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The school as practice ground

Youth citizenship in schools as communities

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Publication date

2024

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Rinnooy Kan, W. F. (2024). *The school as practice ground: Youth citizenship in schools as communities*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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Schools as practice grounds for citizenship: Exploring youth citizenship in four Dutch secondary schools

Based on: Rinnooy Kan, W.F., März, V., Volman, M. & Dijkstra, A.B. Schools as practice grounds for citizenship: Exploring youth citizenship in four Dutch secondary schools (submitted)

Abstract

To gain a deeper understanding of how the school context contributes to students' lived citizenship, we utilize the framework of schools as practice grounds for citizenship to analyze the dynamics of four Dutch high school communities. Through an exploratory multiple case study approach, we analyze how various aspects of the school community (such as its vision, within-school relations, and shared activities) shape the context for students' citizenship experiences. We find that schools differ in the types of lived citizenship experiences they provide, although all have a focus on students becoming citizens. Being citizens and doing citizenship is hardly connected to the school context by teachers and school leaders. This study emphasizes the significance of researching students' citizenship experiences within the school context itself. Schools play a crucial role in shaping students' citizenship, extending beyond mere becoming citizens. As such, citizenship education should also focus on empowering students to actively be citizens and do citizenship within the school context.

2.1 Introduction

The relationship between education and citizenship has been the subject of much research since the turn of the century and compulsory citizenship education has been promoted all over the world (cf. Eurydice, 2017). Despite the increased attention for citizenship education, knowledge about the ways in which schools play a role in relation to their students' citizenship is still lacking. It is likely that schools differ not only regarding their contribution to the development of students' citizenship outcomes, but also in how they realize this (Sincer et al., 2019; Wood, 2014). More in-depth research is therefore needed that goes beyond relating specific school characteristics with certain citizenship outcomes and instead focusses on the processes through which schools play a role in relation to students' citizenship.

Current research on citizenship education is dominated by large scale quantitative studies, connecting a broad array of school characteristics and practices to a specific set of citizenship competences (e.g., Isac et al, 2014; Schulz et al., 2018). While these studies allow for comparison between countries and between different type of citizenship practices, they are limited in terms of their capacity to shed light on the within-school dynamics, processes and mechanism that underlie the identified outcomes. Meanwhile, qualitative studies in light of citizenship education often focus on very specific practices that, based on quantitative research or through a theoretical lens, are deemed relevant in light of citizenship education, such as classroom discussions or service learning and students' and teachers' experiences with these practices (e.g., Caspersz and Olaru, 2017; Hess and Avery, 2008; Nieuwelink et al., 2019). This illustrates a key issue in the research on students' citizenship and the school environment: what constitutes citizenship education is generally only loosely defined, and often focused more on the related goals. For example, Campbell (2012) defines this "notoriously slippery term" (p. 1) as: "the knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience to prepare someone to be an active, informed participant in democratic life" (p. 1). The question how the school contributes to this goal can have a broad array of answers, although consensus does seem to exist on the fact that it is part of the curriculum beyond a stand-alone formal civics course and part of the school environment beyond the formal curriculum. Therefore, several authors call for the development of a more holistic framework, considering a whole-school approach to understand how multiple aspects of the school life and different members of the school community (cf. Gibb, 2016; Potter, 2003) contribute to students' citizenship.

This chapter aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature by adopting an approach in which the school is regarded as a community. It builds on Dewey's (1916) classic notion that the school is a practice ground – a place where students co-exist in relation to their peers and their teachers and in which students can experience the functioning of a

community and as such bring their citizenship into expression. Our premise, therefore, is that if we look beyond the formal curriculum, schools can be regarded as practice grounds for citizenship (Veugelers, 2011). Schools can function as an environment to bring their citizenship into practice in line with the understanding of ‘lived citizenship’ (Isin, 2008) or ‘citizenship as practice’ (Biesta and Lawy, 2006). In the context of lived citizenship, youth are not only understood as ‘becoming citizens’, they already are ‘being citizens’ and ‘doing citizenship’ (Wood, 2022). Citizenship in this framework is understood in the context of daily interactions with others and the ways in which we engage in the shaping of our communities (Kallio et al., 2020) as opposed to a narrower focus on political, civil and social rights, and obligations tied to adulthood and the formal status of citizenship (cf. Marshall, 1963). In this chapter, we aim to understand in what ways schools provide opportunities to do so, or formulated differently, in what ways schools are practice grounds for citizenship. More specifically, we will present the results of an exploratory multiple case study in which we analyzed how four secondary schools function as practice grounds for citizenship. Using the ‘school as community’ framework (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Furman 2012), we focus on the school vision and values endorsed in the school, the relationships within the school, and the shared activities that take place.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Youth citizenship as lived citizenship

We define citizenship as a developing practice throughout life, concerned with how to negotiate the rights and responsibilities that are involved in membership in a community (Biesta et al., 2009; Lawy & Biesta, 2006). This understanding of citizenship is in line with that of ‘lived citizenship’, a broader body of research focusing on the everyday ways that people live their citizenship and contribute to shaping the communities that they are part of (Kallio et al., 2020). In the context of lived citizenship, youth can be defined as becoming citizens, being citizens and doing citizenship (Wood, 2022).

Firstly, becoming citizens refers to the temporality of the phase youth are in and the way the characteristics of this phase influence youth’s opportunities and possibilities to express their citizenship as well as underlines its qualities of an ever-evolving practice (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). That is not to say that youth are not already citizens, or are incompetent as citizens, but it does acknowledge that their age influences the meaning and everyday reality of their citizenship. Additionally, it underlines the fact that the adults present within the lives of youth can exercise a strong influence on their citizenship, in terms of setting boundaries to expressions of it as well as modelling citizenship to them. Secondly, being citizens refers to the identities that belong to this realm of youth’s lives, how they identify with

the communities they are part of and what relationship underline the memberships they experience. Finally, doing citizenship is about youth's agency to influence the functioning of the communities they are part of. All these different expressions of citizenship can be found within the school context.

The understanding of youth becoming citizens most clearly informs the citizenship education agenda, this is visible in the way civic education is often operationalized, for example: "the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience to *prepare* someone to be an active informed participant in de democratic life" (Campbell, 2012, p.1 (italics mine)). As such, through the formal curriculum students are supported in this process. Additionally, teachers, as proximate authority figures, model citizenship as well as the functioning of authority to students (Flanagan, 2013). In terms of youth being citizens in schools, their sense of school membership and community is the clearest expression. Finally, youth 'do' citizenship in school, for example, when they resolve group conflicts, recycle their garbage, organize protests, or participate in the student council. The school context is one of the environments in which students experience community membership, and in turn, research has indicated that the experiences that adolescents have as members of different communities (e.g., in their school, in their neighborhood, in their online social networks) shape their understanding of the larger world (Flanagan, 2013). Through these experiences, they interpret and reinterpret how the status quo, or the social contract, works for people 'like them' (Flanagan, 2013, p. 15). Within the school context their individual experiences are related to those of the other members of the school community: their peers and teachers. This implies that it is the shared experience of citizenship of members within the school community that matters to understand how youth citizenship and schools relate to each other.

2.2.2 The school as community – schools as practice grounds for citizenship

Following the perspective of lived citizenship, schools can become an environment where students cannot only learn about democracy, the rule of law, history, and culture, but where they can also use the everyday reality of their school community membership to bring their citizenship into practice, for instance, by taking part in a debate, collaborating with others to influence decisions, or question the rules. To obtain an understanding of the functioning of schools as practice grounds for citizenship, in which the experiences of youth citizenship are present, we build on the 'school as community' framework. According to the 'school as community' framework, a distinction can be made between the following aspects (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Furman, 2012): the explicit and implicit values and goals that characterize the school vision, the nature, and quality of the relationships between members of the school community, and the shared activities undertaken within this context.

The first element of the school as community refers to the presence of shared goals, norms, and values. These are primarily laid down within the school's vision of the purpose of education and ways to realize this: "A vision enables one to see facets of school life that may otherwise be unclear, raising their importance above others" (Hallinger & Heck, 2002, p. 4). A school vision also enables actors in the school to shape school life in accordance with this vision. Literature that relates the school vision to the functioning of the school community seems limited. So-called 'democratic schools' are an exception here, combining a 'democratic vision' with a 'democratically' organized school community (e.g., Korkmaz & Erden, 2014). For schools as practice ground both the general vision and the vision related to citizenship education in particular are relevant. Research has shown that how teachers understand the goals of citizenship education differs between and within schools. These differences often result in different emphases within their teaching (Knowles & Castro, 2019; Patterson et al., 2012). The type of educational track also influences teachers' vision on citizenship. Teachers in pre-vocational education seem to emphasize social commitment and discipline, whereas pre-university teachers emphasize critical thinking and autonomy (Ten Dam & Volman, 2003).

The second element concerns the relationships within the school. For students, it is in the context of the relationships with peers and teachers that community is experienced and expressed. Students' sense of community, defined as "a feeling of belongingness within a group" (Osterman, 2000, p. 323) positively influences a broad array of student outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2020), including students' civic commitments (Kahne & Sporte, 2009). Two of the factors influencing students' sense of community are the experience of having voice (Evans, 2007; Mitra, 2004) and the experience of teacher support (Allen et al., 2018). Caring and supportive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students in general seem to go hand in hand with a broad spectrum of outcomes, including higher school satisfaction (Klem and Connell, 2004), as well as with citizenship outcomes measured in terms of societal involvement (Wanders et al., 2020) and trust in political institutions (Ziemes et al., 2020). Furthermore, research has shown that an open classroom climate, in which students feel supported and invited by their teachers to discuss and debate, is positively connected to a broad array of citizenship outcomes (Campbell, 2008; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Teachers seem to play a double role when it comes to modelling citizenship, on the one hand they can act as role models for citizenship, on the other, teachers can also be considered to be 'proximate authority figures' representing authority in more general terms. For example, more punitive teacher behavior is related to less trust in politics (Bruch & Soss, 2018).

Finally, shared activities beyond the classroom are distinguished as the third constitutive element within the framework of the school as community. 'Shared' can refer to activities that are experienced together at the same time but also refer to activities that all students

partake in at separate moments. Shared activities can fulfil multiple roles, and one activity can fulfil multiple roles at the same time. First, they can be a 'lived expression' of the school's vision, for example, cultural or religious celebrations in line with the school's identity. Second, such activities can enhance the school's social fabric, by strengthening the connections between the members of the community as they accumulate experiences together; here one can think of traveling abroad or visiting an arts performance (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Finally, these activities can be part of the intentional enactment of citizenship education, for example, organizing a visit to Parliament or raising money for a good cause (McCowan, 2011). Furthermore, in terms of citizenship experiences, shared activities can either be focused school internally or externally. With reference to this last category, the best-researched shared activity is that of social service or service learning. This concerns participating in (compulsory) community service as part of the curriculum (e.g., Myers, 2016; Van Goethem et al., 2014). To conclude, these three aspects – that together define the functioning of the school as a community – will provide the building blocks for our analyses of schools as practice grounds, for students being and becoming citizens, and doing citizenship.

2.3 Methodology

The current study aims to answer the following research question: "How do schools function as practice grounds for citizenship and how do they provide a context for students' lived citizenship experiences?". To answer this research question, the study employed an exploratory multiple case study methodology (Yin, 2003). A qualitative study allowed us to take into account teachers' (based on subject matter, educational track) and students' (based on students' background, educational track) particular experiences and perspectives regarding the school as a practice ground for citizenship. More specifically, comparison between different enactments of schools as practice grounds for citizenship, allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the three constitutive aspects of the school community provide a context in which students' citizenship is enacted and experienced.

2.3.1 Context and sample

The study was conducted in four Dutch secondary schools. Because the Netherlands does not have a national curriculum, schools have a high degree of autonomy in the organization of their teaching (Glenn & De Groof, 2002). Although citizenship teaching is a statutory obligation, this duty has been formulated in such general terms that schools have a lot of leeway to decide how to implement this (Bron & Thijs, 2011). Consequently, there are large differences between schools in this respect (Dijkstra et al., 2021). This makes the Dutch context an interesting setting for the analysis of varying expressions of the school as a practice ground for citizenship. The broader understanding of a school's contribution to

students' citizenship that we propose will nevertheless also provide additional insight into the context of more regulated school systems, as the explicit goal is to analyze what happens beyond the formal curriculum.

We selected four secondary schools from our professional network, using maximum variation sampling (Schreier, 2018). Maximum variation sampling allows “to document variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 200) and is the preferred sampling mode for constructivist inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). All four principals we contacted agreed to participate with their school. We included schools that were highly diverse as well as very homogeneous in terms of the students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status (SES), and schools with different pedagogical principles underlying the education they offer. We achieved the latter by including a Waldorf school. We also aimed at regional diversity and included schools from the two largest Dutch cities, one school from a smaller city and one from a rural area. Finally, we selected schools that offered only pre-vocational track education and schools that offered pre-vocational, general secondary and pre-academic track education (see Table 2.1). The schools' participants were selected in collaboration with the school leaders (for the participating school staff) and mentors (for the participating students), in total 35 members of the professional community and 42 students.

Table 2.1 Overview of the cases

Cases	Location	Student Population ¹	Tracks ²
School 1	Urban	800 (approx. 90% native Dutch)	Pre-vocational (theory) to pre-university (3 tracks) Waldorf school ³
School 2	Rural	300 (approx. 95% native Dutch)	Pre-vocational (job-oriented) (1 track)
School 3	Urban	300 (approx. 5% native Dutch)	Pre-vocational (theory) (1 track)
School 4	Urban	1600 (approx. 30% native Dutch)	Pre-vocational (job-oriented) to pre-university (4 tracks)

1 The percentage of native Dutch students is based on an estimation by school principals.

2 After completing primary school (age 11/12), students are placed in one of the three tracks within the Dutch school system: pre-vocational education (vmbo), general secondary education (havo) and pre-university education (vwo). Pre-vocational schools have job-oriented tracks (vmbo-b/k) and theory-oriented tracks (vmbo-tl).

3 Waldorf education (Steiner education) is based on the work of Rudolf Steiner (1862-1925). Waldorf education is centered around a specific understanding of children's different developmental stages and focuses on the development of the 'whole child', including the child's spiritual, physical, and emotional needs. Whole class teaching is the norm.

2.3.2 Data collection

Data collection took place from September 2014 through February 2015. First, for each case, background information was collected through pre-existing documents and observations, which were used to inform the formal data collection phase (i.e. preliminary data collection; these data were not systematically analyzed). We started by analyzing the school plan (describing the school's curriculum and vision), focusing on aspects that alluded to a) the functioning of the school as a community and b) citizenship education. Next, we spent four full days in each school, observing what happened in the classes of the teachers and students who were going to participate in the interviews or focus groups. We used a semi-structured observation guide based on our theoretical framework and for each individual school we added specific themes based on our document analysis. We focused on the physical environment (specifically the extent to which the school vision was (or was not) reflected, e.g., artwork on the walls or the way tables in classrooms were organized) and visible and audible characteristics of the interactions between students, students and teachers and between members of the professional community (e.g., level of 'rowdiness' during breaks or students' tone of voice in addressing teachers or the janitor during breaks). We also observed the beginning and the end of a school day and during breaks, in the main hall and near the entrance area, focusing on student–student, student–teacher, and teacher–teacher interactions. In two schools, we additionally attended a teacher meeting and in one school, we observed the rehearsals for the school play.

Second, within each school data were obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A total of 44 interviews⁴ were conducted with teachers (n = 20, of which n=8 were also mentors), school leaders (n = 4), vice school leaders/team leaders⁵ (n = 4), building service workers (n = 3), special needs coordinators (n = 4). The interviews were conducted by two interviewers, one of whom was the principal researcher, and lasted between 28 and 55 minutes. The teachers and mentors we interviewed taught a variety of subjects (with at least one civics teacher in each school). The selected teachers all taught the students that participated in the focus groups.

Moreover, we organized two focus groups of four to six students (14-15 years old) in each school. As such, 8 focus groups were conducted which lasted between 30 and 49 minutes. For the focus groups with students, we used three short films (\approx 2 minutes each) that were

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- 4 We spoke to all school leaders twice, once on the first day of our visit and once later in the week so we had a chance to use the input of the conversations in our other interviews and ask remaining questions during the second interview. We spoke to at least one teacher twice as well, once on the first day and once later in the week and used the interview in a similar way as the school leader interview.
 - 5 Team leaders are teachers with a management role; usually they are responsible for a team of teachers who teach in a specific track and/or certain grades within the school.

originally developed for an educational project on social wellbeing and safety in schools⁶. These films were about classroom climate, student social group formation at school, and bullying. The functioning of the school as a community was discussed in a semi-structured way around these short films, addressing all three of the aspects of the school as practice ground. The films were introduced separately, after we explored the corresponding themes with the students in the focus group in a more open way. The films were used as an invitation to deepen the conversation, to add concrete examples and to get the students to bring their own experiences to the table. The interviews and focus groups were conducted with the help of an interview protocol based on our theoretical framework (see Table 2.2). Depending on the type of participants, certain aspects were elaborated more in detail (for instance: vision with the school principals). All participants were informed about the study's procedure and were guaranteed anonymity.

Table 2.2 Sample questions school as practice ground

Aspects of the school as practice ground	Example
Vision	What distinguishes your school from other schools? What is/are the main goal(s) of education at this school? Pertaining to citizenship education in particular, what goals do you have for your students? What do you do to support these goals?
Intraschool relationships	General reflections on all relationships, thematic focus on: Student–student relationships: bullying, within class dynamics, contact with students beyond their own class, collaborating with fellow students. Teacher–student relationships: whom do students go to when they need help or have questions? What is the range of topics that can be discussed? Student–teacher relationships: Can students disagree with teachers? How are rules applied? Can they have a say in school policy? Teacher–teacher relationships: Is there contact between teachers outside of school obligations? Do teachers have voice in school policy? If so, in what ways is that organized?
Shared activities	What kinds of shared activities are offered outside of class hours? What is the goal of these activities?

6 The short films were developed by a Dutch organization called 'Critical Mass' (www.criticalmass.nl), that develops experiential learning projects and originally developed these in 2013 (the project is ongoing). In each film you see a short animation of a situation in school (a class that acted out against a teacher, group formation in the schoolyard and a student who was bullied with other students stepping in).

2.3.3 Data analysis

All interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The data analysis comprised an iterative process of reading and re-reading, selecting, coding, and displaying the data in within-case and cross-case matrices (Miles and Huberman 1994).

In a first step, we divided the transcriptions in text fragments (in Atlas.ti) and coded them by means of descriptive codes (or *in vivo* codes), and interpretative or *a priori* codes. The *a priori* codes were based on the theoretical framework, using the three aspects of the school as practice ground and the notion of lived citizenship as a starting point. The *in vivo* codes added aspects that emerged from the data to these three aspects. The iterative coding process resulted in a final coding scheme (see Appendix 2.A for a detailed overview of the coding scheme).

In the second step, we conducted within-case and cross-case analyses. In the within-case analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994), individual schools were taken as the unit of analysis. We applied the coding scheme to all the interview and focus group transcripts. Transcript fragments with the same codes were grouped. This resulted in an individual and structured case report for each school, encompassing all the results of the analysis and illustrative interview fragments from the different participants. For the cross-case analysis, we looked for systematic differences, similarities, patterns, and processes across the four cases. The structural analogy across the different case reports enabled us to organize the data in a manageable form and facilitated comparisons between schools.

To enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the research, we used a number of techniques. The technique of constant comparative analysis – in which preliminary interpretations are continuously compared with the stories of other participants in the case study and the theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) – was used for both the within-case and the cross-case analysis. Through a process of systematic consultation, all preliminary interpretations and conclusions were moreover critically evaluated for credibility and grounding in the data. Member check was used in the final stage of data analysis, where the interviewed teachers and the school leader were asked to validate our case reports.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 School 1

School 1 is a Waldorf school located in a large city in the Netherlands. The school has approximately 800 students; the majority of which has a native Dutch background. The school offers three different educational tracks: pre-vocational, higher general secondary, and pre-university education.

2.4.1.1 Vision

“We explicitly want students to be open and, in the world, but because we have such an internal focus, and also the kids, and in our education, we sometimes forget to look outside” (Vice school leader)

Being citizens in terms of sharing an identity as school members: Within School 1, all teachers are trained as to what the Waldorf orientation implies, both in theory and in practice. In terms of being citizens, a sense of a shared communal identity is central within this school. For instance, students refer to other students or teachers in terms of being “really Waldorfian”. A student says: “I do believe that because there are so few students with a different background, people get scared more easily by other cultures . . . but later you will be in the real world and there will be all these other cultures around you.” This illustrates a certain tension in terms of belonging between them ‘being citizens’, which for most of the students is a place where they feel connected and recognize themselves in others and ‘becoming citizens’, in a world that looks different than their school community, where they might feel ‘unworldly’.

Becoming citizens in terms of individual critical thinking: One key aspect of Waldorf orientation is that children are understood to go through different developmental phases, which guide what they need at specific periods in their lives. During high school they are understood to make the transition towards independent judgement. Citizenship education is understood in connection to this ability, a focus on supporting them to become “autonomous and independent thinkers”, who “avoid getting dragged along by the masses” (History teacher 1). Another history teacher talks about the importance of “independence and self-determination”. The whole idea of citizenship education is critically evaluated in this light, as several teachers indicate that they do not believe in telling children how they should be or behave: “It becomes a cover up, such a goody-goody and edifying sauce that is spread over education, and that kind of irritates me” (History teacher 2). The idea of a nationally shared status quo that should be accepted, stands in conflict with the focus on critically questioning and autonomous thinking.

2.4.1.2 Relations

Safety and authenticity: Generally, students characterize the school as a safe place with little conflicts between students. One of the students describes it as: “this Waldorf school is very soft and sweet and I heard all these stories about regular schools where it is all very tough . . . and that frightened me somewhat”. One of them describes being called “unworldly”, by a friend because of the lack of conflict she encounters within the school walls. Teachers refer to the importance of students feeling safe to share and question. To reach that goal, teachers use different strategies. In terms of ‘being citizens’ in school, students’ relation with authority is relatively horizontal. Multiple teachers use the word “authentic” to describe how they approach their relationship with students. The civics teacher remarks: “They [the students] are expected to bare the darkest parts of their souls . . . , and we just, no that’s not fair . . . It is important to model and share how certain things have affected you”. Students are also expected to critically question their teachers, as the vice school leader says: “We try to model that not everything the teachers says has to be true”. To preserve that sense of safety, rules and regulations seem almost absent within this school. For example, in response to the question what the rules are when you get sent out of class, multiple students remark: “nothing really happens” or “I would say this school is rather too lenient than too strict”. The vice principal remarks that it is part of the school culture to find the positive in everything the students do and that the students would probably profit from a slightly stricter approach. Also, one of the teachers, who attended a Waldorf school herself, describes her own struggles with rules and regulations in her adult life. In terms of ‘becoming citizens’ these students might be confronted with a tough reality check.

2.4.1.3 Shared activities

Doing citizenship through school internal practices: School membership and doing citizenship within school seem prioritized over membership to the larger society or doing citizenship in the world outside of school. Although teachers are critical of the label ‘citizenship education’ they do find their school’s contribution to students’ citizenship expressed within the context of shared activities. The communal aspect of ‘doing citizenship’ is clearly a part of the school vision, however the focus of these practices is internal. One of teachers remarks that he considers these shared activities a more implicit way of working on citizenship with the students. He uses the choir practice as an example. The visiting conductor said: “Do not think you don’t have to join in, the others will do it. Because I will feel a void and that void is a vacuum that pulls everyone else in. So, you have to join in, every voice matters”. Teachers and students also perform together in the yearly play and choir performance. This illustrates the clear expressions of the school vision in practice and the focus on a school community that includes both teachers and students.

2.4.2 School 2

School 2 is a small school (approximately 350 students) in a rural environment with students of a pre-dominantly Dutch native background, where the last two years of all different levels of pre-vocational education are being taught. The school has two large practice rooms, one to prepare for care-related work (for example: beautician) and one to prepare for technical jobs (for example: car mechanic).

2.4.2.1 Vision

“Citizenship education is about caring for your community, and maybe trying to look over that wall and then try to understand how it is to live in another neighborhood, in another village” (Civics teacher)

Being citizens through caring for individual needs: Both the school leader and the team leader stress that the school is known as a school that supports students in their individual needs, socio-emotionally as well as students who struggle academically: “Not that other schools don’t do that, but we are really known for this in this region. As a school that offers a lot of support. That seems obvious, but it really is our trademark” (School leader). In terms of being citizens within the school community, difference on the socio-emotional level is supported through a clear structure. As such, membership in this community includes those who in this aspect of their development deviate from the societal norm. For example, because they are neuro divergent or develop differently in the socio-emotional realm.

Becoming citizens in terms of an unknown future: The school is strongly orientated towards innovation and ‘the future’. In line with the school’s focus on individual needs, this is translated in to offering personalized learning trajectories. Another expression of this focus on innovation are special interdisciplinary modules developed by the teachers, where all students have a chance to get to know the different vocational areas and options and not, as the school leader puts it, “to blindly follow in their parents’ footsteps”. In terms of youth becoming citizens, this approach is developed to broaden students’ horizons in comparison to that of their parents and to prepare them for a working future that will look and function differently from how it does today.

2.4.2.2 Relations

Sense of shared local identity: Students only disclosed very limited information on the functioning of their relations. However, what they shared was their local identity; their parents often had similar jobs, working on the local farms and they spend their weekends in small dedicated barns for youth. This shared identity deviated from the dominant urban perspective in society. Although they did not consciously reflect on this in terms of being citizens these students were members of a community in which their lives were deemed ‘normal’ by their peers in school, where the characteristics that defined their lives were generally shared.

Division along the lines of profession/gender: As classrooms were divided along the lines of students' future professions what stood out in this school was that classrooms were either predominantly male, in the technical track, or predominantly female, in the care track. During breaks, we also observed that groups of students were divided by gender. In terms of being citizens, from a relatively young age this underscores gender difference along traditional occupational lines. Although the students are actively supported to learn beyond their own subject area, this is not the case in terms of who they are learning with.

Connecting through students' daily lives: Teachers indicate that to connect it is important to stay in contact with student's lives outside of school. Teachers find different ways to do this. During class, when students are working for themselves one teacher tries to find five minutes to get to know their interests, to stay in contact with the way they see the world: "so that they understand me and the other way around, that I still understand them, what moves them, what they think about and what's in their heads at this moment." Another teacher indicates that using local dialect in his teaching is also a good way to connect to students and to keep them alert during his classes. Furthermore, another teacher indicates that students also actively try to engage with him concerning their lives outside of school, and that he sometimes struggles as they tend to 'overshare', for example around 'sexuality, fireworks or alcohol'. In terms of being citizens this shows them authority that moves towards them, not the other way around, that contributes to understanding their life.

Room for questioning rules: Students indicate that they feel they are generally treated fairly, they explain for example that when they get sent out of class they always have the opportunity to express what has happened, why they got sent out of the class and if they think is a fair punishment and if not, what they believe would be a fair punishment. This is connected to doing citizenship, exploring what fairness in terms of rules and regulations and experiencing room to question authority.

2.4.2.3 Shared activities

Activities for broadening their world and for celebrating their local identity: The shared activities at this school are primarily organized to make students' world a bit bigger. But at the same time, one of the teachers says that for him the main goal is to make sure students realize they can contribute to the small world that is close to them, to their neighborhood or their village. Students at this school often stay close to home their entire lives. One of the consequences, several teachers and the school leader indicate, is that students tend to be prejudiced towards people and environments that differ from what they know. A recently opened center for asylum seekers triggered many negative responses of the students. Therefore, a course was developed to create more understanding for the background and presence of this group. In the course, a local man came in to share his experiences during the Second World War, to bring the experience of having to flee closer to home. In terms

of shared activities, the students are taken to the capital as an excursion and that is often the first time that they visit. Some of the students go on an exchange. The program is open for all students, but only a part of them actually participates: “That way students can get to learn about a new world from the outside in. If you simply organize a trip abroad and do not really make contact, then you miss a deeper motive . . . They will participate for at least a week in a family that normally they would not be in contact with.” (School leader). During our visit to this school ‘carnival’ took place, an important yearly celebration in this part of the country. Students had been working long hours on their parade floats. During classes teachers were asking about the preparations and students and teachers took an afternoon off to celebrate. The shared hallway was decorated, there was a stage, one of the students was DJ’ing and everybody dressed up, including the teachers who wore funny hats and scarfs. In terms of being citizens this was a festive way to experience a communal and shared identity.

2.4.3 School 3

School 3 is a small pre-vocational school, with a special curriculum focus on business and entrepreneurship, with approximately 300 students. The school is located in an urban environment in the Netherlands and its student population reflects the inhabitants of the neighborhood it is located in. In this school a large majority of the students is either of Turkish or Moroccan descent.

2.4.3.1 Vision

“A lot of students drop out of higher education because they have been taught too little discipline, have problems keeping appointments, being on time and being pro-active” (Vice school leader)

Becoming citizens in terms of future members of the workforce: When the school vision is discussed, and the central premises that inform their teaching, all teachers seem to share a similarly pragmatic attitude, they refer to: structure, rules, and increasing the possibility to get a ‘proper’ job. In this school, the focus is on youth becoming citizens, primarily as a member of the workforce. This is, for instance, visible in the school’s rules, which are often connected to that goal, for example: “no tracksuits, that’s also typically this school, because you also wouldn’t wear that to your work in the future” (Dutch teacher). The students in one focus group, also indicated that they have a biology teacher they look to for advice on their future: “For example, our biology teacher, she’s been through a lot, and then she tells us always, and she gives tips, and says you should not do this, that is wrong. . . . for example about your job, or the education you will choose, about what you will do in the future”.

2.4.3.2 Relations

Being a majority as a societal minority: The students in this relatively small school all seem to know each other by name and are positive about the relationships that exist between them. Many students share an Islamic background, the implications of which sometimes come up during class, for example when reflecting on news events and students tend to correct each other for example, when one student reflected very negatively on same sex marriage on the basis of his Islamic faith a fellow student corrected him saying “our faith also teaches us to not decide for another if someone is wrong or not”. This school has a relatively diverse teacher population, and a few teachers remark that their Islamic background helps them connect to their students, for example when they have questions about how their shared faith informs their stance on political or societal issues. Whereas, in the Netherlands, the population with an Islamic background is a minority, in this school they are a majority. And in terms of ‘being citizens’ this brings a different dynamic for the students. For example, most of the students only celebrate Islamic holidays and eat only food that is considered halal. As such, many of the norms that are common at home are normalized in the school context, whereas in the wider society they might be met with more resistance or at least be understood as divergent. Being represented or feeling represented in authority is relatively unlikely for these students; being citizens in this school allows, at least in relation to some teachers, for this experience and it is clearly valuable for students.

Involving parents: “At this school, you are not just focused on transmitting knowledge, but sometimes you are also raising students. Sometimes you’re a police cop, sometimes a psychologist, and sometimes a social worker” (Civics teacher). All the teachers describe that many of their students have little parental support concerning their education at home. So, on the hand the teachers try to compensate that lack they identify, and on the other, teachers try to find ways to actively engage parents in their children’s education. Parents are encouraged to be part of the school community, for students this might be a way to strengthen their sense of membership to the school community and to close the gap somewhat between their experiences in school and outside of school. One of the ways is through organizing a ‘mothers morning’ where the mothers of students can meet each other and learn about what is going on in school. The vice school leader also talks about the fact that for him citizenship within the school implies to make sure their school is “a second home” for students, that they feel welcome and seen; by standing at the entrance every morning, greeting everybody, and shaking their hand and welcoming them by saying their name.

Teachers trying to invite students into their 'larger' world: According to teachers, the world of their students is very small. In terms of doing citizenship, as this small world is deemed problematic, students are understood to have a 'deficit' in terms of the community and world they are connected to. Students in this school are thus invited to connect to a larger world and practice to deal with different perspectives. One of the teachers remarks: "I always ask students in my first-year group what their hobbies are and the answer is always, almost nothing: sleeping, watching tv". And one of the older teachers remarks: "The idea they have of society and how it works, for them it's only that part of the street where they live and maybe the part where their grandfather and grandmother live Their view of the world is relatively narrow" (Dutch teacher) This teacher tries to counter that by connecting her classes to current affairs regularly and involving the students in discussion about these affairs. The civics teacher chooses a similar approach to ensure that students encounter that there are different perspectives on things even within their own classrooms.

2.4.3.3 Shared activities

Trips abroad for broadening their world and for strengthening the school-internal community: In this school, foreign trips are considered the main example of shared activities. All students at least experience two trips abroad. Many students do not travel during holidays, and if they do, they often visit family in Turkey or Morocco. These externally oriented activities are intended to broaden students' horizons and to make the world where they can be 'doing citizenship' a larger as well as the world where they are 'being citizens'. But for the students these trips also play a school internal role, they relate to strengthening the social fabric of the school community, not only with their peers, but also with their teachers. "You really get to know them better, because at school it only like 'hi'" And: "They teach you other things about school, it's a different experience".

2.4.4 School 4

School 3 is a large school (approximately 1600 students), separated into six sub-schools located next to each other around a shared yard. The school population is mixed in many ways, all types of secondary education tracks are offered, and students' background varies in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity and the areas where they live.

2.4.4.1 Vision

"... learning from difference is not just learning from cognitive difference, it is also about different capacities, different cultures, different gender, ethnicity, religion and language" (School leader)

Being and becoming citizens through learning from differences: This school was created in the 1970s with the explicit mission to let children learn from each other's differences, qualities, and capacities. This approach is still present, its prime expression being the mixed

first two years of secondary education. These different classrooms are composed to include difference in tracks, in where the students live, and their socio-economic backgrounds. This is very uncommon in the context of the highly tracked Dutch educational system. In connection to this mission, differentiation is a central theme within the school, not only as a crucial teaching strategy, to adapt to all the different needs in the classroom, but also to adapt to the different realities of students' lives: "Yes, even on those counts I'm differentiating between kids. If a student has many houses, or more accurately no house, just has no main home, then I cannot expect him or her to always bring their books. So, in that case it is up to me to find a solution." (Civics teacher)

In this school, students' 'being citizens', implies being part of a community where people differ from each other and being taught, through the way their teacher respond to these differences, what being different means and how "authority" responds to these differences. But also, in terms of 'doing citizenship' this environment constantly asks of students to actively deal with differences.

2.4.4.2 Relations

Small school/big school membership: Being different is part of the students' shared identity. One of the students also indicates that there is little bullying in the school "because we are all different". In terms of membership within the school community, being different from the dominant groups in society seems an advantage here, to understand what that 'being different' means in life. During the first two years, there is a separate school canteen for the students and this also helps to create a sense of community between them and makes them feel less overwhelmed. They indicate that they also feel specifically connected to their sub-school, seemingly looking for membership to a smaller sized community within their large school, by defining a common denominator of that community – an age group or the perceived identity of their sub school. Furthermore, all classes have classroom representatives, which one of the mentors describes as functioning very well to support the connection between her and her class. These classroom representatives are chosen by their fellow classmates, and teachers indicate that they are respected in that position by their fellow classmates. In terms of 'doing citizenship' students work with election and representation in this way. A school wide student council also exists but despite the continuing efforts of two teachers "is sadly not functioning properly yet" according to the school leader. In terms of actively involving students in the functioning of the school community, two new projects have recently been introduced: a youth court, in which students play different roles (judge, lawyer) to address small offences that have been made within the school context and a project where students are trained as mediators, and participate in solving conflicts between students.

Transparency and openness with teachers: Dialogue and openness are key elements of the relationship between teachers and students. This is for example expressed in the way rules are implemented: “Actually, we have never, I think I could swear that, have had to take a disciplinary action without having talked it through with the students, without having explained why this is, without having mirrored the consequences of their behavior for the others” (Dean of one of the sub-schools). That sense of openness between teachers and students is also apparent in the fact that there are no separate teacher rooms. Teachers have ‘zones’ where they work in the halls, and students can address their teachers there. Finally, the openness is also practiced in the classrooms themselves, as each class starts with a circle: “And that we practice the circle shows: everyone is equal and nobody can hide behind a table, you are here open and vulnerable and that’s how you participate. Just as is expected, in society, that you participate” (Mentor).

Involving parents: Different teachers talk about themselves in a role next to parents as co-educator, since many of the students do not have a very stable situation at home. The mentor of each class also plays an important role. For example, there are no ten-minute talks with parents here, but talks with parents easily take half an hour, according to one of the mentors, and they also involve students. This way, parents are invited to become involved in their child’s education, but not just on their grades. The focus when it comes to assessing students is always also explicitly on their social development: “On their report card, students always have 3 grades, their results, their study attitude and their social competencies. . . . yes, that is part of our conversation on students’ development” (School leader).

2.4.4.3 Shared activities

After and out of school activities for broadening their world and for strengthening the school-internal community: In terms of being citizens, students get to experience a wider scope of their interests and identity with fellow community members to be explored within the school context. More specifically, this school offers a broad array of after school activities, mainly focused on movement and art, open to all students, although according to students themselves they mostly join during their first three years of secondary school. Generally, because of their financial situation and sometimes the interests of their parents, most students would not participate in these kinds of activities. It is a conscious policy here to offer them, as to contribute not only to students’ academic growth, but to have a deeper impact: “The student orchestra is one of the projects I spent a lot of time on and have done crowdfunding for . . . although what they learn is limited, but it is such a large project and with the student orchestra you see that so much more kids get the chance to play an instrument, to play in a symphonic orchestra, to perform. . . . the world of the arts is not, it is enormously segregated.” (School leader) Besides these activities, there are also trips with their class, that are mostly meant to create a shared social experience that is not too

expensive. Teachers explicitly refer to this, as to keep the experience open for all students to participate. For example, students happily shared memories of a cheap breakfast at a local furniture shopping center with the whole class. But indicate that “they also do really fun things sometimes” in reference to a trip to a local amusement park.

2.5 Conclusion and discussion

2.5.1 Synthesis

Against the background of the limited knowledge about the ways in which schools provide the context for students’ citizenship, this study focused on the question of how schools function as practice grounds. In-depth case studies of four Dutch secondary schools enabled us to identify how the functioning of the school as a community provides a context to youth citizenship and the relevance of what happens in schools beyond the formal curriculum. Different schools tell different stories on what citizens students should be becoming, on what community they are part of, and on what doing citizenship entails. Our findings show that schools differ in how they function as a practice ground for citizenship, that students are members of very different school communities and, consequently, have different experiences of being and becoming citizens and doing citizenship in their schools.

In all schools, emphasis was on students becoming citizens. Across all schools, students’ citizenship was interpreted through the lens of the school vision, resulting in clear thematic differences: from providing means for self-expression and critical thinking to a focus on future labor market participation. Furthermore, schools differed in the extent to which within-school relations were understood in connection to students’ citizenship. Teachers play a crucial when it comes to all aspects of students’ citizenship within the school context. In terms of becoming citizens, teachers are looked at for guidance, this especially seems the case when students’ have a sense of recognition or likeness in the relationship with their teachers. In terms of being citizens, teachers play an important role in connection to students’ sense of school membership.

In all four schools, teachers used different strategies to connect to their students, to make them feel seen and heard. For example, by advising their students on their futures, by bringing authenticity in the relationship, by showing interest in their daily lives, or simply by welcoming them each morning. And finally, in terms of students doing citizenship, teachers can support and offer opportunities for students to practice their voice and to question rules. The extent to which teachers did this differed between schools. As such, teachers in different schools fulfilled all these roles differently, and consequently students had different experiences with authority in their respective practice grounds, while most of these experiences were not consciously related to students’ citizenship by their teachers. For

example, in School 1 the practice of questioning authority was understood to be a key aspect of the development of students, whereas in School 3 emphasis was on the hierarchy between teachers and students. Finally, shared activities with a school-internal focus seemed to relate to the ambition of strengthening the sense of community within the school, especially on the level of the classroom, whereas activities with a school-external focus seemed to be focused on fostering a stronger connection between students and the outside world, to make students' world, the world in which they are citizens, a little bit larger. But despite similar goals, in different schools these programs were embedded in differing conceptions of students' current worlds and lives. For example, in School 3 there was a deficit approach to reflect on students' social and physical environments (Valencia, 2010), whereas in School 2 the shared identity and local culture that was relevant in students' lives was evaluated in a much more positive way and even celebrated, possibly impacting students' own evaluations of the communities they belonged to. Moreover, our cross-case analysis shows that schools differ in the extent to which teachers and the principal actively reflect upon the different ways that their school provides a context, a community, in which students are citizens, are doing citizenship and are becoming citizens. As such, much of what happens in terms of the schools' contribution to students' citizenship remains unintentional. This lack of reflection regarding school-internal citizenship results in a limited use of students' existing interactions and experiences. It may also contribute to discontinuities between the vision on students' citizenship and the experience they have as members of the school community (cf. McCowan, 2011).

2.5.2 Theoretical and methodological reflections

In current research on the relation between education and citizenship, there is a strong emphasis on youth becoming citizens, the question what they will need to participate as citizens in the future or as Lawy and Biesta (2006) conceptualize it, a focus on "citizenship-as-achievement" (p. 37). Our analysis confirms these previous studies and shows, that this interpretation of youth citizenship is especially visible at the level the school vision. This was particularly evident within the two pre-vocational schools (School 2 and 3), which were focused on students' future position as part of the workforce, whereas it was less obvious in the other two mixed-track schools (School 1 and 4) (cf. Leeman and Volman, 2021). While this focus on future work in light of citizenship education is not uncommon in the context of pre-vocational education (Ten Dam and Volman, 2003), it is interesting that the mixed-track schools also included a pre-vocational track and yet this interpretation of citizenship was mostly absent. For future research, this raises the question of how track influences citizenship education in the context of mixed versus single track schools. But the two schools that were less focused on work and more on their students' critical, social, and cultural capacities (School 1 and 4), also shared the fact that they both had distinct ideological frameworks, namely Steiner and a focus on learning through difference. This

raises the additional question of how the ideological background of schools influences the perspective on youth becoming citizens within the school context.

The connection between youth being citizens and their sense of school membership is not commonly made within research on citizenship education, whereas our study shows that schools can play an important role here. Especially, in light of and in contrast to a sense of belonging in the wider society. For example, in School 3, the majority population was a societal minority. Even though this shared identity was recognized and accepted, it was never identified or utilized as part of the sense of school membership as a in contrast to School 2, where the shared identity was more actively used as something positive, even though this more rural identity also contrasted with the often more urban character of the dominant groups in society. Furthermore, in School 1 it was recognized that non-native Dutch students did not easily experience school membership, but this was never understood in light of societal inequality. This topic deserves more attention, as research consistently shows that sense of school belonging is influenced by students' perceived distance to dominant groups in society (e.g., Passos deNiccolo et al., 2017) and the related risk of reproducing societal inequalities.

Finally, previous studies from the perspective of the school as a practice ground for citizenship were primarily concerned with the dimension of youth doing citizenship in school, specifically operationalized as the opportunity for students to experience democracy within the school context and taking part in school councils (e.g., Lenzi et al., 2014). Nevertheless, throughout the four, very different, schools in this study we saw very minimal expressions of democracy in terms of the school organization and student participation. This raises the question if a narrow focus on student council membership is sufficient to grasp youth doing citizenship in school. In School 4 there were several programs in place that offered alternative ways of doing citizenship, for example through student mediators in conflicts within the school and the experiment with a 'youth court' in which students acted as judges. Additionally, students might take a less formal and more bottom-up approach to doing citizenship, for example by protesting against a specific school rule. For future research more insight into the various ways in which youth does citizenship, specifically in the context of the school community, would help to gain relevant insights for members of the professional community as to how they can support students in this aspect of their citizenship.

We also want to mention some limitations. In this study, our main focus was on the internal functioning of schools as practice grounds for students' citizenship. We did not look beyond the boundaries of the schools themselves and how the school community related to the local community, another line of research done in the context of schools as communities

(cf. Furman, 2012). Including those perspectives on a more embedded understanding of schools, might shed an additional light on how schools function as practice grounds for their students. Secondly, our ambition was to provide insight into the functioning of the entire school as a practice ground. A more ethnographic approach, that would also include the functioning of the professional community would deepen our understanding of how schools provide a context for students' citizenship (cf. Grossman et al., 2001)

In conclusion, our study illustrates the value of the 'schools as practice ground' perspective for analyzing the relation between schools and students' citizenship. In order to improve the contribution of education to students' citizenship, conscious reflection on the wide range of opportunities that present themselves within the school is necessary as the experience of membership in the school context has much to offer to all young citizens.

Appendix 2.A Coding scheme

Category	Code	Subcodes	Description
School Vision			
	School Goal/ Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ideology (a.p.)⁷ - Social/Care (a.p.) - Academic Results (a.p.) - Differentiation (a.p.) - Characteristic programs on offer (i.v.) - Defining aspect of this school (i.v.) - International (i.v.) 	<p>Statements referring to the understanding of the school's goal and role in related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The school's ideology/ideological framework - Social emotional wellbeing of students/special needs of students in terms of their social/emotional wellbeing - Ways of supporting students concerning their academic results and the importance attached to students' academic results - School/teacher practices related to dealing with difference - Programs that are understood by members of the school community as typical or characteristic for the school/are an expression of the school vision - Comparing the school to other schools/ illustrating the school's 'uniqueness' - How international activities fit the school vision
Characteristics of in-school relations			
	Professional community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of community (a.p.) 	<p>Statements referring to how teachers experience their relations with other members of the professional community.</p>
		Teacher Voice (a.p.)	<p>Statements referring to the way teachers experience their voice to be invited.</p>
		Relation teacher-principal (a.p.)	<p>Statements referring to the relationship between teachers and principal from the perspective of the teachers</p>
		Relation principal – teacher (a.p.)	<p>Statements referring to the relationship between teachers and principal from the perspective of the principal</p>
		Teacher support for citizenship education (i.v.)	<p>Statements referring to the way teachers feel and are supported in light of citizenship education.</p>
	Relation professional community - students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher (a.p.) - Principal (a.p.) - Mentor (a.p.) 	<p>Statements referring to the relation between members of the professional community and students, from the perspective of the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher (a.p.) - Principal (a.p.) - Mentor (a.p.)

7 (a.p.) refers to 'a priori' codes and (i.v.) refers to 'in vivo' codes

Category	Code	Subcodes	Description
	Relation students – professional community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher (a.p.) - Principal (a.p.) - Mentor (a.p.) 	Statements referring to the relation between members of the professional community and students, from the perspective of the students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher (a.p.) - Principal (a.p.) - Mentor (a.p.)
	Relation students to school	Student Voice (a.p.)	Statements referring to the way students experience their voice to be invited
	Care/Socio Emotional wellbeing (i.v.)	Care/Socio Emotional wellbeing (i.v.)	Statements referring to the way students experience care for their socio emotional wellbeing in school
	Bullying/Safety (i.v.)	Bullying/Safety (i.v.)	Statements referring to the way students experience bullying and social safety in school
	Expectations of school (i.v.)	Expectations of school (i.v.)	Statements referring to the expectations students had of the school at the moment of school choice
	Sense of community (a.p.)	Sense of community (a.p.)	Statements referring to the way students feel connected to other students
	Experience of rules (i.v.)	Experience of rules (i.v.)	Statements referring to the way students experience the rules present within the school
	Relation school – parents (i.v.)	Relation school – parents (i.v.)	Statements referring to the way members of the professional community connect to students' parents
Shared activities			
	Type of activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Projects (obligatory) (a.p.) - Projects (voluntary) (a.p.) 	Statements referring to activities that were obligatory or voluntary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - obligatory - voluntary
	Theme of activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (National) politics (a.p.) - Travel/international (a.p.) - Social (i.v.) - Arts (i.v.) 	Statements referring to the thematic orientation of the shared activities
	Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal - External 	Statements referring to the orientation of the activity
	Youth citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Becoming citizens (a.p.) Being citizens (a.p.) Doing citizenship (a.p.) 	Statements related to different expressions of youth citizenship