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Article

Cultivating student participation in the context of mock elections in schools: Practices and constraints in secondary education in the Netherlands.

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Keywords: learning democracy, mock elections, democratic student participation, secondary education

- Many governments in the EU and US promote democratic learning opportunities in schools
- Mock elections have a long tradition in several EU countries, including the Netherlands
- Coordinating teachers of the Dutch high schools in our sample want to increase student involvement in the organisation of mock elections
- Three main constraining factors identified are: limited resources for curriculum development; lack of a clear school-policy on citizenship education; and insufficient attention to relevant teacher competences in (post)initial training.

Purpose: In light of growing attention to promoting democratic learning opportunities in the EU and the US, this study provides insight into student opportunities to engage in the organisation of mock elections in Dutch high schools, and constraints that teachers identify in implementing mock elections.

Approach: A survey study was conducted. One fourth of Dutch high schools that organise mock elections through the National NGO for Democracy and Education participated.

Findings: Data analysis reveals clear discrepancies between the existing versus the desired (1) participation of student groups invited to the organisation of mock elections and (2) types of student involvement offered in our research population according to teachers. Main constraints that teachers identified are: limited resources for curriculum development; lack of a clear school-policy on citizenship education; and insufficient attention to relevant teacher competences in (post)initial training.

Practical implications: our paper concludes with several suggestions for strengthening policies and practices on political and educational participatory practices in schools.

in citizenship education. These findings indicate that addressing the material or sensory tokens inherent in such exclusionary discourse may be a useful starting point.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, democratic nations across the world have been bolstering citizenship education (Educational Inspectorate, 2016; Veugelers, de Groot & Stolk, 2017; Shapiro & Brown, 2019). Moreover, many scholars have argued that citizenship education is necessary today because (1) skills for democratic citizenry are not innate to individuals, (2) schools are mini-societies where students can experience - or unlearn - democracy, (3) students have a right to be heard on (school) issues that affect their lives, (4) informed participation in democratic practices within school and beyond can spur enlightened democratic engagement in later life, (5) recent polarization of political debate impacts student behavior in school and society (e.g., Biesta, 2011; Dewey, 1916; Levinson, 2012; Shier, 2001; Parker, 2003; Rogers et al, 2019).

Many EU-countries have introduced additional citizenship education legislation (e.g., on education for democracy and human rights) and support further development of measurement instruments, curriculum materials, and experiential learning activities associated with citizenship education. In France and Finland, for example, governments have introduced policy measures in order to highlight the development of democratic participatory competences (e.g., mandatory attention and support for teacher education) (Veugelers, de Groot & Stolk, 2017). Similarly, many states in the United States have begun implementing state legislation on citizenship education (e.g., Florida, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Texas) in hopes of creating a more knowledgeable citizenry. As democratic countries around the world seek to strengthen citizenship education requirements through legislation and policy instruments, the Dutch case serves as a valuable example to learn how legislative requirements and policy instruments may impact student experiences with citizenship education.

In this paper, we focus specifically on one participatory and educational practice: mock elections. They are simulated elections that schools can choose to organise prior to official elections. In the Netherlands, where this study is situated (as well as in many other countries) mock elections is a common, but non-compulsory, aspect of citizenship education.

1.1 Mock elections: A traditional political and educational participation experience

Although mock elections have been organised for many decades in many EU countries and US states, there are limited research publications in this area. There is some evidence that mock elections, and related political learning activities—especially when organised in higher secondary education—can stimulate political engagement in later life (Keating & Janmaat, 2015). Moreover, scholars have pointed to the value of elections simulations in offering meaningful and robust political education (Parker & Lo, 2016).

Existing surveys like the ICCS (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, Agrusti & Friedman, 2018) have provided insights into whether specific practices, like student councils, are

widespread in countries. However, knowledge about how specific practices are conducted in different countries is still limited. In the last decade, several studies have provided an understanding of how mock elections are organised in various countries. In the US, studies focusing solely on mock elections are rare. Instead, mock elections are usually studied as one of many instructional strategies known as simulations; however, when studied as a simulated activity, mock elections seem to support student engagement in political activities (e.g., Stroupe & Sabato, 2004; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006; De Groot, 2017). In Norway, Ødegaard Borg (2017) suggests that nationally organised mock elections are a staple of the Norwegian political education landscape. In the Netherlands, a qualitative pilot study explored how coordinating teachers in eight high schools in the Netherlands organised mock elections in 2012 (De Groot, 2017; 2018).

Complementing the pilot study above, our survey study set out to explore mock election practices across Dutch high schools in 2017. In an earlier paper, we reported on teachers' aims and learning activities organised in the 2017 mock elections in the Netherlands (De Groot & Eidhof, 2019). In this paper, we explore the generalizability of the findings of our pilot study regarding how coordinating teachers in the Netherlands (want to) involve students in the ME organisation (RQ1). In addition, we explored the constraints that teachers identify in organising the mock elections (RQ2). By presenting a survey on the Dutch case, we offer two contributions to the literature on citizenship education. First, we provide insight into the opportunities for student to help organise mock elections in a country with limited legal requirements and few policy instruments on stimulating political learning experiences. Second, we provide insight into teacher reported constraining factors for organising mock elections and discuss what lessons can be learned from this specific case for promoting mock elections in schools.

2 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN MOCK ELECTIONS AND POSSIBLE CONSTRAINTS IN THE DUTCH CONTEXT

In the Netherlands, pupils start secondary education at the age of twelve. Depending on prior school performances, students are assigned to one of four pre-vocational tracks (vmbo), the general education track (havo), or the pre-university education track (vwo). Over half of the students attend the prevocational track.

Since 2006 both primary and secondary schools are legally required to promote 'active citizenship and social integration' (Ministry of Education, 2006). However, until the introduction of a new citizenship education law in 2021 Dutch citizenship legislation did not specify what participatory competences need to be advanced, or what activities should be offered to all students. High schools promote civic knowledge and analytic skills in mandatory courses like history, geography and the 4th year course 'subject of society' (Maatschappijleer). In addition, students in general and pre-university education can subscribe to an elective subject social sciences (Maatschappijwetenschappen). Yet, the

Dutch government did not mandate schools to offer a subject that also fosters *participatory* competences. Instead, citizenship engagement is to be promoted in an integrative manner.

Drawing from theoretical and empirical work on student participation (Shier, 2001; Fielding & Moss, 2012), democratic education and mock elections, De Groot (2017) developed a student participation model that distinguishes six modes of student-staff collaboration within mock elections in order to examine student involvement in mock election practices in the pilot study (De Groot, 2018): Young people as 1) sources of data; 2) active respondents, 3) co-organisers, 4) leading organisers; 5) partners in co-constructing the event; and 6) partners in advancing the quality of political spaces. To advance student participation in accordance with these modes, teachers can, for example, use surveys to gain insight into student experiences with official and mock elections, related knowledge, concerns, and questions (mode 1). They can invite groups of students who have participated in earlier mock elections to brainstorm about desirable alterations (mode 2). Teachers can consider making students co- or main organisers (respectively modes 3 and 4) or invite students to deliberate about the desirable scale of the mock elections and it relates to educational activities (mode 5). Finally, teachers can initiate meta-discussions among organising partners about the desirable impact of the mock elections on the organisational and political culture in school (mode 6). The pilot study revealed that in participating high schools, coordinating teachers in the Netherlands involved different groups in the organisation of the 2012 mock election (none; social studies students; student from the student council and/or youth council). It also suggested that students in these schools were rarely envisioned as sources of data or as active respondents; they were not invited to deviate from existing planning protocols; and student-staff collaboration was not framed as a political project in its own right. Following this qualitative exploration of mock election related to student participation, this survey examined variance of student involvement in mock elections on two facets (the student groups involved and the mode of involvement) and in constraints identified (see paragraph 3.2).

While the relationship between student involvement in the organisation of mock elections and school/teacher characteristics have not been examined before, international research suggests that mock elections tend to support students' willingness to vote immediately after the experience (e.g., Ødegaard Borge, 2017; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006; Stroupe & Sabato, 2004), even though long-term impacts and gains of mock elections on voter turnout and political socialization paint a less encouraging picture (e.g., Öhrvall & Oskarsson, 2020; Ødegaard Borge, 2018). This means that better understanding of mock election organisation and implementation may provide insights into how students engage with and learn from mock elections.

2.1 Possible constraints in the Netherlands

Ten years after the introduction of the 2006 educational legislation on citizenship education in the Netherlands, the government and Dutch scholars agree that its

implementation has not lived up to public and political expectations (Dekker, 2015; Educational Inspectorate, 2016). The Teaching Common Values study that examined the policy and practice of teaching democracy and tolerance in all 27 EU member states and the UK, which was a member state until February 2020, for example, revealed that citizenship education policy and practices in the Netherlands are mediocre when compared to the other member states (Veugelers, de Groot & Stolk, 2017). With regard to education policy, the Netherlands has basic legal requirements for citizenship education, but teachers also have autonomy in deciding what and how they teach. Apart from a one-year study of society, there is no national curriculum, mandatory subject, or cross-curricular program on teaching democratic values in secondary education.

The Dutch report of the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study—which examined how grade 8 students are prepared to undertake their existing and future roles as citizens —revealed that Dutch grade 8 students have limited knowledge about democracy and the rule of law. And they score lower on political engagement and inclination to vote, when compared to their peers in related EU countries (Munniksma et al., 2017). Possible explanations mentioned in the Dutch report are the rather generic character of citizenship educational legislation, omissions in (post) initial teacher training and the climate for open classroom discussions.

In a previous study, teachers were asked about the challenges they faced in organising and implementing the event (De Groot, 2017, 2018). Typical teacher explanations for paying limited attention to critical democratic citizenship development (CDC) in mock elections related education were the limited scope of the mock election project, limited teacher facilities, the idea of mock election as a "side dish" (Parker & Lo, 2016), isolation from the formal curriculum, and the idea that attention to CDC knowledge and skills is covered elsewhere in the general civics curriculum. The limited emphasis by teachers who participated in the pilot study on pursuing elements of CDC-development in mock election related education could also be understood in light of scholarly critique on the vagueness of citizenship education policy in the Netherlands and the limited space in the curriculum for organising events.

3 DATA AND METHODS

In order to gain insight into the generalisability of the findings from the previous pilot study mentioned above, this follow-up survey examined student involvement in the organisation of the 2017 mock election in Dutch high schools and the constraints that coordinating teachers identify about the process. Instead of looking to establish or discover new relationships between variables, we relied on survey methods to explore broader patterns via descriptive statistics so as to deepen the rationales for the relationships between student involvement and teacher organisation of the mock elections.

Two research questions were developed:

1. How do teachers (want to) involve students in the mock election organisation?
2. What constraints do teachers identify concerning organising the mock elections?

3.1 Research participants

In the Netherlands, all high schools (N = 638) are state funded and need to follow national educational legislation. Two third are denominational schools (affiliated with different religions), one third are open schools (not affiliated with religious groups). Our research population consisted of all high schools (N=394) who participated in the national mock election program of March 2017. This program was facilitated by ProDemos, the NGO appointed by the Dutch Ministry of Education to stimulate democratic education at the national level. In this role, ProDemos provided schools with ballot papers for all participating students. Following the mock elections, which took place in the week prior to the official elections, ProDemos analysed the votes casted anonymously across the country and published overall voting results as well as results per school. This means that about 60% of Dutch high schools were invited to participate.

Our study follows the Netherlands code of conduct for academic practice as defined by the *Association* of *Universities* in the Netherlands (VSNU). Because the data management provisions at ProDemos were insufficient to organise the data collection from the institute, the data-collection was outsourced to a third research organisation (Elion). Because ProDemos did not file information about the school type when schools signed up for participation in a mock election, we had to control our sample for other school types. By checking the names of the schools, we identified 10 vocational schools within the data. Since vocational schools are not legally obliged to foster specific components of citizenship development, we did not include them in our sample. To inform schools about the study, the survey was announced in the ProDemos newsletter. From each of the participating schools we invited the coordinating teacher (N = 384) to participate.

Teachers received an information letter and an invitation to participate in the study by email. This information letter contained an explanation of the aims and significance of the study, what participation entails, how ethical standards are met and contact details of the principle investigator. Teachers consented to participate by answering the questionnaire. Two days after the elections, on Friday March 17, all 384 teachers received a unique code to complete the questionnaire. In the next 3.5 weeks, two reminders were sent by email. When completing the list, teachers could win a coupon for the ProDemos website. From the teachers that received an invitation to participate in the survey, 46% used the link to open the questionnaire. 24% of the teachers (N= 96) completed the questionnaire. While attrition is common in survey research, the drop-out rate may also be related to the length of the survey (which explored not only student involvement, but also teacher aims and types of educational activities organised). Moreover, context factors (e.g., lack of time for curriculum development and the fact that ME's are not part of the formal curriculum) may explain the lack of motivation to participate in the first place.

Of the teachers organising mock elections in our sample, a small majority are men (59%, N =57). In terms of age, our teacher sample is balanced: 51% of the teachers were aged 31 to 50, and 34% were 51 or older (see also appendix 1). The others were aged 30 or younger. Further, 6.3% of the teachers self-reported that they had a migrant background (which was defined as: "one or more parents or grandparents are born abroad"). This percentage mirrors the general teacher population, as the 2009 diversity monitor revealed that 4.7% of the secondary education staff is of non-western origin (Van den Berg, Van Dijk and Grootscholte, 2011).

A slight majority of the coordinating teachers self-reported as accredited Social Studies teachers, while a large minority of the teachers had been teaching civics-related subjects for 11-20 years (see Appendix 1). Most respondents taught subjects of society, social sciences, or a combination of subjects. At a majority of schools, teachers indicated that the percentage of students with a migrant background in their schools was below 25%. As some of the teachers were uncertain about the percentage of students from low-income families and about the religious composition of the student population, we did not include these items in our analysis, given our limited sample size.

Comparing our school sample to the wider population of schools that use ProDemos as a venue to organise mock elections revealed that our sample was geographically representative and mirrors the variety in school-background among publicly funded schools in the Netherlands: denominational schools, open schools and non-traditional schools that are founded on pedagogical principles (e.g., Montessori schools; see Appendix 2).

3.2 Instruments

To gain insight into teacher characteristics, we measured teacher gender (m/f), age, background (migrant background/not), educational background, main subject taught and number of years teaching civics and related courses. The following school characteristics were measured: school type, size of the student population, and the socioeconomic and cultural composition of the student population. Items for measuring teacher and school characteristics (see appendix 1 for the exact items) were adopted from existing instruments on citizenship education in the Netherlands and internationally (Florida Civics Teacher Survey, 2016; Veugelers & De Kat, 1998).

Variables of interest to our exploration of student involvement in the organisation of the mock elections were derived from existing frameworks on student participation (e.g., Bîrzea, 2005; De Groot, 2018; Fielding & Moss, 2012; Shier, 2001) as well as the pilot study results. We created six items that measure the groups of students invited to participate in the design and planning (e.g., subject of society students or members of the debating team [see also Appendix 3]). In addition, we created three items to measure the mode of student involvement in organising the elections (none, share ideas, decisive power). Teachers were asked whether the following statement applied to the existing and ideal situation "At

our school location, the following student-groups are invited to participate in the design and planning of the mock elections." Our questions are thus able to measure the actual involvement of students as reported by teachers, and the groups that were invited (though not the actual participation per student group),

Variables on constraints (see also Appendix 4) were identified based on findings from earlier research (Educational Inspectorate, 2016; Veugelers, de Groot & Stolk, 2017) as well as constraints mentioned in the pilot study (De Groot, 2017) (e.g., lack of clarity on school vision of citizenship education and lack of time for curriculum development). Four items were developed to measure teacher stances about the (lack of) facilitation of educational development and professionalization. Four items measure teacher stances about the (lack of) appreciation from colleagues and management for organising mock elections (e.g., "My teacher-unit finds it important for our school to organise mock elections"). Three items measure the quality of collaboration with colleagues (e.g., "Overall, teachers in my school collaborate well together"). Four items measure the quality of the school vision on citizenship education (e.g., "The school vision clearly states where and how citizenship/political is promoted in the curriculum"). In addition, four items measure attention for relevant teacher competences in (post) initial teacher education (e.g., "Discussing controversial issues in the classroom"). For each of these items, teachers could answer a statement (e.g., "In my teacher education/additional courses, I have gained sufficient competences to…") using a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree/disagree/nor agree nor disagree/agree/strongly agree). To also gain insight into the significance of the constraints, we asked teachers to list, and explain, the main constraints (if they were experiencing any) in an open question.

To increase the validity of the questionnaire, draft versions were discussed with experts from ProDemos, the education department at the University of Humanistic Studies, a number of teachers outside the research population and students in teacher training. As explained before, our study collected self-reported information about schools, teachers, student involvement and constraints. No additional data were developed to verify these teachers' self-reports.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis was conducted in SPSS22. To check the reliability of the questionnaire we developed the following scales: the quality of the school vision on citizenship education (n items = 4, Cronbach's alpha = .881); the place of citizenship education in the school policy (n items = 4, Cronbach's alpha = .82); collaboration (n items = 3, Cronbach's alpha = .79); appreciation for organising the mock election event from colleagues and school management (n items = 4; Cronbach's alpha = .85); and competence development in teacher education and/or teacher training (n items = 4, Cronbach's alpha = .927). Reliability of the scales proved adequate to very good.

For our analysis of student involvement in the organisation of the 2017 mock elections, as reported by teachers (RQ 1) discrepancies between the existing and ideal situation are shown with percentages. To examine relationships between the actual mode of student involvement, as reported by coordinating teachers, and teacher/school characteristics we transformed variables on teacher characteristics into categorical variables (e.g., Main subject taught was scored 1 if a participant self-reported as Subject of Society teacher, and 0 when a participant self-reported as teaching another course) and conducted Chi-square tests.

For our analysis of teacher constraints (RQ2), discrepancies between the existing and ideal situation are also shown with percentages. In addition, Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the significance of these discrepancies.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Student involvement in the organisation

The first research question explored how teachers (want to) organise student involvement in the context of Mock elections. In particular, it explored discrepancies between the existing and ideal situation in terms of the *student groups* that are invited to participate and the *modes of student involvement* in the design and planning as reported by teachers.

73% of participating teachers invited students to engage in the design or planning of the 2017 mock elections. Another 20% stated that they did not invite students this time but would like to in the future. Most teachers who did invite students approached students attending the subject of society (54%). 12% invited students from the debating team, and 18% invited students from the school council. Involvement of the youth council was rare (2%). Large discrepancies were found regarding the existing practice of inviting students, as reported by coordinating teachers, and the ideal situation (see also Table 1): more teachers would like to involve students across school than they did in the 2017 elections. Other invitations mentioned were inviting individual students with an interest in participating in school events or students from the mentor class.

Table 1: Discrepancies between existing and ideal invitation of student groups

Categories*	Current	Ideal
No involvement	27 % (of total N)	7 % (of total N)
All	9 % (of total N)	25 % (of total N)
Students attending subject of society/related subjects	54 % (of total N)	52 % (of total N)
Students from debating team	12 % (of total N)	14 % (of total N)
Students from school council	18 % (of total N)	27 % (of total N)
Students from youth council	2 % (of total N)	6 % (of total N)

*Categories are not exclusive. Teachers could state that more than one category applied to their situation.

Interestingly, the existing and ideal situation concerning the students invited did not differ for the largest group, the subject of society students, and for students from the debating team. This may be due to mock election events often being organised for students that attend this subject and/or that coordinating teachers are typically also teaching this subject and involved in the organisation of debating activities in the school.

Analysis of the modes of student involvement in the design and planning, as reported by coordinating teachers, revealed that 22% arranged opportunities for students to think aloud and share their views and ideas or (co)-organise the event (see Table 2). It also showed that the ideal situation differs from the existing situation: Half of the teachers would like to make students co-organiser of the event, and half of them would like to give students an opportunity to share their views on desirable practices.

Table 2: Existing and ideal modes of student involvement

Categories*	Current	Ideal
No involvement	33 % (of total N)	8 % (of total N)
(Shared) responsibility design and planning	22 % (of total N)	50 % (of total N)
Voice in design and planning	22 % (of total N)	49 % (of total N)

*Categories are not exclusive.

Against our expectations, self-reported student participation in the design and planning of the ME event was not significantly related to teacher and school characteristics. This means that student involvement, as reported by the teachers, did not vary among teachers with different teacher education backgrounds (subject of society/other), the main subject taught (subject of society/other), or teacher aims (more/less complex aims). Likewise, self-reported student involvement was not related to the school type and the (self-reported) strengths of their citizenship education policy for the schools in our sample. A possible explanation can be found in the constraints that teachers identify (e.g., limited compensation for organising mock elections and related educational activities), which are presented in the following section.

4.2 Teacher constraints

The second research question explored the constraints that teachers identified in relation to organising mock elections in their school. Analysis revealed clear discrepancies between the existing and ideal situation regarding opportunities for curriculum development and professionalisation, the quality of the school-vision on citizenship education, and attention to relevant teacher competences in (post)initial training. From the teachers who answered the qualitative question “What are the main difficulties that you experience when organising the elections?” (N = 86), nine teachers stated that they

had not experienced any difficulties when organising the 2017 mock elections. Responses from the other 77 teachers matched the main constraints as identified based on the survey questions.

With regard to opportunities for curriculum development and collaboration, many teachers were unhappy with current opportunities for compensation and professionalization. Where most teachers (70.9%) wanted their school to offer compensation for curriculum development and collaboration in light of political events or debates, 52.1% stated that this support is not available (see also Table 3). Likewise, 80.2% of the teachers wanted their school to offer professionalization opportunities on citizenship education, yet 42.7 % of the teachers stated that these opportunities were not provided.

With regard to opportunities for organising extracurricular activities, teacher perceptions were more mixed. Where most teachers found that it was important to organise extracurricular activities (85.4 %), 62.5% indicated that they were able to organise extra-curricular activities, and 19.8 % claimed to have (very) limited opportunities to do so. Our analysis also showed most teachers (80.1%) were content with the extent to which they could adapt the structure of the social studies program and combine the elections with the module on politics. This indicates that teachers in our research population had enough autonomy to make adjustments to the social studies program.

With regard to the school-vision, we also found clear discrepancies between the existing and the ideal situation. A large majority of the teachers found it desirable that schools have a clear vision on how democratic development is fostered in the curriculum (85.5%). Yet, over one third (33.3 %) claimed that there school currently does not have this clear vision. Likewise, only 14.6 % of the teachers (very much) agreed with the statement that the school-vision is clear about how citizenship development is currently promoted through the school management culture. Yet, most teachers (70.9 %) found it desirable to promote citizenship development this way, in line with the position of the Council of Europe that schools need to advance democratic school cultures (Council of Europe, 2010; Dürr, Spajić-Vrkaš & Martins, 2000). In addition, teachers reported a clear discrepancy between the existing and ideal situation regarding the place for mock elections in the curriculum in general: where most teachers (78.1%) thought that mock elections should be part and parcel of the formal curriculum, only one third of the teachers (34.4%) believed this to be the case in their schools in 2017.

Table 3: Constraints that teachers identify: current vs ideal

Constraints[1]	% very much disagree current/ideal	% not agree, not disagree current/ideal	% very much agree current/ideal	% unknown current/ ideal	% missing current/ ideal)
Teachers can receive compensation for curriculum development**	52.1/ 5.2	16.7/ 11.5	19.8/ 70.9	6.3/ 2.3	5.2/ 10.4
Teachers have professionalization opportunities, specifically on citizenship education**	42.7/ 6.3	10.4/ 6.3	39.6/ 80.2	4.2/ 2.1	3.1/ 5.2
It is possible to organise extracurricular educational activities in the context of mock elections**	19.8/ 0	12.5/ 5.2	62.5/ 85.4	1/ 0	4.2/ 9.4
It is possible to adjust the social studies program, to tailor relevant content to mock elections**	4.1/ 2.1	10.4/ 4.2	80.1/ 80.2	2.1/ 2.1	4.2/ 11.5
The school vision clearly states where and how citizenship/ political development is promoted in the curriculum*	33.3/ 0	10.4/ 3.1	44.8/ 85.5	8.3/ 4.2	3.1/ 7.3
The school vision clearly states where and how citizenship/ political development is promoted in school management*	45.9/ 4.1	19.8/ 11.5	14.6/ 70.9	15.6/ 6.3	4.2/ 7.3
School considers organising mock elections as part of the formal curriculum*	34.4/2.1	12.5/6.3	37.5/78.1	10.4/5.2	5.2/8.3

% discussed in the text in bold. **Significance measured at the 0.000 level using Chi-square. *Significance measured at the 0.05 level using Chi-square.

[1] NB: As missing for the existing and ideal situation varied across items and because of the limited sample size, we decided to present relations at the level of individual items. For readability purposes, we only report descriptives on two of the three key constraints as identified by participating teachers and interesting outliers (the possibility to adjust the social studies program).

In the qualitative explanations of key constraints, limitations of the school vision and/or policy are also prevalent. One of the teachers for example described:

> I do not experience any difficulties in organising the elections and my colleagues are very supportive. What lacks is a vision document in which our management defines citizenship as a subject and installs a teacher unit that consolidates coverage of important societal topics in the curriculum. Currently, our citizenship education depends on the initiatives of a couple of proactive teachers. Our management should introduce structures that make this type of education more sustainable.

Similarly, other teachers' qualitative responses point to a lack of shared responsibility among teachers, the superficial nature of their school vision on citizenship education and lack of a systematic approach.

With regard to the quality of teacher education, about half of the teachers (44.8-49.1%) (very much) believed that their (initial) teacher education prepared them for political education in culturally and/or politically diverse classrooms on the four competences explored: 'supporting students in reading political events'; 'support students with the development of their own political position'; 'discuss controversial issues in the classroom'; and 'discuss tensions between students in the classroom'. Yet, analysis showed how one fourth of the teachers (25.1 %- 28.1 %) believed that their (initial) teacher education did not adequately prepare them for these competences. For this variable, we did not collect data on teacher ideals.

It should be mentioned that missing responses were somewhat higher for the ideal situation responses, compared to the current situation responses. They varied from 5.2 % to 11.5 % in the ideal situation, and 3.1 % to 5.2 % in the current situation. This may be related to survey fatigue. The qualitative feedback question at the end of the survey indicated that some respondents found it too time consuming to answer questions for both the existing and the ideal situation.

5 DISCUSSION

This paper reports on how Dutch high school teachers involve students in the organisation of mock elections, and the constraints that the coordinating teachers identified in this regard. Overall, our study indicates that (limited) legal requirements on citizenship education from 2006 to 2021 and related policy instruments in the Netherlands have made it very difficult for high school teachers to live up to societies expectations and organise mock elections in accordance with their aspirations.

Our analysis of how, according to coordinating teachers, participating schools involve students in the organisation of mock elections (RQ1) shows that coordinating teachers in our research sample would like to use mock elections more as a venue to exercise student political participatory competences in Dutch secondary education. We found that,

although a large majority of schools in our research sample already involves students in the organisation according to coordinating teachers, there are several gaps between the existing and the desirable situation: With regard to the student groups invited, coordinating teachers would like to involve students more in the design and planning of mock elections. One fourth would even prefer to invite students from all student levels. Similarly, with regard to the modes of student involvement applied, half of the teachers would like to make students co-organiser of the event, and half of them would like to give students an opportunity to share their views on desirable practices.

Analysis of teacher constraints (RQ 2) revealed a similar discrepancy between the existing and ideal situation regarding three conditions. We found that half of the teachers critiqued the lack of compensation for curriculum development. One third of the teachers were critical about the current school-vision on citizenship education, and one fourth criticized attention to relevant teacher competences in (post)initial training. These critiques align with insights from recent studies about the lack of a coherent curriculum on citizenship in most schools in the Netherlands, lack of clarity about legal standards, and limited space in the curriculum for value-oriented subjects (Educational Inspectorate, 2016; Munniksma et al, 2017; Veugelers, de Groot & Stolk, 2017). Our findings regarding teacher professionalization support findings from earlier research on civics specific teacher competences, like teacher reporting lack of ability to guide controversial issues discussions (Radstake & Leeman, 2010; Schuitema, Radstake, Van de Pol & Veugelers, 2017; Willemse, Ten Dam, Geijsel, Van Wessum & Volman, 2015). In the following, we discuss the limitations of the study, and conclude with several recommendations for (inter)national policy development on mock elections, and opportunities for democratic student participation in general.

5.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research

In this study, we utilized a survey instrument that captured key elements of political participatory experiences in schools from a critical democratic citizenship perspective. However, as our research sample is rather low (N = 96), we could not further evolve or validate the research instruments in the context of this study. Another limitation of the study is that our sample only contains schools that organise elections using the ProDemos facilities. Schools who organise elections on their own are not included in the study, and we have no data on the schools that organise mock elections independently. As our sample (N = 96) is geographically representative and mirrors the variety in school-background among publicly funded schools in the Netherlands that use the national NGO ProDemos as a venue to organise the elections, we were able to draw conclusions about the (intended) mock election practices in these schools. Important to note, still, is that conditions for participation may have led to a participation bias. The constraints that participating teachers identified (e.g., limited time for curriculum development) may have caused teachers to refrain from participating (e.g., because they feel that they have not much to

say on the topic, or because they are too busy and choose to spend their time differently). Also, social desirability bias may have led teachers to report large differences as questions concerning current involvement were posed in tandem with questions on ideal involvement. This may have enlarged the discrepancies found between the existing and ideal items. In these ways, our study may not be generalizable to a larger context; however, we believe these findings help contribute to building more robust theory around the organisation and implementation of mock elections.

In future research, it would be interesting to examine how our findings on teacher ideals and constraints as experienced in the context of mock elections relate to ideals and constraints in democratic education in general, both within the Netherlands and internationally. Further educational design studies can also initiate research informed student education and participation in the context of mock elections and lead up to evaluative research into if and how such mock election programs influence the democratic culture in schools. Relevant for the further development of mock election practices as well would be an examination of value conflicts that teachers and school leaders may face when introducing and organising mock elections in schools.

5.2 Recommendations for policy and practice

Although we cannot draw conclusions from this study about what would work in in multiple contexts, our results do indicate that the quality of mock election programs, and other political participatory and educational activities in schools, would benefit from strong facilitation by the Ministry of Education, school leaders, teacher education institutes and the organising NGO(s).

In line with pleas from scholars on student participation, student voice, and human rights education to promote student engagement in meaningful participation in accordance with the 'age and maturity of the student' (e.g., UNCRC, 1989; Lundy, 2007), we contend that it is important for governments to formulate legal requirements regarding a variety of opportunities for political participation that schools need to offer to *all* students.

In light of the (perceived) lack of space in the curriculum for extra-curricular projects that we found, and earlier critiques on the lack of a high school subject for all student levels in the Netherlands that systematically fosters democratic values and participatory competences (Educational Inspectorate, 2016; Veugelers, de Groot & Stolk, 2017) we also recommend designating space throughout the curriculum to offer (extracurricular) citizenship education, and meaningful student deliberation on issues that affect the learning and social climate in school.

Furthermore, we argue that it is important to attend to the development of relevant teacher competences in (post-)initial teacher education, and advance deliberation amongst educational partners (e.g., NGO's, teachers, and students) about the types of traditional and novel political participatory experiences that they want to offer in schools. Promising initiatives in this regard are the teacher workgroup on civics (curriculum.nu)

that was installed in 2019 by the Dutch Ministry of Education in order to define (in consultation with a wide range of educational partners) key aims and principles of democratic education, as well as the revision of citizenship education legislation in the Netherlands in 2021. With the installation of this new citizenship education law, schools in primary and secondary education are now required to promote respect for and knowledge about democratic values as anchored in the Dutch constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are also obligated to foster democratic citizenship competences and cultivate a democratic culture in schools.

The findings of this study have also inspired our national NGO for democratic education (ProDemos) to develop additional value related democratic education materials.[1] We look forward to examining shifts in attention to furthering participatory and educational learning opportunities policy and practice in the Netherlands and internationally in the next decade.

Besides implications specific to citizenship education in the Netherlands, this study has also generated food for thought for governments and school leaders in other democratic nations who are committed to furthering the quality of political participatory and educational experiences in schools. In sum, and clear visioning, resources and professional development is required if citizenship education policy or legislation are to fulfil society's expectations of their role in creating a more robust polity.

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APPENDIX 1: TEACHER AND SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

	Percentage	n
Age		
< 30	15,6%	15
31-40	24,0%	23
41-50	27,1%	26
51-60	19,8%	19
> 61	13,5%	13
Missing	0,0%	0
Gender		
Male	59,4%	57
Female	40,6%	39
Missing	0,0%	0
Migrant background		
Yes	6,3%	6
No	81,3%	78
Missing	12,5%	12
Accredited Subject of Society teacher		
Yes	57,3%	55
No	35,4%	34
Missing	7,3%	7
Years' experience in teaching civics		
0-10	51,0%	49
11-20	27,1%	26
> 20	20,8%	20
Missing	1,0%	1
Denomination		
Public	42,7%	41
Christian	45,8%	44
Non-traditional (Dalton, Montessori, etc.)	10,4%	10
Other	1,0%	1
Missing	0,0%	0
Student population size		
< 500	25,0%	24
500-999	24,0%	23
1000-1500	29,2%	28
> 1500	20,8%	20
Missing	1,0%	1
Est. % of students with migration background		
< 25%	78,1%	75
25-49%	10,4%	10
50-75%	1,0%	1
> 75%	1,0%	1
I don't know	8,3%	8
Missing	1,0%	1

APPENDIX 2: COMPARISON OF POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Province	% in population	% in sample	Difference in % points
Groningen	3,0%	2,1%	0,9
Friesland	5,0%	5,2%	-0,2
Drenthe	2,8%	2,1%	0,7
Flevoland	2,8%	3,1%	-0,3
Noord-Holland	16,5%	12,5%	4,0
Overijssel	6,5%	11,5%	-5,0
Gelderland	13,9%	13,5%	0,4
Utrecht	8,1%	11,5%	-3,4
Noord-Brabant	13,9%	15,6%	-1,7
Limburg	2,2%	1,0%	1,2
Zeeland	1,4%	2,1%	-0,7
Zuid-Holland	23,6%	19,8%	3,8

Denomination	% in population	% in sample	Difference in % points
Christian	46,1%	45,8%	0,3
Non-traditional (Dalton, etc.)	7,9%	10,4%	-2,5
Public	41,0%	42,7%	-1,7
Other	5,1%	1,0%	4,1

Note that the population of interest consists of schools in the Netherlands that organise mock elections.

APPENDIX 3: INSTRUMENT AND EXAMPLE STATEMENT STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Introduction and example statement:

The next statements concern the role of students in the design and planning and facilitation of the mock election event. Please explain in the first column what the existing situation is, and in the second column what you consider desirable.

At our school location, the following student-groups are invited to participate in the design and planning of the mock elections

Student groups invited	Existing	Desirable
None		
All students		
Students attending Subject of Society		
Students from the debating team		
Students from the Student Council		
Students from the Youth Council		
Other, namely….		

APPENDIX 4: INSTRUMENT TEACHER CONSTRAINTS

Curriculum development and professionalization	Teachers can receive compensation for curriculum development
	Teachers have professionalization opportunities, specifically on citizenship education
	It is possible to organise extracurricular educational activities in the context of Mock elections
	It is possible to adjust the Subject of Society program, to tailor relevant content to mock elections
Support for organising mock elections	School management supports the organisation of mock elections in internal and external communications
	My teacher-unit find it important for our school to organise mock elections
	The majority of my colleagues find it important (I guess) for our school to organise mock elections
	School management and my colleagues find it important for my school to also offer educational activities to prepare students for the mock elections
The quality of collaboration with colleagues and management	Within my teacher unit, everyone collaborates well together
	Overall, teachers in my school collaborate well together
	Overall, we collaborate well together with the administrative staff
The quality of the school vision on citizenship/political education	The school vision clearly states where and how citizenship/political development is promoted in the curriculum
	The school vision clearly states where and how citizenship/political development is promoted in extra-curricular activities
	The school vision clearly states where and how citizenship/political development is promoted in school management
	School considers organising mock elections as part of the formal curriculum.
Competences gained in (post) Initial Teacher Education	Support students in reading political events
	Support students with the development of their own political position
	Discuss controversial issues in the classroom
	Discuss tensions between students in the classroom

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