Citizenship practices in school spaces: comparative discourse analysis of children's group decision making

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Citizenship practices in school spaces: comparative discourse analysis of children’s group decision making

Beth Cross Dr

School of Education and Social Sciences, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley Campus, High Street, Paisley PA1 2BE, UK

ABSTRACT
Critique of citizenship education has suggested citizenship should be reconceived, not as a status, but as something that people continuously do: citizenship as practice. This article draws on a two-year ethnographic study of citizenship practices in a Scottish primary school examining how citizenship curriculum was distributed across children’s experience of the school day, the ways belonging was constructed in different spaces and time frames and how civic participation was identified in pupils’ own terms. The article’s close discourse analysis examines moments when children’s decision-making reveals the connections made between citizenship curriculum and viable citizenship identities in practice. This micro analysis of the semi-formal space of the school reveals children’s understanding of group cooperation that remain opaque in the more formal setting of the classroom. The findings suggest that educators would do well to attune further to children’s informal decision making processes and curricular practices that would better support them.

KEYWORDS
Dialogic mediated activity; citizenship; collaborative problem solving; curricular practice; group work; discourse analysis; speech communities

Introduction

Let me start by setting the context of the article, first, the wider history of the developing recognition of children’s participative rights within citizenship, secondly, their place within the Scottish curriculum and, thirdly, a critical examination of both in which citizenship theory has evolved. For more than two decades attempts to make citizenship more accessible and appealing have resulted in a number of initiatives across formal and informal learning networks under the banner of participation (Malone and Hartung 2010; Pontes, Henn, and Griffith 2017). These initiatives, including those in Scotland (Mills 2004), sought to shift the conception of citizenship towards one more agentive and rights based than previously conceived. Kerr’s (2014) international research documents that much citizenship curriculum manages only to reinscribe a passive, dutiful version of citizenship that fails to inspire or convince. The recommendations flowing from that research call for an overhaul of curriculum along much more agentive lines that focus on citizenship as practice.
The Scottish context is particularly interesting to examine as citizenship curriculum is conceptualised as being embedded across curricular subjects, which one could argue would be congruent with fostering practices of citizenship. The curriculum itself, *Curriculum for Excellence*, is constructed around a framework for developing children’s capacities as Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens, the first three capacities, it could be argued, all working to support the development of the last (Education Scotland 2013). However, critics have pointed out that distributed curricular goals, being everybody’s responsibility, in practice may mean no-one takes responsibility, making progress towards them obscure or negligible (Britton 2018). An increased focus on attainment, and the apparatus of testing that undergirds it, may mean embedded aspects of curriculum receive less attention and run the danger of disappearing into the background. What is needed, then, is to examine if aspiration (and theory) is born out in practice, by following the trajectory from stated outcomes, through pedagogical planning to children’s actual experience in order to come to some sense of whether or not the distributed pedagogical bridge bears weight.

Across curricular guidance support for children’s development of voice and decision-making is evident. Within benchmarks for literacy, Curriculum for Excellence sets as an outcome for talking and listening:

> When I engage with others, I can make a relevant contribution, encourage others to contribute and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion.  
> *This is simply an indented quote, why is it in red?*

> I can respond in ways appropriate to my role and use contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking. (Education Scotland 2017a)

The importance of developing higher-order thinking skills within group work is highlighted within the Maths and Numeracy Benchmarks with additional guidance for developing the skills of selecting and communicating processes and solutions and justifying choice of strategy. Guidance explicitly highlights the need for learners to

- have frequent opportunities to discuss their thinking with their peers and teachers;
- select from a range of processes and increasingly choose processes which are most efficient;
- discuss their solutions to verbalise their thought process, either through explaining their thinking or demonstrating it pictorially; and
- regularly work in pairs and groups to learn with and from each other to refine their strategies (Education Scotland 2017b)

However, a sense that the dots are not as joined up as they should be, is apparent if one looks at the benchmark for the subject area one would expect citizenship to be most apparent in: social science. In contrast, its benchmarks place much less emphasis on decision-making, which is mentioned only once rather than being positioned as a skill set that attention should be focussed on throughout a learner’s progression (Education Scotland 2017c). The benchmarks in this subject area place much more emphasis on
knowing geographical and historic facts than enacting practices, harking back to the stolid conception of citizenship education which Kerr (2014) critiques as dis-incentivising citizen engagement.

More recent curricular initiatives look beyond the school grounds to projects that involve the wider community. Scotland’s Community Resilience Curriculum serves as a banner for a range of initiatives such as Citizen Science and Learning for Sustainability (Education Scotland 2015b, c). Whilst showcased by Education Scotland, these initiatives are not core to the curriculum, however, that such approaches are being piloted across the country may signal a shift that bears watching. Meanwhile, Scotland’s 2015 Community Empowerment Bill has precipitated a range of participatory budgeting and co-production possibilities for local governance that draw on a wider range of deliberatory practices (Elstub and Escobar 2019) in which schools are partners. Whilst there are a number of critiques of these forms of participation, nevertheless they increase opportunities for young people’s involvement as well as extend the range of skills that citizenship participation draws upon (Menser 2018; SQA 2018).

Fielding’s (2009) work on participation in schools questions the forms of leadership they entrain and exhorts educators to transform them to be fit for purpose in more complex and demanding contexts. Biesta and Lawy (2006, 72), in their critique of normative citizenship education, draw our attention to citizenship as practice and therefore something ephemeral rather than fixed. They argue citizenship education’s instrumentalist focus on constructing the dutiful citizen as a status, restrain practices, particularly those of decision-making. From a different vantage point, Taylor and Robinson (2009) argue that the related concept of student voice is framed as an intervention, a one-off event, which also works to overshadow everyday practices and their accumulative effects. Increasingly, these arguments move participation from the sphere of rhetoric and debate towards practical problem solving, action and evaluation. These arguments come at the same time as new materialism returns scholars to re-examine our understanding of embodied experience and decision-making as a complex interplay with physical spaces and affordances (Spector and Kidd 2019; Barad 2007) or in other words, to the physical and emotional geographies (Black 2015; Mannion 2019) of children’s school experiences. As Mannion (2019) argues, understanding the practices that pedagogies instil is crucial here. This turn invites re-engagement with Dewey’s argument (Honneth 1998) for the importance of embodied joint action within practical investigations as crucial to the development of citizenship and Rudduck and MacIntyre’s (2008) call for ‘experiencing and experimenting’ with participation, democratically and socially. Sociolinguistic tools (Blommaert 2005; Rampton 2007) can help us better understand how children take up opportunities to explore citizenship practices in ways that can easily be overlooked. This article draws from an ethnographic study that followed one cohort of children over two years to investigate practices across the school day that had bearing on children’s experiences and developing conceptions of participation, decision-making and citizenship. In it, I contrast moments of joint, embodied investigation and the meanings of citizenship negotiated within them and compare them to curricular initiatives in this area (Vriikki et al. 2019). The analysis highlights the need for peripheral school spaces where learners can articulate and revise versions of agentic citizenship in these turbulent times where tolerance of difference and ambiguity are sorely in need of encouragement.
**Practice as a pedagogical issue**

With this context in mind, it is important to define more closely what is meant by practice and what role it plays within pedagogy to meet the stated aims of the curriculum, that is, the integration of knowledge, skill and aptitudes into lived habits (Education Scotland 2020, 3). At issue is the question, does content remain shelved only within short-term memory, or does it become incorporated into young people’s modes of understanding and acting (Spector and Kidd 2019)? If so, how? Grammar and mathematical rules and processes are sequentially taught so that what begins as effortful activity becomes routine and automatic. Whilst testing such integration is possible within current examination mechanisms, this is less true for interactional processes such as citizenship engagement. There is concern that because the interactional cannot be so easily measured, it can be side-lined (Palmer 1998). The complexity of what is at stake is worth delineating further. Interactional processes involve the integration of discursive as well as embodied decision-making. To make the task even more complex, it is also important to consider that there are gradations of decision-making. At the lowest level are decisions about how a pre-determined activity will be achieved. An illustration of this limited kind of decision-making surfaces in many critiques of participation where a group is allowed to decide the colour of the walls, but not what purpose the building serves. Higher-order decisions necessitate questions of if or why, with an increasing degree of consequence. Whilst lower-order questions fit more readily within prescribed curricular objectives, the evidence that higher-order critical thinking and collaboration skills are being taught remains poor (Pontes, Henn, and Griffith 2017).

In this study, one pivotal activity is examined for what it conveyed about how levels of decision-making might cohere into a learner’s overall development. Understanding how learning occurs across school spaces and is enacted within different time frames is important, if decision-making skills and a range of related citizenship skills and dispositions are to be better understood. As Mercer (2008) observes, it is important to pay attention to the cumulative impact of specific activities over time. Classroom talk represents past shared experience, carries ideas forward from one occasion to another and frames how future activities will be approached. For this reason, it is particularly important to listen to examples of children’s extended engagement in it, rare though these may be. Bloome et al. (2009) argue that the intercontextuality of collective memories and classroom chronotopes (Bakhtin 1986), and the extent to which students perceive coherence, depends on dialogically mediated activity. It is this dialogically mediated activity that this article centres upon.

**Methodology for investigating resources children draw upon to frame citizenship**

Two illustrative cases are chosen for examination, informed by much more extensive observations within linguistic ethnographic fieldwork that focussed on children’s experience of decision-making in school as they progressed through different relationships and pedagogical approaches over a period of two years. The study gathered information about the broad frame of citizenship curricular activities as they interacted with the curricular content as a whole, with weekly fieldwork observations focussed on observation of class time that teachers identified as being particularly pertinent to citizenship.
development. Within this broad context the study also mapped how the broad themes of citizenship education were threaded into sequences of lessons and activities across the school day, interviewing teachers for their perspectives on their planning strategy and their revisions of it as they read the needs of the class. In order to understand how citizenship learning was distributed across children’s experience of school, observations were taken in a range of ways as is recommended for robust socio-linguistic ethnographic approach (Rampton 2007, 2007). Data collection included:

- 112 hrs participant observation in a mixture of formal and informal school-based activities.
- 40 hours radio mike recording individual pupils.
- 12 hours group recording with multi-media device.
- 11 reflective interviews (4 practitioner, twice, 3 pupils, once).

In addition, field notes were taken to collate contextual data about the established class routines and their embedment within the class’s particular social history as they progressed through school. The findings of these aspects of the study are reported in more detail elsewhere (Cross 2009) and summarised in the findings section below. This wider contextual frame was drawn upon in analysing the micro detail of moments of interaction between teachers, teaching assistant and pupils where meaning was enacted and through it encoded into repertoires of being. This linguistics-ethnography approach was taken in order to understand, as Rampton (2006) argues, the backdrop of differing levels of socio-cultural organisation that contribute to the meanings at work within the interaction examined.

To understand how levels of socio-cultural organisation have bearing on the micro level, particular attention was paid to how activity types were enacted in a series of turns of interaction. This involved the use of a number of linguistic tools first developed by Goffman which merit some explanation here. Activity type is a term used within interactional socio-linguistics to make more accessible what Goffman referred to as frame. Goffman (1974) used the term ‘frame’ to analyse how interactants signal to each other the kind of activity their talk instantiates as it is mutually constructed through their exchange of utterances. This frame, when talk flows smoothly, remains an implicit understanding, providing the basis for meaningful turn taking. Bakhtin (1986) similarly theorised that there are specific genres of interaction that typify agreed activities. Thus, there is a genre for discussing last night’s football match, another for conducting a maths lesson. Drawing these theories together, Blommaert (2005) asserts shifting in and out of frames and genres is at the heart of our life as social beings. Blommaert uses Goffman’s terms to provide tools for analysis, but his reading of the social dynamics are much more complex than Goffman posited. Mixing, layering and overlapping genres is the norm, not the exception. Implicit agreement on what frame and genre are enacted through talk is a fundamental level of decision-making from which more complex forms of decision-making derive their meaning, and therefore are crucial to this study. Identifying activity type is a crucial but complex task as participants bring different understandings and expectations of what activity types they should be performing and how to go about these. In the interactions examined, at any given point, there are multiple activity types and moves by participants to shift to preferable activity types as
they negotiate what it is to be a good group work member in an out of class task. These negotiations over activity type, I argue, prefigure possible citizenship practices they are in the midst of conceptualising for themselves. To inspect what activity types participants are choosing it is important to assess what the governing goals or purposes are, and what roles they require participants to take up, through what steps and stages in relation to each other.

Identifying these strategic interactions provides a frame for analysing how the individual turns either build on and extend a current frame or seek to change the frame either gradually or abruptly. The character of these frames, in turn, has implications for how children actively conceptualise the citizenship choices and thereby practice within their school experience. This is a useful analysis to conduct if, in terms similar to Foucault, one understands power to be dispersed throughout society, pervasive, complex and contextual, not simply wielded over others but mutually constituted by practice and constituting practices. (Taylor and Robinson 2009, 171)

In order to further understand what was happening within the turns taken in conversation we employed another of Goffman’s tools. Goffman (1981) refers to the manoeuvres through which frames are changed as shifts in footing. Each utterance either maintains or shifts the footing. If we imagine footing within conversation as the purchase whereby all interactants maintain a common hold on the frame, we see that when one participant changes their footing this puts pressure on others to adjust their footing as well. As Rampton (2006) helps clarify this concept: imagine a group of people carrying a piano. Utterances are always framed by preceding steps in the interaction, whilst contributing their own set of constraints on what can follow after. Bakhtin 1981, Bakhtin 1986) conception of language as polyvocal, that is, always in the midst of amplifying and dampening meanings borrowed from multiple speech communities to which speakers hold varying degrees of familiarity and loyalty in each situated context is consonant with the vantage point that Barad’s (2007) diffractive perspective also suggests. This conception has implications for the analysis of research as well, as it means the task of analysis is no longer one of standing outside examining a fixed image, but of carefully attending to past events, their interactions and their interplay in and with the present.

With this understanding of power dynamics embedded within turns of talk, the orientating questions for this project were: what genres (or frames) negotiated through what footing comprise children’s growing understanding of how they perform citizenship? Are these performances worth participating in? Worth embedding into their lived repertoires? More specifically, we examined two contrasting out of class group work sessions for:

- What resources across school experience the pupils draw upon to make both discursive and embodied decisions that construct the activity types they recognise and negotiate together.
- their indications of meta-communicative moments in which pupils re-evaluate strategies and roles to change their footing within agreed frames of activity type, or to change activity type all together, thus becoming pro-active about their discursive role.
This article focuses on ‘telling’ rather than ‘typical’ cases (Mitchell 1984, 237–240) where children’s interaction around the same task contrasted sharply, revealing underlying assumptions about what cooperation and decision-making can entail in their school environment. All names used in the transcript are pseudonyms in accordance with the ethical approval granted for the study.

Findings: activity types of compliant inclusion, embodied dissent, and constructive exploration

The wider context is briefly important to relate as key factors within it had a bearing on the ways in which citizenship skills were integrated and practiced in this particular task and how pupils made sense of their interaction together. A salient aspect of how children experienced their wider community was that children came to school across waste land where houses once stood, daily traversing the churned muddy reminder that they lived within a particular community where a number of decisions about its redevelopment had been made in which they had played no part despite the decisions being ones that very much affected them (Unicef 1989). The negotiations of local city and construction companies impinged directly on the lived experience of their home, community and its place within society, yet whilst the mud remained very much with them, the arenas in which the decisions were made was a world removed (Cross 2012). Whilst the lived history of this community and its creative forms of resistance were unique (Cross 2004), it’s demarcation as an area of multiple deprivation meant the larger sociological challenges it faced were the same as many others.

Within school children experienced a citizenship curriculum dispersed across different subjects and embedded within different literacies. An Emotional Literacy Curriculum, anchored by daily circle time, acted to increase social and cultural literacies. Themed project work included a WWII oral history project and a unit on the Scottish Parliament with some inclusion of critical media skills. This formal curriculum approach was supported by a range of activities within the informal curriculum, such as the school’s participation in Health Promoting Schools and a series of sessions coordinated with the local anti-social behaviour early intervention team. In interviews with the cohort’s teachers for Year 6 and 7, teachers indicated that maths lessons would not be an area of the curriculum in which citizenship development was embedded. However, observations of maths classes revealed that in Year 7 a voting exercise was regularly employed to encourage children to articulate the different forms of mental maths they were using. Of particular interest within this practice, was that no one way of solving the problem was privileged by the teacher. Rather, this activity emphasised a variety of approaches and increased children’s awareness of different options. The citizenship implications for respecting others’ perspectives seem an unintended consequence of these lessons. The question arose, how did children themselves experience and understand the voting activity? An opportunity to understand how some children evaluated and incorporated this activity into an opportunity to problem solve arose in the weeks leading up to the class’ residential week at the council’s outdoor activity centre. In order to lay the groundwork for the team-building activities of that week, the teacher planned for pupils to do small group problem solving in an out of class communal space. The task chosen was to assemble vehicles from a kit with parts and instructions as illustrated in Figure 1.
The first group observed was led by the class’ teaching assistant who was accompanying the class on the trip. Her method of scaffolding learning was directive (Table 1). The teaching assistant (TA) carefully translated directions into words more accessible to the children. She retained authority over the interpretation and sequencing of tasks. In Goffman’s terms the activity is analysed in Table 1 as consisting of the following sequence of activity types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Interaction</th>
<th>Analysis of activity type and footings that shape them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:08–5:13 Tina (TA) orients the activity to the residential week away in terms of not leaving people out and being willing to include everyone.</td>
<td>Socially supportive conversation in which TA is the authority and students seekers of emotional reassurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:55 Tina decides for group which structure they will work on. She starts by asking questions about criteria for selection. One student, John, suggests another structure. Tina does not directly respond to John’s suggestions but indicates in her final selection that she is choosing a compromise.</td>
<td>Standard teacher-centred class lesson frame TA as authority and students compliant participants. John bids to negotiate decision, but this is dealt with obliquely rather than actively encouraged as a desired activity in the group, rather, it is dealt with as a potential problem that is defused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:33 Tina shares directions with John and continues to give directions about finding parts to girls who signal they are including slowest member.</td>
<td>Collaboration as compliance is reinforced within defined roles as the frame continues. Decision making is not focussed on problem posed by task but on performing social inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:04 John echoes Tina’s instructions to group, girls only speak to ask questions of how to locate parts.</td>
<td>John bids to establish a more elaborated hierarchical structure with an elevated role within the continuing dominant frame, replicating normative gender roles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This passage is typical of the interaction with the predominance of the Teaching Assistant’s directions interspersed only sporadically with children’s assent.

Tina: Stick that in the side, right (16:15)  
We need another two of them,  
Annie like that  
And a doubler,  
There’s one,  
Stick it in, let’s see if you can find it for her . . .  
So now we got that, the big and the small . . .  
Right, so you agreeing with me?  
John: Aye,  
Tina: John, we attach a ten  
John: Aye, pass that one Anne.  
John: So does that bit join there?  
Tina: Dinnae confuse me

Although this is group work, it provides little opportunity to ‘make a relevant contribution, […] and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion’ (Education Scotland 2017a) or to ‘discuss their solutions’ and ‘verbalise their thought process’ (Education Scotland 2017b). The emphasis, instead, was on maintaining an overall included feel to the rote tasks being performed. Very slow progress was made on assembling the car, with some parts mis-assembled. In terms of preparation for agentive citizenship, there was little in the activity that encouraged or even signalled such a thing would be desirable, rather passivity of class and gender positions was reinforced.

The second group observed differed from the first in one important feature. No teaching assistant was assigned to work with them as demands of other students prohibited this. There did seem to be some unspoken agreement that the researcher would act as a proxy teaching assistant, one of the pitfalls of attempting to be an adult participant-observer in a child’s world. Aware from the first observation that participants might not take advantage of the problem solving potential of the activity were it to be strongly lead and structured by the adult present, I made no attempt to set the frame or coordinate how the group worked but left that as something for the group to decide. The sequence of activity frames in the session that ensued were more difficult to pick out as there was a great deal more speaking over each other and attempts to enact divergent and multiple frames. However, the following pivotal points in the activity are identified in Table 2.

Some very strong contrasts between the two groups are clear. The second group, whilst having less time than the first, actually corrected the mistake made by the first group and managed to assemble significantly more of the car. The first group’s activity passed off uneventfully and offered little opportunity to gain insight into how children experience group work or understand the possibility of their decision-making or agency within it. Whilst Shelly within the second group quickly assumed the posture of an adult directing others what to do, this did not include explaining why or problem solving as such. It was as if that was a possibility beyond them, until Peter reminded everyone of what they were accustomed to doing in maths. So well recognised was this practice, it did not have to be described in detail, the other two
Table 2. Activity types of group 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Interaction</th>
<th>Analysis of activity type, frames and footings that shape them (correspondence to other frames practiced within the school day)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:57 Shelly assumes leadership of group. Others immerse themselves in exploring, parts, directions and diagrams. No strategy is discussed or agreed.</td>
<td>No clear frame or activity type established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:17 Linda begins to try to coordinate her work with Shelly’s</td>
<td>Bid for a collaborative frame, but this does not cohere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:10 Each group member is immersed in different tasks (three productive, one distractive). All members are expressing frustration. Very few rejoinders to each other’s requests, questions or directions are made.</td>
<td>Strong disagreement about activity type and roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda is privileging analytic approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shelly visual literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter textual literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:46–4:11 Shelly reacts to discovering Michelle is hiding or dropping pieces, Peter and Linda are asked to pick up a dropped part.</td>
<td>Michelle bids to set a more playful (hide and seek) child-centred activity type but the other group members momentarily coalesce into a joint effort to get her to revert to a work oriented activity type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:52 Assistant HT passes and praises Shelley’s ability to put the car together. After the Ast HT is out of ear shot Shelley emphatically says ‘I wish a real adult were here’. The researcher for the first time speaks to suggest they could discuss the different approaches they are using and try to agree.</td>
<td>Group seeks Assistant HT approval and performs competence, quickly followed by a metacognitive critique that implies that, as much as they are attempting to adopt adult roles, they need someone who will do this for them. The researcher suggests a frame whereby they could decide on a strategy without that being done for them by an adult. No direct response to say they will do this is made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:14 Shelley and Peter make explicit their different approaches. Peter alludes to practice in maths class of explaining different approaches and voting. Without explicit agreement Shelley abruptly shifts tack and asks Michelle to find a particular piece for her.</td>
<td>A metacognitive discussion frame ensues amongst three group members with a task focussed strategy. Shelley appeals to adult roles she has witnessed teacher and teaching assistant taking. Peter counters with maths class strategy. No explicit agreement is voiced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:28 All concentrate on finding a ‘10’ and they break off into separate aspects of work.</td>
<td>From here on, there is very little talking over or talking at cross purposes. Agreement on a work frame of parallel construction using different strategies as is done in maths class is enacted with moments of cooperation to pull pieces apart or locate pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:23 It is discovered Michelle has turned the timer off and there is a discussion about whether the researcher will tell on them. Shelly orders Peter to start timer again at correct time. This precipitates a conversation about expectations interspersed with task talk.</td>
<td>Group discusses expectations, boundaries of researcher’s role, repercussions of resetting timer and impact on how they are perceived. This frame does not replace established collaborative frame but is an extension of the multi-tasking micro culture they have established. The feel of the group is that now that they know how they are solving the physical task, they have spare capacity to question and reflect on the purpose of the activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:38 Peter announces he has completed the section he has been working on and shows it to Linda and researcher. The researcher brings the diagram in the instructions up to compare.</td>
<td>Frame is expanded to include looking at diagram and comparing it to the assemblages they are each creating. To a degree the researcher models this and can be said to exert authority that replaces children’s initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:20 The group notices Michelle has left the group and discusses the future impact on how the group is assessed</td>
<td>Frame as above, uses talk time to express their concerns about what ‘good group work’ is meant to look like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:53 Shelly, Peter and Linda space out which bits they are working on so that they can combine them. Thinking out loud is used to coordinate activity. Engagement with parts and interaction is coordinated. Reciprocal help is offered.</td>
<td>Frame continues with more coordinated view of project emerging with more detailed comparison to diagram.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
immediately recognised and adapted what they are doing, each working in their preferred way on a different part of the car. What is more interesting, is that given that this freed up time to talk, what they choose to talk about was citizenship, that is, how their group work would be judged. Despite having become quite efficient at their task, at this point they all voiced concerns that this would not be recognised as good group work. The performance of good group work would be seen as more important than its substance. The researcher’s observation was that the first group were given roles far below their capacity, but the second group took some time to realise they had skills they needed. As the conflict intensified Shelly made a bid for an adult to rescue them, goading the researcher to take a decision-making role for them. The researcher did not take control but provided enough of a suggestion for them, it seemed, to become aware that they could take on more aspects of leadership usually provided by adults. Their decision-making happened so tacitly and so quickly and was so effective, it was difficult to capture and evidence. What was interesting is that they did not choose a ‘command and control’ solution, but one that allowed each to make their own contribution in their own way. At this point they could turn to talk about popular culture or recent events amongst peers, but the talk remained work focussed on a higher order of analysis.

Looking more closely at the transcript of the second group provides further insight into the process (Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5), but also raises important questions about the coordination of discursive and embodied activity.

This excerpt, I argue, provides an illustrative example of how children do take lessons learned over time in one context and apply them to another. They also demonstrate that for the most part this collective decision to adopt a strategy learned in maths class was made for the most part by embodied and para-linguistic practices rather than in overt discussion. There was no actual verbal assent given. It was enough for Peter to remind the group for them to collectively change tack as deftly as any sailing crew would, with significant effect. At this point the group had achieved much less than the first group. In

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Excerpt 1: early disagreement.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) P: No –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Can we no- just do the start of it first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Just do that =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) L: Where’s the wheels? = . # 2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Sh: No because that’s confusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) So That’s why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) &lt;Right&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) L: Where’s the wheels? =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Sh: I would do the front part 2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) So let’s do the front part =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) L: = Where’s the wheels =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) P: = How are you supposed to do the front part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Are ye no supposed to do it from there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) L: = Where’s the wheels?#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) Sh: No because that’s just gonna confuse you 2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) P: So?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) L: = What happened to the wheels #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) Sh: [SO].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19) L: The mini wheels? = 2.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Excerpt 2. metacognitive moment.

(1) Real adult?
(2) B: Well maybe you should have a discussion
(3) And decide whether you want to do it with the
[instructions/
(4) P: can we **
(5) P: can we do the instructions #
(6) B: or if you want to do l, ehm
(7) Sh: Well l/
(8) Beth: /just lookin at [the diagram.
(9) Sh: When l/
(10) When I done it
(11) When I done it
(12) Looked at [the diagram,
(13) L: I think we should do it
(14) Along with the diagram
(15) P: I knew it was //#
(16) Sh: I looked at the diagram
(17) And it was a lot easier
(18) L: Well, Sh–’s done it before
(19) She knows what [she’s doin best
(20) Sh: It’s a lot] easier
(21) P: Aye but some people
(22) Like
(23) See in maths
(24) some people
(25) ** solve em in a different way
(26) Sh: M —→ ? #
10: 17
(1) Mt: What?
(2) Sh: If you be a very good friend
(3) A very very good friend
(4) Try to find one of these

Table 5. Excerpt 3. resulting strategy.

(1) P: [[**] mixed up in tha/21:23
(2) That’s me done that bit
(3) L: [I need] a bit like that
(4) P: [<so that can do +++>21:28
(5) That bits on that bit
(6) P: [***]
(7) Sh: But Laura’s makin the
wee bits ( ) at the front
(8) L: I’m doin that bit there 21:33
(9) Ken that bit there Peter?
(10) P: Yeh/ =
(11) L: = Peter? Ken that bit there?
(12) P: <+oh hu>21:38
(13) L: That’s what I’m doin
(14) P: I’m doin here right up.
(15) So this, startin right up to here. 21:43(,
(16) Sh: OK
(17) P: So you/
(18) is she doin the top?
(19) L: I’m doin this bit here22:48
(20) Sh: Do y
(21) Do you want a hand with that Peter then?
(22) P: Aye come on an help me (***)

In this excerpt participants are at a point where they make
a more elaborated attempt to describe to the strategy they
should take. Shelly articulates her strategy of using the
diagram alone. Linda reasons that they should follow Shelly
as she has done this before. Peter articulates that they should
follow the textual instructions given. At ln. 261 he alludes to
the practice in maths class of silently solving problems on
their own, sharing their answer and strategy with acceptance
of multiple ways of solving the same problem encouraged
and examined for their relative merits. He does so in quite
truncated terms.

In settling into a way to work in different ways they have spaced
out which bit of the construction they are working on. As they
work they keep an eye on how what they have constructed
will reach a point that it connects to what someone else is
working on. Most of Shelley’s interjections have changed in
nature. She is not telling the others what to do but making
key observations that will support the other two’s decision
making.

More difficult to interpret are the turns where they think out
loud. Peter in line 374 for instance. This may be a bid to make
it easier for the other members to know where they are, or an
indication that the activity has become more relaxed. There is
a sense that they are thinking together.
the remaining time they overtook the first group to accomplish three times as much construction more accurately. The timing of their verbal cues was quite well coordinated in the latter period. From the beginning of the activity until minute 10:46 when the metacognitive discussion of strategies occurred there were 54 times in which participants spoke over each other. Between 10:46 and 25:52 there are only 12 times, of these, most were instances of parallel conversations between paired working groups rather than conflictual. As Linda’s comment indicated, she was now reading Peter’s activity and anticipating how her work would join up with his. Shelly had switched from dictating activity to identifying where she could help two separate initiatives join up. It is important to note, the children drew on practice that the teacher herself had not identified as important to citizenship development. When planning when I should attend, teachers across the study suggested class times when social sciences were the focus to the exclusion of maths and sciences and yet, as these contrasting cases show, those lessons had the resources that proved crucial to the practice of citizenship in this activity.

Discussion

What, then, do these fleeting moments of interaction, indicate about practices of citizenship? The students in the second group did get to the point where they were engaging with others, making relevant contributions and encouraging others to contribute and acknowledge that they had the right to hold a different opinion, to employ the language of the Literacy Benchmark guidelines (Education Scotland 2017b). It also had many of the characteristics of Alexander’s (2008) more elaborate outcomes for dialogic learning. That the students had practices so embedded in their repertoire that they could smoothly adopt them highlights that a range of learning approaches was an important resource for them. However, that their enactment of these crucial participatory citizenship practices took its impetus from experience in classes that teachers saw as unrelated to citizenship is problematic.

As the second group began, Shelley attempted to enact a roll not unlike one that the Teaching Assistant adopted in the first group, controlling and regulating decisions and the actions of others rather than sharing power or opening up space to explore what each person wanted to bring to the table. Haworth (1999), in her Bakhtian study of dialogic potential within group work, also notes this tendency of ‘ventrinquilisation’ (Bakhtin1986) where ‘teacher talk’ is adopted in group work in an attempt to emulate the predominant genre of school spaces. Tholander and Aronsson (2003) also observed this tendency for students to ‘sub-teach’ in small group work, as well as noting, as was the case here, differing forms of resistance to ‘sub-teaching’ that arise in group work. If we look at Mercer’s work with a number of colleagues to develop dialogic practices through such programmes as ‘Thinking Together’ (Mercer and Sams 2006; Littleton and Mercer 2013; Vrikk et al. 2019), we can assess what is happening in these two groups in light of pedagogical insights they have developed. Littleton and Mercer (2013) broadly categorise three kinds of talk that characterise children’s interaction in small groups: disputational, cumulative and exploratory. The differing activity types I delineate above can be said to fall within these broad categorisations. Excerpt 1 of Group 2 exemplified disputational talk and its frustrations. There were moments in both group one and two that could
be characterised as cumulative in that the focus was procedural with little opportunity for critical thinking. Excerpt 2, albeit in a condensed code, was an exploratory moment. It could be argued that there was not much ‘accountable talk’ or extended reasoning within it, however, it is important to bear in mind that much of the reasoning was embodied and communicated through demonstration and that codes which can be read as ‘restricted’ (Bernstein 1997) from a more privileged class position can have their, efficacy, and significance underestimated (Labov 1972).

This case study allowed insight into the transition from disputational to exploratory talk, in a space where students were given the rare opportunity to choose for themselves amongst activity types. Conflict in the second group provided motivation for the children to ask meta-cognitive questions about how they should go about doing a task. Latterly there was another meta-cognitive turn where they discussed the criteria they believed they would be judged by. This revealed embedded attitudes that there was otherwise little scope for students to articulate. It is evident that they had a narrowly defined view of a ‘good student’ to which they believed they would be compared and judged (Smyth, Mclnerney, and Fish 2013). This did constrain the degree to which they could explore the usefulness of collaboration strategies to suit themselves. However, within the constraints of this emotional geography, important questions underwent an embodied exploration which suggested conflict as part of the curriculum could usefully be re-examined: is conflict a necessary part of developing awareness of different kinds of agential citizenship? A route out of the conflict, though light touch, was provided by the researcher. Is the challenge not only to provide opportunities for conflict but also the tools to work through them? Assigning fixed roles as means to ease group work is a common recommended strategy (Littleton and Mercer 2013). However, it may prohibit awareness of different approaches or the opportunity to ‘experiment’ as Rudduck and McIntyre (2008) advocate. These cases suggest that gaining familiarity with moving between roles in order to adopt different ones as the interaction demands is not beyond children. The transcript evidenced children doing this on their own initiative once made aware of it as a possibility. How might teachers increase opportunities for children to forge for themselves workable strategies of group work? Vriikki et al’s (2019) review of a number of intensive interventions to encourage dialogic pedagogy caution there is scant evidence that the scalability and sustainability of interventions have materialised as of yet. Given the range of such interventions that strive to inculcate aptitudes and skill sets, it is important to look at the broader school experience to understand the challenges these attempts face.

The time and attention that enabled an understanding of these fleeting yet important moments of decision-making in everyday life limits the methods which can uncover them. This is an illustrative case, but one that raises interesting questions educators can think with (Barad 2007) in assessing their own contexts. Though this research was able to capture some of the resources and practices that led up to this moment in their educational journeys, the question remains, what difference does this moment make within their continuing negotiation of their learning strategies and identity aspirations? The contextual information of each participant suggests that the various answers to that are diffractive (Barad 2007), that is, the amplification or heightened awareness of possibilities
and choices constituted in this moment, were likely interpreted and drawn upon for each student to differing degrees. As Taylor and Robinson summarise, dialogic encounters like this have the potential to be

moments of ‘disalienation’ in which students ‘recognise themselves as producers of culture and reclaim their place in the dialogue’ (Puiggrós 2006). In radical pedagogy, dialogue is more than a means to deepen understanding, it is a way of making a difference in the world. (Taylor and Robinson 2009, 168)

Taylor and Robinson (2009) argue that such claims for dialogue are predicated upon notions of a normative modernist subject and therefore they are sceptical about the extent to which dialogues as advocated are inclusive or generative of diverse empowerment. Barad (2007) and Bakhtin (1981) both offer theoretical resources to grapple with a human condition in which we are already in the midst of many dialogues, sampling from them to find, maintain and change footing (Cross 2009). The more opportunities to have different kinds of conversations with differing mixes of challenges and productive possibilities, the more likely a step change or shift in ethos may create conditions for learning relations with emancipatory qualities.

Newer curriculum interventions in Scotland (Education Scotland 20,115, 2018), and those that Vrikki et al. (2019) review signal there are important moves towards a fuller appreciation of multifaceted opportunities that children can learn from as deliberating citizens. For example, curriculum of citizenship education for Northern Ireland explicitly states as a learning outcome: ‘Show deeper understanding by thinking critically and flexibly, exploring problems and making informed decisions using Mathematics and ICT where appropriate’ (Northern Ireland Curriculum 2020).

Citizenship challenges are becoming more complex and the capacity to deliberate whilst appreciating the value of differing perspectives is becoming more important. Whilst the digital terrain exemplifies the dystopian excesses that the lack of such a capacity can exacerbate, there are growing examples of evolving citizenship practices such as citizen’s assemblies and participatory budgeting that involve citizens in scaling up problem solving from the household to the neighbourhood, the city, and, in Ireland’s case (Humphreys 2016), the nation’s constitution. Crucial to these opportunities for better, fit for purpose community building is a widening capacity to learn how to negotiate together, beyond simplistic binary engagement based on adversarial politics. The importance of the opportunity for interactions such as those examined here should not be underestimated.

Transcription Notation:
# noise of parts on table
(.) pause without any speaking
/ speech broken off
- speech that trails off
These underlined speech indicates emphasis
[ ] latched or overlapping speech amongst different speakers
**** indefinite speech unable to be transcribed
[] embodied activities accompanying transcribed speech
< > speech in quieter voice
2:12 time elapsed in recording
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References


