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REVIEW ARTICLE

Citizenship in the Elementary Classroom Through the Lens of Peer Relations

Minke A. Krijnen[1] · Bjorn G. J. Wansink[2] · Yvonne H. M. van den Berg[3] · Jan van Tartwijk[2] · Tim Mainhard[1]

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Abstract

We explored the potential of using a peer relations approach for researching children's citizenship in elementary classrooms. Children express or enact citizenship through their behavior toward classmates and the relationships they engage in (i.e., lived citizenship). These behaviors and relationships can be more or less in line with goals for citizenship education. We propose that, through peer relations methodology, these behaviors and relationships can be assessed systematically. In addition, some of the widely researched behaviors and relationships in peer relations research already closely align with goals for citizenship education. With this theoretical and methodological argument, we consider recent publications on classroom behaviors (i.e., prosocial behavior and aggression) and relationships (i.e., positive and negative affect) and their meaning for exemplary goals for citizenship education (i.e., solidarity, peace, and social cohesion). We show how individual children and classroom peer groups differ in these regards and thus in their citizenship and how these differences can be stratified by gender, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status. Specific attention is paid to the role of teachers, as organizers of the social structures in their classrooms and as educators who can promote citizenship. Finally, we propose new ways for using peer reports to study citizenship in elementary classrooms more directly and to discover potential avenues for teachers to foster citizenship through peer relations.

Keywords Citizenship education · Peer relationships · Teaching · Elementary school students · Quantitative methodology

✉ Minke A. Krijnen
m.a.krijnen@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

[1] Institute of Education and Child Studies, Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, 2333 AK Leiden, The Netherlands

[2] Department of Education, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

[3] Behavioral Science Institute, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

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In the classroom, children engage in relationships and interactions with peers. These social dynamics between peers can be viewed as expressions of citizenship in childhood (Kallio et al., 2020; Lister, 2007). At the same time, the classroom is an educational context, where teachers, through their interactions with children and through explicit curricula, can foster citizenship learning (Evans, 2006; National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). Citizenship education is a socialization process that equips children with competences for active participation in democratic societies (Maitles, 2013; Veugelers, 2021; Ten Dam et al., 2011). Although there are multiple nuances possible in defining citizenship (Eidhof et al., 2016; Veugelers, 2021), for children, often social citizenship competences are mentioned (De Schaepmeester et al., 2022; Lin, 2015), such as interpersonal behaviors and relationships that can be "enacted" in more informal learning settings, rather than being taught through curricular activities (Geboers et al., 2013). This makes the classroom an important practice ground for citizenship learning, where enacting and learning citizenship are intertwined (Bickmore, 2001). We propose that, first, how children practice citizenship in the elementary classroom can be systematically researched with a peer relations research approach. This approach captures the interpersonal nature of classroom experiences and views children as active observers of each other's behaviors and relationships (Bukowski et al., 2018). Second, peer relations research has indicated how teachers can promote or hinder positive social dynamics in the classroom (Endedijk et al., 2022; Farmer et al., 2011; Gest & Rodkin, 2011), which may offer new avenues for teachers to foster citizenship in their classroom through their daily practices, in addition to more formalized curricular activities (Geboers et al., 2013, Schuitema et al., 2018).

We posit that some of the main concepts of interest in peer relations research are already reflecting citizenship competences, which makes them useful for illustrating how looking through the eyes of peers helps us to investigate citizenship in the elementary classroom. The goal of this paper is to make a theoretical and methodological argument on how a peer relations approach can help to gain more insights in how citizenship is enacted in the primary classroom. Adopting a peer perspective can be a valuable complementary perspective for quantitative citizenship research, that to date commonly uses children's self-reports (Geboers et al., 2013), or that, in the context of the USA, is often focused on college students (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). In line with key publications on citizenship educational goals (Bosniak, 2000; Bickmore, 2011; Eidhof et al., 2016; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Veerman & Denessen, 2021), we selected solidarity, peace, and social cohesion as goals for citizenship in primary classrooms and we connect these to closely aligned, core constructs in peer relations research: prosocial behavior, aggression, acceptance, and rejection (Bukowski & Vitaro, 2018; Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018; Dirks et al., 2018; Hastings et al., 2007) (see Table 1). Although these constructs do not exhaustively cover the entirety of citizenship competences (i.e., the Council of Europe (2021) describes 166 descriptors of citizenship competences), the extensive body of empirical peer relations literature on these constructs allows us to illustrate how complex social dynamics can be taken into account in citizenship research.

Table 1 Conceptual connections between peer relations constructs and citizenship goals

	Peer relations construct	Citizenship goal
Behavior	Prosociality: behavior that benefits the needs of others (e.g., helping, cooperating) (Dirks et al., 2018; Hastings et al., 2007)	Solidarity: being concerned with others in a community (Bosniak, 2000; Council of Europe, 2016; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Veerman & Denessen, 2021)
	Aggression: behavior that intends to harm others (e.g., hitting and gossiping) (Bukowski & Vitaro, 2018)	Peace: absence of violence (Bickmore, 2011; Council of Europe, 2016; Eidhof et al., 2016)
Relationships	Acceptance and rejection: positive and negative relationships between people in a group (e.g., (dis)like, friendship) (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018)	Social cohesion: integrated communities, where members are accepted and can feel they belong (Council of Europe, 2010; Veerman & Denessen, 2021; Veugelers et al., 2017)

Citizenship in Elementary Education

Elementary classrooms are both an important environment where children enact citizenship, as well as an educational setting where children further develop their citizenship competences under the guidance of their teachers. Kallio et al. (2020) use the concept of *lived citizenship*, to capture the essentially agentic, relational, and context-dependent nature of children's citizenship (Kallio et al., 2020; Lister, 2007). This means that children are citizens already in their own ways, yet different from adult citizens, and that they enact citizenship in relation to others within the contexts they live in (Kallio et al., 2020). From this perspective, *common behaviors and relationships in childhood* are viewed as expressions of children's citizenship. In this regard, the classroom is one of the major contexts to consider; it is here where children spend a majority of their week with their peers and teachers and where they interact and build interpersonal relationships.

Although children are citizens by definition according to this conceptualization, they should also acquire citizenship competences through citizenship education. Many Western democratic governments strive to enhance intergroup relations and to stimulate the peaceful coexistence of their citizens via specialized education and curricula, to ultimately counteract polarization, and to sustain democracy in increasingly diverse societies (Bethke et al., 2015; Council of Europe, 2016; Stuteville & Johnson, 2016). For example in the European context, basic principles of citizenship education (e.g., social inclusion and social and intercultural competences) have been formulated and implementation is monitored across countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016). In the USA, citizenship competences are often formulated as civic engagement or civic competences and reflected in social studies curricula (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010; Stuteville & Johnson, 2016). Regardless of its specific focus, schools have the unique opportunity, and in some countries even the legal obligation, to foster children's citizenship (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016; National Council for the Social Studies, 2010; Veugelers et al., 2017). On the one hand, societies affect classrooms, because citizenship curricula are formulated based on societal norms (Council of Europe, 2016; Eidhof et al., 2016; Stuteville & Johnson, 2016; Veugelers et al., 2017). On the other hand, classrooms also affect society, because classroom experiences equip children with competences for being citizens (Council of Europe, 2016; Veugelers et al., 2017). Indeed, in addition to thinking about citizenship education in terms of conveying formal curricula to children as passive recipients, classrooms have also been framed as miniature societies or practice grounds where children learn to enact citizenship (Bickmore, 2001; De Schaepmeester et al., 2022; Dewey, 1899; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011; Veugelers et al., 2017). We adopt this latter perspective on citizenship learning and focus, in line with Kallio et al. (2020), on children's lived citizenship in the context of their classrooms.

In sum, according to lived citizenship, citizenship learning also occurs more informally in everyday situations where children have an active role through their interpersonal contact with others. For teachers, this means that they can foster

citizenship through everyday practices that affect the interpersonal processes between classmates (Bickmore, 2011; Evans, 2006; Schugurensky, 2006). This specific conceptualization of lived citizenship in the elementary classroom potentially offers important avenues for fostering citizenship which could complement curricular citizenship activities. A peer relations approach allows to research lived or enacted citizenship systematically because it takes into account children's perceptions of each other and their interpersonal behavior and relationships.

Peer Relations and Citizenship

Peer relations research adopts a perspective on child development that closely aligns with the conceptualization of children's lived citizenship. In peer relations research, children are considered as active agents whose individual psychosocial development is affected by the social classroom context (Bukowski et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2011; Gest & Rodkin, 2011). This is reflected in a methodological approach usually based on peer nominations (i.e., sociometric methods or peer assessment), where children act as multiple observers of classmates' typical behaviors and of their relationships with others (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018; Rubin et al., 2007). Children nominate classmates on various behavioral and affective concepts, thereby mapping the classroom social dynamics into a social network. Behavioral items regard the description of classmates' interpersonal behavior (e.g., Who of your classmates helps others?), and affective items regard interpersonal relationships (e.g., Whom of your classmates do you like most?) (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018). At the intersection of citizenship and peer relations, a peer relations approach could offer a unique perspective on children as enactors and observers of citizenship in the classroom. This might be a useful next step in quantitative citizenship research that to date is often based on children's self-reports (Geboers et al., 2013; Hoskins et al., 2012).

A peer relations research approach offers multiple ways to describe classroom social dynamics that can be informative for citizenship education research. Figure 1 depicts how these dynamics can be conceptualized for a hypothetical classroom of 15 children. Individual children together make up the peer group or peer ecology of the classroom. In Fig. 1, the lines between individual children reflect nominations between them, which can regard virtually every observable behavior or affective relationship. In our example, child A is nominated by all 11 classmates on a certain behavior (e.g., "helps others"), whereas child B is nominated by just 1 classmate. In peer relations research, child A would be described as very helping, whereas child B would be not. This way, each child is characterized based on the observations of classroom peers. At the group level, the total of nominations in the peer group, for example, indicate whether a certain behavior is common in the classroom (in peer relations research, these are referred to as descriptive group norms) (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018) or how socially connected the classroom is (i.e., *density*) (Rubin et al., 2007). Descriptive norms and density are expressed by a number ranging from 0 (no ties) to 1 (all possible ties; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In the classroom of Fig. 1, 64 out of the 210 possible nominations between classmates are present. This equals a density score of 0.32 on, for example, helping

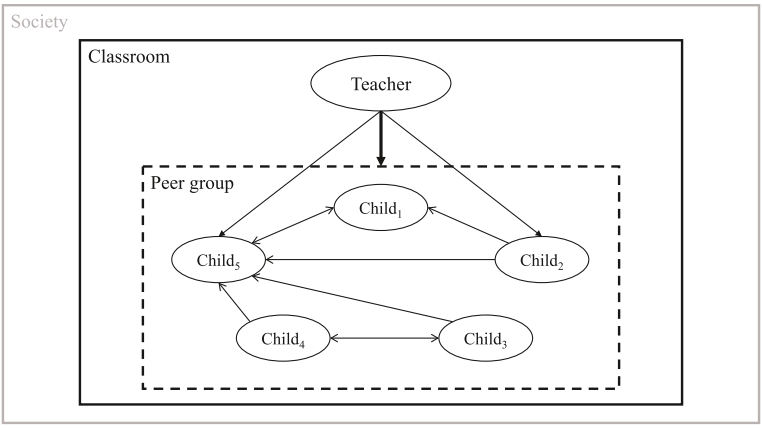

Fig. 1 Conceptual model of the actors and affective relationships or behaviors in a classroom

behavior, which could be considered moderate (e.g., Hendrickx et al., 2016). Finally, the interplay between group-level characteristics and individual behaviors or relationships can also provide insight into how the classroom context and behavior and relationships can be intertwined (Gest & Rodkin, 2011).

Dynamics in the peer group are closely connected to teachers and, ultimately, to society. Teachers are also part of the classroom, but not of the peer group; they have social relationships with individual children and the peer group that also affect how children behave toward each other (Endedijk et al., 2022; Gest & Rodkin, 2011). By investigating the interplay between teacher practices and individual-level or group-level characteristics, it may be possible to examine how teachers can foster citizenship (e.g., fostering conflict resolution behaviors) in specific children or the peer group as such. Finally, a classroom is embedded in the society at large, which means that socialization in the classroom is also based on societal norms (Farmer et al., 2011).

Thus, the methodological approach of peer relations research views children as actors and observers of interpersonal behavior and relationships in their peer group and takes into account the complex social dynamics between the classroom context, individual children, and the teacher. Such an approach allows for quantitative citizenship research that incorporates the social context where children enact citizenship in relation to others as, for example, Kallio et al. (2020) and Lister (2007) described it. Below, we further illustrate this idea by reviewing empirical findings in the peer relations literature through the lens of three major goals for citizenship education (i.e., solidarity, peace, and social cohesion; see Table 1). Note that we view these constructs not as exhaustively describing all aspects of citizenship, but that we use them to illustrate the potential of a peer relations approach to citizenship. Further, equating "low aggression" with "peace" is arguably too simplistic. For example, just the absence of violence is not sufficient for building peace in the classroom or in society. Still, non-violence in the

classroom is regarded essential for other peacebuilding behaviors, such as dialogue and negotiation (Bickmore, 2001).

Solidarity and Prosocial Behavior

Solidarity refers to being concerned with others and a willingness to cooperate with and support them (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Bosniak, 2000; Council of Europe, 2016; Lewis & Kim, 2008) which contributes to social cohesion in societies (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017) and in the classroom (Veerman & Denessen, 2021). In citizenship education research, behaviors such as helping others have been used to study children's citizenship (Geboers et al., 2013; Wood, 2014; Wood et al., 2018). In peer relations research, behaviors that reflect the intent to fulfill other children's needs are considered prosocial behavior (Dirks et al., 2018; Hastings et al., 2007). Prosocial behavior is commonly measured with questions such as "Who helps other classmates?" or "Who cooperates well with other classmates?''. On the one hand, it is widely enacted by children; on the other hand, children also clearly differ in the extent to which they show prosocial behavior in the classroom (Dirks et al., 2018; Hawley & Bower, 2018). Prosocial behavior can thus be seen as both part of children's everyday life, as well as linked to citizenship education goals. We therefore propose that prosocial behavior can be viewed as an expression of solidarity in the classroom context (see Table 1).

Peace and Aggressive Behavior

Another goal for democratic societies is to maintain *peace* (Bethke et al., 2015; Council of Europe, 2016), which requires people to be nonviolent (Eidhof et al., 2016). Violence, the counterpart of peace, can be an effective strategy to exert power, but it is essentially antidemocratic, as it undermines peaceful coexistence (Bickmore, 2011; Council of Europe, 2010). Indeed, in the school context, peace interventions aim for children to remain nonaggressive in interpersonal encounters (Audigier, 2000; Bickmore, 2011). In peer relations research, aggression is widely investigated as behavior that harms others (Bukowski & Vitaro, 2018). It can be either physical (e.g., "Who hits, kicks or pushes others''?) or relational (e.g., "Who excludes or gossips about other classmates?") (Bukowski & Vitaro, 2018; Hawley & Bower, 2018). In the classroom, aggression can be maladaptive (i.e., it is negatively associated with well-being) and functional to gain a dominant social position at the same time (Bukowski & Vitaro, 2018), which is similar to violence being both undesirable yet effective in societies. Therefore, peer relations studies on aggression could inform us to what extent children and classrooms are peaceful (see Table 1).

Social Cohesion and Acceptance Versus Rejection

Being a member of a community and having affective relationships with others is a fundamental element of being a citizen (Bosniak, 2000; Kallio et al., 2020; Lister, 2007). For people to experience a sense of membership, communities need to

be socially cohesive (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). This means that democratic societies strive to build a community in which people accept each other and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Bethke et al., 2015; Jansen et al., 2006), especially with others from different (cultural) backgrounds (Bloemraad et al., 2008). The school context is a crucial environment for fostering social cohesion, which is also referred to as social inclusion (Nishina et al., 2019; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). This essentially means that the goal is that children maintain positive relations with each other (Council of Europe, 2010; Veerman & Denessen, 2021). In peer relations research, relationships in the classroom are commonly researched by peer acceptance and rejection, whereas acceptance reflects a positive affective relationship between peers (e.g., "Who of your classmates do you like most?" and "Who of your classmates are your friends?"), rejection reflects negative affect (e.g., "Who of your classmates do you like least?") (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018). This closely relates to viewing affective relationships as expressions of children's citizenship (Kallio et al., 2020) as well as to citizenship educational goals for social cohesion (Veerman & Denessen, 2021) (see Table 1).

Below, we further examined the meaning of recent findings in peer relations research on prosocial and aggressive behavior, as well as peer acceptance and rejection, for citizenship research on solidarity, peace, and social cohesion. Following Cillessen and Bukowski (2018) we, first, show how peer perceptions of individual children can inform our understanding on how citizenship is enacted and to what extent individual children are member of a socially cohesive classroom. Second, we show how these peer perceptions can also be used to understand how the peer group functions as practice ground for citizenship. Finally, we consider recent evidence on the role of teachers for individual and peer group citizenship.

Citizenship in Individual Children

Peer relations research provides ample evidence for individual differences in children's prosociality, aggression, and relationships, which could also inform our understanding of how children enact citizenship in the classroom and specifically solidarity, peace, and social cohesion. To determine whether a child is seen as prosocial, aggressive, or socially accepted by the peer group, in peer relations research, one counts the number of received nominations by classmates (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018). We consider recent evidence on individual differences on these constructs and their potential meaning for citizenship research.

Empirical studies indicate that some children are clearly more prosocial than others. For instance, in a study including 59 upper elementary classes, consisting of approximately 25 children, children were, on average, nominated by 7 classmates as being prosocial; however, the reported standard deviation was 4 peers, indicating clear differences between children. This also means that some children received no nominations for prosocial behavior at all, whereas some were nominated by as many as 20 children or more (Boor-Klip et al., 2017). Other studies found similar between-child variability in prosocial behavior (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2018; Torrente et al., 2014; Van den Berg et al., 2015). These

findings indicate that some children show solidarity with many of their classmates, whereas others limit themselves to showing solidarity with only some.

Nominations of children's aggressive behavior are limited to fewer classmates compared to nominations of prosocial behavior, yet have more variability between children. For example, Jackson et al. (2015) reported that in an average classroom of 20 children, relational aggression nominations ranged from no received nominations to 14 nominations ($M = 3$ peers, $SD = 2.4$ peers). Physical aggression even ranged from no nominations to nominations by all classmates ($M = 4$ peers, $SD = 3.8$ peers; also compare Ahn and Rodkin (2014), Boor-Klip et al. (2017), Chung-Hall and Chen (2010), Garandeau et al. (2011), Juvonen et al. (2013), and Laninga-Wijnen et al. (2021a)). This indicates that some children may be less able to deal with others in a nonviolent, peaceful manner, which is noticed by many classmates.

Although prosocial and aggressive behavior could be regarded as opposites, correlations between prosocial and aggression nominations tend to be negative but small (Boor-Klip et al., 2017; Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2018; Van den Berg & Cillessen, 2013), indicating that children who are seen as prosocial are generally also seen as less aggressive but not necessarily as nonaggressive. It has been proposed that this co-occurrence can be explained by their instrumental function: Both behaviors may eventually help children to reach social goals, such as social status (Hawley & Bower, 2018). Pursuing one's goals in a prosocial way is, however, seen as more peaceful (Eidhof et al., 2016) and more psychosocially adaptive (Hawley & Bower, 2018). Thus, from these findings, we derive that some children are more inclined to enact solidarity, while other children struggle to be nonviolent, which potentially undermines citizenship.

Children who are accepted and not rejected by peers have better opportunities to experience social cohesion than others (Veerman & Denessen, 2021). For both acceptance and rejection, pronounced individual differences have been found (Hendrickx et al., 2017a, 2017b; Kollerová et al., 2015; Van den Berg et al., 2020; Van der Ploeg et al., 2015). However, the degree to which children are accepted or rejected by classmates varies considerably within classrooms. For example, in a sample of almost 3000 children, some children were not nominated by any of their classmates, whereas others were nominated by 95% of their classmates to be either accepted or rejected (Van der Ploeg et al., 2015). Furthermore, correlational results show moderate to strong negative associations between acceptance and rejection (Hendrickx et al., 2017a, 2017b; Hughes et al., 2001; Van den Berg & Cillessen, 2013). This means that children who receive more acceptance nominations receive fewer rejection nominations, which could be interpreted as a sign that these children have very positive relationships with peers. Thus, although all children are formal members of the classroom, these individual differences in acceptance and rejection indicate substantial possible differences between children in the extent to which they are socially included as a member of the peer group.

Citizenship Behaviors Related to Acceptance and Rejection

The association between children's relationships with peers and interpersonal behavior, such as prosociality and aggression, has been a topic of major interest in peer

relations research for decades (McDonald & Asher, 2018). It can help citizenship research to further understand how behavioral and affective expressions of citizenship may affect each other (Kallio et al., 2020). Overall, children who receive more nominations on prosocial behavior are more accepted and less rejected (Torrente et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2019), especially in classrooms with a high prosocial descriptive norm (Torrente et al., 2014). A longitudinal study showed that children who were accepted by classmates at the beginning of the school year showed more prosocial and less irresponsible behavior toward classmates later that year (Wentzel, 2003). In contrast to prosocial behavior, studies generally indicate that children are less accepted and more rejected by classmates when they are perceived as aggressive (Boor-Klip et al., 2017; Kuppens et al., 2008; Kim & Cillessen, 2023; Mikami et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019; Wilson & Rodkin, 2011). For citizenship research, we could derive from this that children who show less peaceful behavior may also be less included and vice versa. Such students may need support from their teacher to alter their behavior and social position in the group (McAuliffe et al., 2009). A few studies, however, show positive associations between aggression and acceptance, but only in classrooms where a few children were clearly more popular than others or in classrooms where aggression was generally accepted (Ahn & Rodkin, 2014; Garandeau et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2015). Regarding citizenship, these latter studies indicate that nonpeaceful behavior may have benefits, which also calls for context-specific interventions. In general, we can conclude that children who enact citizenship are more likely to be included as a member of the peer group.

Gender, Ethnicity, SES, and Citizenship

From the perspective of citizenship, it is considered problematic if people tend to show solidarity toward those who are more similar but display violence toward those who are less like them, or when positive relationships mainly exist between people who are more alike. Such social stratification indicates segregation and polarization between, or stereotyping of, subgroups. Citizenship education aims to foster positive interactions between children of diverse backgrounds and prevent citizenship behavior from being stratified along ethnic, racial, cultural, or other lines (Council of Europe, 2016; National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). In accordance with this, peer relations researchers recently called for a stronger focus on children's background to address social issues in peer relations (Bukowski & Ryan, 2023). This could also inform citizenship research in education on how children practice to deal with diversity in the classroom.

Evidence of *gender differences* unequivocally found higher levels of physical aggression and lower levels of relational aggression and prosocial behavior for boys than for girls (Chung-Hall & Chen, 2010; Juvonen et al., 2013; Kuppens et al., 2008; Wilson & Rodkin, 2011; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2005). In light of citizenship, these results could indicate that girls show more solidarity with others and enact violence differently than boys. An alternative explanation could be that gender-specific norms in society, expecting girls to be more sociable and boys to be more dominant and aggressive, elicit peers to nominate children according to these norms (Mayeux

& Kleiser, 2020). If the latter is the case, this could inform citizenship research on how gender-specific roles are enacted in the classroom (Geijsel et al., 2012). Furthermore, children tend to like and befriend same-*gender* peers over other-gender peers (Rose & Smith, 2018). In light of democratic citizenship, this may indicate that children hold implicit positive biases toward same-gender peers and negative biases toward other-gender peers (Fabes et al., 2019). However, it may also be a result of children's development; gender segregation diminishes during adolescence (Martin et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it is of added value to promote cross-gender positive relations to reduce gender stereotypes (Fabes et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2018). Therefore, it would be relevant for citizenship research to further research what children have more cross-gender positive relationships and what contributes to them.

Additionally, studies focusing on *ethnic and racial diversity* in aggression and prosocial behavior may reflect societal hierarchy, where children from marginalized groups are perceived more negatively by peers. For example, several American studies indicated that Black[1] children received fewer nominations for prosocial behavior and more for aggressive behavior as compared to their White classmates (Jackson et al., 2006; Wilson & Rodkin, 2011). In European samples, similar differences were found, for example, between Dutch and non-Western immigrant children (Stevens et al., 2020). Although American studies did not report by whom Black children were nominated as being more aggressive or less prosocial, there are indications that the nominations reflect a more negative perception by White children (Jackson et al., 2006). Thus, ethnoracial stratification of aggression nominations could indicate negative bias toward marginalized groups, rather than children of a specific background enacting less solidarity or more aggression.

In line with this, various peer relations studies show that peers of similar ethnoracial backgrounds have closer ties (i.e., they nominate each other more often as likable or as friends) and that cross-ethnoracial rejection occurs more often than same-ethnoracial rejection (Bellmore et al., 2007; Grütter et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2006; Munniksma et al., 2017; Rodkin et al., 2007; Wilson & Rodkin, 2013). Thus, in general, children tend to prefer similar peers rather than being more diversity-oriented. However, some studies show that this tendency seems to be dependent on the ethnoracial composition of the classroom. Two studies showed, for example, that, with increasing numbers of same-ethnoracial peers, children of *all* ethnoracial groups nominated more same-ethnoracial peers on acceptance and rejection (Bellmore et al., 2007; Munniksma et al., 2017). Two other studies reported that specifically Black children were less accepted when they had fewer Black classmates, but this mechanism was not found for White children (Jackson et al., 2006; Wilson & Rodkin, 2013). These examples show that experiencing membership may be harder for some children in diverse classroom contexts.

Lastly, Bukowski et al., (2017, 2020) focused on *socioeconomic differences* between children. Children with a low socioeconomic status (SES) were more often seen as aggressive but less often as prosocial (Bukowski et al., 2017), and they were

[1] The studies discussed use either the distinction "African American/European American" or "Black/White" to refer to children's background. In this article, we chose to adopt the latter terminology.

less often nominated as accepted (Bukowski et al., 2020). This could mean that these children have less equal opportunity to be part of the peer group; however, researchers emphasized the importance of more research into this topic, as SES is infrequently addressed in relation to acceptance or rejection (Bukowski and Ryan, 2023). We think that such studies could also inform citizenship research on potential polarization along the lines of SES.

Together, these empirical studies on peer relations indicate that prosocial behavior and aggression may be stratified along gender, ethnoracial, and socioeconomic diversity lines. Using a peer relations approach could thus better inform us of the degree of (intergroup) polarization in the classroom and may identify potential avenues to promote solidarity, peace, and social cohesion in diverse classrooms.

Implications for Research on Children's Individual Citizenship

Altogether, individual differences found in peer relations research show the potential to further investigate underlying mechanisms of how children enact citizenship in the classroom and potential avenues for teachers to intervene in these mechanisms. Goals for citizenship education specifically target positive relations in diverse contexts (Bethke et al., 2015; Council of Europe, 2016; Jansen et al., 2006; Veerman & Denessen, 2021). It would be relevant to investigate to what degree children nominate each other more on citizenship behaviors or are perceived to have more positive relationships when they are more similar (e.g., same-SES, -ethnicity, or -race), which could be an important factor in segregation in the classroom. In contrast, by investigating by whom children are nominated as aggressive or rejected, we may be able to discover whether patterns of nominations point toward between-group polarization. Some studies have already shown patterns of segregation in classroom relationships (e.g., Wilson & Rodkin, 2011), and such research could be extended by including more behaviors and sociodemographic characteristics. Most peer relations studies included information on children's sociodemographic background, and such data could be used to further investigate segregation or polarization in terms of sociodemographic diversity. This is underlined by Bukowski and Ryan (2023), who called peer relations researchers to pay more attention to social issues, which is closely related to citizenship education. Furthermore, research on this topic may provide insights in how teachers can intervene to promote social cohesion, peace, and solidarity across subgroups through their everyday teaching.

Citizenship in the Peer Group

To research the peer group as a practice ground for solidarity, peace, and social cohesion and to see to what extent classrooms reflect educational goals, it is relevant to also consider research where prosociality, aggression, and relationships are investigated as group characteristics. In peer relations research, the classroom peer group is primarily considered as a developmental social context for individual development (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018), whereas goals for citizenship education

regard outcomes at the group level for communities, such as ultimately a peaceful society (Council of Europe, 2010; Eidhof et al., 2016). To describe how common a behavior is in a classroom, peer relations research focuses on what is called *descriptive norms*. A descriptive norm is the number of nominations as a fraction of the total possible nominations in a class (Hendrickx et al., 2016; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). A higher value thus indicates that more children observe their classmates to enact a certain behavior or that children in the classroom are more strongly socially connected.

In several samples, prosocial descriptive norms of approximately 25–30% have been found, which indicates that in an average classroom of 25 children, 150 out of 600 possible nominations for prosocial behavior are made (Aguilar-Pardo et al., 2022; Boor-Klip et al., 2017; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016; Torrente et al., 2014). However, large differences usually exist between classrooms. For example, in a Dutch sample of 1492 children in 59 elementary classrooms, prosocial descriptive norms ranged from 13 to 44% ($M=27\%$, $SD=7\%$) (Boor-Klip et al., 2017; Hendrickx et al., 2016). For citizenship research, this may indicate that solidarity is more commonly enacted in some classrooms than in others. Furthermore, aggressive descriptive norms typically vary between 5 and 20%, which represents a total of 30 to 120 nominations on aggressive behavior in an average classroom of 25 children (Aguilar-Pardo et al., 2022; Ahn & Rodkin, 2014; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Jackson et al., 2015). Thus, it seems that some classroom societies are less peaceful than others. It is, however, important to note that less peaceful classrooms can, at the same time, be characterized by solidarity. For example, Laninga-Wijnen et al. (2018) identified two types of classrooms in secondary education: One was characterized by high prosocial and low aggression descriptive norms, whereas the other type was characterized by both high prosocial and aggression descriptive norms. This might indicate that there are ways in which nonpeaceful behavior can coexist with solidarity in a classroom. In sum, descriptive norms of prosocial and aggressive behavior are relevant indicators of how commonly these behaviors are observed in the classroom as practice ground.

To characterize relationships at the level of peer groups, *density* and *centrality* are two measures that are used (Juvonen et al., 2019; Rubin et al., 2007). First, density (also referred to as cohesion) refers to social connectedness between children in the classroom, which is calculated the same way as descriptive norms (i.e., number of nominations as a fraction of the total of possible nominations in a class) (Hendrickx et al., 2016). This conceptualization of density in peer relations research thus closely relates to the goal of social cohesion as formulated for citizenship education (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017; Veerman & Denessen, 2021). Second, centrality refers to the extent to which nominations are focused on specific children or not. In high-centrality classrooms, a few children are nominated more often than others, for example, for being liked. In low-centrality classrooms, most children are accepted to similar degrees and no children have a dominant social position (Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016). In light of citizenship, a low centrality represents more social cohesion (i.e., an egalitarian classroom). Both density and centrality are reflected in other assessments of social cohesion in citizenship research. For example, when asking teachers to report on the democratic classroom climate in an international longitudinal study on citizenship in secondary education, Quintelier and Hooghe (2013) put a strong focus on density

(e.g., "how many of your children get on well with their classmates?") and centrality (e.g., "[…] are well integrated with the class"?). Peer reports of density and centrality could similarly shed light on social cohesion in the classroom.

Several peer relations studies show how classrooms differ in both density (Ahn et al., 2010; Hendrickx et al., 2016) and centrality (Ahn & Rodkin, 2014; Ahn et al., 2010; Cappella et al., 2013; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016). For example, Hendrickx et al. (2016) reported a range of 0.06–0.29 for density ($M=0.14$, $SD=0.04$). This illustrates how some classrooms have stronger overall social connections than others. Furthermore, centrality ranged from 0.11 to 0.34 ($M=0.19$, $SD=0.05$). This means that in some classrooms all children were about equally well accepted, whereas in other classrooms, a few children had a more dominant social position in the group. These findings could inform citizenship research on whether the classroom is socially cohesive for everyone, rather than some children being more accepted than others.

Peer Group Citizenship and Individual Citizenship

Classroom-level characteristics of prosociality, aggression, and social cohesion may not only reflect the extent to which citizenship goals are met but can also have a socializing function for individual behavior. A longitudinal study among adolescents showed that individuals tended to become more prosocial over time when the descriptive norm for prosocial behavior was initially high (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2018). Thus, solidarity in the peer group may incline children to show solidarity themselves. A similar mechanism has been found for aggressive behavior (Kuppens et al., 2008; Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2018; Mercer et al., 2009). Interestingly, in highly aggressive elementary classrooms, aggressive children received more liking and popularity nominations (Boor-Klip et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2015; Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2021a), which shows that in some classrooms, violent behavior is rewarded with establishing a dominant social position. These examples indicate that solidarity and violence in classroom contexts may affect and even interact with children's individual development of citizenship.

Also, more density and less centrality in the classroom seem to be beneficial for individual citizenship. In high-density classrooms, children were observed to be more engaged in the group (Cappella et al., 2013). As this was specifically apparent for children with behavioral problems, this might show how a socially cohesive classroom facilitates more equitable participation in education. In low-centrality classrooms, children have been found to experience a greater sense of community (Gest et al., 2014), which may indicate that an egalitarian classroom benefits children's own sense of membership to the classroom as practice ground (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Lister, 2007; Veerman & Denessen, 2021). Furthermore, high density and low centrality may counter the benefits of being aggressive in the classroom. In low-density or high-centrality classrooms, aggressive boys were more accepted, whereas in high-density or low-centrality classrooms, they became less accepted over time (Ahn & Rodkin, 2014). This means that social cohesion may not only

be an indicator of enacted citizenship at the group level but also an important contextual factor that shapes the peaceful behavior of individual children. Zwaan et al. (2013) portray an even more nuanced picture: In high-centrality classrooms, well-included adolescent boys showed less aggression. The authors explained this by proposing that in these classrooms, well-included boys had no need to aggressively gain social status, as they already had established their social position. For citizenship research, these examples show how social cohesion in the classroom may be an important contextual factor for peaceful behavior of individual children.

Implications for Research on Citizenship in the Peer Group

Peer group characteristics, such as descriptive norms, density, and centrality (Hendrickx et al., 2016; Wasserman & Faust, 1994), could be used to investigate how widespread enacted citizenship in the classroom is and whether all children are equally involved in enacted citizenship. Via such indicators, as we showed for solidarity, peace, and social cohesion, it is possible to obtain more in-depth information on how a classroom functions as a practice ground for citizenship. The way children adapt their individual behavior to peer group characteristics is an important factor to consider in studying citizenship education (Gest & Rodkin, 2011). Moreover, most peer relations studies consider these group characteristics as contextual factor for individual development (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2018), but only a few investigated peer group characteristics as outcome (e.g., Hendrickx et al., 2016). For citizenship research, it would also be relevant to put a stronger focus on peer group characteristics as a result of, for example, teacher practices, to investigate how teachers foster a productive practice ground. Future research could thus include peer group characteristics to consider complex social dynamics between individual children and the peer group as practice ground and identify how teachers can intervene on the social structure of the peer group, specifically from the point of view of citizenship goals.

Teachers and Citizenship in the Classroom

Both citizenship and peer relations research point out the responsibility of teachers to promote socially cohesive environments for children, to promote adaptive child (academic) development, and to facilitate active participation (Farmer et al., 2011; Hughes et al., 2001; Kallio et al., 2020; Kilday & Ryan, 2022; Lister, 2007; Wanders et al., 2020). A peer relations approach can inform citizenship research on how teachers can promote citizenship in the elementary classroom through their behavior and relationships with children. Gest and Rodkin (2011) conceptualized how teacher-student relationships may affect individual child outcomes both directly and indirectly, i.e., through affecting children individually and through affecting peer group. Both levels of intervention will be addressed.

Teachers and Individual Children

For individual children, supportive teaching (and specifically, less negative interaction with a child) has the potential to promote solidarity among peers and buffer against nonpeaceful behavior. Teacher reports of their support toward children showed a positive association with peer-perceived prosocial behavior (Breeman et al., 2015; Endedijk et al., 2022; McAuliffe et al., 2009). Similarly, teachers' self-reported general strategies for managing aggression and promoting the prosocial behavior of specific children were negatively related to peer-perceived aggression (Gest et al., 2014). In line with this, observed teacher praise and reprimands can buffer against or catalyze relational aggression, respectively (Weyns et al., 2017). With regard to peer acceptance, a recent meta-analysis showed that negative teacher–child relationships predicted less acceptance by classmates (Endedijk et al., 2022). More specifically, children were less accepted when their teacher reported to have more conflicts with them (Hughes & Im, 2016). Also video observations of teacher's negative affect toward a child predicted less acceptance by classmates (Hendrickx et al., 2017a, 2017b). Opposite associations were found as well: When teachers highlighted positive attributes of children, these children were more accepted later that year (Mikami et al., 2020). Thus, peers may adapt their relations with a classmate according to the quality of the teacher–child relationship, and children can become more or less included over time. These results indicate that teachers can, through their affective behaviors and relationships with children, intentionally or unintentionally steer enacted solidarity, peace, and social inclusion in the classroom.

An important by-product of student-specific teacher behavior is the way peers perceive these interactions. Based on their observations between the teacher and classmates, children adapt their perceptions of their classmates (Endedijk et al., 2022; Farmer et al., 2011; Kilday & Ryan, 2022). For example, peer-perceived conflict between the teacher and a student accompanied fewer nominations for prosocial behavior (Hughes et al., 2001), more nominations for aggression (Weyns et al., 2017), and less acceptance (Hendrickx et al., 2017a, b). For teacher support, opposite effects were found (Hughes et al., 2001; Weyns et al., 2017). Thus, also through modelling, teachers may be able to promote solidarity, peaceful behavior, and social cohesion through their everyday interactions with students.

Finally, teacher practices have also been regarded in light of ethnoracial and behavioral diversity, which can provide more in-depth information on how teachers could target social cohesion in diverse contexts. Recent evidence from ethnically diverse classrooms showed that higher levels of teacher support, as experienced by the student, were associated with this student nominating more other-ethnic classmates on acceptance (Grütter et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers can buffer the negative effect of aggression on being accepted. Children who were seen as aggressive in the fall of the school year were less accepted by classmates in the spring of the school year. However, when teachers emphasized that all children were capable of learning, this association was significantly weaker (Mikami et al., 2010). Along similar lines, when teachers tended to compensate for their negative attributions of high-aggressive children with more positive practices toward these children, this promoted the acceptance

of high-aggressive children by classmates (Hendrickx et al., 2017a, b; McAuliffe et al., 2009), although this was not found when the role of teachers was just defined as a general close relationship with the classroom (Kim & Cillessen, 2023). Altogether, these examples show that teachers can specifically target acceptance for children who are at risk of exclusion due to their background or behavior.

Teachers and the Peer Group

Given the abovementioned positive association between peer group characteristics and individual children, it is important for teachers to address the peer group as such to facilitate peacefulness, solidarity, and social cohesion. Indeed, Hendrickx et al. (2016) showed that when children perceived more peers to get support from their teacher, the descriptive norm for prosocial behavior was higher. In contrast, when children nominated more peers to have conflict with their teacher, the descriptive norm for aggression was higher. Hence, the teacher may steer solidarity and violence at the level of the classroom by serving as a role model. However, these findings are based on cross-sectional data and might also indicate that in low-aggressive classrooms, teachers did not encounter many conflicts with children. Furthermore, more teachers' self-reported disapproval of aggression was related to a lower aggression descriptive norm (Gest & Rodkin, 2011). Prosocial or aggressive norms, in contrast, were not associated with teachers' self-reported strategies for promoting prosocial behavior, nor with observed supportive expressions (Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016). However, in classrooms where teachers emphasized mastery goals (i.e., the intrinsic value of learning), prosocial behavior was more appreciated (McKellar et al., 2021). Thus, to facilitate a practice ground for citizenship behaviors, teachers can serve as role models for the peer group as such.

To foster a socially cohesive practice ground for citizenship, taking relationships in the peer group into account is crucial for teachers (Farmer et al., 2019; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016). Hendrickx et al. (2016) researched peer-perceived teacher support and conflict in relation to density and centrality. They found higher density in classrooms where children perceived more classmates to receive support from the teacher and, vice versa, less density in classrooms where children perceived more classmates to have conflicts with the teacher. Furthermore, peer groups were less centralized when children experienced more teacher support themselves, but more centralized when children perceived teachers to differentially support classmates. This means that children also notice when teachers unequally distribute their support among children. Interestingly, classrooms also appeared to be less centralized when children perceived more classmates to have conflicts with the teacher. The authors explained this by a possible mechanism of peer support that compensates for teacher-student conflict. Thus, teachers may facilitate or hinder the social cohesion of the peer group through the amount of support and conflict they show, but also through how equally they divide these over the peer group. Also, teachers' self-reported strategies matter. Gest and Rodkin (2011) found that classrooms were less centralized when teachers tried to promote new friendships and reinforce existing friendships. Finally, several authors mention the importance

of observed teacher behavior; however, a direct effect has not been found on density and centrality (Audley-Piotrowski et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2019; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016). In short, for researching teacher practices in relation to social cohesion, it seems important to take into account how children perceive teacher-student interactions themselves.

Implications for Teaching

Teaching citizenship is often understood in terms of educating children via explicit citizenship curricula or practices within specific educational activities (Geboers et al., 2013; Schuitema et al., 2018). We propose a broader perspective on the role of teachers as facilitators of (informal) citizenship learning because teachers can also convey how to act as citizens via their everyday interactions with children and even affect children's citizenship behaviors. Therefore, it is important to make teachers aware of the message that their teaching practices convey in light of citizenship and how they could consciously use their practices to stimulate desired behavior (Audley-Piotrowski et al., 2015). First, teachers can model how to act as citizens (cf. Endedijk et al., 2022). For example, being supportive could promote enacted solidarity among children, whereas more conflictual teaching may hinder peaceful behavior in the classroom (Hendrickx et al., 2016). Second, teachers can support children in enacting citizenship in the classroom by providing feedback on how they act toward classmates (cf. Endedijk et al., 2022). This means that during everyday interactions, teachers can convey messages on desired citizenship behavior. Third, teachers indirectly inform classmates how much they appreciate a child via their daily interactions with this child (cf. Endedijk et al., 2022). Through this mechanism (i.e., social referencing), they promote or hinder positive relationships between children (Hendrickx et al., 2017a, b). Moreover, such practices affect both individual children and the nature of classroom miniature society (Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Hendrickx et al., 2016). Thus, everyday teacher practices are also important to consider when thinking of how to foster citizenship.

By researching how children perceive their teachers to model behaviors, engage in relationships, and respond to (un)desired behavior, we are able to understand how teachers "live" and model citizenship. Potentially, teachers could even use social networks generated by peer assessments to either reflect on their own behaviors and relationships with the peer group, or to reflect with the peer group on what citizenship behavior is enacted and how the peer group could support each other to show even more desired citizenship behaviors. Future research could also pay attention to how these mechanisms are related to more formal teacher practices in citizenship education, such as organizing classroom discussions. For example, Wansink et al. (2023) showed how teacher interpersonal behavior has the potential to facilitate students more equal participation in the discussion of controversial issues. Teacher education could point teachers to the implications of their general practices for citizenship learning. This may help teachers to create a practice ground for citizenship by integrating their professional interpersonal skills with their curricular activities.

Discussion

Citizenship education is seen as essential for sustaining peaceful and socially cohesive societies. Children can be explicitly instructed but can also informally learn citizenship by practicing with peers, guided by their teacher (Evans, 2006; Schugurensky, 2006). Our aim was to explore how a peer relations approach can help to investigate how children enact citizenship in elementary classrooms. Citizenship research and peer relations research in elementary education adopt complementary perspectives on children's behavior and relationships in the classroom. In peer relations research, children's experiences with peers are mostly investigated in light of individual psychosocial development and adjustment (Bukowski et al., 2018; Rubin et al., 2007). Citizenship education, in contrast, is ultimately concerned with outcomes for groups, such as solidarity, peace, and social cohesion, which requires specific competences from individuals (Council of Europe, 2016; National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). At the intersection of these two perspectives, lived citizenship conceptualizes children's citizenship as enacted in everyday situations with peers (Kallio et al., 2020). We adopted the concept of lived citizenship which describes children's citizenship as enacted through their behaviors and relationships with others in their everyday context (Kallio et al., 2020), rather than, for example, in terms of their political knowledge.

Specifically, we proposed that how children *enact* citizenship could be investigated with peer relations methodology. Based on our theoretical and methodological argument in which we looked at citizenship in the elementary classroom through the lens of peer relations research, we conclude that this approach could help to get a more systematical insight into how citizenship is enacted between children, to what extent a peer group can be characterized as a productive practice ground for citizenship, and how teachers may intervene. Indeed, existing peer relations research shows that children and classrooms vary greatly in behaviors and relationships which can be viewed as expressions of their citizenship and teachers can foster citizenship via their daily interactions with children and by managing peer relations. This shows the potential of using a peer relations approach for researching citizenship in primary education.

Future Directions

In our consideration of recent peer relations research, we suggested several ways how prior evidence could have implications for citizenship research. To further employ a peer relations approach in citizenship research, peer-assessed items geared more directly toward citizenship are however needed. We argued that core peer relations research constructs are linked to goals for solidarity, peace, and social cohesion (see also Table 1). However, original peer-assessed items have mostly been used to examine what social conditions serve children's socioemotional and academic development and well-being (and not citizenship). For example, solidarity is based on a sense of compassion for people who are marginalized in society (Bloemraad et al.,

2008; Bosniak, 2000). Thus, assessing general prosocial behavior, as operationalized in peer relations research, does not fully capture solidarity in the elementary classroom. Formulating items that specifically focus on, for example, supporting and involving classmates who are in need, could help (Lewis & Kim, 2008), e.g., "Who of your classmates makes sure that others fit in?". Regarding maintaining peace, children can contribute in more ways than just not being aggressive. For example, nonviolent conflict resolution and constructive dialogue are conditions for building peace in the classroom (Audigier, 2000; Bickmore, 2011). Constructive conflict resolution could be operationalized by focusing on negotiation (Bickmore, 2011; Council of Europe, 2016), with items such as "Who of your classmates helps to solve arguments?" or "Who of your classmates carefully listens to others' opinions?". We are aware that, on the one hand, researchers might have ethical concerns about using a peer perspective (see also Cillessen & Marks, 2017), because asking children to rate their peers might reinforce troubling group dynamics. On the other hand, there is some evidence from research among third-grade children, showing that sociometric testing did not upset or hurt children, nor did it change the way they were treated by classmates (Mayeux et al., 2007). We think that formulating new peer-assessed items provides opportunities to look through the eyes of children at their classmates' citizenship and shows starting points to foster desired citizenship, but it is important to take these ethical considerations into account.

These peer-perceived behaviors may well be combined with self-reported intentions or attitudes that are underlying behaviors or relationships, to better grasp how intrapersonal aspects of citizenship are related to interpersonal dynamics. For example, helping or cooperative behavior can be driven by an altruistic intent, but also by self-interest (Dirks et al., 2018). More in general, it is important to take into account the developmental stage children are in, as children are still cognitively and emotionally developing. For example, young children show mainly physical aggression, whereas older children also show verbal aggression (Laursen & Adams, 2018). To formulate developmentally appropriate questions on enacted citizenship, citizenship skills as formulated in validated competence frameworks for children (e.g., Council of Europe, 2021; Ten Dam et al., 2011) are useful. Altogether, future research could use such new operationalizations to describe individual children's and classroom-level citizenship.

Lastly, it could be important for citizenship researchers to consider dynamics in the classroom regarding popularity (i.e., being visible and having influence in the classroom) and, related to this, consider a peer relations approach in adolescents' enacted citizenship (Van den Berg et al., 2020). For example, in classrooms where aggressive children were also more popular, specifically victimized children experienced less belonging (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2021a), but in (secondary) classrooms where children who defended against bullying were also more popular, victimized children experienced more belonging (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2021b). These examples show that popular children can have an additional impact with their behaviors on the classroom, which may also apply to enacted citizenship. Related to this, it is especially relevant to incorporate popularity in citizenship research among secondary school students. In this developmental age, popularity becomes more influential and more distinct from peer acceptance (Van den Berg et al., 2020). Adolescents

tend to be more inclined to adapt their behavior in light of gaining popularity (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010), or to what they think classmates expect from them (i.e., injunctive norms) (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). For example, it is quite likely that in some classrooms, desired citizenship behavior is more popular than in others. Furthermore, in secondary education, there is usually a stronger focus on political dimensions of citizenship and engagement, such as volunteering or voting (Lin, 2015). When adolescents perceive such behaviors to be expected by their classmates, it might become *cooler* (or at least more acceptable) to engage in them.

General Conclusion

We think that a peer relations approach can be an asset for citizenship research in the elementary classroom because it can identify individual and classroom differences and point toward avenues for teacher intervention in children's citizenship behaviors. Importantly, this methodological approach acknowledges the child perspective and children's agency in how they enact citizenship in their peer group. It should, however, be noted that the definition of citizenship is normative, changes over time, and varies across cultures (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Bosniak, 2000; Eidhof et al., 2016). Therefore, the interpretation of peer-assessed behaviors and relationships in light of citizenship is dependent on contextual societally defined norms as well. Nevertheless, future research based on the peer relations methodology could operationalize relational and behavioral dimensions of citizenship more closely, which opens up opportunities for further investigating citizenship in the classroom. Finally, if we understand how teachers' classroom interactions shape children's citizenship learning, teachers could intentionally foster citizenship via their everyday teaching.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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