a presentation, a girl said like, "Well, I always see you as the *silent* child [...] so I think it's good that you were loud and clear now". It was kind of a compliment... But then I

thought: 'Gosh, aren't I *quiet?!'* Well *maybe* that's because you're friends with *Sarissa*, that ugly person. And **maybe that's why I never even talk to you**. She is nice by herself, but friends with Sarissa? Forbidden territory for me. [...] All the girls in class are friends with Sarissa. Literally. And with Nour. That's just really annoying, because they also make really shitty comments. And that's just- no, I don't want that. [...] Then I'm just fine being by myself.

During our conversation, Jaylena is remarkably talkative. Though in the classroom, Jaylena mainly presents herself as quiet due to peer relationships. Also Pepijn points out how he adapts himself based on the dominant social forces in class: "Sometimes I follow Bo around a bit. [...] Then I just do the same as they do, because then I don't really know what else to do" (for Pepijn's drawing of himself in relation to Bo and Rami, see Figure 4.3). In addition, when asked who in their class they would want to be, Pepijn would pick Bo "because he is just a bit famous in class". Likewise, Julia simply wants to be "someone with a lot of friends. **Because I actually don't really have friends in this class**".

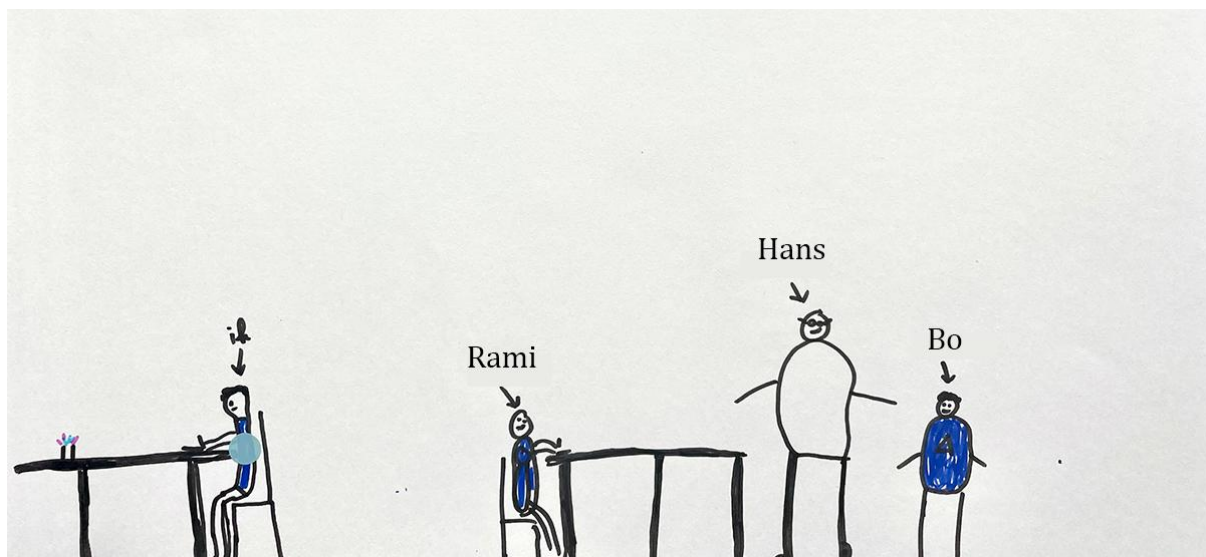


Figure 4.3 - Classroom by Pepijn³²

These accounts illustrate the stark contrast in the amount of peer support that children can count on. Additionally, they imply that positive peer relationships are not just something children simply desire. Moreover, peer support shows to be a key part of belonging in the school community. Consequently, peer support may play a considerable role in children's action perspective for citizenship matters. This is exemplified by Nour, who when she feels she has been treated unfairly by teacher Hans, she discusses it with a friend first: "And then they say 'you should just say 'that's not right''. And then I will just say it". Similarly, Bo, for whom "our whole school is now just about our friend group", would tell his best friends first if he would want to change anything in school. "And then they will say like 'yeah, this is a kind of good idea, but you

³² Himself on the left: 'ik' is Dutch for me. Names are omitted and replaced by pseudonyms.

do have to say it in a more challenging way". After that support, he would approach teacher Karin, and finally he would tell his class too.

At the Bridge, peer support appears to play a similar role, but like in previous situations their elaborate infrastructure for citizenship ensures more regulated practices. For instance, Massin, who keeps bouncing back and forth on his chair, explains that as a part of the *Vreedzame School*, kids can select each other for certain commissions. He proudly reveals he has been elected for the "task commission":

I liked that, because I didn't really expect that from myself. I uh- I wanted that very dad- very badly, but I just wanted- I wasn't sure if I- if uh- if people were going to vote for me, uh, so it was uh, yeah- I was surprised.

Massin adds that learning opportunities are not available to everyone though: "a lot of kids are not in a commission". Also for Imane, peer support was key for obtaining her position as one of the two school representatives in the children's council: she explains to me she did not have to campaign too much to get elected, because she also has "very many friends" in other classes.

In sum, my qualitative work shows that the degree of peer support can both condition the formal as well as the informal citizenship learning opportunities that are present within the school communities. Some of the organised citizenship learning at the Bridge, such as commissions and councils, might seem more outright inequitable due to its explicitly selective nature. However, the effects of the distributions of peer support that the Montessori children's accounts uncovered, call for at least as much attention in terms of fair opportunities for citizenship learning, as these implicit mechanisms may easily hide in plain sight.

4.3.2 Dealing with conflicts

Learning opportunities in relation to dealing with conflicts were brought up in conversation by children at both schools. Many children seem intrigued by instances where they or their classmates clash with one another, narrating in an animated way how interests were negotiated and moreover what the outcome was. In this context, it also becomes clear that the school community extends beyond the school premises. For instance, at the Bridge, Özkan mentions that he can help others out with conflicts at school "because I know that person from football or tutoring or mosque. [Because of that] I actually know how they will react to some things. So I can actually talk it out with them". Imane, who notes that "maybe I have been bullied once – but I don't feel it", tells about how she handled a situation with a boy a few years ago: "I know his mother, I have told his mother. Now he doesn't dare to say that anymore". As a result, she says that now "nobody dares to do that" to her anymore. Other than by means of social capital built up outside of school, the school community is shaped online too. For example, Özkan reports

how conflicts on Whatsapp enter the school: kids have a fight online “and then the next day, the one who was swearing and stuff knows he will be beat up [...] and calls in sick for a few days”.

At the Montessori, several children brought up examples of conflicts, but these did not appear to be harnessed as learning opportunities. At the Bridge however, conflicts are deliberately utilised as a way to practice citizenship. As part of the *Vreedzame School*, children can apply for a position as mediator by writing a letter with arguments to the teacher. Evie explains what mediators do: “Then you go outside and then you're wearing a vest. And then if there's a problem, uh, you go inside with those kids and you try to solve it”. Hira, who is a mediator too, narrates one of her experiences:

One time I saw two boys fighting- Or, was it a boy or a girl? I do not know anymore. Um, then I thought, **I have to fix this. Because otherwise I think, 'then I am no mediator, if I do nothing'.** [...] At first they also didn't listen [...] but then we say, 'Stop! We are talking now'. Like, 'You can say your word later'. Like, if someone else is talking, who is arguing with the other, uh, then I also say: 'that person is talking now. So you have to wait a bit'.

Interestingly, Hira appears to take up her role as mediator as an identity. In addition, Evie notes this position grants a certain authority over other kids:

And the easy thing about the mediator is that children have to listen to you. For example, if someone is angry, we say, 'Come along!' Or just, 'Are you coming in with me'? And if they say no, I go to the teacher [...]. And then she says, [Evie speaks in a high-pitched 'teacher' voice] 'Yes, you have to listen to the mediator!'. That's nice about it.

From Hira and Evie's accounts, it can be concluded that they take their position as mediator very seriously. Being granted some of the authority that is usually only reserved for adults and using that to negotiate interests for a common good provides clear opportunities for citizenship learning.

So far, I have discussed ways in which children experience their schools as practice places for mostly more political capacities, such as having voice or questioning authority. These experiences as mediator – as well as mediatee – are examples that include a more social dimension too, concerning care for the school community. Naturally, within conflicts more political faculties can be practiced too, for instance when children are conflicted with their teacher or other school professionals. Remarkably, children's struggles with adults in school do not seem to be understood as potential learning experiences as are their conflicts with peers.

4.4 Children's relationships with teachers and authority

4.4.1 Meeting teachers' standards

Relationships with teachers play a key role in creating a climate conducive to citizenship learning. This was arguably complicated during the current school year: classes have been

dealing with one or more temporary teachers as well as lockdowns due to an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In these challenging circumstances, it is especially fortunate that the Montessori school works with combined classes, in which children stick with the same teacher for three years. Julia, Nour, Pepijn, Rami, Bo and Jaylena have thus been building a relationship with teacher Karin for almost two school years, whereas Massin, Evie, Hira, Imane and Özkan have been with teacher Aniek for four months by now.

As argued earlier, children may shape their image of themselves as members of a community through interaction with their teachers as proximate authority figures. It is conceivable children internalise some of their teachers' standards and develop their sense of belonging according to the extent to which they feel they meet those standards. In order to shed light on the norms children feel teachers hold for them, I asked them when they feel their teachers were proud of them. At both schools, most children mention something along the lines of their teachers being proud of the class when “we are quiet and work well and listen well” (Rami), “we just follow the rules” (Pepijn) and “don't interrupt the teacher and raise our finger” (Massin). In addition, Rami noted how he feels like Karin and Hans, his teachers at the Montessori, “do often like the quiet kids a bit more”. These statements give a sense of the kind of messages on what a ‘good child’ does in school that children generally take away from daily school practices. In relation to citizenship, these all fit a more adapting, discipline-oriented type of citizenship.

Accounts of when their teacher is proud of them personally, uncover more differences as to what children feel is expected of them as individuals. At the Montessori, these perceptions vary considerably. For instance, Bo tells me that showing social responsibility is valued by teacher Karin:

Usually just when someone is in pain, I go with them and she appreciates that, I think. And if like, someone is sad, I'll help him. [...] And when the teacher left the classroom [...], one time she was also proud of me, because the class started talking and then I took the lead.

This is quite the opposite of Julia's experience, who feels her teachers are proud of her when she is working steadily and “just minding my own business”. Children thus differ in the kind of behaviour to which they feel encouraged. Or, if they feel encouraged at all: Bo feels Karin “is **actually always proud of everybody**”, while Jaylena admits: “But actually, **I don't really feel like she's really proud of us. That doesn't really happen**, to be honest”. These examples demonstrate how children within the same classroom can obtain entirely contradictory messages out of interactions with the same teacher. Especially the contrast illustrated by Bo and Jaylena can be deeply consequential. Since a sense of belonging encompasses feeling “accepted, respected, included, and supported” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 61), having such disparate perceptions of whether they are appreciated throughout daily practices arguably cultivates

children's sense of belonging in unequal ways. While Bo feels affirmed in his presence and actions, Jaylena feels as if she is always doing the wrong thing.

There is another notable variation in relation to meeting their teachers' standards: children are divided in terms of which of their two teachers they value the most. For instance, Pepijn and Jaylena, who both describe being often withdrawn or quiet in class, speak fondly of teacher Hans' approach: he keeps a list of names on the board and adds stars to each name for listening well. Having collected many stars will earn them additional bingo cards, which they can in turn use to win candy. What arguably attracts Pepijn and Jaylena here more than others, is that their usual behaviour is now given centre stage and explicitly rewarded by Hans. All the more so, as the same silent demeanor sometimes makes them feel like an outsider to class discussions. The other side of this coin is illustrated by someone who does not naturally fit the description of a quiet listener: Nour.

And he tells me all the time that I come to him a lot. And then he always gets so mad at me. I don't know why, but just when I have a small question for example. He says I'm asking a lot. [...] And I thought that made pretty much no sense at all. [...] So yes, then of course I go to other kids and to ask them that question.

In line with previous accounts, Nour manages this experience of rejection by means of peer support. Additionally, she remarks how, fortunately for her, the approaches of the two teachers differ: "with Karin it *is* allowed [to ask questions]. I'm glad that's the case".

These accounts indicate that children are likely to feel more or less valued members of the school community, on the basis of their correspondence with the standards their teachers choose (or happen) to set. Thus depending on how each child relates to their teacher, they might obtain different messages with regards to their belonging in school.

4.4.2 Rules and disciplinary climate

While the normative messages that children implicitly pick up from interactions can often be conveyed by teachers unintentionally, school or class rules are a more deliberate and explicit form of norm-setting. However, despite this more explicit presence – several kids in both schools mention their class rules hanging on the classroom wall –, there is large variation in *which* rules are exactly named. At the Montessori school, most kids recall two rules, but all different ones. Examples include to "just be nice. If the teacher is talking, don't interrupt" (Pepijn), "no bullying, no fighting" (Bo) and "no running" (Jaylena). Pepijn is under the impression rules are more of a disciplinary measure: "If your class is very busy, then I think [you need] more rules. And if it's just- they're listening and calm, I think only a few". Nour on the other hand, thinks more in terms of protecting rights:

Especially really, very badly: respect. Because um, we also have a rule, 'everyone is equal in their own way', and just- that's just- then we mean: maybe you wear different clothes, but we're also all

just people and all. So you just have to be normal with each other. Not 'the other is an animal' or something. So just treat each other normally.

Differences in how children relate to class or school rules can be interpreted as indicators of the kind of citizenship they primarily engage with at school in two ways. First, in terms of type of citizenship, Pepijn's perspective can be read as more discipline and adaptation-oriented (Leenders & Veugelers, 2009; Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013), while Nour's explanation seemed more concerned with social justice (Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Another way children's relationship to school rules can tell something about their citizenship practices is by its connection to voice. Because in order for children to question or contribute to school norms, it is vital they have some degree of knowledge as to what the rules are and how they come about. However, at this point large disparities are found. While Julia, Rami and Nour can recount the class rules were made by teacher Karin's class two years ago – before they became part of this class –, Pepijn thinks "the boss of the school" has determined the rules and Bo believes they come from the Montessori founder. While participating in the rule-making process themselves is not part of any of the children's narratives, the children who know it has happened before are arguably far more likely to believe they can suggest changes and have their voices heard, too.

At the Bridge, there is variation in children's accounts of the rules and rule-making process too, but not as much as at the Montessori school. This might be because children were included in revising the rules, when teacher Aniek arrived at school. Özkan recounts:

We just sat down in the circle again and then we kind of discussed: 'these are the rules. And who agrees, and who disagrees?' Some kids did agree, some kids didn't. And then they went on to explain why they weren't agreeing or were.

Özkan strongly endorses this process, while Imane is a bit more critical about the outcomes in practice:

Well, we first had agreements with teacher Charlotte and [the previous teacher]. But then we went to make- did agreements with teacher Aniek. And um, we often keep to teacher Aniek's agreements. But with teacher Charlotte, they are not always performed.

Other kids mention the varying standards between their two teachers too, in particular that *Vreedzame School* is something they only do with Aniek.

Further, next to formal class rules, children also note many more informal regulating practices at the Bridge. For example, there are dedicated spaces in the classroom, Hira tells me:

And also over there you even have a little resting spot [points at drawing]. For example, if you are really angry with someone, or you can't concentrate, then you just go sit over there. **Only teacher Aniek uses that.** Because uh, she thinks that's very good. **I think it's very good too.** Then they can rest there.

In the way Hira talks about her teachers' approaches, a certain esteem for the rules and for authority can be discerned. Generally speaking, all the children from the Bridge I spoke to appeared more concerned with the disciplinary climate than the Montessori kids did. Again, this could be related to the Bridge kids' history as "the busy class", and "the most strict teacher of the school" who then followed as a result. An example of this involvement with the disciplinary climate includes the coloured cards introduced by the student council³³. These cards hang on the board for all to see, indicating each child's disciplinary status: after the green card comes blue, which means 'warning', black stands for staying inside during the break and red commands a parent-teacher-child meeting.

Another example comes from Massin, who says: "I personally think that [...] the person who sits next to me, should talk to me less, and ask me less. [...] Because **I'm also scared that we will be called out and be punished**". His concern with being disciplined relates to a limitation of voice in two ways. First, Massin indicates that he withholds himself from speaking up in class: "if the teacher punishes me- me. Then I get mad and then she says something and I know the answer, but I don't wanna- I won't raise my finger. And I don't say the answer". Furthermore, he expresses: "**I don't think it's fair that you get punished so quickly**. And I wish- want that- yeah, I just want that to change". However, even though Massin did tell me about the weekly circles just before that and is thus well-informed about a possible channel for voice, he cannot think of any way to make the change he hopes for happen. In line with previous observations, it is quite conceivable that the otherwise available opportunities for voice are decimated once children's object of opposition involves authority figures and their standards. In terms of inequalities, this means that the children who find themselves in conflict with their teachers more often have less opportunities to change their conditions – while they arguably are in need of them more.

Children's relationships with the school leader

A final relationship that presents opportunities to practice citizenship is that between the children and the school leader. Also in the experience of this opportunity, large differences are found. As school leaders symbolise the 'highest' proximate authority figure in school, they can play an important role in practicing voice. In order to get a sense of the children's action perspectives, I asked each child about the ways they could imagine to make ideas for their school or class come true. Answers varied considerably. At the Montessori, Rami's single move would be talking to his teacher. Julia would go to teacher Karin as well, but feels that after that more is needed for impact: "then [I would] tell someone else from the school or something. Because

³³ The student council is distinct from the children's council that Imane is part of: the former focuses on school affairs, while the latter is concerned with the city and the neighbourhood.

otherwise it wouldn't happen anyway". However, Julia has no clue who that other person could be: she does not know the school leader. This is in stark contrast with Nour, who – accompanied by a friend, naturally – just pops in at school leader Laura's office:

We had this idea, that you could put a little fence there. And then you could just sit there with bean bags and stuff. To read. Only, so we went all the way to Laura and to eh, well, share our idea and stuff. But only then she said, 'yeah, that's not possible, because it's dangerous', and all that. Then we came up with something new again, and stuff. **So I've done that quite often actually. To Laura.**

To Nour, Laura – who she casually calls by her first name – is clearly approachable: she mentions you can simply knock on her door or "just write a note and [...] give it to her". However, student voice is not just about the student's voice – an essential aspect is the school's *responsiveness* to that voice. Nour, who initially seemed to draw from an endless drive, appears to adjust herself on the basis of her interaction with this important authority figure:

Then we thought of this little door, **but that also wasn't possible**. And uhm, then we also had a-yeah but that was a really stupid idea... [...] [because] then we thought of those uhm black chairs with a nice uh- backrest, and all that. But then she said, 'yes, that's very expensive, I think'. And then we said, 'yes, but all the teachers do get those nice chairs, but we don't'. Isn't that, uh, actually uh a bit, what do you call that? [...] **That's just [...] basically saying someone is better than us, because we sit [...] on just these little wooden chairs**. And then she said, 'yes, but then we have to continue saving first', and so on. And then I said, 'yes, then you should start saving. Then you shouldn't go on vacation'. And then she said, 'yes, I will do that'. **But uh, still hasn't happened. But I don't think it will happen either**... Well, I'm leaving in a year anyway.

Nour seems to downplay her ideas, taking them less seriously – perhaps because they may not be taken seriously by authority figures either. So despite her proximity to the school leader, Nour does not seem to believe her efforts can actually make a difference. Another example of perceptions of limited school responsiveness comes from Rami, who can be understood as experiencing more distance to authority as well as little civic self-efficacy:

Once a year there is [...] a box or something, and then I believe you can [enter] ideas and wishes and something like that- [...] **but usually, it doesn't come**. People for example want a football field in the schoolyard, but that will never happen. [...] It actually doesn't work at all, I think.

Pepijn does not seem to have much faith either in the ability of children to effect change in school, even though portrays a notion of the added value of *collective* civic efficacy:

I don't think it's possible, but I just think that then you just ask the teacher and that **you [make sure you] are with more children**, and all that. A kind of action, and stuff. But I don't think that's really going to happen.

At the Bridge, most children appear to have a more positive image of the potential impact of their ideas as well as perceptions of school responsiveness towards them. For example, Evie mentions that their class has been asked for ideas for playground equipment by their school leader Ellen. They have designed models, which were exhibited in the hall

downstairs and then “teacher Ellen is going to choose which one it will be. And it must be under an amount of Euros. And then they will try to place it during the holidays”. As opposed to an idea box, the specificity of this request appears to undergird the sense that their efforts for voice will be taken seriously.

Aside from this example, school leader Ellen has predominantly been mentioned in children’s accounts of the other side of authority: of being disciplined. Özkan provides examples how their school leader is part of a disciplinary range of measures:

So every time the teacher says, ‘quiet!’, and all. ‘I’m going to- I’ll give you one more chance, or either you go to teacher Ellen or you stay- you sit here and work’. [...] **And then the teacher says, ‘I am done with you, now you go to teacher Ellen’.**

Here, Özkan provides a remarkable reproduction of a dominant adult-child discourse. This stresses the plausibility that children can be sensitive to internalising their authority figures’ gaze. Indeed, Özkan comes across as obedient, with high esteem for authority and making efforts to comply with all the things he feels are expected of him within the school community. Similarly to how meticulously he described the steps of the weekly circles, Özkan recounts the process of having to go to Ellen:

If something happens for example, the teacher will immediately send [them] to teacher Ellen. But uh, with teacher Ellen they sort of talk it out. And then **that person will understand why they were sent out of the class.** At once. And then he thinks, ‘oh right, yes’. And then at the end of the day he’s going to- he’s just going to apologise to the teacher. And then it is a little bit solved.

Among some of her more discipline-oriented classmates, earlier Imane was the exception in terms of portraying more critical-democratic or social justice kind of citizenship orientations. Also in her proximity to authority, Imane appears to diverge: regarding ideas for the children’s council, she mentions “we are also allowed to just go to the director [Ellen]. To ask if we can execute that and all”. So while some are *sent* to school leader Ellen in order to *become* better adapted, Imane *goes* to Ellen in order to *adapt* the school. This illustrates the contrast in children’s relationships to authority: whether they serve as an extension or limitation of their agency in school.

Overall, children have shown to differ considerably in their relationships with their school leader. For the ones who experience proximity to authority, this relationship presents valuable opportunities for developing civic self-efficacy – on the condition that school responsiveness is in order. By contrast, for other children in the same classroom, the school leader may represent punishment, a means of correction associated with not complying. This suggests once more that children who feel they risk being disciplined, do not have the same access to opportunities for citizenship learning as some of their classmates.

4.5 Understanding findings

4.5.1 Four components of civic self-efficacy

My findings illustrate the sizable differences in the ways children perceive and experience their school as a practice place for citizenship. These findings are the result of interpreting data through my conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1). Through this framework, I understood the effects of the school culture on citizenship learning experiences as mediated by belonging and civic self-efficacy. By engaging with my findings, patterns emerged that were more intricate than this conceptual framework could capture. Specifically, civic self-efficacy appears to be not one uniform concept, but is better understood as four constituent components. This allows me to use civic efficacy as a lens to understand when and how children are hindered or bolstered in their citizenship learning. My findings demonstrate that most children are not consistently 'high' or 'low' in terms of civic efficacy, but rather more accustomed to some components than to others. Specifying these four components helps to comprehend what constitutes a bottleneck for citizenship learning. In addition, each of the four components seems conditioned by children's sense of belonging, in different but interrelated ways. This way of understanding civic self-efficacy in relation to children's citizenship learning is a finding in itself. This more specific approach to efficacy and belonging is captured in Figure 4.4.

As through this lens, the aspects of school culture, learning opportunities, belonging and efficacy are understood as intertwined, I will answer both sub questions in conjunction. I will do so with reference to the latter three components as presented in Figure 4.4. For addressing the first component, I will additionally zoom in on a specific example of how children may be individually conditioned by interactions between efficacy, belonging and citizenship learning in the next section. The sub questions of this case study read: (1) *how do children differ in their perceptions and experiences of the school culture and their access to and use of citizenship learning opportunities?* and (2) *how can we understand these differences through children's sense of belonging in the school community and their civic self-efficacy?*

Components of civic self-efficacy: conditions for citizenship learning	Meaning of civic self-efficacy to children	Ways in which sense of belonging conditions efficacy	Aspects that schools can foster
Experiencing drive	Why they would engage with citizenship practices	Feeling part of a community they find worth improving, and/or experiencing injustices that threaten their or others' belonging	Reflection on lived experience; learning in context
Feeling comfortable to act	If they would engage with citizenship practices	Feeling their actions will be accepted, respected and supported	Open classroom climate, peer and teacher relationships and disciplinary climate
Knowing ways and perceiving access	How they could engage with citizenship practices	Knowing the community's infrastructure for governance and experiencing authority as accessible enough	Structures for voice and action, proximity to authority, peer support
Believing their actions can make a difference	What they think their citizenship practices could change or bring about	Feeling their actions will be accepted, respected and supported enough to be taken seriously and acted upon by others in the community	School responsiveness to voice and action

Figure 4.4 - Four components of civic self-efficacy, conditioned by sense of belonging

4.5.2 Feeling comfortable to act

This section started with the extent to which children feel comfortable to act on citizenship learning opportunities. This component of civic self-efficacy is important, as without practice, citizenship learning is limited. I have discussed feeling comfortable in relation to relevant aspects of the school culture, including open classroom climate, relationships among peers and with teachers and the disciplinary climate. The findings show extreme variation in the extent to which children feel comfortable to act. This is especially the case at the Montessori. While Bo and Nour perceive the classroom climate as extremely open, Julia, Pepijn and Jaylena experience high thresholds to speak up, to the extent they never even raise their finger. Especially sharing opinions and disagreement is avoided, thwarting learning opportunities with a critical-democratic type of citizenship. In addition, this distinction of Bo and Nour on the one hand, and Julia, Pepijn and Jaylena on the other – and Rami somewhere in between – coincides with their experience of peer support. This seems conditional, as the children indicate they are more silent and withdrawn in class than they are elsewhere. Consequently, children with an established position in terms of belonging and high social capital amongst peers are the ones

who have their voices heard more and who can make use of important citizenship learning opportunities in class discussions too.

At the Bridge, differences are discernible too, but less extreme in comparison to the Montessori. This could be due to the Bridge having more regulations in place, such as making explicit how children should interact with each other — however, with this small sample and amount of cases, such inferences cannot be made. Interestingly, at the Bridge the distinction between social and political dimensions of citizenship learning emerges: Hira, for instance, shies away from the more political opportunities including student councils and questioning authority, but is very eager to take action in relation to caring for the school community. In addition, at the Bridge several children are concerned with being disciplined by their teacher or corrected by peers, sometimes preventing them from expressing themselves in class. This seems to limit learning opportunities for a critical-democratic type of citizenship, as several children indicate they would not dare contest their teachers' standards. Therefore, children who appear more marginalised in terms of not effortlessly following the rules also miss out on important learning opportunities.

Altogether, with regards to feeling comfortable to act, stark contrasts are found in children's perceptions and experience of the school culture, strikingly enough within the same classroom. Most importantly, peer support and concerns with being disciplined present a booster for some children and a barrier for others in their access to and use of citizenship learning opportunities. Specifically, in both schools, this component of civic efficacy – of feeling comfortable to act – forms a bottleneck in terms of critical-democratic learning opportunities.

4.5.3 Knowing ways and perceiving access

The next aspect I found to condition citizenship doing and learning, is whether children know and have access to channels that advance their citizenship actions. The most important finding being that all the internarratives of children from the Bridge paint a picture of an extensive infrastructure for citizenship learning. Although some feel more comfortable to actually make use of it than others, they all mentioned options for voice and action in the school community, such as the weekly circles or being a mediator. This indicates that capturing citizenship learning opportunities in regular, recognisable activities for children, can strongly contribute to this specific component of civic self-efficacy: knowing ways for citizenship acts.

This is emphasised by the children at the Montessori, whose accounts make up a more dispersed image of the channels they perceive. In comparison to the Bridge, citizenship learning at the Montessori takes place in much less strictly regulated manners. Therefore, if children would want to address or change something in school, most would do so through informal channels. By “just talking to the teacher”, for example. This more informal organisation risks

rendering access to voice dependent on arbitrary aspects, like social capital. Indeed, proximity to authority was found to vary greatly among children: some do not know where rules come from or who the school leader is, whereas Nour just walks into the school leader's office to pitch ideas for the school. Again, those in an outsider or marginalised position within the school community did not have access to such informal learning opportunities.

Furthermore, several of the channels for citizenship that the infrastructure at the Bridge provides, such as commissions or councils, are not accessible to all children. Also, the disciplinary climate plays a role once more in terms of proximity to authority, as children's relationship with the school leader represents learning opportunities for some and a disciplinary measure for others.

In conclusion, in both schools, children's internarratives suggested that those in more marginalised positions of belonging within the school community – in terms of fitting norms or social capital – had less access to channels for citizenship experiences. A factor that seems to contribute to lowering barriers on this component of civic efficacy is having accessible and regular activities in school that explicitly invite voice or other contributions to the community. Although some children did not seem to have the drive or the level of comfort to actually make use of these channels, if they would, they would know where to go.

4.5.4 Believing in the ability to make a difference

The final component that I found to constitute children's civic self-efficacy is the belief that their actions could make a difference. Of all four components, this one poses a particular bottleneck for most children. For instance, even Nour, whose accounts indicate very positive perceptions for the other three components, is doubtful her actions would actually effect change in school. This seems related to her perception of low school responsiveness, which is shared by most children in both schools. The children's accounts of ideas or actions illustrated this by often containing 'disclaimers', such as "but I don't think that will actually happen". This might explain why most of the children had not told anyone about their ideas or concerns yet.

Two 'deviant' cases are provided from Imane and Hira from the Bridge. As a member of the children's council, Imane has access to opportunities for affirming experiences in terms of making a difference through voice. Hira did not feel comfortable in terms of using opportunities for voice, but related positively to her ability to contribute to others' well-being in the school community. She gains these positive experiences by being a mediator and by looking after a classmate who did not fit in well in their class. For this last case, she presented a clear action perspective on how to realise her strivings. Yet, most children did not seem to experience their school community as a place where they could actually influence the conditions in a significant way. This stresses the importance of school responsiveness, in addition to ensuring that

affirming experiences such as Imane and Hira's are available to everyone in the school community. Especially those for whom these experiences are not abundantly within reach due to their outsider position.

In conclusion, my findings have illustrated the varying ways in which children at two different schools experience and perceive their school culture and access and use of citizenship learning opportunities. Organising them according to the different identified components of civic self-efficacy has helped to gain further insight into disparities in how the school works as practice place for different children. In particular, it has shed light on how marginalisation in terms of belonging can thwart valuable citizenship learning opportunities for each of the three discussed components. This means the school as a practice place does not work equally for everyone.

4.6 Individually conditioned by belonging and civic efficacy

In discussing the different experiences of the school as a practice place, the latter three components of my proposed way of understanding civic self-efficacy emerged naturally. What has remained unaddressed so far, is what might ignite children's desire to want to participate in citizenship experiences and acts to begin with. These appeared of a more personal and intricate nature, requiring a more elaborate discussion and connection of lived experience, sense of belonging and civic self-efficacy. To illustrate how children may experience drive and how it can be conditioned by their sense of belonging, I will engage more thoroughly with the experiences of two children: Imane and Jaylena. They are by no means representative of the average student at her schools in terms of citizenship. Instead, their counternarratives can offer important insight into the barriers and boosters at work in the school as practice place: how do these vary for a child who seemingly is able to seize all the citizenship learning opportunities her school community has to offer, as opposed to a child who operates in the community's margins in terms of relationships, voice and academic achievement? As they both exhibit considerable drive, but one manages to translate that into citizenship learning and actions and the other avoids such experiences, these two cases present further insight into the relationship between civic efficacy, belonging and citizenship learning.

4.6.1 Experiencing drive

Imane

The foundational component I propose to understand citizenship learning as individually conditioned, concerns the extent to which children feel the urge to engage in citizenship acts and

experiences. Imane poses an example of someone who indeed has a strong drive for improving the school community. Previously highlighted statements exemplify this, such as Imane indicating she thinks her classmates at the Bridge would have to get upset less and therefore be punished less, if only teachers would discuss things a bit more with children. Also in another way, Imane shows concern for children being understood more, especially the ones who diverge from the norm in some way at school:

That there's just attention given to children who have enrichment [an adjusted program], and so on. Because not all classes have that. Most classes just go 'yes, we do one method and that's it'. And we have [...] a few children who have their own booklet for language and spelling. Because [this girl] is dyslexic and others aren't very good at it. And we sometimes get help from interns for example, who take a few children with them. But it is not done in all classes, **because not all teachers want help. But you shouldn't always think that you don't want help, because sometimes children do need help.**

As a solution, she proposes the interns from her class "are just distributed across *all* classes" [emphasis added]. The remarkable way in which Imane engages with these social justice issues, raises the question: what sparks her concern with adjusting standards towards misunderstood or marginalised children?

To address these questions, it is helpful to look at the relationship between experiencing drive and sense of belonging in the school community. In broad terms, I argue belonging can promote drive in two ways: by feeling part of a community enough to care to contribute to it, or alternatively, by something endangering your belonging or that of others in the community. In the case of Imane, both seem to apply. Currently, there are several ways in which she feels accepted, respected, included, and supported (Goodenow & Grady, 1993), but a few years ago, teachers and peers alike failed to understand the struggles she endured. Imane recounts an important part of her lived experience that underlies these struggles:

I'm from Syria and uh- And uh when I came here and went to the language school, they didn't happen to have *begrijpend lezen* [reading comprehension] in their classes. And here [at school] they do have *begrijpend lezen*. And then they said, 'yes, you're no good at *begrijpend lezen*'. Whereas: I had no *begrijpend lezen* there [at the language school] at all. So then they thought, 'yes, we'll put you in *groep 4*', while I could have been in *groep 5* or *6*.

As a result of feeling determined by something that was beyond her influence – *begrijpend lezen* skills, and in a more fundamental sense, forced migration – Imane deliberately abstained from making friends so she could prove her capacity at school:

I got mad because I was put in *groep 4*. [...] I worked really hard, didn't talk to a lot of kids, and stuff. And uh, when I started to get just good grades in *groep 5* and thought for a second [now] I could uh make friends properly, then uh it actually happened that they said, 'yes, here comes uh the newly born genius', like that. But I said, 'yes, I'm not a genius. I just studied really well in *groep 4*'.

Her peers did not understand at the time that “finishing yet another book” like she did was not optional to her, nor an inborn trait. She notes that in this aspect, she diverges from her (white, majority Dutch background) friends Tess and Evie. And although this history with her friends is currently cleared up according to Imane – “now they think I'm just normal” –, the experience of being underestimated still haunts her today:

The *groep 4* teacher, she [...] just thought, 'this is an ordinary child. She probably can't do *begrijpend lezen* well or do maths well'. And then she deliberately put me in that maths [tutoring] group, whereas I already understood everything about maths. I didn't like that, because I just wanted to learn more and not less. And [while] I was still- still in that uh, group of kids who uh, didn't understand it well, she writes in my report card, 'yes, she did *so well*', and all. And then for example [now in] a conversation with teacher Aniek, my father and my mother, [Aniek says]: 'yes, **she is doing so well, and all that. But then I think, 'yes, maybe you're lying. Maybe you're not telling the truth about me after all...'**

Half a primary school career later, Imane still struggles to trust positive evaluations by her teachers, because it was once coupled with feeling gravely misrecognised at the same time. In her spirited account of how the *groep 4* teacher had all these assumptions about her “while she hasn't even asked me if I get it”, I perceive a match with Imane's current ambitions for the school community. Plausibly, it is this marked event where Imane's drive for having marginalised children be taken seriously and her lived experience with struggling to belong appear to tie in with one another.

Finally, there is another force in Imane's life that might help to understand her drive in relation to her sense of belonging. Imane's membership in the school community does not exist in a vacuum: through her home situation, she also relates to school in a certain way. From what Imane has shared with me, I understand the following to be of influence for her motivation to engage with citizenship practices. Imane's home life can be understood as quite emotionally and mentally demanding, in a way she has little control over. This seems to apply both in terms of major life events as well as everyday life. After having been forced to migrate to the Netherlands, Imane's brother passed away three years ago. While drawing her home, the first thing Imane puts on paper is her brother's room: “And uh, there are still things of him left, and all. That's why we only put a desk for me and for my sister and my father. And the rest is just for him”. This room is her study place, although she prefers to work on the couch.

Indeed, what she terms as ‘work’ seems to be a large part of her home life: when I ask about her hobbies, she lists on her drawing (see Figure 4.5): (1) football, (2) netball, (3) judo (“at school”), (4) reading, (5) working house (“*huishouden*”), (6) working, (7) working, (8) working. Imane explains:

Just keeping house. And the rest is all work from- because my mother makes me study really a lot. [...] Because she wants me to go to vwo [pre-university track]. Sometimes I want in bed [sic], but then mum says ‘well no, seven more pages’. [...] At home, I'm always mad, because uh, my mother

always says, 'you have to work again, you have to work again'. Then I have to help again, and stuff. **And then I'm really mad and no longer as happy [as I was at school].**

The important role academic achievement plays at home, becomes all the more clear from her Imane's response to my question which three things she would like to change at home:

That my sister is faster [with her school work]. That's where most of the fights come from. And uh, **that my parents are more prouder [sic] of me. Because they don't understand if I just do well.** And then they say again, 'yes, you have to do so much', and stuff. And I don't feel like doing that. And uh, that I don't always- that the house gets cleaned up by itself. That I never have to do it.

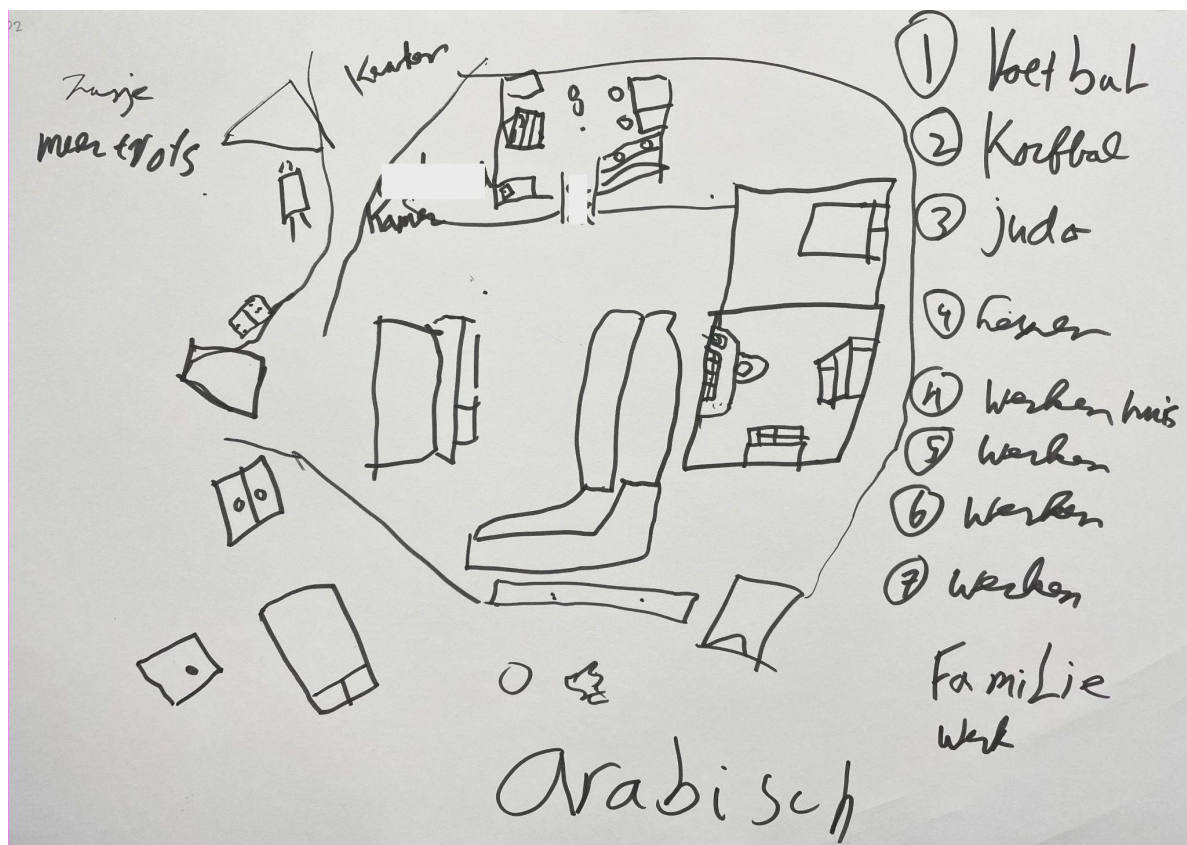


Figure 4.5 - Home by Imane (names omitted)

Against this backdrop, we can better imagine what role her school membership may play to Imane. As she is not allowed to go anywhere other than home after school, it is conceivable she might want to seize every opportunity to undertake things within the school. Indeed, additional activities that came up in conversation were being a member of the children's council and a mediator, in addition to several high achievement programs. However, not only does school seem to be a place where Imane has something to prove and uphold towards her home life. She also talks about school as a counterpart to home, as a place where she *does* have agency, where she can exert influence and where her efforts are highly appreciated – while at the same time, being a space in which she can escape pressure: “sometimes, I just don't want to be serious”.

Jaylena

Another girl who displays a strong drive in terms of social justice oriented citizenship is Jaylena. However, as opposed to Imane, she appears to occupy an outsider position within the school community. Therefore, while Imane is able to translate her drive into action throughout the other components of civic self-efficacy, Jaylena seems constrained every next step in the scheme by her limited sense of belonging. But let us start with two examples illustrate that Jaylena's drive. First, she points out the different rules that apply to teachers and children:

Not fair at all. That we have a point in time we are allowed to eat, whereas the teacher just everywhere- and the teacher can take everything for food. We have to take a sandwich with us per se. 'Sandwich, sandwich, sandwich'. Sometimes we are not even allowed to bring drinks. Ridiculous! We also need food. Normal food.

Jaylena's concern with rights for teachers and children also applies to time management or coming late:

Well, I'm sorry, teacher. But we- If you let us go late, what do you expect us to be at school ten past eight? *Excuse me*. Because we are allowed to be at school until half past eight. [...] You know, I can just be late.

She recounts what happens when she comes in school late:

The teacher, then she starts talking and then I'm just standing here. Yeah, kinda this [points at embarrassed image]. Just, yes. And then I want to go to my place, **but then I'm afraid the teacher will say, 'What are you doing?'** So- but at one point, last time, I just went to my place. Yeah, I'm- I just sit here for a minute. And then she goes- Or when I come in, five to eight-thirty, then of course she goes, 'Oh, I haven't shaken your hand yet. [Because] **you came in late**'. **That's just a little irritating. And then- Then I get a little angry too. But also a bit sad at the same time.**

When relating these accounts to Jaylena's sense of belonging in the school community, it becomes clear she is not just being rebellious. Rather, it appears her home life makes it harder for Jaylena to comply to the school rules:

I am almost always late [...] But then I always have an excuse. But sometimes I also have to make up excuses. But- but mostly I'm just, yeah- [...] **And it's just not fun. And today I had to return my mother's debit card, because she had not bought bread.** [...] I was just at school. And so I was waiting for my mother. [...] And I only had 3 minutes left and then I ran to the classroom.

The way her position within the school community, informed by her home life, withholds her from expressing herself becomes clear when Jaylena tells me:

And then the teacher says, 'blah, blah, blah, you have to be on time'. [makes whining sound]. And that's just annoying. **Then I just want to scream back! But I never do that.** [...] My sister also tells me like, 'talk back'. [But] in the- in the- in primary school you don't dare to talk back. But she doesn't understand- [...] My sister just tells me to talk back if the teacher lets us go so late. Well, she doesn't know that everyone in school has a *reputation* in school. [writes down reputation, see Figure 4.6] [...] I thought she was really- that she's just not going to be nice to you. And yes, **then you just have a reputation. That's why most mouths are just silent.**

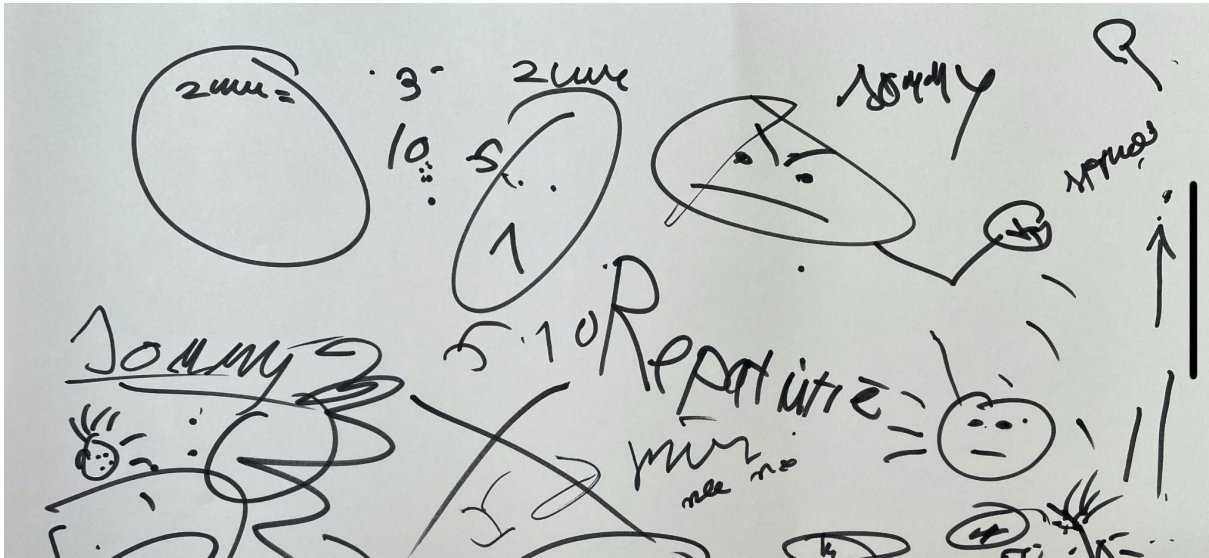


Figure 4.6 - One out of four 'ongoing' drawings by Jaylena, saying 'Repatitue' (Reputation spelled wrong)

Jaylena is in the same class at the Montessori as kids who expressed that “everyone is allowed to say everything, anything. You can say the teacher is stupid”. However, it is clear that even though Jaylena holds a strong drive for critical-democratic or social justice citizenship action, she does not feel comfortable to actually make use of them. In Jaylena’s case, next to the earlier mentioned lack of peer support, this is due to her relationship with one of her teachers:

When it's parent-teacher meeting, I can't say she's being really mean to me or anything. I can not say. Because then I get [back] like, 'what am I doing mean? Blah, blah, blah'. So innocent. **The next day in class I already know it's a bad day.** So uh yeah. [...] I can't really talk to the teacher when it's parent-teacher meeting. That is not possible.

In terms of Jaylena’s perceptions of meeting the teacher’s standards, her counternarratives illustrate how hard it is for her to be ‘a good child’. Her stories contain many smaller and larger frustrations, of which Jaylena says she is not sharing with the person that can make her feel more understood — the teacher. I interpret Jaylena’s civic self-efficacy to be conditioned by her limited sense of belonging: it seems like Jaylena feels she cannot afford to diverge any more from the teacher’s norms than she already does. In this way, despite her remarkable drive, she self-eliminates from citizenship learning opportunities, maintaining an outsider position within the school community.

4.6.2 Conclusion

The deeply private counternarratives by Imane and Jaylena have illustrated how children's citizenship learning can be individually conditioned by interactions between civic self-efficacy and belonging. They also illustrate how different children are hindered and bolstered in their citizenship learning at different points. They mention several aspects that are at play for other children in their classes too, such as the legitimising effect of academic achievement. The proposed understanding of civic efficacy as four constituent components proves helpful to gain insight into what bottleneck occurs when for each child (see Figure 4.4). It also helps to see it is not enough for schools to facilitate only single components. For example, a structure for voice – such as a student council – is no use if children do not feel the urgency or drive, do not feel comfortable to act, or feel their actions will not make a difference. Lastly, these counternarratives in relation to drive have stressed the importance of joint reflection on lived experience in terms of diverging from standards. This lived experience emerged as a key driver for both girls, but when such frustrations and lack of belonging are left unaddressed, they may turn into disengagement and lack of trust.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research has stressed the urgency to address inequalities in young people's citizenship learning, but is yet to provide insight into how these inequalities come about in practice. Against this backdrop, I have conducted a child-centred case study at two Dutch primary schools, in order to shed light on the differential workings of the school as a practice place for citizenship. By designing visual-aided interview methods and using them with eleven children, I have gained insight into children's own experiences and perceptions of the school culture and their access and use of the citizenship learning opportunities embedded therein. Most importantly, these methods allowed for the counternarratives of children to emerge, including those of children who occupy marginalised positions within the school community. Such counternarratives have proven vital in uncovering how the school as a practice place for citizenship can benefit some children more than others. I will now highlight three of this study's main findings and their implications.

5.1 Main findings

First, in this case study, children's civic self-efficacy appears conditioned by their sense of belonging in the school community. Children who occupy a marginalised position in terms of such belonging – for instance, because of lack of peer support or feeling they do not meet their teachers' standards – in turn have less access to citizenship learning opportunities than their more established classmates. My proposed understanding of civic self-efficacy as four constituent components, each conditioned by a sense of belonging (see Figure 4.4), provides further insight into how and why these inequities occur. The sharpest contrasts in children's experiences of the school as a practice place are found in the second component, which concerns the children feeling comfortable to act on citizenship learning opportunities. More specifically, children's accounts indicate that feeling comfortable to act conditions their opportunities to practice and develop the important critical-democratic type of citizenship (Leenders et al., 2008).

My findings illustrate this in two main ways. First, discrepancies are found in how children in the same classroom perceive the openness of the climate. For several children in outsider positions in terms of belonging and peer support, this meant feeling strongly inhibited to speak up in class discussions. Their reasons varied from wanting to avoid disagreement to fear of having "the wrong answer" or opinion, thereby abstaining from critical-democratic learning opportunities altogether. Another way in which belonging arguably hindered children's

efficacy in terms of feeling comfortable to act, is by concerns of being disciplined. Children who do not feel they match the standards their teachers implicitly or explicitly set, appear to obtain less affirming messages in terms of their belonging in the school community and experience higher thresholds to question authority figures. In that way, children's relationships with both their peers and teachers are shown to likely play an important role for children in feeling more or less valued as members of the school community. This, in turn, can condition whether children feel they can afford the risk of engaging with critical-democratic citizenship learning opportunities — the risk to be wrong, punished or in conflict.

A second key finding concerns a way that may contribute to diminishing such hindering effects of sense of belonging on citizenship learning. This finding occurred in relation to the third component of my understanding of civic self-efficacy: whether children have channels for citizenship acts. At one school, which maintained an extensive infrastructure for citizenship learning, children's internarratives included descriptions of the regular and relatively accessible activities for voice and caring for the community. They seemed aware of available opportunities independent of their sense of belonging. Although some of the children indicated inhibitions to actually make use of these channels, they were all informed about these possibilities in case they would feel ready. In that way, the knowing ways-component of civic self-efficacy depends less on children's individual and arbitrary relationships with authority figures in the school for informal access to citizenship learning. Having regular and recognisable structures in place for citizenship practices thus appears especially valuable to not only optimise citizenship learning opportunities in general, but moreover minimise disparities in access between children (Bol & van de Werfhorst, 2013).

The final finding worth highlighting is the need for joint reflection. Many of the children in more marginalised positions indicated feeling treated unfairly by their teachers, such as feeling they are punished too fast. However, most of them did not seem to recognise this as something they could act upon. They showed limited action perspectives, as their civic self-efficacy appeared limited on one or several components. Based on my findings, I suggest reflecting on lived experience can be a way to bolster the first component: experiencing drive. As critical pedagogue Paulo Freire contended, social action and reflection cannot be understood separately: "reflection – true reflection – leads to action" (1970/2000, p. 66). And since from a practice place perspective, doing citizenship equals learning citizenship, reflection is instrumental for both. Thus, I argue harnessing lived experience is essential, not only to prevent disengagement from the ones experiencing marginalisation, but also for the important contributions such experiences can make to everyday life in the school community. Children's deeply intimate counternarratives have illustrated how lived experience can form an enormous driver for them to seize citizenship learning opportunities in school. However, we should not

mistake a child's eager participation for that child to belong effortlessly, as their eagerness can be driven by quite the opposite.

5.2 Findings in relation to prior studies

Comparison of the findings with relevant studies confirms the importance of recognising that students do not experience citizenship learning opportunities in the same way. My findings support as well as expand two earlier observations. First, my case study aligns with variations found between schools in their practice place function by Rinnooy Kan and colleagues (2021a). Additionally, I demonstrate how differences also occur within the very same classroom. Another research with which the findings of this case study correspond is that of Cleas and colleagues (2017). In relation to a specific form of citizenship learning – classroom discussions –, they too stressed the significant role of civic self-efficacy³⁴ for students to engage in discussions. In addition, they identified important differences in students' perceptions of discussion opportunities. However, their multilevel analysis of ICCS³⁵ data was limited to the school and individual student level. This means that my findings on discrepancies in perceptions of the class climate by students *within the same classroom* complement existing research.

In addition, to my knowledge no prior studies have addressed inequalities in citizenship learning opportunities in primary education, nor have they engaged with children's experiences of how the school functions for them as a practice place, indicating a second way of extending current knowledge. Consequently, one of the ways in which this case study contributes to existing knowledge is by outlining an issue with citizenship learning that needs to be addressed before it can 'solve' any of the societal challenges it has been tasked with: inequitable distributions of citizenship learning opportunities. This study also specifies the location of this issue. While most research on citizenship has demonstrated inequalities in secondary education, and in the Dutch context often in relation to educational tracks, the findings of this case study imply inequitable citizenship learning is already in place in primary education, and can occur even within the same classroom. This indicates a more fundamental change in the functioning of schools as practice places is required.

In comparison to more general studies on citizenship outcomes, this case study additionally nuances two widespread assumptions. First, this study has been unable to reproduce previous findings in which student characteristics, such as class and migration background and gender, are strong determining factors for citizenship (Dijkstra et al., 2015;

³⁴ As previously noted in chapter 2, Claes and colleagues (2017) use a limited operationalisation of citizenship self-efficacy, which does not include whether students feel their efforts can make a difference.

³⁵ International Civic and Citizenship Education Study.

Geboers et al., 2013; Munniksmas et al., 2017). Although it was beyond the scope of this small-scale study to determine patterns in backgrounds, I expected to find more convergence in backgrounds on the one hand and civic efficacy and belonging on the other. I did find children in more marginalised or established positions in terms of their citizenship in school, but these were more nuanced: some stories of marginalisation were indeed related to experiencing limited Dutch language capabilities or not fitting dominant 'schoolish' norms, but others were inhibited by not having friends or feeling shy. In sum, it is not that children's position in social hierarchies outside the school community appeared of no influence, it was just not the only factor at play.

Second, studies on citizenship outcomes often maintain that schools have limited influence on children's citizenship, as they are mostly 'decided' by children's home environment. For this reason, in their much cited review study, Geboers and colleagues conclude by questioning if large effects of schooling on citizenship should be expected (2013). I argue this kind of reasoning indicates a too narrow understanding of how citizenship learning takes place in schools. If citizenship learning were understood as the relational and ongoing process that this case study supports it to be, then outcomes in which students' backgrounds play a large role is a manifestation of the kind of reproducing practices that take place at school. It overlooks what students can accomplish in and for their school communities if they are equipped and encouraged. Thus, rather than concluding that little should be expected from schools, I contend *more* should be expected, as the current study demonstrates practices at school can in fact strongly influence the way students relate to citizenship learning, and students can impact conditions at school, given they are taken seriously.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This small-scale qualitative study has enhanced insights into children's own experiences at school. However, several limitations need to be addressed. First, a larger scale study would allow for broader generalisations of findings. For example, the accounts in the current study are situated in a heterogeneous student body. As citizenship learning takes place relationally, different dynamics are likely to occur based on which groups form a minority within the student body. Expanding the scale of this study would contribute to finding and elucidating patterns. Second, structured observations could take place at school, in order to triangulate children's own accounts with a different method.

Third, a longitudinal research design would advance the understanding of how children's current experiences are embedded within their broader development. In addition, a

longitudinal study would be a suitable research design for criticising, altering or expanding my proposed framework for civic self-efficacy (see Figure 4.4). For instance, further studies could investigate if and how these four components interact over time. In addition, earlier I suggested two possible ways for countering the barriers that children encounter in the components of experiencing drive and knowing channels. Further research could investigate these and other approaches to counter inequitable citizenship learning in schools, contributing to advance schools in directing their policies. Finally, it would be of interest to see whether interventions focused on bolstering a specific component could affect children's efficacy and belonging in relation to the other components too.

Other shortcomings of the current study include the scope in terms of participants and locations. This study has centred children, as their experiences are often underrepresented in both research and practice. However, these practices at school are co-constructed (Clark, 2011). This implies the perceptions of teachers and other school professionals are a valuable addition in further understanding the workings of the school as a practice place. Lastly, this case study has focused on what happens at school — while for children, citizenship learning happens throughout their lives. As such, if the aim is to fully grasp the differential ways in which children develop themselves as citizens, we must also understand the roles they play as social actors in the multitude of arenas outside the school. To that end, the understanding of citizenship learning as conditioned by civic self-efficacy and sense of belonging developed in this study could be translated to other communities outside of the school too, such as the neighbourhood and home environment.

5.4 Implications for the educational field

Both schools in this case study have provided inspiring examples of how schools can function as practice places for their students. Both have also allowed for insights on where attention should be directed towards, if we are to ensure each child can benefit from that practice place. Here, I will address how my findings may contribute to the educational field. Following Claes and colleagues (2017), I first stress that my findings indicate there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will provide all students with *equal* citizenship learning opportunities. There are, however, approaches that contribute to a more *equitable* distribution of learning opportunities. This first requires the awareness that teaching methods are not objective, but rather promote the learning of some students more than others, for example on the basis of their correspondence to certain dispositions or position within the school community. Acknowledging this can help make deliberate decisions for teaching approaches in terms of equitable citizenship learning.

In terms of this awareness, it is relevant to point out that not all schools reflect actively on the citizenship learning opportunities already present within the school (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021a). Therefore, if inequities exist in learning opportunities that are not yet recognised as such, a foundational step is to broaden the understanding in schools of the ways in which they already function as a practice place for citizenship. Evidently children should play an important role in coming to such an understanding.

Indeed, the current case study has illustrated the value of children's counternarratives, not only as a drive for themselves to engage in citizenship experiences, but moreover as an untapped source of information needed to further harness the school's function as a practice place. During our conversations, several children indicated they usually do not talk about these topics or would not know how to tell their teachers about their concerns. An example of an issue that does play a role in children's lives, but is not discussed with their teachers, are perceptions of racism in school practices. As most children experience high thresholds to openly challenge dominant standards and question authority figures, many of children's counternarratives will remain absent in dominant discourses in school. Indeed, children have previously been found to express false acceptance of rules they find unfair and hide criticisms towards their teachers (Thornberg, 2008). This emphasises once more the value of joint reflection and taking children seriously as social actors and providing them with access to resources for voice accordingly, both in further research and in educational practices.

With regards to implementing these findings, I previously discussed the benefit of a citizenship infrastructure that provides moments for children to practice their voice and care for the community, which are recognisable and open to children independent of their sense of belonging. In addition, I argue citizenship learning opportunities should also be available to children independent of their academic achievement. To illustrate, in one school in this study, both children and their teacher indicated that a substantial part of their extensive infrastructure for citizenship was actually mainly targeted at children who did well in terms of academic achievement. Examples include student councils and commissions. This can result in disengagement of the ones who do not fit academic standards enough to 'earn' their right to citizenship experiences and consequently leave their voices unheard. Therefore I argue opportunities for voice and other citizenship experiences should be decoupled from achievement in other aspects of school. In this way, schools can contribute to countering the reproduction of established-marginalised hierarchies through civic self-efficacy.

In order to more specifically contribute to providing equitable citizenship learning opportunities, schools may additionally make use of the framework for civic self-efficacy I proposed, which specifies efficacy as four components, each conditioned by sense of belonging (see Figure 4.4). This could support further understanding of how and when children are exactly

constrained in their citizenship learning in school. In addition, it can help identify promising approaches, as the scheme includes aspects that schools can foster for each component. It should be noted that if children are 'put through' the scheme individually, their differences should not be understood as individualised shortcomings, but rather as a challenge for dealing with differences for the school community as a whole, as citizenship learning is a contextual and relational process (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021b).

Finally, the aforementioned recommendations – awareness of the differential workings of the school as practice place, a serious role for children's counternarratives and providing resources for voice independent of academic achievement – ask a lot of teachers and other school professionals in terms of restructuring adult-child relationships. Simply differentiating more in citizenship learning opportunities could in fact risk enhancing inequalities rather than diminishing them, as intuitive differential teacher approaches have been shown to advance those students whom teachers hold high expectations for (Denessen, 2017). Therefore, the importance of preparing and enabling teachers in countering inequitable citizenship learning should not be underestimated (Devine, 2002). Both in initial teacher training as well as throughout their careers, teachers should be substantially supported in their significant role as enablers of equitable citizenship learning for a younger generation.

5.5 Final conclusions

The current body of research has failed to provide sufficient understanding of how inequalities in young people's citizenship come into existence. Whereas this knowledge is indispensable if citizenship learning is to contribute to any of the societal issues it has been proposed as a solution for. This is why the current child-centred case study was conducted. Children's (counter)narratives of their school as practice place have shed light on the differences in the citizenship learning experiences available to them. They have demonstrated how learning opportunities are distributed in inequitable ways, as they appear primarily allocated to children who already occupy more established positions within the school community. Aspects of this more established position include dominance in terms of civic self-efficacy, sense of belonging in the school community and academic achievement. As a result, the important voices of children in outsider positions often remain untapped, and these children are likely to experience limited opportunities to practice with the essential critical-democratic type of citizenship.

The relevance of these findings are further emphasised by the practice place approach that I employed throughout this case study. From this perspective, children interpret the ways society works for them through the relationships and practices that the school contains as

mini-society. The position children occupy within that mini-society seemed to determine how they experience the opportunity structure for citizenship learning: whether such opportunities were 'for them' or not. As a result, some children appeared able to obtain far more affirming citizenship experiences than others. From a practice place perspective, such experiences might resonate later in life, as might the implicit message that citizenship is 'for them' or not. This underscores the urgency of diminishing inequities in citizenship learning and to make learning opportunities available to children independent of their position within the school community.

To this end, the insights this study offers in children's civic self-efficacy and sense of belonging as conditioning children's relationship with learning opportunities captured in the framework of Figure 4.4 may be useful. It provides a basis for understanding how, why and when children may be bolstered or hindered in specific aspects of their citizenship learning, which may be applied in research as well as the educational field. Also, approaching the school as a practice place has proved valuable, as it helped to view civic self-efficacy not as an outcome, but rather as an action perspective for undertaking citizenship learning experiences. Each component of civic self-efficacy I proposed appeared in turn conditioned by children's sense of belonging. This offers a way to understand how through this seemingly self-reinforcing cycle of doing and learning, dominant and marginalised positions in relation to a school's citizenship opportunity structure are (re)produced.

Finally, breaking these cycles should not just be a mission for teachers and school leaders, management, training and the policies that support them. If anyone can point out how practices are in need of change, it is the children who experience their constraints. Scholars have argued that the critical-democratic or social justice oriented type of citizenship, which is concerned with this kind of system change efforts, is less suitable for children and young teenagers (Jagers et al., 2017). However, this case study demonstrated there is clear interest among children in social justice issues, as their perceptions indicate they are already confronted with unfair treatment and marginalisation despite their young age. These drives for citizenship action should be reflected upon and harnessed. In that sense, the democratisation of society can be understood as at least in part depending on the democratisation of the school (Bruch & Soss, 2018). Or, as one of the participants put it: "That the teachers better understand [...] that children sometimes want to say things too".

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³⁶ In order to maintain the schools' privacy, the full hyperlinks cannot be disclosed.

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Appendix I: Coding scheme

Categories	Codes	Subcodes
- Child's classifications →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alleen/geen vrienden (IV) - Anders zijn/verschillen (IV) - De beurt krijgen/willen/geven (IV) - Druk/veel/praten/geluid (IV) - Iets goed(s) doen (IV) - Iets niet goed(s) doen/fouten maken (IV) - Stil/rustig/verlegen (IV) - Straf (IV) - Werken/werk(je) (IV) 	
- Child's life →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic performance (pressure) - Corona - Ethnoracial identities - Interests, preferences, and leisure - Online - Previous school - Religion 	
- Citizenship learning opportunities →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acting democratically - Acting in a societally responsible manner - Dealing with conflicts - Dealing with differences 	
- Cultural logic →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural logic: Home - Cultural logic: School 	
- Home →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Home: Demanding or challenging situation - Home: Other family members - Home: Parent(s) - Home: Relationship school-home - Home: Responsibilities - Home: Talking 	

- Individual citizenship factors →
 - 1. Efficacy - Having drive +
 - 1. Efficacy - Having drive -
 - 2. Efficacy - Comfortable to act +
 - 2. Efficacy - Comfortable to act -
 - 3. Knowing ways/access +
 - 3. Knowing ways/access -
 - 4. Believing their actions can make a difference +
 - 4. Believing their actions can make a difference -
 - Barrier
 - Belonging →
 - Belonging conditions
 - Belonging +
 - Belonging -
 - Booster
 - Civic self-efficacy
 - Collective civic efficacy →
 - Collective civic efficacy +
 - Collective civic efficacy -

- Interview interaction →
 - Blue cards
 - Child asks question
 - Draws while telling
 - Feedback

- Narrative →
 - Counter narrative
 - Master narrative

- Position:
 - Established/dominant position
 - Outsider/marginalised

- Relationships →
 - Child-child relationships →
 - Child-child relationship +
 - Child-child relationship -
 - Child-child Aisha
 - Child-child Bo
 - Child-child Evie
 - Child-child Hira
 - Child-child Imane
 - Child-child Jaylena
 - Child-child Julia
 - Child-child Massin
 - Child-child Nour

- School citizenship factors →
 - Agency →
 - Agency +
 - Agency -
 - Authority →
 - Authority +
 - Authority -
 - Fairness peers +
 - Fairness peers -
 - Fairness teachers/rules +
 - Fairness teachers/rules -
 - Open/democratic climate →
 - Open/democratic climate +
 - Open/democratic climate -
 - Rules
 - School community
 - Voice →
 - Voice +
 - Voice -
 - Voice - School
 - responsiveness +
 - Voice - School
 - responsiveness -
- Child-child Özkan
- Child-child Pepijn
- Child-child Rami
- Child-director relationships
- Child-teacher relationships →
 - Child-teacher relationship +
 - Child-teacher relationship -
- Self image →
 - Self image: +
 - Self image: -