

Citizenship, self-efficacy and education: A conceptual review

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Abstract

Primary and secondary schools across the world are expected to contribute to the citizenship development of their pupils. Most citizenship curricula focus on the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of skills and attitudes. Citizenship-related self-efficacy beliefs are often neglected in the literature on citizenship education, although they appear to play a crucial role in learning processes, among others as explanatory factors for the inequalities between students in different educational tracks. As such, studies on the development of citizenship-related self-efficacy beliefs have the potential to inform practice in a way that fosters greater equality of opportunity. However, as the literature on civic and political self-efficacy uses different dimensions and conceptualizations, this poses challenges to both the scientific accumulation of knowledge and translation to teaching practices. Here, we analyse the conceptual challenges and propose a framework for the study of self-efficacy in citizenship education research that incorporates social and political tasks of citizens and distinguishes the variety of communities in which citizens perform those tasks on two axes, namely formality and size. In doing so, we argue for fine-grained distinctions based on context instead of the all-encompassing notions of civic and political self-efficacy political theorists appear to prefer. We end by discussion two normative issues.

Keywords

Citizenship education, civic efficacy, collective efficacy, political efficacy, self-efficacy

Introduction

Democracies depend on active citizens, because democratic national and local governments cannot legitimately be formed or controlled without active citizens: solving collective problems in a fair manner requires that citizens are able to and want to participate.

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Likewise, active citizens have an interest in maintaining a democratic culture and democratic institutions as it gives them freedoms, rights and a better chance to promote collective goods such as justice. As such, a reciprocal relationship exists between the institutions of democracy and the degree to which citizens are knowledgeable, skilled and prepared to engage.

With democracies under pressure worldwide (Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), 2020), parliaments have increasingly demanded of schools to provide civic or citizenship education (Veugelers et al., 2017). There are several reasons for doing so. First of all, citizenship education may protect an existing democratic culture, and therefore, the democratic quality of society as a whole (e.g. Gutmann, 1987). Second, the quality of democratic processes is expected to be higher when citizens are informed and capable of participation. Third, the inequality of democratic opportunity between citizens leads to systematic underrepresentation of certain groups, undermining democratic legitimacy (Dahl, 2008; Lijphart, 1997). For instance, political scientists have demonstrated that legislators are substantially less responsive to vocationally educated groups than they are to the academically educated in countries such as the United States or the Netherlands, among others because the vocationally educated are politically less active (Gilens, 2012; Schakel, 2019; Schakel and van der Pas, 2020).

Developing citizenship education programmes requires insights into civic competences like citizenship knowledge, skills and attitudes. These have been well studied in major national and comparative citizenship education studies (e.g. Schulz et al., 2018a; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Yet, to be motivated to act as citizen, it is also required that people believe they have the capacity to contribute to a cause. In other words, that their actions make a difference. They need to feel self-efficacious in civic matters.

While civic self-efficacy does not tend to be included in the major studies on citizenship education,¹ there are various psychological and political (empirical) studies on civic self-efficacy that citizenship education scholars can draw on. Yet, these studies are based on a variety of conceptualizations of the term which complicates a reliable and effective scientific knowledge base for the (study into the) education of civic self-efficacy. For, although various conceptualizations make sense individually, research outcomes of studies using diverging conceptualizations cannot be compared. This not only affects academic research, but also complicates matters in deciding which of these conceptualizations are relevant for informing classroom practices.

In this article, we want to improve conceptual clarity by explicating the two parts of the term and by bringing together the core elements of the various conceptualizations in a new and more complete notion of citizenship self-efficacy. First, we describe what we mean by citizenship, as a necessary demarcation of *civic* self-efficacy beliefs. Second, we refine the notion of *self-efficacy* in the context of citizenship education, extending the work of Sohl (2011). Both sections lead to the conclusion that various dimensions need to be distinguished. Finally, we discuss two implications of stimulating civic self-efficacy in schools. But before doing so, we end this introduction by describing more extensively why this topic merits attention.

The relevance of civic self-efficacy

In general, self-efficacy is an essential educational goal, as the knowledge and skills students acquire may go unused when they do not feel that they can actually perform a particular activity. Their self-efficacy beliefs motivate individuals to act in the world, rather than feeling helpless. Empirical research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs predict future learning by increasing motivation, resilience and perseverance (Hattie, 2012; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Furthermore, an unequal distribution of self-efficacy in the early years might contribute to a Matthew effect, further increasing inequalities over time, as students with high self-efficacy levels are more motivated to learn, and as a result continue to learn, further boosting their self-efficacy levels. This is also true for civic self-efficacy beliefs. Considering oneself able to influence the outside world may lead to more intentional action and engagement, increasing the number of potentially informative experiences. This in turn leads to more acquisition of experience, knowledge and skills, analogous to the positive relationship between general self-efficacy and academic learning (Hattie, 2012). Empirical research has shown that positive civic self-efficacy beliefs increase civic engagement, both in terms of motivation and future participation (Solhaug, 2006) and that differences in civic self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in the reproduction of civic inequalities (Hoskins et al., 2016). Finally, citizenship-related self-efficacy beliefs appear to be an important predictor of both (future) citizenship learning and (future) civic engagement and have proven to be malleable through education (Beaumont, 2010; Hoskins et al., 2016). This leads to the question: can education that aims to diminish differences in civic self-efficacy beliefs early in the lifespan contribute to more equal democratic and civic processes?

This question is important, because of the currently unevenly distributed levels of political and civic self-efficacy among youth, with students of lower socioeconomic status and/or in (pre-)vocational programmes consistently reporting lower average political and civic self-efficacy beliefs than students of higher socioeconomic students and/or in (pre-)academic programmes (ADKS et al., 2019; Schulz et al., 2018a; Sohl and Arensmeier, 2015), contributing to inequality in making use of civic opportunities. In our view, a just democratic society provides its youth with equal civic opportunities by stimulating civic self-efficacy. This may have the potential to address significant and problematic inequalities between students from different social backgrounds and/or different educational tracks.

However, as noted, the requirements for a reliable and effective scientific knowledge base for research into or the practice of citizenship education are not met yet, as scholars use different conceptualizations and operationalizations of civic efficacy and related terms such as political efficacy (Morrell, 2003). This will be illustrated in the next section, in which we will offer a conceptual clarification of civic self-efficacy and related terms.

Clarity of concepts used to describe education for civic self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy was popularized by Bandura (1977, 1982); denoting persons' belief in their capacity to execute a particular task. Self-efficacy is a belief comparable to self-confidence in its positive evaluation of an aspect of oneself, but

self-efficacy is more specific in that it relates one's abilities to *tasks* one may pursue in the world rather than for instance one's general self-image. Within the self-efficacy literature, a further distinction has been made between general self-efficacy and specific self-efficacy. An example of general self-efficacy is that one is a competent learner, the civic self-efficacy that we are interested in here is an example of a specific type of self-efficacy.

Empirical studies demonstrate that the concept of self-efficacy is most predictive of engagement when it is operationalized for specific domains, contexts and tasks (e.g. Bandura, 1989; Pajares, 1996; Wollman and Stouder, 1991). While one may feel generally efficacious in sports, such a feeling does not predict, engagement with or performance in a specific sport such as football, nor would self-efficacy beliefs in football predict performance or self-efficacy beliefs in other sports like swimming or in a completely different area like maths.

Given that people's self-efficacy is related to both the context in which one acts as well as what is specifically required in that context, we first need to describe what we mean by citizenship.

Citizens' membership of and civic action in communities

For the purpose of this article, we stipulate a rather broad description of citizenship. We take citizenship as a particular type of *membership* of or *role* in a community and the concomitant tasks one performs as a community member – the tasks that are expected or that community members as citizens expect of themselves.² Our interpretation of citizenship includes, but is explicitly wider than the standard description of a citizen as being an inhabitant of a city or a town or being a member of a state³ whose civic status is recognized in possessing civic rights and privileges (as explicated in liberal descriptions of citizenship, such as Callan, 1997; Gutmann, 1987; Rawls, 1993) and having particular duties (that are stressed in republican descriptions) against fellow citizens and towards local governments or the state (e.g. Sandel, 1996; Sullivan, 1986). The width lies in the types of communities in which one can have a role as citizen that include, as we will describe below, classrooms and religious communities too. While the general citizenship literature rightly emphasizes citizenship as a *legal status* and critically reflects on which legal and material requirements are necessary for citizenship (such as civil, political and social rights (Marshall, 1950), here, we focus on the *capacities* of individuals and groups *to act* as (or in their role of) a citizen, which is more in line with the citizenship education literature (Keating et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2010; Torney et al., 2008).

The activities we have in mind are those that have a political or a social quality. By social activities, we mean that one aims to contribute to the well-being of other members of a community or the entire community, either directly or through the environment in which the community lives – for example, by volunteering for activities such as cleaning up the neighbourhood or offering free tutoring services to families that cannot afford it. By political activities, we mean that one aims to influence the power relations, the expected ways of interaction and rules of distribution of goods within or between communities – such as advocating for gay marriage within a religious community or organizing a boycott against multinationals that pollute the environment or drive local shops

out of business. In societies or communities where citizens are granted individual rights, such conflicts are an inherent consequence of the differences allowed by these rights and require acceptance of each other as agonistic opponents rather than antagonist enemies (see Mouffe, 2005). The political entails, as Flanagan (2013) puts it: '[. . .] membership in communities and the processes and practices whereby we work with fellow members of those communities to determine the kind of communities, society, and world we want to live in' (p. 2). Thus, as we see it, being a citizen is a particular *role* in all communities one is member of outside one's family.

We subscribe to a relatively minimal interpretation of 'community', namely as a group of people with mutual dependencies. This encloses a wide variety in size and kind, such as classes, schools, social and religious communities, and political communities, at different geographical levels (see also Biesta et al., 2009; Cogan et al., 2000; Davies, 2006; Lee and Leung, 2006; Osler, 2011; Serriere, 2014). On the one end, we find small communities that share values and traditions with high barriers to entry and exit (e.g. Bellah et al., 1996; Noddings, 1996; Young, 1986), on the other end, a global community that primarily has a degree of shared fate without necessarily having shared values. For instance, on a global scale, actions of every inhabitant of the world that affect the climate also affect the livelihoods of people in other locations across the globe. And in between, we find among others the nation state in which people can be said to experience a shared fate (Van Gunsteren, 1998). Ben-Porath (2012), for instance, suggests,

Shared fate encompasses the diversity of visions, affiliations, and values that citizens hold, and it also seeks to weave the historical, political, and social ties among members of the nation into a form of affiliation that would sustain their shared political project. (p. 381)⁴

But we can also think of a classroom in which students are dependent on each other for the production of an atmosphere that is safe and conducive to learning. In communities, current values and norms are cherished, new norms emerge, and tensions or conflicts arise between individual members, between individuals and the community or between communities. All these situations can be considered citizenship situations.

It might run against linguistic intuition to call members of religious communities or sport clubs citizens. But again, we do not refer to membership per se. What we mean is that when they undertake particular activities, namely the activities of a political or social nature concerning the state of the community or its members, they act as citizens of these communities. Or put differently, there are particular tasks expected of members of communities and the political or social tasks we call civic tasks.

Given the diversity of communities, it is unlikely that one feels equally self-efficacious across the whole range of communities. Previous studies indeed show that one may feel self-efficacious in one community, while not in the other (De Groot et al., 2014). Therefore, in reflecting on civic self-efficacy and its education, we propose to distinguish different types of communities. In doing so, we also need to draw on the aforementioned insight that the predictive power of self-efficacy increases not only when it is domain-specific, but task-specific as well (Bandura, 1989; Pajares, 1996; Wollman and Stouder, 1991). Hence, it is helpful to distinguish between types of communities that

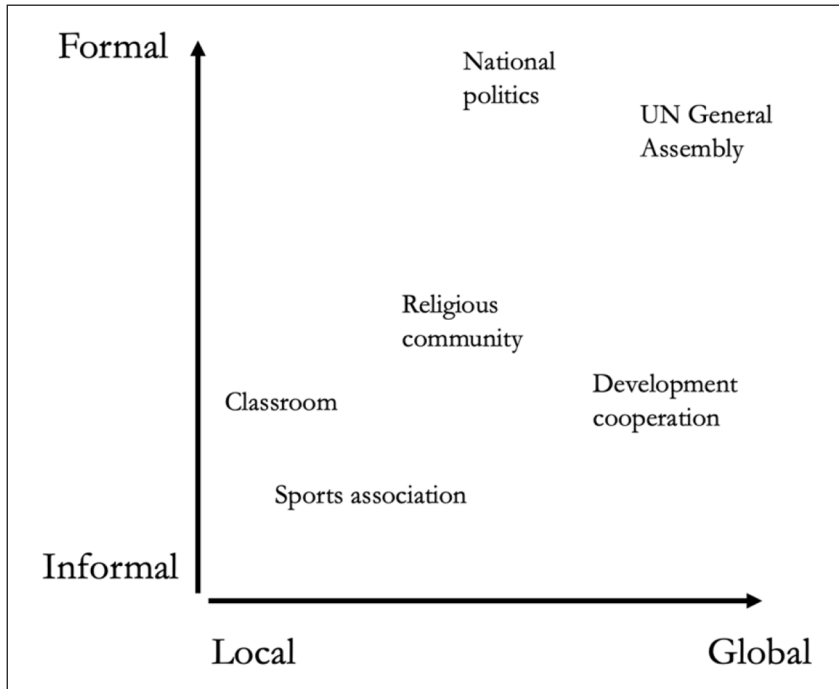


Figure 1. A framework of types of communities to plot civic self-efficacy.

acknowledge the different types of tasks that are required to operate effectively in community interactions.

Hence, we consider two dimensions as informative for categorizing different types of civic self-efficacy: scale and degree of formalization (see Figure 1). The first dimension consists of the scale of the community, ranging from local to global.⁵ This is a relevant dimension in multiple ways. First, the scale gives an indication of the number of members in a given community and the degree to which they represent themselves or use representatives. In general, it is often possible to resolve issues in group of seven people among themselves, but not in a community with, say 35,000 members. It is no coincidence that modern, national democracies are not governed by the same practices and procedures as the Athenian democracy once was. Second, larger geographic scales tend to introduce more variety not only in community members but also their environments. This translates in more diverging geopolitical interests, which increases the difficulty of coming to mutually satisfying decisions in collective problems. The second dimension denotes the degree to which the tasks involved in solving conflicts, discussions and decision-making in a given community are formalized, or bound by rules, procedures and institutions. Whereas the average neighbourhood community tends to be organized in a rather informal fashion or not all, political communities such as municipalities or nations tend to be characterized by an entire system of rules, procedures and institutions in which governments are indirect instruments for addressing collective problems with democratic mandates. Navigating

such systems requires knowledge and skills that are specific to formal contexts, although relevant similarities across formal contexts may exist, for instance, on how they regulate the exchange of arguments and provide checks and balances.

The framework can be used to illustrate that every type of community places specific demands on the citizenship of its members.⁶ This is important to acknowledge in research on the practice of citizenship education, as young citizens will act in multiple communities both in the present and the future. Having developed civic self-efficacy in one community (e.g. the classroom), does not immediately result in civic self-efficacy in a different community (e.g. a neighbourhood or society at large). For instance, resolving a global problem such as climate change in the United Nations involves the task of thoroughly analysing the interdependencies between countries and navigating cultural differences, while being more bound to detailed decision-making procedures. It requires levels of abstract thinking as well as knowledge about many cultures and high sensitivity of differences on one hand, but one's creativity in negotiations and decision-making is perhaps less drawn upon. In a primary school class, on the other hand, one would seek to account for differences in the capacities of its members to ensure inclusion of every pupil in discussion and decisions. This places special demands on the use of language in order to keep discussion accessible for everyone, for example, but features presumably less demanding procedures for aligning the interests of pupils as compared to the typical United Nations assembly.

Thus, each specific community places specific demands on its members for operating effectively in political and social matters, such as knowledge of the community's history, the interaction preferences of individual members, coalitions within the community or how reality is perceived by the various members. Moreover, some of these requirements for engaging effectively in the community can only be acquired by being active in the community, such as being held in esteem. At the same time, there are skills that are relevant for civic tasks in every community, such as the ability to voice one's convictions, perspective taking ability and the ability to resolve conflicts between individual and collective interests or between competing collective interests. Thus, we suggest making a distinction between the following three types of competences: strictly specific to the community, general, and general with a level or dimension that is community specific. For example, being able to interpret holy scriptures is a competence specific to religious communities, while critical thinking skills are necessary to separate facts from fiction in order to provide a common starting point for conflict resolution in any community. An example of a competence, that is, relevant in all communities, but requires community-specific levels of proficiency is conflict resolution – as one requires this less so in a sports association than in, say, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Citizenship encompasses a wide range of communities in which one may choose to participate and make a difference, from a social community within school to supranational political communities (Davies et al., 2005; Mohan, 1995; Richardson and Abbott, 2009). The proposed classification enables the identification of community-specific characteristics that influence the types of civic tasks required of its current and future members. Distinguishing the various communities provides a more fine-grained understanding of civic self-efficacy, acknowledging that tasks like negotiation or critical

thinking ask something different of citizens in the various communities. To these tasks, we now turn.

Self-efficacy in civic tasks. Having described various types of communities, the second part of this article will deal with the notion of self-efficacy in civic tasks. After discussing the different conceptualizations currently in use, we extend Sohl's (2011) work by going beyond individual civic self-efficacy.

The origin of the word efficacy comes from the Latin verb *efficere*, or to accomplish. Where efficacy refers to the ability to produce a desired or intended result, self-efficacy is generally used to describe belief in one's ability to produce a desired or intended result. This distinction is relevant, as one may believe to be able to accomplish a task, while in reality falling short, and vice versa. The academic use of the concept of self-efficacy has been a matter of debate, however, Sohl (2011) has provided a compelling analysis of the diversity in use of political self-efficacy, on which we will draw in this section. While our interest lies not only in political self-efficacy but spans the entire domain of citizenship, the analysis presented by Sohl is relevant for our purposes as well.

Conceptualizations of political self-efficacy have mainly been provided by two disciplines: political science and psychology. Political scientists were the first to use the concept of political self-efficacy (also known as 'political efficacy') in the 1950s. They initially conceptualized political self-efficacy as 'feelings of having an impact on the political process as an individual citizen', combining a judgement of oneself as political actor and the degree to which political change is possible in the society of interest. In the next decades, political scientists distinguished two dimensions by introducing the concepts of internal political efficacy and external political efficacy. *Internal* political efficacy consists of an individual's perception of being able to understand political processes and take part in political actions. In contrast, *external* political efficacy refers to beliefs about the degree to which a political system is responsive to political efforts from the public (Sohl, 2011).

Within psychology, political self-efficacy has been studied within the frameworks of motivation theory and cognitive theory since the 1970s (Sohl, 2011). Believing that one is *able to impact the environment* is an important ingredient for motivation, according to motivation theorists (Deci and Ryan, 2008; McClelland, 1975; White, 1959). In contrast, cognitive theory about self-efficacy focuses on perception of control and *the ability to perform actions* (e.g. Bandura, 1997; Rotter, 1966). Where most motivational theorists stress the importance of having a sense of influence (outcome expectation), the cognitive theories emphasize the need to feel competent or able (ability belief). These views need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, civic efficacy requires both, resulting from an evaluation of one's ability to perform a certain task that changes or influences the external environment or outcome.⁷ Such outcome beliefs are inherent to the tasks at hand. After all, citizenship is about being able to fulfil a role in communities. Even if one chooses not to engage in a certain matter, such non-engagement has an influence on the outcome, as it gives greater weight to members in the community who do act, vote or speak up.

Sohl (2011) identifies multiple critiques of conceptualizations of political self-efficacy in political science and psychology, of which we will re-iterate two here. First of

all, against the ability conceptions within psychology, she notes that conceptualizing internal political efficacy without any notion of influence or outcome expectations does not do justice to the political in political self-efficacy. In activities such as sports or academic work that are not necessarily aimed at the well-being of others, it may not be a problem if they go unnoticed. Political actions, however, inherently aim to affect others, as politics is concerned with the relations people in a community have with one another. Sohl notes that multiple conceptualizations have started incorporating influence or outcome expectations.⁸ Bandura (1997), in his later work on political self-efficacy, also acknowledges that a feeling of influence, not just ability, needs to be a part of the conceptualization. Second, in Sohl's view, political scientists are mistaken to perceive of external political efficacy as a form of efficacy. She suggests that it should be treated as a separate concept, namely as perceived system responsiveness. Empirical studies support this distinction by demonstrating how individuals with high internal political self-efficacy and low perceived responsiveness of the political system do find ways to engage politically, often outside of conventional ways of participation (Craig, 1980). As such, external political efficacy or perceived system responsiveness does not predict political participation or internal political self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2009; Levi and Stoker, 2000; Yeich and Levine, 1994). This is also illustrated by people who engage civically against great odds, such as the early civil rights movement in the United States (Abramson, 1983; Liebschutz and Niemi, 1974; McAdam et al., 1988), or recently Greta Thunberg and the Black Lives Matter movement.

In our view, Sohl improves existing conceptualizations by addressing their weaknesses and incorporating empirical findings. Her proposed definition of political efficacy is *an individual's perception of her/his abilities to execute political actions aimed at producing political change in society*. In this multidisciplinary version, the emphasis is put on internal political efficacy, which includes outcome expectancies (Sohl, 2011). Sohl's definition can easily be applied to the wider range of communities that we described in the former section and to social tasks as well. The definition would then be an individual's perception of her or his abilities to execute social and political actions in a community.

A sense of collective civic efficacy matters, too. We subscribe to Sohl's analysis, but do believe an argument can be made for an extension of her conceptualization to account for collective civic efficacy. In the previous section, we outlined our thinking about the scale and formality of communities as relevant dimensions that current accounts of civic self-efficacy do not take into account. Here, we supplement this analysis by drawing attention to the fact that these communities as a collective also (have to) experience civic efficacy. A large part of the citizenship and citizenship education literature focuses on individual citizenship knowledge, attitudes and skills. However, citizenship situations often require some form of collective action. Therefore, one's belief that the group one feels a part of (or a group one is able to bring together for a joint cause) can bring about change is relevant too – in particular, as some challenges feel daunting when considered as an individual, but feasible as a group. We therefore argue that a sense of collective efficacy should be distinguished from individual self-efficacy, and that this distinction is particularly

relevant when studying citizenship and citizenship education in larger communities. This insight is recognized in a more general form by Bandura (2000):

The growing interdependence of human functioning is placing a premium on the exercise of collective agency through shared beliefs in the power to produce effects by collective action. [...] Perceived collective efficacy fosters groups' motivational commitment to their missions, resilience to adversity, and performance accomplishments.

Within the fields of social geography and political science, the distinction between individual civic self-efficacy and a sense of collective civic efficacy is more routinely made and the importance of the latter highlighted. A collective sense of efficacy has been shown to be associated with reductions in violent crime, lower obesity rates and a reduced fear of crime, among other outcomes (Browning et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2006; Gibson et al., 2002; Sampson et al., 1997). Where high individual self-efficacy may contribute towards a higher sense of collective efficacy, the relationship between the two senses of efficacy is not one in which a collective sense of efficacy is a simple product of the sense of personal efficacy members in a given community have, or vice versa. Specifically, the translation of an individual sense of self-efficacy to a collective sense efficacy appears to be catalysed by bonding social capital. Specifically, it appears that when members of a community are able to build relationships of trust, they perceive a greater sense of collective efficacy. A reverse relationship has also been found: personal civic engagement can also contribute to bonding social capital, suggesting that engagement in civic activities provides opportunity to form trusting relationship with other community members (Collins et al., 2014; Putnam, 2000). Finally, other studies report that civic engagement, individual self-efficacy and a sense of collective efficacy may strengthen one another (Ohmer, 2007).

In the context of democratic states, collective civic efficacy may emerge in different communities. As such, it may improve bonding when a community successfully resolves intra-communal conflicts and finds shared norms and values. However, collective civic efficacy may also undermine bridging, by escalating tensions between communities. Hence, stimulating collective efficacy is not sufficient as a guarantee for non-violent, democratic ways of co-existing.

Implications for education

In this article, we have identified civic self-efficacy as a potential lever for citizenship development – both individually, and as a way to reduce inequality in citizenship opportunities between students of different educational groups.⁹ In particular, we have attempted to clarify the conceptual framework of self-efficacy in relation to citizenship and its consequence for citizenship education. The literature portrays numerous diverging conceptualisations of civic self-efficacy. For instance, as mentioned in the first note, the comparative International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz et al., 2018b) equates civic self-efficacy with the belief or estimation that one has a particular skill and various studies within political science still refer to perceptions of system responsiveness as external political efficacy (e.g. Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020; Geurkink

et al., 2020). This variation in conceptualization is problematic, as it renders studies incomparable and hampers translation to practice.

Importantly, we identify citizenship as membership of or a role in a given community, where a community entails a group of people with mutual dependencies. This notion of community is shared by various scholars and educators who see classrooms as micro-societies. Moreover, it is in line with research that indicates that what is seen as a political action is getting broader (Dalton et al., 2004; Norris, 2002). Second, we have distinguished different types of community, by introducing two dimensions: scale and degree of formalization. These dimensions show that relevant civic competences that are given the same name such as negotiating, open-mindedness or critical thinking are qualitatively different within communities of different size and formality and therefore that the concomitant (absence of) civic self-efficacy beliefs vary qualitatively as well. This enables a specification of civic competences that are required for the study into and practice of citizenship education. Third, we have extended Sohl's notion of civic self-efficacy by including non-political communities, stressing the importance of social civic activities, and by incorporating the notion of collective civic self-efficacy. The current scientific literature on self-efficacy in the context of citizenship does not conform to refined conceptualizations such as Sohl's or ours as yet. Finally, we have claimed that self-efficacy is an important aspect of active citizenship and therefore should be a part of citizenship education.

We end with an exploration of two issues that show that education for civic self-efficacy in schools is necessary but not sufficient for civic self-efficacy that students will need in society. First, we have argued that civic self-efficacy differs between types of communities, which implies that civic education in the school or the school as a civic community is not enough – being a democratic lab in which students (self-efficacy in) democratic skills and attitudes are fostered, does not mean that they thereby learn these for the level of society too. Second, civic self-efficacy is a morally neutral belief that can motivate people to promote a democratic society or to undermine it. Thus, civic self-efficacy is in itself not a desirable aim of education (is not sufficient), but needs to be complemented by democratic citizenship education to make it so.

The first point we address is a practical (didactical or curricular) educational issue. Fostering the development of civic self-efficacy in schools is a good thing – particularly for students who come from communities or families in which their civic self-efficacy is not furthered. This could be the case because they grow up in a community or family in which there is no possibility to practice their civic-like activities, for instance, because their parents have an autocratic parenting style that gives no room for the input of children. Other children grow up in communities that have lost faith in democracy and the possibility that they can influence the state and society towards a fairer treatment. For these students, schools can be an important place to practice their civic activities, for instance, in negotiations in the classroom, working together with students with diverse backgrounds and possibilities, developing social rules in the school, school elections, school senate. Practicing with these civic activities is also beneficial for students from backgrounds that further their civic skills within the community or whose parents foster their civic self-efficacy beliefs. For we have said that having civic self-efficacy in one

community does not automatically mean that one has these beliefs in other communities as well, because these involve other tasks and concomitant skills.

That civic activities are community related also means that practicing civic activities in the school may enhance civic self-efficacy in this community. Yet, it does not necessarily translate to the level of society. This conclusion in our view has three implications for schools that want to foster civic self-efficacy in their students. First, citizenship education also needs to involve activities outside the school in neighbourhoods or political activities at national level. Community service projects, for instance, do not only give students the opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and (social and moral) attitudes (for which they are often introduced), but they can also enhance their civic self-efficacy. Another example would be to involve students in local politics when these concern the students as well. Particularly students who are apprehensive to participate may be more interested and willing if the issue concerns something that affects their school, a community they are a member of or their own well-being, for instance, the speed limit around the school or in the neighbourhood or facilities to play (from a play garden to a skateboard or basketball field). Second, we do not want to deny that practicing with civic tasks in schools can support the development of self-efficacy in civic tasks in larger communities. While civic self-efficacy does not generalize or (fully) transfer to other communities as the tasks to which they are related are qualitatively different, acquired civic self-efficacy may lower the threshold to engage in civic tasks in larger communities. Therefore, while it is not enough, fostering civic self-efficacy in schools is certainly useful. Yet, the acquired self-efficacy in the school may give students the erroneous belief that they will therefore also be effective in larger communities. Thus, third, for any sustained development of civic self-efficacy within other and larger communities, students need to (learn to) be hopeful and realistic at the same time. Without hope, they may not take up tasks in other communities and begin to develop civic self-efficacy in those contexts too, but without being realistic it is quite likely that reality will squash such beliefs as soon as they are turned into action (Beaumont, 2010).

The second point is a normative educational issue. Civic self-efficacy is a morally neutral quality that can accompany social and political convictions that are morally wrong because they are unfair, discriminatory or in other ways undermining democratic society. For instance, white supremacy activists or the rioters who attacked the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 do not seem to lack civic self-efficacy.¹⁰ An evaluation of the civic tasks members perform is informed by implicit or explicit ethical norms present in the community. For instance, at the level of society in most democratic countries, that ethical core is provided by liberal democratic values and obligations, such as respect for the rule of law, the willingness to resolve conflicts non-violently, respect for civil and political rights, and the willingness and ability to make decisions in a democratic manner. Such an ethical core inhibits the freedom of its members. Their negative freedom is limited by norms and laws, ranging from the concrete ‘thou shalt shake hands to signify respect for another’ to the more abstract ‘thou shalt not discriminate’. But limiting the negative freedom of the newcomers¹¹ of the community – by instilling them with knowledge, skills and insights – also widens their positive freedom to act in relevant communities.¹²

The question is therefore if schools should aim to ensure that self-efficacy of citizens is related to democratic causes. We believe that schools should do so, but that the

standards should be low and concern those of the ethical core of a democratic society we just mentioned. This means, for instance, that the expression of partisan convictions should not be sanctioned or corrected, unless they are of anti-democratic nature (Ben-Porath, 2017). Where the boundary lies precisely and how the teacher should respond require a professional judgement and continuing dialogue between teachers. For it matters not only what is said, but also how things are said and who says something. The teacher often has to decide in a split second whether to confront a student with a morally wrong conviction in a direct manner or to more openly discuss convictions of students in a classroom. The latter gives students the opportunity to discover where their convictions are coming from, whether the assumptions made are based on reality, and what consequences such convictions might have (see also Sieckelinck et al., 2015). As such, students who voice anti-democratic convictions should ideally be stimulated to scrutinize their perspectives for educational purposes, rather than simply being told that they are wrong, as long the schools' aim to maintain democracy is not threatened or other students are not excluded from the classroom discussion. Beyond this minimum schools should be politically neutral. This does not mean that teachers cannot express their political views, but implies that the school does not have the intention to promote a particular political view be it that they have to promote the rules of democracy and thus have to set boundaries as to which political views are regarded as acceptable in the school.

Yet, this minimal standard can still lead to frictions between the families or communities in which students grow up and in theory reduce or undermine civic self-efficacy of students who do need the support in schools.¹³ With the danger of presenting a stereotypical example: Think, for instance, of students growing up in racist families with connections to neo-Nazi communities, but whose families are dedicated to such ideas because they believe that migrants have taken away their jobs and that they therefore live in dire circumstances without a possibility to escape. Here, teachers face a challenging balancing act: they have to acknowledge the (economic and social) plight of the families of these students that also undermines the civic self-efficacy of the families, but they also have to teach students that the values of their parents cannot be condoned in the school and that there are other ways in which justice in society can be pursued that are within the limits of the core values of a democracy. In contrast to the values and beliefs of the parents, schools have to foster students' belief that they can make a difference in a democratic way. Or think of the opposite: students who grow up in orthodox migrant families who are silenced by the majority view. For this group of students, the development of civic self-efficacy would be important to give them the boost to engage in social and political matters in the neighbourhood or at national level. For the fact that the convictions of their parents are negatively evaluated may inhibit their belief that they can speak openly (obstructing learning about civic matters) or in contrast give them the belief that they should not act, as the way they have picked up in their family is considered wrong. While this is important for the students (and the democratic process of a society), this does have the danger of the so-called spill-over effect, that is, that citizenship education influences the students' perception and adoption of the conception of the good their parents promote. This will indeed happen if the convictions of the parents do not meet the minimal democratic standards we proposed. Furthermore, promoting civic self-efficacy and speaking out in public may not cohere with certain orthodox beliefs – it may not be

regarded as appropriate for women, for instance. Yet, as democracies depend on citizens who are able to use their political and social voice and that this also serves the interests of the citizens, schools have to foster civic self efficacy of these students too. However, it should be expected of schools that they do so in a way that does not inhibit these students' belief that they can speak openly about the faith of their family. If students feel ridiculed, they may become less confident or lose interest in democratic processes. In other words, stimulating civic self-efficacy puts demands on the cultural sensitivities of teachers.

Both the minimal standards of what may be said in the school and the tension between convictions of the family and the school show that enhancing civic self-efficacy can lead to educational challenges and requires wisdom of teachers and school leaders. Yet, difficult as this task may be, it is necessary in order to show students the potential of democracy and prevent individuals who experience or perceive grave injustices from using non-democratic means, feeling powerless, or becoming disengaged altogether. That would not only be a disservice to these students, but to (the legitimacy of) democracy as whole.

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Notes

1. An exception is the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS), which incorporates a measure of civic self-efficacy. However, the authors in our view do not operationalize citizenship-related self-efficacy beliefs properly. Instead, the study uses a scale that consists of items which are self-reports of citizenship skills ('How well are you able to perform activity X?' Schulz et al., 2018b).
2. While one may critically analyse the problems pertaining to the issue which individuals or groups are granted membership, which does have an implication for (the growth of) civic self-efficacy, we do not deal with this matter here.
3. In our explication of civic self-efficacy and how this can be promoted, we do presume that the communities are democratic, but we do not stipulate a particular type of democracy. This is not necessary for the explication of civic self-efficacy. We do, however, acknowledge that concepts and conceptions of democracy and concomitant ideas of citizenship influence the type of political or social action and required capacities for which one needs to have belief

in oneself. For example, a deliberative democracy, which is defended by many influential political philosophers such as Habermas, Rawls, Cohen, Gutmann, Young, who again defend particular conceptions, asks for citizens who are among others rational and reasonable, having reasoning skills, the willingness to accept the majority outcome of the deliberation and be tolerant.

4. The idea of shared fate as a characteristic of citizenship is explored in a special issue of *Educational Theory* (vol 62, no 4), edited by Michael Merry.
5. Although communities may be nested and interrelated, individuals may, of course, be member of multiple communities at the same time.
6. And indeed, communities that uphold different types of democracies also differ in the specific demands they put on their members. One needs different skills in a community that primarily decides by majority vote as compared to a community that employs highly deliberative ways of decision-making.
7. As illustrated by motivation theories that explicitly include ability beliefs, such as self-determination theory.
8. Such as Yeich and Levine (1994), Caprara et al. (2009) and Sylvester (2010), among others.
9. Note, though, that stimulating civic self-efficacy should not be seen as an alternative to reducing systemic structural inequalities. Both are necessary to provide equal citizenship opportunities. See also Kahne and Westheimer (2006).
10. We thank one of the reviewers for the suggestion to incorporate this example.
11. Be they members of young generations or immigrants.
12. Relevant communities are at least the national democratic community, and others deemed relevant by schools.
13. This issue resonates with the one that was discussed among philosophers of education and political philosophers around the turn of the century. In that debate diversity liberal philosophers like Galston (2002), Kymlicka (2002), autonomy liberals such as Callan (1997), Brighouse (1998), Levinson (1999) and communitarians like Arthur and Bailey (2000) discussed the relative responsibility and rights of parents and the state (through schools) to educate children into a particular conception of the good life both in relation to the content of mandatory citizenship education and the autonomy of children. While they all defended the importance of education for democratic citizenship (of which Gutmann's (1987) idea of conscious social reproduction as defended in her seminal book *Democratic Education* is probably the best known), they differed among others on whether this should be conceived of as *liberal* democratic citizenship education and therefore should include the aim of autonomy and critical thinking, the comprehensiveness of mandatory citizenship education (i.e. based on a thin or thick conception of democratic citizenship, for example, McLaughlin, 1992), whether or not separate religious schools should be funded by the state (see, for instance, Spinner-Halev, 2000), the compatibility of religious education and education for autonomy, for example, if parents had the right to withdraw their children from (citizenship education) classes that do not cohere with their conception of the good (Levinson, 1999) and what the state should offer to (minority) communities to be able to continue to live their lives according to their conception of the good (e.g. Kymlicka 2002).

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