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Enacting children’s citizenship: developing understandings of how children enact themselves as citizens through actions and Acts of citizenship.

Journal:	<i>Childhood</i>
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Keywords:	Children’s Citizenship, Acts of Citizenship, Participation, Agency, Social Justice
Abstract:	<p>Children have an unsettled relationship with the status of citizenship, being given some rights, responsibilities and opportunities for participation, and being denied others. Yet if citizenship is conceived of as a practice, children can be firmly seen as citizens in the sense that they are social actors, negotiating and contributing to relationships of social interdependence. This article develops understandings of children’s agency in citizenship and some of the different ways in which children’s actions enact them as interdependent citizens. It presents one aspect of the understanding of citizenship generated from research by six groups of marginalised children, aged 5-13, in Wales and France. Synthesising the research groups’ descriptions of activities they associated with the component parts of citizenship with citizenship theory, these children can be seen to engage in actions of citizenship that include making rules of social existence, furthering social good and exercising freedoms to achieve their own rights. Their activities also transgress the boundaries of existing balances of rights, responsibilities and statuses, through their (mis)behaviour, in ways that can be interpreted as Acts of citizenship. In children’s everyday activities, however, the distinction between actions and Acts of citizenship can at times be blurred. This is because recognizing aspects of children’s practices as citizenship is a challenge to dominant definitions of citizenship, and claims a new status for children. Exploring children’s citizenship in these ways has potential for widening understandings of participation and appreciating broader aspects of children’s agency in citizenship.</p>

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3 Children are citizens. This assertion, although not new, remains contentious (Lister,
4 2007). When citizenship is seen as a status related to national membership or
5 political voting rights, although children are rights holders according to the UNCRC
6 (1989), the extent to which this conveys citizenship upon children is debateable.
7 However, citizenship is not only a status. Indeed focusing on contractual and
8 universal status models of citizenship reinforces exclusion. Difference-centred,
9 relational approaches to children's citizenship, that recognise and value children's
10 practices and differences, are therefore necessary (Cockburn, 1998; Moosa-Mitha,
11 2005). Exploration of children's role as social actors is a good starting point for
12 developing such understandings of citizenship (Jans, 2004), as is listening to
13 children's views on what their citizenship should mean (Stasiulis, 2002). This article
14 develops difference-centred relational understandings of children's agency in
15 citizenship, drawing on research with six groups of marginalised children, aged 5-13
16 and living in Wales and France. Synthesising the groups' perspectives on aspects of
17 citizenship with existing theory, the research produced a theoretical lens for
18 understanding some commonalities and difference in their citizenship experiences
19 and aspirations and explored the relevance of Europe. This article reports one aspect
20 of the theoretical lens developed, related to the ways in which children are enacted
21 as citizens through their actions. It draws particularly on citizenship theories of
22 Arendt (1998), Lister (1997), Isin (2008) and Neilsen (2008).
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28 **Existing Understandings**

29 Citizenship is a legal and social status, and a set of 'juridical, political, economic and
30 cultural' practices (Turner, 1993: 2). Citizenship determines 'how economic and
31 cultural capital are redistributed and recognised within society' (Isin & Turner, 2007:
32 14). It comprises 'relationships between rights, duties, participation and identity',
33 these elements being defined differently from different political perspectives
34 (Delanty, 2000: 9). Lister (2007a: 699) argues that comprehensive definitions of
35 children's citizenship must consider the ways children live 'membership, rights,
36 responsibilities and equality of status'.
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39 Dominant contractual and universal definitions of citizenship exclude children from
40 the status of citizenship on the basis that, as not-yet-adults, they do not have the
41 competences associated with citizenship, such as rationality and independence
42 (Cockburn, 1998; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). There are not, however, clear-cut
43 differentiations between childhood and adulthood competence, dependence and
44 vulnerability (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005; Cockburn, 1999; Wyness, 2000). All children
45 are not more vulnerable than all adults (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005), and adults too
46 need protection in some times and places (Cockburn, 1999). All definitions of
47 citizenship have to acknowledge that self-sufficiency is an illusory goal in most
48 societies and that the scope for self-direction is limited by contexts of social living;
49 adults and children can both be seen to live in relationships of social
50 interdependence (Cockburn, 1998, 2005).
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54 Some authors (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Liebel, 2008; Lister, 2007a;
55 Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Stasiulis, 2002), suggest children are citizens in some ways,
56 because in relationships of social interdependence, they live and negotiate the
57 practices and statuses of holding rights, exercising responsibilities and participating
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3 in social life. However children's status as citizens is also undermined, by social
4 welfare interventions and laws that apply levels of control, limitations in rights and
5 restrictions in access to certain public spaces, that that are not imposed on adults
6 (Cockburn, 1998). Cohen (2005: 222) uses the term 'semi-citizenship', to show that
7 children 'are citizens by certain standards and not by others'.
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10 Relational and difference-centred approaches are proposed as an alternative to
11 evaluating the extent of children's citizenship against an abstract definition of
12 citizenship status that does not apply to marginalised adults or children (Cockburn,
13 2005; Lister, 2007a; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Relational and difference-centred
14 approaches acknowledge that individuals are specifically socially and historically
15 situated, but do not judge differences as meaning 'less than' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005:
16 378). Rather than passive recipients of the legal status of citizenship, conveyed by
17 nation-states, in difference-centred approaches citizens define citizenship through
18 practices and in relationships with others and communities (Moosa-Mitha, 2005).
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21 The relational space in which children's citizenship is practiced includes the home,
22 neighbourhood, school and leisure facilities plus occasional contact with figures of
23 authority in peripheral zones (Jans, 2004). Cockburn (2007) suggests citizenship
24 exists in groups of collectivities and intermediate spaces between public and private
25 spheres. Locating citizenship in these spaces moves children's citizenship from
26 discussions of state-individual or state-civil society interactions, to consider more
27 horizontal dimensions of relations within civil society (Roche, 1999). Whilst children
28 have rights and responsibilities, conveyed upon them by national law and
29 international conventions, these are realised in the spaces of interpersonal, as well
30 as person-state, relations (Roche, 1999).
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33 In these relational spaces, children are participating social actors (Jans, 2004).
34 Children exercise agency and contribute, for example, to domestic and national
35 economies and interpersonal relationships, in homes, schools and businesses
36 (Alderson, 2010; Morrow, 1996, 2008; Qvortrup, 2008). Children and young people
37 also participate as social actors in local, national and international organisations
38 working for change (Liebel, 2008; Stasiulis, 2002).
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41 Not all agency is citizenship, but the relationship between the two is fundamental
42 (Lister 1997: 39). The question therefore arises as to through which practices are
43 children citizens? In some discussions children's citizenship agency has been
44 intertwined with participation (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), especially since Hart's (1992)
45 ladder equated increasing levels of influence over decision-making with movement
46 closer to the attainment of citizenship. A focus on participation as decision-making or
47 influence over systems remains important, to ensure political mechanisms become
48 responsive to children's demands (Wall, 2012). But in European contexts, youth
49 participation tends to also include taking part in collective activities focused on social
50 integration (Loncle, 2008). Learning from a majority world perspective, Thomas and
51 Percy-Smith (2010: 2) suggest that meeting one's own needs can be a form of
52 participation, concerned with 'survival, [children] meeting their basic needs and
53 contributing to their family and community, as [much as] it is about choice and self-
54 realisation'. Rather than defining citizenship agency as participation, this article
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3 explores the activities children associate with citizenship and argues a fuller
4 framework for understanding children's social and political agency in citizenship is
5 needed.
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10 **Research Process**

11 **Participants**

12 This research developed understandings of the citizenship components: rights,
13 duties/ responsibilities, participation, status and membership/belonging (Delanty,
14 2000; Lister, 2007a), with children aged 5-13. Young people's perspectives on
15 citizenship vary according to whether they are 'insiders' or 'outsiders' (Lister *et al.*,
16 2003) and this research had a particular focus on developing an inclusive definition
17 of citizenship and relating this to European policy. Existing research in Europe had
18 focused on the views of older 'insider' young people, I therefore sought participation
19 of groups of younger and marginalised children, selected to mirror significant
20 exclusions as identified in the EU children's rights strategy (Commission, 2006). All
21 groups were located in areas experiencing significant levels of poverty.
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25 Participants were recruited in two countries, Wales and France; a choice based on
26 the language skills of the researcher (in English and French) and the wish to relate
27 at least two EU member states with different theoretical traditions on citizenship.
28 Key differences between the two traditions are that in France *citoyenneté*, strongly
29 associated with the nation state and '*La République*', requires citizens to detach
30 themselves from any community allegiances, downplaying differences in order to
31 express themselves as individuals in a formal political arena. In the UK, in contrast,
32 citizenship is associated with social rights, the welfare state and community
33 engagement (Neveu, 2004; Vanhoenacker, 2011). Although anthropological
34 approaches in France do explore lived practices of citizenship (Neveu, 2004), the link
35 between citizenship and nation remains more fixed in France than Britain
36 (Vanhoenacker, 2011).
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40 The participants in Wales were the Disabled Children, Gypsy Travellers, and Young
41 Carers groups. In France they were Refugee, Looked After and Minority Ethnic
42 groups. The Looked After group were all living in alternative residential care, with
43 differing levels of contact with their birth families. The Refugee group members had
44 not been granted legal refugee status at the start of the research and were in a
45 process of asylum seeking: during the research some group members' statuses
46 changed. These two groups participated in the research in the places where they
47 were living: a children's home and a refugee reception centre. One group, the Gypsy
48 Travellers, took part in the research in school. The other three took part in the
49 research whilst at clubs or a play scheme. Group size varied between four and
50 sixteen members, the smallest being the Disabled Children group and the largest
51 being the Young Carers group. The 55 children were aged 5-13 years. 51% of them
52 lived in Wales and 49% in France. 65% were girls and 35% were boys.
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56 The recruitment of participants paid attention to ethical considerations, as outlined
57 by Alderson (2005), Morrow (2005) Punch (2002), particularly concerning children's
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3 freedom to consent and confidentiality. Invitations to participate were given to
4 established groups within the selected geographical areas, where host organisations
5 would commit to support action by and on behalf of the children's research goals.
6 These host organisations gave research information sheets and invitations to the
7 children they worked with. Children in all of the groups approached expressed
8 interest in participating. They were then given parental information and either
9 consent or assent forms, depending on advice from host organizations. At our first
10 meeting I offered children further opportunities for information exchange and gained
11 their signed consent to participate. Fluid consent, the freedom to withdraw from the
12 research at any time, was assured by making other activities available at the same
13 time as the research sessions. During the research process confidentiality was
14 limited by local child protection procedures. The research group members chose
15 their own pseudonyms, or asked me to choose a name for them.
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19 **Methodology and methods of fieldwork**

20 These six groups generated qualitative data through participatory reflective action,
21 drawing on the methodologies of Freire (1973). Namely, the groups were given
22 generative words, then cycled through processes of exploring their own experiences
23 and meanings, reviewing the understandings they co-created and taking action for
24 change in their own understandings and environments. The cycles of reflection were
25 facilitated by a participatory approach (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). Entirely child-led
26 research was not possible in this context, as I had set the initial focus on citizenship
27 and Europe. Instead I aimed to enable participants' self-direction over the maximum
28 range of research processes possible (Franks, 2011). The groups choose their own
29 methods and themes, analysed their own data and edited their own research reports
30 and videos.
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34 The groups met with me to do research for four to six sessions, of between an hour
35 and three hours each. Sometimes we held further sessions to edit and agree their
36 video and reports. At the first session I provided resources and activities to facilitate
37 groups to develop a range of different methods, including art materials, games,
38 voice recording, photo and video equipment. Each group took then control of the
39 direction and content of the research at different speeds; the Young Carer group set
40 their own questions and created their own methods on the first night we met. The
41 data collection activities the six groups created were video and audio interviewing,
42 performance, drawing, group discussions and site tours. The children's research
43 group members sometimes got consent to photograph, film and interview their
44 families, friends and workers during their video and photo tours, and these extra
45 contributions became part of the groups' data. At the fourth or fifth session with
46 each group I asked how citizenship should be distributed and we discussed the
47 meaning of the word 'Europe'.
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52 To facilitate groups' interaction with, ownership and coding of data, I provided them
53 with their data from previous sessions in various forms. Verbal research data was
54 made available as entire transcripts, coded and grouped data, and just codes
55 (extracts of their text on small cards, using wording agreed by the group). The
56 visual research data was made available to each group through photographs and on
57 DVD edited according to their instructions. In each session the groups reviewed the
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3 data they had previously produced, sometimes prompted by me asking questions
4 such as 'What does this mean?'. They then applied codes to sections of their videos
5 or text and chose what themes to pursue in greater detail. At the end of our
6 research they chose the content of their own group research reports and videos,
7 which four groups then used to lobby for and sometimes achieve change in their
8 local environments.
9

10 11 **Further data analysis and theory building**

12 Following the fieldwork, I reviewed and coded the few sections of their work which
13 they had not had time to code themselves. I then analysed their work using a
14 grounded approach to critical realist theory building to explore possible causal
15 mechanisms and to reflect on the interplay of agency and structure (Oliver, 2012).
16 This involved developing central process categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), and
17 then a metatheory by exploring existing accounts and their deficiencies
18 (Cruickshank, 2003). In relation to agency, I explored different dimensions of the
19 activities that emerged from the groups' codes and then explored differences within
20 these with reference to existing academic literature on citizenship practices. I then
21 tested the explanatory power of the emerging theory, by using the analytical
22 framework I had developed to explore whether it provided insights into causal
23 mechanisms linking the Children's Research Group's goals for change and EU policy.
24 This testing led to revision of some categories and clarification of some of the
25 overlaps between them.
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30 The eventual framework I identified, through which the Children's Research Group
31 members experienced citizenship, comprised five processes: domains, attitudes,
32 actions, resources and constraints. These intertwined to reveal how children held
33 and requested attitudes that can be associated with citizenship, and exercised
34 agency through their actions; creating, using and distributing resources, accepting
35 and challenging constraints. At the same time these children encountered structures
36 which imposed constraints and provided resources, sometimes expressed through
37 the actions and attitudes of institutions and other actors. My understanding of the
38 different ways the Children's Research Group members engaged in only one of these
39 processes, actions, is detailed in the rest of this article. Their understandings of the
40 relevance of Europe are reported elsewhere (Author, 2011).
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44 **Language and Limitations**

45 This work is informed by children with a range of experiences, but remains firmly
46 fixed in my position as a researcher educated in politics and sociology within the UK.
47 My interpretation of the children's perspectives aims to be a 'good enough' attempt
48 to grasp at meanings by reflecting on tensions across social positions, cultural and
49 language barriers (Temple et al., 2006). To this end, I developed generative words
50 associated with citizenship from a review of empirical research with children and
51 young people, in English and French. Following Redmond's (2003) advice on cross
52 national research on childhood, local researchers were recruited, to generate
53 understandings about their own cultural contexts and constructions of childhood. In
54 this case the researchers were children. I worked with the research groups' data in
55 their original languages during the analysis, but in this article I paraphrase in English
56 all of the Children's Research Group members' words. The theoretical literature used
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3 in relation to actions, and the citizenship process which I explore in this article, was
4 entirely in English, although this literature also influences French language writing on
5 citizenship. As in all critical realist theory building, my analysis therefore remains
6 provisional and open to revision and development. To extend differentiated
7 understanding of children's agency in citizenship, further research is therefore
8 needed with other groups of children and exploration of French theory on citizenship
9 and agency remains crucial.
10

11 Findings

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13 As an introduction to the understanding of actions that emerged from my analysis of
14 the Children's Research Groups' work, I describe below an overview of the groups'
15 key targets for change which they highlighted in their research reports and I list the
16 activities in which I identified their agency. I then explore ways in which these may
17 be seen as actions of citizenship (broadly contributing to dominant definitions of
18 social good); and Acts¹ of citizenship (transgressing established norms to rebalance
19 distributions of rights, responsibilities and status).
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21

22 Overview

23
24 The Gypsy Traveller group report asked for an end to racism, improved conditions
25 on Traveller sites and more resources at school. The Young Carers' main target for
26 change was to increase understanding of the contributions they make to the care of
27 others, and for the weight of their responsibilities to be recognised by teachers.
28 They also asked for more power, voice and choice. The Disabled Children made very
29 few demands for change, although they wanted more time at their play scheme. The
30 Looked After group asked for more opportunities to go home, for children to stop
31 fighting and falling out with each other in their children's home and for people to not
32 shout in meetings. The Minority Ethnic group wanted changes at their homework
33 club, so that there were more opportunities for play; changes in rules at school; and
34 more money, food and housing for people in need. The main focus of the Refugee
35 group's discussion was housing and a long-term home. They also wanted to change
36 the situation of children and families in refugee reception centres, so that they are
37 not shut in and can go wherever they want.
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41
42 In their discussions, all of the Children's Research Groups mentioned activities that I
43 have categorised in the following ways: contributing, influencing, making safe,
44 communicating, caring, doing education, playing/association, creating self/space and
45 (mis)behaving. Some groups also mentioned travelling or relaxing. For example,
46 children in the Looked After group created resources, and shared their resources
47 with each other, so that they had posters to put on their walls. I categorised this as
48 overlapping activities of *contributing* and *creating space*. In a second example,
49 Nathan, in the Disabled Children group, negotiated more turns on a mud slide by
50 communicating in gestures, then achieved more turns than he had negotiated, by
51 continuing going down the slide five more times. I categorised these as activities of
52 *influencing*, *communicating*, *playing* and *(mis)behaving*.
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55 Actions of citizenship: Negotiations of rules and construction of self

56 I took theories of action in citizenship that allow an expanded notion of where
57 citizenship can be located as a starting point for theory building from the groups'
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3 work. Arendt (1998: 198) sees citizenship as located in space that 'arises out of
4 acting and speaking together', that is, space that 'lies between people living together
5 for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be'. For her, citizenship action is
6 also a practice through which the self is created and revealed, by appearing to
7 others in the negotiations of social existence.
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9
10 Everyday practices of communicating and influencing to negotiate social coexistence
11 appear to readily fit with this definition. For example, members of the Young Carers
12 Group described how they communicated with each other, in a committee which ran
13 their peer led youth group. This committee influenced decisions about what
14 opportunities and resources were made available to group members.
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16
17 Arendt's focus on appearing to others might also provide a way of understanding the
18 activity of 'creating self' as an action of citizenship, when this combines with
19 negotiation of rules of social coexistence. For example, three Minority Ethnic group
20 members discussed their rules and roles within the space of their research
21 workshops. Their heated discussion, at the end of the first session, resulted in the
22 drafting of a rule which was unanimously voted in at our second session: namely,
23 that everyone should have a role in the research. This process of rule negotiation
24 during the research was perhaps particularly significant and constructive of a sense
25 of self, for these group members, as they described this being the first time they
26 had had the opportunity to set their own rules.
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29
30 Arendt's understanding of citizenship action does not, however, fit with all activities
31 the groups described. For example, Gypsy Traveller group members talked about
32 developing their sense of identity, and feeling proud, through actions of helping
33 others and looking after themselves, being part of a Gypsy community, and taking
34 part in certain traditional cultural activities. Arendt's definition of citizenship action
35 also does not accommodate other activities which all the groups discussed, such as
36 caring and doing education.
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39 **Actions of citizenship: Social Contributions**

40 Activities of caring that do not correspond to Arendt's (1998) definitions of action,
41 appear related to her definition of labour, which concerns bodily biological processes
42 of survival. All six Children's Research Groups discussed activities of this kind: caring
43 for and helping parents, workers or other children through harvesting food,
44 shopping, laying the table, washing up, cooking, giving money and personal care.
45 These activities could be social contributions in relationships of interdependence with
46 their friends, families, people they live with and neighbours. Some activities also
47 contributed to the survival of people not personally known to them, such as when
48 group members harvested food or raised money that was passed on to others
49 outside their acquaintance. All groups also described elements of social contribution
50 when they were doing education. Although this was sometimes of personal benefit,
51 they also described helping others and having to do work set by teachers. These
52 social or familial contributions have resonance with Arendt's (1998) description of
53 work that is engaged with material things and not freely undertaken.
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3 Although Arendt does not associate work or labour with citizenship, previous
4 research with young people in the UK has repeatedly included working as part of
5 definitions of what makes a good citizen (Lister et al. 2003). Lister (2007a) and
6 Qvortrup (2008) also argue that activities of caring and doing education are
7 contributions by child citizens. The argument that caring can be citizenship,
8 challenges a formal political understanding of citizenship (Lister 2007a). An action
9 may be seen to constitute social citizenship if it contributes to social benefit, such as
10 towards securing the survival of each living generation of citizens (Pateman 1992 in
11 Lister 1997). Social contributions of caring, although they may take place in what
12 have been termed 'private' spaces, may also be political (Kershaw 2005 in Lister
13 2007b). Lister therefore suggests that 'the key determinant of whether or not an
14 action constitutes citizenship should be what a person does and with what public
15 consequences, rather than where they do it' (Lister, 2007b: 57).
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20 At first glance the Children's Research Groups activities of playing, (mis)behaving,
21 travelling and relaxing appear not to be actions of citizenship in either of the two
22 senses outlined above. In some of these activities, however, groups described social
23 contributions to relationships of interdependence. For example, Gypsy Traveller,
24 Refugee and Disabled Children's Research Group members talked about playing with
25 other children as ways of making other children feel included. It could also be
26 argued that play is of social benefit because through play children contribute to their
27 own health and competences. Just as has been claimed of education, play equips
28 children with skills useful for future economic contribution and their current ability to
29 keep themselves and others safe.
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32 More often, however, the Children's Research Groups' members discussed playing,
33 travelling and relaxing for their own individual benefit. Might activities of personal
34 benefit be citizenship actions?
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37 **Actions of citizenship: Freedom to enact individuals' own rights**

38 The research group members described achieving personal benefit through some
39 aspects of playing, creating space, travelling, relaxing, communicating, influencing,
40 caring and doing education. For example, in a pair interview, Gypsy Traveller group
41 member John described achieving his right to play, on his own, in the woods. This
42 isolated action involved activities of playing, creating space and making himself safe
43 in a tree house. The importance of John enacting this right to play may have been
44 particularly significant, because his research group identified the need for the right
45 to somewhere safe to play without experiencing racism. A second example of an
46 action of personal benefit came from the Looked After children group, who talked
47 about exercising the right to silence, in an attempt to influence decisions made
48 about where they live.
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52 These actions, that further individual gains, are means by which members of
53 marginalised groups challenge some structural oppressions associated with racism
54 and generation; however they remain claims to socially agreed rights. These actions
55 might be seen as the exercise of freedom to follow self-interest, within the confines
56 of the law, which Faulks (2000) suggests is fundamental to liberal citizenship theory.
57 Actions of self-sufficiency in achieving socially acknowledged rights might also reflect
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3 neo-liberal conceptions of active citizenship, which Kennelly and Lewellyn's (2011)
4 research with young people suggests comprises actions and choices of law-abiding
5 people, geared towards increasing individual's own success and reducing their
6 demands on state provision.
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9 Children's activities of (mis)behaviour might then also be citizenship actions, to the
10 extent that (mis)behaviour can fulfil socially agreed rights that are being denied by
11 external constraints. For example, a video recorded by Refugee group member
12 Maximo, showed a group of boys disobeying the Director and enabling their right to
13 play with a worm by going outside the fence of the refugee centre. As they were
14 living in a reception centre for asylum seekers, this could be seen as refugee
15 children, in the face of the structurally confined access to space, achieving the right
16 to play, as defined by Article 31 of the UNCRC (1989). But what of actions that go
17 beyond existing definitions of rights?
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20 21 **Acts of citizenship: transgression of boundaries**

22 On some occasions, the Children's Research Group members described activities that
23 might be termed (mis)behaviour, because they transgressed the boundaries of
24 existing norms of appropriate behaviour and rights. For example, Looked After,
25 Young Carer and Minority Ethnic group members described how they broke rules at
26 school, to achieve what they described as fairness. Activities such as these may be
27 described as Acts of citizenship (Isin, 2008; Neilsen, 2008). Acts of citizenship are
28 distinct from the actions of citizenship identified above, because they do not
29 contribute to citizenship in currently accepted ways. Acts of citizenship claim shifts in
30 rights and responsibilities, new distributions of resources or a new political status
31 that stretch beyond existing boundaries, bringing 'into being new actors as activist
32 citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through creating new sites and
33 scales of justice' (Isin, 2008: 39). Acts dispute how social goods and attitudes are
34 'shared, cared for, encouraged, protected or transformed, disciplined, outlawed,
35 abandoned' in a specific time and place (Neilsen, 2008: 268).
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41 Isin (2009) gives three elements as key to understanding Acts of citizenship. First,
42 Acts create a scene of 'performance and disturbance' (2009: 379). Rather than
43 following existing scripts of citizenship (such as voting or paying tax), Acts that
44 remain political because they relate to more than two actors, use new forms,
45 technologies or practices (Isin, 2008). For example, Minority Ethnic group members
46 disturbed the established order at school, and drank water during class. They asked
47 for permission but it was not given, even though the teacher herself was drinking.
48 They then drank anyway. In this instance, the dispute is articulated through secretly
49 drinking, a performance not normally associated with being political. It was political
50 because it involved a range of actors, the pupils, the teacher and the school rules.
51 The Act claimed greater rights, for these children to quench their thirst, and less
52 disparity in status between the pupils and teacher.
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56 Isin's (2009: 381) second key principle states 'acts produce actors that become
57 answerable to justice' but he does not state a given standard of justice to which Acts
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3 are answerable. Questions of limits to justice and contexts of answerability may
4 arise from this, for example as to whether theft by a group of deprived children or
5 assassination by a terrorist, constitute Acts of citizenship. Isin does imply some
6 limits, as some Acts enact actors as activist citizens, whereas others enact actors as
7 outsiders or aliens (Isin, 2008). Neilsen (2008: 268) imposes the limit that although
8 Acts of citizenship may go beyond the law, they remain assertions of justice; they
9 must 'improvise creative but also enduring and convincing arguments for justice', be
10 situated in the specific moment of the Act, and not be exclusionary. The idea of
11 limits is also present in the Research Groups' data, as they did not see all their
12 (mis)behaviour as justified. Regarding answerability, Isin (2009) notes that actors
13 may not articulate the reasons why they act, but that those who view and interpret
14 an Act ascribe qualities, based on the grounds for an Act and its consequences. An
15 Act may then acquire its meaning for different audiences in different ways at
16 different times. Theft by a group of deprived children may, for example, may be
17 relatively hidden and answerable only to fellow children as the act occurs. It may not
18 until later be known to parents, police or more distant observers, through children's
19 communication or other forms of revelation.
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24 Exploring answerability to justice within the Minority Ethnic group example, their Act
25 created actors who were answerable to justice, the answerability to justice of the Act
26 being interpreted when it was revealed to different publics at different times. It was
27 a claim to inclusionary justice made in front of some children at the time of the Act;
28 made to other children and the researcher during the fieldwork; and, to a wider
29 public through the dissemination of their research findings. In each instance, they
30 gave the grounds for drinking as that it was fair, as the temperature in the class at
31 that moment was high and the teacher was allowed to drink. The consequence of
32 their Act was to include more people in the right to drink.
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36 Isin's third key principle reinforces that 'acts of citizenship do not need to be
37 founded on law or enacted in the name of the law' or responsibility (2009: 382), but
38 that acts create different kinds of political actors, namely 'activist citizens', claiming
39 extensions of justice; contrasted with 'active citizens', whose forms of being political
40 conform to current social expectations of citizenship behaviour (Isin, 2008, 2009).
41 Acts of citizenship, then, are those actions through which individuals or groups
42 challenge the existing relationship they have with citizenship and indeed strive to
43 redefine what citizenship means.
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46 Applying Isin's three key elements to another example from the fieldwork, Young
47 Carers group members' descriptions of a scene in which they disrupted teachers'
48 expectations and school rules may be seen as an Act of citizenship. They used the
49 performance of stealing a homework sheet. Their Act enacted them as actors
50 answerable to justice in relation to other students, teachers and the school rules.
51 They defended their Act on the grounds that they did not have the time to do their
52 homework because of their caring responsibilities. A consequence was to draw
53 attention to their need for more understanding. It disputed elements of the active
54 citizenship expected of them, with significant responsibilities for both social
55 contributions in school work and in caring for parents and siblings. It enacted them
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3 as activist citizens, of a citizenship which would give them greater rights to resources
4 such as time and answer sheets, or fewer homework responsibilities.
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8 **Discussion**

9 This research reveals a framework of four ways in which children's agency can be
10 seen as practices of citizenship. Three actions of citizenship, consistent with existing
11 social norms of citizenship and enacting what Isin (2008) terms activist citizens, can
12 be differentiated. Namely:

- 13 1. negotiation of rules and creating selves;
- 14 2. contribution to social good; and,
- 15 3. contribution to the achievement of individual's rights.

16 The fieldwork also revealed a further aspect of agency that challenges existing
17 norms of what constitutes citizenship, in ways which may be Acts of citizenship (Isin,
18 2008):

- 19 4. transgressing existing boundaries of citizenship to dispute balances of rights,
20 responsibilities and status, enacting activist citizens answerable to justice.
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24 Some tensions remain in this framework as, although Isin (2008) suggest Acts and
25 actions of citizenship are distinct, the line between these is blurred, as recognising
26 children as capable of enacting themselves as current citizens still remains a
27 challenge to dominant understandings of childhood and citizenship. Recognising
28 children's activities of social contribution as actions of citizenship challenges
29 dominant definitions, because it values children's current rather than future
30 contributions to social good. Recognising that children exercise freedoms to enact
31 their individual rights, whether these are rights in the UNCRC or fulfilling appropriate
32 responsibilities of neo-liberal citizenship, challenges notions of childhood dependence
33 and acknowledges how they are at times called upon to fulfil their own rights in the
34 absence of social provision. Demanding recognition of the value and meaning of
35 children's agency in these recognised citizenship activities, challenges definitions of
36 citizenship, and therefore may itself be an Acts of citizenship. Acknowledging that
37 children can enact themselves as holders of rights, through Acts of citizenship
38 hidden from adult view, may challenge the notion that decisions about the nature of
39 children's citizenship are determined by adults.
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44 Further, blurring between Acts and actions of citizenship occurs as different activities
45 may be interpreted differently. Resistance and transgressions at school, for example,
46 are a recurrent and international phenomenon, subject to different interpretations
47 (Devine, 2002; Castro, 2012). Likewise, in two research groups communicating in
48 collective decision-making about youth group leisure activities was not a
49 transgression, it was an action of citizenship consistent with the groups' norms and
50 rules. In a third group, however, collective communication to influence choices about
51 leisure activities was not within the norms of the group setting, and the children's
52 attempts to achieve this were punished. Whether children's activity is judged to be
53 an action or Act of citizenship, then, changes across time and space, according to
54 local and individual decisions about how performances or grounds for acts are
55 judged.
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3 Mirroring how some authors have argued practices of citizenship might include
4 aspects of caring, I have argued that some aspects of playing, can be seen as
5 practices of citizenship. Not all play is citizenship, not all caring is citizenship. But
6 part of both of these activities may be related to citizenship. Such arguments
7 challenge dominant conceptions of the meaning of citizenship and the relevance and
8 value of everyday practices. Such a challenge is necessary because children's actions
9 have been dismissed as non-political, and their calls for justice thereby ignored. This
10 occurred, for example, when rioting by children in Belfast was described as playful
11 and the political content of this practice ignored (Leonard 2010). As children remain
12 largely excluded from formal political spaces, it is vital to recognise the political
13 content of their agency, wherever and however it is performed.
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17 In contrast to assumptions that children are not citizens because they are not
18 independent, this research confirms that children's practices of citizenship contribute
19 to interdependence. Children's individual and social contributions revealed in this
20 research also show at times their self-reliance, in achieving their own rights or
21 adults' dependence on children's contributions of caring. The extent to which
22 children's citizenship practices consist of actions of individual and social contribution
23 may highlight the impact of neo-liberalism, or economic recession, on children's
24 lives. In the interests of maintaining and recognising interdependence across the
25 generations it remains, then, important to also identify other actors and institutions
26 whose social contributions might assist the achievement of children's citizenship
27 aspirations.
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30 31 **Conclusion**

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33 Citizenship is not only practiced by those children who engage in formal participatory
34 processes negotiating rules of social coexistence, such as through councils,
35 committees, forums and decision making processes. Children also enact themselves
36 as citizens through practices at least as diverse as negotiating rules of social
37 coexistence (wherever this may be), contributing to socially agreed good, and
38 fulfilling their own individual rights. The citizenship practices revealed in the
39 research show that children transgress dominant and local constructions of their
40 citizenship and childhood, contesting the justice of existing balances of rights,
41 responsibilities and status. I interpret some of these as Acts of citizenship. Out of
42 fear of reprisals, many of these challenges to existing balances of rights,
43 responsibilities and status were hidden from adult view and only revealed during this
44 research.
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49 To develop this provisional framework for exploring children's agency in citizenship,
50 further research with children is needed to create safe space in which children may
51 explore whether and how they interpret their practices as citizenship. Rather than
52 comparing children to dominant standards of citizenship or calling all of children's
53 citizenship practices participation, children's citizenship studies could usefully focus
54 on children's everyday practices, and children's interpretation of these. This may
55 generate understanding the different citizenships children aspire to. This is not to
56 deny the importance of participation, but to also value the practices through which
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children do not participate in the citizenship they are offered, but enact citizenship of a different kind.

1 *I follow Isin's (2008) protocol and always capitalise the term Acts*

For Peer Review

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