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Published online: 14 May 2025.

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Children's rights in, and to, the city: everyday life, education and empowerment in London and Glasgow

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ABSTRACT

Research in children's geographies and connected fields has enhanced knowledge of children's lives, spatialities, mobilities and agency in cities. Drawing on a small-scale project – co-constructed with a teacher in London and a teacher in Glasgow – this article examines the relationships between education and children's rights in, and to, the city. The research asked young people aged 11–12 years to draw/map their city and dream city and to engage with a questionnaire about their rights in education and everyday life. Analysis identified that the young people who participated, valued the city in which they lived but wished to make improvements to make it more liveable for themselves and those they share it with. The research found that young people actively considered (their own) lived citizenship when reflecting on their rights and that whilst they had often been taught about their rights, many did not feel confident in sharing their views on things that mattered to them. The article concludes by arguing for further research to examine the relationships between how citizenship is conceptualised in education policies, the curriculum-making done by teachers, and how young people with different identities and in different places experience the relationships between their (lived) citizenship and what they learn in schools.

Introduction

Cities are 'extraordinarily complex entities – a mangle of machines, infrastructures, humans, non-humans, institutions, networks, metabolisms and nature – where coming together is itself constitutive of urbanity and its radiating effects' (Amin and Thrift 2017, 11). As Massey (2008) explains, cities are open spaces connected to other places through people arriving and leaving, trade, politics, digital connections, environmental processes, power relations and cultural influences. The processes of geographical change that shape cities also raise questions around who citizens are in 'such a constantly evolving polity', and how they engage in political participation (Kallio, Wood, and Häkli 2020, 721). These questions are especially important when considering those who may be removed from decision-making in national as well as everyday spaces, for example, people

whose national status is unclear or partial, people living in poverty, and children and young people (Freeman 2009; Kallio, Wood, and Häkli 2020).

The relationships between children and citizenship are complex. Young people's lives vary within and between places, and their experiences of citizenship relate to 'their positioning within communities and nations, their geopolitical positioning, their outlooks, their experiences, their subjectivities, and their political goals and values' (Staeheli 2019, 3). Young people are often expected to follow laws before they are enfranchised (Freeman 2009) and may be conceptualised as citizens-in-waiting (Percy-Smith 2015; Starkey et al. 2014). There are competing and sometimes paradoxical discourses about young people's citizenship, which may position them as positive agents of change, or a threat to social and political stability (Wood 2022).

Engagement with children's rights and using rights-based approaches can shift the focus to treating children 'as capable participants and partners in decision-making' (van Vilet and Karsten 2015, 2). In urban planning, van Vilet and Karsten (2015, 2) argue that children's rights extend to their rights *in* the city ('their access to urban resources which affect their life chances') and their rights *to* the city ('opportunities for meaningful participation in urban development'). Building on this theorisation, this article examines the relationships between education and children's rights in, and to, the city in London and Glasgow. Through engaging with literature from across children's geographies, children's rights, citizenship education and urban geography, the article argues the importance of critical consideration of the relationships between formal schooling and children's lived citizenship (Kallio, Wood, and Häkli 2020; Percy-Smith 2015). As children have, at times, been disempowered in both education and society (Biddulph 2011; Catling 2014), the term empowerment aims to support consideration of if, and how, young people feel that education supports their citizenship.

As children shape, and are shaped by, the places in which they live, play and study, and there are injustices in knowledge production, it is important to note that much of the literature engaged with was written in, or about, the contexts of the research or other Western countries. The terms children and young people are used interchangeably to reflect the literature engaged with, with the participants being referred to as young people to reflect their age and recent transition to secondary school.

Children's rights in, and to, the city

Cities are designed, constructed, negotiated, imagined and experienced, with some people having more power to access, influence and alter systems, processes and spaces than others (Freeman and Tranter 2011). The design and use of cities are reflective of diverse historical and cultural understandings of people and places (Hörschelmann and van Blerk 2012), and children's lives and childhoods within them are 'multiple and variable and they are emergent, predicated upon social, political, historical, geographical and moral contexts' (Aitken 2018, 17). Children use and (re)produce the city (Ergler, Freeman, and Guiny 2022), with social processes such as racial discrimination and its structural influences also shaping urban spaces and the experiences of young people (Cope 2006).

Children are one of the largest social groups in all cities, but especially so in Global Majority countries (Kraftl 2019). Young people are 'visible and vibrant presences' (Skelton and Gough 2013, 456) in cities, who often spend significant amounts of time in their neighbourhoods and have nuanced knowledge of local areas (Kraftl 2019). Despite this, children and young people are sometimes represented as being incompatible with (Bourke 2017), or out of place in, cities (Freeman and Tranter 2011). Narratives and fears of the 'social and moral ills of contemporary urban life' (Mills 2022, 51) have led to children being (in)advertently managed out of public spaces and/or into specific places (e.g. playgrounds) through architecture, policies and social norms (Kyttä et al. 2018). Children's lives in cities are often patrolled by adults including parents and policy-makers (Kraftl 2019) who may use power structures to control young people's experiences and

spatialities (Skelton 2009). The social construction of 'the child' in the city, can lead to young people feeling or being marginalised or misrepresented in discussions over city space (Butcher and Dickens 2016).

Engaging with children's experiences and imaginations of cities can help adults to better understand their lives and the spaces they (re)produce, which is significant in considering 'how we, as adults, enable or constrain them in the process of making the world anew' (Aitken 2018, 19). Until recently, young people were 'relatively absent in the *academic* work that attempted to understand, decipher and explain the city' (Skelton and Gough 2013, 256, emphasis in original). However, research in children's geographies and connected fields has examined children's relationships with cities (Freeman and Tranter 2011) and enhanced knowledge of their im/motilities; their health; their relationships; their experiences of tensions and in/justices; changing cultural values; and young people's socio-spatial and political agency (Aitken 2018; Butcher and Dickens 2016; Cope 2006; Ergler, Freeman, and Guiny 2022; Freeman and Tranter 2011; Hammond 2021; Hörschelmann and van Blerk 2012; Kraftl 2019; Skelton 2022). Research has also examined the relationships between children, cities and educational inequalities, practices, policies and attainment (Butler and Hamnett 2007; Kulz 2017), with the urban sometimes being positioned 'as a 'problem' to be overcome by education' (Pykett 2009, 806).

Rights are a valuable lens through which to consider young people's experiences and imaginations of urban spaces. *The right to the city* is an idea developed by Henri Lefebvre, which has become a key theme in socio-legal scholarship as it considers who inhabits the city, on what terms, and their power to affect change (Hubbard 2018). For Harvey (2013, xiii), the right to the city 'rises up from the streets, out from the neighbourhoods', for example, through the Black Lives Matter movement and climate strikes. Rights are complex and can exist in law and be upheld by authority, but they 'do not always hold sway in a given urban situation' (Hubbard 2018, 220). There are sometimes tensions between international conventions, national laws, urban land use and social norms, with some groups privileged over others in urban spaces (Hubbard 2018).

Consideration of children's rights *in* the city can support the examination of young people's access to urban resources that affect their life chances, including access to education, safe housing and clean air (van Vilet and Karsten 2015). Consideration of children's rights *to* the city can support the examination of children's citizenship and agency, and how they are engaged within different spaces. The concept of lived citizenship is helpful here in exploring how citizenship is realised through practice and everyday life, as opposed to how it is represented in 'conditions imposed from above' (Percy-Smith 2015, 402) and enacted through performed participation (Ibid.). Lived citizenship draws attention to how 'citizenship is experienced and enacted' in different spaces, allowing for exploration as to the meaning citizenship has in people's lives and how their identities and material circumstances shape their citizenship (Kallio, Wood, and Häkli 2020, 713).

Introducing the research: education, rights and citizenship

Schooling is often a significant element of most children's education, socialisation and everyday lives. Whilst schools vary within, and between, places and across time–space, conformity and compliance can, and do, feature in education policies and school cultures (Alexander 2008; Kulz 2017). The nature of schools as a (generally) state-funded public service sometimes means that they overfocus on 'guaranteeing stability', which, Hart (1992, 37) argues, can impact upon how schools foster 'young people's understanding and experience of democratic participation'.

Children are sometimes constructed as objects to which education is to be done in policy and practice (Catling 2014) and may feel subordinated through the design and (re)production of education spaces (Giddens 1984; Kraftl 2023), as well as through decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (hooks 1994). However, educators can engage with children's diverse geographies (Biddulph 2011; Catling 2014; Hammond 2022), recognise them as citizens 'holding rights to participate and influence policy and practice' (Starkey et al. 2014, 426) and create the 'intellectual space

for explorations of the meaning, spatiality and contextualisation of what citizenship is' (Anderson et al. 2008, 39). This can support children in reflecting on their own (lived) citizenship and that of others, exploring how citizenship is conceptualised and experienced in different times and places, and develop their knowledge of events and issues in the world (Ibid.). However, the socio-political positioning of children in education can affect the nature of practices to support them in sharing their views about what they are learning in class and the world beyond the school gate (Starkey et al. 2014).

Whilst there is an increasing literature base that examines the value of children's participation in education and the importance of children's rights to children, education, and society (Byrne and Lundy 2019; Jerome and Starkey 2021; Osler, 2010, 2016; Osler and Starkey 2005), children's voices have not always been fully represented in these discussions. In addition, the relationships between what Benwell (2014, 53) describes as 'the confluence of geopolitics and schooling', along with the relationships between formal education and the geographies of young people, require further attention in both academic debate, and education policy and practice (Catling 2014; Hammond 2022; McKendrick 2023; Pykett 2009; Walker, van Holstein, and Klocker 2024). To contribute to this work, this small-scale study sought to actively listen to young people and to consider if, and how, they felt they were empowered in, and through, their education. The project had three main aims:

1. To investigate Year 7 (England) and Secondary 1 (Scotland) children's knowledge of their own rights and of rights more broadly in London and Glasgow.
2. To examine children's experiences of rights *in* education – considering what they have learnt about rights and how they have enacted their rights in school.
3. To examine if, and how, children perceive that they are empowered *through* their education in their everyday lives on matters that concern them.

The spatial and curricula contexts of the study

Whilst comparisons are always challenging due to different contexts and ways that data are reported, focussing on different schools, cities and countries can support exploration of the relationships between people and place(s), and education policy and practice. Education is a devolved matter in the UK and has never been integrated into a 'British system'. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland legislate their own education policy, and Westminster (UK Government n.d.) legislates for England alone. It is significant to note that the Scotland Act 1998 and subsequent '(re)creation of the Scottish Parliament' has resulted in 'attention to children, childhood and related policy nationally' being greatly encouraged (Tisdall and Davis 2015, 214), with Scotland being the first country in the world to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) into domestic law (Scottish Government 2021).

Whilst national curricula are distinct from school policies and the curriculum that is made by teachers and that comes to life in classrooms or out in the streets and fields, national policies shape educators' curriculum-making, and what, how and where children study and learn (Hammond et al. 2024). Citizenship education is constructed differently in England and Scotland, with different ideas of what Pykett, Saward, and Schaefer (2010) term the good citizen shaping policy. In England, citizenship became a part of the national curriculum under New Labour in 2002 (Morgan 2001), as part of a movement to support 'a more participatory form of politics and promote 'cultural belonging' in response to 'the changing social and cultural context of the UK' (Pykett 2009, 804). Today, citizenship is a 'required subject in the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14) and 4 (ages 11–16), so must be taught in all maintained schools at the secondary level. Whereas in primary, 'Citizenship is not statutory', but has a Programme of Study for Key Stage 1 (ages 5–7) and Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11) 'that should be used as the basis for planning teaching' (Association for Citizenship Teaching n.d.). Subsequent governments' ideas about citizenship

are also embedded in education policies such as the 'obligation since 2014 for schools to promote Fundamental British Values' (Starkey 2018, 149), which has been argued to feed into nationalist imaginaries and associated practices (Winter and Mills 2018) and reduce engagement with political issues (Starkey 2018). There are debates about the relationships between citizenship and subjects such as geography (Anderson et al. 2008; Lambert and Machon 2001), with it being significant to note that only some state schools are required to follow the national curriculum in England (DfE 2014).

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the national curriculum for Scotland. CfE is underpinned by four capacities – *successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens* and *effective contributors* (Education Scotland 2023) – which can be seen to engage with citizenship in different ways. It has been argued that the capacities are undertheorized, leading to teachers and children not always being aware of what is meant by *responsible citizens* (Cassidy 2018). Citizenship is also incorporated in the cross-curricula *Learning for Sustainability* framework (Scottish Government, n.p), which 'weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development and outdoor learning' (Scottish Government 2023, 5). Citizenship is engaged through curriculum areas such as Social Studies (Hancock, Robertson, and Robertson 2018) in Broad General Education (which runs from the early years until Secondary 3 (ages 3–14)), and Modern Studies in Senior Phase (ages 14–17) (Britton 2018).

More broadly, it has been argued that national education policies often do not fully consider children's lived citizenship or citizenship identities, and 'how these are constituted through the emotional and relational experience of being citizens in communities' (Wood 2013, 50). Policy may 'presume a 'flat' space onto which a uniform national curriculum can be applied' (Pykett 2009, 808), rather than recognising young people's rich and diverse geographies. Children's experiences of formal citizenship education are shaped by factors including their 'school neighbourhood in relation to other spaces in the city, in addition to teachers attitudes towards them as a social group and their own sense of themselves as citizens in relation to others' (Pykett 2009, 805).

As the largest cities in England and Scotland, London and Glasgow provided rich contexts for the project. Connections with schools were made through networks related to my work in teacher education. Year 7 (England) and Secondary 1 (Scotland) were selected as the young people have just been through an academic and social transition by beginning secondary school, and are likely to have more social and spatial freedom as they enter this new phase.

The school in London was a non-selective, mixed gender, non-denominational, 11–18 school, with just over 1800 students on roll, located in the densely populated outer London borough of Redbridge. In the 2021 census, the majority (47.3%) of respondents in Redbridge identified with the 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh' category, followed by 34.8% with the 'White' category, with 8.4% identifying with the 'Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African' category (Census 2021, n.p.). The school in Glasgow was a non-selective, mixed gender, Roman Catholic, 11–18 school with just under 1800 students on roll, located in a densely populated area on the outskirts of the city in one of the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland (SIMD n.d.). Scotland's urban areas are the most diverse parts of the country, with 17.3% of Glasgow's population identifying as 'ethnic minority' in 2011 (Scotland's Census 2023).

Methods and ethics

The research involved working with a teacher in each school to design and teach three lessons on children's rights in, and to, the city. The collaboration aimed to develop my knowledge of the places, schools and policy contexts in which the teachers worked, and to support the teachers to engage in, and with, research. The collaboration facilitated reflection as to how school- and university- based colleagues can work together for mutual benefit and identification of challenges in doing so. Collaborators reflected on how teachers and academics have distinct and overlapping areas of expertise and work within different systems and contexts (Freeman et al. 2024; Hammond and Freeman 2025). Planning, teaching and assessment occur in a much shorter period in schools than planning,

conducting and disseminating academic research, which may shape the nature of collaborations and how research findings are shared with children, educators, schools and local authorities. Teachers also sometimes face barriers to engaging with research connected to workload, their role and research experience, and issues including accessing literature through paywalls, which require work to support meaningful collaboration (Freeman et al. 2024).

The teachers were invited to collaborate on all aspects of the project from the research design to publication. Following individual online meetings to discuss the project and their aspirations for it, and a group meeting to co-design the research, both teachers chose to feed in ideas at the design stage and to support data collection. We discussed the importance of methodological decisions when researching with young people, as they shape the nature of data yielded and spaces that are (co)created (van Blerk et al. 2009). The decision to collect data during lessons was made to support whole-class participation and to facilitate examination of the relationships between education, rights and citizenship. However, we acknowledge that as the research was conducted in schools by a teacher and academic, power relations and institutional expectations may have shaped how young people engaged with the research(ers).

IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society and Glasgow City Council granted ethical approval for the research. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Glasgow City Council prohibited any in-person work by me, so the teacher kindly facilitated data collection. I went into the London school on three occasions to co-teach with the teacher. The research was opt-out by young people and their parents/carers in London, as it was deemed by the ethics committee to be educationally beneficial for all young people in the class to take part. 30 young people took part in all/most of the survey and 28 in the drawing tasks. Glasgow City Council operated an opt-in – by children and their parents/carers – only approach to education research, with 15 young people and their parents/carers opting in. Five young people completed all/most of the survey, and 15 at least some of the drawing tasks.

As the young people may have had varied or no experience of engaging with research, the first lesson began with an introduction to the project, before engaging the young people in a discussion about why people conduct, or may choose to take part in, research and research ethics. The young people were encouraged to choose their own pseudonyms, and where they chose not to do this, the researchers selected a name reflective of their given name. In the second half of the lesson, the young people completed an online questionnaire, which began by collecting personal data, before asking a variety of open and closed questions through two sections: children's rights in the city and children's rights in schools. Perhaps especially with children, questionnaires can be limited in the depth of data that they yield, but they can help to provide initial insight and identify patterns (McGuirk and O'Neill 2021). Both teachers expressed a desire to use questionnaires, noting that young people in schools were familiar with this method due to teachers conducting practitioner inquiries and student voice initiatives.

In the second lesson, young people were asked to draw/map their London/Glasgow, with space provided to reflect on their rights in, and to, their city through short written prompts. The prompts aimed to support young people in describing the 'intentions, emotions and storylines that inform their pieces' (Hickey-Moody et al. 2021, 61) and to stimulate informal peer-to-peer and young person-to-educator discussion, even if a young person chose not to take part in the research. In the third lesson, young people drew/mapped their dream city. The young people were again provided with written prompts to describe and compare their city and dream city. Drawing was used to support the young people in sharing their imaginations of cities and entanglements with communities and places within them (Hickey-Moody et al. 2021). Arts-based approaches can allow young people 'to express and formulate their sense of self and their relationality in and of the world' (Hickey-Moody et al. 2021, 3), and support participation and alter power relationships in research by recognising children's expertise and experience (Leitch 2009).

Demographic data were collected via the survey (Table 1); however, due to the differences in response rates, it is not possible to conduct a detailed analysis connected to this data. This was a limitation due to the restrictions on data collection during Covid-19 and the complexities of working within different ethics systems.

Table 1. Demographic data as shared by the young people.

	London	Glasgow
Gender identity	Female (15) Male (14) Choose not to say (1)	Male (4) Female (1)
Free school meals	Yes (1) No (22) Don't know (7)	Yes (3) Don't know (1) Chose not to respond (1)
Religion	Muslim (11) Other (than Catholic or Protestant) denomination of Christianity (7) Hindu (4) Sikh (3) Catholic (2) Other (2) Chose not to respond (1)	Catholic (5)
Ethnicity	Asian English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British (7) Asian Bangladeshi (4) Asian Pakistani (3) Asian Indian (2) Any other Asian background (2) Any other mixed background (3) Black African (2) White EU (2) White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish (1) Mixed/Multiple ethic groups – White and Black African (1) Prefer not to say (3)	White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British (4) Black English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British (1)

Analysis

Data from the drawings/maps – which included a mixture of images and texts – were coded inductively. Data from the survey were coded inductively, with a second cycle of coding of the open-ended questions completed using Osler and Starkey's (2005) three dimensions of citizenship. Osler and Starkey (2005, 9) conceptualise 'citizenship as a site of political struggle', which occurs in different ways in different spaces, arguing:

> (citizenship) is frequently defined as having two essential elements, first as a status and a set of duties and secondly as an entitlement to rights. Whilst these are certainly key elements, they do not take into account the fact that citizenship is probably most immediately experienced as a feeling of belonging.

They conceptualise *status* as 'the relationship between the individual and the state' (10), noting the status of citizen may afford a person some protection and benefits (e.g. access to education and healthcare), along with some expectations. Citizenship as *practice* may be 'facilitated or restricted by membership of a state' and is 'facilitated by awareness of and access to human rights' (Osler and Starkey 2005, 14). The feeling of *belonging* to a community, state or place (Ibid.) is recognised as a key dimension of citizenship. This is significant, as theorising citizenship in terms of statuses and practices can risk focussing on the more formal elements of citizenship, for example, voting in an election (Kallio, Wood, and Häkli 2020). As such, attention to how the young people expressed their (negotiations of) 'rights, responsibilities, identities and belonging through interactions with others in the course of daily life' (Kallio, Wood, and Häkli 2020, 713) was given during the analysis.

Result and discussion

The discussion is broadly structured around the research aims and begins by reflecting on the survey data to examine the young people's knowledge and experiences of children's rights, particularly in the city in which they live. Following this, the discussion focuses on young people's experiences of their rights in schools and if/how they perceive that education empowers them in their everyday lives, before engaging with the young people's drawings.

Young people's knowledge of children's rights

Analysis of the London data in response to the question 'what do children's rights mean to you?' identified the five most common themes noted in young peoples' responses as freedom (8/30), voice (7/30), safety (4/30), education (3/30) and equality (2/30). For example, Xavier expresses that children's rights 'means that children should be able to have a say in stuff and to be able to feel comfortable in their own homes and not feel danger/worried (*sic*)', suggesting that, for him, safety and being able to practice citizenship – including in domestic spaces – are important dimensions of rights. Whereas Alex considers the positionality and status of children by stating 'for children to have very similar rights to adults unless there is a safety concern'. Where equality was mentioned in responses, it was noted in terms of the language of 'equal rights' and the status of children. For example, Lucy states; 'it means that we all have equal rights unless it like driving and drinking alcohol and things like that (*sic*)'. In Glasgow, all five responses consider rights as a status (e.g. the right to shelter), with one young person mentioning equality, and one voice. For example, Alicia expressed 'that every child has the right to be safe and looked after and do what they want as long as it is legal and doesn't hurt others and people should help kids get their rights (*sic*)', suggesting she recognises citizenship is a struggle and that rights require infrastructure and consideration of power relations.

Young people's knowledge of their rights in, and to, the city in London and Glasgow

To investigate young people's knowledge of (their own) rights in London and Glasgow, the questionnaire asked participants to respond to the prompt 'as a young person I feel that I have rights in the city in which I live'. In London, 11 of the young people who participated expressed that they felt they 'always' had rights in the city, 13 that they had rights 'most of the time', five 'sometimes' and one that they 'rarely' had rights. In Glasgow, one young person expressed they 'always' had rights, three that they had rights 'most of time the time', and one that they 'sometimes' had rights.

When provided with an opportunity to comment, analysis of the London data suggests the young people considered their lived citizenship in different spaces and places. Jay states:

> I can walk freely on the streets without being told I have to be with my parents, I can go to the shops on my own. The city I live in lets me have rights. As I can go to school and play and do things independently.

Jay's comment suggests he feels that he has the freedom to explore on his own (a feeling and a practice), without his parents being present. Jay appears aware of his rights as a status (including a right to play and right to education), with his comments suggesting that 'acting as a citizen' (Lister, 2008; in Percy-Smith 2015, 402–403) in everyday life is an important dimension of citizenship for him. Kallio, Wood, and Häkli (2020, 720) argue that acts of citizenship – as distinct from practices of citizenship – are important as they 'can be performed less publicly and without political intentions.'

Whilst only two of the young people mentioned the UNCRC directly (both in London), most of the responses included a discussion of specific rights connected to the convention. The most noted right was the right to play – 11/30 in London and 5/5 in Glasgow. For example, Kye (London) stated 'i have a right to play, eat, laugh, walk, drink water, to (*sic*) do things by my choice and i have the right to be treated the same as everybody else'. Kye's response suggests that he is aware of children's rights (status) and feels he has agency in the choices he makes. Young peoples' engagement with the UNCRC is important to explore as the convention marked a significant catalyst for consideration of children's rights in urban planning and life (Freeman and Tranter 2011), challenging previously held ideas about the relationships between adults and children in political spheres (Starkey et al. 2014). However, opportunities for citizenship depend upon democratic processes and if/how 'power is exercised and decision-making controlled by adults' (Percy-Smith 2015, 402). As such,

just being aware of rights does not necessarily mean that young people are able to enact them in different spaces in the city. Whilst many young people demonstrated some knowledge of the UNCRC, there was no critical engagement with the convention.

Analysis of the Glasgow data suggests that most of the young people perceived citizenship as a status. For example, Michael's response suggests that he feels relatively free in Glasgow and that he values the right to play; 'I can play football, games or go to the shops whenever I want thee (*sic*) is no limit apart from COVID lockdown'. There was no explicit mention of the UNCRC or its implementation into domestic law in Scotland in any of the responses.

In considering young people's rights *to* the city, the young people were asked whether they felt that they were able to express their views on matters which concern them. In London, 11 young people responded that they could 'always' express their views, 10 'most of the time', five 'sometimes', three 'rarely' and one chose not to respond. In Glasgow, one young person responded that they could 'always' express their views, two 'most of the time' and two 'sometimes'. When provided with an opportunity to comment, two young people in Glasgow and two in London noted that they had a student council. Education spaces are an important part of many children's lives, and these comments can be seen to reflect the young people engaging with the roles that (their) school plays in developing their (capacities for) citizenship (Pykett 2012). School councils are often part of the infrastructure that schools create to engage with student voice (Biddulph 2011). However, concerns have been raised about how inclusive they are (Trivers and Starkey 2012), with schools sometimes becoming over-reliant on student councils leading to a lack of focus on other citizenship practices (Skelton 2013), lived citizenship, and what Kallio, Wood, and Häkli (2020, 714) describe as 'less formal modes of political participation and ways of enacting citizenship beyond largely institutionalised practices'. As cultures of compliance sometimes exist and (re)produce injustices in schools (Kulz 2017), it is important for children to be able to participate and act as citizens in both formal and informal (education) spaces, going beyond what Percy-Smith (2015) terms performed participation.

Analysis found that the young people in London felt it was significant that they were able to communicate their feelings to their families and communities. Zenat commented 'if I am worried I can talk to a trusted adult in my community they are very friendly (*sic*)'. Whilst Zenat does not mention who her community are, her comment suggests that she feels comfortable in, and has the agency to, approach people beyond her family. April explains, 'we do meetings with family about what is wrong an (*sic*) what is right'. Families are sites of socialisation and democratisation with relations and practices often (co)constructed within a family but made possible, shaped or constrained by wider social norms and policies (Oswell 2013).

To further explore young people's perceptions of their rights *to* the city, the survey asked participants whether they felt that their views mattered in the city in which they lived. When given the 'opportunity to tell us about if/how your views matter, you could also tell us who you views matter to, and how you know this', Michael was the only young person in Glasgow to respond, commenting; 'I am not sure for Glasgow overall, my school listens'. Michael's comment suggests that he feels he can practice citizenship through sharing his views in school, but he is not clear about wider socio-political structures in Glasgow and perhaps Scotland. In London, Dhanisha expressed 'my views matter to me, my family and the community I live in'. Dhanisha's response suggests that she feels that she is engaged within a variety of spaces and that experiences of lived citizenship matter to her. Two young people in London also considered the value of listening to one another as part of the practice of citizenship, with Inaayah commenting; 'hearing peoples understanding of things help other people understand how people think and we have to accept this … . we might learn something about it'.

Analysis of the London data also shows that feelings of citizenship are important to young people. Richard – who identified as 'mixed/multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African' – comments 'make race not interfere with people's life', suggesting he recognises injustices in

citizenship connected to people's identities may prevent or constrain people from acting as citizens. As Richard's reflection suggests, these injustices can impact upon young people's spatialities, feelings of belonging and their agency in different spaces in the city (Cope 2006; Hammond 2021).

Young people's rights in, and through, schooling

5/5 young people in Glasgow and 23/30 young people in London stated they had been taught about their rights. Four young people in London responded that they had never been taught about their rights, and three chose not to respond. Young people were given the prompt 'I feel confident in sharing my views on things that matter to me in school' and provided with an opportunity to give an example of how they had done this. Analysis revealed that the young people most often considered citizenship as a practice. Three young people in Glasgow mentioned that they had held a mock election and elected a leader in school. Manuel commented that they learnt about global citizenship – an underpinning concept in *Learning for Sustainability* in Scotland (Scottish Government 2023) – and Michael suggested that participation is embedded in his school's culture and practices, when he commented; 'in class we have a lot of respectful discussions on topics like poverty, slavery and racism'.

In London, the young people also reflected upon citizenship as a practice, with Xavier being one of four young people who mentioned posters, stating 'I've made posters and signs'. Four young people mentioned their primary schools in their response, which was not unexpected as data were collected within their first school term at secondary school. Two of these young people stated that they had debates, suggesting they considered different views and perspectives. Whilst there are limitations of surveys in terms of space to reflect, in both London and Glasgow, young people often separated practices in citizenship (e.g. making posters) with the reasons for the practice, their audiences, and knowledge about citizenship and rights.

Young people were also given the prompt 'my school is a place where I feel safe'. 11 young people in London reported they 'always' felt safe in school, eight 'most of the time', five 'sometimes', one 'rarely' and five chose not to respond. Two young people in Glasgow responded that they 'always' felt safe, two that they felt safe 'most of the time', and one that they 'sometimes' felt safe, reflecting that some young people may not feel safe to share their views or to be themselves in school. The survey asked young people 'what I learn about my rights in schools helps me in my everyday life'. Here, most young people felt that school helped them in their lives 'all' or 'most of the time', with two young people (one in London and one in Glasgow) expressing it helped them 'sometimes' and one young person (London) that it was 'rarely' helpful. Jerome and Starkey's (2021) argument that learning about rights in schools is not enough and that learning *about*, *through* and *for* rights may further develop young peoples' knowledge of, and practices in, citizenship.

Young people's drawings of their city and dream city

Young people were asked to 'draw a map/picture of your London/Glasgow to show us how you feel about the city, and your life and rights within it', with the five most common themes identified through analysis being shown in Table 2.

Alex's drawing of London (Figure 1) reflects that the young people often placed their houses next to London landmarks despite their school being several miles outside of central London. Young people 'mostly live their lives within the warp and weft of the striations of adult space' (Jones 2000, 43), and Alex's statement about her favourite place in London – (it is) 'central London as it makes me happy because I like looking at the famous landmarks' – suggests that she values and connects with the histories and grand narratives of the city. Analysis found that the young people valued open and green spaces (e.g. parks), and as is reflected in Alex's drawing, being

Table 2. Five most common themes identified through analysis of the young people's drawings/maps.

	Number of images analysed	Drawing/map of London/Glasgow	Drawing a map of the young person's dream city
London	28 city and dream city	Houses (14)	Stopping pollution (8)
		Public transport (13)	Improving road safety (7)
		London landmarks (12)	More parks and play areas (7)
		Parks (9)	New/adapted houses (6)
		Shops (9)	Improving public transport (5)
Glasgow	15 city,	Parks (8)	Housing (6)
	11 dream city	Shops (8)	Shops and restaurants (3)
		Houses (8)	Parks (3)
		Drink/drugs (5)	Sport (3)
		Sport (4)	Skyscrapers (2)

near family. Whilst Alex has drawn Big Ben on her picture, there is no mention of the function of the Houses of Parliament of which it is a part.

When reflecting on her least favourite place, Alex identifies the London Underground 'because it can be very scary, because it is very dark and there are not that many people'. Alex's perception is echoed by others, including Faith, who states 'the DLR (Docklands Light Railway), the underground and the overground. It makes me feel stressed and I don't like the noise (especially on the central line)'. This suggests that whilst some (adult) spaces are seen by the young people as exciting, interesting and offering opportunity, they find other structures and places much harder to navigate. This may be shaped by their intersectional identities including gender, race, and class, with it also being important to note that trains are more expensive than buses in London and 11–15-year-olds are eligible for free bus and tram travel, and discounted rates on other modes of public transport, leading to some young people being less experienced with the underground and overground.

When asked to draw their dream city, four young people expressed that London was great as it is, but that they would like to change some elements (e.g. less litter). For example, Alex calls her dream city 'Lovely London' and explains that everyone there would feel 'safe and happy', perhaps reflecting that children often 'care about, and are care-full towards, their city, neighbourhoods and local and
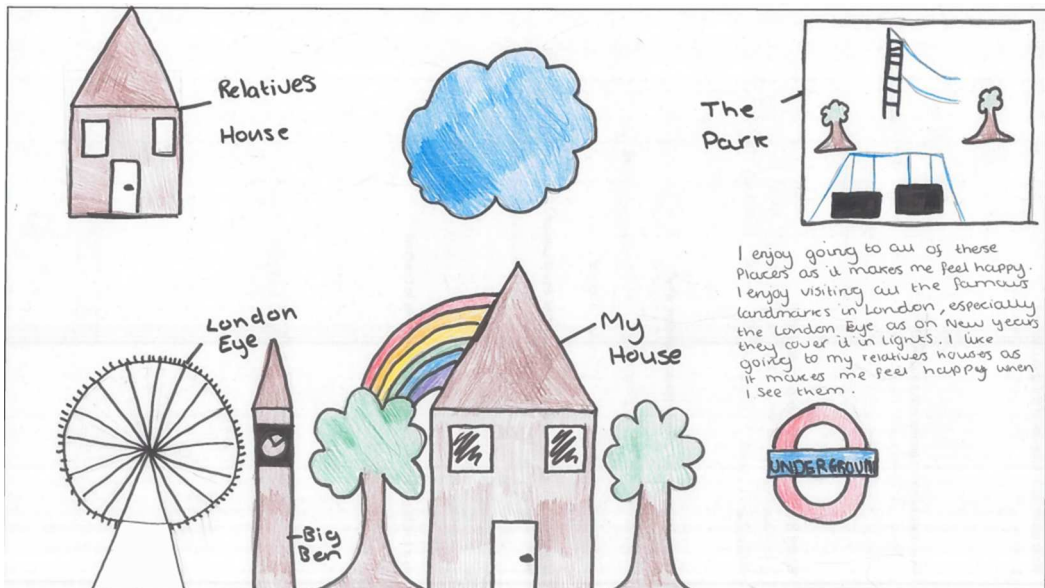
Figure 1. Alex's drawing of London.

home spaces' (Ergler, Freeman, and Guiny 2022; cited in Skelton 2022, 174). Jamie L's writing on his dream city reflects similar sentiments (Figure 2):

> The one thing I would change about London the pollution. As it has effected our planet in many ways. One point is very vulnerable for the people who have asthma as the smoke affect their lungs (*sic*).

Implicit in his response is a concern for rights *in* the city and access to resources that affect life chances. Jamie L can also be seen to be considering both vulnerable members of society and the
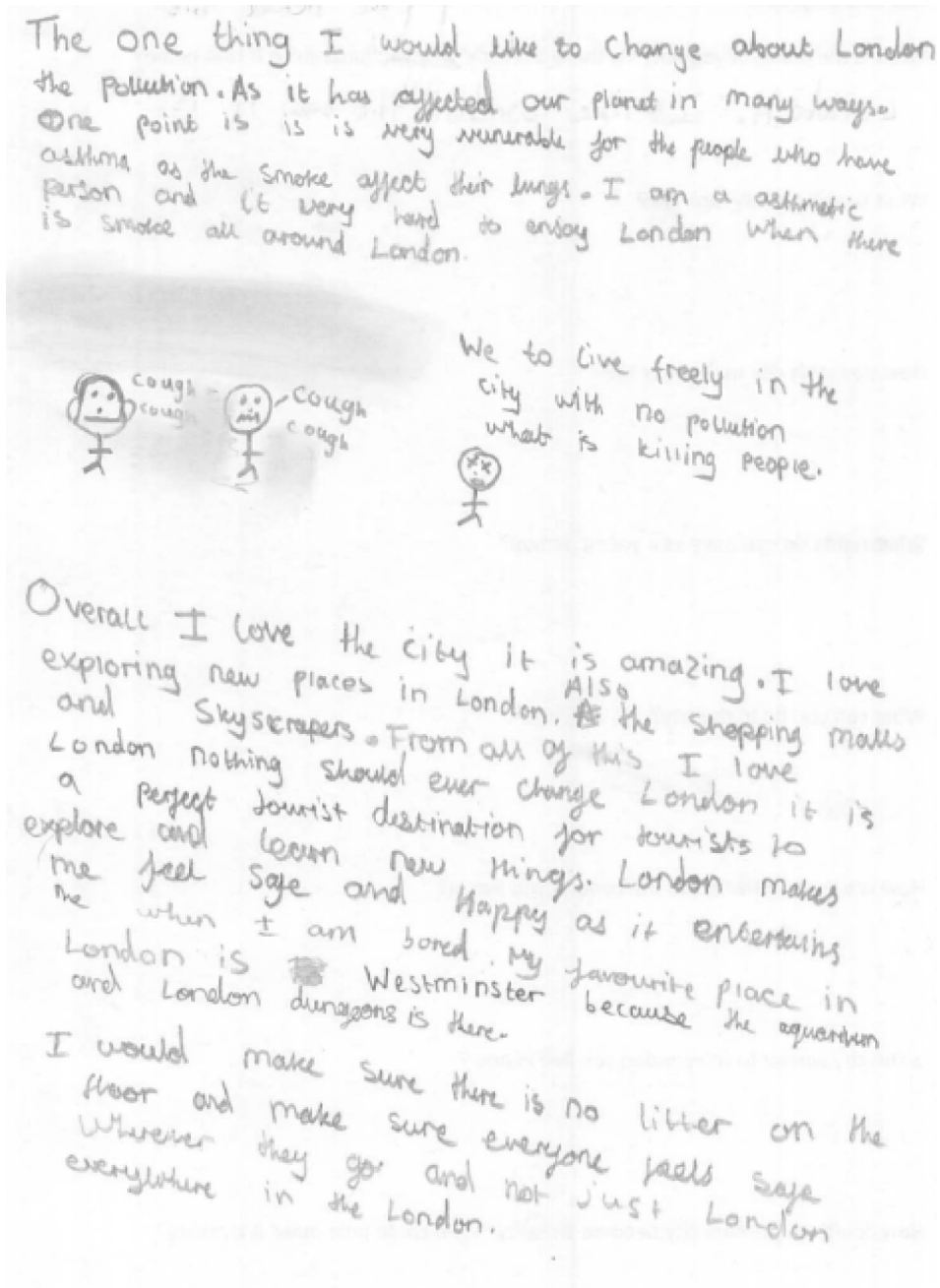

Figure 2. Jamie's L's drawing/reflection on his dream city.

Figure 3. MJ's drawing of Glasgow.

relationships between actions in London and planetary systems and health. As Ergler, Freeman, and Guiny (2022, 135) argue, children's participation in the 'creation, transformation and healing of their environments' can shed 'new light on discussions around maintaining, continuing and repairing an unequal world and moving towards a fresh look into the interrelatedness of the human and non-human city spheres and their meaning for wellbeing, mutuality and liveability.'

In Glasgow, three of the most common features identified through analysis of the young people's drawings/maps were the same as in London (shops, parks and houses), but the young people also included references to sports (mainly football). For example, Chunky Chunks states that his favourite place in Glasgow is 'Celtic Park', and his least favourite place is 'Rangers Park'. In addition, one-third of the young people identified a concern related to alcohol/drug use. This may be reflective of personal experiences or wider social discourse, with the Scottish Government (n.d.) stating 'higher
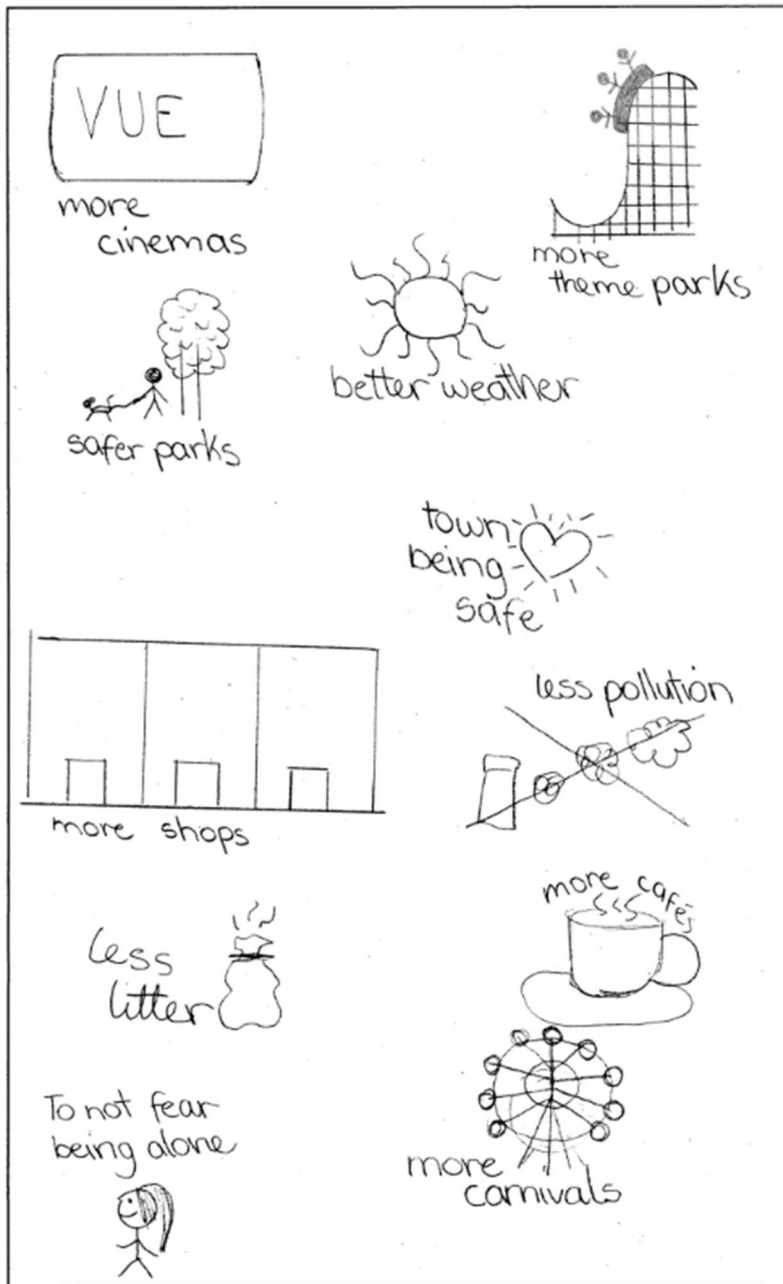
Figure 4. MJ's drawing of her dream city.

risk alcohol use and problematic drug use are significant issues in Scotland, causing damage to people's lives, families and communities'.

MJ (Figure 3) draws her city by identifying things she likes and hates about Glasgow, reflecting that the places she likes are 'cinemas & shopping centres – makes me feel safe & happy'. MJ explains that her least favourite places in Glasgow are 'parks at night because a lot (*sic*) of weird/dangerous people show up', noting that she would like Glasgow to feel safer 'because I don't want to be scared all the time'. MJ reflects on how the city can change at different times of the day, highlighting the

complexities of navigating rights within the city – i.e. that rights can exist in law, but that they do not always hold sway, with some people having power over others in some situations (Hubbard 2018).

Much like in London, many of the young people in Glasgow expressed a love of their city whilst also wishing to make improvements. MJ called her dream city 'Glasgow' (Figure 4) which she gave the strapline 'to make our city shine', suggesting that she values the city in which she lives, but in her own words, hopes for it to be 'alot (sic) safer' and 'more exciting'. MJ can also be seen to be considering rights *in* the city and factors which impact on the life chances of humans and more-than-humans in her dream city, by expressing that she would like less litter and pollution. Chunky Chunks returns to football in his reflections on his dream city, and in response to the prompt 'what is the name of your city? Is there a reason why you have given it that name?', Chunky Chunks writes 'its called celtic land. I support celtic and that's my reason (sic.)'. When asked to describe 'what does your city look like?' Chunky Chunks writes 'it has some celtic flags all around the place and everyone is celtic Fans and some are rangers fans (sic.)', which can be seen to reflect a degree of territoriality around (the histories and geographies of) football in Glasgow shaping Chunky Chunks relationships with the city (Holligan and Deuchar 2009).

Conclusions

Whilst academic work in children's geographies and connected fields has enhanced knowledge of children's lives and agency in cities and sought to empower children in, and through, research (Freeman and Tranter 2011; Kraftl 2019; Skelton 2022), the place of (formal) education has not been fully explored in these debates. Although it is significant to note that this project was small scale, meaning the findings from the project cannot be generalised, the study identified some important tensions between children's experiences and imaginations of their (lived) citizenship and formal education, which are worthy of future investigation.

Analysis found that the young people who participated in the research often valued the city in which they lived but wished to make improvements to make it more liveable for themselves and others. When reflecting on their dream city, analysis suggests that the young people in the study felt 'emotions, connections and responsibility to other human and non-human actors' (Ergler, Freeman, and Guiny 2022, 134). The research found that the young people reflected on their lived citizenship when asked how they experienced and perceived their rights, particularly valuing opportunities to participate and be agentic in their families, communities and at school. When considering rights *to* the city, the young people in both London and Glasgow had some knowledge of the UNCRC (1989), but no participants commented on the national or city policy context in which they lived, perhaps reflecting the conventions and policies discussed in school.

When reflecting on their experiences of schools, analysis found that the young people had often been taught about their rights, yet many did not feel confident in sharing their views on things that mattered to them, and/or did not always feel safe in school. Where participation was discussed, it was often connected to specific spaces (e.g. school councils), potentially connecting to wider compliance cultures that sometimes shape education policy and practices (Kulz 2017). Young people gave examples of citizenship practices (e.g. making posters), but there appeared to be disconnects with the reasons for the practice and their audience, with it being important for educators to consider how young people's views are given due weight in, and through, schooling (Lundy 2007). This is significant for educators in considering the spaces they (co)create with young people, including through the decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It is also an important area of attention for those involved in the design of schools, including architects and school leaders, in considering how the material, social and digital spaces of education can support children's citizenship. Engaging with ideas, methods and philosophies developed in, and through, research in children's geographies could support this work, not least through using participatory methods that support children's agency and voice. In addition, as schools are spaces of education, socialisation, play

and everyday life, engaging with children's experiences and imaginations of schools is important for children's geographers in considering how children's citizenship and geographies are shaped by (formal) education.

Moving forwards, further research is needed to examine the relationships between how citizenship is conceptualised in (national) education policy, the curriculum making done by teachers, and children's experiences of citizenship education and being citizens in education spaces. Citizenship is conceptualised differently in education policy in different schools and countries, and examination of how curricula constructions of citizenship impact upon teachers and teaching, children and learning, and the education spaces that are (re)produced would enhance knowledge of how policy shapes education practices and children's experiences and imaginations of (their own) citizenship and citizenship education.

As culturally and linguistically diverse countries, research into how children and young people with different identities, and in different places, in England and Scotland (and beyond) imagine the relationships between their (lived) citizenship and what they learn in schools would support examination of perceptions of the value of citizenship education to lives and futures, and if/how it helps address barriers to citizenship in domestic, public, institutional and (inter)national spaces. This might include exploring how young people whose national status is unclear or partial experience and imagine citizenship education, and how teachers consider children's lives, geographies and identities when planning and teaching citizenship. The significance of this future research lies in its potential to enhance knowledge of, and practice in, supporting young people's citizenship in, and through, (formal) education.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Funding

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