

Netherlands: Education for democratic citizenship in Dutch schools

a bumpy road

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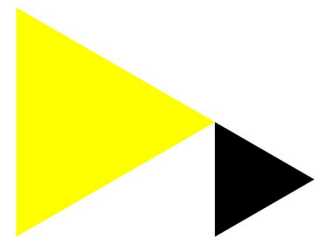
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Country Report

Education for democratic citizenship in Dutch schools: A bumpy road

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Keywords: citizenship education; education policy; primary education; secondary education, tertiary vocational education; the Netherlands

Highlights

- Constitutional freedom of education affects democratic citizenship education policy.
- Citizenship education legislation in 2006 and 2007 placed little demands on schools.
- Legislation introduced in 2021 has further specified what is expected from schools.
- Studies of citizenship education in practice are largely critical of the extent to which schools teach about, through and for democracy.

Purpose: This paper discusses developments in citizenship education policy and practice in the Netherlands, and outlines key challenges as faced by the different stakeholders involved.


Design/methodology/approach: Our discussion is based on existing research and policy documents in the Netherlands. The authors, from three Dutch universities, are experts in the field of research on citizenship education.

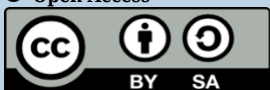
Findings: Promoting citizenship education in primary, secondary and vocational tertiary education in the Netherlands has been challenging, particularly in light of the constitutional freedom of education in the Netherlands. Five issues are discussed in this regard: the contents of CE legislation, the normative character of legal requirements, integration of CE legislation in national curriculum aims, clarifying expectations from schools in teaching CE, and teacher education and professionalization.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Like in many European countries, citizenship education (CE hereafter) in the Netherlands is mandatory for all schools in primary and secondary education and in tertiary vocational education (Eurydice, 2017). Legislation mandating CE in primary and secondary education was introduced in 2005 (and shortly thereafter for tertiary vocational education), and further specified in 2021. However, evaluations of CE have been critical of both legislation (Onderwijsraad, 2012) and its implementation (Inspectorate of Education, 2016).

In this country study, we discuss developments in CE policy and practices in primary and secondary education and tertiary vocational education. In doing so, we draw specific attention to the broader educational context in which CE developments have taken place. We also provide insight into the work of scholars who have contributed to academic and public discussions on CE in the Netherlands in the last decades and recent doctoral theses. Given the broad range of possibly relevant theses, we limit our scope to studies that have looked into how CE is implemented in the Netherlands and not so much on studies with other foci, such as the effectiveness of specific CE practices, students' views on citizenship and the like.

Main questions addressed are: 1) what strengths and weaknesses of the 2005 and 2021 CE legislations does research on Dutch CE identify? 2) What do we know about CE practices in the Netherlands from studies conducted in the last fifteen years? And 3) What are the foci and findings of recent PhD studies on CE in the Netherlands? Our country study does not provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the literature, as we did not conduct a full review study. Instead, our aim is to provide readers outside the Netherlands with an understanding of the intricacies of CE in the Netherlands.

To position our discussion of developments in Dutch CE policies and practices, we first explain some of the characteristics of the Dutch education system. We then explain our use of the key concepts of democracy, citizenship and citizenship education, and the normative underpinnings of our discussion. In section two a brief account of the Dutch societal and educational context is provided. Here, we specifically highlight Dutch legislation on the rights and responsibilities of Dutch schools (article 23 of the Dutch constitution), which has had a big influence on CE, and continues to do so today. The third section of this article sketches the historical background of CE legislation in the Netherlands. In sections four to six we answer the main questions. Sections four and five discuss developments in CE policy in primary education, secondary education, and tertiary vocational education, and highlight five issues that we identify based on the work of Dutch CE scholars. The sixth section presents insights into CE practices in Dutch schools from recent PhD research. In section seven, we return to the title of this article in describing how moving forward with CE has been like driving a bumpy road for stakeholders in different ways. We also provide suggestions for future research, in line with the theoretical and normative underpinnings of our discussion.

Democracy is a key concept when considering CE. Characteristic for democracy as a

‘fact’ and a norm, as defined in the Universal declaration of Human Rights of 1948, is that citizens in democracies have the right to take part in the government; elect their representatives in free voting procedures, and that they have equal right and access to public service (Van der Zweerde, 2011). While the ideal democracy does not exist, and while ideas about what constitutes an (ideal) democracy will always evolve, democratic theorists have established several substantial and procedural criteria to assess the quality of democracies, e.g., freedom, participation, representation, and responsiveness (Dahl, 1989; Diamond & Morlino, 2005; Beetham et al., 2008).

Both democratic theorists and democratic education experts have argued that democracy cannot sustain itself without commitment of its citizens in a way that aligns with key democratic principles like equality, freedom, and solidarity (e.g., Dewey, 1917; Parker, 2003; Thayer Bacon, 2013). Since one does not develop democratic citizenship naturally, we argue, together with other CE scholars, that CE in liberal democratic societies should *also* prepare students for contributing to the vitalization of the pluralist and democratic character of these societies (e.g., Biesta, 2011; Parker, 2003; De Winter, 2011; Veugelers, 2007). This means that schools need to teach students about, through and for democracy and democratic citizenship. Teaching about democracy and democratic citizenship implies that schools provide students with insight into democratic procedures and democratic deficits, covering democratic issues in all sectors of life (questions of, for example, inclusion and exclusion, majority rule and minority interests). Teaching through democracy means that schools offer opportunities for students to engage in existing democratic practices (e.g., democratic deliberation and other democratic decision-making processes) within school and in the (local) societal context. And teaching for democracy means that schools also offer opportunities to (learn about avenues to) promote social and political transformation. Our position aligns with several elements of a political approach of CE: that democratic CE should not only socialize students into the current social order, but also provide students with opportunities to question the socio-political order, place themselves into the world and learn to deal with their freedom in a grown-up manner (Biesta, 2007, 2021; Dewey, 1917; Veugelers, 2007). To further situate our discussion of Dutch CE education, we now turn to the larger societal and educational context.

2 SOCIETAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

The Netherlands have long been characterized as a consensus democracy in which minorities had to find a majority to be able to govern the country. Because no single political party was ever in the possession of a parliamentary majority, elites were forced to form coalitions and find compromises. Parties, and social organisations in the broader sense, were aware that they needed support from other parties or groups, also in the long run (Lijphart, 1969, 2008). In the last two decades, Dutch political culture has changed. Due to a variety of reasons, parties are less focused on finding consensus and compromise and ruling parties take decisions, also on far-reaching policies, with small majorities (Andeweg

& Thomassen, 2011). In addition, since the turn of the millennium, Dutch politics is characterized by the rise of radical right-wing populist parties, which have been very influential in political debate and policies in the Netherlands in the first decades of the 21st century (De Jonge, 2021).

In the Netherlands, the government is responsible for maintaining the education system, and schools are largely autonomous in providing education. Attending school is mandatory from the age of 5 to 16, or until the age of 18 if the person does not have a diploma. Children can start primary education when they are 4 years old. Secondary education starts at the age of approximately 12, when children are selected for one of six different education tracks, ranging from pre-vocational to pre-university education. After secondary education, the vast majority of students attend a form of tertiary education: vocational education (mbo), higher vocational education (university of applied science; hbo) or academic education (universities). About 40% of the labour force has a degree in tertiary vocational education, and 40% has degree in higher vocational education or university (Maslowski, 2020). Legislation on CE for secondary education applies equally to all tracks. Of tertiary education, only vocational education has legislation on CE.

A key factor in shaping the Dutch educational landscape is article 23 of the constitution, titled Public and private education.¹ The article dates back some 200 years – having undergone several changes in the meantime – and provides three types of freedom to schools: freedom of establishment (“*vrijheid van stichting*”), freedom of conviction (“*vrijheid van richting*”), and freedom of organization of teaching (“*vrijheid van inrichting*”). The article originally enabled the different and largely separate religious groups present in the Netherlands to establish and run their own schools, within the parameters of the constitution and Dutch educational legislation. Since 1917 these privately run schools are entitled to equal funding to public schools. Most students attend publicly funded schools: less than one percent of students attend privately funded schools. Most schools are therefore publicly funded and privately managed, or publicly funded and publicly managed schools. Education legislation places equal demands on all publicly funded schools, whether they are publicly or privately managed.

Today, about seventy percent of Dutch students in primary and secondary education attend privately managed public schools: schools that are based on religious or ideological principles (DUO, 2022a, 2022b). In primary education, thirty percent of students attend publicly managed schools, thirty-three percent of students attend Roman-Catholic schools, twenty-eight percent of students attend Protestant schools, and ten percent attend other privately managed public schools (e.g., non-religious denomination, Reformed, Muslim). In secondary education, twenty-seven percent of students attend publicly managed schools, twenty-three percent of students attend Roman-Catholic schools, twenty-one percent of students attend Protestant schools, and twenty-eight percent attend other privately managed public schools (e.g., non-religious denomination, combination of denominations).

Article 23 ascribes privately managed schools the freedom to choose their teaching aids

and to appoint teachers as they see fit. However, other legislation and policy have expanded schools' freedom, and schools in the Netherlands have nearly the greatest level of autonomy in planning curriculum and assessment among all OECD countries (OECD, 2010). Schools have full responsibility for organising teaching personnel and materials; for resource allocation; and for the construction and use of facilities (OECD, 2012). A common – though not entirely accurate – summary is that government is responsible for *what* is taught, and schools are responsible for *how* it is taught (Commissie Parlementair Onderzoek Onderwijsvernieuwingen, 2008; Ledoux et al., 2014). The Dutch curriculum thus consists of the curriculum goals, or 'core objectives' (Dijkstra & de la Motte, 2014) set by the government for all (eligible) exam subjects, but schools are free to choose their methods for attaining these. The quality of education in schools is monitored by the Inspectorate of Education.

Since its introduction in 1798, predecessors of the article in the Dutch constitution that we now refer to as article 23, have been the subject of scholarly and public debate. We briefly discuss three societal and scholarly discussions here that exemplify these debates. One discussion concerns the scope of what constitutes a valid conviction: what is considered a legitimate ground for founding a (private) school? A recent development concerning the freedom of education is the introduction of the law More room for new schools ("*Meer ruimte voor nieuwe scholen*") in 2021. As a consequence of this law, schools can now also be founded on educational beliefs, where previously they were required to be based on religious or ideological beliefs represented in Dutch society. Debate on the More room for new schools-law also feeds into the second discussion, namely on the effects of freedom of education (and more specifically, school choice) on segregation. School segregation in the Netherlands is primarily explained by residential segregation, and further increased by school choice (Boterman, 2019). More room for new schools stands to increase segregation through schools, because schools may be targeting particular subgroups within the population (Waslander, 2018). A third debate concerns the extent to which freedom of education should facilitate expression of minority viewpoints. This debate is also present in media coverage of an Orthodox Reformist school that demanded from parents to sign a statement rejecting homosexuality (or rather, that marriage is believed to be a union between a man and a woman), or an Orthodox Muslim school allegedly not promoting students' support for democratic values. In 2021 *NRC Handelsblad*, a Dutch newspaper, uncovered how several large publishers have been receptive to pressure from Reformist school organisations to rid teaching materials of pictures and writings that – according to these organisations – do not align with their values, like fantasy figures and rainbow families.²

Article 23 thus not only impacts policy regarding CE in the Netherlands. It also influences the citizenship experiences of teachers and students within schools. The implications of the freedom of education are fundamental to understanding policy and practice of CE in the Netherlands, and the challenges policy makers and schools are faced with.

3 DUTCH CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION POLICY FROM 1950 TO 2000

Schools by definition have a socializing function, and CE therefore has always had a place in Dutch schools via explicit subjects (e.g., history, social sciences and religious education), extracurricular activities and/or the school culture (e.g., Geboers et al., 2013; Veugelers, 2007). Policy instruments directed at the formation of citizens have varied over time. The focus of educational legislation in the Netherlands has often been on social cohesion and the formation of national identity (De Jong, 2014). Following secularisation processes in the Dutch society in the post-war period, government started to emphasize the role of schools in fostering students' autonomy, rather than socialising students into a particular religious or political community. Regarding implementation, in both nineteenth century and the post-war period the main focus was on implementing distinct school subjects in secondary education: History, Geography and State studies ("*Staatwetenschap*") in the nineteenth century and Civics³ ("*Maatschappijleer*") in the post-war period (De Jong, 2014; Olgers et al., 2014; Wilschut, 2013). In the eighties, subsequent governments further adopted a technical-instrumental approach to education, with an emphasis on knowledge and skills suitable for standardized testing. Standardizing the curriculum, it was thought, would promote equal opportunities for all students (Van der Hoek, 2012; Veugelers 2007). In this context, Civics became a more knowledge-oriented school subject in secondary education with formal goals and students were able to choose it as a subject for their final exam. While this benefited the status of Civics as a distinct subject in the curriculum, the content of the subject was formalised, which had implications for the freedom teachers had to freely choose the topics they covered in class, and for attention to values in (civic) education (Veugelers, 2007). With limited time demarcated for Civics in the curriculum, opportunities for engagement in democratic participatory and educational activities have also been limited in many Dutch schools (e.g., Veugelers et al., 2017; De Groot & Eidhof, 2019).

The situation in tertiary vocational education was distinct from that in primary and secondary education. In the mid-1990s, a plethora of up to 500 educational institutions offering vocational education and training were combined into the current schools: around 70 schools, often hosting over 10,000 students each in a range of courses (Bronneman-Helmers, 2011). For decades, hardly any discussion took place regarding desirable (citizenship) education innovations in tertiary vocational education. Until 2007, some vocational education sectors offered a subject similar to Civics with considerable status; in others this subject was absent (Olgers et al., 2014). There were no formal curriculum aims or guidelines for Civics courses in tertiary education, however, and teachers did not need a degree in CE (related) subjects.

4 FORMAL CE LEGISLATION (2006 & 2007)

Discussions about CE in primary and secondary education resurged in the 1990s when in 1993 the minister of education established the Platform for the Pedagogical Task of Education (“*Platform Pedagogische Opdracht van het Onderwijs*”). In 1995 this platform published a final report stating more attention should be spent on developing democratic citizenship, stating: “Universal values, which form the basis for a democratic and humane society and are considered a common cultural asset, should be given a prominent place in school codes and curricula to be designed” (Platform Pedagogische Opdracht van het Onderwijs, 1995, p. 27). However, although the attention for CE grew, progress towards any kind of legislation was slow, and the report did not significantly impact policy or practice.

This changed at the turn of the century when concerns over diminishing social cohesion gained traction. Political and public debate typically focused on lack of social cohesion, concerns about the norms, values, and deviant behaviour of certain groups of citizens, and the perceived necessity of integration of minorities. These concerns and subsequent advisory reports by the Education Council and the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Onderwijsraad, 2003; WRR, 2003) eventually led to the introduction of the 2006 CE law: Active citizenship and social integration (“*Actief burgerschap en sociale integratie*”). This law mandated schools to a) assume that students grow up in a pluralistic society; b) promote active citizenship and social integration; and c) ensure that pupils have knowledge of and become acquainted with the different backgrounds and cultures of their peers. In 2007 tertiary vocational education adopted a competency-based learning approach. Part of this educational innovation was the implementation of new guidelines for CE. In educational sectors where Civics was part of the curriculum, this subject was replaced by a more generic requirement to teach students about four dimensions of CE: political, societal, economic and, what the policy makers claimed to be, healthy citizenship (Nieuwelink, 2019).

CE scholars in the Netherlands were pleased with the introduction of CE legislation in the Netherlands, as it affirmed the responsibility of schools (and society at large) to help prepare students for their role in sustaining and promoting vibrant liberal democracies. In line with the concerns highlighted in the advisory reports, diminishing social cohesion became a key aim of CE. Initial CE legislations were viewed critically though. In the following we highlight five, interrelated critiques.

A first critique concerns the vagueness of CE regulations (Bron & Thijs, 2011; Inspectorate of Education 2016; Ledoux et al., 2014; Munniksma et al., 2017; Nieuwelink 2019; Veugelers et al., 2017). With reference to freedom of education legislation, the 2006 CE law required primary and secondary education schools to develop their own understanding of what active citizenship and social cohesion entail, and to translate these into citizenship practices that reside with the school religious and educational values. For many teachers and school management, citizenship was a relative new concept that they

found hard to understand. Consequently, they often perceived citizenship as an additional task, on top of related activities (Inspectorate of Education, 2016). Conversely, schools built CE portfolios with activities that are related, but not necessarily envisioned as key component of CE, such as anti-bullying and self-esteem training programs and career orientation programs. In tertiary vocational education this became even more the case with the introduction of the 2007 CE regulations. Education in two of the four dimensions formulated, 'healthy citizenship' and 'economic citizenship' came to focus primarily on self-reliance ('zelfredzaamheid' in Dutch) which many CE scholars consider related to, but not part of citizenship (Nieuwelink, 2021).

These critiques of vagueness not only concern the content of initial CE regulations, but also the non-bindingness of these regulations. Both in the 2006 law for primary and secondary education and the 2007 regulations for tertiary vocational education only required minimal commitment from schools (Den Boer & Leest, 2021; Nieuwelink, 2019). Schools would meet the requirements if they organized a one-day service-learning experience, in addition to the regular civics and history classes. Schools would even meet the requirement when they promote anti-democratic attitudes. Indeed, a judge ruling in 2020 on alleged anti-democratic teaching in a Muslim school stated that the school would only be in violation if the school in no way paid any attention to CE (Laemers, 2021). The 2007 tertiary vocational education regulation did not contain learning standards for students. Instead, schools were only obliged to make an effort ("*inspanningsverplichting*") to prepare students for participation in the Dutch society.

Secondly, scholars were critical about the framing of this CE law as 'neutral'. While Dutch governments have claimed that schools were free to shape CE in accordance with their own ideological convictions, many scholars have argued that the government should also be clear about limitations to this freedom, and shared guiding principles. That in a democratic country, for example, the government should also specifically target young citizens' willingness and capacity to maintain and strengthen the democratic and pluralist character of the Dutch society (e.g., De Winter, 2011; Veugelers, 2007). Building on the work of experts on education politics (e.g., Apple, 2008), others stressed that education is never neutral, and that because of this, it is important to be explicit and reflexive about the political choices made. Based on a qualitative inquiry of Dutch students' narratives about democracy and their democratic citizenship education, De Groot & Veugelers (2015) argued that by focusing on teaching *about* democracy as a political system and accomplishment, rather than also teaching *for and through* democracy as a political system and a way of life, the government de facto instils a thin type of democratic engagement. It promotes an understanding of democracy as a political system "where every citizen has an equal say, rather than as a continuously evolving set of practices and procedures which is constantly shaped and challenged by economic and environmental developments as well as existing and emerging normative frameworks" (e.g., De Groot & Veugelers, 2015, p. 31-32). And it promotes compliant participation in current civic and political practices, rather than participation in activities that challenge power imbalances

in existing democratic practices and procedures.

Likewise, scholars have pointed to implicit messages conveyed in the key conceptions selected and reflected public discourse: how a focus on integration instils a false image of newcomers as not adhering to democratic values and ignores the fact that that addressing democratic deficits and social inequalities requires a shared effort (ibid.). How a focus on national values is misleading in that the key values referred to (e.g., freedom of speech) are important values for people across the world. And how a focus on the Dutch society is misleading in that many issues (e.g., global warming) can only be faced when addressed also at an international level (e.g., De Groot & Veugelers, 2015; Veugelers et al., 2019).

With regard to the normative dimension of CE, scholars have also criticised the socialization focus of CE requirements in tertiary vocational education. Van der Ploeg and Guerin (2021), for example, have argued that it is undesirable to require from tertiary vocational education institutes that they foster not only knowledge and skills, but also attitudes and behaviour. Especially when the aspired behaviour is to abide by general rules and procedures, to function adequately, and to be accepting. With other scholars, they argue that CE should focus on critical thinking rather than compliance (e.g., De Groot & Veugelers, 2015; De Groot & Eidhof, 2019; Nieuwelink et al., 2019; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003).

A third critique concerned the (lack of) embeddedness of the CE law in the national curriculum. While the Dutch curriculum agency (SLO) explained how existing curriculum goals reside (in part) with this original CE law (Bron et al., 2009), CE legislation did not lead to a revision of the national curriculum goals. This means that, until today, there is no formal relation between the legal framework for CE and the national curriculum on school subjects related to CE. Also, the limited demarcated time in the curriculum for Civics was, and still is, considered a constraining factor in organizing democratic learning experiences in schools (e.g., Nieuwelink, 2019). With De Groot & Lo, (2020) we here define democratic learning experiences as experiences with participatory *and* educational activities that are explicitly framed as democratic and activities that involve practicing democratic skills (e.g., joint decision making; classroom deliberation or dialogue and student mediation). Also, in tertiary vocational education the embeddedness in the curriculum was considered problematic, as there were no requirements to implement school subjects related to CE.

Fourthly, it remained unclear who was responsible for organising CE in primary and secondary education as well as in tertiary vocational education schools. While teachers and teacher organizations of citizenship related subjects such as Civics and History were expected to cover aspects of CE, no additional time was allocated in the curriculum for this. The formal responsibility of the school board was limited to a) defining in the school mission how the school aims to promote citizenship development, and b) to explain how CE is organized in the school (Nieuwelink, 2019; Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 2005).

A fifth critique concerns the lack of guidance provided to teachers and schools in

implementing CE. Initial regulations were implemented without an accompanying supporting structure. Yet, citizenship was a new concept for most teachers, and they were unsure how to integrate CE in their education. In teacher training programs in the 00s there was hardly any focus on CE, except for Civics (Education Council, 2012; Nieuwelink & Oostdam, 2021). This gradually changed during the 2010s. In many institutes for teacher training, awareness of the importance of CE and subsequent teacher education increased. Consequently, in an increasing number of teacher training programs for school subjects, teachers are prepared for CE. A recent study revealed that current programs predominantly focus on the social dimension of citizenship (e.g., diversity, solidarity, social cohesion). Substantial attention to the political dimension of citizenship (e.g., political institutions, democracy, rule of law) is only provided in the teacher training programs of History and Civics (Nieuwelink & Oostdam, 2021). While it is arguably the case that CE requires much knowledge and skills from teachers, one in four teachers in Civics has no teaching degree on the subject, and the subject is thereby champion in the relative number of unqualified teachers (Oberon, 2022). Moreover, there are no specific teacher requirements for CE teachers in tertiary vocational education. Consequently, many CE teachers in these institutes do not have any professional background in citizenship. Teaching CE is often assigned to teachers within the teaching team who happen to be available (Nieuwelink, 2019). These circumstances are also reflected in concerns over necessary further professionalization of teachers, particularly because the contents and approaches to teaching citizenship often differ between teachers (Elfering et al., 2016).

These critiques about the quality of CE policy, the available policy instruments, and the (lacking) implementation of CE in practice paved the way for expansion of legislation.

5 EXPANSION OF CE LEGISLATION (2021)

In August 2021, the law ‘Clarification of the citizenship assignment for schools in primary and secondary education’ took effect. In the following, we briefly describe its development process. Next, we discuss the revised CE law in light of the five critiques as outlined in the previous section.

The revision of the law started in 2017, with a number of consultation rounds with mixed groups of teachers, school leaders, Ngo-experts and scholars. In tandem with this revision process, the government also launched a larger process of rethinking the entire school curriculum (Platform Onderwijs2032, 2016). Public and political debates during the revision process concerned, amongst others, the extent to which the government is entitled to promote aspects of personal development in the context of CE, civic and/or democratic attitudes, and a democratic school culture in light of freedom of education legislation (Education Council, 2018, 2021; Raad van State, 2019). In line with Freedom of education legislation and the contested nature of citizenship, governments have traditionally been wary of ‘state pedagogy’: to (also) educate students in line with a certain

conception of good citizenship. Many scholars on the other hand have claimed that the government cannot avoid prioritizing certain values (like freedom, equality, and solidarity), and that it is important to be explicit about what this means for schools (De Groot & Veugelers, 2015; Dijkstra et al., 2018; Education Council, 2021).

The 2021 law aims to further specify what is expected from primary and secondary schools in terms of CE (Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 2021). Schools are required to promote active citizenship and social cohesion in a goal-oriented and coherent manner, that focuses on a) teaching respect for and knowledge of democracy and the rule of law; b) developing the social and societal competences that enable pupils to be part of and contribute to pluralistic, democratic Dutch society; and c) imparting knowledge about and respect for differences in religion, belief, political opinion, origin, gender, disability or sexual orientation as well as the value that persons should be treated equally in equal cases. Schools should encourage a culture that is in line with these values, which stimulates students to behave in line with these, and where students and personnel feel safe regardless of their differences. For tertiary vocational education new CE regulations are currently prepared. It is expected that these regulations will provide more binding requirements, and that theoretical underpinnings of the CE law will be strengthened.

The new law has addressed several concerns about the vagueness of CE legislation (first critique). It now centres democratic principles, the Dutch constitution and human rights legislation as guiding principles for CE practices in all schools, and highlights how schools are not allowed to teach values and norms that violate these principles. According to the Education Council (2021), the government now has enough legal instruments to monitor and guard the quality of CE practices in the Netherlands with the installation of the new law. Yet, the Council also recommends the government to more actively confront discriminatory and anti-democratic practices in schools and encourages the government to further specify the content and aims of CE.

With regard to the normative dimension of CE legislation (second critique) the 2021 law forefronts cohesion rather than integration, thus departing from a discourse that implicitly portrays people with a migrant background as (eternal) outsiders. While the focus on democracy as a shared normative framework for citizenship is widely supported among education scholars and educational organizations, some scholars and educational institutes have expressed concerns about the negative discourse on orthodox religious schools (e.g., Bertram-Troost, 2022). They sense that these schools are viewed with distrust and are considered potentially harmful, suggesting these schools may not adequately prepare students for living and working together in the Dutch pluralist democratic society. In response, they highlight how orthodox schools play an important role in envisioning how religion and democracy can go hand-in-hand, and how they are a valuable component of the pluralist educational landscape.

With regard to embeddedness (third critique) little has changed. The 2021 CE law does not explicate the relationship between the new guidelines and the curriculum for primary and secondary education. In the explanatory memorandum the government explains that

the position of CE will be further clarified in the ongoing revision of the national curriculum aims. This revision, called 'curriculum.nu', was initiated by several educational organisations (e.g., VO-raad, PO-Raad, CNV Onderwijs).⁴ A complicating factor is that the CE goals as developed by curriculum.nu are formulated both in a separate CE domain and within several course specific domains, such as Civics and Language. From the outset of curriculum.nu it was not clarified how these sets of goals should relate to each other. In the Spring of 2022, however, the government has invited the Dutch curriculum agency (SLO) to integrate the goals set for CE in the curriculum.nu-trajectory and the goals of the new CE law in the curricular goals for Civics.

While obligations for schools have been expanded (fourth critique), the 2021 legislation remains rather vague on the actions expected from schools. Commenting a draft version of the new law, the Educational Council (2018) expressed doubts about the extent to which the new law would clarify what is expected from schools. And indeed, while the new law provides more requirements for organizing democratic learning experiences in schools, e.g., by demanding that schools promote a democratic culture in schools, and organize discussion, it remains unspecified what types of discussions, and other types of participative and educational activities should be offered at a minimum. In theory, this means that schools can abide by the new law without teaching controversial issues (De Groot et al., 2022).

With the implementation of the new CE law, the government has announced the installation of a support structure for teachers and schools (fifth critique) and facilitated deliberations with different stakeholders about the desirable organization of this support structure for primary and secondary education (e.g. Ledoux & Vaessen, 2021). Regulations for teacher qualification in tertiary vocational education have not yet changed, which may hinder the opportunities of subsequent teacher units to offer high quality CE. Moreover, we would recommend future tertiary vocational education legislation to incorporate teacher professionalization requirements in terms of conceptualizing democratic citizenship and attending to the qualification, socialization, *and* subjectification dimension of democratic CE.

More generally, scholars have also pointed to limitations of attention to culturally responsive teaching, intercultural competences, and newcomer education in Dutch teacher training (Gaikhorst et al., 2020; Severiens et al., 2013). Newly initiated projects aim to address these limitations, e.g., via the examination of teacher competences and development and evaluation of theoretical frameworks, analytic tools and research informed teacher education programmes in urban education and culturally responsive education for regular students and newcomer students (e.g., Gaikhorst et al., 2020; De Groot et al., 2019; 2023; Susam, 2015).

Increased attention to educational inequality has also led to studies into social justice-oriented teacher education, which also attend to how power, marginalisation and inequalities in society impact teaching and teacher education (De Groot et al, 2023; Leijgraaf, 2019; Hosseini et al., 2021). Based on a literature review on existing approaches

to promoting educational equality, Hosseini et al. (2021) argue that more research is needed to translate insight from international literature on social justice education to the Dutch or Flemish context. These developments in teacher training (research) may help strengthen Dutch teachers' ability to teach through and for democracy and human rights.

A final, additional critique that we want to attend to here concerns the viability of liberal democratic education in the school system (see also: Culp et al., 2022). Michael Merry (2018), for example, is sceptical about the political reform and progress that can be obtained via liberal democratic education in the Netherlands and elsewhere via "coercive, state-directed, curriculum-based citizenship education" (2018, p. 4). He finds it rather peculiar that CE studies and policies are predominantly developed by academic and political elites, while they aim to address voids in citizenship development of deviant groups that they themselves have identified. As long as liberal democratic theories and practices do not take account of these power issues, he argues, it is unlikely that CE will promote a democratic outlook, and truly prepare (disadvantaged) young citizens to "question authority, critique and resist concentrated power, and even engage in civil disobedience." While scholars have written about limitations of liberal democratic education theory and the politics of curriculum development for a long time (e.g., Apple, 2008), discussions about the current and desirable role of political and educational elites and desirable alternative or complementary trajectories have gained traction with increased attention to whiteness studies and decolonial education (De Groot et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2021; Merry, 2018).

6 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

After outlining concerns about CE legislation in the Netherlands, it may come as no surprise that the tone of research into CE practices in the Netherlands is also quite critical. While in theory, schools can stimulate the citizenship development of their pupils and students, a number of studies have shown that in many Dutch schools CE practices are rather fragmented, and do not live up to societal expectations (Inspectorate of Education, 2016; Slijkhuis et al., 2021; Veugelers et al., 2017).

Since the late 00s and especially the 10s the number of studies on CE has surged. Many studies focus on (the development of) student citizenship itself (e.g., De Groot, 2013; Daas et al., 2016; Slijkhuis et al., 2021; Slijkhuis, 2021; Thijs et al., 2019; Wanders, 2019). Other studies focus on the effectiveness of CE (e.g., Coopmans et al., 2020; Dijkstra et al., 2015). In this section we focus on research that describes practices of citizenship in primary education, secondary education, or tertiary vocational education. The number of studies investigating CE in tertiary vocational education is still relatively limited compared to those in primary and secondary education.

In line with the questions formulated in the introduction section, sections 6.1 and 6.2 will highlight CE-studies conducted in the Netherlands in the past 15 years (question 2) and summarize some of their main findings. In particular, we will list foci and key findings

from recent PhD studies (question 3), to provide an understanding of recent directions in CE-research in the Netherlands. Ongoing projects are not included in this overview. For a more thematic overview of research and education projects in CE see for example Eidhof (2019), Nieuwelink et al. (2016a) and Ten Dam et al. (2016).

6.1 Primary education

While there are no national standards to assess students' citizenship competences in primary education, the central testing agency for education (Cito) undertook a study in 2009 and 2011 which was followed up on in 2019/2020. In 2009 a group of experts were asked to formulate standards for minimal, sufficient, and advanced proficiency for three domains of citizenship knowledge for students at the end of primary school. In the empirical part of the study, students scored far below the expected levels of proficiency. While 70 to 75 percent of students were expected to score at the proficiency level that was set, only 25 to 41 percent of the students did (Wagenaar et al., 2011).

A study of sixth graders' citizenship attitudes and skills concluded the image was fairly positive, with students generally supporting hearing each other's opinion and acting socially responsible (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012). Results from a recent national study (using some of the same instruments) were largely similar (Slijkhuis et al., 2021). The level of students' knowledge slightly decreased since 2009, the inequality in student knowledge is substantial and student have rather positive attitudes towards citizenship. In schools the curricula, programs and activities seem to be rather fragmented: schools offer CE primarily through the activities related to school culture and school climate, and not so much via curricular activities (Slijkhuis et al., 2021). Differences between schools in terms of both student outcomes and CE are typically small (Dijkstra et al., 2015; Slijkhuis et al., 2021).

A study by the Inspectorate of Education (2016) into the state of CE and service learning in primary and secondary education concluded that there is broad support from schools for teaching citizenship. However, it also concluded that there appears to be little structure and cohesion to curricula offered by schools, and that programs offered in school could be labelled as patchwork. CE in primary education generally focused on promoting social and emotional development. Topics such as democracy and diversity generally received little attention.

Scholars have also examined The Peaceable School ("Vreedzame school"), a prominent CE initiative in the Netherlands. This program was developed in 2006-2007, and aims at promoting social competence and democratic citizenship, with particular attention to peaceful resolution of conflict between students, by students themselves (Pauw, 2013; Verhoeven, 2012). The program introduces students into several types of democratic practices, e.g., resolving conflicts, classroom meetings, a student council and student mediation. More generally, existing CE educational programs in primary education predominantly focus on developing students' social competences, which aligns with

attention to ‘living together’ in CE policy (cf. Slijkhuis et al., 2021).

In his dissertation Jeroen Van Waveren (2021) built on Gert Biesta’s (2011) work on the three functions of education and Chantal Mouffe’s (2005) agonistic democracy theory to examine primary school teachers’ conceptions of subjectification (personal formation) and agonism (valuing conflict as indispensable for democracy). His findings suggest that in primary education there is only limited attention for the political and pedagogical dimensions of CE. For many teachers CE is complex, and teachers find it difficult to develop programs that do justice to the rich nature of the subject (Van Waveren, 2021). The study shows the need for teacher professionalisation in this area, a result that aligns with findings from another study which examined the development of CE programs in primary and secondary education (Willemse et al., 2015).

Rob Bartels contributed to democratic education practices in primary education in his dissertation. Bartels (2013) examined how Philosophy for Children (P4C) contributes to the development of three types of democratic skills and attitudes in four primary schools. He found that P4C contributed to the students’ ability and willingness to participate in dialogue, and the ability to deal with differences. Attention for critical thinking and judiciousness, however, would need to be strengthened at the formal, the interpreted and the operationalised curriculum level in these schools, for P4C to also contribute to this component of critical democratic development.

6.2 Secondary education

Substantially more studies have focused on CE in secondary education than in other sectors. Prominent in setting the research agenda is the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) in which the Netherlands participated in 2009, 2016 and 2022. The 2016 study showed principals most often consider CE to be taught in subjects related to social sciences (or, to a lesser extent, all subjects taught at school), and as the result of school experience as a whole. Compared to other countries, Dutch students indicate learning little about citizenship at school, and show less inclination to participate in civic activities at school (Munniksmas et al., 2017). Studies of CE stress the importance of an open climate for discussion (cf. Geboers et al., 2013), on which Dutch students scored among the lowest of 24 countries participating in ICCS 2016.

There are no absolute standards to which to compare students’ citizenship competences, so interpretation is done relative within or between groups. Dutch students scored below the international average in ICCS 2009, and above average in ICCS 2016 (Maslowski et al., 2012; Munniksmas et al., 2017). However, these results are still considered problematic in the 2016 report, noting that Dutch students score lower than students in comparable countries. The report and follow up analyses by its authors stress the impact of inequalities in citizenship competences among students (Dijkstra et al., 2021). In the case of citizenship knowledge, these are strongly linked to the educational track students attend, which in the Dutch secondary education can be split in up to seven levels. Students

in vocational tracks score lower than those in general tracks, and these differences have increased since 2009. The ICCS 2016 national report also shows how students from a higher socioeconomic background score significantly higher on seven out of eight scales that are presented (Munniksma et al., 2017).

Besides the large scale ICCS studies, there is a large amount of research on CE in secondary education, studying a wide range of themes (e.g., desirable content and methods for education related to cultural, religious, and sexual diversity, slavery, controversial issues, terrorism, sustainability and (neo)colonialism). Some studies in the Netherlands focus on the practices and preferences of teachers regarding CE. Wiel Veugelers has extensively studied the goals that teachers in the Netherlands emphasize in relation to CE: discipline, critical thinking and autonomy, and social commitment (Veugelers, 2007). Teachers found these goals to be important but not to the same extent. A small majority of teachers aimed to foster both critical thinking and autonomy, and social commitment. Teachers indicated that there is a gap between the importance they attach to the goals and the extent to which students attain these goals (Leenders et al., 2008).

Findings from research into teacher self-efficacy are rather mixed. In a survey study among teachers in Amsterdam, most teachers reported that they feel efficacious in relation to CE. A majority of the teachers feel that they are capable of discussing topics related to citizenship (democracy, diversity, etc.) and that they are able to use different pedagogical-didactic strategies. Relatively, teachers in Civics and History felt most efficacious of all teachers. However, the study also showed that participants only occasionally give attention to topics of CE. Again, this was mostly the case for teachers in Civics and History (Nieuwelink, 2018). Studies which examined teacher self-efficacy and/or agency related to a specific aspects of Civics education identified a couple of (self-reported) gaps in teacher preparation, which we will present in the following

Several studies focused on the extent to which students are able to experience diversity and democracy in the school context. For her PhD research, Willemijn Rinnooy Kan observed CE practices in schools (Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021). She found that students experience limited possibilities to learn to deal with differences. In schools there is limited reflection on being different and differences are primarily understood as individual characteristics and not so much as group characteristics. Insofar dealing with differences was related to CE, teachers operationalised diversity as ethnic or cultural diversity. Other types of diversity received little attention. In her PhD research, Işil Sincer (2021) studied the effects of diversity of student composition on a range of aspects pertaining to citizenship competences. She found both positive, negative, and non-effects of school composition on relevant outcomes. Students' sense of belonging was generally lower in more diverse schools. Similar to other studies, differences between students' citizenship competences are more strongly explained by individual students' characteristics than school characteristics, and effects of schools differ between outcomes and studies. Though schools are still found to have an effect on students' citizenship competences, the relation

between school composition and outcomes in the area of citizenship is found to be complex, dynamic and multidimensional.

Other studies have examined student opportunities to engage in democratic participatory and educational experiences in Dutch schools. For his PhD research Nieuwelink (2016) investigated student possibilities with democratic decision-making, discussions, and the stimulation of political engagement in pre-academic educational track and pre-vocational educational track. In both grade eight and grade ten, students felt to a large extent that they have limited experiences with discussing social and political issues, with decision-making processes and with being stimulated to become socially or politically engaged (Nieuwelink et al., 2016b). In an interview study Nieuwelink also compared student experiences in a pre-vocational track (which is considered to be of 'lower' status) and student experiences in a pre-academic track. Especially in grade ten, students in the pre-academic track reported having more experiences with democracy (e.g., discussions and stimulation to be engaged), compared to their peers in the pre-vocational track. For example, while the pre-academic students reported to have extensively discussed the parliamentary elections that took place some months before the interviews, the pre-vocational student reported that they hadn't discussed the elections in the classroom at all. His study therefore indicates that schools in the Netherlands risk reproducing existing social inequalities (Nieuwelink et al., 2019).

Scholars have also studied discussions of controversial issues in the classroom. They developed tools for discussing controversial issues and examined teacher experiences and teacher strategies in this regard (Kruit et al., 2020; Wansink et al., 2019). A recent study into the role of history education in dealing with controversial issues in the class also revealed how history teachers in the Netherlands (and elsewhere) show awareness of the "relationship between the sensitivity of the history of immigration and that of Islam and the relationship between pupil diversity and self-silencing on these issues" (Savenije & Goldberg, 2019, p. 39). Teachers do discuss sensitive topics in the class and take into account the feelings of their students. In their study into the way teachers organise discussions in the classroom, also about controversial issues, Schuitema and colleagues (2018) have shown that although teachers engage in discussions with their students, they find it hard to shape discussions in such a way that students explicitly interact with each other and that controversies can be dealt with in their full extent.

De Groot and colleagues conducted two studies about the possibilities for students to gain experiences with elections processes through mock elections in the school contexts (De Groot, 2018; De Groot & Eidhof, 2019; De Groot & Lo, 2022). Both projects explored (self-reported) teachers' current aims and educational practices and the discrepancies with teacher ideals. Analysis of survey data on teacher aims and activities organized revealed that teachers paid limited attention to critical, value-related aims and aims directed at strengthening a democratic school culture in mock election-related education in 2017. Half of participating schools offered less than one hour of mock election-related educational activities (De Groot & Eidhof, 2019). The survey study also revealed how one fourth of the

participating teachers who organized student participation in the context of mock elections preceding the 2017 national elections, criticized lack of attention to relevant teacher competences in (post)initial training (De Groot & Lo, 2022). In light of these findings and large discrepancies in students invited and involved in decision making, the authors argued for more attention to developing relevant teacher competences for deliberation amongst educational partners about the political participatory experiences that they want to offer in schools.

Student voice and student collaboration has been another topic in CE-research. Jeroen Bron's (2018) PhD research examined the value and contribution of involving students in curriculum development in relation to developing democratic qualities and improving curriculum relevance. He developed and evaluated a curriculum negotiation intervention in five lower pre-vocational education schools in which students had the opportunity to express their views, were heard, formulated questions, and made decisions that affected them. Based on case studies in five schools, in which he examined returned student prompt sheets, teacher interviews prior to and after using the curriculum negotiation method, classroom observations and a student questionnaire, he concluded that the approach increased student participation through students communicating, collaborating, and negotiating. Criticizing the dominant socialisation approach in citizenship education, Laurence Guérin (2018) developed and justified an alternative participatory approach to citizenship education in her PhD research, based on the democratic principle of group problem solving.

Furthermore, Lozano Parra's dissertation (2022) examined the meaning of democracy and its conceptualisation in Dutch secondary education. Building on the work of John Dewey and Hanna Arendt he also examined what a school as a playground to practice democracy looks like if conflict is envisioned as an inherent part of human relations, and he came to distinguish five ways in which teachers can handle friction when teaching sensitive topics.

Scholars have also examined the implications of COVID-lockdowns and related emergency distance education on CE in Dutch schools. During the first lockdown, spring 2020, Nieuwelink, et al. (2022) surveyed around 170 teachers in secondary and tertiary vocational education about the possibilities to provide CE through (emergency) distance education. They found that teachers were very critical about the possibilities to do so. They felt unable to guarantee a safe classroom climate, they stated that classroom discussions cannot be offered via a laptop, and they noted that most students adopted a consumer-stance during class – which made it nearly impossible to activate them in class.

6.3 Tertiary vocational education

In both 2016 and 2021 the state-of-art of CE in tertiary vocational education was evaluated in order to see whether the current policy would suffice (Den Boer & Leest, 2021). In 2016 the researchers had concluded that more investment in CE was needed. Five years later the researchers concluded that, despite substantial efforts from teachers, institutions, and policy makers to improve CE in tertiary vocational education, the quality of CE still varied widely. The researchers also identified the non-binding framework with regards to CE as an important reason for the meagre results in CE practice. This conclusion echoes the criticism on policy decisions from the onset of the implementation of CE in tertiary vocational education in 2007. While policy makers in the early 20s were reluctant to introduce more binding policies for CE, the policy climate seems to have changed in the past years. As of yet however, there is little to no binding legislation for the provision of CE in tertiary vocational education.

A survey among 2500 students by Holman et al. (2021) showed students' citizenship attitudes and skills on average to be fairly positive. Despite tertiary vocational education being split into a range of vocations and sectors, the study notably showed little differences based on students' vocational track or background characteristics. Although the study did not measure students' experiences with CE, this result appears to suggest that the contents of CE do not substantially differ between schools and sectors. A more critical interpretation would suggest that CE in tertiary vocational education does not significantly influence students' citizenship development. This latter interpretation is supported by research of the Inspectorate of Education (2016), concluding the curriculum for CE in practice shows little cohesion.

After interviewing 20 students in tertiary vocational education about their attitudes towards and application of democratic principles, Vaessen et al. (2022) found that participating students were generally able to apply these principles flexibly. Students adjusted their answers to hypothetical dilemmas as the conditions were altered. Notably, after the interview, most students commented that they had rarely considered these kinds of issues both in class and generally. They indicated that they had enjoyed thinking about these kinds of questions but doing so was new to them.

7 CONCLUSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this country study, we have discussed developments in CE policy and practice in the Netherlands. Following a brief introduction of the societal and educational context, section four described five critiques on the 2006 legislation as discussed in the work of Dutch CE scholars: 1) critiques concerning limitations of the content of CE legislation in primary, secondary and vocational tertiary education, 2) the normative character of legal requirements, 3) lack of alignment of legislation with the learning standards, 4) unclear allocation of responsibility for effectuating CE legislation, and 5) the quality of (post-)

initial teacher education.

Our discussion of developments and limitations also highlights how the challenges in promoting CE in the Netherlands can be understood within the context of the constitutional freedom of schools to organise education in line with particular ideological convictions and pedagogical positions. In the 2006 CE legislation (2007 for tertiary education), democracy was largely absent as a normative framework, and teachers were expected to foster active participation and social integration in line with the normative underpinnings of their own school (board). Political wariness of state pedagogy appeared to be the main cause of refraining from setting clear expectations from schools, meaning any minimal effort legally sufficed.

The critiques on the 2006 legislation as outlined in this paper have led to a stronger focus in policy on the school as a training ground for citizenship and democracy and, therefore, to more balanced, and integrative, attention to teaching about, through and for democracy. The expansion of legislation in 2021 mandates schools to create opportunities for all students to engage in democratic experiences and practice social and citizenship competences, to promote support for democratic values, and to create a democratic culture. The legal expectations for schools are more clearly defined, among which is the expectation that schools organize teaching citizenship in a more systematic and robust manner. The 2021 legislation addresses several of the issues affecting earlier legislation and can thus be expected to promote CE-practices in school. However, much of the success of CE policy can be seen to depend on the extent to which other theoretical, normative, and organizational issues are addressed.

Overall, our discussion of scholarly literature on (democratic) CE demonstrates how moving forward with CE has been like driving a bumpy road for stakeholders in different ways. Proponents of democratic CE have struggled with the vagueness of CE policies and lack of provisions. Proponents of the autonomy of schools to offer CE in line with their own religious or political convictions on the other hand, have struggled with the increase in government demands and control. And other parties (e.g., the Dutch government) have been struggling to navigate, and accommodate stakeholders with competing interests and positions.

Following our discussion, we want to highlight two larger issues that, in our view, need further attention in the upcoming years from scholars, policy makers, school leaders, teachers and (teacher) training institutes. Moreover, we delineate desirable courses of action and suggestions for future research in line with our theoretical and normative position in this country report, which is that all schools should balance education about, for and through democracy in their CE, both within specific subjects and in an integrative manner (e.g., by promoting a ‘democratic school culture’), and in line with a political approach: also providing opportunities to question the current socio-political order in schools and society (Biesta, 2011).

The first issue follows from our discussion of Dutch CE research and concerns insufficient provisions to organise high quality CE in primary, secondary and tertiary

vocational education. Our discussion of developments in Dutch CE revealed a need to address in particular the problematic aspects of the theoretical and normative underpinnings of the 2021 citizenship legislation, the integration of CE legislation in curriculum standards, and the quality of teacher training.

With regard to the theoretical and normative underpinnings of CE we argue that, following a political approach of CE, it is important for the Dutch government and other stakeholders to further deliberate and specify key conceptions and aims of CE, and specify what is considered (un)desirable and (il)legitimate, in this regard. This also requires acknowledgement of the extent to which the contents and (desired) outcomes of CE are contested. In light of the constitutional freedom of education, this evidently also involves a continued evaluation of the balance between schools' obligations and freedoms, and by extension the government's obligation to uphold both social and civil rights.

Integration of (parts of) CE legislation into the core objectives for Civics and related subjects also requires clarifying the responsibilities of different stakeholders in meeting these standards. Who is to promote and maintain the quality of education for democracy in a school when CE is offered primarily in an integrated manner? And which staff members will be in charge of organizing 'shared authority, shared responsibility and shared identity' (Thayer-Bacon, 2013) in the school, and equipped to do so? Here too, the large degree of school autonomy in deciding how the curriculum is delivered, means that these decisions have to be made at the school level. Within the current legislative framework, teaching about citizenship may be clarified via learning aims, but teaching through and for democracy will be directed at the school boards, as these are responsible and accountable for maintaining school quality. As a result, central planning of these responsibilities within schools is unfeasible under current legal provisions.

This brings us to the quality of (post-initial) teacher training programs for democratic education. Teaching about, through and for democracy places high demands on teachers (e.g., De Groot & Veugelers, 2015; De Groot & Lo, 2022). Teachers must have in-depth insight into the issues at stake (such as questions about welfare state, globalisation, democracy, war and peace, pluralism and so forth) and have the pedagogical knowledge and skills to discuss these topics with students in an appropriate manner. The importance of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for a range of students' learning outcomes is well documented (Ulferts, 2019). Moreover, teachers need to be able to organise democratic deliberation and political advocacy projects in a pedagogically sound manner, if we agree with Levinson and Fay (2019) that preparing students for democratic discord also requires offering students opportunities to practice subsequent skills in their daily (school) lives.

The second issue moves beyond the insights discussed in this article and concerns epistemic limitations of existing CE research. Scholars in the Netherlands (e.g., Merry, 2018) and internationally (e.g., Levinson, 2012) have stressed how, in order to promote more equitable CE practices, it is important to also attend to the epistemic and political dimension of mapping citizenship development and education in qualitative and

quantitative research. Whose perspectives are not included in the design of measurements instruments? And what does this mean for the validity of assessing citizenship competences? Do pre-vocational students obtain lower scores on citizenship knowledge in survey research compared to their peers in pre-university education, for example, because they have less democratic knowledge? Or because they draw on other funds of knowledge? Likewise, with regard to citizenship participation, Levinson has argued that while it is important to keep measuring student engagement in traditional political participatory practices, we should be cautious about using such measurements to draw conclusions about the citizenship development of marginalized student groups. Truly addressing civic and educational inequalities requires from researchers and teachers that they also seek to acknowledge, value, support, and map different knowledge funds, and attend to novel, online and alternative forms of informal political participation like political expression through spoken word. Moreover, it requires from researchers that they gain awareness of how existing hegemonies may impact their own work (Levinson, 2012; Merry, 2018).

Debates on democratic citizenship and democratic CE in the Netherlands are much more central in public and political debate now than they were 20 years ago (Veugelers et al., 2017). Research on CE has also mapped and discussed many facets of CE, including many of the underlying (false or just) assumptions to policy and legislation, e.g., what aims are explicitly or implicitly promoted as part of CE, and what impact schools can reasonably be expected to have on students' citizenship development. Future CE research in the Netherlands can help to clarify strengths and limitations of existing CE, particularly in primary education and tertiary vocational education. It can also help to build complementary CE programs in the Netherlands, and thus contribute to balancing teaching about, for and through democracy across education levels in Dutch schools. Much of these developments depend on a multitude of parties involved, particularly in a system where government intervention is continuously balanced against freedom of schools.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Artikel 23: Het openbaar en bijzonder onderwijs - Nederlandse Grondwet. Available at: https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/vi5kn3s122s4/artikel_23_het_openbaar_en_bijzonder

² NRC Handelsblad. (2021). Dino's en korte rokjes worden uit de schoolboeken geweerd. *NRC Handelsblad*. Geraadpleegd van: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/10/08/dinos-en-korte-rokjes-worden-uit-de-schoolboeken-geweerd-a4061168>.

³ In the Netherlands, Civics (also referred to as Subject of Society or Social Studies) is a mandatory one-year course, offered in upper secondary education, which teaches knowledge about society and reasoning skills. Apart from this mandatory course, students in all educational tracks can choose an elective course social sciences in the (pre)final year of secondary education. In this article, we use the term Civics to denote the mandatory subject, and CE to denote the wider range of legislations and practices organized in/by schools to prepare future generations for their role in society.

⁴ See also: <https://curriculum.nu/>

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